

Duterte administration launches “red-tagging” witchhunt

John Malvar

2 November 2020

The administration of fascistic Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte over the past month dramatically escalated its political attacks on activists and dissidents, “red-tagging” them without presenting any evidence as to their being members of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). The CPP and its armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA), have been deemed “terrorist organizations” by the Duterte administration.

At the center of the spree of red-tagging is the government National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) and one of its most vocal members, Lt. Gen Antonio Parlade.

Over the past several weeks, Parlade has issued statements denouncing various mass organizations as “terrorist groups” for their alleged ties to the CPP. On this basis, he has denounced members of the House of Representatives, trade union leaders, movie stars, and a beauty queen as part of this terrorist network, publicly threatening them not only with prosecution but with the possibility of extrajudicial killing.

When 22-year old television star, Liza Soberano, participated in an online seminar hosted by women’s rights organization Gabriela, Parlade published a statement addressed to her, warning her that “there’s still a chance to abdicate that group. If you don’t, you will suffer the same fate as Josephine Anne Lapira.” Lapira was shot dead by the military as a member of the NPA in 2017.

Parlade issued similar public threats to movie actress Angel Locsin and to Miss Universe 2018, Catriona Gray.

As a result of the celebrity status of his targets, Parlade’s red-tagging spree became the subject of national news, and mass opposition quickly took shape online denouncing the baseless charges and vulgar threats of Parlade. He was after all accusing Miss

Universe of being a terrorist. The Duterte administration was compelled to distance itself from Parlade and Parlade eventually issued a partial apology.

While the attacks on these celebrities were overreach on the part of Parlade, the NTF-ELCAC has been engaged in a systematic campaign of red-tagging against grass-roots level activists throughout the country. The power of the anti-Communist taskforce enormously increased on July 3, with the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The Anti-Terrorism Act, which received overwhelming support in both houses of the legislature, granted the Duterte administration sweeping police state powers. It authorized warrantless wiretapping and surveillance, and warrantless arrests for up to 24 days of anyone accused of terrorism by a presidentially-appointed commission, the Anti-Terrorism Council.

The US-based Human Rights Watch stated that the law makes the Anti-Terrorism Council “prosecutor, judge, jury, and jailer.”

The NTF-ELCAC has published a long list of various legal groups which it has labeled as member organizations of the Communist Party of the Philippines. This accusation opens the tens of thousands of members of these organizations to charges of terrorism and the full force of the Anti-Terrorism Act.

In an attempt to whip up public hysteria and support for the witchhunt, tarpaulin banners were printed and displayed throughout Metro Manila denouncing the CPP-NPA-NDF (National Democratic Front) as “persona non grata.”

The Duterte administration has orchestrated a campaign of mass murder over the past four years in the name of its “war on drugs.” The targets of police and paramilitary extrajudicial killings are the poor.

There is a nightly body count of victims, often scores of dead. Since Duterte took office nearly 30,000 people have been killed as part of the so-called war on drugs.

The fascistic and police state measures of the Duterte administration have received nearly universal support from the ruling elite. The representatives of the various parties in the legislature have in an unprecedented supermajority repeatedly voted to extend additional powers to the president in support of his authoritarianism.

Duterte's policies express a trend in the ruling class around the globe to turn to authoritarian forms of rule as a means of suppressing mass unrest in the face of social crisis and explosive levels of inequality.

The various mass organizations now being red-tagged by the Duterte administration—Bayan, Bayan Muna, Gabriela, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU)—gave their enthusiastic support to him as he took office. The members of these organizations are not secretly members of the Communist Party, despite the lying threats of the NTF-ELCAC. These organizations, however, do share a common political line with the CPP, the program of Stalinism. It was this program, which subordinates workers to the capitalist class in the name of nationalism, that served as the justification for the ties that the CPP established with Duterte.

Representatives of Gabriela and other organizations now red-tagged by the Duterte administration entered the Duterte cabinet in 2016 and proudly proclaimed that Duterte was a “left” and “socialist” president. Luz Ilagan, spokesperson of Gabriela, remains part of the Duterte cabinet where she serves as undersecretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development. Her immediate supervisor, the secretary of the DSWD, is on the board of NTF-ELCAC.

As the CPP's relations with the Duterte administration soured in 2017, as a result of a shift in the Duterte administration to a more open reliance on the military, the party began looking to form an alliance with the bourgeois opposition in the Liberal Party (LP), which at present is a small minority in the legislature.

CPP founder and ideological leader, Jose Maria Sison, in early 2020 began issuing public statements calling on the military to withdraw its support from Duterte and install Vice President Leni Robredo, the LP chair, as president.

The escalating red-tagging accusations of the military

and the NTF-ELCAC are a vicious response to these coup plots of the CPP. The Duterte administration is attempting to suppress the organization of mass dissent behind its political enemies and to intimidate working people more broadly.

It is impossible for Filipino workers, peasants and youths to defend democracy and human rights on the basis of the political line of the CPP. The organizations now being viciously targetted by NTF-ELCAC played a critical role in propping up Duterte in 2016, depicting him as a progressive figure. The only way forward in opposition to the murderous red-tagging being conducted by the Duterte administration is to break with the political line of the CPP and take up the struggle of the working class for socialism, independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact