

Stalinist Makabayan Coalition endorses right-wing Robredo campaign in the Philippines

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On January 28, the Makabayan Coalition, the umbrella group of all of the various organizations that follow the political line of the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines, announced its full support for the presidential campaign of Vice President Leni Robredo. Robredo is the leading bourgeois opponent of the current front-running ticket of Ferdinand Marcos Jr and Sara Duterte in the May 2022 elections.

The most recent surveys, conducted in mid-December, showed the son of the former dictator receiving more than 40 percent of the vote, more than twice that of Robredo, his nearest competitor.

Marcos is running a far-right campaign whose central focus is rehabilitating the martial law regime of his father, in doing so depicting the decade long period of military rule as a golden age in Philippine history. His running mate, who is the daughter of the current president, Rodrigo Duterte, is campaigning to impose mandatory military service. Their campaign carries with it the open threat of dictatorship.

Robredo is running an equally right-wing campaign in response. In late November she met with the top military brass and declared her support for the mandate of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a body created under the Duterte administration to persecute and suppress dissent. The NTF-ELCAC is empowered to conduct warrantless wiretaps and arrest political dissidents as “Communists” for up to 24 days without charges.

Robredo has carefully assembled a senatorial slate that reflects this orientation. Antonio Trillanes, responsible for multiple military coup attempts and head of the far-right Magdalo party, is on her slate, as are several former allies of the Duterte administration.

It is behind this campaign that the Makabayan Coalition, with its January 28 announcement, has thrown its full support. The declaration was the culmination of months of negotiations.

The Makabayan Coalition is the electoral umbrella of a wide range of organizations—peasant groups, unions, youth organizations, women’s groups—all of which adhere to the Stalinist perspective of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is routinely referred to as “national democracy.” The CPP, in keeping with the perspective of Stalinism around the globe, argues that the tasks of a revolution in the Philippines are not yet socialist in character but national and democratic only. A section of the capitalist class, they falsely claim, will play a progressive role in this national democratic revolution.

Dressing up their class collaboration as revolutionary and Marxist, the CPP, working through a wide range of organizations, has for more than half a century channelled mass opposition behind one or another representative of the ruling elite. They have never run an independent campaign.

Each of the party’s alliances with the elite was a betrayal of the working class, binding them to the political interests of their class enemies. Seldom, however, has the party mustered as much enthusiasm for this role as they now show for Robredo.

Robredo’s orientation is to the right. She is concerned above all to

retain the support of the military and police on taking office if she is elected. In the Philippines, the President and Vice President are elected separately and not on a single ticket. It is highly plausible that even if Robredo is elected president, Sara Duterte will be elected to the Vice Presidency, giving a strong incentive to the military to topple Robredo and install Duterte as President.

Robredo has kept the Makabayan Coalition at arms-length, repeatedly refusing to include their candidates on her slate. Her opposition to Makabayan was compounded by the fact that she has long been allied to a rival pseudo-left party, Akbayan, that has been a part of the Liberal Party which she chairs for over a decade. Robredo’s spokesperson, Barry Gutierrez, is a member of Akbayan, as is Risa Hontiveros, who is running for senate on Robredo’s slate.

Jose Ma. Sison, founder and ideological leader of the CPP, issued a statement on October 31, after Robredo refused to include Makabayan on her slate, denouncing Robredo as “a reactionary and the lite version of Duterte.” He declared that the line of Manny Pacquiao, the boxer turned senator running for President, was “pro-poor and pro-worker.”

Pacquiao’s politics are deeply reactionary—he has campaigned for extending the death penalty to children as young as 12—and he was until recently a key supporter of Duterte. In his favour, however, as far as Sison was concerned, Pacquiao had offered the Makabayan candidates for Senate, Neri Colmenares and Elmer Labog, spots on his slate and they accepted.

Survey results quickly revealed that Robredo was the front-runner in opposition to Marcos. The Makabayan Coalition distanced themselves from Pacquiao and resumed negotiations with Robredo.

A key element in this process was the newly formed coalition party ISambayan. ISambayan was founded in early 2021 to back a unified opposition candidate. The decisive criterion in ISambayan’s selection was the candidate’s position on the South China Sea and the Philippines orientation to China or the United States. ISambayan sought to endorse the candidate that would reverse Duterte’s orientation toward Beijing and restore the country’s alignment with the military and diplomacy of Washington in the region.

Neri Colmenares, foremost candidate of Makabayan, was a convening member of ISambayan and was instrumental in its creation. ISambayan endorsed Robredo for President. Denied a spot on Robredo’s slate, Colmenares appealed for a spot on the Senatorial slate endorsed by ISambayan. In mid-January, ISambayan announced the seven candidates it was endorsing, pointedly excluding Colmenares and endorsing the far-right Trillanes.

On January 28, a week before the formal election campaign period opened, ISambayan announced that it was also endorsing Colmenares. In return, Colmenares announced that the Makabayan Coalition was enthusiastically backing Robredo and her Vice Presidential Candidate Francisco Pangilinan.

The forces of Makabayan threw themselves into their new role. The

posters for Colmenares were altered from red to pink, the color of the Robredo campaign. The Makabayan coalition staged a press conference to announce the launching of a “broad united front against the danger of the Marcos-Duterte tandem.”

They justified their support on two grounds. First, they claimed, there were aspects of the Robredo platform that were held in common with the national democratic platform of Makabayan. They dishonestly claimed that she would moderate and curb the excesses of NTF-ELCAC. The most fundamental shared principle they cited was Robredo’s commitment to defend Philippine sovereignty “against Chinese seizure, exploitation and building of military bases in the West Philippine Sea.” Makabayan, like Robredo, is lining up with Washington.

The second justification for supporting Robredo was exceedingly straightforward. They decided that, other than Marcos, she was the most likely candidate to win. This, they stressed repeatedly, was the most significant factor.

While Robredo refuses to endorse Colmenares or the Makabayan Coalition, they are going all out to secure her the presidency. Colmenares told the press conference:

“The official endorsement of Makabayan for Robredo and Pangilinan is a key change to the makeup and thrust of her campaign. Her campaign will be widened, strengthened and enlivened ... That’s a big deal. The apparatus of Makabayan throughout the country is at the ready to play a critical role in the new phase of Robredo’s campaign. This is our commitment. We will hit the ground running.”

Colmenares pledged the Makabayan could “swing 3 to 3.5 million votes behind Robredo.” In an interview with ABS-CBN on January 31, he spelled out the role of Makabayan, which is the fundamental class function of Stalinism.

Philippine surveys routinely employ a demographic stratigraphy that breaks the country up into five income tiers, from group A, the very richest layers, to E, the most impoverished layers of workers and farmers.

Colmenares noted that Robredo was polling very strongly in groups A,B, and C—the upper and middle class—but lacked the support of D and E—the workers and poor. “To a large degree that is where Makabayan can also come in. Our members are workers, farmers, and urban poor. A new field opens up with this merger. Hopefully the ABC and DE will merge in support for Robredo with Makabayan’s support for her.”

During the January 28 press conference, Colmenares set these forces into motion: “To all the supporters and allies of Makabayan, we have entered a phase where we need to double and triple our efforts in the campaign on the ground, in leafleting, in going house-to-house, and in social media. This is our chance to give the struggles of the people for their interests in all of the different sectors—workers, farmers—our support for the Robredo-Pangilinan ticket.”

The youth organization Kabataan has already begun painting Robredo murals. The powerful social media apparatus of the member organizations of Makabayan are in motion, promoting the hashtag #Makabayan4Leni.

While the Makabayan Coalition has reconciled itself to supporting Robredo while she holds them at arm’s length, they continue to plead for her endorsement. Colmenares told ABS-CBN, “If she would consider me as part of her senatorial slate, it would be very good for us, because it would inspire our members to campaign the more. When they land in provinces, most of our chapters, our machinery, will be there, but I won’t be there.”

In other words, Makabayan pledged the party “machinery” of Stalinism to Robredo, but they were having difficulty whipping up enthusiasm in their rank-and-file because of Robredo’s openly right-wing campaign. If she would only endorse their candidate, it would allow Makabayan to present her as more “progressive” and cultivate greater mass support.

Makabayan’s campaign for Robredo has the open backing of the Communist Party. The flagship publication of the CPP, *Ang Bayan*, ran a

news item heralding Makabayan’s support for Robredo. Sison has shared every interview and press statement announcing the support on his Facebook page.

The danger of dictatorship posed most sharply by the Marcos-Duterte ticket is an expression of the crisis of capitalist rule around the globe. It cannot be prevented by voting for a rival section of the ruling class. Robredo herself is oriented in this direction. When asked in a nationally televised interview on January 23 if the country needed “an iron-fisted leader,” she did not defend democracy but her capacity as a woman to rule responding, “it depends how you define an iron fist. ... This has nothing to do with gender.”

Robredo and Makabayan were instrumental in the rise of Marcos and Duterte to political prominence. The Liberal Party, of which Robredo is chair, made Rodrigo Duterte a figure of national prominence a decade ago. The Stalinist CPP and the Makabayan Coalition openly campaigned for and supported Duterte.

The spokespersons of Makabayan at the press conference pledging support for Robredo were all instrumental in this process. Carlos Zarate chaired the press conference. In 2016, he signed a public declaration of “full support” for Duterte. Satur Ocampo and Liza Maza both spoke, declaring that Robredo was the best hope to prevent the “return of fascism” under Marcos-Duterte. In 2010, Ocampo and Maza campaigned with Marcos, running for Senate alongside him on Manny Villar’s slate. Maza served in Duterte’s cabinet nearly two years.

Neri Colmenares, the frontrunner of the Stalinist opposition to Marcos and Duterte, secretly campaigned for Duterte in Davao in 2016, speaking on a shared platform with the President they now denounce as a fascist. He is now running on ISambayan’s senate ticket alongside the far-right Trillanes.

The Filipino working class have lived through nearly a century of Stalinist betrayals. The endorsement of Robredo reveals once again the fundamental class function of Stalinism—of the CPP and the Makabayan Coalition. It seeks not to defend democracy, but to stabilize bourgeois rule and above all block a genuine struggle for socialism by the working class.



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