

BAYAN's phony opposition to the US basing deal in the Philippines

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On January 12, the Philippine Supreme Court ruled that the US-Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) was constitutional. The decision gives a green light for the basing of unlimited numbers of US forces and weaponry throughout the country as part of Washington's war drive against China. The Philippine military immediately announced eight locations at which the US military would be basing its forces, including its sprawling former facilities at Subic Naval Base and Clark Air Base.

The Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), through its front organizations headed by the umbrella group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), played a crucial role in facilitating the return of US troops to the country.

Over the past several years, these organizations have labored to whip up anti-Chinese nationalism in the Philippines, denouncing Beijing as imperialist, comparing China to fascist Italy and calling for anti-Chinese pogroms.

They have given enthusiastic support to Manila's legal case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague against China's maritime claims in the South China Sea. This case was drawn up in Washington and is being argued by US attorneys.

BAYAN has called for the armed defense of the Philippines' territorial claims in the South China Sea and has led repeated demonstrations outside the Chinese embassy.

In all of these actions, BAYAN has served the interests of US imperialism and sections of the Philippine ruling class most closely allied with Washington. The organization has raised the specter of Chinese "imperialist" aggression and provided a lying pretext for the restoration of US military bases in the country.

The military tensions over the disputed waters are not the product of Chinese aggression, but have been

deliberately stoked by Washington in its drive to militarily contain and control Beijing. The basing of US forces in the Philippines marks a historic milestone in the imperialist war drive of Washington.

The US bases in the Philippines, until their removal in 1991, when the Philippine Senate voted 12-11 not to renew the leasing agreement, were a source of immense political anger among Filipino workers. Filipinos were treated as second-class citizens in their own country and were regularly mistreated by US troops, who enjoyed extraterritorial immunity from legal prosecution.

BAYAN and the CPP, however, have no principled opposition to the basing of US forces. They do not articulate the interests of the working class, who are deeply hostile to the return of US military occupation.

To the extent that it opposes the treaty, BAYAN does so entirely from the standpoint of extreme Philippine nationalism and anti-Chinese warmongering. BAYAN's argument is that the EDCA is too weak and does not go far enough in ensuring all-out war against China and securing US military protection of the Philippines.

It was on these grounds that BAYAN, in 2014, filed an appeal before the Supreme Court against the EDCA and was joint signatory to another.

The first case was filed before the Supreme Court on May 26 and was signed by BAYAN Chairperson Carol Araullo, who writes a regular column for the leading Philippine business paper, *Business World*, and Teddy Casiño, former congressional representative of the party list organization, Bayan Muna, which is affiliated with BAYAN. They signed alongside former Senator Rene Saguisag and Francisco Nemenzo, the former leader of the rival Stalinist Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), from which the founders of the Maoist CPP broke in 1967 as a result of the Sino-Soviet split.

They argued that the EDCA would not serve as a "sure-fire deterrent to the Chinese dragon" because the United

States would not be obligated to modernize the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and because “there is no assurance that the United States will actually come to the aid of the Philippines in case of an invasion by China.”

Saguisag made this point crystal clear when, immediately after submitting the case, he said that he would support the basing agreement provided Washington promised to set up one of its bases in the Spratly Islands, a move that would be tantamount to a declaration of war against China.

The signers petitioned the Supreme Court to demand that the EDCA be sent to the Philippine Senate, which “must negotiate the best possible terms for a just, fair and equitable agreement.” Araullo and Casiño, two of the most prominent members of the front organizations of the CPP, submitted a legal document calling for a “just, fair and equitable agreement” with US imperialism.

The lie that Washington is not serious in its war drive against China has been routinely repeated by the CPP. During Obama’s visit to the Philippines in 2014, the CPP issued an official statement declaring that “the US has chosen to avoid antagonizing China.”

Not content with the first case filed before the Supreme Court, the front organizations of the CPP, including BAYAN, Bayan Muna and the Makabayan Coalition, filed their own separate appeal the next day, May 27. The first two sentences of the case state: ‘In this petition to nullify the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), we face a formidable opponent. The daunting adversary is certainly not the United States’ military and industrial complex that backstops the EDCA.’

According to BAYAN and the CPP, US imperialism is not the enemy. The greatest enemy, according to BAYAN and its fellow petitioners, is the colonial mentality “of our own officialdom, from the president to the lowest of his minions,” who are engaged in “brown-nosing” the Americans.

Renato Reyes, secretary of BAYAN and one of the signatories to the second case, laid out its basic argument in a news release on May 25. The problem was “classic colonial thinking, the kind that will prevent our AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] from ever modernizing.” He continued with the complaint that “our capacity to defend our territory against China will not be improved. ... It is silly that China is even being mentioned.”

Reyes had stated on April 24 that the problem was that there was “really no assurance that the US government will come to our defense and hit back at China.”

The 101 page appeal concludes: “The reality is—despite the ‘special relations’ and the decades-long presence of US military bases and troops in the country, the Philippine Armed Forces remain one of the most miserably backward and pitifully antiquated armed forces in the region.”

On these grounds—that the EDCA will not modernize the AFP and that there is no guarantee of US protection in the event of war—BAYAN and company appealed to the Supreme Court to “not allow this tricky relationship with a ‘frenemy’ to continue.”

The CPP is in the service of the bourgeoisie, not the working class. It is not opposed to US imperialism. It speaks for the interests of the most reactionary sections of the Philippine bourgeoisie, who are spearheading Washington’s anti-Beijing pivot in the South China Sea while seeking guarantees of US protection. They still remember how, in early 1942, US Gen. Douglas MacArthur pulled his troops out of the US colony in the wake of the Japanese invasion.

BAYAN and all of the front organizations of the CPP under its umbrella are in a political alliance with Senator Grace Poe, who is running for president in the May 2016 election. They have formally backed her candidacy and are running a senatorial candidate on her ticket. They are a key component of her presidential campaign.

When the Supreme Court announced its decision declaring the EDCA constitutional, Renato Reyes issued a statement that “this is another sad day for Philippine sovereignty.” Grace Poe, however, stated, “As mentioned before, we are thankful to the SC for providing guidance in the EDCA issue. Their decision will serve as guide for all concerned. We call on all to respect the decision of the SC.”

Behind BAYAN’s empty posturing as an opponent of the US bases, it is performing yeoman’s service for US imperialism.



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