

Philippines: For a radical alternative to Duterte

“We believe a viable alternative to Duterte should come out of a radical critique of EDSA’s trapo democracy from the left”

Saturday 21 July 2018, by [HEYDARIAN Richard Javad](#), [MAGTUBO Renato](#), [Partido Manggagawa](#) (Date first published: 20 July 2018).

What can be (or should be) an alternative to Duterte? The publication in the *Inquirer* of an article of Richard Heydarian prompted an answer from the Partido ng Manggagawa (PM, Labor Party-Philippines). We are reproducing below the answer of the PM in full, the shorter version as published in the *Inquirer*, and Heydarian’s original article.

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Richard Heydarian argues (Leni and the ‘third way,’ July 10, 2018) that Vice President Leni Robredo should remake herself into a “third way” alternative ala Tony Blair of UK and Bill Clinton of the US. With Robredo declaring her intent to lead the opposition, the question of an alternative to Duterte is truly worth discussing and debating.

The so-called third way epitomized by Blair and Clinton has been described by critics as “neoliberalism with a human face” or “austerity lite.” In which case, Robredo already is third way, as she is the current leader of the Liberal Party that in its six years in power under Noytoy Aquino presided over pro-globalization policies in the guise of “public-private partnerships” and was exemplified by its affirmation of contractualization in the Philippine Airlines outsourcing dispute.

Robredo embodies a continuation of EDSA and thus of the epic failures of the elite democracy established after the Marcos dictatorship. In contrast, Duterte has made a popular career out of lambasting the EDSA democracy from the right. We believe a viable alternative to Duterte should come out of a radical critique of EDSA’s trapo democracy from the left.

Heydarian posits that a radical alternative to the status quo has been eclipsed by the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism. Thus his espousal of Blairism and Clintonism. But it can be argued that Blair and Clinton’s swing to the right merely paved the way for a further shift and thus the rise of extremism of the UKIP and Trump. Blair and Clinton’s abandonment of the historic and traditional working class base of the Labour Party and the Democratic Party made them prey to demagoguery of right populists.

Heydarian likewise insists that socialism has been made passé by the rise of postmodernism. However, this is belied by the rise of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders. In opposition to Blair and Clinton, Corbyn and Sanders have openly identified themselves as socialists and have championed radical platforms of reversing globalization. Corbyn has wrestled control of the Labour Party from

third way acolytes and is poised to be the next Prime Minister if new elections were held. Sanders of course lost the primaries to Hillary Clinton through the undemocratic maneuverings of the Democratic Party machine but he would have beaten Trump in the election according to surveys.

Despite predictions of the end of history and the death of grand narratives, socialism is alive and kicking. The defeat of working class struggles heralded the birth of neoliberalism but discontent over the greed and barbarism of globalization is engendering renewed resistance. Majority of millennials in the US prefer socialism over capitalism. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a card-carrying member of the Democratic Socialists of America, just trounced in the primaries a high-ranking Democratic Party leader and is primed to become the youngest congresswoman in the next US elections.

In many countries, radical candidates not third way politicians are in ascendancy as the rivals to authoritarian leaders. Andrés Manuel López Obrador just won Mexico's election on a progressive platform of change. In Europe, third way social democratic parties have collapsed and it is new radical left parties which are battling extreme right wing groups for political hegemony.

In the Philippines, more than 30 years of the EDSA regimes have exhausted the majority who remain mired in poverty and hopelessness, and even the middle and upper classes who are disillusioned at corruption and underdevelopment. Duterte has harvested the discontent at EDSA democracy and is trying to channel it into support for dictatorship. But after two years of broken promises, Duterte's satisfaction ratings are down from excellent to good, especially among the urban masses who are reeling from endo and inflation. They are the constituency for a radical alternative to Duterte and the rotten system of the EDSA regimes.

Partido ng Manggagawa (PM), Labor Party - Philippines

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* <https://partidongmanggagawa2001.blogspot.com/2018/07/for-radical-alternative-to-duterte.html>

Radical alternative to Duterte (short version)

Richard Heydarian proposes in "Leni and the 'third way'" (7/10/18) that Vice President Leni Robredo be remade into a third way alternative à la Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. The third way is aka "neoliberalism with a human face" or "austerity lite." Thus, Robredo already is the third way.

She embodies a continuation of Edsa and the failures of elite democracy. In contrast, President Duterte has made a career out of lambasting Edsa from the right. An alternative to Mr. Duterte should come from a critique of "trapo" democracy from the left.

Heydarian posits that a radical alternative has been eclipsed by the hegemony of neoliberalism. But Blair and Clinton's swing to the right paved the way for the rise of extremism. Their abandonment of their traditional base made workers prey to the demagoguery of right populists.

Heydarian insists that socialism has been made passé by postmodernism. Yet socialists Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders belie this. Corbyn is poised to become the United Kingdom's next prime minister, and Sanders would have beaten Donald Trump in the election.

Despite predictions of the death of grand narratives, socialism is alive and kicking. The defeat of workers' struggles heralded the birth of globalization, but capitalist greed is engendering resistance. The majority of millennials in the United States prefer socialism. An unknown New York socialist just trounced a high-ranking Democrat in the primaries. Elsewhere, radicals, not third way politicians, are the rivals to authoritarian leaders. A leftist just won Mexico's election. In Europe, social democratic parties have collapsed and new radical parties are battling the extreme right for hegemony.

Mr. Duterte has harvested the discontent with Edsa democracy and is trying to channel it into support for dictatorship. But after two years of broken promises, Mr. Duterte's ratings are down, especially among the urban masses who are reeling from "endo" and inflation. They are the constituency for a radical alternative to Mr. Duterte and the failed Edsa regimes.

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* Inquirer, 05:02 AM July 17, 2018:

<http://opinion.inquirer.net/114649/radical-alternative-duterte>

Leni and the 'third way'

There is nothing permanent except change," ancient philosopher Heraclitus once observed. In the world of politics, no principle could be truer. We live in a post-ideological era, which is paradoxically both modern and medieval.

On one hand, the decline of ideology as a force for social mobilization is a reflection of the emergence of postmodernism, an inherently pluralist state of mind built on the belief that there is no singular truth. As British historian Perry Anderson observed in "The Origins of Postmodernity" (1998), it all began with avant-garde architectural and artistic experimentations that defied the rigidities of modernism. Over the decades, this subjective free-spiritedness fused with the explosion of consumerism among the aspirational middle classes.

Eventually, the average Westerner would be drawn to commercial brands (think of Apple) rather than political ideologies (think of socialism), giving birth to consumerist nihilism. Thanks to globalization, this phenomenon has spread from the West to the East.

By the end of the 20th century, no singular ideology, in its traditional sense at least, had managed to hold sway among large sections of society. The collapse of the Soviet Union made capitalism the default reality for the entire humanity.

As a result, many leftist-progressive parties in the West confronted an existential crisis. Their ability to mobilize their base was significantly hampered by the collective loss of confidence in absolute truths, whether political or religious.

Our age is also one of medieval tribalism marked by charismatic leaders—men and women who are endowed, as Max Weber memorably put it, with perceived "supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." Not only are ordinary voters less attached to ideology,

they are also more drawn to such polarizing and tough-talking leaders, who skillfully tap into their basic fears and instincts.

More than policy, what matters to most voters nowadays is affinity and trust—a mystical connection to political leaders who promise certainty and provide a sense of belonging amid dizzying change.

In the Philippines, the liberal-democratic opposition confronts a similar dilemma. Standard slogans of human rights, civil liberties and political freedom are far less appealing to average voters today than during the heyday of democratic struggle in the past century.

As the de facto leader of the opposition, Leni Robredo has found herself in a similar situation with progressive-leftist leaders in the West throughout the 1990s. Yet, there are valuable strategic lessons to be drawn from the latter group's struggles.

Unwilling to concede the political arena to an ascendant conservatism, a younger generation of progressive leaders opted for a new ideological synthesis, the so-called "third way." At the forefront of this effort were the likes of Tony Blair, who would become one of the longest-serving British prime ministers, and Bill Clinton, one of the most successful politicians in American history.

Their solution, and subsequent electoral success, was based on the recognition that traditional progressive-socialist ideals no longer appealed to vast sections of society. By fusing economic pragmatism with progressive values of tolerance and social welfare, they managed to establish a potent new political narrative that made the left electorally dominant.

They promised economic growth as well as order. Crucially, both Blair and Clinton recognized the instinctive power of personal charisma by building affective bonds with ordinary voters. This way, they managed to sideline their right-wing rivals like none of their colleagues, though, over time, they also began to lose touch with their progressive roots.

Thus, the challenge for liberal-democratic leaders in the Philippines is to preserve their fidelity to their fundamental principles, such as the inviolability of human dignity and rights, while weaving a new political narrative that recognizes the citizens' legitimate concerns over order and inclusive development.

In the emerging markets, where rule of law is weak and growth is uneven, disaffected individuals tend to choose order and shared prosperity over law and civil liberties. Even more crucially, one must not forget the sheer power of charisma.

Democratic politics is not the realm of algorithmic rationality, but the struggle for the affections and loyalties of voters. This is the "third way" that Leni and the new generation of liberal democrats should strive for, if they wish to remain relevant in our age of populism and ideological skepticism.

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* 05:05 AM July 10, 2018:

<http://opinion.inquirer.net/114492/leni-third-way>
