Problems of Redemocratization in the Third World: The Philippines and Latin America

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IN THE 1980s, A WAVE OF CIVILIAN liberal democratic regimes rose up to take over the mantle of political leadership in a number of Third World societies hitherto dominated by authoritarian forms of political rule. The notable examples of these societies which took the thorny path towards redemocratization are Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and the Philippines.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the impetus for authoritarianism in the Third World was provided by the objective conditions of crisis and underdevelopment inherent in peripheral capitalist societies. Such conditions foster popular challenges from the ranks of the underclasses protesting against their intensified marginalization in society. Rising popular mobilization coupled with the political disarray among the ruling class fractions conspired to produce a situation where the power bloc' becomes largely unable to come up with a common economic thrust in its attempt to cope with the demands of the world economy.

Given the political conjuncture where the ruling classes cannot rule in the old way while the underclasses cannot seize power at the same time, the authoritarian regime steps in to restore order in society. Presenting itself as the guardian of stability and the vanguard of growth, the authoritarian regime proceeds to repress the opposition and reorganize government along corporatist lines, thereby establishing the appropriate political framework for the pursuit of a foreign-led, export-oriented indus-

trialization strategy in the periphery. The authoritarian regime of the traditional caudillo type has been replaced by the bureaucratic and modernizing one of the 60s and 70s²

Authoritarianism and Peripheral Capitalism

In pursuit of its growth objectives, the authoritarian state in peripheral capitalist societies, as pointed out by Clive Thomas, thus performed the role of capitalist by playing a leading role in the process of capital accumulation. In this regard, the state became interventionist as it established government corporations that undertook joint ventures with foreign investors.

For a time, the peripheral societies were quite successful in realizing respectable growth levels. However, this proved to be highly artificial as such growth rates were heavily dependent on the steady flow of foreign loans and investments as well as on the stability of the export market. With the contraction of the world economy in the 1980s, the peripheral economy was thrown into the maelstrom of crisis.

The gross domestic product (GDP) of Latin America, for instance, which had increased by 4.8 percent annually in 1975-78, and 61 percent in 1979-80, plunged down to an average zero percent in 1981-84. With the explosion of the economic crisis, foreign capital inflows dropped from \$37.6 B in 1981 to a mere \$4.4 B in 1983. Since interest payments on foreign loans combined with profit

repatriation reached the \$27.7 B mark in 1983, the net capital outflow from Latin America amounted to \$23.3 B.4

Crisis of the Economy, Crisis of Legitimation

In the face of the deteriorating economic condition which confronted peripheral societies under authoritarian regimes in the 1980s, the ideological justification that authoritarianism is politically conducive to economic development fell flat on the ground. Because of the peripheral state's heavy involvement in the economy through its entrepreneurial activities and its technocratic control over policy-making, when its economy breaks down it is natural for that state to earn the deep-set ire of the people.

In this sense, the economic crisis coupled with the sheer political repressiveness of the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes did much to downgrade their very legitimacy and hence, hasten their own downfall. The grand failure of authoritarianism to deliver its promises of order and progress amid poverty and instability simply served to add fuel to the popular clamor in the 80s for a return to democratic forms of rule in many parts of the Third World.

The restoration of democracy in such countries as Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and the Philippines have been welcomed initially by widespread popular enthusiasm. Promises of economic development, participatory democracy, and social reforms swept into power populist leaders like Argentina's Raul Alfonsin, Peru's Alan Garcia, and the Philippines' Corazon Aguino, However, the persistent problems of poverty and unemployment, foreign debt crisis, iniquitous agrarian land distribution, military intervention in politics, human rights violations, insurgencies, and elite-dominated. patronage-based party systems continue to lay siege to the erection of genuine democracy's social fortresses in many Third World nations.

The Politics of Democratic Transition

This study is meant to be a modest contribution to the expanding volumes of studies on transitions to democracy. Specifically, this work intends to look into the nature and process of transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy in Third World societies. The identification and study of this type of transition would be crucial in conducting a critical assessment of the extent and depth that democratic forms and procedures were instituted in the periphery following the fall from power of the authoritarian leaderships.

Viola and Mainwaring noted three types of non-revolutionary transitions to democracy: (1) transitions initiated from above, (2) transitions through regime collapse, and (3) transitions through regime withdrawal.

Transitions Initiated from Above

Transitions initiated from above are usually characterized by a high level of continuity in the policies of the preceding authoritarian regime. While there is the marginalization of the so-called "hardliners" in the authoritarian regime, the more flexible leaders soon found their way into critical governmental posts in the new regime. Consequently, the new regime though renouncing the extreme authoritarian practices of the past is, at the same time, bent on excluding radical elements from partaking of the fruits of democ-

This is to be expected since in this type of transition, the authoritarian regime itself is the controlling force in the shift towards political liberalization and democratization. In this regard, Share and Mainwaring would prefer to use the term "transitions through transactions" to classify instances where the regime initiates the transition, establishes limits to political changes, and remains an important electoral force during the transition. Specifically, the notion of "transaction" would imply the employment of negotiations between the regime's elites and the moderate opposition in hammering out the mechanics of the transition process.8 Significant examples of transitions initiated from above could be gleaned from the Spanish and the Brazilian experience.

In the Brazilian¹⁰ case, the process of liberalization was inaugurated with the declaration of abertura (opening) by General Ernesto Geisel in 1974, ten years after the coup of 1964 which overthrew the Joao Goulart government. In this manner, the Brazilian military sought to supervise the process and set the conditions whereby the reins of government would be handed back to civilian rule. For instance, the military

successfully blocked the diretas ja (direct elections now) campaign for president launched by the opposition in 1984 for fear that a progressive president would most probably be placed in office if direct elections were allowed.

Hence, the present Jose Sarney¹¹ government, though predominantly civilian in character, continues to be heavily influenced by the military. Six active-duty officers representing the various military branches and services hold cabinet positions. At the same time, the military retains the power to veto crucial political and social policies.¹²

Transitions Through Regime Collapse

Another form of transition to democracy is that which comes in the heels of a regime collapse or breakdown. Numerous examples could be cited in this regard. Among them are the cases of Germany, Japan, Italy, and Austria after World War II. Costa Rica in 1948. Portugal and Greece in 1974, and Argentina and the Philippines in the 1980s. Unlike in transitions initiated from above. transitions after regime collapse afford the preceding authoritarian regimes little chance of taking charge of the transition process. In fact, the likelihood is pretty slim that prominent elites identified with the former regime would be allowed to hold important positions in the new government.

In this type of transition, the authoritarian regime is often heavily delegitimized, either through its failure to manage the economic crisis, its crude political repressiveness, or its defeat in external wars. In this respect, the demand from the populace for a definitive break from this type of regime is greatly emphasized. Thus, regime breakdowns open up a broader opportunity and a wider space for civil society to organize and penetrate the state. The initial period of the transition therefore is usually characterized by an intense struggle to redefine the rules of the game in the political system.¹³

In the case of Argentina, the return of electoral democracy was facilitated by the defeat of the Argentine military in the hands of the British in the ill-fated Falklands (Malvinas) War of 1982. The massive delegitimization of the regime forced the military junta to surrender the reins of power to civilian politicians.¹⁴

During the initial stage of Argentina's transition process, the military tried to pass (though in vain) an Amnesty Law that would

have exempted the military leaders responsible for the "dirty war" of 1976 to 1983. The nature of the transition process characterized by regime collapse, however, enabled the succeeding liberal democratic regime of Alfonsin, which rode high on the crest of massive popular support to take the initiative in prosecuting the military rulers responsible for human rights violations. The conviction of military junta members who presided over the "dirty war" has been noted to be a first in Latin American political history. The courts sentenced Gen. Jorge Videla and Adm. Emilio Massera to life imprisonment while the head of the second junta, Army Brig. Gen. Roberto Viola, was given a sentence of 17 years in prison. Adm. Lambruschini and Air Force Brig. Gen. Orlando Agosti received lighter sentences.15

As of late, however, the Alfonsin regime seems to have succumbed to pressures from the military establishment with the passage of a law widely known as *Punto Final* (full-stop). The legislation puts a stop to the trials and prosecutions of military officials accused of human rights violations.¹⁶

With respect to the Philippine case, the assassination of opposition ex-Senator Benigno Aquino Jr. in 1983 signalled the beginning of the end of the Marcos regime. The massive demonstrations which erupted and the enormous economic crisis which unfolded in its wake severely undermined the authoritarian regime's capacity to continuously reproduce itself.

The snap presidential elections of February 1986, which the Marcos regime intended to be just a simple "demonstration election" to legitimize its rule, was instead utilized by the popular movement as an occasion for harnessing people's power in opposition to authoritarianism. Amid the massive exposition of the fraudulent electoral activities of the Marcos political machinery to win the elections at all costs, the masses rallied behind the united opposition's presidential candidate, Corazon Aquino, and found in her the perfect symbol of protest against the dictatorship.

The snap elections therefore provided the organizing framework which prepared the stage for the mass insurrection that accompanied the military mutiny at EDSA on February 22-25, 1986, thus forcing the hurried and harried flight of the dictator



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Marcos. In the Philippine case, therefore, the transition to democracy followed a regime collapse which was facilitated by a popular uprising.¹⁷

The Philippine transition, in comparison with the other forms of transitions to democracy elswhere in the Third World offered greater possibilities for popular intervention in the process of social change. The Aquino regime after all rode to power on the back of a mass movement.¹⁸

Given the manner it was thrust into office, there were high hopes that the new regime would lead the way in breaking away from the past. However, instead of acting immediately on urgent issues of social reform (e.g. agrarian reform) as guaranteed by the awesome powers it commanded under the Freedom Constitution which replaced the 1973 Constitution of the previous regime, the Aquino government waited for the establishment of Congress and the fuller reassertion of conservative interests in policy-making.19 Thus, the regime, in sticking to conventions, appears to have forgotten its insurrectionary origins when confronted by the ageold problems of the Filipino people.

Transitions Through Regime Withdrawal

The third form of transition to democracy as propounded by Viola and Mainwaring is that precipitated by regime withdrawal. This transitional type is an intermediate category between the transition controlled from above and the transition after regime collapse. Transitions through regime withdrawal usually occur due to the low level of legitimacy and weak fiber of internal cohesion afflicting the authoritarian regime. The regime therefore, voluntarily decides to step down from the ladder of power. In so doing, a total regime collapse is avoided, while at the same time providing the authoritarian regime a fairly substantial opportunity to control certain aspects of the schedule and content of its own withdrawal. However, a major hindrance in this transitional form is the authoritarian regime's inability to organize a mass political party thereby rendering the regime inutile in controlling the transition beyond the holding of the first elections.20 Outstanding recent examples of transitions through regime withdrawal are those of Ecuador and Peru.21

The study of the form of transition to democracy undertaken by Third World societies in the 1980s is thereby of utmost importance in trying to make sense of the nature of the problems of redemocratization confronting the newly restored democracies. Furthermore, by looking into the process of democratic transition, we are able to place in its proper perspective the successes and failures so far incurred by

the regimes which replaced authoritarian rule in their efforts at redemocratization.

Towards A Comparative Study of the Latin American and Philippine Political Formations

The authoritarian regimes that emerged in many Third World countries in the 1970s and 1980s were of the bureaucraticauthoritarian type which relied heavily on technocratic policy-making practices. This type of political order was instituted to be a prerequisite for the implementation of the monetarist model of development promoted by the so-called "Los Chicago Boys." Heavily influenced by the economic thought popularized at the University of Chicago, these economic planners and technocrats held that economic efficiency and monetary stability could be achieved only through the free market mechanism and the opening of the economy to the rest of the world.22

In practice, however, free trade and the unregulated flow of foreign investment has only led to the sorry sight of Third World economies reeling from the disastrous impact of chronic balance of payments deficits. This led authoritarian regimes to borrow heavily from foreign lending institutions in the 1970s and eventually, precipitating the debt crisis of the 1980s. It would be good therefore to compare the various approaches to the debt crisis adopted by the four regimes under study to see if they serve to further or to otherwise hinder the redemocratization process in their respective societies.²³

The comparison of the Latin American and the Philippine military would also be an interesting exercise. While the former has a long history of intervention into the political affairs of its country, the latter only became really that politically active after the imposition of martial law in the Philippines in 1972.24 Moreover the coup d'etat as a political weapon is a relatively political novelty unlike in Latin America where the notion of golpe de estado has become a natural part of political life.25 In this light, it is extremely valuable to look into the role and behavior of the military during the transitional process so as to determine the political future of democratic regimes in the Third World.

A limitation of the study may be the fact that it did not endeavor to compare the democratic transition in the Philippines with that of our Southeast Asian neighbors. However, it could easily be noted that there has been no major democratic breakthroughs in Southeast Asia in the 1980s except in the Philippines. On the contrary, it could be observed as of late that there is even a trend towards the further diminution of democratic space in the particular cases of Singapore and Malaysia through the strengthening of Internal Security Acts.

Another reason, aside from the other points raised above, why the author chose to compare the Philippine transition with its Latin American counterparts is the similarly critical role played by the Catholic Church in these societies.²⁶

What is Democracy?

The term democracy from the purview of procedural politics would refer to a political regime with free competitive elections and with universal adult suffrage. A regime of democracy would respect freedom of speech and the press, freedom of political association, and individual political liberties and civil rights.²⁷

Redemocratization, therefore, would refer to the process by which the political conditions enunciated above are reconquered by the body politic. Applied to the concrete practice of politics, however, we would find out that the solid exercise of democratic procedures often run against the obstacles erected by social relations. Hence, it becomes imperative to make use of the distinction made between the concepts of regime and state by Brazilian social scientist Cardoso.

According to Cardoso, a regime embodies the rules of the game which link political institutions and administer the bonds between the political leadership and the citizenry. A state, on the other hand. represents the pact of domination which exists among the dominant classes or class fractions and the norms which quarantee their dominance over the subordinate strata. Furthermore, he pointed out that while the state's pact of domination determines which social forces control and whose interests prevail in a given political order. the regime form merely establishes the political procedures and institutions through which the dominant class coalition exercises its power.28

Problems of Redemocratization

The problems of redemocratization confronting Latin America and the Philippines could be viewed along three different levels of analysis:

(1) political level

- problems of political institutionalization
- lack of civilian control over a politicized military
- persistence of elite-dominated, patronage-based political party system
- insurgency problem

(2) economic level

- poverty and unemployment

- foreign debt crisis

inflation

transnationalization of the economy

(3) social level

- iniquitous land ownership (agrarian reform issue)
- unequal social structures

- lack of cultural identity

The basic argument in this study is that the problems of redemocratization in the Philippines and Latin America could be attributed to the fact that what occurred in these societies, was basically a change in the political regime rather than a transformation in social structures. Hence, while the political rules of the game have changed, the social formation which subsidized the state structures of elite domination have remained basically intact.

In this regard, the social conditions of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment

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which are the characteristic traits of peripheral or dependent capitalism have remained firmly implanted in the group. Simply stated, the roots of social unrest and political instability have not been eradicated, thus leaving the door wide open for the re-entry of authoritarianism in the political center stage given the proper breaks and the right timing.

Liberal democracy was able to thrive in the advanced industrial societies because of a substantial socio-economic base for such a form of democracy — the middle class. However, in a Third World setting where the majority are impoverished, liberal democracy appears to be possible only in form, but never in substance.

What is being proposed here, therefore, is a perspective which looks at democratization as a complex and exhaustive process involving the dispersal not only of political power but also of economic power. To be truly considered democratic in essence, the political regime in the face of massive social inequality has to render distributive justice if it is to rule for the majority interest in society.

The first line, of argument in this paper follows the logic that progressive changes in the social formation of peripheral capitalism (e.g. democratization of wealth, agrarian reform, profit sharing, etc.) has to occur so as to allow the majority interests in civil society — the underclasses — greater opportunities in penetrating the state struc-

The second line of argument, which is not exclusive of the first, posits the view that democracy is won and sustained through active political and ideological struggle. It has been argued here that the social formation of peripheral capitalism which is based on private accumulation of wealth and transnationalized distribution of surplus, provides the foundation for the rise of an authoritarian state. The Gramscian notion of hegemony points out that such social arrangements are sustained not only through the outward use of force, but are justified through the active propagation of the dominant ideology.²⁸

If the threat to democracy lies not only in the objective existence of social conditions of poverty and inequality but also in the subjective propagation of forms of consciousness which makes people accept their subjugation in hunger and in silence, then the struggled for democracy also involves the active propagation of a counterconsciousness where people become convinced of their right to shape and manage their own social, economic, and political lives.

NOTES

According to Nicos Poulantzas, the power bloc indicates the particular contradictory unity of the politically dominant classes or fractions of classes as related to a particular form of the capitalist state. See his book Political Power and Social Classes (London:

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"It was Tancredo Teves who was chosen as president by the electoral college on January 15, 1985. However, Teves died even before he assumed the presidency, thus paving the way for the evaluation of vice-president elect Jose Sarney as president of Brazil.

¹²Social scientist Guillermo O'Dennell has put forth the view that a single civilian Minister of Defense should replace the traditional Ministers of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Furthermore, he batted for the removal of the Chief of the Intelligence Services from ministerial status. All along, the military ministers have opposed the creation of a single Ministry of Defense under civilian control. See Frances Hagopian and Scott Mainwaring, "Democracy in Brazil: Origins, Problems, Prospects," (Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame), Working Paper No. 100, September 1987, pp. 12-13. 13Viola and Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy:

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¹⁸Eduardo Tadem, "The Popular Uprising in the Philippines," New Asian Vision 3 (1986) 1: 43-55.

¹⁹Randolf David, "Filipinos Wait Impatiently for Reforms from Cory Aquino," *Third World Network Features*. No. 88, 1987

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²⁶Viola and Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy: Brazil and Argentina in the 1980s," p. 2.

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"According to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is achieved and maintained by a dominant class or fraction through ideological struggle resting on political, intellectual and moral leadership, and that rather than resting on the "false consciousness" of the dominated classes, it gains their active conseint through articulating a national-popular outlook that includes concessions to their interests and a broadening of the dominant class perspective beyond a narrow economic-corporate dimension. See his Selection From the Prison Notebooks (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

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