Philippine Stalinists back Marcos amid US war preparations against China

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16 November 2026

The impeachment trial of Philippine Vice President Sara Duterte has entered its defense stage, with prosecutors pressing for a verdict before the end of the year. The Marcos administration is using the proceedings to eliminate the leading contender for the 2028 presidency, whose return to power would threaten Manila's alignment with Washington's preparations for war against China.

Spearheading this operation are BAYAN and allied organizations that follow the Stalinist political line of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), alongside the leftist Akbayan. They initiated the impeachment campaign, supplied congressional votes, prosecutors and public spokespeople, and mobilized demonstrations to press the proceedings forward.

They furnish a left populist justification that Marcos and his immediate allies cannot credibly supply themselves, translating anger over corruption, poverty and repression into support for another faction of the ruling class.

The impeachment is an instrument of all-out political warfare between the Marcos and Duterte camps over control of the Philippine state and its geopolitical orientation. Rodrigo Duterte, Sara's father and president from 2016 to 2022, is now imprisoned in The Hague. By removing his daughter from office and barring her from the presidency, the Marcos administration seeks to eliminate the rival faction as a contender for national power.

The Marcos camp represents the entrenched elite's traditional economic and political ties to Washington, anchored in the loyalty of a military built from the ground up by US imperialism. The Dutertes represent a growing section of Philippine capital and provincial political clans based far from Metro Manila, seeking Chinese investment and greater distance from Washington. Their power rests on local patronage, warlordism and death squads, with stronger ties to the police—the principal apparatus of Rodrigo Duterte's murderous "war on drugs" against the poor—than to the military. Neither faction offers anything progressive for the working class and rural poor.

This division is not peculiar to the Philippines. Throughout Asia and internationally, ruling classes confront the conflict between their economic ties to China and Washington's demands for alignment with its preparations for war. The resulting tensions cut across established parties and alliances, producing bitter struggles over foreign policy and control of the state. The Marcos–Duterte conflict is a particularly sharp expression of this global process.

A conviction would remove Sara Duterte from office and bar her from the presidency, for which poll after poll identifies her as by far the leading contender. Akbayan and the Stalinists are attempting to mobilize popular support for this elite political warfare, directing anger over corruption and repression behind the interests of Marcos and Washington.

Akbayan and BAYAN did not merely join the impeachment campaign; they spearheaded it.

Akbayan representative Perci Cendaña endorsed the first complaint against Duterte on December 2, 2024. Two days later, BAYAN led the filing of a second complaint over the alleged misuse of 612.5 million pesos ($US9.6 million) in confidential funds. Makabayan representatives France Castro of ACT Teachers, Arlene Brosas of Gabriela and Raoul Manuel of Kabataan supplied the congressional endorsements.

On February 5, 2025, the Marcos-aligned House leadership rushed a fourth complaint through the chamber, gathering 215 signatures and transmitting it to the Senate that afternoon without committee hearings. Castro acknowledged that Makabayan legislators were shown the final draft at a leadership caucus that morning. The Supreme Court subsequently declared the impeachment unconstitutional, citing the prohibition on successive proceedings within one year and violations of due process.

These organizations renewed the campaign in February 2026. BAYAN and allied organizations filed a fresh complaint, endorsed by Makabayan representatives Antonio Tinio, Sarah Elago and Renee Co. Cendaña and Leila de Lima, representing the Liberal Party's sectoral wing Mamamayang Liberal, endorsed another complaint that morning. Akbayan has been closely integrated with the Liberal Party since the Aquino III administration, when its leaders received government posts in return for their political support. Their joint intervention continued this longstanding alliance.

All three Makabayan representatives and all three Akbayan representatives subsequently voted for impeachment, alongside de Lima. The May 11 vote—257 in favor, 25 against and nine abstentions—reflected the presidential grip on the House, where access to pork-barrel projects binds legislators to the administration. Securing conviction in the Senate, whose members possess more independent political bases, is a different matter.

Akbayan and the Stalinists are prosecuting the case in the Senate and campaigning for it in the streets. Akbayan's Chel Diokno serves as a House prosecutor, pursuing access to Duterte's financial records and defending the subpoenas against her lawyers' objections. Kabataan's Renee Co serves as one of the prosecution's official spokespeople.

BAYAN and Akbayan are campaigning to rally students, workers, and the oppressed masses behind the impeachment. They demonstrated outside the House during the May 11 vote, while BAYAN and allied organizations staged protests in Metro Manila, Baguio, Cebu, Iloilo and Davao, directing public anger over corruption into demands for Duterte's prosecution.

Akbayan and BAYAN have long been bitter rivals, competing for political influence and denouncing one another's bourgeois alliances. They now prosecute a common campaign because they have aligned behind the same bourgeois faction. Akbayan's course is inseparable from that of the Liberal Party and its elite constituency. The rapprochement of the Aquino and Marcos camps, driven by their shared orientation toward Washington, brings Akbayan into concert with BAYAN.

The Stalinists are less openly bound to a single bourgeois party, but their

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nationalist program invariably directs workers behind some section of the ruling class. Having supported Duterte's rise to the presidency, they now spearhead the campaign against his daughter. Their convergence with Akbayan expresses the realignment of bourgeois forces behind Marcos and, through him, Washington's preparations for war against China.

For all their organizational differences and bitter rivalries, the CPP and Akbayan share a nationalist perspective. They proceed from the supposed requirements of Philippine national development, rather than from an assessment of world capitalism and the international revolutionary tasks of the working class. Their political goal is an alliance with a section of the Philippine bourgeoisie, not the independent struggle of workers for socialism.

The CPP's program derives from the Stalinist bureaucracy that usurped political power from the Soviet working class. Defending its privileged position, the bureaucracy repudiated the international socialist strategy of the October Revolution in favor of "socialism in one country." It transformed the Communist International and its national parties from instruments of world revolution into bargaining counters in its dealings with capitalist governments. To justify subordinating workers to supposedly progressive capitalists, Stalin revived the Menshevik theory that the democratic and socialist revolutions constituted separate historical stages.

The two-stage theory furnished Communist Party leaders with a justification for their own nationalist ambitions and pursuit of power through deals with the capitalist class. The Soviet bureaucracy it originally served no longer exists, but the theory continues to sanction the opportunist alliances through which national Stalinist leaderships advance their political and material interests. In the Philippines, the CPP invokes a supposedly "national democratic" stage to demand that workers support capitalist politicians, while relegating socialism to an indefinite future.

Maoism, the CPP's particular variant of Stalinism, places the peasantry and the "protracted people's war" of its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), at the center of this national perspective. The armed struggle served as a means of pressuring the bourgeoisie, not of its overthrow; over decades, it has been reduced to radical cover for the leadership's opportunist alliances. Akbayan dispenses with guerrilla warfare and the promise of a future revolutionary stage, pursuing its nationalist reformism through parliamentary politics and government posts. Their different methods lead to the same political result: the subordination of workers to capitalist rule.

Socialism never guided their political activity; it simply served as a rhetorical cover for subordinating workers to capitalist allies. Over decades, even this pretense has largely been abandoned. Their pursuit of government posts and political influence is now openly justified in the language of capitalist reform: "good government," accountability and honest administration.

Within this framework, poverty is presented as the product of corruption rather than capitalist exploitation; the solution offered is honest administration and better representatives—foremost these organizations themselves. The Stalinists and Akbayan employ the language of the IMF and World Bank, promoting good governance within the capitalist system as the means to economic development and poverty reduction. They cultivate the illusion that the existing social order can serve the masses if only the right people administer it.

In January 2026, BAYAN leaders and allied figures filed an impeachment complaint against Marcos over alleged corruption in infrastructure spending and discretionary funds, endorsed by Makabayan's three representatives. With no realistic prospect of advancing through the administration-controlled House, the complaint furnished political cover for their prosecution of his rival. It allowed the Stalinists to advertise their supposed independence even as their practical activity became increasingly integrated with Marcos's interests. The House dismissed the cases against him by 284 votes to eight. A multiplicity of impeachment complaints does not establish independence from elite politics.

In this case, it disguises an essential role within them: cultivating illusions in the reformability of capitalist rule while prosecuting its factional struggles.

Whatever the reality of the underlying offenses, a corruption scandal becomes an instrument of bourgeois political warfare because of the interests served by its exposure and prosecution. Rival economic, political and geopolitical interests are fought out publicly in the language of democracy and accountability. The decisive questions are which faction exposes the corruption, why it does so, and whose power the prosecution strengthens.

The Stalinists serve as the interface between popular anger and elite rivalry. They corral developing opposition to capitalist exploitation behind one or another faction of the capitalist class, presenting the strengthening of its rule as a victory for the people. Their usefulness lies precisely in their ability to rally constituencies that their bourgeois patrons could not mobilize themselves.

The CPP's flagship publication, *Ang Bayan*, acknowledged the character of the present operation. Its October 21 editorial stated that Marcos was using impeachment not to secure justice but to extend his family's power beyond 2028 by blocking Sara Duterte's presidential ambitions. It also identified his anti-China accusations as a performance for Washington while he made the country available as a vast US military base. Yet the organizations that follow the CPP's political line are spearheading the prosecution that advances these interests.

The Stalinists' prosecution of interests that their own publication identifies as those of Marcos and Washington is neither an accidental departure from their politics nor evidence of inner party disputes. Nor is the relationship adequately explained as hypocrisy. Subordinating the working class to a section of the bourgeoisie, while furnishing that subordination with nationalist and revolutionary justifications, is a fundamental political function of Stalinism. Their record over the past quarter-century demonstrates that function repeatedly.

The record of the past quarter-century demonstrates how these politics work in practice. Akbayan and the organizations following the CPP's political line have repeatedly mobilized popular opposition to corruption and repression behind capitalist politicians. Having helped install an administration, they subsequently campaign against it in alliance with another section of the ruling class, presenting each realignment as a new struggle for democracy.

The two political tendencies entered this period with different organizational histories. BAYAN and its associated organizations followed the political line of the Maoist CPP. Akbayan brought together ex-Stalinists, social democrats and other reformist currents in the 1990s. Their rivalry did not prevent them from serving together as instruments of bourgeois political consolidation.

In 2000–2001, both participated in the campaign to impeach and remove President Joseph Estrada under the banner of "good government." Washington and international finance capital regarded the populist Estrada as unreliable and favored Vice President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo as his replacement. BAYAN and Akbayan helped channel popular anger over corruption into demonstrations presented as a new "people power" movement. In January 2001, the military withdrew its support from Estrada, and Arroyo assumed the presidency with the backing of powerful business interests. The promise of honest government supplied the democratic justification for installing a president more directly aligned with Washington and finance capital.

Within months, Arroyo's security forces were suppressing demonstrations by Estrada's predominantly poor supporters. BAYAN denounced the protesters as a "raging, bloodthirsty pro-Estrada mob" and

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demanded the arrest of their "instigators, agitators and financiers." Having helped bring Arroyo to power in the name of democracy, it supported repression against those challenging her government.

Arroyo's relations with Washington subsequently deteriorated. She withdrew the Philippine military contingent from Iraq in 2004 and sought closer economic ties with Beijing, including Chinese investment and joint exploration of the South China Sea. The president initially backed as a reliable representative of US and financial interests became the target of a rival alignment committed to restoring Manila's orientation toward Washington. Akbayan and the Stalinists joined the campaign against their former ally, once again presenting support for a competing bourgeois faction as a struggle against corruption.

Benigno Aquino III succeeded Arroyo as president in 2010. His administration moved to dismantle her remaining influence within the state while aligning the Philippines with Washington's "pivot to Asia"—the US military and diplomatic offensive against China initiated by US President Obama. Akbayan leaders took cabinet positions in his administration. The CPP-aligned organizations had sought to run on the Liberal Party slate of Aquino, but Akbayan blocked their entry. Despite their rivalry over access to office, both backed Aquino's campaign against his predecessor and her allies.

The impeachment of Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona in 2011–2012 was a decisive episode in this consolidation of power. Arroyo had appointed Corona shortly before leaving office, and he remained an important obstacle to Aquino's efforts to remove her allies and assert control over the state. His prosecution, presented as a struggle against corruption, became the means of subordinating the Supreme Court to the incoming administration.

Akbayan and the Stalinists spearheaded the campaign. BAYAN chair Carol Araullo boasted that "all the cases filed against GMA [Arroyo] and her cohorts" had been filed by progressive party-list representatives. Bayan Muna representative Teddy Casiño acknowledged signing the impeachment complaint without reading it.

When the prosecution encountered difficulties, Akbayan threatened a "people power" campaign, while Bayan Muna likewise threatened extra-parliamentary mobilization if impeachment failed. Their role was to supply charges, prosecution personnel and public pressure for the removal of an obstacle to presidential power. Corona's conviction in May 2012 strengthened the administration pursuing Washington's strategic realignment of the Philippines against China. The parallel with their present prosecution of Sara Duterte is unmistakable.

The CPP-aligned organizations' next major alliance exposed the fraud of their democratic pretensions even more starkly. In 2016, they supported Rodrigo Duterte's rise to the presidency. Despite Makabayan's formal electoral alliance with rival presidential candidate Grace Poe, BAYAN and allied organizations campaigned for Duterte in many parts of the Philippines.

After Duterte's victory, leading figures accepted cabinet posts and remained in his administration for over a year, even as police and paramilitary forces murdered nearly 10,000 impoverished Filipinos in his "war on drugs."

Anakbayan secretary general Einstein Recedes declared in June 2016 that Duterte's war on drugs and crime was "a boon to the poor." BAYAN secretary general Renato Reyes stated: "To put it plainly, he is an ally." Being "immediately confrontational every time the President said something disagreeable," Reyes explained, would have weakened the alliance. The CPP welcomed Duterte's appeal for cooperation against drug trafficking despite his openly advertised intentions to carry out mass killing.

The representatives of the Stalinist organizations in Duterte's cabinet did not resign in opposition to the slaughter. They were driven out by the hostility of the military and the administration's own anti-communist campaign, which targeted rank-and-file members of their organizations.

The self-appointed democratic prosecutors of Sara Duterte were the accomplices of her father: they helped bring him to power, endorsed his murderous campaign and clung to office until they were expelled.

As Washington's drive to war against China has fractured the Philippine ruling class, these organizations have become spearheads of American strategic interests.

Akbayan's anti-China agitation accompanied Aquino's pivot toward Washington. During a 2011 visit to disputed Thitu Island, Akbayan representative Walden Bello beat the drums for a confrontation with China, calling for a military buildup and expanded Philippine settlements while declaring that Filipinos were willing to die for their soil. Akbayan subsequently helped organize anti-China demonstrations within the political network supporting Aquino.

The Stalinists' nationalism supplied its own poisonous contribution. At a BAYAN-organized protest in June 2015, Tonying Flores secretary general of the peasant organization Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP) moved from denunciations of China to attacks on Chinese-owned businesses and Chinese surnames in the Philippines. "We need to kick the Chinese out of our country," he declared. Elmer Labog, chair of the labor union umbrella organization Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), singled out businessman Henry Sy on the basis of his Chinese ancestry.

This was not opposition to the government's foreign policy but the racist language of pogrom directed against Chinese Filipinos.

BAYAN continues to denounce US imperialism. Such declarations do not alter the consequences of its activity. By helping eliminate Marcos's rival, the Stalinists assist the consolidation of the faction making the archipelago available for American bases, weapons and military operations.

The repeated betrayal of workers through alliances with their exploiters is not a series of mistaken choices. Subordination to a supposedly progressive section of the bourgeoisie is the political program of Stalinism and the pseudoleft. Under the banner of "good government," they are now mobilizing popular anger to consolidate the power of an administration turning the Philippines into a staging ground for US war against China.

The alternative is the international socialist strategy elaborated in Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and vindicated by the October Revolution of 1917. In countries of belated capitalist development, where basic national and democratic tasks remain unresolved, the bourgeoisie's profit interests are inextricably bound up with international finance capital, while its defense of capitalist property makes it organically hostile to the working class. These tasks can be achieved not through an alliance with the bourgeoisie, but only through its overthrow by the working class, leading the oppressed rural masses and establishing workers' power. Their resolution is inseparable from the socialist transformation of society and the extension of the revolution internationally.

The defense of democratic rights, the struggle against poverty and corruption, and opposition to imperialist war cannot be entrusted to either faction of the Philippine ruling class. Neither subordination to Washington nor accommodation with Beijing offers workers a way forward. Both proceed from the interests of capitalist exploiters, not the social needs of the working population.

Filipino workers must break politically with both bourgeois camps and with the Stalinist and reformist organizations that bind them to their exploiters. Their allies are workers in China, the United States and throughout the world, who confront the same capitalist system and the catastrophe of imperialist war. The task is to build an independent revolutionary party of the working class, fighting for power as part of the international struggle for socialism.

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