

Philippines: Prospects under a Duterte presidency

“The rise of Davao Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as chief political representative of the ruling classes”

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The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and all revolutionary forces take stock of the significance of the rise of Davao Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as chief political representative of the ruling classes and head of the reactionary client-state and its consequences in advancing the national democratic revolution through people's war.

1. Significance of Duterte's election as president

The election of Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte as next president of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) is a resounding rejection of Aquino's claims of “good governance”, “inclusive growth” and “tuwid na daan.” He routed the ruling regime's fund-rich and political-favored candidate Mar Roxas.

Duterte strongly attacked the Aquino regime and presented himself as an anti-thesis of the oligarchic and cacique rule, keenly aware of the Filipino people's profound hatred of the Aquino regime and its six years of corruption, mendacity, puppetry and wholesale failure to address the needs of the Filipino people.

By drawing broad support, mobilizing large crowds, social media drumbeating and hitech counter-actions, Duterte succeeded in preempting the plans of the US-Aquino regime to use the automated counting system to steal the elections from him. Still, there are strong indications that election results were manipulated to boost Roxas' votes, favor Aquino's vice-presidential and senatorial candidates, as well as to prevent progressive partylist groups from gaining more seats in parliament.

With election-related assassinations, vote-buying, use of public funds, party-switching, automated fraud and so on, the recent reactionary elections is as dirty and rotten than before, contrary to insistent claims that elections were democratic, clean and credible.

Duterte's rise to the presidency is a reflection of the deepening and aggravating crisis of the semicolonial and semifeudal system. He was able to draw broad support from the people because he presented himself as sympathetic to their discontent and deep desire to put an end to the oppressive and rotten ruling system.

Duterte's election also reflects the deepening factional strife among the ruling classes. In running

his election campaign, he relied on the strength of contributions by big business and political groupss, kingmakers, religious sects, military cliques and other interest groups in his presidential campaign kitty, in exchange for economic and political favors come payback time. He spent billions to fund his media and advertising campaign, as well as his technology-supported social media campaign.

He polarized the political elite with his cuss-filled bluster. Duterte and his allies advocate federalism criticizing scant national attention and resources, slow delivery of services and failure to develop the local economies. Such a proposal is a reflection of the demand of the ruling classes to further divvy up the country's resources among the ruling elite.

Certain sections of the political elite support Duterte in the hope of pushing his anti-crime crusade to justify the establishment of a police state. They seek the imposition of more draconian measures to suppress workers' democratic rights and people's human rights to more effectively carry out the exploitation and plunder of the country's human and natural resources.

With Duterte set to become GRP president, for the first time, the Philippine client-state is to be headed by one who is not completely beholden to the US imperialists. Duterte has railed against the US and the US CIA for whisking away its agent Michael Meiring who accidentally exploded the improvised bomb he was preparing inside a Davao hotel during the height of the 2003 US terror bombings in Mindanao. He has opposed the use of the Davao airport as a base for US drone operations and has spoken disfavorably against the EDCA. Duterte has slammed the current US and Australian ambassadors for political meddling after recently making comments about higs tasteless rape joke.

On the other hand, the rest of the political elite are largely pro-US and favor US dominance and military presence. The CIA and US military and its local agents continue to hold sway over most aspects of the ruling state, especially the AFP. Duterte himself is surrounding himself with pro-US and pro-IMF/WB officials. The US also continues to hold dominant sway in the Philippine congress, the Supreme Court, the GRP economic policy and finance agencies, media and cultural organizations.

If Duterte seriously and vigorously pursues his promise to eradicate criminality, especially widespread drug trade, within three to six months, he will likely drive a wedge deep into the ranks of military and police generals and bureaucrat capitalists who are protectors, operators and associates of criminal syndicates.

He has baredhis intention of declaring a ceasefire as one of his first acts as president in order to boost peace negotiations with the NDFP, as well as with various groups representing the Moro people. He has flaunted his friendship with and respect for the revolutionary forces to the chagrin of the militarists who seek only the suppression of the people's resistance.

Duterte has styled himself a maverick, an anti-establishment politico and a "socialist" and claims he will be the country's first "Left president." Duterte's avowal of being a socialist, his anti-US fulminations, openness to develop relations with China and enthusiasm for peace negotiations with the revolutionary forces will not sit well among the more rabid defenders of US military intervention, hegemonism and counter-insurgency dogma.

2. Prospects of accelerated peace negotiations with the Duterte regime

After 15 years of stalled NDFP-GRP peace negotiations, the Filipino people are highly desirous of

progress in efforts to attain a negotiated political settlement of the long-running civil war.

Certain progressive aspects in Duterte's discourse, his recognition of both the political legitimacy and armed political strength of the revolutionary movement and his history of cooperation with the revolutionary forces in Mindanao, make possible the acceleration of peace negotiations.

The CPP and revolutionary forces welcomes Duterte's plan to seriously pursue the NDFP-GRP peace negotiations as well as his plan to visit The Netherlands in order to personally meet NDFP senior political consultant Prof. Jose Ma. Sison and the Utrecht-based NDFP peace panel.

The CPP fully supports the NDFP proposal, put forward by Prof. Jose Ma. Sison, to pursue NDFP-GRP peace negotiations under the Duterte government with the aim of forging an agreement to establish a government of national unity, peace and development.

Duterte and Prof. Sison can forge a plan for accelerated peace negotiations with the aim of forging comprehensive agreements addressing the substantive issues in a matter of a few months. The CPP and NPA are open to consider proposals for a mutual ceasefire during the definite period of peace negotiations.

The revolutionary forces expect Duterte to recognize and uphold all standing agreements signed by the NDFP and the GRP over the past 20 years, including The Hague Joint Declaration of 1992 which has served as framework and anchor of the negotiations; the Joint Agreement on Safety and Immunity Guarantees (JASIG); the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) of 1998; and so on.

Necessarily, among the first measures that need to be carried out by the Duterte regime to boost peace negotiations would be the release all detained NDFP consultants and facilitation of their travel to a neutral territory where negotiations can be conducted. They were treacherously arrested in violation of earlier agreements and made to suffer unjust prolonged imprisonment.

3. Challenge for significant reforms under Duterte

Duterte's rhetoric has raised high the people's expectations for substantial and accelerated reforms.

As an avowed opponent of US meddling, Duterte has the unique opportunity to end the 70 year chain of US puppet governments since the 1946 Roxas regime.

He can undo Aquino's legacy of national humiliation for having served as a pawn in the US "Asia pivot" strategy by allowing the US to restore its military bases and maintain permanent presence of its warships, jetfighters, drones and interventionist troops.

To countervail Aquino's puppetry, he must withdraw his stand to let the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) stand. He must immediately notify the US government of his intent to abrogate the EDCA which was signed as an executive agreement in April 2014.. He must rescind the EDCA-sanctioned use of five AFP camps in the Philippines as US military bases and facilities.

He can serve the US notice to end the unequal Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and the Status of Forces Agreement (SFA) as well as the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951, the parent agreement and source of all military iniquities.

He can immediately send home US Ambassador Goldberg for interference in Philippine internal affairs and ask that the US government send a replacement.

Duterte can be the first Philippine president to pursue an independent foreign policy, one that is not beholden to and dependent on the US. Towards this, Duterte must condemn US war-mongering and US-China saber-rattling and oppose militarization of the territorial sea by the US and Chinese military forces. He must not allow the US military to use the Philippines as base for its interventionism. If he does so, he is bound to be the Philippines' first world-class president who stood for Philippine sovereignty and prevented the military buildup in the region.

He must oppose the US demand to effect charter change to remove the remaining restrictions against foreign ownership as requirement for Philippine integration into the Trans-Pacific Partnership, dubbed as the "dirtiest deal ever".

Corollarily, he can pursue a policy of developing mutually-beneficial economic and trade relations with China with an aim of ending economic and trade dependence on the US. He can pursue a policy of engaging China in bilateral talks to peacefully resolve the South China Sea conflict and opposing US military presence in the area. He can take advantage of the availability of low-interest funds from China's Asian International Infrastructure Bank (AIIB) to support the development of local industry and manufacturing.

Duterte can choose to forge agreements with oil producing countries such as Venezuela, Russia or Iran for state centralized procurement of cheap oil which has been a non-option so far because of the US-defined Philippine foreign policy.

As an ardent anti-crime and anti-corruption advocate, the challenge is for Duterte to prioritize the biggest criminals. The small-fry criminals will disappear without their big fish protectors and sharks up high in the bureaucracy and military and police organization.

He can immediately carry out the arrest and swift prosecution of Benigno Aquino III, Florencio Abad and the biggest criminal perpetrators of the trillion-peso DAP swindle and prevent them from leaving the country. He must follow-through with the prosecution of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and ensure that she is held criminally responsible for the anomalous ZTE broadband deal and other corruption cases, including fraud in the 2004 elections.

The biggest drug lords and criminal syndicates continue to expand their operations under the protection of the top generals of the AFP and PNP. To address the widespread drug trade, Duterte will have to risk subjecting the top echelons of the military and police to a major shakedown to weed out, charge and punish the criminals. Street-level drug pushers and users must be rehabilitated through employment and by establishing centers for medical and psychological rehabilitation from drug abuse.

Duterte has rightly declared his plan to prioritize agriculture, education and health. He must immediately address the urgent needs of the toiling masses of workers and peasants.

To develop agriculture, Duterte is challenged to heed the clamor for genuine land reform which is both an urgent economic and social justice measure. Genuine land reform is the free distribution of land to the peasant tillers and producers. The fake land reform of the past 30 years was a burdensome real estate transaction where peasants were made to pay for the land that they have already earned through years of feudal exactions.

Duterte must cancel all unpaid amortization as well as absorb loans where land titles were collateralized under the prenda system. He can work with organizations of the peasant masses to effect genuine land distribution of Hacienda Luisita, as well as Hacienda Dolores and many other feudal land holdings. He can put an immediate stop to the widespread land-use conversion of

farmlands and privatization of public lands that have resulted widespread eviction of peasants and national minorities from their lands.

As an economic policy, genuine land reform can unleash the productive potentials of the peasant masses as owners of land and expand the local market for manufactured commodities.

A correlated national industrialization policy must be geared, among others, towards the mechanization of agriculture in order to boost food production and processing to ensure sufficient supply of low-priced rice, poultry, meat and vegetables. Irrigation facilities must be expanded and subsidized for free use of the peasant producers.

Duterte has declared he is not much of an economist and said he will listen to the experts. Unfortunately, the supposed experts he is set to appoint are technocrats and big businessmen who excel at neoliberal economic policies and serve foreign big capitalists, and not at promoting domestic economic growth and production. They advocate the economics of “attracting foreign investments” and “easing restrictions” as sought by the US and foreign big capitalists.

In framing economic policies, Duterte should listen first to the workers and peasants, rather than big business and technocrats who advocate the same failed economic policy of more than half a century. This is decisive. Failure to do so will in the end prove his regime to be not simply part of the neoliberal continuum.

To aim for rapid Philippine independent economic modernization with balanced and integrated development of heavy, medium and light industries, Duterte must repudiate the neoliberal thrusts of liberalization, privatization, deregulation and denationalization of the previous regimes. Advancing land reform and national industrialization will generate jobs and end the need for such palliatives as the conditional cash transfer (4Ps) that only perpetuate the people’s poverty and smokescreen the deterioration of public social services.

The Duterte regime must heed the demand of workers and employees for a national minimum wage and the abolition of the regionalization of wages. He must end contractualization and take back his earlier statements against unions and workers rights. Without their unions, workers have nothing to defend themselves against attacks on wages.

In education, Duterte is challenged to scrap the K-12 program which generalizes technical and vocational education to produce cheap contractual labor for export and for export-oriented semi-manufacturing. He must reverse the policy of state abandonment of education and uphold state policy of providing free education for all.

He can push for the integration of education with independent economic modernization through the promotion of research and development in the fields of agricultural production, energy generation, manufacturing, computer technology, new materials and others. To leave a lasting legacy of patriotism, he must gear education to a patriotic cultural renewal by rewriting history from the point of view of the Filipino people instead of its colonial subjugators.

In public health, Duterte is challenged to revoke the policy of privatization of public hospitals and uphold the state policy of providing free public health care for all. He can end the Philhealth milking cow system of private health insurance and instead ensure that everyone is given access to free health care.

He must deliver the basic social services demanded by the people and recast the national budget to allot sufficient funds for education, health, housing and such.

Furthermore, Duterte must cancel Aquino's highly questionable PPP contracts, including the MRT Cavite extension, which gives the Ayalas, Cojuangcos, Consunjis, Pangilins and other big bourgeois compradors undue advantage in using state funds and state-guaranteed loans and government assured profits.

In the field of human rights, Duterte must effect the release from prison of close to six hundred political prisoners who continue to suffer from detention, mostly peasants and workers, who are facing trumped-up charges. Duterte can effect their release from prison as a boost to his government's effort to uphold human rights and as a turn back on his endorsement of vigilante killing.

He must pave the way for the return of the Lumad evacuees by ordering the pull-out of the operating troops of the AFP from their schools, communities and land and allow the people to re-open their community-run schools. He must heed the demand for justice of the Lumad people and recognize their all-encompassing rights as a national minority people, as well as those of other minority groups.

He must undertake steps to punish all violators of human rights of the past thirty years. He must put a stop to extra-judicial killings. He must heed the demand to put an end to the US-instigated Oplan Bayanihan "counterinsurgency" operations and militarization of the countryside.

4. Challenges to the Filipino people and revolutionary movement

While engaging the Duterte regime in peace negotiations and possible alliance in order to advance the national and democratic aspirations of the Filipino people, the revolutionary forces will continue to relentlessly advance the people's armed resistance and democratic mass struggles. While open to cooperation and alliance, they must relentlessly criticize and oppose any and all anti-people and pro-imperialist policy and measure. There will be no honeymoon with the Duterte regime.

While incoming GRP President Duterte has displayed progressive aspects, the revolutionary forces are also aware that he is mainly a part of the ruling class political elite.

For the past four decades, he has served the system as a bureaucrat and implemented its laws and policies. He has worked with foreign and local big capitalists, plantation owners and big landlords who expect returns under his regime. The masses of workers, peasants and farm workers in Davao City have long-suffered from the oppressive and exploitative conditions in the big plantations and export-oriented contract-growing businesses.

In his policy pronouncements, Duterte has yet to declare a clear deviation from the dominant neoliberal economic thinking which has brought about grave hardships to the Filipino people for more than three decades.

Indeed, world history has seen the rise under certain conditions of anti-US leaders in countries dominated by the US. In recent years, Venezuela's Hugo Chavez (1999-2013) and Bolivia's Evo Morales (2006-present) have stood militantly to defend their country's right to self-determination.

Their anti-imperialism allowed their government to free large amounts of resources such as land and oil from foreign control and accrue these to the people in the form of increasing state subsidies for education and public health. On the other hand, while clearly benefiting from their government's anti-imperialism and increasing resources for the delivery of social and economic services, the broad masses of workers and peasants continued to suffer from oppression and exploitation because

foreign big capitalists and landlords remained dominant in other fields of the economy and state power.

The worsening conditions of the semicolonial and semifeudal system, the deepening factional strife among the ruling classes, the prolonged recession of the US and the rise of China as a competing imperialist power are among the prevailing conditions where we find the rise of political maverick Rodrigo Duterte as GRP president.

The Filipino people and their revolutionary forces keenly look forward to the possibility of forging an alliance with the Duterte regime within a framework for national unity, peace and development. Duterte's mettle is about to be tested. Will he walk his talk and take on the opportunity to stand up against US imperialism? Or will his bombast end up as empty rhetoric?

Duterte must heed the people's mounting clamor for land, jobs, wage increases, free education, public health and housing, reduction in the price of commodities, defense of Philippine sovereignty against US intervention, defense of national patrimony and economic progress and modernization, an end to corruption and crime in the bureaucracy, military and police.

If he fails or refuses to heed the people's clamor, he is bound to end up a mere historical anomaly and suffer the same fate as the Estrada regime.

The Filipino people are ever ready to intensify the people's war to advance the revolution and mass struggles to amplify their democratic demands.

The New People's Army must continue to carry out the tasks set forth by the CPP Central Committee to intensify the people's war by launching more frequent tactical offensives and seizing more arms from the enemy.

Armed with a strategic and historical point-of-view, the Filipino proletariat and people know fully well that only a people's democratic revolution can decisively and thoroughly end imperialist and local big bourgeois comprador and landlord rule by overthrowing its armed state.

By intensifying their struggles, the Filipino people are bound to attain more and more victories in the years to come. The people's war is set to press forward under the Duterte regime.

Central Committee

Communist Party of the Philippines

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P.S.

* <http://www.ndfp.org/prospects-duterte-presidency/>