

Fascistic candidate Rodrigo Duterte wins Philippine presidential election

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Rodrigo Duterte, mayor of the southern Philippine city of Davao and long-time head of the city's death squads that have executed over 1,400 people in the past 20 years, was elected president of the Philippines yesterday.

With over 75 percent of the votes tabulated last night, Duterte had received more than 15 million votes. His nearest contender, Mar Roxas, had obtained just over nine million; Grace Poe, 8.5 million; and Jejomar Binay, five million.

Poe has already conceded Duterte's victory, staging a televised press conference after midnight to announce her concession.

While neither Binay nor Roxas had conceded as of press time, Duterte's victory is being acknowledged universally in the Philippine media as a foregone conclusion. Duterte will thus become president having received approximately 38 percent of the vote.

The vice-presidential race is the tightest in Philippine history. Leni Robredo, closely associated with the outgoing Aquino administration, and Ferdinand Marcos Junior, son of the late dictator, are polling within a percentage point of each other. It is likely to be some time before this race is finally resolved.

Elections in the Philippines are violent and corrupt affairs. The 2016 election was no exception. An estimated 50 people were killed in election-related violence from January 10. The reports vary, but an additional 13 to 18 people are estimated to have been killed in poll violence on election day.

The past six years of outgoing President Benigno Aquino's administration have been shaped above all by Washington's drive to war with China. Under its so-called "pivot to Asia," the Obama administration has escalated tensions in the region to the brink of war.

Under Aquino, Manila has functioned as a leading proxy of Washington in this confrontation. Under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), the

Aquino government arranged for the restoration of US military bases in the country. Manila filed a legal case in The Hague, which was drawn up by Washington, against China's territorial claims in the South China Sea. With the full support of Washington, Aquino has staged repeated military provocations in the disputed waters.

In the face of explosive social tensions and the threat of global war, elections around the world have become exceedingly volatile affairs. The political representatives of the bourgeoisie are moving sharply to the right.

Duterte is the embodiment of this trend in the Philippines. War and dictatorship are on the agenda of the entire bourgeoisie. Not a single candidate presented any alternative to this. Duterte, however, gave this drive within the ruling class its most openly fascistic expression.

Duterte repeatedly pledged that he would launch a campaign to kill alleged criminals throughout the country upon his election. He declared he would "dump" 100,000 corpses in Manila Bay. If workers in an export-processing zone attempted to form a union, he asserted he would kill them.

Washington has no objections to Duterte's fascistic politics, but Duterte is also an unstable and volatile figure. He has alternated between calling for bilateral negotiations with Beijing to solicit massive investment from China, to calling for mandatory military service for all youth in preparation for war with China.

Of the rival candidates, Washington would have preferred either Roxas, the former investment banker from a long-standing political dynasty, or Poe, whose husband was recently revealed to have been a contractor for a private intelligence firm based in the United States working for the CIA.

Binay represented sections of the Philippine bourgeoisie who are concerned that Washington's drive against China is bad for business. Binay was not opposed to the basing

of US forces in the country, but did seek a more conciliatory approach to Beijing and looked to scaling back Aquino's confrontational moves. He was polling well ahead of his political rivals until a series of corruption scandals undermined his campaign.

Washington sees Manila's legal case against China as a bellwether for the political allegiance of the new administration. The elected president will assume office on June 30. The International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) is expected to hand down a decision before that date. Washington intends to use the ITLOS verdict as a legal pretext to dramatically escalate pressure on China in the South China Sea. The US government will expect its proxy in Manila to lead the charge in this matter.

Duterte will toe Washington's line or his presidency will not last long. In an early indication that Duterte intends to follow Washington's dictates, he announced today that problems in the South China Sea should be resolved through multilateral negotiations, which should include Japan, Australia and the United States. China has long insisted that problems should be resolved through bilateral negotiations, while Washington has demanded multilateral negotiations to which it would be a party.

Washington is already carefully eying Duterte's intended cabinet. Ernie Bower, senior adviser for the Southeast Asia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), told Reuters on May 9: "If he selects technocrats with experience, good track records and strong networks, it may not be as bad as the campaign rhetoric suggested." Drawing a parallel between Duterte and US Republican presidential aspirant Donald Trump, Bower stated: "The fear and anxiety come from the fact that we just don't know—and neither Duterte nor Trump seem to know—who they would include in their cabinet teams if elected."

Duterte gave an initial sense of his intended administration in an interview on election day. He told the press he would staff his cabinet with "military men." He also said he intended to revise the constitution to ease rules limiting foreign ownership in the country. "I will open investments. If possible, in every region, I'll have economic zones. And the foreigners can come, and they'll have the same protection. I guarantee them profits that will be swiftly returned to them."

Responsibility for Duterte's successful political career, which has now culminated in his election as president, rests with the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), a nationalist and anti-working class organization.

From his early days as mayor of Davao and the head of

the Davao Death Squads, the CPP's New People's Army (NPA) consistently provided Duterte with support. Duterte's campaign manager was a former high-ranking member of the CPP.

Duterte has repeatedly styled his fascistic politics as "leftism." The CPP has endorsed these phrases. In the weeks leading up to the election, the NPA on two occasions staged ceremonies, turning over captured police officers to the Philippine government in the person of Duterte, providing him the chance to pose with the NPA in front of a hammer and sickle flag.

Jose Ma. Sison, founder and head of the CPP, staged a meeting over Skype with Duterte, which was then published on the Internet. Sison stated how excited he was at the prospect of peace talks between the NPA and a Duterte administration. He announced that if Duterte were elected, he would return to the Philippines after 30 years of exile in the Netherlands.

Sison was the first public figure to hail Duterte's election. He issued a statement within an hour of the closing of the polls, which was published in the *Inquirer*, the leading Philippine daily paper. Sison extended his "warmest congratulations" to Duterte. Sison said he "now looked forward to further conversations with President Duterte to arrange an immediate ceasefire, release of all the political prisoners, my return home and acceleration of the peace negotiations. Let us have as goal a government of national unity, peace and development."

Carlos Zarate, representative of the CPP's front organization Bayan Muna, likewise endorsed Duterte's victory, hailing it as "phenomenal" and stating that it "changes radically the politics in the Philippines."



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