

Towards an Autonomist Leftist Movement in the Philippines

Anarchipelago Kollektive

2018

Before his presidency, Duterte as Mayor of Davao was linked to the Davao Death Squad vigilante group which executed more than 1,000 people over a decade. Despite this, the major parties of the Philippine left heralded Duterte as a pro-people, anti-imperialist, unorthodox candidate for the presidency.

Over 13,000 people — including women and children — have already been killed since the beginning of Duterte’s drug war, mostly in the poorest urban areas of the Philippines. There is no indication that the killings will slow or cease under this regime.

While in office, Duterte has unapologetically and repeatedly threatened to declare Martial Law (which has already become a reality in Marawi, motivated by Islamophobia), candidly compared himself to Hitler in his promise to slaughter millions of drug addicts, and joked about how he should have been the first to violate a victim of gang rape. Duterte arranged for the reburial of Ferdinand Marcos in the Libingan Ng Mga Bayani (Heroes Cemetery), while his presidential campaign was funded and strongly supported by the Marcos heirs Imee Marcos and Bongbong Marcos. Duterte also engaged in character assassination against those who have attempted to hold him accountable, including the now-imprisoned Senator Leila De Lima, who led the charge in investigating Duterte’s record of human rights violations. Yet the major leftist blocs have been reluctant to declare their opposition to the Duterte administration. Instead, they have become entangled in an endless tug-of-war that they refer to as “peace talks”. One day, the claim is made that Duterte is a socialist willing to work for the good of the people: “Duterte’s show of readiness to continue cooperation and friendship with the national democratic movement is the basis of possibilities for a fruitful alliance with his government.” The next day, Duterte himself is calling for leftists to be captured and killed.

The inflexibility of these top-down organizations has discouraged members within their ranks from speaking outright against Duterte. At the same time, their hostility towards autonomous leftist movements in the Philippines has manifested in the silencing of those with more vocal critique of the Duterte administration and the posturing that the party members are the only ‘true’ revolutionaries organizing the masses.

Ultimately, the ambivalence of the leftist vanguard parties towards Duterte — and the reluctance to retract their leadership from Duterte’s cabinet — has neutralized the possibility of building a broader resistance against his administration.

To be clear: we reject Duterte’s authoritarian rule because we do not believe in negotiating with fascists.

You cannot claim to be “pro-people” while motivating and perpetuating violence with a politics of ruthless machismo. You cannot hide behind the rhetoric of anti-imperialism while entertaining and colluding with western forces to maintain their investments in Philippine land, resources, and labor.

Duterte’s apologists call for us to consider that he is a “flawed” human being, that he is “not to blame” for the rising casualties in the drug war. But we understand what flaws look like. Wielding state violence — consistently and unapologetically — is not a flaw. Death squads and blood spilled nightly on the streets are not flaws. A strongman’s iron fist is not a flaw: it is a weapon.

And so we do not mistake strong men for saviors. A nationalist, socialist “revolution” that systematically commits genocide against the poor, that is fueled by patriarchy and misogyny, that is homophobic, that is ruthlessly militaristic, that insults Western powers to our face but continues to make deals with them behind our back, is no revolution at all.

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