

Maoists take cabinet positions in Philippine government

By Joseph Santolan
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Since Rodrigo Duterte's election as president of the Philippines in early May, his administration, which will be inaugurated into office on June 30, has taken on an ever-more openly fascist character. At the same time, the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has become increasingly vocal in its support for his government and opened peace talks to end its 47-year armed struggle. Three of its leading representatives have been installed in cabinet-level posts in his administration as secretaries in the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Department of Agrarian Reform, and as undersecretary in the Department of Labor and Employment.

Over the past week, with Duterte's explicit encouragement, police and vigilante groups have carried out at least ten summary executions of alleged criminals throughout the country. The victims had their hands tied behind their backs and were repeatedly shot in the back of the head. Cardboards signs were left on the corpses, stating they were drug pushers or petty thieves. At least one cardboard sign read "#DU30"—the social media hashtag of the newly-elected president.

Duterte told a press conference the majority of journalists murdered in the Philippines deserved to be assassinated because they were "rotten sons of bitches." The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) lists the Philippines as the third most dangerous country to be a journalist, after Iraq and Syria. The Philippines, however, is not a war zone. All the journalists killed in the country have been the victims of targeted assassinations.

Duterte announced he would no longer hold any press conferences, or allow himself to be interviewed or questioned by reporters. All press releases, he stated, would be censored through the government-owned TV channel, PTV-4. The last Philippine president to manage the press in this manner was Ferdinand Marcos, after his declaration of martial law.

All these measures, from the creation of death squads to the moves toward suppressing the freedom of the press, are being prepared to crack down on emerging struggles of the working class. Duterte's presidency has the support of leading sections of the Philippine ruling class and of international finance capital. The Washington-based think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), wrote on June 6 that Duterte "promised to continue and maintain the successful macroeconomic policies" of outgoing President Aquino. They hailed Duterte's stated intention to allow increased foreign ownership of Philippine corporations.

Duterte is thus heading a government that is preparing to crack down on and murder the working class at the behest of international finance capital. The task of building a base of support for this fascist program in the petty bourgeoisie and among various lumpen elements rests with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

The Maoist CPP has given its support to Duterte for decades, while he headed the notorious Davao Death Squads as mayor of the southern city. Elements from the CPP's New People's Army (NPA) have long been reported to have assisted in the assassinations carried out by these death squads. The NPA participated in the vigilante violence of the past week, carrying out a raid on a town in Davao Oriental in support, it told the press, of Duterte's campaign against drugs.

On his election, Duterte offered four cabinet posts to the CPP, calling on Joma Sison, the founder and head of the party, to select his appointments. Sison hailed Duterte's offer as "magnanimous." Thus far, three CPP nominees have been appointed. These positions are not simply rewards for the CPP's support. The CPP-appointed officials will be directly responsible for carrying out the suppression of the working class.

Selected to head the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) was Judy Taguiwalo. Taguiwalo

was a national council member of one of CPP's youth wings, the Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK), in the early 1970s. She was in the leadership of the Nationalist Corps, a student-based front organization responsible for carrying out charitable projects in poor communities in order to win their support for the CPP. After the declaration of martial law, she went underground with the party, re-emerging after Marcos's downfall to take up a position as Professor of Women's and Development Studies at the University of the Philippines (UP).

Taguiwalo announced she would continue the Aquino administration's Conditional Cash Transfer program. This program, pushed by the World Bank, uses a limited cash subsidy for small sections of the poor who qualify, as a means of implementing austerity measures and slashing social infrastructure.

Appointed head of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) is Rafael Mariano. The long-time head of the CPP's peasant wing, the Kilusang Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (KMP), Mariano led peasants in 1987 in a march to request land reform from President Corazon Aquino's Ministry of Agrarian Reform. The CPP leaders said they were looking to "meet Your Excellency in a dialogue." Aquino's military forces opened fire, killing 13, in what became known as the Mendiola Massacre. When Aquino died in 2009, Mariano attended public masses to honor Aquino and to pray for the well-being of her soul.

Joel Maglunsod, vice president for Mindanao of the CPP trade union umbrella Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), was made undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). When Duterte announced in February that he would kill workers who attempted to organize a union in Export Processing Zones (EPZ), Maglunsod issued a press release describing Duterte's statement as "hyperbole."

These three departments—Social Welfare, Agrarian Reform and Labor—serve as arms of the state for policing the poor, the peasantry and the working class. The CPP appointees to these positions will be directly responsible for carrying out the dictates of capitalism via an increasingly fascist government against the working class.

The CPP's various front organizations are working to whip up illusions in Duterte. Renato Reyes, national secretary of the CPP umbrella front organization, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), wrote: "We support the progressive and nationalist goals and program of the new government."

Carol Araullo, national chair of BAYAN, penned a more extensive justification of Duterte's administration in her regular column in *Business World*, the leading business daily in the country. Araullo described Duterte's government as "apparently inconsistent." Duterte was "continuing the neoliberal economic policies of the Aquino government while offering socio-economic cabinet posts to the communists." This seeming contradiction, however, was an example of Duterte's "exceptional brinkmanship." Duterte was "proving that an avowed Leftist and Socialist can win and wield the Presidency while reassuring the Right that he will keep his oath to preserve the system."

Araullo's perspective is a damning indictment of the CPP's nationalist politics, which are entirely in the service of the bourgeoisie. She admits that Duterte is carrying forward Aquino's policies of austerity and repression, which over the past six years have presided over mounting social inequality.

The fact that Duterte is installing "communists" into his cabinet, is only "apparently" contradictory. Duterte can install the CPP into his government and "reassure the Right" at the same time, precisely because the CPP's politics are hostile to the working class.

From its inception, the CPP has been based on the Stalinist two-stage program, which stated that the tasks of revolution in the Philippines were national and democratic only, and not yet socialist. The working class, the CPP claimed, should not fight for its independent class interests but ally with its enemy, the bourgeoisie, in the name of national democracy. Time and again, this program has led to the betrayal and murder of the working class. The alliance with Duterte is the most criminal demonstration of the bankruptcy of the CPP's politics.

As Duterte and Sison engage in peace talks and negotiate the role of the CPP in the new administration, the working class must take warning. These forces are preparing immense betrayals and class suppression.

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