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Macapagal-Arroyo's "strong republic"

Advancing fascism and neocolonialism

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's speech in front of Congress on July 22 declaring her support for a "strong republic" is a tribute to fascism and neocolonialism.

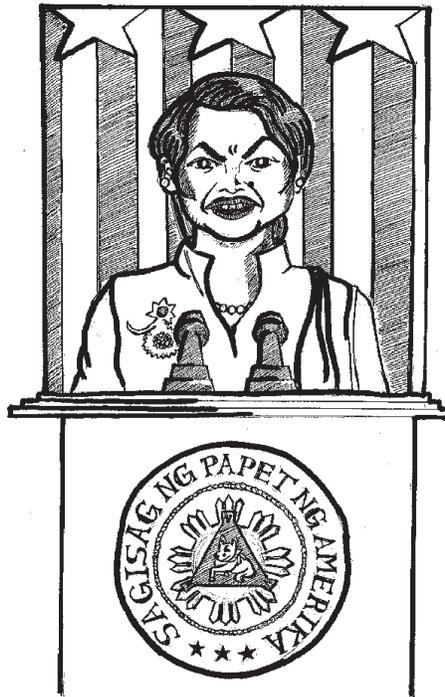
Contrary to its promised development, Macapagal-Arroyo's "strong republic" is replete with corruption and will merely burden the people and worsen their enslavement and oppression.

The theme of her second State of the Nation Address is a portent of further suppression of civil rights and does away with the remaining obstacles to fullblown US military intervention and the operations of foreign capital in the country.

It is necessary to block these measures. There is need to form a broad people's united front to confront and thoroughly resist Macapagal-Arroyo's "strong republic".

THREATS TO CIVIL LIBERTIES AND A DIRECTIVE TO INTENSIFY THE ANTIPEOPLE WAR

Through the "strong republic", Macapagal-Arroyo wants to rationalize the laying down of laws and



policies that will intensify the fascist oppression of the people.

Macapagal-Arroyo now uses the seeming momentum in the campaign against "terrorism" and her declared victory against the Abu Sayyaf and certain prominent cases of criminality to justify the implementation of laws that will allegedly defeat terrorism

and criminality and promote peace and order.

In this regard, Macapagal-Arroyo is asking congress to speed up the passage of bills on "counter-terrorism". The bills were filed by Sen. Robert Barbers at the senate and by Rep. Imee Marcos (House Bill 3802) in congress. They are practically duplicates of the former bill filed by Sen. Orly Mercado and Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile in 1999 that was not enacted due to the people's thoroughgoing resistance.

According to the bill's broadened definition of "terrorist", anyone who criticizes government policies may be considered a "terrorist", prosecuted and sentenced to life imprisonment or death. In such a definition, even revolutionaries, progressives and anyone who has resisted or even merely expressed resistance to the regime, may be considered a "terrorist". It is a counterrevolutionary and fascist proposal. If enacted, it will trample on basic civil liberties, including the right against warrantless arrest and detention.

If Macapagal-Arroyo had her way, there would be no room for

criticism and protests against her policies. The merciless truncheoning and bombardment by water cannons of peaceful demonstrators on July 22 in Quezon City was done precisely upon Macapagal-Arroyo's orders, to project herself as a tough leader with the capability to build a "strong republic".

These violent dispersals of demonstrations were conducted as a prelude to Macapagal-Arroyo's declaration on July 24 that the "maximum tolerance" policy would be discarded in confronting demonstrations. She declared that the way her government dealt with the demonstrations on July 22 would be the last manifestation of "maximum tolerance". The fascist "no permit-no rally" policy will once more be enforced along with the use of a mailed fist policy to disperse militant mass actions by the people. She also declared that the "no maximum tolerance" policy against rallies would be followed during the arrival of US State Secretary Colin Powell in the first week of August.

She and her military have revived the "anti-communist" bogey to justify the ongoing suppression of legal organizations and personalities and provide distorted rationalizations of brutal military operations. According to Macapagal-Arroyo, it is only the "communists" who persist in assailing her. Recently, she has even resorted to calling human rights organizations "criminals" and "terrorists".

Macapagal-Arroyo uses "anti-terrorism" as a seemingly all-encompassing license to use force and violence against anyone she or her government has branded a "terrorist".

She has insisted on categorizing the armed revolutionary movement led by the Communist Party as "terrorist" and "criminals who kill in the

name of politics". She is looking for ways to rationalize the scuttling of the peace talks between the NDF and the GRP and the launching of brutal attacks against the revolutionary movement. Macapagal-Arroyo and the militarists within her cabinet wish to finally do away with obstacles to the conduct of all-out war against the revolutionary forces and the people in the countryside.

ALL-SIDED DOMINATION BY U.S. IMPERIALISM

In the final analysis, Macapagal-Arroyo's "strong republic" conforms to and serves the objective of all-sidedly advancing the interests of US imperialism in the Philippines. Macapagal-Arroyo wishes to use the full force of the state to defeat the people's patriotic movement and lay the ground for US imperialism to ride roughshod over Philippine sovereignty and the national patrimony.

Macapagal-Arroyo is ensuring the permanent presence of American troops in the Philippines through the continued conduct of "joint military training exercises" and the enactment of more laws and treaties.

After focusing on the Abu Sayyaf, the Macapagal-Arroyo regime now wishes to bring these "training exercises" to the territories of the New People's Army to enable the US to intervene in the counter-revolutionary war.



The approval of the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) that will pave the way for the continued presence of American troops in the Philippines is in the offing. The MLSA will allow American troops to set up semi-permanent facilities and structures for their accommodation in various parts of the country. Thus, it circumvents the constitutional provisions prohibiting the establishment of foreign military bases in the country.

She has also posted rabid US imperialist puppet Sen. Blas Ople at the Department of Foreign Affairs to facilitate the ratification of the MLSA and other pro-US treaties and policies.

In the economy of the "strong republic", the policies of liberalization, deregulation, privatization and denationalization will be pushed to the hilt to thoroughly open up the Philippine economy to imperialist "globalization".

Macapagal-Arroyo plans to create new laws and dismantle the remaining provisions that block the free entry and operations of foreign monopoly capitalists in the country.

Among others, she plans to enact the Special Purpose Assets Vehicle (SPAV) that will pave the way for foreign capitalists to own land in the country—which is still formally prohibited by the reactionary constitution.

In her desire to attract foreign capital into the country, Macapagal-Arroyo supports the US' call for major changes in the provisions of the reactionary constitution that are still considered hindrances to the free operation of foreign investments, including the provisions that bar 100% foreign ownership of businesses in the Philippines.

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CONFRONT AND FRUSTRATE THE POLICIES OF THE "STRONG REPUBLIC"

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's declaration that she would be establishing a "strong republic" is a mere coverup for her unstable government and the rotting and disintegrating reactionary ruling system. It is a sign of the ruling classes' desperate defense of the exploitative and oppressive system in the face of a most severe crisis within and outside the country and vis a vis the rapidly advancing acts of resistance to smash reactionary semifeudal and neocolonial rule.

Even as Macapagal-Arroyo was delivering her speech with such overweening arrogance, her knees trembled with dread at the thought that her days in power are numbered. In the face of the swift plunge in her popularity and growing calls for her ouster, Macapagal-Arroyo is laying down measures to gag the people and neutralize her reactionary political rivals.

The revolutionary forces must act swiftly to unite the people in resisting Macapagal-Arroyo's imminent political measures, as well as her isolation from some middle forces and reactionary elements formerly within her faction, in order to broaden the ranks of forces who will thwart her advocacy of a "strong republic".

The national-democratic forces must stand ready to unite with the various forces against the Macapagal-Arroyo regime, even on a tactical basis. Simultaneously, the national-democratic forces must lead in the formation of a broad united front for democracy, people's welfare and national sovereignty.

The New People's Army must take advantage of the Macapagal-Arroyo regime's instability and rapid weakening by continuously launching big and small tactical offensives it is capable of winning while continuing to expand and strengthen the mass base in the countryside.

In particular, the NPA must prepare for the threat that American troops will directly participate in counter-revolutionary operations by joining intelligence operations, tacticizing or by participating in actual armed operations in the guerrilla fronts of the revolutionary movement.

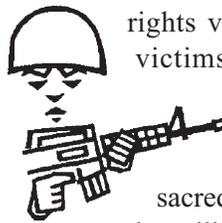
This early, the patriotic and democratic forces in the cities and countryside must take thoroughgoing action to evict American troops from the Philippines.

Through all-out and militant people's resistance, Macapagal-Arroyo's goal of advancing her "strong republic" will be thwarted. Should Macapagal-Arroyo insist on implementing fascist and pro-imperialist policies, the need for collective and decisive action to end her regime will become ever clearer to broad numbers of Filipinos. **AB**

Human rights violations claim 37,000 victims

FROM THE TIME MACAPAGAL-ARROYO took over on January 22, 2001, until July 15,

there have been 1,334 cases of human rights violations claiming 37,164 victims nationwide. Out of this



number, 148 are victims of salvaging and assassination, 55 were mas-

sacred and 14 were abducted by the military and remain missing to date. Various forms of violations such as frustrated murder, indiscriminate firing, bombing, illegal arrests, torture, illegal searches, destruction and denial of access to property, forcible evacuation, food blockades, massive dislocation, denial of medical attention and others are also rampant.

One-hundred twenty-five cases of human rights violations against leaders and members of Bayan Muna have been documented, involving 2,581 victims. Twenty-two Bayan Muna community leaders have been killed while three are massacre victims. Other leaders were able to survive the murder tries while four remain missing.

There are 86 cases involving killings of activists and suspected NPA sympathizers, claiming 148 victims. This is worse than the Estrada regime's record where 59 similar cases were documented in its 18 months in power.

In Basilan, up to 3,169 have been victimized by human rights violations since the intensification of the anti-Abu Sayyaf campaign. Ten of them were salvaged, six were killed, 42 tortured, 126 arbitrarily arrested while one remains missing.

Meanwhile, four women and six children have been jailed to force their relatives who are suspected Abu Sayyaf members, to surrender. They are now illegally imprisoned at the Basilan Provincial Jail and Camp Bagong Diwa in Taguig, Metro Manila. More than 100 other suspected Abu Sayyaf members are jailed in the two camps. **AB**

The illusion of development

At first glance, the “economic growth” bragged about by the Macapagal-Arroyo regime would seem to be true. The statistics are rosy—GDP was supposed to have grown by 3.8%, GNP by 4.9% and the agricultural sector was supposed to have posted a surprising 4.1% growth. There is a balance of payments surplus of close to P2 billion, the peso-dollar exchange rate does not stray far from the P50 mark and the stock market remains relatively “stable”. Also supposedly stable are the prices of commodities, like the *galunggong* (round scad) that Macapagal-Arroyo “bought” for P60 a kilo.

But like the “cheap” price of *galunggong*—that was easily belied by marketgoers all over Metro Manila—the statistics are meaningless in the face of the actual poverty suffered by the people. The claimed economic growth is a far cry from what Macapagal-Arroyo has bragged about and is artificial and temporary, with part of it even illusory.

In reality, the Philippine economy survives solely through infusions from the outside—loans, remittances of migrant workers and foreign investments.

NON-GROWING ECONOMY

According to no less than the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, remittances from OCWs remain the leading factor in the growth of the national income. In fact, almost 15% of the country’s overall income comes from such remittances. From January to April, remittances totalled up to \$2.83 billion—61% more compared to the same period last year. The growing number of Filipinos looking for overseas employment reflects the lack of opportunities to find good jobs in the country. The number of overseas workers has gone up to about eight million (more than 22% of the total work force in the country). In the first four months of the year, the number of Filipinos who have gone abroad to work even grew by 4.4%.

Foreign capital infusion seems to have grown, with



tuta ng kano(n): an American puppet

the \$1.5 billion in direct foreign investments being double the figure for the previous year. But the bulk of it is composed of Kirin Brewery’s payment for the shares of stock it bought from San Miguel Corporation. The rest of the amount is made up of loans extended by monopolies to their subsidiaries in the country. Excluding all this, the amount of new investments entering the country actually dropped 50%.

After hitting rock bottom for more than a year, export earnings grew slightly by 2.7% in May. Imports likewise registered a 3% growth in the first quarter of the year—after continuously posting negative figures from January 2001 to January 2002. The balance of trade deficit once more stood at \$475 million in May, after momentarily becoming positive (\$18 million) in April.

It is important to note that almost 40% of the additional goods imported was composed of telecommunications, electronic and office equipment. The bulk of it comprised cellphones and other telecommunications equipment (20% of overall imports)—all for the growing number of texters and cellphone users.

Production, on the other hand, remains sluggish. A leading indicator is the 20% fall in imported oil due to industry’s reduced need for the commodity.

Export industries are practically at a standstill, especially those involved in the export of electronic spare

parts (which has fallen by 2.4%). Up to now, the much hoped-for recovery of the US economy (the leading market for electronic products) has not taken place. The fall in garments production was much worse (18.2%) as the US reduced its garments imports from the Philippines by 25%. The only product that continued to earn income as of late is canned tuna. But this is likewise sure to collapse now that the US Congress has passed a law approving the duty-free importation of fresh tuna from Latin America. Tuna im-portations from the Philippines are slapped with a 6-12% tariff.

In the first two months of this year, up to 820 factories closed down and laid off their workers. The figure is 65% higher than that of the previous year. More than 20,000 workers lost their jobs (79% more than last year). In January, up to 355 workers per day were terminated.

Contrary to Macapagal-Arroyo's promise of creating a million jobs, the unemployment rate even grew (reaching 13.4% in April) based on conservative government statistics. From 3.94 million at the beginning of the year, the number of unemployed ballooned to 4.87 million by the end of the first quarter. Only the service sector registered a 1.3% growth in employment—but most of the jobs were contractual or casual in nature. Aside from the unemployed, almost six million Filipino workers are underemployed.



MORIBUND AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

Upon close scrutiny, the much-vaunted P240 million-fund that the Macapagal-Arroyo regime was supposed to have poured into agriculture comprised no more than the regular budgetary allocations for agricultural agencies and funds from the Land Bank, the Agrarian Reform Fund and the Department of Agriculture. Aside from this, the regime made no other infusions into the moribund agricultural sector.

Even the creation of 800,000 jobs that the regime has bragged about is a big lie. According to the National Statistics Office, only 110,000 new jobs were created within the sector. Most of those who allegedly found jobs were agricultural workers and fisherfolk who have work only on a seasonal basis. The statistics also included those who were given 90-day jobs in various government agencies through the Emergency

Employment Program and who were once again jobless afterwards. The program has had no significant effect on the status of the millions of unemployed people in the countryside.

Rice and corn production remain stagnant. Rice production posted a mere 0.7% growth in the first six months of the year while corn production even registered a slight decrease.

Contradicting a program to achieve self-sufficiency in rice production, the regime stepped up rice importations. By May, the country's importation of 890,000 metric tons

had vastly exceeded the target of 390,000 metric tons. The government imported 780,000 metric tons of rice the previous year.

GROWING INDEBTEDNESS

The budget deficit ballooned to P120 billion in July—almost twice the six-month target. In fact, the deficit already comprises 91% of the target set for the entire year. The budget deficit is estimated to reach P158 billion to P163 billion for the whole of 2002. To control it, there are plans to reduce funds allotted to social services by up to P83 billion.

No less than the government has said that the burgeoning deficit is the result of sluggish tax collection due to low corporate incomes especially in the manufacturing sector, and reduced tariffs on imported goods—in conformity with the policies of the World Trade Organization.

From January to May, government expenditures ran up to P331 billion, higher by 15% than in the previous year. It borrowed up to P150.7 billion in the same period.

External debt has undeniably ballooned. It now stands at \$53.4 billion (P2.67 trillion)—\$1 billion more than the previous year's figure. It is the third largest in Asia. The Philippines likewise pays the highest interest (13.1%) in all of Asia.

NO SOLUTION TO POVERTY

Much of Macapagal-Arroyo's braggadocio about caring for the poor and solving poverty is an outright lie.

Macapagal-Arroyo has persistently refused to increase the wages and salaries of workers and government employees. The daily minimum remains pegged at P234 (on the average)—which is woefully inadequate compared to the average P438

Outside of Congress

The real state of the nation



Tens of thousands of people marched towards Congress on July 22 to air their grievances and expose the real state of the nation. In confronting them, the regime demonstrated what it meant by a “strong republic” by deploying 8,000 policemen along Commonwealth Avenue and laying down the “no tolerance” policy for the demonstrators. The peaceful assembly ended in a bloody confrontation when the police began throwing rocks and arrested protesters. Eleven men, including an attorney, were arrested by the police. Thirteen were injured in the incident.

BURNING ISSUES

Leaders of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan and its allied organizations condemned Macapagal-Arroyo’s bellicose words that spoke of a “strong republic”—which is nothing more than a coverup for her weak and unstable rule. BAYAN said that this meant none other than intensifying repression and suppression by the regime on the people opposed to her regime. They likened it to the Marcos dictatorship’s

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daily needed by a family.

The amount of land she distributed under the agrarian reform program is by far the lowest in five years. The amount of private land distributed—a mere 65,941 hectares—is less than her promised 100,000 hectares and likewise the lowest in 10 years. Such “distribution” has, in the main, been replete with anomalies, with most of it used by landlords as a means of passing on inheritance to relatives. In many other cases, landlords continue to own the lands through dummies. Macapagal-Arroyo has not lifted a finger regarding her husband’s vast landholdings in Negros.

Prices of basic services remain high. Up to now, consumers shoulder the anomalous and unjust PPA (purchased power adjustment) that comprises up to more

than half of the total billing for electricity. More than the previous regimes, it is the Macapagal-Arroyo regime that has legalized the collection of such high rates through the Electric Power Industry Reform Act. Prices of prime commodities are also high, especially after successive typhoons destroyed farms and fishponds.

Macapagal-Arroyo’s promise in her SONA last year to reduce the prices of medicines by half for the benefit of the majority of the people has had no significant results. This was supposed to be accomplished through the importation of cheap medicines. But the amount of cheap drugs purchased from abroad constituted not even one percent of the country’s total consumption. Foreign monopolies continue to lord it over the drug industry in the country. The regime has been inutile as foreign monopolies effectively blocked drugstores from selling cheap medicines. **AB**

“New Society” that resulted in the systematic suppression of civil rights and widespread violations of human rights.

“Lies”—this was what the Bayan Muna congressmen called Macapagal-Arroyo’s much-vaunted “victories”. They said that the people neither see nor feel the effects of the regime’s “achieved” targets. The congressmen believe that Macapagal-Arroyo will use suppressive measures (like the “counter-terrorism” bill) not only against those she considers terrorists but also against her political rivals and the people.

Popular urban poor leader Nanay Mameng provided a counterpart to Macapagal-Arroyo’s SONA. Nanay Mameng’s 15-minute speech on the real state of the Filipino poor ended with a call for Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s ouster.

Among the thousands of urban poor who attended the protest were the three children from Payatas that Macapagal-Arroyo used as part of her “paper boat” gimmickry and to whom she made certain promises during last year’s SONA. The children said Macapagal-Arroyo did not fulfill her promise of providing housing for the residents of Payatas and justice for the hundreds who were buried in garbage in a terrible tragedy in July 2000.

National minorities roundly condemned the Macapagal-Arroyo regime for its systematic neglect of their welfare even as it allows giant foreign corporations to grab their ancestral lands, extract their natural resources and destroy their way of life. They said that the regime has been systematically implementing a policy of genocide against them through “development” projects and military operations.

According to the Moro-Christian People’s Alliance, the regime attacks Islam in its continued support for US imperialism’s “war against terrorism”. Many Moros have been illegally arrested and accused of being “terrorists” merely because of their religion. They gave as example the seven Moros arrested in a *madrasah* (religious school) in Pangasinan in May.

Scientists and researchers likewise attended the protest action to expose the pathetic state of research and development in science and technology. They said that funds and support promised for these endeavors were nothing but hot air.

Filipino-Americans called attention to widespread violations of human rights of Filipinos in the US in the name of the “war against terrorism”. They said that after the September 11 attacks, the US implemented racist and oppressive policies that have resulted in the deportation of 479 Filipinos. Many other Filipinos lost their jobs by virtue of their nationality—including 28,000 airport controllers who were recently terminated due to racial profiling, a security measure taken by the US because of its fear of Arabs and other races.

Macapagal-Arroyo should confess and ask forgiveness for her political and economic errors—this was the call aired by the Promotion of Church People’s Response. They said that Macapagal-Arroyo should confess her sins against the people—in particular, her failure to reduce electricity rates and the prices of prime commodities.

IN OTHER AREAS

Baguio City. A hundred protesters marched, carrying a cardboard effigy of a giant termite. The effigy that was made to resemble Macapagal-Arroyo—because she accused her former allies now turned critics of being “termites”—rode on a huge paper boat.

Iloilo. Two thousand people marched through the streets of Jaro and Molo. Among them were peasants who brought sprayers to eradicate the Philippines’ biggest pest—Macapagal-Arroyo, the termite queen.

Bacolod. A giant termite was also what 500 protesters brought as a symbol of the “national pest”—the Macapagal-Arroyo regime.

Davao City. Some 5,000 persons put the Macapagal-Arroyo regime on trial before a people’s court in the city’s Rizal Park. The verdict: Guilty! The sentence: Ouster from power! **AB**

