

Philippine Vice-presidential Candidate Walden Bello: Why Democratic Socialism Is the Answer

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Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses, PLM) and Laban ng Masa (Fight of the Masses) are jointly contesting the May 9 national elections in the Philippines.

PLM militant and labour leader **Leody de Guzman** is running for president and activist parliamentarian and Laban ng Masa chairperson **Walden Bello** is running for vice-president.

Bello gave the following speech at the rally to launch the PLM/Laban ng Masa election platform, held in the capital Manila on February 8:

Among all the economies of Southeast Asia, the Philippines has the highest poverty rate, at 25% or more of the population. Inequality is also among the highest in the region, with less than 5% of the people controlling 50% or more of total wealth. Let us have no illusions: the Philippines is still the sick man of Asia.

Indiscriminate opening up of the economy, demanded by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and World Trade Organization and imposed by compliant technocrats, has irreparably damaged our manufacturing and agriculture, resulting in loss of livelihoods and leaving large numbers of Filipinos with little choice but to go abroad to improve their lot.

We are caught in a vicious circle of underdevelopment, and unless we adopt truly radical measures, our downward spiral will gather speed.

Presidential candidate Leody de Guzman and I do not offer a superficial diagnosis of the causes of our national malaise and simply attribute all problems to corruption or bad

governance or the weakening of our values as a people.

We offer no easy, deceptive solutions like “forge national unity” (Marcos-Duterte), “reinvigorate our values” (Leni), “reform government” (Lacson), or “abolish corruption” (Manny). These are slogans, not solutions.

There are sectors of the population — the ultra-rich — that will be hurt by the structural changes we propose, like a wealth tax and truly comprehensive agrarian reform.

There are powerful external forces, such as the big foreign banks, the United States and the European Union, which will not be pleased with the measures we propose to protect our economy from total ruin, such as ending the dumping of super cheap (state-subsidised) foreign goods and stanching the massive outflow of much needed capital in the form of debt service payments.

There are very influential local and international business interests that want to keep wages low to extract even greater profits and prevent the more equal distribution of wealth that is not only an imperative of justice but also a precondition for the creation of a truly dynamic, prosperous national market. They will brand us as “reds”.

There are political dynasties that see government mainly as an institution to be plundered for private wealth accumulation rather than an agent of national development via planning and wealth redistribution. They will dismiss us as “enemies of the free market” or “promoters of a totalitarian state”.

Yes, the program we offer will hurt; there is no use denying that. But it will hurt the very few ultra-rich and ultra-powerful for the benefit of the vast majority. The interests of this handful of families contradict the interests of the Filipino people.

Finally, there are those that say the most urgent task is to prevent a Marcos-Duterte restoration. Yes, we agree that we must prevent the Marcos-Duterte axis of evil from coming to power. But the best way to do that is not by simply changing the yellow wrapper that covered up the discredited practices of the last 35 years of a failed elite democracy with a wrapper of another colour — be this blue, green, white or pink. That is a dead end.

The only way to prevent a desperate people from being seduced into going back to a nightmarish authoritarian past is by offering them a program that would make them participants in the creation of the future they deserve: a truly democratic Philippines.

So what is this program? In two words: democratic socialism.

In conclusion, comrades, the elections in May are not just regular elections. They are an electoral insurgency for democratic socialism. Win or lose, this democratic socialist insurgency will go on after the May elections and, indeed, become more intense.

Long live socialism! Long live our common struggle!

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