

A Powerful Icon

There are, according to influential analysts, four revolutions converging in the present world economy. These are: the globalization of markets; the spread of information technology and computer networks; the dismantling of traditional organizational hierarchy; and the rise of a new information age technology.

The four converging revolutions have caused discontinuities and opened opportunities. The post-Cold War world seems unhinged. The economies of both rich and poor countries are in a condition of flux. Traditional alliances have been transfigured. Old concepts have required reimagination. Old structures have required reinvention.

The grand ideologies inherited from the nineteenth century died along the way. The fluidity of present conditions have defied the constitution of new orthodoxies to replace those that suffered unlamentable deaths. Grand theorizing has lost its merits in the rapid pace of change. In the face of breathtaking transformation, coping, rather than systematic anticipation, has proven to be the more viable disposition. Planning has seemed to be a futile exercise.

There is an encompassing sense of incoherence that envelopes our efforts to plot the trajectory of things. Because of this, there has been much temptation to retreat to the intellectual nihilism of broadly describing the drift of present affairs as 'post-modern.' That phrase has now come to refer not only to the unstructured character

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of 'post-industrial' societies but also to the emergence of patterns of growth in what was formerly described simply as 'developing societies.'

In the flux, political positions have turned topsy-turvy. The 'progressives' of a prior age have emerged as conservatives, clinging to the straws of populism, protectionism, regulationism, and even nativism in a vain effort to stand against the tide of globalism. Fundamentalism, ethno-nationalism, and various mutations of old-style radicalism have become the isolated sanctuaries of social forces seeking certainty and shape in an uncertain and shapeless world.

In the face of this new reality, how should we envision a Filipino path from a turbulent past to a prosperous future? Given the formlessness of simultaneous revolutions in technology and trade, ideology and information, social organizations and social institutions, how do we construct a coherent framework for viewing our future?

These are the gut questions of the day. The obvious demise of old ideologies denies us the ability to pretend that a ready framework for apprehending reality is available. At best, we can design icons to denote general dispositions towards the changes now altering the shape of the economic and political terrain we must deal with.

Philippines 2000 is such an icon — a very powerful icon.

A distinction shall have to be made between the Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan (MPTDP) and *Philippines 2000*. The MPTDP was assembled on the basis of extensive consultations between planning authorities on one hand and people's organizations on the other. It quantifies the 'fighting targets' for our economy as it moves from recovery phase to growth. It puts together an indicative design for free-market driven growth. It defines the criteria for success or failure in our economic performance. Since it indicates a market-driven path of economic growth, success or failure will be the outcome of private sector activity — with the government playing a supportive role. Since the preferred path to growth is market-driven, rather than centrally-planned economic arrangement, government cannot be made to bear exclusive responsibility for the assurance of success.

Philippines 2000, as icon, musters the imagery of high growth, higher value-added production, greater efficiency, and a globally

competitive economy. Call it *NIChood* — although this term bears no nationality and no time frame.

As icon, *Philippines 2000* captures the mood of optimism, the emerging sense of confidence in our abilities as a people, the willingness to work harder and achieve competitive excellence, the vision of achievable prosperity. It is, therefore, a positive icon — also a powerful legitimizing icon. It establishes this government on the side of growth, on the side of a new future we may aspire for.

By capturing the positive mood, *Philippines 2000* (as icon) forces its critics to the side of negativism, of defeatism, of a low opinion of what is achievable. *NIChood* is the utopia of this age. Its attractiveness is reinforced by the sterling performance of the East Asian economies. The examples are concrete. The record is compelling. It is not easy to argue against this utopia without falling into the role of naysayers, the role of filibusters arguing from the platform of dead ideologies and the tragic examples of inward-looking economies that failed.

The political opposition has no choice but to confront this powerful icon head-on. Here they are at a disadvantage. The icon is merely symbolic. It captures a positive, forward-looking mood. Those who challenge it must challenge what it symbolizes — without, in turn, symbolizing the opposite mood: negative and backward-looking.

In this double issue of *Kasarinlan*, we put together papers addressing both *Philippines 2000* and the MPTDP. They represent various shades of opinion and various political positions. The objective here is to capture the principal dimensions of what is quickly emerging as the principal point of substantive debate in Philippine society.

The positions represented here are almost equally undeveloped. They cannot be considered the final terms of debate. The lines of differentiation and the points of engagement will be sharpened in the succeeding period. The debate has yet to be fully joined.

By publishing these papers together for the first time, *Kasarinlan* hopes to make a small contribution to the maturation of the debate. This should help consolidate a clearer consensus on where we, as a nation, will want to go from here.