

Stalinists, far right support new bourgeois coalition in the Philippines

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With the formation of a new coalition, 1Sambayan (One Nation), on March 18, the ruling-class opposition to Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte began organizing a united electoral campaign in preparation for the 2022 elections. In a remarkable alignment, every Stalinist political tendency in the Philippines has declared its support for 1Sambayan, joining hands with Magdalo, the far-right political party of military officers who rose to prominence in 2006 when they attempted to carry out a coup d'état.

The fundamental concern of 1Sambayan is to bring Philippine foreign policy back into camp of the United States, which is engaged in an aggressive escalation of military threats against China, reversing Duterte's orientation of the country's ties toward Beijing.

The elite opposition, organized in the Liberal Party and headed by Vice President Leni Robredo, suffered a devastating defeat in 2019, marking the first time in the country's history that opposition candidates failed to secure a single senatorial seat in the midterm elections. 1Sambayan is an attempt to cobble together a viable opposition vehicle prior to the presidential election.

An opinion piece in the influential *Business World* indicated the perspective of the capitalist interests behind the formation of 1Sambayan: "I feel betrayed by the Liberal Party (LP). Don't you? As the predominant opposition party, it is their duty to mitigate the policies, decisions, and actions of the executive branch and their allies in the legislature. But this has not been the case. ... As an opposition party, the LP is a national shame. I have never seen an opposition party so weak."

The fundamental concern of 1Sambayan is geopolitical. It articulates the interests of layers of the capitalist class in the Philippines whose economic and political orientation is to Washington. These forces are predominantly based in the stock market and the business process outsourcing sector.

Significant layers of the Filipino elite have embraced Duterte's reorientation of Philippine economic ties to Beijing. They see in ties with China, and its promise of infrastructural loans and investment, a means of expanding their holdings. Business interests in real estate speculation, malls, infrastructure, and those outside the national capital region have lined up behind this orientation.

Duterte has at the same time secured mass support from the sizeable lower-middle class, playing to their prejudices and fears of the working class and poor. His law-and-order campaign, under the guise of a war on drugs, has deployed the apparatus of state

and paramilitary repression against any source of possible social unrest. Over 30,000 people have been killed as a direct result in the past five years.

In this manner Duterte has secured the support of an unprecedented super-majority in the Philippine legislature, which includes a number of defectors from the Liberal Party in its ranks.

Even a glance at the figures behind the convening of 1Sambayan lays bare the interests involved. Three names feature most prominently: Albert del Rosario, Antonio Carpio, and Conchita Carpio Morales.

Del Rosario was the Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Benigno Aquino III administration of 2010–2016. Under del Rosario, Manila came to serve as the most reliable and aggressive partner in South East Asia for Washington's pivot to Asia. It was on his watch that the Aquino government repeatedly compared China to Nazi Germany, engaged in military, diplomatic and legal disputes over the South China Sea, and signed the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) for the re-establishment of US military bases in the country.

Antonio Carpio is a former justice of the Supreme Court. More than any other figure he is the legal face of the Philippine claim to the South China Sea. He has relentlessly and publicly promoted the most expansive claim to the disputed waters. He termed China's presence in the Philippine-claimed maritime region an "invasion," and declared that the EDCA basing deal was an essential element for defending the country against it.

Conchita Carpio-Morales was ombudsman under the Aquino III administration, where she used corruption charges, often with data supplied by the US embassy, to prosecute sections of the political elite who were tied to the Arroyo administration, which had begun the reorientation of Philippine ties to China.

In 2019, the triumvirate of del Rosario, Carpio, and Carpio-Morales filed charges of "crimes against humanity" against China in the International Criminal Court (ICC) for its continued presence in what they term the "West Philippine Sea."

That these three figures are the leading convenors of 1Sambayan sharply defines the new coalition. They have demonstrated only one common interest over the course of a decade: the strident denunciation of China and the formation of intimate ties with the United States. They are joined in the leadership of 1Sambayan by retired Rear Adm. Rommel Jude Ong, former vice commander of the Philippine Navy. Ong has publicly announced that the forthcoming elections would likely be "a contest with China," and

decided the forces around Duterte as “Manchurian candidates.”

ISambayan stated that it proposes to review possible candidates for president and vice president before announcing its slate. Carpio told the assembly that the prominent names they were considering for nomination were Vice President Leni Robredo, Senator Grace Poe, Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, Senator Nancy Binay, and Senator Antonio Trillanes.

The names demonstrate that ISambayan do not represent any alternative to the reactionary policies of the Duterte administration. Many of these candidates have supported Duterte on key measures extending his apparatus of repression, including the imposition of martial law on the southern island of Mindanao.

Moreno was part of the Duterte cabinet until he ran for mayor in 2019. He has repeatedly defended Duterte’s war on drugs. Moreno has, however, very publicly scapegoated Chinese immigrants in the Philippines for social ills. It is this that wins him the support of ISambayan.

Trillanes rose to political prominence by staging multiple coup attempts in the first decade of the 21st century. He represents far-right forces, organized in the Magdalo party, oriented to the formation of a military junta. He has repeatedly denounced Duterte as a “puppet of China,” and called for direct military confrontation with China in the South China Sea.

Magdalo is one of the convenors of ISambayan. They were joined on the rostrum by representatives of Bayan Muna (Nation First) and Partido ng Manggagawa (PM), rival mass organizations that share the nationalist program of Stalinism. Bayan Muna is an electoral party of the umbrella group, Bayan, which shares a common political line with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). PM represents a Stalinist tendency, founded by Popoy Lagman, that broke from the CPP in the early 1990s.

These long-time rivals are joining hands together and uniting with far-right forces, a fact which has been widely commented upon. An editorial in the *Philippine Star* on March 21, wrote that ISambayan represented the joining of the left “to the extreme right such as Magdalo party-list.”

Every Stalinist party and tendency in the Philippines immediately embraced ISambayan. The various organizations associated with the political line of the CPP, broadly referred to as the “national democratic movement,” led the way.

Jose Ma. Sison, founder and ideological leader of the CPP described ISambayan as a “newly risen broad coalition of patriotic and democratic forces that are determined to fight [Duterte’s] tyranny and challenge his clique in clean and honest elections.”

The CPP was directly responsible for facilitating Duterte’s rise to power in 2016. The party embraced his presidency, declared him progressive and even offered support for his war on drugs. Teddy Casiño of Bayan Muna wrote a rare acknowledgement of this last week, when he admitted that one of the difficulties for the national democratic movement in forming a new alliance was “because it opposed the Aquino administration and initially supported Duterte in the first year of his regime.”

The CPP-aligned forces are repeating the pattern now with their embrace of ISambayan. Representative of the Kabataan party-list, a “national democratic” youth organization, Sarah Elago “urged the youth to actively participate in ISambayan.” Carlos Zarate,

elected representative of Bayan Muna, who in 2016 signed a public statement pledging full support to Duterte, stated, “We welcome this initiative for a broadest gathering of democratic forces to restore good governance, respect for human rights and an end to tyranny in our country.”

The rest of the so-called “left” in the Philippines is comprised of organizations that emerged out of various tendencies known as “RJ,” or rejectionists, who broke with the CPP in the early 1990s. All of these organizations retained the nationalist, class collaborationist perspective of Stalinism. One of the organizations that emerged out of the RJ forces, Akbayan, has effectively merged with the Liberal Party, and is one of the driving forces behind the formation of ISambayan.

A number of organizations tied to trade unionism formed under the leadership of Popoy Lagman. When Lagman was assassinated in 2001, these groups broke into various rival tendencies. All of these tendencies have now united in embrace of ISambayan. PM is a convening member. The rival Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP, Solidarity of Filipino Workers), associated with the leadership of Sonny Melencio, issued a statement declaring that the founding of ISambayan was “a breath of fresh air.”

The splits that occurred in Philippine Stalinism in the 1990s were brutal. They were marked by assassinations, subterfuge, hysterical denunciations, and embezzlement of funds. The rival parties were fighting to retain control over their mass membership, for this is the constituency that they bring to the alliances that they form with the capitalist class.

For all their tactical disagreements, there were no principled political differences between these organizations. They shared a common orientation to forming an alliance with a section of the capitalist class in the name of “national democracy.” As the bourgeois opposition gathers itself, desperately trying to reorient the country back into the ambit of the US, its former colonial ruler, all of the forces of Stalinism have aligned behind them. They stand exposed for what they truly are: agents of the bourgeoisie.

The far-right populism of the murderous Duterte administration cannot be successfully opposed on this basis. The only way forward to mobilize mass discontent in opposition to the crisis of capitalism and the threat of dictatorship is the perspective of socialism. The defense of basic democratic rights can only be carried out on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program against the threat of war and capitalist onslaught on living standards. This requires a break with every section of the capitalist class and the Stalinist parties which are all based on nationalism, chauvinism and class collaboration.



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