

Theorizing the Transition

There is a growing consensus that the present world crisis is a crisis not only of the economy and of the State but also of social science. The latter crisis manifests itself in the chronic inability of social scientists to anticipate the major directions of social events, to uncover the key elements that are at work, as well as to indicate the future course of desirable development.

*The social science of development is particularly vulnerable to these charges. The dominant paradigm of modernization does not go beyond labelling societies on the basis of the presence or absence of certain indicators associated with development. Little attention is paid to those internal and external structures which condition the possibilities of reproduction or transformation. The process of development itself is often conceived as nothing more than an integral aspect of the more general historical drift towards rationalization. Alternatively, it is seen as a possibility that is actualized through the conscious intervention of modernizing elites. (See the excellent discussion by John Taylor, *From Modernization To Mode of Production*.) Accordingly, much attention is given to changes in value orientations or the inculcation of a greater "need for achievement" (nACH) in the general population, while maintaining a scandalous silence on the structures that fundamentally determine the feasibility of certain forms of intervention within a given situation.*

We argue that the proper objective of an alternative social science, apart from outlining the basic contours of an attainable strategic vision of the desirable society, is to theorize the transition. By this is meant the careful analysis of the limits and possibilities – in short, the boundaries – of affirmative intervention on behalf of genuine societal transformation. Alternative social scientists have no choice but to work closely with political activists in order to realize the possibilities that are being opened up by specific conjunctures in the history of a society. These possibilities may often fall short of the strategic end-states envisioned in all maximum programs for change. This is to be expected. But the important point is that every form of intervention must be a conscious contribution towards the development or maturation of conditions that will support long-range objectives.

The task of theorizing the transition in the Philippines must proceed from an appreciation of the fluidity of the political situation which has the following features: (a) we have a precarious political regime attempting to consolidate itself (b) within an essentially unchanged State order – a State order that is itself being challenged by forces from below. This political moment is perhaps best understood as a democratic conjuncture, which allows the unresolved social and national questions facing Philippine society to be addressed in a peaceful and pluralistic way.

Theorizing on behalf of activism in the transition means being alert to the possibilities that are being opened up within a fragile conjuncture. The tension that is latent here is that between the need to sustain, support, preserve and enlarge the democratic opening, on one hand, and the desire to immediately actualize the possibilities for radical change, on the other. There is tension precisely because the democratic opening is itself being challenged by resurgent reactionary elements who prey on the public's inclination towards the familiar. Consequently, advocates of the alternative order may often find themselves not just unable to launch meaningful transformatory initiatives, but even tragically engaged in a defensive rearguard action against those who seek to close the democratic openings.

It is the function of alternative social scientists to formulate the axes of the ongoing political struggle, and to indicate to political activists and popular organizations the direction of progressive action. Here, the relevant options are necessarily a function of the properties of the concrete situation – e.g., the level of political consciousness and organization of the basic masses, the level of cohesion of the dominant classes, and the strength and level of interest shown by the external forces.

In the present democratic conjuncture in the Philippines, it may be argued that the battle lines are currently drawn on a number of crucial political, social and economic issues. The nature of the polarization leaves no doubt that maximalist demands are out of the question for the moment. The salient issues in the Philippine transition are the following:

Political Issues

(a) To remain within the orbit of US influence, or to unilaterally declare a policy of non-alignment and neutrality.

(b) To conduct a campaign of attrition vis-a-vis the communist movement and other unreconciled social elements who have taken up arms against the existing State, or to follow a policy of negotiation and reconciliation in the interest of greater ideological and political pluralism.

(c) To maintain a policy of pure civilian supremacy in the conduct of government, or to replicate the sharing of powers with the military which is found in countries like Thailand and Indonesia.

(d) In the matter of redressing the crimes of the previous regime: to adhere strictly to the often tedious legalism of due process, or to follow the logic of legitimate revolutionary prerogatives.

Economic Issues

(a) To adopt an open market economy led by private enterprise, or to create a mixed economy with a dominant State sector.

(b) To adopt a program of economic growth under the aegis of global capitalism, or to systematically launch a self-sustaining program of economic development and self-reliance.

Social Issues

(a) To respect all existing property rights, or to institute State intervention (e.g. land reform, sequestration, confiscation, etc.) on behalf of social justice and the redress of historical and social inequities.

(b) To maintain a bloated civilian bureaucracy, which had grown into the largest employment agency under Marcos, and an expanded standing army, or to trim down both, lowering the budgetary deficit, while risking a political backlash from the newly unemployed.

The search for viable alternatives in the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres must be carefully informed by an analysis of the available and attainable options that are being thrust into the ongoing debate in society. The clarification of these options, as well as the analysis of the conditions and forces that sustain particular options, is a function of alternative social science.