

Polarization and the Quest for Alternatives

The polarization of any society between two hostile camps having irreconcilable social intentions usually produce a simplified paradigm of choice directed at the mass of unaligned population contained therein. Where there is polarization, the choice is either to side with those forces committed to the transformation of society or with those bent on the preservation of the prevailing order. It is a situation where the refuge of indecision and neutrality has already been eroded by its own untenability.

Polarization is actually a simplification of society. Thus, in the context of the process of social change, the concept of polarization takes it optimum importance. Most would agree that advocates of social change carry with them the responsibility of effecting polarization in society in the expectation that the consequent simplification of choices will draw to their side a considerable multitude of unorganized citizens. In any event, the ranks of these social transformers will swell thereby making them formidable enough to be prepared with the inevitable showdown against that society's defenders. Forcing an early and decisive confrontation with the latter forces therefore become the purpose of such polarization.

Ostensibly, the goal of polarization is social change; in fact, it is a major requisite for any revolution. But while the simplification of choices in society can hasten its trek along the natural path of progression, it can just as well delay and even retard that society's maturation. Just as simplification makes the decision easier by reducing the options into a mere dichotomy, it can likewise result in digression from the correct path of societal development. When the simplifications made neglected to account or deliberately ignored essential items which in the long run can prove to be key factors that can make or break a social movement's momentum.

Depolarization, however temporary it may occur, then results when polarization is aborted or unable to reach its

climax of social change. When depolarization takes place, the prime culprit can most likely be found among the frameworks operationalized by the adherents of polarization. While others can cite unforeseen events proving to be unfortunate clinchers or an overwhelming material superiority of their opponents as possible reasons for the phenomenon of depolarization, it is still upon the shoulders of the social transformers that the fault can be ascribed since the capacity of these factors to negate a momentum is largely dependent on the soundness of the frameworks where social transformers operate and necessarily, their ability to contain such. Moreover, the anatomy of depolarization (or the failure of polarization) is umbilically linked to what is transpiring within these social movements since such movements are the ones actively in pursuit of initiatives to widen the amicable gap in society.

The depolarization that marked the immediate post February Philippine milieu is a case in point. It is a well-known fact that previous to that historic turning-point, the sentiments of the Filipino people can be seen as manifesting dilemmas only polarization can offer. At that time, it was becoming apparent that the unorganized population will sooner or later have to choose between a repressive dictatorship and an armed radical movement. What with all the other avenues of change (much less the public system of redress of grievances) manipulated with impunity by the Marcos government, the radical option and its corresponding method of violence showed an increasing preferential treatment if not outright desirability among a great number of the people. Moreover, the attraction of the radicals gained more reinforcement as their bold propaganda initiatives successfully narrowed the choice, i.e., them vis-a-vis the dictatorship. Compounded by the alarmist propaganda counter-offensive and the ensuing hysteria generated by the regime's henchmen, it seemed to most Filipinos that indeed the hour of decision is nothing but a choice between the two.



However, the success of the February uprising demolished in the minds of the people the dichotomous situation that the previous antagonists have been trying to project. February reaffirmed among the people their wish for a tenable middle ground. Much to the dismay of the radical movement, it was not them who put an end to the Marcos government but the millions of unorganized citizenry and numerous political movements not within the orbit of its influence. In short, all the efforts of polarizing Philippine society both in fact and in the people's conception came to a naught with the ascendance of the middle ground to political power.

It must be reminded, however, that February 1986 in Philippine history does not vindicate the middle ground as a valid venue for authentic social change. In countries ingrained with deeply-seated and centuries-old economic contradictions and its resulting disparity in social and political privileges, the middle ground's position cannot simply be maintained nor can it undertake even the most tamed social reform since it is constantly wracked by the much more powerful forces of the extremes. Pathetically, it can be presumed that the reason why the Philippine middle ground won was mainly because the radical movement decided *not to* at that precise moment. Given this light therefore, the success of February only implores the social transformers to re-investigate their positions and, more important, their frameworks. Moreover, with the prevailing view that the present government is merely a transitional regime, there arise the need to reevaluate the concept of polarization. Thus the question: how does one effectively polarize a society so as to make the prospects of social change immensely possible?

Attempts to answer this question necessarily must tackle the methodologies of polarization. A current popular belief among the Philippine Left has it that polarization must be conducted along class lines, meaning, the efforts to isolate the deemed enemy in society should be done using a united front whose basis of determining an ally or a foe is generally governed by a class analysis of these forces. The united front, a political undertaking aimed at forging the broadest possible alliance of the class-allies is thus viewed to be the vehicle of polarization. This class analysis, in turn is dictated by the vision of an alternative society: classes and sectors deemed by that society as its essential components constitute therefore

one camp battling the excluded classes considered by the alternative societal vision as its anathema.

A class analysis framework is nothing but a simplification of the subjective forces in society. It attempts to outline the characteristics of the various classes based on their economic conditions and aspirations thus making their actions predictable when confronted by the prospect of a social transformation. There is nothing wrong in using class analysis as the yardstick in gauging the consequences of a movement's political initiatives, so as long as it is based on the concrete analysis of existing realities and flexible enough to leave room for appropriate revisions when the realities have objectively changed. However, the fatal flaw plaguing social movements nowadays manifests itself when class analysis is not totally rooted in the concrete societal conditions or is held as an absolute, inflexible diviner of the attitudes of the various subjective forces. What is referred here are the problems of "mechanicalism" (brought about by the presence of societal models) and dogmatism stemming from an inflexible application of basic precepts. These are nothing but a further simplification of a previous simplification.

The success of the Philippine February ultimately vanquished the pretensions of validity of these two widespread practice among the Philippine Left. It showed that the Philippines is a unique social milieu which no model (especially the Chinese) can easily comprehend. It also showed that the distinct peculiarities of the Filipino psyche transcends the limited descriptions of a class analysis which incidentally is also patterned after a model.

Thus the quest for alternatives. Alternative vision of societies congruent to the latent yet most basic characteristics of Philippine society and its people that were brought to fore by February. Alternative modes of action that shall draw their imperatives mainly from the changed subjective conditions of Philippine classes and sectors. With an impending polarization based on the misguided dichotomy of communism vs. democracy as initiated by the Rightist bloc, it becomes more necessary that social transformers hinge their methodologies onto more solid grounds. That is, cognizant of all the changes and problematics February ushered. A political program of polarization drawn from all these is therefore the immediate agenda of all proponents of social change. **K**