

Opposition candidate Robredo endorses anti-communist task force in Philippine election

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Philippine Vice President Leni Robredo, the leading candidate of the bourgeois opposition to Duterte in the 2022 presidential elections, told an assembly of military brass on Friday, November 26, that she supported their anti-communist task force. Robredo's endorsement of the Duterte administration's fascistic National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) is another demonstration of the right-wing character of her campaign.

The front-runner in current polling for the May election is the Ferdinand Marcos Jr./Sarah Duterte-Carpio ticket. The son of the former dictator and the daughter of the current fascistic president are running a far-right campaign that seeks to rehabilitate the martial law regime of Marcos and to escalate the bloody law-and-order rule of Duterte.

Rodrigo Duterte, who cannot run for a second term, has lost a considerable degree of ruling-class support over the recent period, and is now sharply at odds with Marcos Jr as well as with his own daughter. On November 30, Duterte's chosen presidential candidate, his right-hand man, Senator Bong Go, announced that he was withdrawing from the presidential race.

A good deal of the political establishment has consolidated behind the Marcos/Duterte-Carpio ticket. Former President Joseph Estrada has joined his arch-nemesis, former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, in backing the Marcos campaign.

There are other bourgeois candidates, all of a markedly right-wing character. Manny Pacquiao, the boxer turned Senator, is a strong supporter of the death penalty and of lowering the age of criminality to twelve. Senator Panfilo Lacson headed the torture apparatus of the Marcos dictatorship. Manila Mayor Isko Moreno wants to use Duterte's murderous war on drugs to target Chinese immigrants.

Vice President Robredo is posturing as the humane, decent exception to this bunch of reactionary scoundrels. The head of the long-standing and influential Liberal Party (LP), Robredo is also the preferred candidate of Washington.

Over the course of the past five years, Duterte substantially realigned Philippine economic and diplomatic ties away

from Washington and toward Beijing. A significant section of Philippine capital, looking to secure money for infrastructure that was not forthcoming from the United States, supported this manoeuvre. Marcos promises to continue this policy, and the forces gathered around his campaign are all associated with it.

Robredo and the Liberal Party represent layers of the Philippine elite still tied to Washington, the country's former colonial ruler. She received the endorsement of ISambayan a party organized in 2021 focused on the Philippine claim to the South China Sea and opposition to China. Robredo hesitated about announcing her candidacy, but the US charge d'affaires met with her and the next day she announced that she would run for president.

Robredo's appeal is above all to sizeable sections of the middle class. This layer is concerned about social instability and class unrest and desires a law-and-order candidate, but is at the same time put off by the vulgar extremes of Duterte. For them Robredo represents a kinder face and a moderated authoritarianism.

Vice President Leni Robredo is a lawyer and the widow of the popular Interior Secretary of the Benigno Aquino III administration, Jesse Robredo. When her husband died in a plane crash in 2012, she ran for congress the next year. She was elected Vice President in 2016, defeating Ferdinand Marcos Jr for the position by a razor-thin margin.

There are clear historical precedents for Robredo's candidacy, above all the campaign of Corazon Aquino against Marcos in 1986, who ran as a housewife and widow, a humane and not particularly political person thrust into politics in order to oppose a tyrant. The campaign concealed the fact that Aquino was head of one of the wealthiest sugar estates in the country. Upon taking office she lurched drastically to the right, crushing all forms of popular resistance with armed force.

Robredo is chair of the Liberal Party, one of the most influential parties in the country's history. She is running, however, as if she were an independent candidate, without the official affiliation of her own party. She has repudiated

the traditional Liberal Party yellow, and is campaigning in pink. This ruse expresses her awareness that the LP is widely distrusted. The party of the Aquinos, associated with post-Marcos democracy, it repeatedly betrayed the democratic hopes of the population in the wake of the ouster of the dictator.

The World Socialist Web Site has consistently stressed that Robredo is running a right-wing campaign. She has brought together on her senatorial slate an array of reactionary figures, including Antonio Trillanes, responsible for multiple military coup attempts, as well as several former Duterte allies, who only recently broke with the president.

The right-wing character of the Robredo campaign found sharp expression on November 26, when she held a security briefing with military leaders at Camp Aguinaldo. She told the assembled brass, “I want to address the elephant in the room kasi (because) I’ve been quoted so many times already that I’m for the abolition of NTF-ELCAC. And I want to emphasize today that I am all for the mandate and the functions of [NTF-ELCAC].”

The anti-communist task force, NTF-ELCAC, which Robredo endorsed, was formed in December 2018 by the Duterte administration as an instrument for suppressing dissent. It was allocated a staggering annual budget of 20 billion pesos (\$US415 million). As part of the Anti-Terrorism Council, it is authorized to conduct warrantless wiretapping, surveillance and arrest without warrant for up to 24 days of anyone accused of terrorism.

Over the past two years, activists, students, workers and peasants, as well as prominent public figures have been accused by NTF-ELCAC of being communists. Some of these people have been killed in government raids. The NTF-ELCAC is a heavily funded and murderous form of McCarthyism.

Robredo told the security briefing, however, that she was opposed to “careless red-tagging.” This was a reference to the fact that she herself had previously been denounced as a Communist by the spokesperson of the very task force whose work she was endorsing.

Robredo’s support for NTF-ELCAC is in continuity with her entire political career.

On December 6 2017, Robredo announced that she supported President Rodrigo Duterte’s declaration that the Communist Party of the Philippines was a “terrorist organization.” She added, “All the government’s moves to break violence, illegal activities, and terroristic activities, we agree with them.” She compared the CPP to the terrorist Abu Sayyaf and ISIS.

Similarly, Robredo supports the continuation of Duterte’s war on drugs, a murderous crusade that has resulted in the death of an estimated 30,000 poor Filipinos. Robredo told

the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* that her administration would continue the war on drugs.

She stated, “In my belief, once the Dangerous Drugs Board sits as the chair its plan will not be just ‘kill, kill, kill’ but the plan will be more comprehensive—heavy on prevention, heavy on rehabilitation.” In other words, her plan would not be exclusively killing; she was not repudiating murder, simply adding other techniques as well.

Critical to Robredo’s calculations is the limitless opportunism of the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), who have done everything possible to provide support for her candidacy. The various political organizations that follow the political line of the CPP—Makabayan, Bayan, Bayan Muna—have demonstrated that they are prepared to endorse her campaign even when she publicly repudiates any alliance with them.

The CPP is intensely sensitive to petty bourgeois opinion; it is the social layer that they represent. A significant portion of this social layer is lining up behind Robredo and the CPP is attempting to bring mass support behind this orientation.

Founder and ideological leader of the CPP, Jose Ma. Sison, declared on November 21 that Robredo was “the most credible opposition presidential candidate” and, despite her refusal to accept the support of Makabayan, he stated, “We still need to form a united front.”

Leni Robredo’s endorsement of the fascistic NTF-ELCAC is a clear demonstration of the right-wing nature of her politics. Behind the smiling pink facade of her campaign lurks authoritarianism and repression.



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