

Philippines: Statement on the prospect of the Left under the Duterte presidency

Philippine Left facing a Duterte-CPP Coalition Government?

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An extremely interesting and challenging political situation has opened up for the Philippine Left. Plans are underway by the newly elected President Rodrigo Duterte to establish a government with CPP participation and move forward with peace talks to resolve the five-decade long armed struggle conducted by the New Peoples Army. The May 9 national elections saw the former mayor of Davao City, Rodrigo Duterte, elected as president. Duterte is considered to be a political maverick and an outsider to the traditional oligarchy that has ruled the Philippines since the 'Edsa revolution' that overthrew the Marcos dictatorship in 1986. Duterte is a former student of the CPP founding Chair Jose Maria Sison and is a long-time ally of the CPP-NPA, since he became a local official in the Davao City government, in the late 1980s.

The CPP has proposed a list of candidates to head up four key ministries: labor, social welfare, agrarian reform, as well as energy and the environment (combined in one department). Key leaders of the CPP-National Democratic Front, who have been living in self-declared exile in the Netherlands, have now returned to Manila to negotiate the arrangements. Jose Maria Sison is expected to return to the Philippines after Duterte formally assumes the presidency. Duterte has declared that he will set in place security arrangements for Sison's safety. He has also promised to release imprisoned CPP leaders, including leaders of the New Peoples Army.

The CPP has called for the establishment of a 'government of national unity, peace and development' and the CPP Central Committee has issued a statement outlining its position. The statement analyses the Duterte presidency as a continuation of elite rule in the Philippines and is seemingly contradictory, given the CPP's agreement to participate in and form a coalition government with Duterte: "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". The statement outlines the program for such a government of 'national unity', which is against neoliberalism and based on the historic demands of the mass movement: "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." [1]

The CPP analysis of the class-character of the Duterte presidency is in line with the position of PLM. [2]

Joma Sison has also indicated that he is open to unity with Left forces outside the CPP: "Past

differences can be overcome by current resolutions which are good and forward-looking toward a better and brighter social system". The newspaper report quoting Sison refers to the "rejectionists" forces, specifically the forces led by Felimon 'Popoy' Lagman, who disagreed with the CPP military strategy of 'protracted people war', which led to a split with the Manila Rizal Regional Committee declaring 'autonomy' from the party in 1993. Popoy Lagman was brutally assassinated in 2001, the first leader of the left to be killed under the regime of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, by unidentified goons of the military.

Partido Lakas ng Masa-PLM Chair Sonny Melencio has welcomed Sison's statement: "This is a welcome statement from CPP founding chair Jose Ma. Sison. ... I have long believed that the RA-RJ divide, which happened 23 years ago, that is a very long time in politics, can be overcome by political unity, not so much by ideological homogeneity. Ideological unity can be a process of discussion and clarification as the class struggle unfolds. On the government of national unity, its objectives of peace and development can only be founded on the interests of and justice for the masses. This is where the unity of the Left and progressive forces is crucial - it is to ensure that such a program can be achieved and implemented, whichever direction the political storm surges during the coming administration." (RA are the 'reaffirmists' of the strategy of protracted peoples war; RJ are the 'rejectionists' of the strategy of protracted peoples war.) PLM was instrumental in forging a unity ticket of seven senate candidates, including Neri Colmenares of the Makabayan bloc (aligned with the CPP) and Walden Bello, former leader of Akbayan in Congress. Both Colmenares and Bello attended and spoke at various gatherings and assemblies of PLM and its allied organizations.

The CPP statement is not so much addressed to Duterte, as to the masses who support Duterte. The statement presents a program for how a Duterte regime can genuinely advance people's aspirations for change. In this sense, this is also a program that can scrape away the layers of posturing that Duterte has projected in his campaign. If the CPP confronts a Duterte regime that fails or refuses to heed this program, then it will be better to turn its call for a government of national unity, into a broad popular movement that mobilizes the masses and fights for a national program against neoliberal-elite rule.

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P.S.

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<http://www.masa.ph>

Footnotes

[1] See full statement available on ESSF (article 38022), [Philippines: Prospects under a Duterte presidency](#).

[2] See full statement available on ESSF (article 37860), [Philippines Presidential Campaign: The Duterte Phenomenon and our attitude to it](#).