

REINVENTING DEMOCRACY

Democracy is always clearer in theory than in practice. It is always easier to critique existing institutions for falling short of the democratic ideal; harder always to work the raw material of historically-derived social conditions and political cultures to actualize the "best practicable" democratic practice.

As the political rigidities of the Cold War period give way to new institutions and new social forces, the democratic question needs to be posed afresh. The fixed (and obsolete) dualities of capitalism/socialism, democracy/authoritarianism and elite-rule/popular empowerment have ceased to be fecund sources for meaningful insight into contemporary issues.

It is never comfortable to part with old certainties. But it is a necessary leap. Comfort in this case comes at the cost of political and ideological inadequacy. As in all explorations, however, the task of re-configuring old categories does not necessarily affirm preconceptions. It might, in fact, invite too many tenuous propositions. This might not be convenient for the existing "progressive" political formations. Political movements, as we know, thrive on ideological certainties, never on loosely-held hypotheses.

In the Philippines today, the progressive movements have become deeply divided between those who insist on the "reaffirmation" of old doctrines and those who feel compelled to ply the uncharted waters of a novel political condition. Within the Filipino Left, in particular, the emerging principal line of division is between those who continue to abide by the hierarchical, statist, and

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coercive vision of the political alternative and those who view democratization of the social order as well as political means as the central motif of progressive popular movements.

The debate cannot be settled polemically. Nor can it be guided by historical illustration. Nor will it be resolved by exegesis. The praxis of popular struggle will have to be the decisive element.

In this issue of *Kasarinlan*, we bring together six papers, written for different purposes, but all addressing the nuances and the contours of democratization in the current situation. None of them are directly participating in the intense debates now going on within the community of left-wing political formations, grassroots movements, sectoral groups, and non-government organizations.

Together, these papers do not sustain one position or the other in the debate. None of them offers a conclusive political direction for the progressive mass movements in this season of redefinition and reinvention.

The set of papers collected here, however, constitute an interweaving narrative of context, dynamics, intuition, stresses, conflicts, and recorded experience that may help enrich the political reflection and animate the debate.

While much has been written about the "debate" within the community of progressive Filipino activists, the fact remains that this "debate" is unconsolidated and prematurely drawn. There is no unity of concept and categories; no agreed upon criteria for resolution. The terms of debate have not been set. It will probably be more accurate to describe the situation as a dangling conversation - in search of a shared political language.

Dangling and discontinuous as the political conversation may be, the necessity for its continuation is fairly obvious.

Kasarinlan hopes this collection shall contribute to the sustainability of the political conversation that is now in progress. The criterion for selecting the papers in this set is the proposition that democratization is the central consideration in mapping out a truly popular agenda for the future.

The meaning of redemocratization itself needs to be liberated from the narrow formalism of traditional doctrine. It will have to be re-thought, re-imagined, re-invented and thus crafted into an effective mobilizing call for popular movements that remain firm in their conviction that the future could be better.