

Philippine Supreme Court issues decision on Hacienda Luisita

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On April 24, the Philippines Supreme Court issued a ruling that Hacienda Luisita, the 6,000-hectare sugar plantation owned by the family of President Benigno Cojuangco Aquino, should be redistributed and the Cojuangco family compensated at the land prices prevailing in 1989. The Cojuangco family had made an appeal to the court for compensation at 2006 prices. The decision by the Supreme Court is another skirmish in the on-going factional war between rival sections of the Philippine bourgeoisie.

Hacienda Luisita is the largest sugar plantation in the country. It has served as a clear example of the farce of bourgeois gestures at land reform. Any attempt to redistribute the estate has been blocked, and protests have been repeatedly suppressed with blood and bullets.

Since assuming office in 2010, Aquino has been consolidating power from his rival, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. This political vendetta between competing sections of the local bourgeoisie takes place in the context of the sharply intensified pressure of US imperialism against China. The military, diplomatic and economic machinations of Washington have turned a political turf war into a proxy battle between US and Chinese interests. Arroyo during her nine years in office had begun to re-orient Philippine economic and political ties toward China. Through its increasingly open support for Aquino's prosecution of Arroyo and her allies, Washington has struck back.

The Philippine Supreme Court has been the central arena in this struggle. The court is composed almost entirely of Arroyo appointees. Supreme Court chief justice Renato Corona is a known loyalist of the former

president. As Aquino has filed corruption charges against Arroyo allies, and removed Arroyo appointees from office, the Supreme Court repeatedly struck down these moves as unconstitutional. Aquino responded by threatening to impeach Supreme Court justices.

Throughout 2011, as Arroyo's political clout was waning, the court wavered between its loyalty to Arroyo and its fear of threats from the Aquino administration. In July 2011, the Supreme Court issued a ruling which effectively preserved the Cojuangco family's Luisita landholdings. The tension between the executive and the judiciary temporarily subsided.

In November, however, Aquino had Arroyo arrested on charges of election fraud. Within days, the Supreme Court reversed its July decision and ordered the redistribution of Hacienda Luisita. The president responded by railroading the impeachment of Supreme Court chief justice Renato Corona through congress. The Cojuangco family issued a public statement saying that they accepted the Supreme Court decision, but simultaneously filed an appeal with the Supreme Court that the land be valued at 2006 prices (P2.5 million per hectare), rather than the 1989 prices (P40,000 per hectare) when the original land reform act was passed.

Despite political pressure, the court found against the Cojuangco family. The April 24 decision that the land should be distributed at 1989 prices has absolutely nothing to do with concerns for the sugar plantation farmers at the hacienda. It is another round in the on-going battle between sections of the Philippine elite.

Every section of the Philippine "left" has strived to disguise this truth from workers and peasants. The

umbrella front organization of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), Bayan, hailed the court's decision, saying: "This is a historic day. We congratulate the farmers of Hacienda Luisita for their hard won and well-deserved legal victory in the Supreme Court's final ruling on the Luisita land distribution. We are happy that the HLI management's motion for reconsideration was defeated. There is no legal impediment now for the immediate distribution of the Luisita land to the farmers."

The Cojuangco family is already making moves to file for reconsideration. The Department of Agrarian Reform, which will be responsible for carrying out any distribution, is in the complete control of the president, and yet Bayan claims that there is "no legal impediment" for "immediate distribution."

The head of the CPP peasant organization, Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Philippine Peasant Movement) issued a statement saying: "We call on Aquino, the landlord-president, to respect the decision of the judiciary and allow the immediate distribution of land to the original farm worker beneficiaries." The CPP is directing the peasants and workers of Luisita to appeal to their landlord, while in the same breath claiming that this is a great victory for the peasants. Not a word is said about the battle between sections of the bourgeoisie, which produced this decision.

Akbayan, the so-called "left" grouping which is now allied with Aquino, absurdly hailed the redistribution as Aquino's own "victory on Hacienda Luisita redistribution."

The Philippine "left", both the CPP and groups such as Akbayan, which broke from it in early in 1990s, have without exception directed the peasants and workers on large plantations to appeal to the bourgeoisie and to their landlords for land distribution. Time and again the bourgeoisie have responded to these requests and marches with bullets.

Fourteen protestors, including two children, were shot dead on Luisita land in 2004 by the current president's own bodyguards. By repeatedly subordinating the peasantry to sections of the ruling class, the various

Stalinist parties are politically responsible for such tragedies.



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