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**DEMOCRATIC "EMPOWERMENT"
AND DEMOCRATISATION OF POLITICS**
Radical popular movements and the May 1992 Philippine elections

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Introduction¹

Why is it that struggles for freedom, civil rights and democracy become increasingly important in the third world and not least in the Far East? Recently, when Bangkok was paralysed by huge protests against military predominance, most analysts maintained that previous disturbances in the area were usually due to peasant-based attempts at real revolutions. But later on, they said, it was rather capitalism that gained strength. The societies were "modernised". A new and increasingly broad middle-class soon emerged. And now these middle class people are instead the ones who protest – but mainly against the authoritarian state. And usually "only" for freedom, the rule of law, and democracy.

This sweeping generalisation can of course be questioned. To be sure, many people from the lower classes also protest. And it is not exactly crystal clear what the new middle class actually encompasses. But generally speaking, more and more people with some skill and education in urban areas obviously have a little bit more freedom of action than other dissatisfied groups and do play a vital role. So a more important problem is, therefore, if the new middle class can not only initiate democratisation but is also capable of carrying it through – *and*, in case it is not, if other democratic forces are emerging.

¹This is the first in a series of studies (financed by Uppsala University and the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries) of the importance of democratisation for radical popular movements as they tackle problems of development in Kerala (India), the Philippines, and Indonesia. Certain movements will be followed over time and this essay is based on the initial round of studies in the Philippines. I am most thankful to all friends *cum* colleagues, political leaders and activists in the Philippines, who in a spirit of mutual trust and interest in critical studies have spent a lot of time, even during hectic election campaigning, informing and discussing with me. And thanks also for valuable comments on drafted versions of this essay by some of these Filipinos, plus colleagues in Sweden and participants in the "International Workshop on Social Movements, State and Democracy" in New Delhi, October, 1992.

As of now, such questions are not easy to answer. Democratisation is a process that takes quite some time. In the Philippines, however, the perhaps most astounding breakthrough for the third world's new middle class democratic uprisings actually took place already in February, 1986.

Peaceful mass demonstrations and protests against massive electoral rigging incapacitated the military and brought down the Marcos regime. The communist led national-democrats and their mainly peasant based New Peoples Army, who until then had continuously gained strenght, swiftly lost the initiative. Corazon Aquino became the new president. Economic and political liberties were saluted. The Philippines became in vogue in the international aid market.

So now, more than six years later, it is thus reasonably fair to begin by asking how the still widely esteemed new middle class democratisation is actually doing. The answer, however, is rather gloomy – solid foundations are lacking. Consequently, the major part of this essay will then be used to discuss the much more exciting question concerning if and how new radical popular movements could instead become vital in anchoring democracy.

Towards a critique of the new-middle-class-democratisation

As late as on May 11, 1992, synchronised national, provincial, and local elections² were actually carried out in the Philippines – while at the same time those in Thailand who demanded democracy were just about to be cruelly repressed. Some 75 % of the more than 30 milion registred voters chose among 88 000 individual candidates, contesting more than 17 000 positions.³ These elections even led to the first reasonably democratic transfer of political power at all political levels since the mid 1960s.⁴ And the whole event was unusually peaceful, at least by Philippine standards. (From January 12, when the campaign started, till May 24, some 104 people were killed, 105 wounded and a few kidnapped.) At least the national staff of the previously so abused

²Excluding the elections of leaders in the villages, *barangays*, which are held separately.

³The president, vice-president, and 12 senators are elected at the national level for a period of 6 years. 12 other senators are elected for 3 years. All the others are also elected for 3 years: 200 congressmen representing various constituencies; 73 governors, 1 600 mayors and almost 14 000 municipal, city and provincial councillors.

⁴Actually, Mrs. Aquino was never formally elected president in 1986. And thereafter followed "only" a constitutional referendum (February 1987), legislative and local elections (in May 1987 and January 1988 respectively) and *barangay* elections in 1989.

Commission on Elections did a surprisingly good job. And while the professional coup-plotters kept a low profile, journalists from all over the world found little hot news to report, only a merciless heat to avoid.

However, the financial resources of the different candidates were just as decisive as usual. Vote-buying still abounded and some electoral rigging occurred. Many analysts even claim that the Philippines has merely returned to the illusive democracy under the semi-feudal political bossism that preceded Marcos and his state of emergency. That is, to a situation when the post-war guerillas had been marginalised in the mountains, local landlords and businessmen mobilised the votes of all those dependent upon them, and the local oligarchies ran their own armies. Moreover, the mayors were usually relatives. And at the provincial and national levels, various clans came together, made contact with the American Embassy, and formed temporary alliances around the candidates who might be able to win – whereafter the politicians who were successful made use of public means and resources to pay back their sponsors and enrich themselves.

Some years ago Ben Anderson spoke of the revival of "cacique democracy"⁵ – a concept which in turn may be related to the mainly Latin American argument, that the recent tendency towards more rule of law, civil liberties, and political democratisation in the third world is primarily because the previous negative features, such as dependency and clientelism, have grown worse and made authoritarianism untenable. This then opens up for horse trading, institutional arrangements between old and new dominating parties, and clientelistic or corporatist forms of democratic government. But the fundamental relations of power and exploitation remain intact.⁶

However, the Philippine situation is not really that bad and unambiguous any more. Appearances are deceptive. On a closer examination, the elections and the results indicate rather that old structures are falling apart – while new solid forms have not yet appeared.⁷

The influence of the old landlords diminished already with the growth of Marcos' central powers. At the same time capitalism expanded in urban as well as rural areas.

⁵Anderson Ben, "Cacique Democracy and the Philippines: Origins and Dreams", in *New Left Review*, No. 169, May/June 1988.

⁶O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P., and Whitehead, L (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Cf. Richard Robison's *The Dynamics of Authoritarianism: Theoretical Debates and the Indonesian Case*, Paper to the ASAA-Conference, Griffith University, July 1990, p. 9, 24-5

⁷Cf. Magno, Alex, *The Altered Terrain of Electoral Politics in the Philippines*, Talk and paper to seminar at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, 30 April, 1991.

Tenants and workers managed to gain some freedom of action. Certain rice-growing peasants got their own land. So when Marcos' state-authoritarianism finally collapsed, it was not possible to return to the old days, even if many of the new businessmen have their roots in haciendas and huge plantations. In addition, the number of migrant workers has increased drastically within the Philippines as well as overseas. And many have moved to the cities and taken up jobs within industry, trade and services as well as administration. Contacts and patronage are still vital, but skill and education become increasingly important. Family loyalties and traditional ideas and authorities including the Church(es) have become less decisive than before, even though portions of them have got a new lease on life within some of the many fragmented new social movements. "The truth" is now just as often told by journalists, movie- and TV-stars. And this, of course, holds especially for the younger generations; which really says a lot. More than two-thirds of the potential voters in the recent elections were below 45 years of age and almost 50 percent were below 35.⁸ So while the capacity to influence public opinion by way of, for instance, populism and personality-oriented politics may be even more important than before, that kind of polity is simultaneously characterised by the falling apart of its previous rather solid social, economic, and cultural bases.

Rootless democracy

Consequently, the old anti-feudal Left has been bypassed in much of the country. And on top of its shrinking domestic relevance came the devastating ideological and logistical effects of the breakdown of state-socialism in Eastern Europe and its degeneration in China. Moreover, during the 1992 elections it was not even possible to take much advantage of nationalism as the Americans had just started to evacuate their military bases.

But the traditional politicians are also dated. Even the main frontrunner in the presidential race, Ramon Mitra, finally made a fiasco (15 % of the votes) – despite the blessings of Cardinal Sin, as well as the most extensive network of somewhat undermined but still powerful political bosses all over the country, and the most efficient election machinery.

⁸Demographic Distribution of Voting-Age Adults based on 1990 Census as reproduced in *Kasarinlan* Vol 7:4 p.138.

So what happened instead? Did some serious issues turn crucial? Did people go for honest politicians representing their interests and ideas?

Generally speaking, the overall results rather suggest the opposite.

The winner of the presidential elections, but only with 24 % of the votes, was a general, Fidel Ramos, who was the head of the constabulary under Marcos until he abandoned the sinking ship, jumping to that of "Cory" Aquinos instead, and then was marketed – by the administration in office – as her "Steady Eddie" (implying continuity and increased stability).

Second came Miriam Defensor-Santiago with 20 % of the votes – a crossbreed of Ross Perot and Maggie Thatcher – who was carried along by media and the almost infantile message that all evil is due to corruption and can be curbed if politicians are locked up and businessmen given all possible liberties. And almost as many votes (18 %) were given to Eduardo Cojuangco, Marcos' foremost crony-capitalist with endless resources (and full support from the only fairly stable voting block left, that of *Iglesia ni Cristo*). He may even have become the new president if Imelda Marcos had not also decided to run. She managed to attract 10 % of the votes, more than what had been expected.

But now it was thus Ramos who won the day. Furthermore, an old movie star within Cojuangco's camp, Joseph Estrada, became the new vice-president. The nationally elected senate was also decorated with various personalities (usually with roots in the most densely populated parts of the country), among whom a comedian, Vicente "Tito" Sotto, got the most votes.

At the same time, however, modified patronage and machines were still very important in the elections of congressmen (representing various constituences), governors, and mayors. Also, vote-buying and electoral rigging were most frequent at this level. Suddenly, local elections had in fact become critical. Much of the central state powers that had not already been privatised were about to be decentralised. Consequently many bosses gave priority to their own fiefdoms, while the presidential and senatorial elections ranked second in importance to them.

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In conclusion, much of the Philippine polity continues to be almost a caricature of the individualising, personality-oriented and ideology resistant American settler-democracy – which was exported to the former US colony and was then conformed with and taken advantage of by feudal-like clans and bosses who, moreover, retain some

remnants of Spanish and Chinese culture. It is true that many of the old structures are now falling apart. But new solid forms fail to appear – including any clear-cut representation of different interests and ideas about societal change. And this will probably lead to continuous diffusion of public resources and difficulties for the personalities *cum* politicians to form powerful blocks and offer stable political and economic leadership. Which in turn, as usual, may generate demands for a somewhat more authoritarian and "efficient" regime.

New base for democracy?

One of the main problems is thus, that the new middle class democratisation still lacks a solid foundation in movements with genuine roots among the people, representing different interests and ideas, and keeping track of their political representatives.

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The vital importance of this factor should be clear if we briefly recall the historical experiences of the democratic breakthrough in Western Europe. (The American settler-democracy is of course more well known in the former US colony the Philippines, but it did not grow out of struggles against some kind of feudalism and is thus less relevant.)

The transition to democratic forms of government in Western Europe was first rooted in bourgeois struggles, supported by peasants, against feudalism and the absolutist state. These conflicts, and the capitalist market economies which followed, made possible a relative separation and diffusion of economic and political power, the rule of law (the *Rechtstaat*), and certain civil rights. Dominating groups could then extend the vote and accept the political sovereignty of the people within a mixed strategy of concessions and co-operation in face of growing popular demands, especially from the rapidly expanding labour movement. Within the nation states, political parties with ideological foundations –and usually rooted also in class-based interest groups such as trade unions, peasant cooperatives or employers' associations – became the important actors.

Moreover, these structural conditions caused the radical labour-based majority of the important popular movements themselves to organise large parts of the society along democratic lines, accept constitutionalism, and give priority to the struggle for popular sovereignty in order to support their mainly socialist oriented development projects. Even the movements' own Marxist understanding of how to transform dynamic and

comparatively pluralistic capitalist societies from within contributed to the democratic orientation.

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But how will the new-born Philippine democracy be able to gain a similar dynamic foundation? Obviously, the new middle-class cannot build it, at least not on its own. And that is, of course, only natural. While the liberals were definitely important in the democratisation of Western Europe, we know it was rather workers and to some extent peasants who came together in the most powerful popular movements that cemented democracy.

Moreover, this took place only in the process of, or even towards the end of, societal transformations, including industrialisation, drastic enough to cause many scholars to claim that time is not (yet ?) ripe for meaningful democracy in countries like the Philippines. One of the more convincing arguments is that while people in large parts of the early industrialised Western Europe were integrated into the political arena through non-personalised state bureaucracies, mass parties, and unions, third world citizens are instead incorporated via personalised and particularistic politics in societies where a kind of superficial political modernisation has preceded industrialisation.⁹

In addition, the traditional view among radical popular movements in the third world has not been to bet on political democratisation. Their usual argument was rather that there was a need for extraordinary means in order to create socio-economic preconditions for meaningful democracy, including real national independence and industrialisation plus anti-feudal agrarian reforms.¹⁰

But while generally speaking all those and other obstacles to democratisation in the third world *were* there, one may still wonder if the political and socio-economic transformations during the last few decades in countries such as the Philippines have not altered the conditions. Of course, the new situation is much different from the one that bred democratisation in Western Europe. Even the newly-industrialising countries, which the Philippines would like to join, are not experiencing the same protracted industrial and cultural transformations, but rather seem to be turning rapidly into

⁹Mouzelis, Nicos P. *Politics in the Semi-Periphery: Early Parliamentarism and Late Industrialisation in the Balkans and Latin America*, (London: Macmillan, 1986)

¹⁰Cf. Törnquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The Destruction of the PKI in Indonesia* (London: Zed Books, 1984), *What's Wrong with Marxism? On Capitalists and State in India and Indonesia*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), and *What's Wrong with Marxism. Vol. 2: On Peasants and Workers in India and Indonesia*, (New Delhi: Manohar 1991), plus "Democracy and the Philippine Left" in *Kasarinlan* (University of the Philippines) Vol 6, No 1-2 (1990); also in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), Vol XXVI No. 27-28 and 29, 1991.

unevenly developed service societies with a huge though heterogeneous new middle class. But, if we do not want to give up beforehand, there is still a need to probe into the actual processes and social forces through which democracy could nevertheless, perhaps, be anchored.

The previously so strong revolutionaries, for instance, should have had rather wide popular support. What do all these people say today? And what has happened to all the cause-oriented groups and non-governmental development organisations (NGOs) that were so important in bringing down the Marcos regime and carrying Cory Aquino into office? Was this perhaps the beginning of an alliance between new middle class people and the many weak groups in the society? Are there no indications of *any* promising tendencies in the recent Philippine elections?

If one looks behind the present main actors, it is definitely possible to identify new processes and movements that may become important and already tell us a lot about both options and problems in anchoring democracy.

Situating and explaining movements and democracy

First, however, a note on how such a study of movements and new processes can be carried out.

One way would be to explore if and when democracy makes sense to various representative social movements, and then to control for variables such as their perspectives and different conditions. However, preliminary studies indicate that even some important popular movements with roots in the still dominating and non-democratic revolutionary Left are now in the process of actually focusing on democratisation. And since this is thus a unique possibility to follow theoretically exciting new movements over time which – in their own specific contexts – could perhaps shoulder some of the democratic tasks carried out by the labour movement in Western Europe, I have decided to concentrate on a few such movements instead of making a wider selection.

This reduces of course the number of cases to choose from when trying to operate different explanatory variables and relate them to the politics (including policies) of democratisation of the movements. However, strategic individual movements can be followed over time. The conventional comparative studies method, of studying similar cases with different outcomes and looking then for the few variations that might explain

this, may be supplemented by different cases with similar outcomes and attempts at explaining this by identifying what they nevertheless have in common. Moreover, because of the lack of relevant and solidly based knowledge in this field, we may sometimes simply have to confine ourselves to the generation of hypotheses by way of systematically contrasting democratisation in different contexts, thus allowing for commentary on the specificity of each case.¹¹

The handling of all this will be spelt out as the concrete analyses proceed. Anyway, examples of the three most exciting 'democratic tendencies' in the Philippines have been selected. A study of how the selected representatives of those tendencies first arrived at their new orientations has been carried out.¹² And with this essay we begin to follow them critically over time – starting off with the 1992 elections. Later on, the Philippine cases will also be compared with similarly intriguing movements in the different settings of Kerala and Java.¹³ And as already indicated, the general task is to probe into what kinds of politics of democratisation, if any, they focus on and to discuss how this could be explained.

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Moreover, when first analysing movements' politics (including policies) of democratisation, their statements and activities need to be filtered through a non-partisan conceptualisation of democracy and democratisation.

However, even though a definition of democracy should be limited, it is not enough to ask to what extent and in what way the work carried out by the movements studied is characterised by *the essence of democracy in terms of sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of political equality or one-person-one-vote*. We also know that this principal point is closely associated with many other factors, which in turn relate to the actual politics of democratisation. A wide classification into four groups of such factors will be indicated below. Their importance and composition may vary from one society or context to another, and scholars as well as actors (such as our movements) do of course have different opinions about them.

¹¹Cf. Skocpol, T and Somers, M, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 22 (pp.174-197), 1980.

¹²Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left" Op. cit.

¹³Cf. Törnquist, *Popular Movements, Development and Democracy: Comparative case studies of the importance of democratisation for radical popular movements as they tackle problems of development in India, The Philippines, and Indonesia. Brief presentation of a research programme*, Uppsala, Spring 1992. For a background study regarding the Indian case in Kerala, see Törnquist, "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate" in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol 23:2 (1991).

A first cluster of factors is the *preconditions for meaningful democracy*. Our next question is thus what conditions the various movements really stress, try to promote or set aside in their different contexts and over time? For instance, the right to organise and to express opinions? Human rights? Constitutionalism and the rule of law? Social and economic equality or autonomy in order for people to be able to candidate and especially to cast their votes in accordance with their opinions without having to submit to the wishes of their leaders, employers or landlords, dominant propaganda, or intervening governments or armies? And if so, how much of this is regarded as necessary?

Second, what *forms of democracy* do the movements support (or try to avoid)? For instance, decentralisation of government, extensive participation (direct control), pressure politics, and co-operative efforts instead of or in addition to representation (indirect control), parties, and participation in national and/or local elections? What (if any) constitutional arrangements are important? What about the problem of "democratic centralism" within radical organisations?

Third, *the extension of democracy*. Do the movements try to spread democratic forms of government to almost all resources which people have in common? Where do they draw the line between state and "civil society"? What about democratisation within "civil society"? Within what parts of "civil society"? (Companies? cooperatives? NGOs?...) And who will here have the right to vote? Moreover, how do they tackle the problem of monopoly and non-democratic governance of already publicly controlled and regulated resources. Do they resort to privatisation or some kind of democratic rule?

Finally, *the content*. What democratically decided policies do the movements find undemocratic, arguing that they run counter to necessary prerequisites for democracy to become meaningful? Only, for instance, policies undermining basic civil rights – or do they include also measures giving rise to serious inequalities? And do their own ends justify undemocratic means?¹⁴

¹⁴If we now combine the minimum definition of democracy in terms of sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of political equality, or one-person-one-vote, and the important factors classified into four groups (1. certain necessary preconditions for democracy to become meaningful, 2. the forms in which democracy is exercised, 3. the degree to which democracy is extended to various sectors of the society, 4. what policies and actions, even if democratically decided, that support or undermine the necessary preconditions for meaningful democracy) it is possible to conclude by offering a more comprehensive but unfortunately still general definition – since we want it to be open and non-partisan – of democracy, namely *the actual capacity of the adult citizens to exercise in various forms equal and*

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The politics of democratisation of the movements thus situated then remains to be explained. However, as already indicated, most of the scholarly knowledge in this particular field is rather sketchy. Hence, it is reasonable to limit oneself to the generation and discussion of more precise hypotheses in relation to the two dimensions emphasised in the general discourse: Firstly, the political, economic, and social conditions which the movements are up against as they try to promote a radically different kind of development, and which thus determine what they can possibly do. Secondly, their own more or less Marxist oriented understanding of the situation and the prospects of change.

Instead of approaching the full range of structural factors that may or may not generate interest in democratisation, we can make things easier by starting off from certain significant and concrete "projects", such as the introduction of cooperatives or improvement of squatters' bargaining power, whereby the movements try to promote a radically different path of development. Let us assume then that we already know what democratic politics that have made sense to the movements. The causes for this may now be located by studying the main political, economic and social obstacles that they have confronted in their specific contexts. Those difficulties are likely to have varied between the movements as well as over time – and the point is of course to analyse and compare how the problems relate to what we know about the movements' politics of democratisation.

Finally the question remains as to whether the movements' own more or less Marxist oriented understanding of the situation may have supported or even prevented democratic politics. This should be possible to answer if we begin by identifying their own *basic* reading of the situation – for instance in terms of fundamental social and economic contradictions – as well as their *related long term* strategical calculations. We will then be able to examine if, and if so in what way, those basic perspectives have, firstly, considered the actual structural obstacles that the movements faced, and, secondly, have really informed the more specific politics of democratisation, which otherwise may simply be pragmatic.

Moreover, with such an approach we may then conclude by discussing whether the movements are more or less genuinely democratic. A reasonable materialistic

effective rule over resources which they hold in common without thereby undermining the absolutely necessary prerequisites for this rule.

assumption is namely, that while many actors may maintain that democracy is important as such, their consistency may be doubted as long as it cannot be substantiated that their democratic politics go beyond the level of fine principles and simple tactics by *also* following from the movements' basic reading of the situation and being instrumental to the achievement of their long-term goal, for instance a radically different development.

New attempts at radical national politics of democratisation

Now back to the findings in relation to the Philippine elections. Just before the note on methodology, we spoke of some new processes that may become important and already tell us a lot about options as well as problems in anchoring democracy. What are those processes?

At this stage it is of course impossible to make full use of the idea of comparing various movements in quite different contexts over time. But the results from the initial studies of the Philippine cases may be supplemented with previous background analyses. Thus it should be possible to trace certain tendencies.

So let us start now with a brief introduction to the national scene, before concentrating in the next main section on an attempt to employ more close local studies in identifying, precisely, characteristic processes at work.

Crisis in the mainstream Left opens up for new alternatives

To begin with, the Left as a whole is still dominated by the old mainstream "national democrats". For most of them, political democratisation in general and electoral politics in particular are simply not meaningful, at least not at this stage.¹⁵

One of their principal arguments is, that even if most people are now able to organise and to express their opinions, and even if the abuses of human rights are less widespread than during Marcos, the basic relations of power have not changed and the social and economic inequalities are still so severe that a majority of the citizens simply cannot vote in accordance with their own interests.¹⁶

¹⁵In relation to the following, Cf. Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", op.cit.

¹⁶This argument is now also found in the otherwise "flexible" statement by the National Democratic Front's (NDF) former chairperson Mr. Satur Ocampo to an open forum held at University of the Philippines, August 29, 1991. See *Kasarinlan* Vol.7:2-3, 1992 pp. 177-80.

Moreover, according to conventional national-democratic thinking, further *political* democratisation would not help much to alter those relations of power and inequalities. In other words, politicians, administrators and so-called "bureaucratic capitalists" have no real bases of power of their own which could be hit at by way of political democratisation. Instead they continue to rely on the more powerful imperialists, compradors, and landlords with private sources of power who must be tackled head on by other means. Thus even if more progressive people were elected, they would not have access to much resources and almost no room of manoeuvre.

Besides using elections for propaganda purposes and some horse-trading, one must therefore, the argument continues, hold on to extra-parliamentary and often armed struggles against landlords, capitalists and other fundamental enemies. Also, this requires, of course, rather authoritarian but still enlightened leadership – at the expense of democratic principles within the movement as well as equal cooperation with other progressive movements.

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For some time now, however, the national democrats themselves have been in serious crisis.¹⁷ The armed units are on the defensive, popular support is dwindling, and the logistical problems are severe. Many of the leading members have been rounded up or have opted for other forms of struggle. Old theses and strategies are being questioned, especially, but not only, within the legal branches of the movement.¹⁸ And the members are far from an agreement on what to reconsider and how to go ahead.

This may even lead to full scale disintegration, especially since many progressive members who have invested most of their life in the movement quite naturally find it difficult to change or give up without substantial achievements or new options.

Concerned dissidents, however, are eager not to push the debate too far, to stand provocations from orthodox and stubborn leaders, and to contribute instead to the negotiation of a sensible settlement with the government. And *if* this can be achieved¹⁹ there should be much more space for fresh alternatives, especially among the many

¹⁷The following is mainly based on interviews with sympathisers, concerned dissidents and analysts who must remain anonymous.

¹⁸Cf. eg. the discussion in the new magazine *Debate: Philippine Left Review*, from March 1991 and onwards, and the articles in *Kasarinlan* Vol. 8, no 1

¹⁹As of this writing, preliminary talks had started between the new Ramos administration, via its National Unification Commission (under the much respected Haydee Yorac, who even included Horacio Morales and Bernabe Buscayno among her consultants), and, among others, certain national democratic leaders in exile, including the orthodox founding chairman Sison.

"nat-dem-led" organisations for peasants, workers, and urban poor as well as within "their" cause-oriented groups and NGOs.

In face of the recent elections, most national democrats were not yet prepared to step outside the old fold. However, rather many leaders within the open sections of the movement tried at least to stress important issues, bet on "electoral education" and endorse "progressive candidates". For instance, in 1991, they made an attempt to revive the legal national democratic party *Partido ng Bayan*.²⁰ Furthermore, in early April the next year, "their own" movements were brought together in a separate non-partisan electoral committee, *Kapatiran*,²¹ to "reinforce the people's organised strength in projecting major issues".²²

The "soft Left" enters into electoral politics

This crisis has also contributed to more democratic forms of cooperation among the many various factions of the Left.²³ National democratic leaders are no longer hegemonic. Many dissident groups feel more self-confident than before. And even though some warn against the risk of "guilt by association" whenever well known national-democratic organisations are included in joint ventures, they also know that there is a need for such a broad unity. At the same time, the national democrats cannot ignore what some of the others want to do – engage in elections, for instance – since these people can now get things started on their own.

²⁰See e.g. the interview with Etta Rosales and her own "The Dilemma of Liberal Democracy", in *Conjuncture*, Vol V, No 2, and No 3 1992 respectively.

²¹*Kilusan ng Alternatibong Pulitika para sa Inang Bayan*, with some 40 organisations (including *Bayan*, New Democratic Alliance)

²²Quoted from *Coalition corner* (Published by the Institute for Popular Democracy) April 3, 1992.

²³In this section of the article, when nothing else is specified, I am mainly drawing on interviews (in den Hague February 7, 1992 and in the Philippines from mid April till mid May 1992) with leaders and activists related to the *Akbayan* movement – including Randolf David, Karina Constantino-David, Ed de la Torre, Ronald Llamas, Gerry Bulatao, Clark Soriano, Bong Malonzo, Jurgette Honculade, Isagani Serrano, Lisa Dacanay, Arman Alforque and Gwen Ngolaban – as well as on related articles and documents such as in *Conjuncture*, Vol IV - Vol V, 1991-1992, platform and campaign materials of the *Akbayan* (and its local partner in Cebu), documents related to the electoral work and institute of Bisig (including "Bisig's orientation to Parliamentary struggle", "Tentative workplan: Bisig electoral work", "Proposal for a three-year trajectory for Bisig", "Electoral education program for Popular organisations" "Institute for electoral education: progress report") and eg. Rene Cira Cruz' talk in the Hague 7 February 1992 "Why the Philippine Left must take the Parliamentary Road, reproduced in *Debate: Philippine Left Review*, No 2, March 1992; Cf. also the interview with him in *Conjuncture*, Vol IV:4, April 1991. I have also benefitted from a drafted version of Eric Gutierrez' case study of 1992 electoral coalitions within IPD's coalition research project.

A broad front was not possible to arrive at before the 1992 elections. However, for the first time for decades at least three "soft" sections of the Left took elections seriously. They were able to initiate electoral cooperation and to work smoothly with each other.

These "three little pigs" – as opposed to the "national democratic wolf" – included the socialist Bisig-movement²⁴, the rethinking social democrats of *Pandayan*²⁵, and the similarly rethinking former national democrats of the Movement for Popular Democracy.

None of them are thus parties, but rather groups promoting slightly different ideas about "new politics".²⁶ Also, those political blocks linked up with like-minded cause-oriented groups, NGOs, and interest organisations (such as unions) to form a partisan electoral movement, *Akbayan*. They adopted the core elements of the "popular development agendas" generated by various broad progressive movements (in which national democrats are also participating) as their own programme. And the keywords were "people's interest", "participatory democracy", "sustainable development" and "genuine structural reforms".²⁷

In the spirit of realism, *Akbayan* also became part of the liberal electoral coalition, *Koalisyon Pambans*, National Coalition. This was actually brokered by leading members of the "three little pigs".²⁸ It was the only block with some ideological profile, radical propositions and progressive candidates, at least on the national level, (who included the generally respected senators Jovito "Jovy" Salonga, ex-speaker of the senate and responsible for carrying through the anti-US-bases treaty campaign, and Aquilino "Nene" Pimentel, primus motor in decentralising state powers, as presidential candidates; plus, for instance, the radical nationalist senator Wigberto "Bobby" Tanada

²⁴*Bukluran sa Ikaunlad ng Sosyalistang Isip at Gawa*; The Alliance for the Advancement of Socialist Thought and Action.

²⁵*Pandayan para sa Sosyalistang Pilipinas*; Workshop for a Socialist Philippines

²⁶Moreover, they are almost exactly the progressive forces within the Left that were identified in an earlier paper (Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", *op.cit.*) as those most likely to propel democracy – which in turn made me select two of my local cases for closer study within the folds of Bisig and the Movement for Popular Democracy (MPD) or the "popular democrats". And while "my" third propelling force (led by Dante Buscayno) was not directly involved in this new cooperation, it was instead most active locally, and we shall return to that movement, as well as to the Bisig and MPD-related local cases, later on in the essay.

²⁷*Akbayan* adopted the development agenda generated by the National Peace Conference, People's Caucus, Green Forum, Project 2001, and CODE-NGO. Cf. also *People's Agenda for Development and Democracy* Ateneo Centre for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Ateneo de Manila University, 1992.

²⁸See Platform for Participatory Democracy and Sustainable Development of the *Koalisyon Pambansa*, in *Conjuncture*, Vol V No 2, 1992.

and consistent NGO spokesman and expelled agrarian secretary Florencio "Butch" Abad as senatorial candidates.)

There was also an exciting attempt among a broad group of generally progressive NGOs to gradually intervene in politics – the so-called project 2001.²⁹ This time, however, almost the only thing they could agree on was partisan "electoral education", including information of what candidates could be expected to support the aims and means of the NGOs.

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It is true that many "soft" leftists often emphasised that they simply had to participate in elections because they needed legitimacy and because people in general were fond of elections and would only participate in an insurrection if reactionary forces distorted elections, as in 1986. Besides, all other avenues, including armed struggle, were closed. Furthermore, their own work, plus the NGOs, unions' etc., would be threatened if a new rightist regime came into office. The so-called "democratic space" was at stake.

But simultaneously, the *Akbayan* people were about to develop something more than sensitive pragmatism – namely a strategical view on democratisation and elections. This time they wanted to gain experience, reach out to as many people as possible and prepare the ground for further engagement in the forthcoming elections. (Village or *Barangay* leaders will be elected in 1994 and 1997, half of the senators, plus the congressmen, governors and mayors in 1995; and all the senators, congressmen, governors, and mayors plus president and vice-president in 1998.)

In contrast to the mainstream national democratic view, the *Akbayan* people thus maintained that a minimum of prerequisites for a meaningful democracy actually exists after the fall of Marcos – despite all the social and economic inequalities. Moreover, further democratisation, they said, would be of critical importance in helping them to alter the Philippine path of development.

This was not because their reading of the fundamental social and economic forces at work had been modified. They still maintained that the important sources of power were outside the state and not subject to political competition. For instance, few references were made to analyses indicating that one of the reasons for the importance of electoral

²⁹Cf. *Project 2001, An Electoral Movement of the NGO Community* (Mimioographed Statement 1992?), *Project 2000: NGO intervention in the electoral process*, Talk by Florencio Abad, 26 February 1991, Reproduced in *Conjecture*, Vol IV:4, 1991, plus his talk at an open forum at University of the Philippines August 29, 1991, Reproduced in *Kasarinlan*, Vol 7:2-3, pp.180-83, and "New Politics as the Art of Combining and Balancing" talk by Gerry Bulatao, Secr. general of Project 2001, 7 Sept. 1991.

struggles was that politicians and bureaucrats monopolised vital resources which should be democratically governed. On the contrary, almost everyone was eager to stress that the new politics of democratisation were subordinated to their old basic work as unionists, development activists and so on. This work, they said, was the only way to alter the relations of power in society and thereby to create, at the same time, more favourable preconditions for democracy.

Most of the *Akbayan* people had previously limited themselves to lobbying and pressure politics; viz. extra-parliamentary politics. For many leaders, especially within the NGOs, this went hand in hand with struggles against the authoritarian state by supporting people's own initiatives in "civil society" rather than trying to grab state power. And demands for participatory democracy were added. Thus, on top of this the *Akbayan* people agreed now to *supplement* pressure politics and development and democratic activism by making use of their work and confidence among people also to mobilise votes for progressive representatives.

Challenging results

What were the immediate results?³⁰

The entry of leftist groups into the liberal coalition accentuated its fairly radical image. This was hardly a problem with regard to support among concerned citizens – but surely it was in terms of money. Traditional business funding of the allied liberal parties (the Liberal Party and PDP-Laban³¹) dried up. As mentioned above, the "soft Left" had tried to be realistic in brokering and associating with the coalition and its electoral machine. But now this apparatus began to break down. Some politicians defected to rival camps with more resources. The campaign lost momentum. There was not even enough money to feed the devoted poll-watchers in some cases, (even though related Christian groups did their part of the job). So the poor and inexperienced Left found itself in the midst of something much more exacting and burdensome than what they had asked for. In the late night hours, several overstrained leaders and activists even remarked with a smile, that as it turned out they could almost just as well have launched their own candidates. (Interestingly, when the vice-mayor candidate in

³⁰In this section I am drawing mainly on the same interviews and materials as those mentioned in fn. 23 above *plus* on more local interviews and documents regarding *Akbayan* related work in Cebu and in Bataan – to which I shall return in more detail in the next main section of this article.

³¹Philippine Democratic Party - Strength of the Nation

Gen.Santos City, on the southern tip of Mindanao, dropped out at a late stage, the Left decided to launch its own man and was not too far from winning.)

Moreover, most of the *Akbayan* people were usually busy with development work, unionism etc. which were not linked to partisan politics and especially not to electoral politics. Their campaign work was therefore a different task which could not be attended to until very late. Many activists did not find time for the campaign. Further delay was caused by the various negotiations with the other progressive groups and movements that they tried to bring into the coalition. Locally, there were often more progressive candidates outside the folds of LP-PDP than inside. This further complicated things and called for supplementary forms of cooperation. And on top of this came the uphill task of convincing people, whom the Left had been telling for years and years that it did not matter which way they voted, that this time it really would make a difference. As a result, rival candidates gained a lot of votes even from people who otherwise fought them, for instance within a union or an action group. Outright vote-buying could not be resisted. And electoral rigging was still possible in some places.

Finally, since the Left basically carried along the same issues they used to emphasise in their extra-parliamentary work and paid little attention to the problem of how to govern public resources and of implementing their great ideas, the field was open for neo-liberal populists like Miriam Santiago to exploit the general discontent with traditional politicians and rampant corruption.

Consequently, the results in terms of numbers of votes were quite disappointing. It is true that the New Left made a difference. If we limit ourselves to the national scene, Salonga and Pimentel, for instance, seem to have done rather well in areas given priority to by the Left. But altogether Salonga got only about the same share of votes as Imelda Marcos (10%). And the foremost NGO senatorial candidate Butch Abad remained out in the cold. Just one official liberal (although radical) nominee slipped into the senate, Bobby Tanada – perhaps partly because he was the only candidate who was also acceptable among traditional national democrats.

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However, all this will hardly cause the New Left to give up its democratic orientation. To begin with, at least to my knowledge, no important organisation or leader has so far claimed the outcome to indicate that, after all, other options have appeared, that they no longer have to use elections to gain legitimacy and defend their

own work, that minimum prerequisites for democracy really do not exist, and that further democratisation would not be of critical importance in their struggle for an alternative path of development.

On the contrary, many more leaders than before now add and stress instead that the ongoing decentralisation of state powers to provinces and municipalities – as provided for by the Local Government Code of 1991³² – will make it both necessary for progressive grassroots organisations to engage themselves in local politics and possible for them to play a significant role.

Firstly, they say, it will be necessary because a lot of important resources and powers shall be allocated to local politicians and bureaucrats, and because the local political arena will be crucial. So if the New Left does not try to enter into that playground and stand up for popular interests, people will simply have to link up with other groups and various patrons instead – while the Left will be marginalised in the backyard.

Secondly, they claim, it will be possible to do this since the code itself stipulates, among other things, that NGO representatives shall constitute no less than one-fourth of the local development councils. And when it comes to local political candidates, the grassroots organisations should be better equipped to mobilise support *and* to keep track of them than national politicians.

However, if the New Left shall be able to really affect and alter local and eventually even national politics and policies, it is of course absolutely vital that its certified capacity to carry out actions and alternative development work to "empower" people can be transformed into votes and influence within the political system. The most serious problem is, that the recent elections clearly demonstrated that this can hardly be achieved with only temporary electoral alliances and campaign machineries. That kind of politics has rather proved to be the home ground for political clans, bosses, and machines, as well as increasingly important media-personality-candidates.

The New Left can of course always advocate constitutional reforms and a new electoral system. Yet, since a lot of powerful interests are vested in the present set-up, it will in reality either have to adjust or fight it out. That is, either continue along an enlightened US model of further developing pressure politics, lobbying, and temporary alliances behind as progressive personalities as possible – or try to transform the system

³²Republic Act No.7160, 1991. The act took effect on January 1, 1992.

from within. And as far as I understand (and hope), the latter is what most leaders now seem to have in mind.

But then again, the recent experiences indicated, that just compiling their ideas and pooling their resources under one umbrella is not enough. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. (Which is not, however, to say that it can be proclaimed from above.) So the problem is how to combine general political issues with the daily struggles for various interests and alternative development work – so that broad political consciousness and popular movements placing their specific interests within a total perspective are already established when elections come up and will thus be able to generate parties or similar organisations.

In other words, the task is overwhelming. In a former colony where capitalism expands but not on the basis of far reaching bourgeois and industrial revolutions, the New Left must not only work out a realistic alternative to bygone national democratic paths of development. It must also, at the same time, try to form genuine and powerful popular movements – which may propel democratisation in the process of trying to implement a new political development project.

The question then is if there are any tendencies indicating that such movements and such an interest in democratisation are at all under way, in spite of everything.

Radical popular movements and democratisation: local tendencies

To get an idea about conceivable linkages between attempts at alternative paths of development and growth of genuine and powerful popular movements propelling democratisation in trying to reach their aims, it is necessary also to turn to some more specific local cases, following them over time.

Cases and contexts

Two cases are local chapters within the folds of the already discussed Movement for Popular Democracy, the "popular democrats", and the socialist Bisig-movement, in the province of Bataan and in Cebu City respectively. The third example is the cooperative efforts of founding commander of the New Peoples Army Bernabe Buscayno, and his People's Livelihood Foundation in Central Luzon. Despite the fact that these politically significant movements in vital parts of the country have much of their roots within the

traditional Left that did not focus on democratisation, they have nevertheless began to seriously do so since the mid' 80s.

The popular democrats are usually associated with leading dissidents of the traditional Left such as Edicio de la Torre and Horacio Morales.³³ In the mid' 80s, they retreated from communist-led fronts and worked out platforms for broad coalitions, including the use of elections, against president Marcos and for the development of non-elitist or "popular democracy". The present Movement for Popular Democracy grew out of committed middle-class professionals, industrialists and intellectuals.³⁴ As their post-Marcos coalitions did not generate substantial gains from either critical support of the early Aquino government or from participation in the 1987 elections, their efforts to help vulnerable people to become reasonably autonomous citizens were increased. This was namely identified as a basic prerequisite for the development of democracy. The most important national umbrella-institutions are the mainly research and political policy oriented Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) and the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) which initiate and service development projects and grassroots organisations simultaneously with efforts to promote coalitions and "people's councils". Their intentions are perhaps best reflected locally through the PRRM-work designed and led by Isagani Serrano and Lisa Dacanay in the province of Bataan, the peninsula northeast of Manila Bay.³⁵

Bisig, or the Alliance for the Advancement of Socialist Thought and Action, was founded in May 1986 by radical socialists and Marxists with various backgrounds, including Christian social democracy, trade union work, community activism, concerned scholarship, and the new as well as old communist movements.³⁶ Bisig will be followed here by focusing on its electoral institute (which is partly supported by the

³³Father "Ed." de la Torre among other things initiated the Christians for National Liberation in the early' 70s; Horacio "Boy" Morales was, among other things, the celebrated head of Marcos' prestigious Development Academy before he defected when he was to be awarded as one of the "ten outstanding young men" in 1977 and rebuilt instead the communist-led National Democratic Front until he was imprisoned in 1982.

A somewhat more comprehensive analysis of the popular democrats are found in Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", op.cit.

³⁴Who first spoke of themselves as Volunteers for Popular Democracy.

³⁵For a recent general introduction, see *Bataan: A Case Study on Ecosystem Approach to Sustainable Development in the Philippines* (Quezon City, PRRM, 1992)

³⁶Among the personalities are trade union leader "Bong" Malonzo, and professors "Randy" David, "Dodong" Nemenzo and Karina Constantino-David; also TV-talk-show-host, columnist, and senior community development organiser respectively. For a somewhat more comprehensive analysis and further references, see Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", op.cit. See also *The Socialist Vision and Other Documents* (Quezon City, Bisig, 1987) and relevant parts of fn. 23 above.

Swedish labour movement³⁷⁾ and the concrete work of two Bisig-related NGOs based in Cebu City in the Visayas. These are the Fellowship for Organising Endeavors (FORGE) and the Cebu Labour Education Research Centre (CLEAR) which promote community development and organisation among urban poor plus some fisherfolk, and union work respectively.

Finally, Bernabe "Dante" Buscayno's cooperative efforts in Tarlac, Central Luzon – which is exactly where poor peasants first fought hard against the Japanese occupation and neo-colonial governments, and then formed the New Peoples Army in 1969.³⁸

While in prison (1976-1986), Dante produced new ideas but failed to change the line of the national democrats even after the fall of Marcos and even though he was the Left senatorial candidate in the 1987 elections who gained the most votes. He returned to Tarlac to start anew among peasants who had forced Marcos to implement a partial land reform, but were now facing exploitative businessmen with good political contacts and control of inputs, rice-mills, marketing, etc. The small farmers would have to come together. The new liberties under Mrs. Aquino made it possible to organise in late 1988 a NGO-foundation, ask for government credits, and initiate legal cooperation among some 500 suspicious but loyal petty farmers. Already two years later, the results were phenomenal: some 8000 farmers with individual plots³⁹, efficient and collective use of modern inputs and methods; drastically increased production; collective market arrangements, lesser indebted farmers and better paid workers, new jobs, a collective rice-mill, a duck-farm, a fishpond, and production of organic fertilizers; government credits repaid ahead of schedule... And while problems then included the devastating Mt. Pinatubo eruption in 1991, there was also a lot of reconstruction work and active participation in the recent local elections.

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³⁷I'd like to thank Jan Hodann of the AIC (International Centre of the Swedish Labour Movement for fruitful discussions.

³⁸For a more comprehensive analysis than the following, see Törnquist, "Fighting for Democracy in the Philippines", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 30, 1990 and Törnquist, "Democracy and the Philippine Left", op.cit.

³⁹Actually, the cooperative efforts encompassed larger areas than the famous nearby huge sugar-growing hacienda Luisita which is partially owned by Mrs. Aquino and cover some 6000 ha. While the cooperative efforts are, of course, endowed with less capital, they continued to expanded even more.

The movements' politics of democratisation – which of course vary and may come to an end – may, to begin with, be analysed in view of similarities and differences with regard to their basic perspectives and ways of organising.⁴⁰

Generally speaking they all share Marxist oriented approaches to society and social change plus try to link NGO-work and popular organisations in building broad movements.

Bisig tries to indigenise much of the new left thinking of the late '60s and onwards in Europe, North America *and* Latin America, including the dependency perspectives and attempts to renew radicalism within the European labour movement and related cooperative and educational organisations. Union and community organising, thus, go hand in hand with attempts to build a radical democratic socialist party.

The popular democrats, on the other hand, try rather to go beyond the Asian and often Maoist national democratic tradition by bringing in, again, some of the new left thinking but also the recent international discourse on "civil society against the state" in general, and the role of NGOs and "sustainable development" in particular.

Finally Commander Dante, who is probably open to most of the new influences mentioned – as long as they make practical sense in Tarlac and fit into his own renewed combination of deterministic analysis, flexible Leninist tactics, and dynamic leadership.

Further, the movements' politics of democratisation is also likely to vary with the socio-economic and political contexts.

The Bisig-case is found among urban poor and unions as well as sections of the middle class in the rapidly expanding commercial and industrial centre of Cebu City, where political clans still dominate and where national democratic organisations are rather strong.

The site of the work of the popular democrats in Bataan, on the other hand, is not the well known Export Processing Zone on the southern tip of the peninsula. In this environmentally hard hit province, the popular democrats are instead promoting broad coalitions and are mainly active among rural and semi-rural communities of small farmers and fisherfolk, petty-businessmen and other weak sections of the population. Traditional politicians dominate, and the national democratic movement, which until recently was rather strong, has suffered from severe repression.

⁴⁰For the following, I am, in addition to the general references given on the popular democrats the Bisig and Dante's project, mainly drawing on interviews with and documents provided by the leading personalities already mentioned plus Ms Gwen Ngolaban of FORGE in Cebu.

The case of Dante, finally, takes us to Tarlac – the home province of the Aquinos and Cojuangcos, who still dominate politics, as well as the revolutionary peasant movement, which is no more. This is in the agricultural heartland of Central Luzon, with small scale rice farmers, big sugarcrowing haciendas, petty as well as big traders, and commercial centres with some industries; all of which are affected by the Mt. Pinatubo eruption.

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What do my initial studies indicate? Two major tendencies seem to be at work in historical sequence and may thus be discussed separately: democratic "empowerment" and democratisation of politics.

(1) Democratic "empowerment"

In the third world, even celebrated radical and popularly based movements for national liberation have rarely been capable of transforming themselves into equally progressive forces in the process of further developing their countries. Of course, resources have been scarce and the enemies powerful and well organised. But that was true also during the liberation struggle. What makes a difference is rather that conditions have changed more than the ways of reading them and organising. Previously necessary forms of struggle, including armed resistance, still shape organisational logics and even the minds of many activists. And when old perspectives and institutions do not serve any more, leaders and members turn pragmatic, while organisations often degenerate. Hence, alternative perspectives and movements emerge.

Much more could of course be said about this. But my point here is that similar processes are at work among the Philippine revolutionary movements designed to fight the Marcos regime.

Our cases vary in terms of contexts and basic perspectives, but one pattern is quite clear. Fundamental conditions changed as capitalism expanded and, for instance, reduced the importance of landlordism, increased environmental destruction, and allowed for new forms of government. The old organisations were rarely capable of reading this and renewing themselves. Dissidents came forward with alternative analyses and propositions. They worked out concepts for how the already existing movements should be able to support at least supplementary efforts. But even devoted, emphatic, and well funded attempts to find some new *modus vivendi* often failed. Thus,

a new generation of popular movements emerged, which instead of first fighting for political power tries to start from below by addressing people's immediate problems of survival and development. *And* in the process of doing so, it seems as if they also find it quite important to promote democratic cooperation outside the direct framework of the state, within "civil society" – even though, of course, methods and results vary a lot.

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Bataan is a good case in point.⁴¹ Many more or less legal national democratic mass movements grew out of the armed resistance, for instance among peasants. When Marcos was gone and the space was wide enough, PRRM worked out progressive development projects and tried to base them among the already existing popular organisations. Theirs (PRRMs') was a supplementary effort. They did not want to refute what had already been done. And why should they try to build new organisations when so many already existed?

But repressive state policies against the guerillas also made progressive leaders in the more or less legal mass movements vulnerable. Of course, this was not surprising. But the critical problem was, that the various movements – in which PRRM had tried to base new development efforts such as credit cooperatives – fell like a house of cards as soon as the leaders were threatened. Thus, the movements proved to be mainly rejectionist campaign machines within the framework of revolutionary national democratic struggles.

Consequently, the popular democrats emphasised instead the need to strengthen "civil society". They simply had to help people form new organisations on their own, through which they could make use of the education and resources provided by the PRRM.

In addition to this, it became more and more obvious to the popular democrats that the problems of development in Bataan had to be tackled head on. Sweeping political changes were not on the agenda. For the time being, one had to live with the harsh political situation, playing down different interests within communities and focusing on issues that most people could agree on and manage themselves. One method was to help

⁴¹I am mainly relying on interviews in April and May 1992 with Isagani Serrano, Lisa Dacanay, Ed. de la Torre, and discussions with community organisers in Bataan, plus Bataan (1992), and documents such as the "PRRM Rural Development and Democratisation Program of 1988", the ditto proposal for 1991, the "Program Status Report (January - August, 1990)", "the SRDDP-Bataan Area Perspective Plan for 1992-1996", "Bataan Province as an Area of Intervention for SRDDP (1991)", "SRDDP-Bataan Proposed Operations Plan for 1992", and the writings of Serrano, including "A Community Empowerment Strategy for Sustainable Development" (1991) and "A Popular Democratic Agenda for Transformation" (1991).

people mapping their own problems as well as potential resources, and to introduce democratically governed cooperatives within, for instance, a village as a whole.

The character of the immediate difficulties, the popular democrats continued their analysis, also called for integrated efforts both within the communities themselves and on a regional basis. For instance, environmental destruction was often so urgent that many people's livelihood was directly threatened. And as usual with such problems, this called for a lot of integrated efforts. Broad scale cooperation simply had to be developed. The popular democrats try therefore, among other things, to promote various coalitions and to initiate councils where organisations and movements can come together. Local businessmen are also brought in. Working relations with the "actually existing politicians" are skilfully cultivated – but mainly to defend and if possible expand the space for NGO-activities and popular initiatives in "civil society".

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Similar processes appeared in Cebu City.⁴²

Here capitalism is really on the offensive. A huge metropolitan development plan has been launched. There are visions of another Hongkong. Thus, many urban areas have to be "developed"; viz. cleared of poor settlers. One way is to classify areas as entirely commercial rather than also residential. Hence, even if squatters organise and try to buy their plots, the price is too high, and they would not be able to live there anyway. Also, a lot of the reclaimed land along the coast is not suitable for huge buildings. Thus it is better to go for areas nearby, where the squatters themselves have done the job more efficiently ever since they first settled there after the war to look for jobs. All these people will instead be offered living quarters up in mountain *barangays*. But while a lot of more jobs in the city is fine, it will take quite some time before the factories open up. And up on the hills there are almost no means of livelihood. Transportation to the city takes a long time and is expensive. Basic social services are lacking.

One major dilemma now is how to tackle all this. It follows from the old revolutionary paradigm that the urban poor should reject the entire metropolitan development program and in the end line up in front of the bulldozers. People would then get rid of all their illusions about the present system. The ones in power would be threatened. The struggle for state power would take a few steps ahead.

⁴²I draw mainly on interviews in Cebu City in early May 1992 with Ms. Gwen Ngolaban and community organisers of FORGE plus documents like "Forge-Orientations" (no date). Cf. also fn. 23 above.

However, dissident activists connected with Bisig argue instead that this will not do any good for the people. Capitalism should be resisted but cannot be overthrown while still in dynamic progress. So until there are any realistic alternatives, one must try instead to help the urban poor survive and strengthen their bargaining power for better conditions. Almost like in Bataan, this is initially done by assisting community organising as part of various self-help activities, cooperatives and so on. And this has implied the need for participatory democracy on the local level as well as the formation of various instruments for broader cooperation. In a short period of time the new path has proved quite popular.

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Finally, while the same general tendencies are also at work in the case of Dante's activities in Tarlac, the outcome in terms of democratisation is rather different because of the special character and dynamics of his project.⁴³

Of course, cooperatives are initiated to help people raise their standard of living and "empower" themselves. But while the PRRM in Bataan first tried to supplement old "national-democratic" mass movements, Dante found it necessary to build new ones right from the beginning. As already hinted at, his somewhat more radically revised view was namely that the feudal-like structures had been penetrated by a partial land reform and by capitalism. After Marcos there were many possibilities of working open and legally. And much less was left of the previous anti-feudal and anti-authoritarian movement in Tarlac than in Bataan, besides certain individuals and their consciousness and loyalties.

Moreover, Dante deliberately tried to make use of his good contacts in Manila as well as in Tarlac⁴⁴ to get protection and money and be able to rapidly build up large scale cooperatives within various supplementary and thus less vulnerable sectors.

The old guerilla commander wanted a lot of things done rapidly. As little time as possible should be spent on the "conscientisation" and formalised participatory democracy to which so much attention was paid, for instance in Bataan and Cebu. On the contrary, he expected the farmers to be economically motivated enough to work

⁴³I'm mainly drawing on previous analyses in Törnquist, "Fighting for Democracy in the Philippines", and "Democracy and the Philippine Left", op.cit. – based on observations and interviews plus correspondence with at first hand Dante and Fatima Buscayno. I have also benefitted from Teresa Encarnacion, *The NGO as a Vehicle of Empowerment: the Buscayno Experiment*, Draft-report within the Joint Philippine-Dutch research project on Agrarian Issues in Central Luzon, University of the Philippines, 1992.

⁴⁴Especially with Mrs Aquino and Dona Aurora Aquino, the landlady mother of Cory's assassinated husband Sen. Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino.

hard and then to develop in practice appropriate forms of cooperation when proving profitable. He himself and the core group would "simply" guide and enlighten them, plus provide them with arms and ammunition in the form of a cooperative framework, tools and credits etc.

While formalised political "education" and politics would therefore have to wait, a silent political strategy nevertheless persisted: When feudalism is no more, at least commercial capitalism is expanding, and the room for manoeuvre is much greater than under Marcos, one must help the farmers to work hard and fast to achieve as much as possible "under the existing relations of production". But later on, when the farmers themselves face the limits of the present setup – and are confronted with hard opposition from powerful businessmen, politicians and bureaucrats – they will be able to develop the common political struggle. And then, but only then, Dante will be prepared to engage in open politics again. Back in 1990, he envisaged mainly the need for further political democratisation of various organs of the state – by way of among other things elections – in order to defend the freedom of action for cooperatives and get hold of sufficient resources. But this thus was not for immediate consumption. Hence, we shall return to it some pages ahead – in relation to the 1992 elections.

Of course, great risks were involved – dependency upon good contacts, a lot of money; Dante's personality and sort of guided democratic leadership, etc. But in 1990, at least he himself and his special companion were well aware of them and able to analyse the factors just as in-depth and critically as many suspicious scholars and activists whom I talked to elsewhere.

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We have thus new popular movements which, despite different contexts and varying basic perspectives, all acknowledge the transformation of fundamental political and economic conditions due to the expansion of capitalism, set aside more or less revolutionary politics of conquering the state, giving priority instead to "empowerment" by way of fostering their own alternatives within "civil society" – *but* simultaneously finding also more or less democratic organising, management and cooperation instrumental in building their alternatives.

The forms differ however. It is true that alternative projects like those of "our" movements partly require more or less undemocratically pre-fixed money and protection. But once this has been "taken care of", there are two main patterns: The activists in Cebu and Bataan, on the one hand, stress time consuming education,

"conscientisation", and small scale projects with participatory democracy plus coalition building. Dante, on the other hand, relies more on guided democracy, practical experiences, and calculated interests on a large scale – in a deliberate attempt to rapidly prepare the ground for further politics of democratisation, and thus, for instance, the possibility of removing the need for special funds and protection.

(2) Democratisation of politics

So far so good. But after the 1992 elections we have to conclude, that "our" movements did not perform much better than the rest in their ability to transform their acknowledged capacity to carry out democratic actions and alternative development work in "civil society" into votes and influence within the political system. Neither of their two forms of democratic work proved successful in this respect.

However, when we follow more closely how this varied with the contexts, basic perspectives, and different forms of democratic work, a new promising tendency appears. As the movements continue their work in "civil society", they face certain structural changes and problems which, in their own way of reading them, call for extended politics of democratisation along two lines. First, the cases of Bataan and Cebu point in the direction of taking democratisation beyond "civil society". Second, the experiences in Tarlac speak of a need to democratise already existing attempts at linking alternative development work and political interventions. Let us discuss them one by one.

(a) Democratisation beyond "civil society"

An initial problem is, with a slight overstatement, that in face of the elections even many radical NGOs and associated movements almost resembled, firstly, the Church in abstaining from active and open political involvement, and, secondly, resembled liberal educational societies in lacking wide popular support.

PRRM in Bataan⁴⁵ abstained from partisan involvement. Only some voters' education was conducted, mainly towards the end of the campaign. And some individuals took a few days off for partisan work.

⁴⁵Interviews in Manila and Bataan directly before after the elections with Ed. de la Torre, Isagani Serrano, and Lisa Dacanay plus discussions with community organisers in Bataan.

The main argument in Bataan was that the hunting season for progressive forces had just passed. The PRRM has to work with a wide spectrum of people and institutions. Of course the sensitive question of funding was also relevant. To put it mildly, the much acclaimed independence of the NGOs from the state and similar institutions should not be exaggerated in view of other dependency relationships. And as far as I know, neither did many of the popular organisations supported by PRRM involve themselves. One argument is of course, that they are simply not yet strong enough, that the situation is harsh, etc. But it remains to be seen if there are also problems due to their perspective, their ways of organising people, and the type of problems they have to handle.

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In Cebu, on the other hand, the Bisig-related NGOs were able to take a stand and to do hard and comparatively impressive campaign-work.⁴⁶ They lost the race but learnt a lot. As in Manila and elsewhere in the country, they could only get started at a late stage, particularly because of complicated negotiations with various progressive forces and the liberal coalition. They also managed to establish some cooperation with certain national democrats and progressive individuals. A local coalition campaigned for the liberal coalition candidates for the presidency and the senate, and five city councillors of its own choice for Cebu north, headed by union leader and human rights lawyer Arman Alforque. The Bisig-related activists gave of course priority to election work in the urban poor areas where they were already involved in community organising and self-help activities. Especially women were prepared to listen.

However, the rationale for concentrating on elections had not even reached all Bisig-activists. Thus, some of them did not contribute much. Also, despite the reasonably successful coalition work, mainly Bisig-related people had to do most of the job. Moreover, they were not able to form local chapters of the electoral alliance in "their" urban poor areas. It proved difficult to nominate candidates from bottom-up. Most popular organisations did not want to take a clear stand since this might cause disunity in their daily work. And a general observation is that radical NGOs seem to work so in-depth that there are almost no rings on the water.

⁴⁶I draw mainly on observations and interviews and discussions just before the 1992 elections in Cebu City (and on the island of Pandanon where FORGE has initiated cooperatives among poor fisherfolks) with Ms. Gwen Ngolaban, Arman Alforque and several organisers and election campaign workers of FORGE and CLEAR plus on documents referred to by them (supplemented by discussions before and after the elections with Ronald Llamas and other *Akbayan* campaign leaders and with Karina Constantino-David, central Bisig leader and senior community organiser and theoretician).

So, with the words of the Cebu-activists themselves, "the presumption that our urban poor mass organisations/people's organisations can be automatically converted into a political machinery is wrong".⁴⁷

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Already during the election campaign, senatorial candidate Butch Abad concluded, apropos the NGOs not being able to take a stand, that separate vehicles must be formed.⁴⁸ This seems to be a general conclusion. In Bataan, the Movement for Popular Democracy is likely to set up a permanent apparatus. The activists in Cebu are asking for an electoral desk. And at both places the NGOs talk of the need to integrate voters education in their daily work and their various manuals.⁴⁹

But in addition to this, the decentralisation of state powers will also make it both necessary and possible for the New Left to engage in local politics. A lot of vital resources and powers will be devolved and the new arena cannot be avoided. NGOs will be represented in development planning, and grassroots organisations should have a great capacity to mobilise support for various political candidates. Moreover, it seems possible for the movements to make use of their basic perspectives in reading these changes – and thereby to tackle them in a conscious way rather than just adjusting pragmatically.

Also, even if the NGOs, and the popular organisations that they service, only continue along the same line as before in "empowering" people in "civil society", it might be safe to say that the very problems they face, and the ways in which they themselves now seem to perceive them, almost force them to take more active part in the local political system and thereby in democratisation beyond "civil society".

In the case of Bataan the serious environmental degradation calls for a series of integrated measures and cooperation. The PRRM has in fact already published analyses of this and started trading "sustainable development programmes" on the local political market.

In Cebu it is mainly the metropolitan development plan that cannot be avoided. The Bisig people themselves analyse this in-depth. And when really hard hit, the popular community organisations, which did not want to turn partisan this time, may have to

⁴⁷Correspondence with Ms Ngolaban and "Initial evaluation of Bisig-Cebu's electoral involvement, May 17, 1992".

⁴⁸Conversation with Abad, May 1, 1992.

⁴⁹For this and what follows till the next main paragraph, see fn. 45 - 47 above.

relate their specific interests to such general problems that they must already integrate political considerations in their common local activities.

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Interestingly enough, progressive labour organisers also took active part in the Cebu-campaign-work.⁵⁰ Of course, most union activists, no matter how politically conscious they may be, must concentrate on the daily struggles over wages, conditions of employment and collective agreements. At times, even strong capitalists and profitable companies might be more important than democratisation, not to mention political elections.

But many other issues are becoming increasingly important. There is a need for political enforcement of minimum-wages as well as respect for the right to organise. And of course, the new metropolitan development plan will not only provide more jobs, but also cause serious problems for the many workers and their families living in threatened communities. So this time progressive unionists even gave priority to election-work together with community organisers in the urban poor residential areas.

Moreover, central leaders refer to similar experiences in the plantation sector further south when asked why it is that they find political democratisation to be of great and immediate importance, despite so many other questions which have to be attended to in order for them to survive.

The answer is quite simple. Many plantations have been (or are about to be) abandoned by their masters. When it comes to forestry there are simply no more trees left in many areas. Thus, workers themselves try to take over, form cooperatives and reconstruct business. (There are also certain legal options for entering into cooperative arrangements where plantations are still profitable). This, of course, presents the workers and unions with many new problems – including everything from how to run the companies and mobilise credits to an interest in upholding law and order to protect their land and other assets. Now, those problems cannot be solved by their own democratic cooperation alone, but clearly also require public support. And this support in turn will definitely not come unless the workers and unions themselves try to influence local as well as national politics.

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⁵⁰For what follows, see fn. 45-47 above. I'm also drawing on interviews and discussions with Bong Malonzo, leader of National Federation of Labour (mainly on April 28, 1992), and Jurgette Honculade, also of NFL; both also related to Bisig.

The general indication is thus, that decentralisation of political powers in addition to the increasingly important problems (which have to be handled on a general level) of environmental destruction, aggressive development plans, employment, housing, and of running workers' own cooperatives etc. seem to make it instrumental even for unions or movements working with specific development projects to come together and engage themselves more in local politics. Democratisation may thus be taken beyond "civil society" to the state. The forms, however, will of course vary with the concrete settings, the special problems, and the distinct outlook of the movements.

(b) Democratising linkages between development work and politics

In the case of Dante's cooperative efforts, on the other hand, the idea of taking democratisation beyond "civil society" to the state was built into the project itself from the very beginning. As we know, the silent political strategy of the late '80s was to help the farmers work hard and fast to improve their production and standard of living under the new political and economic conditions. As soon as possible they would thereby reach the limits of the system and face powerful businessmen and politicians. And once again people would then be prepared to engage in politics, including elections – since real freedom of action and further democratisation of various organs of the state would be necessary already to sustain their cooperative achievements.

So what happened? Did the basic analysis and calculation prove fruitful? Did the envisioned interests in democratisation materialise? And if not, then why?⁵¹

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As already mentioned, the first period was a tremendous success. The following series of growth pains also seemed possible to manage. However, handling the

⁵¹I draw mainly on observations plus interviews and discussions with at first hand Dante Buscayno and special assistant Fatima Buscayno plus with Boy Palad, vice mayor candidate of the Capas coalition sponsored by the cooperative, and Meg Feliciano, head of the O'Donnell resettlement camp and councillor candidate in Conception, and some other leaders and workers within the cooperative. I am also thankful for discussions with prof. Cynthia Bautista, who has planned research and done close observations in Tarlac just after the Mt Pinatubo eruption, asst.prof. Teresa Encarnacion, who has spent several months with the cooperative collecting information for the previously mentioned research report, "The NGO as a vehicle of empowerment: the Buscayno experiment" (which has been most useful in my attempts at learning more about the farmers-debt-problems and the critique of Dante's style of leadership), and prof. Randolph David, discussant of a drafted version of this research report when presented in U.P in late April 1992.

devastating eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in mid' 1991 – which brought ashfall, lahars and mudflows destroyed harvests, fertile land, irrigation facilities and so on – was trickier.

On the other hand, the dynamism of Dante and his group in organising people and resources to minimise destruction, provide relief, and to start reconstruction almost directly further expanded their activities and influence in the province. In addition, president Aquino appointed Dante provincial chairman of the official task force.

Soon enough those efficient and devoted activists began, for instance, helping many of the tribal people (*Aetas*) of the Mt. Pinatubo slopes to a new area, new houses and to find new means of livelihood. Business was attracted to provide new jobs for the many more people in the plains. A whole new town, including residential areas, social services and industries, was under way in early 1992 in the Tarlac part of the previous US airforce base. And when in the same area the former O'Donnell US powerplant – which could have provided the whole province with all the desperately needed extra electricity – was looted, and office-holding local politicians did nothing to prevent this but probably even contributed to it, Dante called on Malacanang (the presidential palace) to stop it but was instead asked "to please do something" – which *he* could and did. But unfortunately it was too late.

Meanwhile elections were coming up. Dante had of course been approached by various delegations. Would this not be the time for him to run for governor? What local and national politicians would get his support?

Tarlac is the home province of the Aquinos as well as of factions of the Cojuangcos. One of them is headed by Corazon "Cory" Aquino (whose maiden name was Cojuangco) and her brother "Peping", while the other is led by "Danding" Cojuangco, 1992 presidential candidate and Marcos favourite business crony. While retaining his independence, Dante is naturally friendly with Cory's and Peping's camps. To survive in Tarlac, one has to take some kind of a stand. In 1992, however, the latter faction was also divided, at least on the national scene. Peping backed Ramos Mitra for presidency, while Cory backed Fidel Ramos. Now, this time Dante stood up against his lady patron Cory. He refused to support Ramos – who had sent him to prison during the struggle against Marcos – and concluded that Mitra's and Peping's flock was the only realistic option. Cory then asked him at least to abstain from getting himself too much involved. Dante himself adds, that this would not anyway have been the right time for him to run for a position given the enormous financial resources of Danding.

On the local level, however, Dante and the core group of cooperative and task-force leaders could not remain silent. Clearly, local politicians even sabotaged their efforts to provide relief and do reconstruction work after the Pinatubo disaster. At a late stage, a local progressive coalition for mayor, vice-mayor and councillors was formed in Capas, the foremost homebase of the cooperative efforts and quite near the large emergency and resettlement camps. Dante did not run himself, but he campaigned actively and openly for the coalition, together with the cooperative leaders and many people involved in the Mt Pinatubo task force. The true face of the politicians in office was exposed and a realistic plan to turn Capas into a model town was offered.

So what happened? Did the coalition win a landslide victory? No, it lost – in Dante's heartland. So what went wrong?

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Various dirty tricks explain a lot. Some people were prevented from casting their vote. Massive vote-buying took place towards the end of the campaign. Poll watchers were bought off. Outright rigging of the results was common, and so on. Many stories could be told. But it was no surprise that all this would be attempted, only that the tricks would be successful. The coalition camp knew it had to get a very clear majority in order not to be cheated in the final process of counting votes. So the question is rather why there was no overwhelming support for the coalition and why people did not resist the juggling.

Factors such as a late start, a not very popular mayoral candidate, and the fact that people did not have to offend Dante himself by not voting for the coalition (since *he* did not run) hardly explain much. Most people must have known the important basic differences between the blocks and that Dante was behind the coalition. And given the strength of the cooperative efforts and the task force, massive fear of losing protection from traditional politicians and their sponsors can hardly have been decisive.

So we probably have to turn the problem around. People may not have identified their own well-being with the fate of the coalition and thus the efforts of the cooperative and the task force. And perhaps *Dante* and *the cooperative projects* were not popular any more.

Actually, some reports and various informants – including Dante himself – speak much about people arguing, that while Dante has become a big shot, commands a lot of resources, and says he is there to help them, he now claims back loans even when they are in trouble and makes all decisions on his own, especially the "wrong" ones.

What is behind this? Let us consider a few processes at work.

One basic idea is that farmers would get loans and various forms of support to be able to increase their production. Then they would deliver their harvests, get help with storing, processing, and marketing (to further increase their income) and meanwhile get good pay – minus, of course, their loans.

However, a major problem is that this chain has been easy to get around. Thus, it has been possible to avoid repaying the loans, and the question is then how to get them back. The elected farmers' leaders claim that they do not have the time to do the job. They probably do not want to do it either. Thus, people from the staff have had to be sent out – mainly young female professionals, but occasionally even Dante himself.

Yet, the indebted farmers say they cannot pay. They find the "collectors" and even Dante hard-hearted. Even though he often helps people in trouble, he still does not resemble a traditional "kind patron" who seems to care for his subjects while employing efficient and forceful collectors to do the dirty job he considers below his own dignity.

The farmers may even have used the money for other purposes and in the process taken other loans from private businessmen – which have to be paid back first, since their terms of trade are rougher than Dante's. And how can we, say the farmers, ever return the cooperative loans if we do not receive new ones – from the cooperative?

The situation was worsened by the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo. Thereafter farmers took it for granted that the government would grant massive debt relief, but this never came through. Why, they asked, could not Dante solve this? Was he not even appointed by the president as head of the task-force?

Moreover, how would it be possible for Dante to decentralise decision-making when all these problems were on the agenda and when he kept to the idea of working fast and guiding people? Problems of inefficiency were already there – not only as a kind of hidden resistance but also because some employees did not know how their own tasks fitted into others, and did not dare or want to take dynamic initiatives on their own. And when Dante therefore tried to speed up the process of turning parts of the NGO-ventures into full-scale cooperatives, those who were offered the chance to buy shares were rarely interested in taking the risks involved.

Finally, it was not even easy to handle the cooperative shops established in order to reach out on the local market, bypass middlemen and sell products as cheap as possible to common people. Very many households include namely not only farmers but also petty traders – who of course find it difficult to compete with the cooperative shop.

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In other words, Dante's grand strategy did not work. Just as expected the local oligarchy caused very serious and clear-cut problems for the cooperative efforts in general and for the attempt at efficient relief and reconstruction work after the Mt Pinatubo eruption in particular. Thus Dante supported an electoral coalition to get rid of some of the obstacles. However, most of those expected to realise all this, and to vote in favour of change because of their very own interest, did not do so.

Two factors stand out as particularly important.

First, Dante's assumption that he was associating with farmers whose main interest was to work hard on their land, who step by step would realise that cooperation was favourable, and who would then defend those options if they were threatened – this assumption proved wrong. On the contrary, most farmers are part of households where they themselves and especially the other members are involved in many other different activities and ways of surviving. Their decisions thus are not guided only by the deterministic rationale that Dante took for granted. For instance, younger family members who are not involved in farming may find it more sensible to use cooperative production loans for other purposes than those intended.

Second, many people initially experienced the positive effects of cooperating, but mainly under the firm leadership and successful fund-raising of Dante rather than on their own. In addition, there were few possibilities for them to directly realise the negative effects of breaking the rules of the cooperative game. Thus, many were alienated, did not identify themselves with all the cooperative initiatives, asked instead for more money from heaven, turned angry when they did not get it but rather had to start paying back their debts – and were not particularly enthusiastic when asked to endorse or even defend it all in the elections.

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The deterministic assumptions about farmers' interests and their likely ways of acting, as well as Dante's "guided democracy", have thus been insufficient (and at times even counterproductive) in helping the activists to rapidly exhaust possibilities within the established system and thereby pave the way for radical politics of democratisation.

Now, in what direction does all this take Dante and the other leading persons involved? Basically towards, firstly, the need for an even broader mix of projects to engage many more than the outright farmers, and, secondly, towards more democratic participation *and* responsibility within the different projects.

Dante now agrees that there is no unified peasantry that can be organised and led like an army. (Even a common visible enemy is lacking.) But he emphasises that relations within the movement must be both harsh and fair. Farmers themselves should take responsibility for collecting loans via their elected leaders and not young female employees who could rather serve as their assistants. Everybody has to experience directly – or if that is not possible, constantly be informed about – the effects of what they and the others are doing and of the difficulties caused by the politicians and bureaucrats that they have voted into office.

– Finally, Dante concludes, I will probably have to speak up more in public, even though we now have to live for another period with unscrupulous traditional politicians who already do their utmost to exploit the decentralisation of state powers.

Generally speaking there are thus signs of a tendency, that the bad experiences may lead to further democratising of the attempts made to link alternative development work with political interventions. But if and how this will actually come about, remains of course to be followed up in our future restudies.

Conclusions

More than six years after the peaceful "people power revolution" against Marcos' dictatorship, the Philippine polity remains almost a caricature of the personality-oriented American settler-democracy – adapted to and taken advantage of by feudal-like bosses. But the full scale elections of May 1992 also indicate that old structures are actually falling apart, though new solid forms fail to appear, including reasonably clear-cut representation of different interests and ideas of societal change. One of the main problems is, thus, that the widely esteemed new-middle-class-democratisation still lacks solid foundation in movements with genuine roots among the people, standing up for different interests and ideas, and keeping track of their political representatives – the importance of which is quite clear from the democratic breakthrough in Western Europe.

But how will the new-born Philippine democracy be able to gain a similar dynamic in a former colony where capitalism expands but not on the basis of far-reaching bourgeois and industrial revolutions, and where the traditional third world view among radical popular movements has been not to bet on political democratisation?

The serious crisis of the still dominating traditional Left opens up the arena for fresh alternatives and contributes to more democratic forms of cooperation within the Left as a whole. A broad front was not possible in face of the 1992 elections, but rethinking "soft" sections of the Left came together. While pragmatic reasons were there (and some spoke of tactics, while waiting for an insurrection), a new strategic view of democratisation and electoral participation was in the making. It is true that the "soft Left" still claimed the important sources of power to be outside the state, and thus not subject to political competition but possible to affect only by way of unionism, development activism, pressure politics, etc. However, this was now supplemented by an attempt at using people's trust in radical extra-parliamentary work, to mobilise also votes for progressive political representatives.

The immediate results were meagre, but will hardly cause the New Left to give up its democratic orientation. On the contrary, in face of the new local government code, the New Left is currently modifying its basic perspectives, stressing the vital importance of intervening in local politics, including elections. The local political area will be crucial. A lot of resources and powers will be allocated to local politicians and bureaucrats. The law stipulates NGO representation in development councils. And grassroots organisations will be better equipped to support and keep track of local political candidates than national ones.

The 1992 elections indicated, however, that the certified capacity of the New Left to carry out actions and alternative development work could not be transformed into votes with temporary electoral alliances and machineries. Either it will have to expand on the US model of pressure politics, lobbying, and temporary alliances behind as progressive personalities as possible, or try to transform the system from within. But while the latter is preferable, compiling ideas and pooling resources has proved insufficient. Since the whole is more than the sum of its parts but cannot be proclaimed from above, the problem is thus if general political questions can be combined with the daily work and separate single issues – so that people and various movements place special interests within a total perspective (and can generate a political party) well ahead of elections.

Are there then any signs of radical popular movements that find democratisation essential in trying to work out and implement a new political development project? Two major tendencies seem to be at work among our cases of rethinking movements with roots in the traditional Left – one in the direction of *democratic "empowerment"*, another in the direction of *democratisation of politics*.

1. "Our" movements are active in quite different contexts. Even their Marxist oriented basic perspectives vary in many ways. Still, two factors are in common and possibly explain much of their new democratic orientation. As against the traditional Left, they all argue that the expansion of capitalism (plus of course the fall of Marcos) has caused fundamental political and economic changes in their respective areas. This has then caused them to set aside much of the old revolutionary politics of conquering the state, in favour of building their own development alternatives within "civil society" and thus "empowering" people. Of course, good contacts, protection, access to international funds, etc. have been important in getting the projects off-ground. Yet once there, the most interesting thing is that *democratic organising, management and cooperation have so far tended to be instrumental in building these alternatives.*

There seem to be two very different models of how to go about with this. On the one hand, time consuming education, "conscientisation", and small scale projects with participatory democracy supplemented by coalition building. On the other hand, democratic guidance of large projects based on calculated interests and practical experiences to rapidly prepare the ground for further politics of democratisation.

2. While neither of these models proved successful in the attempts at transforming democratic "empowerment" into votes during the recent elections, another promising tendency seems to be under way. *In carrying out their work in "civil society", the movements face namely important structural constraints which vary with the specific contexts but even according to the movements' own reading call for different forms of extended politics of democratisation:*

On the one hand, democratisation may be taken beyond "civil society" to the state. Even unions or movements working with specific development projects find it instrumental to joint forces and seriously get into local politics for two basic reasons: (1) They are confronted with problems that must be handled on a general level beyond their individual projects, like environmental destruction, aggressive development plans, unemployment, bad housing, and the running of workers' own cooperatives. (2) A new local government code is now implemented. A lot of resources and powers will be allocated to local politicians and bureaucrats. The local political arena will be crucial. The law stipulated NGO representation in development councils. And grassroots organisations will be better equipped to support and keep track of local political candidates than national ones.

On the other hand, already existing attempts at linking development work and political interventions may be democratised. A most important negative experience from the local elections nearby Dante's cooperative was nameley, that most of the people involved had no clear-cut material interests, for instance as farmers, which could be taken for granted even when only trying to sustain the developmental efforts by offering an electoral alternative to corrupt local politicians. Organisation and collective action (that do not undermine the general efforts of the activists) thus seem to require that people themselves get to know and experience the consequences of how they and others (including elected polticians) act. That is, a kind of democratisation of the political work based on experience, dialogue, consciousness and so on. The development of an alternative discourse, to use a notion in vogue.

But of course, what actually can come out of such tendencies now remains to be followed up in future restudies and compared with other movements in the very different settings of Kerala and Java.⁵²

/Spring 1993

⁵²As indicated in fn. 1, the essay is part of a project to compare over time certain movements in the Philippines, Kerala (India) and Java. This article is based on the initial round of studies in the Philippines. Thereafter the first round of studies in Kerala has also been carried out and an article is forthcoming. (Preliminary conclusions are available in my "Popular politics of democratisation: Initial results on the importance of democratisation for radical popular movements in the Philippines and Kerala", Paper to Conference on Social Movements in the Third World, Lund (Sweden) 18-21 August, 1993.) Then comes a study in Java – and finally the second roound of restudies of all the cases.