

# Philippines: Why Ka Leody and Walden are 'winnable'

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**Many commentators are convinced—and want us to be convinced—that the first socialist presidential and vice-presidential tandem to run in Philippine history have zilch chance of winning.**

This belief about the socialist duo's "un-winnability" is not without basis. It is true, after all, that Ka Leody de Guzman and Walden Bello are not widely popular and do not have a fat campaign chest.

Still, the conventional wisdom about these candidates is deeply problematic, because it overlooks a fundamental source of strength on their part while obscuring a major weakness on the part of their rivals.

Many commentators commonly fail to recognize that all the mainstream candidates suffer from one crucial infirmity: their more or less complete dependence on the support of big business, landlords, and other powerful elites to run their campaigns.

This is a key source of weakness, because it ties these candidates' hands to different degrees. It drives them to constantly try to be on the good side of the rich. It forces them to make all sorts of compromises. But by so doing, it also prevents them from offering real and lasting solutions to the problems faced by the working class and other oppressed groups—i.e., those who make up the majority.

Take Ferdinand Marcos Jr. for example, the unapologetic son of the cruel dictator and craven plunderer.

Careful not to antagonize the possessing classes, he has not even come out with a detailed platform itemizing what he will do for workers or small farmers.

Or consider Leni Robredo, who has gone so far as to ditch the yellow color of her party—a party that has historically represented the interests of large property.

Careful not to arouse the enmity of big business, Robredo has vowed to end "endo," but she has refused to back the proposal for a wealth tax on the country's billionaires, for a P750 national minimum wage, or for prohibiting manpower agencies that perpetuate contractualization.

Indeed, Robredo has even gone so far as to say that, when it comes to labor issues, the problem is just with the implementation of the Labor Code rather than with the law itself. Referring to this law, she has said "sobrang kampi ito sa employees"—a claim that would sound offensive to workers who have suffered from the law's inherent pro-business bias, but which could only be music to the ears of her billionaire backers.

In practically all instances, the dominant candidates' reliance on the actual or potential support of

the propertied class compels them to appease the latter, thereby constraining them from going farther to alleviate the suffering of the majority—and therefore also from fully winning them over. Constrained from taking uncompromisingly pro-worker positions, the mainstream candidates are also thereby prevented from mobilizing the “99 percent” to fight for programs that promote their own interests. Electoral politics remains a battle between icons rather than between ideas. As a result, mainstream candidates fail to help the “laylayan” cease to be just mere followers or objects of charity and begin to be agents of history.

With all their advantages, one of the mainstream candidates may well end up winning, of course—but “winning” understood in narrow terms: securing the most votes.

Ka Leody and Walden don’t suffer from this problem. They are not at all dependent on the super-rich, and they actually disavow any alliances with them.

This is why they are still the only candidates who have unveiled a detailed platform packed with uncompromisingly pro-poor proposals such as a P750 national minimum wage, the abolition of all forms of contractualization, a wealth tax on billionaires, and so on.

By being able to advance real solutions to working people’s problems, they are also able to do something else: Instead of making the campaign about themselves, they are able to empower people to fight for programs that promote their interests.

A new kind of politics thereby becomes possible: politics no longer as a battle between competing idols but between competing projects. Politics that’s not about politicians but about us, ordinary people.

Working-class consciousness can consequently be taken to a higher level. Instead of remaining mere fans or recipients of lugalaw, the oppressed can become leaders in their own right, capable of deciding their own destiny and changing history.

To be sure, their autonomy from the elites does not automatically offset all of Ka Leody and Walden’s weaknesses. But it is precisely what can enable them to overcome their limits.

If, building on their independence from the super-rich, these leftist underdogs are able to mobilize people power from below to raise more money and build a national machinery, they may very well end up proving the conventional wisdom wrong.

Against all odds, they may very well end up winning—and winning in a more profound sense: not just in terms of gaining the most votes, but in terms of helping more people liberate themselves.

That victory will not just be theirs, it will be ours, too.

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