Philippine "left" quarrels over election

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Over the past month, a sordid conflict has been played out in full public view between two rival organizations of the so-called "left" in the Philippines: Akbayan and Anakbayan. The controversy stems from a dispute over participation in the party list system of proportional representation, which allocates 20 percent of seats in the Philippine House of Representatives to "sectoral organizations" which are deemed to represent various "marginalized sectors."

The party list system was first implemented in the 1998 election. Any party list organization which received 2 percent of the total vote cast on the party list ballot was apportioned a seat in Congress. No party may be allotted more than three seats.

Akbayan was formed in the wake of the break-up of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in the early 1990s. Every decision made by Akbayan over the past two decades has born the stamp of its origin. The nationalist, opportunist and class collaborationist politics of Akbayan are the continuation of the Stalinist politics of the CPP. What differences now exist between Akbayan and its Maoist rivals are born out of the contingencies of alliances formed with different sections of the bourgeoisie.

During the 1998 election, Akbayan became one of the few political parties to gain seats in the House of Representatives via the party list system.

Those sections of the CPP that had retained the name of the "Communist Party" moved to take part in the next elections in 2001. Through its front organizations, the CPP formed a number of political parties, each claiming to represent the interests of a distinct "marginalized sector"—women, migrants, peasants, fishermen.

The party-list system quickly became yet another stomping ground for the elite political dynasties of the Philippines. Oligarchs formed parties around the interests of some imagined "marginal group," placing their scions on the party's ballot as the leading candidate for congressional representative. The 2013 elections, for example, will see former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's son, Mikey, running as the representative of the "marginalized" interests of security guards. In 2010, on the other hand, Mikey led the party that purported to serve the interests of tricycle drivers. The former head of the Philippine Armed Forces ran under a separate public transit worker party list.

This farcical arrangement led to a public outcry for the purging of the party list system of "fake parties." The Commission on Elections (COMELEC), appointed by the president, convened to determine if individual party list groups were "truly marginalized or served the interests of the marginalized," or if they were a dynastic subterfuge. Any party deemed "not marginalized" was banned from participation. Appeals over the bans are adjudicated by the Supreme Court.

As the deadline to receive approval as a marginalized group approached, the rival "left" organizations, Akbayan and Anakbayan, began publicly quarreling, each appealing to the state apparatus to be deemed the true representatives of the "marginalized." While Anakbayan is not itself a party-list organization, it is part of plethora of front organizations created by the CPP, many of whom are vying for party list seats.

In late October, Anakbayan protestors crashed an Akbayan political rally, denouncing Akbayan as part of President Aquino's administration. Akbayan representative Walden Bello struck back, denouncing Anakbayan as a front organization of the CPP. Anakbayan in turn denounced this as "red-baiting."

As pathetic a spectacle as these denunciations may be, the public dispute reveals the depth of the opportunism and charlatanry of both Akbayan and Anakbayan, as well as the other CPP front organizations.

Akbayan has become inextricably intertwined with the Aquino government. Key positions in Aquino's cabinet are held by Akbayan members, including President Aquino's personal political adviser. Akbayan is running a candidate for senator on Aquino's Liberal Party ticket.

The official donor list for Akbayan's 2010 election campaign was recently released to the press. Akbayan received 110 million pesos (just under $US3 million) in campaign contributions. P17 million was donated from President Aquino's immediate family. Most of the remaining donations were multi-million peso lump sum contributions from large businessmen. Two million pesos were contributed by Antonio Moncupa, a former CPP cadre, now president of the multi-billion dollar East-West Bank. He is representative of the class layer that Akbayan serves.

Anakbayan, in its turn, condemned Bello's statement that it along with Bayan Muna, Kilusang Mayo Uno and other groups were CPP front organizations. They denounced not merely the attempt to have their party list revoked, but the very idea that they were front organizations. Anakbayan and the other groups repeated the absurd claim that no organizational links existed between any of their groups and the CPP.

The ties between the CPP and its front organizations are the worst kept secret in Philippine history. Bayan Muna, BAYAN, Gabriela, Migrante, Anakbayan, KMU, KMP and a host of other groups hold to the exact political line. They all mouth the same Maoist phrases about a National Democratic revolution against the enemies of the people: "imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucrat capitalism." And it is openly understood that they cycle activists through the ranks of the legal organizations into the so-called UG, or underground movement.

No political figure, no journalist, and certainly no military officer, is even slightly fooled by the claim that these organizations are not connected to the CPP. The lie that they are separate provides no safety to low-level organizers who are frequently murdered by the military or by paramilitary thugs.

The claim that these front organizations are ideological and organizationally separate from the CPP has a long history. It was created and perpetuated because it gave bourgeois politicians the ability to maneuver and ally with these parties, despite the CPP's illegal status. The lie also enables the CPP's front organizations to engage in open alliances, dalliances and wheeling and dealing with the ruling elite. The perpetuation of this lie lurks behind the outcry over "red-baiting."

Neither Akbayan nor Anakbayan serve the interests of the working class and poor. They function as the left flank of the bourgeoisie. In the 2010 election, the CPP front organizations approached Aquino, asking to be part of his Liberal Party ticket. The only difference between Akbayan and the CPP groups is that Akbayan made it onto the ticket of the winning candidate.

Like all forms of opportunism, Akbayan and the CPP groups are rooted in nationalism, which is displayed in their various names: Makabayan, Bayan, Bayan Muna, Akbayan, Anakbayan. Bayan means nation. The CPP was founded upon the reactionary perspective of the two-stage theory of revolution, which subordinated the working class to the so-called progressive wing of the bourgeoisie in the name of carrying out national democratic tasks. Socialism was always consigned to the indefinite future.

This perspective has led to one defeat after the other for the working class in the Philippines and other countries with a belated capitalist development. As Leon Trotsky explained in his Theory of Permanent Revolution, the bourgeoisie in countries like the Philippines is organically incapable of meeting the democratic aspirations and social needs of working people. Only the working class can fulfill the democratic tasks through its struggle to mobilize the rural poor in the fight for a workers' and peasants' government as part of the struggle for socialism internationally.

Akbayan, the CPP and its front organizations are deeply hostile to this revolutionary perspective. Under conditions of a deepening economic crisis, all of them are integrating more closely than ever into the political establishment in the Philippines.

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