

Prospects for Redemocratization

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In the process of determining the prospects for redemocratization, one should not overlook the many gains we have already achieved since the February Revolution. This is true not only in the structural/procedural aspects but more importantly in the substantive aspects. It is also important to have the proper perspective and to look at the whole society in relating the government and the bureaucracy. A continuous process of learning should be undertaken by all the leaders and institutions of the government through participation and interaction with the people in the myriad processes of development and governance. Emphasis must be on relevance, responsiveness and effectiveness of public management to achieve human development goals as articulated in the Constitution. Furthermore, transformation of the Filipino culture can gradually be achieved if traditional values and capacities are preserved and treasured by society as a whole.

It is so easy to be critical, even hyper-critical of the times which we live, and the situation in which the government finds itself. But as they say, it is a matter of looking at a glass as half-full or half empty. I prefer to look at the glass, or the national glass, as more than half-full.

It is a short nineteen months since the triumphant four days in February 1986 when our people toppled the dictatorship and began rebuilding our democracy. Step by step, the Filipinos have persevered in restoring democratic processes and institutions amid destabilizing forces from the extreme ends of our political spectrum. Our fragile democracy continues to survive through the sheer determination and skill of our duly chosen leaders led by President Aquino and her Cabinet, by our Senators and Congressmen, the loyal elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the National Police, and those of us who staff our bureaucracy with the moral and material support of our people. The commitment to democratic restoration was behind the popular uprising against the dictatorship in February 1986. The overwhelming approval of the electorate of the 1987 Constitution was both an expression and a renewal of that commitment. The high level of participation by our voters during the plebiscite for the ratification of the Constitution last February, as well as during the legislative elections in May, was further testimony to the popular desire to restore democracy in this country.

Just after the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino in 1983, a number of observers of Philippine politics speculated on the possible scenarios

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should Marcos, either by volition or by *force majeure* allow a certain amount of liberalization to lead to a transition to democracy. Questions and issues such as the following were confronted: If we really want to redemocratize the political system, how would we do it so as to maintain a measure of political stability and security for those who would be relinquishing power or be divested forcibly of that power? If we were to redemocratize, how would we be able to reconcile and aggregate the demands that would surely and suddenly increase to satisfy the competing and conflicting interests? How would we avoid the disruption of governmental services when new waves of leaders and administrators would move into the political and administrative scene? Finally, how would we allow the steady consolidation of democratic gains? These questions which were asked in November of 1983 are still as relevant to us today as the revolution continues. In a sense, we are still in the midst of that revolution or that struggle—to maintain legitimate power and to govern, or on the part of the extreme left, to grab power in order to overthrow the government, and the social order.

In this political struggle, we can recognize overlapping groups or movements contending for primacy or dominance. In the far left of the political spectrum, we have revolutionary Communism led by the Communist Party of the Philippines, its military arm, the New People's Army, and its front organizations that offer national democracy as an alternative. This is actually the authoritarianism of the extreme left. Just a little left of center, we have groups offering what they call popular democracy. Included in this cluster are the legal left, Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), Partido ng Bayan (PnB) and some of the cause-oriented groups. Near the center or at the center, we might call a group governing the nation in a very difficult situation under constitutional democracy, that is, our 1987 Constitution, which is a conservative to reformist coalition sometimes referred to as the middle forces. Because it is a coalition of forces somewhat to the left and somewhat to the right, we notice the shifting of the membership and leadership of the center. And to the right, the authoritarianism of the extreme right, the militarists and anti-communist ideology typified by some of the Marcos loyalists, Colonel Honasan and some of the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) officers. We might add a fifth force that is involved in ethnic and regional rebellion and even separatism and secession. This force is represented by the autonomous movements in the Cordilleras and in Mindanao. The Cordillera People's Liberation Movement has joined the Administration in leading an autonomy movement in the Cordilleras and the Moro National Liberation Front is oscillating between autonomy and secession and is threatening to install a group which calls itself the Mindanao Independence Movement. Those of us who know Mindanao, realize that the feeling of long standing neglect by the people there draws support to the ideology of an Independent Republic of Mindanao. We know that the far left movement, the radical movement of Communism antedates President Marcos' time, but we can say

that Communism and the NPAs grew and expanded considerably during that time so that by February of last year, it had grown into a nationwide insurgency. The Moro rebellion was also born during the Marcos time and has continued to this day. We can consider the authoritarianism of the left and the rebellion and secessionist movement as parts of the legacy of the Marcos years. But certainly, the authoritarianism of the extreme right is also traceable to that time when the military was given an unusual share in the privileges of power.

We are discussing redemocratization and Public Administration reform in this context of political struggle which has resulted in many deaths and injuries since we regained freedom in five coup attempts and at least two Cabinet reshuffles. Efforts of political destabilization continue.

In looking at the glass as more than half-full, the significance of the 1987 Constitution must be underscored. This Constitution is unusual because it is not just a document that establishes an ideal government. It is a Constitution which really embodies a vision of a preferred Filipino society, a society which is very cryptically described as a just and humane society. So it is a vision of a preferred future, if one is a futurist, that spells out broad societal goals and not only the desired form of government, its structure, processes and procedures, but the substance of a constitutional democracy. That is why it is a very elaborate and long constitution. It does more than what constitutions normally do.

It is good to remind ourselves of the gains in redemocratization achieved since the February Revolution:

- 1) The formulation and the ratification of the 1987 Constitution;
- 2) The change from a president marked by politics of systematic plunder or kleptocracy, extravagance and deceit to a president of exemplary integrity, honesty, simplicity, and humility;
- 3) The attempts to recover part of the ill-gotten wealth of the past regime primarily through sequestration;
- 4) The change from an unlimited and arbitrary rule of the rulers towards a rule of law and checks and balances;
- 5) The installation of a co-equal Congress duly selected by the people from a rubber stamp Batasang Pambansa beholden to the dictator;
- 6) The installation of new institutions of initiatives and referendum premised in the new Constitution from managed elections;

- 7) The assumption of an independent Supreme Court from a dependent and subservient Supreme Court and improvement of the judiciary;
- 8) The bureaucracy which is currently undergoing reform as a consequence of various waves of reorganization;
- 9) The changes in local government including — the promise of local and regional autonomy which is an innovation in our system of government;
- 10) The change from a guided and dependent media to a free and independent media, and to some degree, licentious media;
- 11) The change from corporatism with attempts to control and integrate labor, business, industry and other sectors of our society, to free and competitive existence of various sectors and institutions;
- 12) The recognition of the important role of people's organizations in the Constitution which still has to be institutionalized or fulfilled;
- 13) The changes from systematic human rights violations to the restoration of civil and political rights and the release of political prisoners;
- 14) The break up of monopolies by the government and of the cronies;
- 15) The move towards privatization;
- 16) Economic recovery that has been achieved despite the political destabilization measures;
- 17) Control of inflation and capital flight, and the improvement in our dollar reserves;
- 18) Stability in our exchange rates;
- 19) The beginnings of agrarian reform; and
- 20) Greater freedom to labor.

These are but some of the structural/procedural aspects of redemocratization, although the issue of human rights not only matters in form but more importantly in substance.

Lest we be content with looking at just administration and political reforms, let us allow a slight digression, or consider other aspects of change and reform. This is because it is questionable to assume that it is only the

government or the bureaucracy that bear the sole or primary object of reorientation, improvement or reform. While this is a useful focus specially for us, public administrators, we are reminded that this focus of change or reform underplays the multiple and often contradictory goals of development. The complexity of the development process, including its moral and participatory aspects and the need to view development as societal change and human growth, needs the constant balancing of the often contradictory requirements, which we are now experiencing, such as stability, change and social justice given major disparities and inequities that afflict our society. It is therefore important to look at the whole society in relating to the government and its bureaucracy and in assessing the prospect for governmental and administrative reform. The government and its bureaucracy will reorient and reform themselves with greater urgency and with less reluctance if they are under continually strong pressures, sustained pressures from the leaders of the competing political parties and movements such as those of the extreme left and the extreme right, e.g., pressures from private business enterprises, trade unions, youth groups and citizen organizations, from the so-called cause-oriented groups, from relatively free and uncontrolled media, from religious organizations.

But all the leaders and institutions that have been mentioned and as large a segment of the citizenry as possible, should undergo a process of learning individually through participation and interaction in the myriad processes of development and governance from the local community to the national government level, and even beyond our participation in the international community. Without due emphasis on these important considerations affecting the relevance, responsiveness and effectiveness of public management, not only in sufficiency and cost effectiveness, it is unlikely that human development goals such as those articulated in the Constitution can be satisfactorily realized both in the short run and in the long run; neither can there be progressive improvement of political decision-making and public management. It is also unlikely that the citizenry will regard the political and economic order as moral and therefore, worthy of their continuing allegiance and support.

Filipino culture will be gradually transformed if traditional values and capacities are prized, treasured and rewarded by society as a whole. Culture in this context is the anthropological culture and the values and capacities are those which are prized by nations whom we regard as advanced or more developed in certain ways although they also have aspects of underdevelopment as there is no wholly developed society. These values are:

- 1) Merit and pursuit of excellence;
- 2) Honesty and integrity;

3) National consciousness, self confidence, pride and loyalty, public or civic consciousness and concern for the people's welfare in the face of poverty, violence, inequity and injustice;

4) Tolerance and appreciation of ethnic, cultural, religious, and ideological differences;

5) Critical attitude and desire for improvement and not complacency with whatever obtains;

6) Capacity for self-organization and self-management at the local level which enables local communities to be resilient and to survive whatever happens in the national agencies in Manila or in the government as a whole;

7) The national capacity to cooperate and compete internationally;

8) The capacity to link interdependent local, national, regional and global problems, to see them as connected rather than disparate or separate problems;

9) The capacity to think into the future in an integrative way or in a comprehensive way, to look at our problems in terms of their local or national manifestations;

10) Lifelong learning by all without exception, junking the idea that once one finishes college, he is already educated; and finally,

11) A sense of solidarity with all the world's peoples and of the oneness of humankind which makes one identify with people beyond the nation.

Like other peoples and nations, Filipinos need inspiring and highly visible role models provided by leaders at all levels to make real and concrete the values and capacities that we seek to foster in the development process and in our reforms. The changes require not only individual learning but what is known as societal learning and reorientation. Nations have to learn. Nations do learn as nations and not only as individuals. There is a great need for the contribution of religious and ethical norms to the attainment of a truly humane and democratic order in our country. The people's participation and contribution to the national dialogue in our social reform is indispensable; without them our quest will be futile.