

Philippine Stalinists line up behind right-wing Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny

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In a revealing statement issued last Sunday, the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) enthusiastically endorsed the right-wing Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny and the protests against the Putin government triggered by Navalny's return to Russia and arrest.

Released by the CPP's chief information officer Marco Valbuena, the statement declared: "All democracy-loving people must support and emulate the mass protest actions in Russia against the Putin fascist regime, particularly against the plans of the dictator to extend his power by seeking a third term."

The statement, while ferocious in its denunciations of Putin and his "tyrannical, corrupt and criminal regime," is completely uncritical of "critic and opposition leader" Navalny, who is backed by US imperialism and its allies. Indeed, one of the first actions of the Biden administration has been to demand Navalny's release.

Whatever the criminality of the Putin regime, there is nothing remotely progressive about Navalny. In the final analysis, he articulates the same class interests—those of the Russian bourgeoisie. His tirades against "corruption" and "crooks and thieves" at the top are simply attempts to mask his ruthless, pro-market agenda of imposing economic austerity, cutting taxes and red tape for corporations, and privatising semi-state-owned enterprises.

Navalny's differences with Putin are purely tactical. He speaks for a layer of the ruling class whose economic ambitions are blocked by Putin and his allies, and who look to a close alignment with Western imperialism. He has opposed Russia's support for separatists in East Ukraine and criticised Putin for his ties to China's president.

Navalny's contempt for democratic rights and the working class is summed up in his links to extreme-

right forces within Russia, where he has addressed far-right marches on numerous occasions. He used to be a member of the organisational council of the Russian March, an annual event organised by the country's fascist and far-right forces.

In backing Navalny, the US and European powers are seeking to reprise the 2014 coup in the Ukraine that relied on far-right and openly fascist layers. Navalny participated in the World Fellowship program at Yale University in the US in 2010 and 2019, which has been instrumental in training other leaders of imperialist-backed "colour revolutions" in the former Soviet Union.

The fact that none of this is mentioned in the CPP statement is no accident. It supports Navalny precisely because it is lining up with sections of the ruling class most closely aligned with US imperialism, represented by Vice-President Leni Robredo and her Liberal Party.

The CPP makes no secret of its aims, appealing to "all democracy-loving people" to emulate the Russian protests. "The Filipino masses must act in their numbers to fight all forms of repression and all attempts of Duterte to extend his power using different tactics such as 'cha-cha' or having his ambitious daughter Sara sit in his throne in 2022," it declares. "Cha-cha" refers to Duterte's attempt to change the constitution to enable him to stand in the 2022 presidential election.

The CPP's denunciations of Duterte are utterly cynical. The Stalinists backed his election in 2016 and sought to form a political alliance with his administration, even supporting his murderous "war on drugs" directed against the working class. It was Duterte, under pressure from the military, not the CPP, that broke relations and then turned the armed forces against the CPP's rural guerrillas.

In an opportunist about-face, the CPP is now aligning with the bourgeois political opposition to Duterte, headed by Robredo and the Liberal Party. The CPP has repeatedly appealed to the disgruntled pro-US elements of the military to withdraw support from Duterte and install Robredo.

Like Navalny in Russia, the Liberal Party in the Philippines has only tactical differences with the current regime, primarily over foreign policy. It has repeatedly criticised Duterte for his ties with Beijing and branded him as a puppet of China.

Duterte's predecessor as president, Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino from the Liberal Party, was the leading advocate in South East Asia for the Obama administration's aggressive "pivot to Asia" against China. He signed a far-reaching military agreement with the US, allowing its military forces virtually unfettered access to Philippine military bases.

In league with Washington, Florin Hilbay, solicitor general under Aquino, was responsible for bringing the Philippine case against Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea before the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague. He is now a Liberal Party senator.

Akbayan, a breakaway from the CPP and now part of the Liberal Party, is viciously anti-China. In her latest diatribe, Akbayan representative Risa Hontiveros, a Liberal Party senator, called on Duterte this week to denounce "China's bullying" after the alleged harassment of a Filipino fisherman by the Chinese coast guard. "This is the arrogance of a country that still considers itself the Middle Kingdom and an empire. This is an unacceptable encounter," she declared.

Any new Liberal Party regime would be just as ruthless as Duterte in trampling on democratic rights and the working class. The Philippine bourgeoisie as a whole confronts a deep economic and social crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The country has reported more than 500,000 cases and 10,000 coronavirus deaths—the second-highest toll in South East Asia after Indonesia.

The economy contracted in 2020 for the first time since 1998, and by a huge 9.5 percent, placing new intolerable burdens on workers, peasants and the poor. All factions of the ruling class are united in their determination to suppress any eruption of mass

opposition.

The CPP is positioning itself as a key political instrument of the bourgeoisie to divert any opposition movement into the arms of Robredo and the Liberal Party—an outcome that would be as disastrous for working people as the Duterte regime.

The CPP's rotten opportunist manoeuvres are not simply "mistakes." They flow directly from the reactionary Stalinist two-stage theory, which subordinates the working class and peasant masses to a non-existent "progressive" wing of the bourgeoisie and relegates any struggle for socialism to the distant future.

The only progressive alternative to Stalinism is Trotskyism—that is, genuine Marxism fought for today by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

In his Theory of Permanent Revolution, Leon Trotsky insisted that the venal bourgeoisie in countries of a belated capitalist development such as the Philippines was organically incapable of meeting the democratic aspirations and social needs of the masses. Those tasks fell to the working class in a revolutionary struggle for a workers' and peasants' government that would begin the socialist transformation of society as part of the fight for socialism internationally.

To fight for this perspective, it is necessary to build a section of the ICFI in the Philippines. We urge workers and youth to contact us to discuss these issues.



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