

# **New left party — Power of the Masses Party — formed in Philippines**

Tuesday 10 February 2009, by [BOYLE Peter](#), [DSP](#) (Date first published: 1 February 2009).

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Manila, February 1, 2009 - *Green Left Weekly/Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* — More than a thousand people, including 920 elected delegates, attended the inaugural congress of Partido Lakas ng Masa (literally “Power of the Masses Party”) on January 30, 2009. They represented the mass organisations of workers, urban poor, peasants, students, street vendors, jeepney and tricycle drivers, women and senior citizens – a mass base estimated at 300,000 according to PLM leaders. The congress adopted a target of 1 million members in Manila and 2 million in the country as a whole by 2010 (when presidential elections are due).

The slogan “PLM: A new party for our time, a party of change, a party of socialism” set a confident tone for the congress.

Sonny Melencio, who was elected chairperson of the PLM, describes the new party as a “combination mass movement and electoral party” that was inspired by the recent Latin American experiences which have put into power progressive and socialist parties in countries like Venezuela and Bolivia.

“We are trying to build a mass party that can lead an uprising as well as engage in elections.” The socialist victories in Latin America were not simply victories in the ballot boxes. Those electoral victories were preceded by popular uprisings that mobilised millions of people. During the elections, these uprisings were transformed into giant mobilisations but the mobilisations are also continuing in an ongoing process of building new institutions of popular power. “The PLM congress adopted a “Platform of the Masses”, a transitional program aimed at the “dismantling of the rotten capitalist system and its replacement by socialism”.

This program consists of key demands around economic and political reforms that the party will campaign for. includes the nationalisation of basic industries and services, such as electricity, oil and water; the provision of basic needs of the masses, such as land, decent housing, education, jobs and health; and the establishment of a genuine government of the masses.

## **Popular power**

“But the political aspect of the program is crucial”, Melencio told *Green Left Weekly* in an extensive interview (see video above of the full interview). “We want to put power into the hands of the masses. This has to happen from below through the transformation of barangay (neighbourhood) councils into barangay assemblies that can institute alternative structures to replace the congress that is dominated by the trapo (traditional politician) elite.” The masses are tired of a system where successive people’s uprisings, such as EDSA I and EDSA II which changed nothing. EDSA III was a

failure and led by another trapo, “Erap” [Joseph Estrada], who wanted to return to power. “We don’t want another EDSA where ‘people’s power’ is hijacked by the elite. So we need an uprising that is heading by the masa themselves and crowned by the institution of a government of the masa.”

The forces that launched the PLM came out of an experience in a broad collation of the left called Laban ng Masa. This alliance including most of the left except the sections associated by the Communist Party of the Philippines, a significant force that holds on to a sectarian approach to the rest of the left, according to Melencio.

This alliance operated on consensus and, unfortunately, there was no consensus on how to relate to important issues such as the Moro struggle for self-determination, the rebel soldiers movement and the commitment of serious resources to building the alliance at all levels, especially at the grassroots, according to Melencio.

“So we decided to form a party that could do this grassroots organising among the masses, to mobilise them in the streets and in elections too. However, we are still pursuing left regroupment and the PLM has an inclusive approach.”

Melencio hopes that some other groups from Laban ng Masa might join the PLM in the next few months.

**By Peter Boyle**

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## **Images from the PLM conference**

Well-known leaders of the broader left, including president of the University of the Philippines and Laban ng Masa chairperson Dr Francisco Nemenzo, former Akbayan Congress representative Etta Rosales, current Akbayan Congress representative Risa Hontiveros and Ric Reyes delivered greetings to the PLM congress in person.

### **Rebel soldiers movement**

The major alliance the PLM is building is with the military rebels. Melencio has been visiting the rebel military leaders in detention and discussing the possibility of them joining the PLM. Some have already expressed their willingness to join or support the PLM. The PLM congress received a message of support from imprisoned Brigadier-General Danilo Lim, a widely respected leader of the rebel soldiers movement.

“Some of the military rebel groups are in full agreement with the PLM platform. In fact the platform of the PLM is based on a platform put forward by the Young Officers Union for New Government (YOUNG)”, said Melencio.

“They asked us to comment on it, during the days of Laban ng Masa, and we developed it into the Platform of the Masses. We have some more things to discuss, including how to explain socialism to the ranks of the soldiers.”

Melencio said that some of the rebel soldiers had been studying the Venezuelan revolution and

reading about Hugo Chavez and “Socialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. The PLM has been discussing putting forward Brigadier-General Lim as its presidential candidate in 2010.

There were international observers at the PLM inaugural congress from the Japan Confederation of Railway Workers Union, the Sweden’s Left Party, the Democratic Socialist Perspective of Australia and the Ceylon Bank Employees Union. Solidarity greetings were presented from these groups and other international parties, including the Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM), Papernas from Indonesia and Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR, Spain), which emailed greetings.

**Peter Boyle**

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## **DSP greetings to the founding conference of Partido Lakas ng Masa, Philippines**

Dear Comrades

Warmest congratulations on this founding conference of Partido Lakas ng Masa from the Democratic Socialist Perspective, a Marxist tendency in the Socialist Alliance in Australia.

This important initiative in socialist leadership and organisation in the Philippines comes at a time when the capitalist system faces its worst economic crisis in decades and when the world sits on the brink of cataclysmic global warming.

In addition, after years of bloody imperialist wars abroad, associated assaults on democracy and civil liberties, and the systematic social and environmental vandalism that is neoliberalism, the capitalist system is also suffering a severe crisis of political legitimacy.

This stands out very starkly in the in the Philippines where the GMA regime is widely discredited and hated by the working masses and the traditional politicians in the opposition are seen to be equally corrupt and to offer no real political alternative.

If the left does not offer a lead to the masses in such times of crisis, then other hostile class forces will take advantage of this. Now is the time for the left to step up to the plate and not to retreat to a sectarian outlook. Now is a very good time to launch an effective party with which to try and win over and lead the working masses towards a socialist transformation.

We in the DSP share with the PLM a determination to pursue all such openings for such leadership to the fullest extent.

We in the DSP also share with your party an admiration and enthusiastic support for the advancing revolutions in Venezuela and other Latin American countries. This is an elementary response of solidarity. This also comes from our recognition that it is the duty of all serious socialists today to study and absorb the lessons of what has come to be called “Socialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century”.

After many years of global retreat, the working masses of the world have begun to turn and go back onto the offensive. Millions of the oppressed have now taken their destiny into their hands and have begun to create a different future.

The revolution led by Hugo Chavez and his comrades in Venezuela celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary last December. I was fortunate to be able to join in that celebration in Caracas and I can tell you that the power of the masses was a great sight to see. A giant sea of red stretched down the street from the presidential palace as far as my eyes could see. It was a noisy crowd: singing, shouting, chanting and dancing in the street. And then when Chavez stepped up to the podium to address the crowd, you should have heard the masses roar!

For a socialist revolution to survive 10 years, when not that long before the rulers of the world were celebrating the so-called "end of history", the so-called final triumph of capitalism, that is truly a great win. It is a great win, but only a taste of what the masses can, must and will do in the future. We have no choice but to fight for a new system to replace capitalism. All these crises tell us one thing: for humanity today the choice is socialism or barbarism. As the workers, the urban poor, the poor farmers and the rebel soldiers of Venezuela shout out:

***Patria, socialisme o muerte, venceremos!***

***Workers of the world unite!***

Peter Boyle

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\* From Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal.

<http://links.org.au/node/893>

\* Peter Boyle is national secretary of the Democratic Socialist Perspective and attended the PLM congress as an international observer.

[Reihana Mohideen, a representative of Partido Lakas ng Masa, will be a featured guest at the World at a Crossroads conference, to be held in Sydney, Australia, on April 10-12, 2009, organised by the Democratic Socialist Perspective, Resistance and Green Left Weekly. Visit

<http://www.worldATACrossroads.org> for full agenda and to book your tickets.]