

Three Philippine Senators arraigned on corruption charges

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Three Philippine senators have been arraigned over the past two weeks on charges of plunder and graft. The three politicians, who are the key leaders of the bourgeois opposition to President Benigno Aquino III, are accused of spending billions of pesos of their “pork barrel” funds on overpriced or non-existent projects through a host of bogus non-government organizations in exchange for kickbacks from contractors amounting to hundreds of millions of pesos.

senator Ramon Revilla is accused of pocketing PHP224.51 million (about \$US5 million); Senator Jinggoy Estrada, PHP183.79 million and senator Juan Ponce Enrile, PHP172.83 million. If found guilty, they face life imprisonment and the confiscation of all illegally acquired assets.

Revilla and Estrada have been in detention at the national police headquarters for the past week, while a warrant for Enrile’s arrest was issued on July 4. He surrendered to the police shortly after the issuing of the warrant.

A nearly year-long scandal leading up to the arrests has wracked the political establishment. Accusations and counter-accusations between Aquino and his opponents exposed that Aquino’s allies in Congress—17 senators and over a hundred congressmen—have similarly plundered their pork barrel funds. It has also emerged that Aquino and his cabinet officers siphoned billions of pesos from the national budget and created a massive presidential pork barrel fund from which they channeled millions of pesos to pay off senators who voted to impeach former chief justice of the Philippine Supreme Court Renato Corona, a political ally of Aquino’s rival, former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.

This week, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously that presidential pork barrel funds, known as Disbursement

Acceleration Programs (DAP), were unconstitutional, exposing Aquino himself to the possibility of impeachment.

Aquino has sought to dress up the political crisis besetting ruling circles as the outcome of his campaign against government corruption. The arraignment of the senators is now being touted as the high water mark of his drive for honest government. This is not the case.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has carefully established, Aquino’s anti-corruption campaign is in reality a drive to crush opposition in any section of government—in the civil service, in the military hierarchy, in the judiciary and, now, in the legislature—to his sharp turn toward US imperialism. Aquino has, through countless provocations against China and the signing of a sweeping basing agreement with Washington, placed Manila on the frontlines of the US “pivot to Asia.”

From the onset of the “pivot,” Washington brought down immense pressure on governments throughout the Asia Pacific region—and particularly those of Japan, Australia and the Philippines—to line up behind its campaign against Beijing. This pressure led to the 2010 ouster of Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who sought to straddle the line between the US, the Australian bourgeoisie’s political and military ally, and China, the main export market for the immense Australian mining industry. Weeks earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama was forced to resign over the issue of US bases in Okinawa and after calling for closer Japan-China relations.

For Aquino and his faction, the US “pivot to Asia” dovetailed with its drive to remove President Arroyo and her cohorts from power.

Arroyo initially supported the interests of US imperialism and its global “war on terror.” Amidst the

rapidly expanding economic relations between the Philippines and China, on one hand, and, the marked decline of US economic influence in the Philippines and throughout the region, on the other, Arroyo began to tilt Philippine politics and economy in the direction of China. She welcomed Chinese investment and business into the Philippines to the detriment of US businesses and sections of the local ruling elite who were traditionally aligned with the US.

The representatives to US imperialism were livid. Along with its allies among the local ruling circles, it has long insisted that this “tilt” was facilitated by the exercise of China’s “soft power,” a transparent euphemism for massive bribes to, and the corruption of, the Arroyo government.

Following his installation into the presidency in 2010, Aquino, aided and abetted by the US, used corruption allegations, provided by US agencies, to publicly humiliate and sack Arroyo appointees in the civil service bureaucracy and in the military hierarchy. One former general committed suicide. The head of anti-graft prosecutors resigned under threat of impeachment charges. The purge of Arroyo supporters culminated in the ouster of Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona and arraignment and detention of former President Arroyo herself on corruption charges.

In tandem, Aquino has ratcheted up tensions with China, aggressively asserting Philippine claims in the South China Sea. He has filed a suit before the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) over the disputed waters. The suit has been drawn up, and is being prosecuted, by Washington. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Aquino openly compared China with Nazi Germany.

The arrest of the three senators, however, is more than just another chapter in Aquino’s purge. It signals the deepening of the involvement of the Philippines in Washington’s preparations for war with China.

It is not a coincidence that the charges were rapidly brought forward following the signing of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). EDCA grants US imperialism sweeping access to the entire country, allowing the stationing of unlimited troops and equipment anywhere that Washington deems fit.

The three senators constitute a known pole of attraction for sections of the Philippine ruling elite with close economic ties to China. Significantly, Enrile

voiced opposition to the basing agreement during its negotiation, warning that he believed that key provisions of the deal, which were then merely hinted at by the negotiators, violated the constitution.

The new basing agreement is now being questioned before the Supreme Court, which is headed by an Aquino appointee. In the unlikely event that it rules that Aquino must submit EDCA to the Senate for approval, as mandated by the constitution, the significance of the arrest of Revilla, Estrada, and Enrile becomes clear. No opposition, however feeble, will be tolerated as the Philippines joins US imperialism in its march to war against China.



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