

Philippines: Thinking through the 2010 regime change

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The May 2010 national election has given the Philippine bourgeois state,,in a manner of speaking, a new lease on life after almost a decade of being dragged into a crisis of legitimacy and the mire of big corruption scandals by the previous regime of Macapagal-Arroyo. Widely perceived and accepted, at least for the moment, as credible, this election saw the new President, Noyonoy Aquino, winning by a big margin over his rivals, with votes coming from across all classes and sectors.

The regime change has brought to power a broad alliance of ruling class factions, at the core of which are leading players in both EDSA I and EDSA II. The other allies are no less important and powerful like a new bloc in the AFP and PNP officer corps, Danding Cojuangco, the Iglesia and new recruits from sections of the big business chambers. More regional and provincial and city elites are signing up as new turncoats before Congress opens in late July.

More significantly, the United States government as well as those of the G-7 countries have expressed new enthusiasm in supporting the new regime. The new US envoy even went to the extent of discarding protocol and whatever qualms US proconsuls have about Philippine sovereignty to greet Aquino before the Philippine Congress proclaimed him as the president-elect. China followed suit. The US would be pleased. Aquino appointed to the key Cabinet portfolios of foreign affairs, finance, economy and defense persons with long and close association with US and/or global capitalist institutions.

It is the big popular vote that Aquino garnered which has given him the cloak of a popular mandate. The myth woven around his famous parents bolstered his brand appeal of incorruptibility and disinterestedness in power which bourgeois media moguls successfully conveyed to the middle class and the masses who were long fed up with the scandalous corruption and greed for power of the incumbent president. Later in his campaign, Aquino linked the issue of corruption with poverty to draw mass support from his rivals Estrada and Villar who were harping on the latter issue. His slogan of “ Kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap “ is a propaganda coup

but it is also one of the most disjointed and misleading slogans of our time.

Everything considered, the regime change brings together a mix of three important elements which are crucial in determining Aquino's hold on power and his capacity to bring the country to the direction he wants. These are: 1) a legitimacy that springs from a credible election; 2) support from a broad array of ruling class factions; and 3) a huge popular vote.

The two uppermost issues which Aquino has zeroed in during his campaign and after getting elected are big-time corruption and poverty. There are yet no expressed strategies coming from his camp to address these problems. But his ascendancy to power may well be situated in a context wherein both US and other global capitalist interests and sections within the domestic ruling circles who are now in his first circle of power have long been putting pressures on Philippine elite leaders to modernize their State rule so as to make it efficient and effective for both global and domestic capital operations and for the strategic geo-politico-military interests of the United States.

A reasonable prediction can be made that Aquino will adopt this kind of modernizing framework in working out his anti-corruption and anti-poverty agenda. The big question is : will this work ?

Socialists cannot even say : It's Tall Order. Surely, our time-tested analytical instruments and historical experience will give us a totally different answer.

We can presume that Aquino's anti-corruption drive will hit hard at the GMA faction. He ought to, in the first place; that is his No. 1 promise during his campaign. In a way, the precedent of an incarcerated Estrada will help him, although this too ended in an ignominious compromise. Worse, despite this precedent, subsequent events show that the crime of plunder has become much bigger at the highest levels of officialdom.

It is impossible for Aquino to stamp out big-time corruption unless he strikes at the heart of the Philippine oligarchy's patrimonial power relations with the Philippine State. Yes, the oligarchy whose bigger and leading representatives are behind him during the campaign and those who joined him after he got elected. It will demand from him the task of breaking decisively the base of rent-seeking and privilege: the political dynasties, the semifeudal enclaves, the warlords, institutionalized corruption like the pork barrel, executive discretionary powers over the budget and manipulated public bidding of contracts, and the culture of nepotism, *kumpadre* system and paybacks made in the name of utang na loob.

Poverty eradication, even a critical and sustained poverty reduction, will be even more impossible for Aquino and his regime. At the outset, he has reaffirmed his loyalty and adherence to the capitalist globalization order by his appointments to key Cabinet portfolios and his pronouncements in favor of foreign investments. For example, his promise of decent jobs and good pay has better chances of getting realized if the Philippines

industrialize and modernize its agriculture based on redistributive reforms and appropriate technology. The shackles with which the present international division of labor bind the Philippines to a marginal position and assign Philippine labor to low-income and contractual jobs here and abroad must be cut.

Moreover, these above-mentioned features of classical modernization must be accompanied by a steady expansion of the domain of direct public control over state mechanisms and the markets - an empowering process which the bureaucracies of the bourgeois democratic or the authoritarian socialist polities stifled. With Latin America leading the way, this now constitutes a major socialist revolutionary theme for our period. In contrast, the bourgeois globalization modernizers now in Aquino's circles have nothing to offer but bureaucracy and the market as the way out of corruption and poverty.

The other possibility is for the new regime to just plod through the murky waters of Philippine politics and economics, doing one patchwork after another. This will surely have dire consequences for our country but not necessarily for the new regime. For those among us who think that this will bend the winds of fortune to our side, they may be in for another big disappointment. Now aboard the new dispensation are people and institutions who have access to other institutions, resources, technology and skills extremely useful for socio-cultural engineering which can make it appear and make people feel that things are moving and are turning out alright even if they don't. Or dissipate mass anger or a popular outrage or crisis points for the regime and the ruling system.

This technology of contemporary governing has long been with us. We have seen giant examples of this. While democracy was being sung everywhere after EDSA I ala Te Deum, bombs were raining over the countryside, human rights violations continued to rise and the precursors of the extra-judicial killings of today were rampant and non-stop for months on end. Under Ramos, the country was made to believe that we were on our way to being a Tiger economy until the bust arrived just before he ended his term. Estrada's term was cut short but we were regaled nonetheless by his huge "para sa mahirap" extravaganza. GMA Part I was richly adorned by the mantra of institutionalized civil society participation in governance, transparency and accountability and modernizing governance only to end up with the nightmare that was GMA Part II.

On big trimedia, the nation witnessed the magnificent and magical EDSA I myth revival campaign to back Aquino's candidacy. Villar may have spent billions for his trimedia blitz but he had no myth to cultivate. Now with State power and resources, the Aquino II regime will roll into action ideological spectacles several times more enthralling than what was witnessed during the election campaign. The task of revealing the deeper class truths of our society and the better world to which Filipinos are entitled to will be more formidable given the array of topnotch mythmakers, spin doctors and intellectual hacks ready to defend bourgeois rule and the dominant system.

Appreciative inquiry will tell us that we should also count our blessings. How can we disagree with that? Autonomous people's organizations have flourished, the social movements have risen to test the limits of the spaces won during the long and trying period of the anti-dictatorship struggles, a deeper patriotic reawakening has broken through the iron-clad enclosures of the US-moulded military and police establishments, progressive journalism and art, music, and cinema have continued to breathe amid the constraints of mainstream media and art moguls, and new and more dynamic Left and progressive forces are coming out of the old shells and getting enriched by relating to a growing global justice movement and an inspiring Latin American socialist resurgence.

Indeed, we have moved forward but at a moment when we anticipated a leap, a rude awakening however was to happen to us when we saw face to face our collective failure to oust the bankrupt regime of GMA. To ever think that the leap took another route just as a famous journalist wrote that it was People Power again manifested again through an election will be too much of a hype, an exaggeration of the transformative potentials of a political event, an abandonment of the time-tested class, ideological and political perspectives to determine those potentials.

The oust GMA movement is a call for extra-constitutional change, one that is easily superior than a bourgeois electoral mode especially if that mode such as the Philippine variant is corrupted by fraud, violence and money. The former is superior to the latter in the sense that it qualitatively allows more leeway and scope for effecting political and social change because they need not be worked out within the established constitutional or legal structures and processes.

The failure of the Oust GMA movement means that proletarian power is weak, that the multi-force, multi-class combinations it carried is weak, that the middle class and the working masses were not ready to risk themselves for an extra-constitutional change, and that the leadership offered by the military rebels and their civilian allies for such venture was not acceptable to them.

How about the 2010 regime change? It is done through the electoral mode and this means that the scope and breath of change is restricted by the established constitutional structures and processes. How much of proletarian power is manifested here? D and E (income categories) votes were divided between Aquino and Estrada, with the latter getting a significant share of the total. It is the ABC votes which decisively went for Aquino. C votes are still working class but we wonder what their message was, unlike the Estrada votes which said that poverty is more important as an issue than corruption. Another significant factor to input is the Left and progressive constituency votes. They were divided among Aquino, Estrada and Villar with a small intellectual segment going for Teodoro.

The influence of proletarian power as expressed through mass votes of the class is weakened by its division. The more significant indicator, the votes generated by the organized Left forces show that the latter are insignificant in the recently held presidential polls. The senatorial, the partylist and

the local polls are likewise interesting. But this paper limits itself to regime change, and that means in our presidential system, the presidential election.

It is not surprising therefore that Aquino did not get somebody from the Left or close to the Left to join his Cabinet. He may have promised Risa Hontiveros a Cabinet post but that is one year from now, and in Philippine politics that may be ages from now.

What awaits socialists and radical progressives is one big hell of a fight with a bourgeois rule that has gained a broad consensus of ruling class factions combined with a popular electoral consent. We have to face the challenge, really shape up and do our very best.

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