

The People's Movement: How do elections serve the agenda of social transformation?

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Guest Speakers:

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Project 2001

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and a statement from
Mr. Satur Ocampo
National Democratic Front (NDF) former chairperson

Editors' note: The largest left formation, the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN: New Patriotic Alliance), agreed to send a representative, but for one reason or another, its speaker failed to attend.

Prof. Alexander Magno (Acting director, Third World Studies Center): In the past months, the TWSC has held the *Academe Meets the Political Parties* lecture series which featured the leaders of the major political parties, namely, the *Nacionalista* (Nationalist) Party (NP), the Liberal Party (LP), the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (Fight of the Democratic Filipino: LDP), and the *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (Party of the Filipino Masses: PMP), in a dialogue with members of the academe.

As a finale to the series, we leave the world of the traditional politicians to venture into the non-traditional end of Philippine politics inhabited by different groups collectively known as the people's movement. These are the hardened veterans of the parliament of the streets who now find themselves sudden amateurs in the battle for the parliament of the state. For the coming elections force on all who seek meaningful social change, the urgent task of defining and redefining the role of elections in the struggle for social transformation. We hold this forum among the different tendencies of the progressive movement not only to hear their respective analyses but also to identify common thoughts that would hopefully pave the way for common action.

As a way of structuring this forum better, the speakers were provided a set of questions, sent beforehand. The first set of questions is conjunctural. Given the current state of the progressive movement and the society as a whole, how could progressives meaningfully participate in the coming elections? What are the pros and cons of joining or supporting existing political parties? Is it feasible for the progressive movement to form a broad electoral coalition and are your groups willing to join?

The second set is strategic. Given the retreat of the orthodoxy that saw elections as nothing more than as instruments of class domination, the decline of armed struggle as the primary means of seizing state power, and the steady rise of alternative modes of struggling and empowering besides the electoral and the armed; how must progressives integrate elections in their theory of social change and reconstruction? What is the role of elections both in the empowerment of the people and the wresting of power by the people? What is the relation between electoral struggle and other forms of struggle employed by various people's movements?

Aside from our invited speakers, we have here a statement from the former National Democratic Front (NDF) chairperson Satur Ocampo. Mr. Ocampo is presently under military custody so he could not join us today in this forum. We will start the forum by reading the letter of Mr. Ocampo.

Warmest greetings to all the participants in this forum.

I thank the Third World Studies Center for asking for my comments on the view or position of the National Democratic Front as regards the 1992 national and local elections. I shall try to respond briefly, without the assumption that I speak for the NDF. Having been in military

detention with my wife and comrade, Bobbie Malay, for more than two years now, denied visitors outside of family and a few friends, I cannot be expected to be so up-to-date on the NDF's positions on this and other issues.

We may all agree that the Philippine electoral system has been historically designed for the upper classes and thereby dominated and manipulated by them through their factions masquerading as political parties and the means of mass coercion and persuasion at their disposal -- guns, goons, and gold, as these are commonly known -- to perpetuate their hold on state power and the economic levers of the nation.

Unless fundamentally reformed -- and this can be achieved only in consonance with a profound reformation of the political system itself -- the electoral system as it is will continue to exclude the masses of workers and peasants and the lower stratum of the middle classes from effective participation in government.

This, in brief, I think is how the NDF views the existing electoral system. So how to go from here?

In September 1990, the NDF presented to President Corazon C. Aquino a proposal for bilateral peace talks between itself and the government, sending a similar proposal the following month to the multisectoral peace advocates headed by Sen. Wigberto E. Tanada. The proposal called for "common understanding and determined action" on outstanding national questions, including "political and electoral reforms to remove undue advantages of upper class parties and to ensure effective participation of the workers, peasants, and the middle social strata in government."

To facilitate the accomplishment of the desired political and electoral reforms, as well as the other measures pertaining to democracy and to national sovereignty and independence, the NDF suggested the "immediate broad basing of the government through an interim council of national unity that involves the significant representation of the toiling masses, middle social strata, and the national minorities, and that directs constitutional and social reforms." The goal is a broad-based government of national unity, salvation, and reconstruction.

Given the quality and the requisites of the political and electoral reforms envisioned by the NDF, we cannot see their fulfillment before the 1992 elections. The Aquino government has refused to talk directly with the NDF national leadership, and its appointed representatives in exploratory talks with the multisectoral peace advocates have not even commented on any of the specific proposals that the NDF laid on the table. Even if the Aquino government were to agree now to sit down and try to hammer out a common understanding with the NDF, the negotiation process would probably take a longer time than what the remaining months of the regime could allow.

Thus, non-upperclass parties and people's organizations (POs) engaged in the electoral struggle will again not be given an equal chance to campaign, much less win, in the 1992 electoral process. And, naturally, the NDF along with its affiliated organizations will remain legally barred from taking part in the process.

Nonetheless, the NDF recognizes the usefulness of the 1992 elections as a good opportunity for carrying across to the broadest range of the population, and to the electorate in particular, the national democratic stand on the outstanding national questions. Call it propaganda, political education, conscientization, or whatever -- the overarching objective is to raise the people's political consciousness about the roots of our worsening national problems and how these could be solved with their effective participation.

From the NDF point of view, the following factors, among others, make the 1992 elections significant:

- The continuing fight against the US military bases and US domination;
- The continuing search of the people for genuine alternatives to the political structure that has bred endemic corruption in government and the economic programs and policies that have caused their continuous impoverishment;
- The people's dashed expectations for meaningful improvements in their lives since 1986, with the revival of pre-martial law reactionary politics; and
- Revolutionary politics, or new politics, has already made itself felt on the traditional parties and politicians, as evidenced by the efforts of some to project themselves as sincere advocates of pro-people causes.

By this time, I believe, the NDF shall have reckoned with the lessons derived from certain inappropriate policies and tactics in the past that deterred or discouraged national democratic-oriented organizations from actively participating in elite-dominated elections. I believe the NDF is now determined to encourage these organizations to fully exercise their initiative in this regard, to pursue broad coalitions, alliances, and various working relationships with other political forces to attain common goals, electoral or otherwise.

In striving to build broad coalitions and alliances, these organizations need no longer be hobbled by having to insist that common programs or calls to action always carry the most revolutionary political positions. Flexibility ought to be the rule when playing in the arena of reactionary politics. This is to avoid prolonged bitter and unresolved debates, recriminations, or worse, splits and pullouts from the coalition or alliance.

The underground revolutionary forces assume the primary task of projecting and carrying forward the most revolutionary positions possible, working as they do outside the reactionary political process but in conjunction with organizations and movements seeking change within the limits of the political process.

In the electoral struggle, united or coordinated endeavors should focus on advancing, throughout the campaign period, public discussions of the issues regarding the prevalence of poverty, injustice, national oppression, and the question of a just peace. Equal efforts should be applied to support, in order to win, candidates for national and local seats who carry pro-people programs and issues with proven

conviction. In the past, overemphasis on mass political education or confusion as to the principal goal of participation relegated to lower priority the goal of getting candidates to win. That may have deprived the progressive movement of more elective officials who would have amplified the people's cause in legislative and other government bodies.

While we must entertain no illusions that the progressive popular coalitions, alliances, and movements can significantly influence the results of the 1992 elections, given the fact of built-in hazards in the electoral system, these efforts can achieve the following:

- Expose the sterile and duplicitous electoral platforms of the upperclass parties and their irrelevance to the people's needs;
- Rally the people around an alternative politics that is rooted in their aspirations and that can flourish and become dominant through the assertion of their own political power; and
- Enable as many progressive candidates as possible to win seats in the local councils and in the national legislative chambers.

I hope that these humble comments can contribute somehow to this forum's earnest effort to evolve a consensus or a common ground for united action in the 1992 elections.

Thank you.

We shall now move on to the live panel.

Our first speaker, Mr. Florencio "Butch" Abad, was elected to Congress in spite of the odds mentioned in Mr. Ocampo's statement. He then resigned his seat in order to assume the secretaryship of the Department of Agrarian Reform, but that position was denied him by the Congress' commission on appointments. He now directs Project 2001, a network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) concerned with their role in elections.

Atty. Abad: Firstly, I would just like to explain what Project 2001 is all about. It was to be called Project 2000 but we discovered that there was a charismatic movement that carried the name Project 2000. So we decided to add "1" and called it Project 2001.

Project 2001 is not simply a deadline or a title we came up with to attract attention. The name signifies the commitment of the NGOs to get involved in the electoral process not only tactically but also in a long-term way. It is concerned not only with such activities as raising popular consciousness, using the elections as an occasion for organizing the people, or an opportunity for flexing our organizational muscle or mobilizing people, but it is more concerned with achieving key electoral victories in 1992 and beyond.

Project 2001 is essentially an electoral movement of NGOs. From February 8 to 10, 1991, about eighty-five NGOs from various parts of the country met and reflected on what role they will play in the 1992 elections. They asked themselves whether they will participate, boycott, or just remain as spectators. The unanimous decision was to get involved not only in the

1992 elections but in subsequent elections as well. This is a new development among NGOs so many are asking why in the past, NGOs did not want to get involved in elections or politics. Why are they now getting into politics?

First, it should be made clear that NGOs recognize that the struggle for social transformation walks on many legs, so to speak. On the one hand, we get involved in pressure politics by marching in the streets and being in political mass movements. We also get involved in building alternatives in communities through our social development works. During the said meeting, the NGOs expressed the need to study how electoral politics can advance their political, economic, and social alternatives. The NGOs thus saw the need to study 1992.

We in the NGOs realize that the electoral arena is one of the various venues wherein we could function and push for the programs that would help our countrymen. What is more important to recognize is that there are conjunctures in our society's history when we should either concentrate on mass mobilizations or on participation in elections or on community work. Our focus depends on our analysis of a particular situation. Whether we function in the electoral, in the streets, or in the community, what is important is that POs and NGOs have a strong base in whatever arena so that they will be flexible. So the primary task is to establish and strengthen bases especially among the basic sectors for whom most of our programs for change are conducted. This is the given context that gave rise to the decision to participate in elections.

Non-governmental organizations realize that they have little experience with the electoral struggle. The little that they have has not been encouraging. This is because -- as Mr. Ocampo has pointed out -- the electoral process in general is still dominated by those who have the resources and capacity to win elections. But we also realize that the situation is not that single-tracked if we study our past experiences with elections as well as our present observations of it. We also have to take seriously the surveys and our own observations in our stay in the provinces. Both show that many of our countrymen still consider elections as one way of effecting change in the leadership and initiating programs for change. This is the point of view of our people so that they will vote and participate in elections no matter what. The latest survey of the Social Weather Stations (SWS) says that 94% of our people still see elections as a means by which to effect change. We wonder why. Maybe one reason why this is so is because our people do not see any other alternative means by which to change society, thus they see that the only way to do this is by participating in elections.

The NGOs think that if we intend to take elections seriously, then we should start building an electoral infrastructure. If we look at it as a long-term commitment then it should be about time that we produced people who understand the complexities of this arena as well as the institutions and programs that would help us have a fighting chance. So our primary task is to establish an electoral infrastructure.

The NGOs also see indicators and conditions that could possibly point to our good chances of achieving victory in the event that we support or field candidates. One of these is the demographic profile of the voters of 1992. Most of them are young. According to Commission on Elections (COMELEC) Chairperson Christian Monsod, four million will be voting for the first time. We know that the youth are more idealistic and educated. They are more open to the possibility of change. They are more passionate about the need for change especially with the political and economic situation of our country today.

A second condition is that many of our countrymen are really disappointed with our political system. This could be seen in a recent survey where not a single political party registered a positive rating. On the brighter side, they are looking for alternatives. It is thus the responsibility of the different groups advocating social transformation through various means to present an alternative which people can embrace.

A third factor is the Roman Catholic Church. We know that the church has a very strong influence in our country, especially in the countryside. Recently, the church has decided to get involved in the elections and according to Bishop Teodoro Bacani, this involvement is not only to ensure peaceful, orderly, and honest elections, but also to make it meaningful. Bishop Claver says that this means that the church wants people who support programs which would help the impoverished majority to win. They are supporting nationalist, humanist, and pro-poor candidates who will push for programs of social justice, social order, and peace. Because of the influence and reach of the church, these declarations should be thoroughly considered. It would be wise to be in constant touch with the church since we also want orderly and meaningful elections.

Finally, based on our experience with the last elections, the electoral process is not that restricted. It has many openings for progressive initiatives. For example, in Mindanao, many individuals who advocate change and reform in our society were elected as congressmen, governors, and local officials. We in the NGOs have seen the advantages of having in our localities officials who support our programs such as those concerning agrarian reform, environment conservation, and community development. They are a big help in the realization of development programs for the people.

We realize that our participation in the elections would not be easy because of those people who will defend their interests by maintaining their hold on political power. They will resist the initiatives of the NGOs and this we have experienced in the last elections. So what is needed is that NGOs must thoroughly organize and fully coordinate with those sectors who would help them in the elections. And because we realize that participation would not be a smooth-sailing endeavor, we have no illusion that we would be able to change the present conditions of society in the upcoming elections. What we are after is a place in this arena to advance our various alternative programs.

We are not expecting a miracle but we hope that in 1992, NGOs, POs, and other groups belonging to progressive movements would be recognized by politicians and the different sectors of society as major and significant forces in the electoral arena.

Mr. Rolando Librojo: I will divide my presentation into seven parts and in the process answer the questions posed in this forum. I will try to answer first the questions regarding strategic considerations.

Firstly, as a matter of principle, the PDSP is committed to the appropriate means of struggle. This means that our strategy or mode of struggle is always based on our analysis of prevailing conditions. There are times in our history when the appropriate means is armed struggle and there are times when it is the legal means which is appropriate. At this time, we think that the appropriate means is the legal.

How do we view elections? Our political line states that the conduct of the party in legal struggle involves two vital and complimentary components: the electoral struggle and the militant mass struggle. The electoral struggle is oriented towards the eventual democratic control of government by the party. The militant mass struggle is oriented towards educating, organizing, and mobilizing the masses to advance their interests and aspirations through militant mass undertakings with the objective of, among others, obtaining substantial improvements in the daily living and working conditions of the toiling masses.

This means that the reason why we are considered a non-traditional party is because the electoral is not our only mode of struggle. We also engage in militant mass struggle. Of course, the ultimate objective of our electoral struggle is the democratic control of state power. But this objective is not an end in itself. The party's democratic ascension to state power must be viewed as a means whereby the toiling masses can exercise their collective will and radically transform Philippine society according to the provisions of our minimum and maximum programs.

How do we integrate our militant mass struggle with the electoral struggle? The two are complementary. One without the other is not enough.

The electoral struggle benefits from the militant mass struggle in three important ways. The militant mass struggle provides the dedicated militant an ideologically-oriented mass base that in the long run will ensure the party's electoral victory. The militant mass struggle gives the line, ideas, issues, and programs of the party in between elections, plebiscites, and other similar political exercises. The militant mass struggle also creates the necessary political atmosphere conducive to issue-based politics.

Conversely, the militant mass struggle also benefits from the electoral struggle by concretizing and institutionalizing the demands, aspirations, and interests of the toiling masses. Furthermore, the activities and interests generated by elections, plebiscites, referenda, and similar political exercises widen the avenues for organizing, educating, and mobilizing the unorga-

nized sectors of Philippine society.

And now to answer the conjunctural questions.

How do we see the situation in 1992? The observation advanced by Mr. Ocampo is correct, that Philippine electoral politics as it is now being practiced is not conducive to progressive ideas and provides very little opening for the effective participation of the toiling masses. In the last elections for members of the House of Representatives, 69% of those elected came from the landed elite. Over 20% came from the business sector. Only 10% were professionals. There were the sectoral representatives that came from the toiling masses but they are insignificant in so far as the composition of our legislature is concerned.

Who are in control of the country's local government units in the twelve regions? Two regions are controlled solely by LDP: Southern Tagalog and the Bicol Region. It controls with other parties Central Luzon, Western Visayas, Eastern Visayas, Cebu, and the National Capital Region. The *Partido Demokratiko ng Pilipinas - Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP-Laban: Democratic Party of the Philippines - Strength of the Nation) controls one region, Region X. The LP controls Eastern Visayas and Region VII with LDP. This one is interesting: the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (KBL: New Society Movement) controls three regions, Regions I, II, and III, the last two it controls with the LDP. As you may have noticed, the conservative parties are the dominant parties in most of our regions.

Let us look at the law on elections. The law has a big loophole for committing electoral fraud. For example, in Region IX, the names of ghost voters and ghost barangays in the last elections have not yet been erased from the official roster. This is a fact especially in the areas of Lanao del Sur, Sulu, and other remote places of Mindanao. Ghost barangays there consist of tens of thousands of votes. So it is not surprising that there are statistically improbable results like a 98% "yes" vote in the past referendum in one barangay or one municipality. This is almost impossible considering the diversity of the ideas and opinions of the voters.

I also would like to take note that in Philippine electoral politics, party affiliation takes only a secondary role to clan affiliation. It is less important to look at political parties than to look at the clan and its patronage network. I think the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) has a study on this. So we see that the shifting of political parties is a usual occurrence. Politicians can easily shift political parties and when they do, their followers follow suit. This is why party affiliation is only secondary.

Now let us take a look at the profile of the electorate. Butch was right when he said that the electorate is relatively young. But I would hasten to add that there is no such thing as a youth vote. It has never been proven that there is one. It is depressing for those in the progressive movement to accept the fact that there is no labor, urban poor, peasant, or woman vote. That is a sad reality that the progressive movement face. This is because the people are largely

unorganized. For example, only 20% of the labor sector is organized.

If we look at the electorate geographically, the electoral heavyweight is Luzon which has 57% of the voting population. Visayas and Mindanao are about the same with 20% and 23% respectively. On the basis of regions, five regions have 56% of the votes. The NCR has 17% of the voting population. Southern Tagalog has 13%, and Central Luzon has 10%. So the NCR and its two neighbors have 40% of the voting population and thus we see why the center of national politics is Manila and the areas around it. Sometimes, this fact is detrimental to the other regions.

The average voter is poor because more than 60% of the population is below the poverty line, but their participation rate is high. In 1987, 81% of the voting population participated in the elections. People still want to vote and they do vote. Our participation rate is very high compared to other countries.

We can say that the electorate is personality-oriented. In 1984, according to one survey, 69% of the electorate said they will vote on the candidate's merit and only 17% will vote according to party affiliation.

So where does this leave the progressive forces? Unless there are radical changes in the trends, the 1992 elections will again be dominated by the elite and their parties. It will be dominated by the four major parties: the LDP, the LP, PDP-Laban, and the NP.

But there will also be several minor parties. We will be one of the minor parties. The other minor parties will include the National Union of Christian Democrats (NUCD), the *Partido ng Masang Pilipino* (PMP: Party of the Filipino Masses), and the People's Reform Party of Miriam Santiago. Why are they considered minor parties? This is because to be a major party one has to have a solid network and machinery. By mere virtue of their having been elected as officials, members of the major parties are presumed to have standing machineries and networks necessary for the election campaigns.

Another thing is that most of the major parties have major clans aligned to them and thus their patronage and cheating network is intact. So is it any wonder why House Speaker Mitra still shows that big smile in spite of the fact that he is among the lowest ranked in the presidential surveys? He knows that he will get the LDP nomination and that the LDP's patronage and cheating network is intact. So nobody can erase that smile off Mitra's face when it comes to his presidential ambitions.

Unless trends are reversed, there will be more than five presidential candidates. We think that the LDP will split into a Ramos faction and a Mitra faction. Those two will run for president. The PDP-Laban and LP have one presidential candidate each. The NP has three presidential candidates. To these we add Joseph Estrada and Miriam Santiago.

So what will happen in 1992 is that we will be electing a minority president because for the first time in Philippine history, there are more than

two viable candidates. Prior to martial law, the people just chose between two candidates, plus one or two other nuisance candidates. Sometimes it may not have been a nuisance candidate but not a strong contender either. An example is Raul Manglapus when he ran under the Philippine Progressive Party. But this time, not one of these candidates is a nuisance candidate. All of them are assured of a market of votes plus the machinery or the popularity to ensure that they get these votes.

A significant portion of the electorate will remain undecided even until voting day itself. In the latest survey, 16% were still undecided. In a five-cornered fight, that is an important thing to consider. Secondly, even if Cory Aquino is already unpopular, she still carries 16% of the electorate. This is the result of certain surveys. This means that Cory's blessings will mean something in the outcome of the elections. If it were a two-cornered fight, it would have no significance. But in a five-cornered fight, it is bound to have some weight.

What are the objectives of the PDSP for 1992? Will we support a presidential candidate? Will we coalesce with other parties? Definitely not with the NP. LDP is hard to stomach. Maybe LP or PDP-Laban. Possibly with the minor parties but we might just be fooling ourselves knowing that nothing will happen to us considering that we are small parties. These are the things that we are studying.

So what are our objectives in 1992? One is presence in the legislature and, hopefully, in the executive. When we say presence in the legislature, we mean putting there one or two congressmen. We are aiming for seven but one will constitute presence. We pray that we will not suffer a shut-out. When we say executive, we mean the local governments. We have strong chances in the local governments because we have base concentrations among the urban poor and the peasantry especially in the small municipalities in certain provinces, and therefore we will definitely run in those areas. You may not see us running here in Metro Manila. But if you live in Malalag, Davao del Sur or Calauan, Quezon, you will see us.

Secondly, we want to prepare for 1998. The 1992 elections will not be the one where the left and progressive forces can make a significant dent in the system. Reality shows that the left cannot make significant gains in this coming elections. We think that our time will come in 1998. My comrades ask me if that is not a long time to wait for, that we might get impatient. I answered to them that it took the Swedish Social Democratic Party eighty-four years to come to power. But once they were there, they never lost, except once. This is because their trade union base was already strong and this was what kept them in power.

And thirdly, for 1992, we would like to preserve the people's gains that we got during the transition period of 1986 to 1992. Definitely we had gains during this period and these we do not want to lose. We hope that if ever there is going to be a coalition of which we and the other progressive forces are a part, this would serve to preserve the gains of the people, for example, in the areas of agrarian reform, industrial relations, and issues of the urban poor.

Lastly, what will be our strategy for 1992? Even if our 1992 objectives are modest, we have a grand scheme. It is grand in the sense that we are hoping that by 1992, the labor and peasant movements would have had a significant voice in the selection of candidates. At present, there is no peasant or labor vote. But, if things are done right, there might be a certain percentage of peasant and labor votes, or an illusion of both. The candidates will think that there are such votes and will therefore respond to peasant and labor issues. Just do not tell the presidential candidates in case it is just an illusion.

What are our moves? We do not belong as of yet to any electoral coalition. Why? We do not want to belong to a coalition without having a significant portion of the peasant and labor movements behind us. The fact is we do not negotiate with political parties without the backing of peasant and labor groups. If we do without them, the political parties will not take us seriously. And if that happens, then the programs of the trade unions and the peasant organizations will not be included in the 1992 agenda of these political parties. Hence, we are working towards region-based alliances of workers and also of peasants.

We have been successful in forming such alliances among the workers in Davao City, Cagayan de Oro, Bacolod, and Iloilo. There are ongoing seminars on this in Manila, Baguio City, and Benguet. The area alliance that we have built in Cagayan de Oro in Region X consists of 90 out of 160 unions, and in the conference we held we invited the governor of Misamis Oriental and the mayor of Cagayan de Oro. They came. Why? Because they are attending a conference of 90 out of 160 unions in the region and we think that by 1992 they will be a significant force in that region. They will be able to successfully negotiate concessions for the trade union movement from those who will run for mayor and governor or even field a candidate of their own.

They may be PDSP or not, depending on the nature of the alliance. But whether they run under our banner or not, the fact that they are able to have such capacity is enough to make us happy because then we would have made a niche in the trade union movement in Region X.

That is our main strategy. We would like to consolidate a portion of the labor and peasant movements. It would be better though if the majority of organized labor and the peasantry get consolidated so that their programs will not be shut-out in the elections.

And because of the fact that we will be electing a minority president in 1992, we think that it would be more viable for the country to have another rainbow coalition in which major and minor political parties can agree on a common slate. This is still a shot in the dark as of now but if there are certain changes in the political situation, then there might still be a chance for coalition politics. In the event that one comes up, the PDSP will definitely join in the fray and negotiate for certain programs and probably certain positions.

Mr. Julio Macuja: *Pandayan* is a non-party political formation although we belong to the broader social democratic and democratic socialist formations in the Philippines.

It is clear that we in the progressive movement cannot simply ignore elections. Butch said that 94% of our people are still determined to participate in the elections although there is an existing view that there are limitations in the use of this process as an instrument for social transformation.

But when you say that you are joining simply because 94% are participating, this would appear to be just a tactical consideration since you cannot afford not to join. I would like to emphasize that it can also be viewed as a strategic means of obtaining power. That is on the assumption that the mass movement gains enough strength and that the rules are structured in such a way that they will give a fair chance to non-traditional political forces.

What therefore is to be done? The first thing that should be done is for the mass movement to ascertain its numbers, networks, and strength. But numbers and networks are not enough. We can come up with a map locating and marking the places where we have people, contacts, and organizations but even if we have the people, it does not automatically mean that they have the capacity to participate, or even just vote the way our organizations would like them to.

For example, although it is said that there are about two or three million organized workers, that does not mean that we could harness the total of these two or three million to vote for a certain candidate. There is that distinction between the level of organization in sectoral and popular mass movement struggles on the one hand and the electoral on the other. Very few of the mass movements are organized at the barangay level. Many of the activists are probably not even known in their own barangays because their activism is in their factories, schools, or other places of work.

We think that the mere fact that almost everyone here is already preparing for the elections is a positive development. This means that we are studying the landscape. Those activists who have never registered as voters in their whole lives have decided to register as the first step in their participation in the electoral process. So, at least all of the groups, not only political formations, are already preparing which means gaining the technology and learning the ins and outs of the voting process.

The second major thing that can be done is to equalize the arena which also means transforming its parameters. Of course, changing the political texture of participation in this arena is conditioned on substantial economic changes that cannot be immediately realized. But there are still things that can be done based on the prevailing limitations. So we should not dismiss the small efforts of other groups like massive voters education programs.

It is a very positive development that even the usually conservative Catholic Church hierarchy has decided to seriously undertake such programs on the parish level. Other short-term efforts such as strengthening monitoring activities which involve that of monitoring election expenditures or the proliferation of guns should also be acknowledged.

The long-term however is more important, like the institutionalization

of alternative proportionate systems which include the operationalization of a party-list system. Another thing is support for mechanisms both within and outside government that will monitor the elections and ensure that such will be free, clean, and honest -- such as independent watchdog organizations. All these reforms whether before or after 1992 are important if the electoral arena is to be made a worthwhile area of activity in which the mass movement and its different tendencies would pour their efforts. These undertakings may seem incremental but they are important in the long-term effort for a fair electoral process.

Elections are not merely for raising consciousness. Definitely, the mass movement, or at least segments of it, will get involved in the elections because they want to consolidate victories, they want to gain some control in the legislative and executive branches. Today we have a progressive bloc of about thirty people in the Lower House to speak of. And I dare say that we have the most progressive Senate that this country ever had. Electoral participation is important because we want to have footholds in this type of institutions to safeguard the gains of the mass movement.

For example, the anti-bases movement will not deny that the presence of twelve anti-bases senators in the Senate has been a great help. Imagine where the struggle would be now without them especially when we consider the fact that 70% of our people are for the retention of the bases. An activist speaking does not carry the same impact as when a senator speaks, although I am not saying that the latter is the most important creature on this earth. I am just saying that legislative and executive victories are important if we are to consolidate and further our gains. No matter how successful our cooperatives or our trade unions are, their gains can always eventually be negated by anti-people policies of the government.

Definitely, when we talk about mass movement involvement, this means that the mass movement will have to ask what its vehicle will be. We in *Pandayan* see that one day, the mass movement will achieve a certain level of hegemony in government. What will be the instrument to acquire such hegemony? I think it will definitely have to be a political party. We hope to see the dawning and the emergence of a unified democratic socialist party within the next decade which will slug it out with other parties in a relatively more developed multi-party, pluralist, and ideology-based democratic order.

Our goals for 1992 are simple. Firstly, we hope to strengthen the networks and acquire the technology needed to be able to participate in elections. Secondly, we have to make sure that at the minimum, the current presence of progressives in government will not be diminished. Moreso, we hope to increase this. We will not be participating to simply expose the rottenness of the electoral process. We will participate to win.

We have no illusion of being a major player in the 1992 elections. We are not even a party. We feel that there can only be a reasonable chance at victory if there are serious efforts in organizing coalitions. One is a coalition among progressive groups and individuals who have similar views about the elections and intend to take participation in elections seriously than they had

in the past. Seriously in the sense that they consider it as a strategic vehicle to victory and for obtaining state power.

The second level of coalition will be among progressives and existing political parties which are not necessarily of the non-traditional mold but have a discernible left wing. What do we mean? For example, although the LP is a largely traditional political party which depends on patronage as its main mechanism of consolidation, still there are identifiable left-wing people in its ranks. The idea -- although I do not know how chaotic this would be -- is to primarily strengthen the hand of these left-wing people so they will have a louder voice in these political parties and eventually in Congress and the executive in case they win in elections. I do not think that there is any illusion about transforming the nature of any of the traditional political parties. At least we can work together on issues where we have similar goals such as the military bases and the foreign debt issue.

Mr. Cesar Cala: I agree with Butch when he said that it is about time that people's movements, independent POs, and NGOs take elections seriously and have a firmer and more realistic grasp of the options, possibilities, and limitations of the electoral exercise.

One cliché about elections in the Philippines is that it is arithmetic, that it is a process of subtraction and addition. Maybe it would be more correct to look at Philippine elections as chemistry, or even quantum physics later on.

I see it as chemistry in the sense that the effects and results of elections, generally, are more than the addition of the various entities involved in the elections. It becomes chemistry due to the presence of active agents within the electoral exercise. Otherwise, it really becomes arithmetic. So maybe one big challenge for the people's movements is how to make elections a chemical or quantum physics process.

But it also needs quantity. Is the size and number of the progressive movement large enough? Is it organized in a manner in which it could respond effectively in an electoral exercise? It was mentioned that in terms of quantity, there is still a lot to be done by the mass movement. If we are to compete with traditional parties, we still have a lot of homework to do in terms of refocussing our organizations. But the potential is there. A big issue among us is our numbers. For instance, the projections of the *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB; People's Party) in the last elections were very different from the actual results.

But in terms of number, I think there are a considerable number of us already. But it is another thing to ask if the combined quantitative strength of the people's movements has the capacity for electoral victory. It is not easy to transform organizational strength into votes. Two things have to be considered here. First, maybe it is because not all of our numbers will vote for our candidates. Second, in the elections in this country, it is one thing to vote and another thing to count the votes.

Elections in the Philippines take on a bigger meaning than just simple voting depending on the conjuncture the exercise finds itself. In certain

instances, elections assume a bigger role than the one it usually plays which, as Mr. Ocampo has said, is to legitimize the prevailing order. Take for example the case in 1986 when the boycott position of many of the groups of the people's movement was premised precisely on this orthodox analysis on the role of elections in society. But we found out that people gave a special meaning to the 1986 elections. It was a chance to get rid of Marcos more than simply to vote for a president.

So, the meaning of the elections is important. In 1986, it took the meaning encapsulated in the slogan "*Tama na, Sobra na, Palitan na!*" (Stop it, too much of it, change it!). Is there such a potential for 1992?

The presidential candidates would express their view of the 1992 elections on how they would like to present themselves. Ramon Mitra would say that we need a healing presidency, meaning that there were many injuries since 1986. Fidel Ramos would say that what we need is a presidency that would help people's empowerment. This is his slogan which means that from the people power of 1986, there has to be a higher kind of democratic expression which is people empowerment.

Of course we would take all this with a grain of salt. Anyway, what all this means is that aside from trying to organize the quantitative requirements of the 1992 elections, those who have a major stake in it are coming up with their own meaning of the 1992 political exercise. Our question therefore for the progressive movement is what meaning will it put into it?

I think many in the people's movement are of the opinion that once they get involved in the elections, the elections takes its own dynamics, and they fear that they will be swept away by the logic of elections especially when the gains are not that big and not enough to make a qualitative change in the form of government. What would be the cost of participation? Maybe it will be at the cost of losing what they were primarily fighting for in the social movements. That is the basis of the fears of Mr. Ocampo.

But the meaning of the elections that I mentioned a while ago would be for us to understand how to integrate what the people's movements are doing now, to find out how the elections figure in their struggle for empowerment at various levels. The 1992 elections perhaps would open opportunities for us to learn the dynamics of elections in preparation for 1998, and also opportunities for institutionalizing the gains achieved in the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary arenas.

The elections of 1992 can become a chemical process since many issues like poverty and livelihood are coming to a head. These issues would give the people a different perspective of 1992, and this perspective may lead to the possibility of 1992 becoming an open accounting by the people of the past six years. Of what kind of open accounting it will be depends upon the symbol with which people would identify the elections. This can be gleaned from the different sectors of society. If we look at the business sector, perhaps they view the election as the chance to elect a president who will be fair to the various

groups within the business sector. So what kind of a presidential candidate or symbol would stand to answer such need?

But the larger sectors of society, at this point, still have no electoral expression of their hope for solutions to the problems of society. The year 1986 was a time when new promises were born and new aspirations emerged. In their accounting, how would the people's past aspirations affect their perception of 1992?

What people's movements should have is an organized capacity to provide a venue for the expression of the aspirations as well as problems of the people. The people will not join the *Bagong Alyansang Makabayan* (BAYAN: New Patriotic Alliance) or *Pandayan* or even the left-wing of the political parties. Thus, what kind of means, venues, options, or electoral openings can be opened by the people's movement in order to tap the popular aspirations of the people?

Our observation in the MPD is that the weakness of the mass movement in the Philippines is that it is fragmented. Most of the time, their response to a political question or issue is on a fragmented basis. This is what may happen to their response to 1992. We look into our own different organizations and set the trajectory of our organizations based on our individual organizational objectives. For example, Jolly Macuja said earlier that they are envisioning the advent of a grand democratic socialist party in 1998.

Our advocacy in the MPD is that we must not wait for 1998 but instead respond in an effective manner to 1992 and this we could do only by coalescing with other progressive forces. We are not optimistic that it will take the form of an organizational coalition or party but maybe it would be a coalition of efforts as a preparation for bigger battles ahead. The relations of the coalition can be defined this early even without an organizational expression. We could identify common objectives, common areas of cooperation, and probably in some areas especially at the local level, a common organization. That is why we view with optimism developments such as the establishment of coalitions like Project 2001. There are also bilateral and trilateral discussions between various progressive blocs and movements on how to cooperate and at what levels to cooperate.

We agree that this would be the most fragmented presidential elections ever in the history of the Philippines. If the present trend continues, we can anticipate a five- or four-cornered fight. This is the kind of elections that could provide additional opportunities for the progressive movements to come together and take advantage of the situation. We have to define our relations with and attitude towards the mainstream parties. Which among the mainstream parties are we willing to cooperate with and which among them do we consider as hopeless candidates for an alliance? And from there, only with a more consolidated effort among the progressives will we be able to prevent being swept away by the logic of the elections.

The 1992 elections is both a national and local elections. Several POs are more comfortable with participation at the local level since POs are not

scattered evenly in all regions of the country. They matter in elections in those areas where they are concentrated. At this local level, it is easier to link-up the electoral to their organizing and empowerment activities. This is especially true with NGOs that had started to come together not only in Project 2001 but also in development efforts at the local level.

But this is not to say that the national elections is not crucial. It is. And the reason why we should confront it is not because it is there but because whatever happens in 1992 will be crucial to what will happen to the Philippines in the next ten to fifteen years. It might provide the occasion to the formation of a new framework of elite rule.

We see that one trend after 1992 is the coming together of the old political clans under the direction of the one who wins and is able to consolidate them after the battle of 1992. One possibility also is the coming together of a technocratic-militaristic type of governance. This is because one question that confronts the elite formations is what kind of elite governance will probably emerge after 1992? There is the view that Cory's kind of governance will no longer do. So they are after a common framework of governance but there is still no consensus, that is why there are the various factions of the elite which are contending for 1992. They equally have contending solutions to the crisis of governance that the elite sectors of Philippine society are facing.

On the letter of Mr. Ocampo, although we can grant that elections is one way of reproducing an old order or acquiring a new mandate for an old order, the paradox is that by doing so, the order opens itself to vulnerability. It opens itself to public accounting and scrutiny. That was the gamble of Marcos in 1986. He opened the vulnerability of his regime.

The year 1992 is the opening of the vulnerability of this government and the kind of governance and the array of governing power and policies it represents. Are the POs ready not only to give the system a bashing by criticizing it but also by participating in this exercise in order to effect some changes?

Mr. David Diwa: Probably I am the luckiest speaker since so much that has to be said has already been said. Maybe I will just devote my talk to the open forum.

OPEN FORUM

Question: It was said that there is a possibility of a coalition among progressives in 1992. Who are your possible candidates? Which parties will you probably support and how will you support them?

Atty. Abad: It is difficult to mention names because they may not run

after all. But we are in the process of studying the track records of the different candidates particularly their stand on certain issues.

We will surely support Sen. Wigberto Tanada and Cong. Bonifacio Gillego. We want them to win again because they were a big help not only in fighting for our positions on issues there in Congress but also because of their help in our communities. We will help them win which means bringing the people to the precincts to vote, then guarding the ballots, and finally, ensuring their proclamation and assumption to office. We have to do all this because in this country, the people may like you but you would not get elected. The people may vote for you but your votes would not be counted. Then they may be counted but you might not be proclaimed as the winner. Sometimes, you are already proclaimed but you will still be prevented from assuming office. Once in office, you might still be removed from your position. If that is the case, then we have to keep an open eye over the process. We can take care of that.

If all the groups here would be interested only with their own participation and candidates, it would be difficult for us to make any impact. But the way I see it, the fight will be between those who want reforms and those who merely want to preserve their interests which usually are against the interests of the impoverished majority. The latter are our enemies. He is the landlord who is against agrarian reform. He is the businessman who thinks that the correct economic strategy is connivance with foreign capital and capitalists.

What is important is that we who want reforms should come together regardless of our party and organizational affiliations so we can help get elected people who will implement genuine reforms. We are not hoping for a miracle or radical changes but we are just after improving or changing the programs of government, like on agrarian reform. If we could add a million hectares to the present one million hectares that are presently said to be distributed, then two or three million more hectares in the next six years, then this would already be a big advance for the peasant struggle for agrarian reform.

It is true that in 1992, the political elites would be divided so that if the ranks of the progressive and reform-oriented groups are consolidated, they can in fact become a significant swing factor. This is why the political terrain is very fluid.

When the ranks of those groups wanting change become solid, we know that they will still envision change at different levels. There are those who are for structural changes and those who are for changes limited to a liberal democratic set-up. We can find a common ground in all this so that instead of losing to an authoritarian figure backed by business groups, we can advance the gains we have achieved since 1986.

What I am saying to the ideological groups is this: we have many differences but let us set this aside for a while because we have a common concern. What will be at stake in 1992 might be the system of democracy itself.

Question: I believe that our efforts have been fragmented. Indeed there is a coalition such as Project 2001 but how many years will it take for this coalition to become a solid group?

Atty. Abad: Until we learn, we cannot unite. In 1986, we had the chance to fight for and participate in a government which we may not control but we can influence heavily. I know that this government has a lot of shortcomings but I would also point out the fault of the progressive groups who became indifferent to government after EDSA believing that the government would just be dominated once again by the political elite. Others joined government but only to get something for their sectors. Others simply did not care. If this will always be the case, we will never benefit from the opportunities before us.

For example, there are many departments of the government which could support our efforts in organizing if we would only help some people in those departments. Of course, we do not expect to do this with all departments but if you can get hold of one which has two thousand personnel and a big budget, we can do a lot of things.

The problem then was that we did not agree in our analysis of the political developments so every group went its own way. However, for 1992, everybody agrees that there are possibilities here so if we unite, all the more we can gain something for the success of our struggle. So I say that we should be open to coalescing with each other and with certain traditional groups and formations.

For example, there are people in the LDP who are not like Mitra and can cooperate with us. These people joined the LDP because of existing political realities. For example, Cong. Greg Andolana joined the LDP to avoid being targeted by the Citizens Armed Force Geographical Units (CAFGU). He needed something that would protect him from the vigilantes. But he has done a lot for his area.

Mr. Cala: If we look at the different groups' stands on issues, especially crucial issues, we can see that these groups are probably more united than they perceive. On issues such as the US bases, the foreign debt, and land reform several common positions emerge, and these could be the starting points towards electoral unity.

We should try to define what are the feasible political projects that our various groups can unite on. Next year offers the possibilities. Let us not wait until 2001. It might be too late then.