

Far-right and Stalinists maneuver in Philippine presidential election

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Political jostling and maneuvering are at a fever pitch in the Philippines, as the November 15 deadline for withdrawals and substitutions of candidates in the 2022 presidential election approaches. Campaigns are being run by a collection of scoundrels and reactionaries in what is proving to be the most right-wing election in the country's history. All of the various Stalinist and pseudo-left organizations have thrown themselves into the mix, adapting to the general atmosphere of reaction.

The current front-runner in early polling is Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the former dictator who ruled the country in a brutal martial law regime in the 1970s and early 1980s. Marcos represents an explicit continuation and escalation of the repressive policies of the outgoing administration of Rodrigo Duterte.

He has launched a well-funded campaign of disinformation in both mainstream and social media aimed at rehabilitating the martial law period of his parents' rule. Armies of online trolls churn out lies on a daily basis depicting the Marcos regime as a "golden era" in Philippine history. Next year 2022 marks the 50th anniversary of the imposition of martial law. Marcos Jr has declared that he will overhaul the country's textbooks on the dictatorship if he is elected.

Marcos continues the policies of the current Duterte administration in another respect. Over the course of his presidency, Duterte dramatically reoriented Philippine diplomatic and economic ties away from Washington and toward Beijing. In an interview with ABS-CBN, Marcos declared that he intended to continue Duterte's China policy.

Over the weekend, Marcos met with possible presidential candidate Sarah Duterte-Carpio, daughter of President Duterte, in Cebu City. They spoke extensively and posed for photographs flashing the V for victory gesture of the Marcos' campaign and the extended fist salute of Duterte.

Duterte-Carpio told the media that their meeting was held to discuss how Davao, the city where she is mayor, could best support the Marcos campaign. It is widely speculated, however, that the possibility of a tandem campaign—in which one would run for president, the other vice president—was being discussed.

The degree of criminality and murder represented by the social forces around these two campaigns, as they smiled and posed for the press, is perhaps without precedent in this country's bloody history. A formal alliance between the camps of Duterte and Marcos is highly plausible, but it is also possible that Duterte-Carpio is contemplating a separate bid for president.

Senator Ronald dela Rosa, who is currently the presidential candidate of President Duterte's PDP-Laban party, is widely speculated to be a placeholder for Duterte-Carpio. Dela Rosa has repeatedly declared that he is ready to drop out and offer her his slot if Duterte-Carpio decided to run for president.

Duterte-Carpio is currently running for re-election in the southern city of Davao, where she succeeded her father as mayor. Dela Rosa met privately with Duterte-Carpio on Monday at Davao City Hall. Asked afterwards about the substance of their meeting, dela Rosa responded, "I just reminded her that November 15 is fast approaching."

A critical consideration of the dela Rosa campaign is to protect himself and the outgoing administration from charges now being raised in the International Criminal Court (ICC) of crimes against humanity for the brutal conduct of its "war on drugs."

Dela Rosa, as head of the Philippine National Police (PNP), was the architect and implementer of the Duterte administration's strategy of state sanctioned mass murder. Official police data report over 6,100 "suspects" were killed by the police in the past five years. If one includes those killed by paramilitary death squads overseen and often paid by the police, the death toll is over 30,000.

President Duterte, speaking to his anti-Communist taskforce, a formal government body, declared that dela Rosa was "getting nervous... I told him not to worry." Dela Rosa told ABS-CBN news in a recent interview that "he will move to protect President Duterte and himself from the investigation by the ICC if elected president."

In the three weeks that remain before the November 15 deadline, it is expected that campaigns will merge, candidates drop out and take up new positions. With an eye to not being left out of the spoils, most of the various candidates for the senate are simultaneously running on multiple slates.

The leading candidate of the bourgeois opposition to Duterte is Liberal Party head and current Vice President Leni Robredo. Her senatorial slate reveals the right-wing character of her election campaign. Among her senatorial candidates is Antonio Trillanes of the far-right Magdalo party, who was responsible for multiple military coup attempts in the past two decades.

The names on Robredo's slate include known scoundrels of long-standing: Richard Gordon, Miguel Zubiri, Francis Escudero, and Joel Villanueva, the corrupt son of a televangelist—members of the landed elite, former Duterte supporters, and proponents of

lowering the age of criminality.

Some of the members of Robredo's slate are also running as candidates on the slate of Panfilo Lacson, a candidate known for being the head of the Marcos dictatorship's torture apparatus. Two of her candidates, Zubiri and Binay, are running on three slates—Robredo, Lacson and Manny Pacquiao, the boxer and, until recently, key ally of Duterte.

Robredo announced that she was keeping the final, twelfth senatorial slot open to a candidate who “represented the marginalized sector.” All of the various “left” groupings—Makabayan [Nationalist] and Laban ng Masa [Fight of the masses] in particular—publicly stumbled over themselves to secure this slot.

In the end, Robredo selected Sonny Matula, president of the trade union umbrella group, Federation of Free Workers (FFW). The FFW is a right-wing organization, founded on anticommunism. It served as a source of unionized scab labor during major labor conflicts in the 1960s.

In 2016, the FFW staged an event to host Marcos Jr. during his run for vice president, giving him the stage to promote his campaign to the union membership. Matula issued a statement that “First of all, [Marcos] fights for the security of tenure of workers in the Philippines.”

Makabayan and the various other political organizations that share the Stalinist political line of the CPP failed to secure a slot on Robredo's slate, despite a mass campaign demanding that their front-runner, Neri Colmenares, be included.

Unwilling to even posture as an independent candidate, Colmenares told the press that “he is not ruling out the possibility of working with Vice President Leni Robredo despite his exclusion from her senatorial line-up for the 2022 elections.” Colmenares stressed that they had reached out to Robredo's team, but “had yet to meet with the vice president in person.”

“It is for this reason,” a Makabayan representative told the Philippine *Star*, “that they have not yet endorsed Robredo or any other presidential aspirant.” The *Star* wrote, “It is not clear why Robredo, who has also been advocating for a broad coalition to crush Duterte and Marcos in the polls, did not personally meet Colmenares and members of Makabayan.”

Robredo's refusal to even meet with Makabayan has several underlying motivations. First, the Liberal Party already has its own pseudo-left wing: Akbayan, an organization formed in the 1990s by social democrat and ex-CPP forces. Akbayan has longstanding bad blood with the so-called “national democratic” organizations that continue to follow the CPP's political line.

There is a powerful strain of outrage in the popular opposition to Duterte at the support which the national democratic organizations, and the CPP itself, gave to Duterte in 2016.

In 2016, on the southern island of Mindanao, Colmenares campaigned for Duterte's election. Makabayan, and its sister organizations, celebrated his victory, initially supported his war on drugs as a “boon to the poor,” and entered his cabinet.

Finally, Robredo's reluctance to engage with Makabayan expresses the right-wing campaign that she is attempting to run. Robredo is attempting to incorporate the backing of Lacson, Pacquiao and former Duterte supporter Isko Moreno. She has held

unification meetings with each of these camps. Some of these forces will not come anywhere near Makabayan, and thus Robredo, for the time being, excludes them.

Makabayan is maneuvering, looking to increase their value to Robredo, and have secured slots on Manny Pacquiao's senatorial slate, where Neri Colmenares is running alongside fascist news personality Raffy Tulfo.

Laban ng Masa, associated with the various organizations founded by Popoy Lagman after he broke with the CPP, is running their own presidential candidate, labor union leader Leody de Guzman. De Guzman's declaration of candidacy was initially a bid to secure the final senatorial slot on Robredo's ticket. When de Guzman was passed over, Laban ng Masa issued a statement that “though we do not agree, we nonetheless respect their decision.” They made clear their goal, declaring in the same statement, “our representatives should have a seat in every table.”

As it was now apparent that their bid to secure a senatorial slot had failed, Laban ng Masa found itself trapped in an independent presidential bid. Prominent intellectual Walden Bello, formerly of the CPP and now chair of Laban ng Masa, announced that he was running for vice president.

Laban ng Masa began to promote a platform promising various progressive measures, including disbanding the anti-Communist taskforce, increasing taxes on the wealthiest Filipinos, raising the minimum wage, and ending contractual labor.

There is, however, no genuine political independence to this campaign, which but weeks ago was pleading to be included on the right-wing slate of Leni Robredo.

Laban ng Masa's continuing attempt to integrate itself into elite politics is highlighted by the inclusion of Makabayan on de Guzman's slate. The forces of Makabayan and Laban ng Masa represent political tendencies that for decades were murderously opposed to each other. Now they are uniting.

Makabayan keeps one foot in Pacquiao's camp and one in Laban ng Masa. All have their eyes on Robredo, waiting for the moment when they are called upon to support her.



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