Philippine politicians declare candidacy for the 2013 election

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Another election season opens in the Philippines. Friday, October 5, marked the deadline for political aspirants to file their candidacy to compete in the May 2013 midterm elections. Up for grabs are 12 senatorial seats, as well as positions in the lower house of congress and in provincial, city and local government.

For the past two years President Aquino has been consolidating power from former President Arroyo, who has now been arrested for the third time on charges of fraud and plunder. Her party coalition, the dominant force in Philippine politics but three years ago, has been decimated in the political equivalent of a well-coordinated mafia hit. Through a combination of corruption charges, scandals, and impeachments, Aquino and his allies have eliminated Arroyo's support. While Arroyo herself is running for congress, either from jail or a hospital bed, her party is strikingly absent from the election.

Out of the political debris, two major groupings have formed: the United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) and the Liberal Party (LP) coalitions. Political parties in the Philippines do not form on the basis of platforms, or coalesce around even the semblance of a political idea or slogan. They are the personal vehicles of family dynasties for the acquisition of a share in the power and the coffers of the state. The coalitions for the 2013 election are the gathered detritus of nearly ten such parties organised into two shapeless politically amorphous heaps.

There is not even the pretense of opposition between the two coalitions. Family ties cut across their line-ups. Four senatorial candidates are running with the joint backing of both coalitions. Even a cursory glance at the senatorial line-up of the two coalitions lays bare the incestuous nature of the entire affair.

President Aquino's Liberal Party coalition includes the political party of his uncle, Danding Cojuangco. Danding was, for decades, the mortal enemy of Aquino's side of the Cojuangco dynasty. Both sides of the Cojuangco clan are vast landholders, whose hands are dripping with the blood of suppressing the struggles of sugarcane workers and peasants. But Danding was an intimate supporter of the Marcos dictatorship, one of the so-called Rolex 12 who plotted the staged ambushes and bombings that justified the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. When current President Aquino's father was imprisoned by Marcos, and was later assassinated, Danding profited from his political ties to gain ground in the Cojuangco family feud. When Aquino's mother became president, she used her power to take Danding's holdings back. But now Aquino and Danding Cojuangco are allies.

Not only Danding. Current senator Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos—son of the late dictator—is now Aquino's ally as well. Aged, but rapacious as ever, the dictator's wife Imelda Marcos is yet again running for congress. Imee Marcos, her daughter, is standing for governor of Ilocos province.

The Nacionalista Party, which fielded Aquino's ostensible political rival Manny Villar in the last presidential election, is also part of the Liberal Party coalition. Villar has reached his term limits as Senator, so his wife is running instead.

President Aquino's cousin Bam Aquino is running for the Senate. His sole qualification for office seems to be that when he wears glasses he bears a passing resemblance to his uncle, the assassinated Ninoy Aquino.

The UNA coalition is headed by former president Joseph Estrada, current vice president Jejomar Binay, and senate President Juan Ponce Enrile. The coalition is fielding Enrile's son, Jack; Estrada's son JV Ejercito; and Binay's daughter, Nancy. One of Estrada's other sons is already a Senator.

Repeat military coup leader Gringo Honasan is on the UNA ticket. However, the Liberal Party ticket also has its repeat military coup leader—Sonny Trillanes.

President Aquino's aunt Tingting Cojuangco—from his

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side of the Cojuangco family rivalry—is running on the UNA ticket.

This is a cesspool of gangsters, movie actors, military thugs, and war criminals. There is only one tie that binds these groups together: the lust for money and power. The state apparatus yields lucrative contracts; power over business rivals; direct access to foreign investment; privileged concessions; and control over the bodies of armed men that police the country's rampant social inequality

And into this cesspool every section of the Philippine pseudo-left has plunged with both feet. Maoists and ex-Maoists alike have traded on their threadbare radical credentials as so much devalued political currency, investing their coalition partners with the cheap coin of populism.

Akbayan, the political amalgam of former Maoists and social democrats has, since 2010, been Aquino's own "left" party. They form an intimate part of his cabinet. Akbayan is now fielding a senatorial candidate on the Liberal Party coalition ticket.

The spokesperson for Joseph Estrada's UNA is J.V. Bautista, the former head of the pseudo-left group Sanlakas. Sanlakas made its name in 2001 for shouting the most militant-sounding, but empty political slogans demanding then President Estrada's ouster.

The Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its front organisations BAYAN and Bayan Muna wanted in on the political spoils as well. Their senatorial candidate Teddy Casiño approached first the UNA, stating in an article in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in June, "We're hoping to get a slot," and promising full political support as "part of the package."

Of course, if the UNA turned them down—which it did—he stated that "we're not closing the door to inclusion in the Liberal lineup. We can work with both camps … With either group there is lots of room for common cause." This phrase-and-a-half neatly sums up the flagrant opportunism of Maoism through all of its sordid historical twists and turns based on their reactionary nationalist perspective of "socialism in one country" and the two-stage revolution. The Maoists no longer even pretend to be supporting the "progressive" wing of bourgeoisie—a perspective that brought one disaster after another for workers and the rural poor—but are simply selling their services to the highest bidder. However, both the UNA and Liberal coalitions rejected BAYAN's pathetic overtures, so Casiño is running on an "independent" ticket.

Philippine politics have always been simultaneously bloody and farcical. For the Philippine working class and peasantry, it has never been the question of voting for the lesser of two evils, it has always been a question of survival. Behind the pageantry and the song and dance routines at party rallies, lurks violence, coercion and fraud. The Philippine Commission on Elections recently speculated that the 2013 election may see more instances of vote buying than any prior. Local candidates are routinely shot; guns for hire and private goons are the order of the day.

The character of elections in the Philippines is not an accident, nor is it an immutable cultural trait. It is the historical outcome of first Spanish and then US colonialism. The United States deliberately cultivated ties with and promoted the careers and landholdings of the dynasties that now leech the Philippine body politic.

The 2013 elections take place at a crucial juncture. The continuing global economic crisis means that the newly elected representatives will begin immediately enacting further austerity measures, slashing yet deeper the paltry living standards of the working class.

With the mounting tensions in the South China Sea, fueled by the Obama administration's reckless assertion of US imperialist interests against China in the region, it is certain that Washington will play a role in the upcoming elections. Washington is currently on track to re-open the Subic naval facilities for the basing of US troops and warships. As the *World Socialist Website* has documented, the United States played a vital role in Aquino's campaign against Arroyo, boosting its political influence in Manila at China's expense. Washington will be working to make certain that its hold does not loosen in the 2013 election.

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