

Bogus agrarian reform ends in the Philippines

Dante Pastrana
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The Philippine agrarian reform land acquisition program expired on June 30. The agrarian reform law, known as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), was a sham. Passed in 1988 under President Corazon Aquino, the mother of current President Benigno Aquino III, it was premised, like all “land reform” under capitalism, on the defense of bourgeois property.

Under the law, the landlord was to be compensated at market value. The supposed beneficiary, the landless tiller, was to be condemned to 30 years of debt servitude, paying amortization at 6 percent annual interest for a 3-hectare farm lot, even as the globalization of production put paid to the small peasant farm.

The law was riddled with loopholes that allowed the landed elite total control over the process, including under what conditions the law applied and who could be beneficiaries of the distributed land. Deploying political influence and state violence, the landed elite, capitalist landlords and agribusinesses retained their stranglehold over the rural masses.

However, the whole sordid exercise of implementing CARP cost billions of pesos in government funds. By 2009, the ruling elites had had enough. The Philippine Congress, after extending the law for the third time, legislated that further land acquisitions of private agricultural holdings were to finally end on June 30, 2014.

By the government’s own figures, 76 percent of all land distributed was either government-owned or voluntarily offered by their owners. That is to say, most of the plots redistributed were no longer economical to operate.

The landholdings left untouched by CARP belong to the oligarchs who run the country. According to a *Business Mirror* report, CARP did not touch a 590-hectare block belonging to the Ayala family; the

Cosunji’s 845 hectares; a 764-hectare farm owned by Eduardo Cojuangco, a relative of President Aquino; and the 1,178 hectares of untitled lands claimed by the Fortich family. On Negros Island alone, over 128,000 hectares are controlled by 188 haciendas.

Extreme poverty and unemployment afflict the vast majority of the rural population. Among the so-called beneficiaries of agrarian reform, 52 percent were reported to be living below the country’s austere poverty line. Since CARP’s implementation, landlord thugs or the police have murdered over 600 farmers who attempted to secure land under CARP’s false promise.

Significantly, the re-concentration of distributed land, abetted by the government, is well underway through the “aryendo” system, which pushes the beneficiaries of agrarian reform, under the compulsion of poverty, to sell the control of their land for a pittance.

A stark example is the Hacienda Luisita owned by President Aquino’s family. It was subdivided and redistributed to its tenants and workers with much fanfare last December. The *Rappler* news web site reported that, within seven months, 80 percent of the beneficiaries fell under the aryendo system. One “aryendador” alone is estimated to control 300 hectares of the 4,000 hectares that were distributed.

On the day of CARP’s expiration, 1,000 members of the Maoist Kilusang Mambubukid ng Pilipinas (Philippine Peasant Movement) and its partner, the Bayan Muna party list organization, demonstrated in Metro Manila, the national capital. They briefly barricaded the head office of the agrarian reform department and burned an effigy of President Aquino.

The Maoists called upon the legislature, dominated by the leading members of each of the major landowning families, to support for the passage of a new agrarian reform bill sponsored by Bayan Muna. The Maoists have for years heavily promoted the new

bill, labeled the Genuine Agrarian Reform Bill. It is a political charade, which has no chance of passing through the legislature, and exists solely to imbue the thoroughly corrupt political establishment with a veneer of credibility by pretending that it might.

On the same day, the Maoist breakaway organization Akbayan and its peasant arm, the Save Agrarian Reform Alliance (SARA), appealed to Aquino, with whom it is in a political coalition. They called upon him to fire the agrarian reform department secretary who, they claimed, lacked the political will to use the “powerful” agrarian reform law against the landed elite.

Both Bayan Muna and Akbayan are laboring to cultivate illusions among the working masses in the state, which is the instrument of the bourgeoisie and landowning classes.

The various Maoist factions represent privileged layers of the petty bourgeoisie ensconced in the bureaucracies of conglomerates, businesses, trade union federations, non-government organizations, the civil service, the academe, the Roman Catholic Church and the military in the Philippines. Their privileges are rooted in the stability of the nation-state.

With the deepening global economic crisis and mounting social inequality, these layers are acutely conscious that the deep gulf between the ruling elites and the working masses is leading to a social explosion. Their proposals seek to defuse mounting frustration and anger among impoverished farmers and landless peasants.

These events demonstrate, yet again, the truth of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution. In countries of belated capitalist development in the epoch of imperialism, the bourgeoisie and its various petty bourgeois representatives, including the Maoists, are organically incapable of carrying out basic democratic tasks, including a radical redistribution of land and other basic measures, to meet the needs of peasants and the rural poor.



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