

# **Towards Studies of the Importance of Democracy for Popular Movements**

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As mentioned in my first lecture, it became increasingly difficult in the 1960s to uphold the idea that the "modernisation" of non-socialist developing countries would lead to replications of democratic transformations in Western Europe. The tendency was rather one of authoritarianism. Some said that this was due to undeveloped capitalism and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Others claimed instead that it was because of the way in which the societies were integrated into the international capitalist system.<sup>2</sup> Since the mid-80's, however, we witness instead more rule of law, civil liberties, and political democratisation, not least in South and Southeast Asia.

Many scholars now say that this is because capitalism and bourgeois forces, including huge new middle classes, have finally developed.<sup>3</sup> Others claim that it is rather the previous negative fea-

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<sup>1</sup>For a recent contribution see Hydén, Göran, *No Shortcuts to Progress*. (Heinemann, London, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>See the classical writings of André Gunder Frank and Samir Amin and, for instance, O'Donnell, Guillermo, *Modernisation and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1973) and Evans, Peter *Dependent Development: The Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). For an Asian discussion in the same tradition, see Budiman, Arief, "The State and Industrialisation in Indonesia", in *Dependency Issues in Korean Development*, (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1987). For interesting combinations of the two perspectives mentioned in the text, see e.g. Martinussen, John, *Staten i periferie og post-koloniale samfund: Indien og Pakistan*. (Aarhus: Politica, Aarhus University, 1980) and Mouzelis, Nicos P. *Politics in the Semi-Periphery: Early Parliamentarism and Late Industrialisation in the Balkans and Latin America*, (London: Macmillan, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Cf., for instance, the four volume series edited by Diamond, L., Linz, J.J., and Lipset, S.M. *Democracy in Developing Countries*, of which I am mainly drawing on Volume 3: *Democracy in Asia* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications/Sage, 1989). One example of a recent exciting discussion within the Marxian tradition is Richard Robison's *The Dynamics of Authoritarianism: Theoretical Debates and the Indonesian Case*, Paper to the ASAA Conference, Griffith University, July 1990.

tures, such as dependency, clientelism etc., which have grown worse and made authoritarianism untenable. This has finally opened 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 are intact.<sup>4</sup> Yet others, including myself, say instead that capitalism really has expanded, but that the dominating bourgeois forces have also promoted their positions by capturing state institutions and substantial public resources. Therefore it is hardly this very development of capitalism which has opened up for some rule of law, certain liberties and democratic forms of government – but mainly increasing dissent among those businessmen, professionals, farmers, workers and others with certain bargaining powers who suffer from, or no longer need, all the political monopolies.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, and irrespective of the various interpretations, all seem to agree that, labour and middle class movements have got more solid socio-economic bases and that many new social movements have also mushroomed. The movements grow increasingly more important and their room of manoeuvre expands. It is true that some seem to be almost neo-liberal and that many, for instance, seek shelter behind various ethnic or state-based patrons. But the movements in general contribute to the extension of civil rights. And their various demands and the cooperation between them may lead to democratic concessions from ruling groups.<sup>6</sup> Actors as different as the World Bank and leftist aid activists are supportive of a stronger "civil society" and "non-governmental organisations".

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. e.g. O'Donnell, G., Schmitter, P., and Whitehead, L (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), including the theoretical contribution by Adam Przeworski, and for an Asian example Ben Anderson's brilliant article on the resurrection after 1986 of "Cacique democracy in the Philippines", in *New Left Review*, No. 169, 1988.

<sup>5</sup>See my *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). Cf. also several of the contributions, including Tanter's, Budiman's, and my own, in *State and Civil Society in Indonesia* (ed. Arief Budiman), Monash University, Australia, 1990.

<sup>6</sup>On this last point, cf. the argument put forward by Björn Beckman in his *Structural Adjustment and Democracy: Interest Group Resistance to Structural Adjustment and the Development of the Democracy Movement in Africa – a Research Proposal* (Department of Political Science, University of Stockholm, 1990).

## **The problem**

However, an important question that remains to be answered is whether or not those among the popular movements that aim at a radically different path of development will themselves give priority to democratisation.<sup>7</sup> (Radical popular movements will hereafter be labelled RPMs.)

The substance and relevance of this question should be clear if we begin by briefly recalling the historical experiences of the full emergence of democracy in Western Europe. Of course it is true that the transition to democratic forms of government in Western Europe was 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 economic and other demands, especially from the rapidly expanding labour movement.

However, most scholars agree also on the importance of the other side of the coin (which is also the aspect I shall focus upon): That these structural conditions later on caused a majority of the important RPMs themselves to organise democratically, accept constitutionalism, and give priority to the struggle for popular sovereignty in order to support their socialist oriented development projects. Furthermore, this democratic orientation followed also from the RPMs' own reasoning – from their Marxist understanding of how to transform dynamic and comparatively pluralistic capitalist societies from within.

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<sup>7</sup>In this paper, a "movement" indicates an organisation *and* the people rallying around it. "Popular" indicates by the people, not by the rulers, etc. "Radical" indicates that the movements aim at extensive changes of society, but also that it is informed by leftist views.

All this has traditionally been contrasted both with Eastern Europe (especially the Soviet Union) *and* with the Third World, where most RPMs have not given priority to democratisation. The common structural explanation is that the movements had less stable social bases and faced very different situations. The bourgeois forces were weaker; and so was the labour movement. Some kind of feudalism, state-authoritarianism, and foreign domination were very much alive. From the RPMs' own Marxist point of view, it was thus quite possible to argue, firstly, that they themselves must enforce the political, economic, and social modernisation which the bourgeoisie had not carried out *and* start building socialism; and secondly, that this task required special means and leadership. In other words: The old system was rotten. The bourgeoisie could not do much about it. Democratisation was not instrumental to the RPMs. Most of the already indicated preconditions for democracy in Western Europe were missing in Eastern Europe and in the Third World. They had to be created. In the Soviet Union by way of a revolution. In Third World societies by tackling imperialists, their domestic capitalist allies, authoritarian states, and so-called remnants of feudalism.

We all know about the implications of this for Eastern Europe.<sup>8</sup> In the Third World, most RPMs tried to uphold the "original" nationalist state-led projects – but often became clients of new state-based patrons "or took to the hills" as outright revolutionaries.<sup>9</sup> But while generally speaking all this has taken place in many Third World countries, one may still wonder if the current political and economic transformations that I hinted at in the beginning of this paper have not drastically altered the conditions. Will RPMs now perhaps even play an important role in the full emergence of democracy by giving priority to democratisation, as did many similar movements in Western Europe? To my knowledge there has been comparatively little research into this general problem. The tentative answers are usually negative:

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<sup>8</sup>Including the fact that already the "special means", not to talk about the state-socialist system that emerged, prevented, until losing all dynamics, even the diffusion of power which has proved necessary if critics shall have a real say.

<sup>9</sup>See, for instance, my own *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The Destruction of the PKI in Indonesia* (London: Zed Books, 1984) as well as *What's Wrong...Vol. I and Vol. II*, op.cit.

The previously mentioned argument that the current democratisation is mainly the negotiated institutionalisation of relations between the dominating parties, while the basic relations of power and exploitation are intact, implies, of course, that the preconditions for changes among the RPMs are few, even if certain new liberties may allow for occasional democratic work, especially in urban areas. And those who explain instead the tendency towards democracy with the development of capitalism usually stress the importance of the new middle classes.<sup>10</sup> Looked at in this way, the people with a weaker position who also benefit from rapid economic growth may keep a low profile,<sup>11</sup> while the RPMs are confined to being the "victims of development" who find few chances of working within the system.

Furthermore, it is usually argued that the RPMs' own Marxist oriented reading of the situation allows only for tactical use of what is often labelled a temporary democratic space. The RPMs are likely instead to continue identifying fundamental relations of power which prevent alternative paths of development and which can only be altered by extraordinary means. For instance, most of the Philippine Left focused on "semi-feudalism" and imperialism, neglected democratisation and became almost irrelevant in 1986, as huge masses of the people followed instead bourgeois leaders who rose the banner of democracy and actually got rid of the Marcos' regime.<sup>12</sup>

I am not ignoring the fact that some of these negative propositions may prove correct. My own results from extensive studies of the radical Left in South and Southeast Asia suggest even that its once propelling and politically viable development project has been out-

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<sup>10</sup>This may also be maintained from a Marxist point of view. For one example related to Asia, see Robison, *op.cit.*

<sup>11</sup>Cf. e.g. Huntington, Samuel, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?", in *Political Science Quarterly*, 99:2, 1984.

<sup>12</sup>Törnquist, Olle, "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.

dated by the dynamics of capitalism.<sup>13</sup> However, the same results, among others, point also in other directions. There are no full-fledged alternatives to the old RPM-project in the region. But some important movements are rethinking. Many new are coming up. And I find it interesting that already as RPMs tackle pressing obstacles to their followers' attempts to improve their daily lives, they often face problems related to the monopolisation of more or less public institutions and resources, which constitute important parts of capitalism in the region. Actually, even some significant movements with communist roots and bases among peasants and "victims of development" have tried to fight these monopolies by way of democratising public institutions and resources, rather than by privatising them or by seeking support from patrons. Hence, there are exciting indications, that the special way in which capitalism has expanded in the area may cause RPMs to give priority to democratisation.

Moreover, my results also indicate that while it is true that the Marxist oriented teachings which the RPMs used to consult neglected this monopolisation – and thereby also neglected many arguments in favour of democratisation – it is at least theoretically possible for the movements to take account of the monopolies and suggest democratic solutions without abandoning more basic Marxist approaches to the study of power and social change, such as the focus on relations of production. This perspective may be broadened to include also conditions of production and studies of, for instance, the control of formally public resources as well as the capacity to regulate many necessary preconditions for production such as credits via state and markets.

To sum up: The different scholarly views of the structural conditions the RPMs are facing, and their own Marxist oriented understanding, give rise to various general propositions on RPMs and democracy. The specific problem is therefore to examine this relation more closely by generating and discussing more precise hypo-

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<sup>13</sup>See at first hand my *What's Wrong...Vol I and II*, op.cit. and the attempt to summarise in *What's Wrong with Third World Marxism? Political Lessons from Indonesia, India, and the Philippines* (Akut 44, Uppsala 1991).

theses about in what respects the RPMs themselves actually find democratisation more or less important – and how this is related to, firstly, various structural conditions, and, secondly, to the movements' own reading of the situation as they try to promote radically different paths of development.

### **The approach**

The question is now how one could go about such a study. I hope you do not mind if I discuss the issues in relation to my own new project. One way of probing into the question would be to study when democracy may make sense to representative movements with varying perspectives in different settings. However, personally I will *not* do this. It may be more fruitful to take the opportunity of turning directly to some important RPMs which already seem to focus upon democratisation in different countries – and then study these movements over time.

The most productive approach would thus be to select significant RPMs which (a) are unlikely to be democratic (because of their ideological roots<sup>14</sup> and bases among peasants and the "victims of development"), but nevertheless, by now, seem to focus upon it, and (b) face rather typical conflicts in different settings. Thereafter, when such movements have been given the best possible chance to prove their democratic potential, one can expose the showcases to a most critical study of in what respects and why they first became, now are, and then will continue to be more or less committed to democratisation for some years ahead. Having said this we have to identify such exciting cases, operationalise the questions, and work out the necessary analytical tools. Let me begin with the methodological issues and return then to the cases.

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<sup>14</sup>As the reader will soon find out, I have been able to select cases with more or less communist roots in India and the Philippines but not, for obvious reasons, in Indonesia – where I shall instead focus on radical activists with followers in an area where the previous communist movement was quite strong.

## Situating movements and democracy

The first main question is in what respects the RPMs gave and continue to give more or less importance to democratisation during a certain period of time. To answer this question we need a non-partisan definition of what democracy and democratisation is all about. This can then serve as an analytical tool helping us to sort out which aspects the movements might pay attention to over time.

I presume all agree that the essence of democracy is sovereignty of the people in accordance with the principle of one man, one vote – and that democratisation involves the introduction of this.<sup>15</sup> But while a definition of democracy should be limited, we know also that its essence is closely related to many other factors. These, I suggest, may be classified as, (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.<sup>16</sup>

These dimensions of democracy may differ from one society to another and vary over time. Moreover, scholars as well as actors such as our movements do have different opinions about them. The discourse is huge.<sup>17</sup> To answer the question in what respects and for how long the RPMs stress democratisation, I shall investigate what they say and actually do during a certain period of time with regard to the essence of democracy as well as the four additional dimensions:

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<sup>15</sup>Since studies of what is formalised may be separated from what is real, I should perhaps mention that I am mainly but not exclusively interested in the latter.

<sup>16</sup>One could thus say, that democracy *has to do with* the actual capacity of the adult citizens to exercise in various forms equal and effective rule over resources which they hold in common without thereby undermining the absolutely necessary prerequisites for this rule. (This conceptualisation may also be useful in discussions about "full or maximum democracy", but that is *not* necessary within this research programme.)

<sup>17</sup>In this paper, time and space thus prevent me from making even a brief review. But I will certainly relate to the discourse when presenting and discussing my results.



- What are the RPMs' positions, including within the movements themselves, with regard to popular sovereignty and the principle of one man, one vote?
- What preconditions for democracy to become meaningful do the RPMs give priority to? What about the right to organise and express opinions in society but also within the movements themselves? How do they view constitutionalism and the rule of law? And how much of social and economic equality or autonomy do they find necessary in order for the citizens and members to be capable of casting their votes in accordance with their opinion without having to submit to the wishes of their leader, employer or landlord, or dominant propaganda from certain candidates, or intervening national or foreign governments or armies?
- What forms of democracy do the RPMs emphasise? Multi-party systems? Decentralisation of government, extensive participation (direct control), and co-operative efforts in addition to representation (indirect control), parties, and elections? Is constitutionalism important? What about the forms of governing their own movements (including the problem of "democratic centralism")?
- Do the RPMs stress that democratic forms of government should be extended to almost all resources which people have in common? Where do they draw the line? Moreover, do they pay attention to resources which are already publicly controlled and regulated but perhaps non-democratically governed because of various monopolistic practices? And what recommendations do they make: Deregulation and privatisation or some kind of democratic rule?
- What democratically decided policies would the RPMs find undemocratic since they run counter to the necessary prerequisites for democracy to become meaningful? Only policies undermining basic civil rights – or also policies which may for instance give rise to serious inequalities? Moreover, to what extent do the RPMs act democratically? Do their ends justify undemocratic means?

The sources that I shall use are documents, news clippings, studies carried out by local scholars, and interviews with strategic leaders and activists of the RPMs at various levels as well as with dissidents and opponents having experienced what the RPMs actually do.

### **Towards explaining movements and democracy**

Having established in what respects the RPMs give more or less importance to democratisation over time, the results remain to be explained. There are of course numerous causes and reasons for the variations. As already indicated, I shall try to generate more precise hypotheses related to the two dimensions that are 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 Marxist-oriented understanding of the situation and of the prospects of change. The general validity of the hypotheses will be discussed in a comparative perspective by focusing upon movements which are similar to each other but appear in different settings over time.

The most difficult task is to design a feasible study of the conditions, i.e. of the possible *causes*. Instead of approaching the full range of structural factors that may generate interest in democratisation, I have worked out and tried a shortcut. My point of departure will be certain significant and concrete projects whereby the RPMs try to promote a radically different path of development – *and* which they until now claim require democratisation in order to succeed. Let us assume also that I have already analysed their different positions on democratisation over time. In order to find out what may have caused these positions, I will identify the main structural obstacles confronted in trying to implement the projects. These difficulties are likely to have varied over time – and the point is of course that I

shall analyse how they relate to the movements' positions on democratisation in different settings.<sup>18</sup>

For example, let us say that a RPM is engaged in promoting a cooperative that must have access to public credits, and that the movement tries seriously to mobilise the necessary credits by giving priority to democratisation of the relevant public institutions. I will then examine the problems that the movement faces in order to get the credits. What kinds of obstacles is the movement up against when, for instance, after some time abandoning democratisation and subordinating itself instead as a client to a patron who can provide the money? And what about similar movements in different settings? My sources are, once again, mainly news clippings, studies carried out by local scholars, and, most importantly, interviews with people who are or were strategically placed inside or outside the movements in relation to the projects and conflicts under review. This time, however, meaningful documents are often rare.

Having analysed how various obstacles and conflicts relate to the movements' different positions on democratisation over time, it should be possible finally to discuss in a comparative perspective hypotheses associated with the general question of under what conditions struggles for alternative development may generate interest in democratisation. Hopefully, this may also be of relevance to the development aid discourse.

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<sup>18</sup>One can, of course, argue that there may be other important determinants than the obstacles which the RPMs face. Is it not likely that I will be limited to the obstacles which the movements themselves choose to fight in accordance with their perspectives? This is partly correct. But the most important reason for my shortcut is that it *is* a shortcut; a shortcut which saves time and thus makes it possible for me to carry out additional studies of the movement's position on democratisation as well as of their perspectives. Moreover, to approach instead the full range of relevant structural factors is not only an enormous task but furthermore implies that one must (therefore) make use of some theories – which in their turn also restrict one's capacity to take certain important determinants into consideration. Finally, the movements are *not* fully capable of consciously selecting enemies and problems. The most critical "objective" factors are likely to show up anyway – at least if the work of the RPMs is of some significance; and especially if the structural conditions are as important as many scholars, including myself, maintain. But just as those analysts who make use of some theories when they turn directly to the structural factors must take into consideration that they are only applying *certain* perspectives, and discuss other scholars' perspectives as well, I must of course also discuss the extent to which the movements' perspectives affect my "picture".

The possible *reason* why movements are giving more or less emphasis to democratisation which I shall examine is that the RPMs' own Marxist-oriented understanding of the situation may support or prevent such policies. In my background studies<sup>19</sup> it has proved fruitful to identify first the RPMs' theoretical and strategical perspectives and then examine if, and if so in what way, the perspectives, firstly, have considered the structural obstacles that RPMs have faced, and, secondly, are related to the movements' positions on democratisation. For instance, we may find that the actual priority which a RPM has given to participation in elections does not at all follow from its perspectives but is instead tactical or pragmatic. Or it may be that while a movement's perspective favours democracy, its actual priorities and actions have been far from democratic.

The latter example illustrates also how one can discuss whether movements are more or less genuinely democratic: The materialistic assumption is that many actors may maintain that democracy is important as such, but that their consistency may be doubted as long as it cannot be substantiated that democratic aims and means are instrumental to the achievement of their central goal, for instance radically different development.

### The cases

India, Indonesia, and the Philippines differ sharply in terms of structural factors and represent three important kinds of rule. For instance, the stability of India's democracy is remarkable, despite harsh state interventions, clientelism, and communalism. The room of manoeuvre for RPMs is considerable. In Indonesia, on the other hand, it is rather the stability of authoritarian rule which is unique, even though a new generation of RPMs is under way. In between these extremes is the less stable Philippines. Marcos' despotism and Maoist guerilla struggles, after the peaceful "people's power re-

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<sup>19</sup>See my "Communists and Democracy: Two Indian Cases and One Debate" in *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* Vol 23:2 (1991) and "Democracy and the Philippine Left" *op. cit.*

volution" of 1986, have been replaced by an uneven process of democratisation in which many RPMs take part among other actors.

Let me now, within these different settings, turn to the individual cases. They will be politically significant RPMs which are unlikely to be democratic because of their ideological roots and bases among peasants as well as "victims of development", but nevertheless seem to focus upon democratisation as they face rather typical conflicts in each of the different countries. The cases shall also be possible to study both independently of and in fruitful contact with those directly involved as well as in close contact with local scholars.

#### 1: Democratic developmentalism in Kerala (with references to West Bengal)

The best Indian examples of this kind of RPMs having started to focus upon democratisation are related to communist-led struggles in rural and semi-urban West Bengal and Kerala. While I shall concentrate on Kerala – which harbours the most recent, exciting and still open-ended cases – I shall also, for comparative purposes, use my previous and others' ongoing research on the attempts to decentralise and democratise in West Bengal since 1977, in the framework of agrarian reforms which differ from those in Kerala.<sup>20</sup> The reforms in West Bengal have not done away with landlordism. Many people have become dependent on alternative Left-patronage. The peasant movement in Kerala, however, enforced India's most radical land reform. Agricultural and other labourers successfully defended their interests. Teachers, scientists, and organic intellectuals developed impressive cultural movements. The Left stressed redistributive policies and reached its peak in the late 1960s and early 70s. But the free peasants had only small pieces of

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<sup>20</sup>See at first hand my *What's Wrong...Vol II* and "Communists and Democracy..." op.cit. The scholars include Drs. Kirsten Westergaard and Neil Webster at the Centre for Development Research in Copenhagen, G.K. Leiten within the Indo-Dutch programme on alternatives in development, Dr. Nripen Bandyopadhyaya at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta, Dr. Biplab Dasgupta, who is also member of the national parliament and peasant leader, and the till recently Land Use Commissioner in Kerala, Dr. Subrata Sinha, who is based in and has extensive experiences from West Bengal.

land. The labourers were well organised. And the vital agricultural resources besides land were often cornered on the markets and within the co-operative societies as well as the the organs of the state. Communal and political loyalties were highly important.

Consequently, agricultural production stagnated. The few private and public-sector industries did likewise. Capitalists usually invested outside the state or in commerce, real estate and money-lending. Neither were most remittances from the many migrants invested productively. The employment problem grew seriously. The RPMs faced a blind alley and elections were lost. In the mid-80s however, this crisis paved the way for the idea that unemployment must now be tackled by directly promoting development rather than, as before, by first splitting the pie. Since this in turn required better resource management – which presupposed clean and efficient government – democratisation came up as a realistic and attractive way of approaching the problems. Actually, those ideas helped bring the Left Front – including moderate communist, socialist and liberal-left parties – back into office already in the 1987 state elections.<sup>21</sup>

Since the mid-1980s it is thus possible to follow closely the RPMs which opted for democratisation – and to virtually see in what respects and why this has made and maybe will continue to make sense for them, including after June 1991 when the Left was voted out of office again.<sup>22</sup> Their main thrust so far is decentralisation of power and popular participation, so that planning, better resource management, and thereby development, can start from below and be based on joint interests.

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<sup>21</sup>See my "Communists and Democracy..." op.cit. for more comprehensive historical analyses.

<sup>22</sup>Having been extremely successful in district elections in early 1991, when democratisation was on the agenda, the Left failed in the State and national elections in June which at least partly were affected by the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. For analyses of these elections see Thomas Issac's "Kerala's verdict", "Muslim League: the inevitable end", "Kerala: advantage LDF", and "The Kerala shock: Factors that revised the trend" in *Frontline* February 16-March 1, March 2-15, April 13-26, and July 20-August 2, 1991, plus Thomas Issac and Mohana Kumar, "Kerala Elections, 1991: Lessons and Non-Lessons", in *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 23, 1991.

In accordance with my methodological principles, I shall study some of their main projects: (1) decentralisation of government and administration to districts and *panchayats*,<sup>23</sup> (2) massive mapping of local resources,<sup>24</sup> (3) group farming,<sup>25</sup> and (4) cultural, including literacy, campaigns among weak sections of the population.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, I shall not only follow these schemes generally, but also in two local settings; in semi-urban Ullor, nearby the capital of Trivandrum, and in a historical stronghold of the peasant movement, in the district of Trichur in central Kerala.<sup>27 28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>*Panchayat*, rural local government covering many villages/cluster of houses – large parts of Kerala is actually semi-urban. While the new state-government now negate the decentralisation of powers to the district councils which the Left Front Government had started to implement, (see e.g. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Dec. 7, 1991, pp.7993 f.), the RPMs reactions to these obstacles remain to be studied.

<sup>24</sup>Nobody has a clear overall picture of what resources are available and what can be done, for instance, to prevent erosion or irrigate fields through simple local planning. Concerned scientists have initiated a massive mapping of resources, approved by the Left-government and coordinated by the Centre for Earth Science Studies and the Land Use Commissioner (Dr. Subrata Sinha). When the experts have done their part, instantly trained activists of the People's Science Movement collect information from, and spread the message to, ordinary local people. (The People's Science Movement is an independent radical popular movement with its roots in Kerala and a very wide following and basically aiming at spreading scientific knowledge and promoting its careful usage by and in the interest of common people. Its dynamic leaders include Dr. M.P. Parameswaran.) The plan was also to incorporate the results in the *Kerala State Gazetteer*. This is a series of public major reference books, originally mainly for administrators. et al. The editor under the Left-Government (Dr. K.N.Ganesh), however, tried to reach out to a much wider audience with relevant and readable basic knowledge. Moreover, local plans would form the base for the State Planning Board.; this was also the expressed intention of the until recently vice chairman of the board, prof. I.S. Gulati. Many of those involved try to continue these efforts despite the fall of the Left Front Government.

<sup>25</sup>Group-farming of rice was initiated by the Left-government (especially by the dynamic former minister of agriculture, V.V. Raghavan) and peasant movements to, for instance, pool resources, and thus promote agricultural production without harming anybody. (The labourers seem to accept it.) This may expand to other crops, processing, and marketing. The projects continue.

<sup>26</sup>The People's Science Movement tries new forms of popular communication. Film is most powerful in Kerala. For example, production and local distribution of good video-films have been initiated. Moreover, to make the very poor capable of participating in the new processes, a literacy campaign, involving hundreds of thousands of volunteers, has started.

<sup>27</sup>Ullor is a *panchayat* where the Left has gained many new "non-traditional" voters because of its altered policies in 1987 and where scholars with whom I cooperate are also doing studies. In Trichur the plan is to do local studies in the Ollukkara, Madakkathara and/or Panancheri *panchayats*. The final decision on which of the *panchayats* to focus on will have to be taken later since it depends on what studies are carried out by scholars with whom I am cooperating and where local leaders and others involved are present and able to assist me.

<sup>28</sup>Research has been carried out on the background of why RPMs in Kerala and West Bengal began turning to democratisation. (See my *What's Wrong...Vol II* op. cit. and "Communists and Democracy..." op. cit.) The new study has been planned, introduced to the RPMs concerned, and will be carried out in association with the Centre for Development Studies in

## 2: Anchoring "people's power" in the Philippines

In a previous study of why democracy did not make sense for most of the Philippine Left, it was possible also to identify three ways in which RPMs with communist roots and bases among peasants and "victims of development" seem *now* to give real importance to.<sup>29</sup> One cannot cover those three tendencies in one study only by taking one area or one issue as a point of departure. A major case study and two sub-studies are thus necessary. Let me begin with the primary and most spectacular case.

### Major case: From armed anti-feudalism to cooperative farming and popular politics

One of the main bases of the until recently so powerful Philippine Left grew out of the poor Tarlac<sup>30</sup> peasants' struggle in Central Luzon, first against the Japanese occupation and then against Philippine landlords. Moreover, the New People's Army was formed here in 1969 by their leader Bernabe Buscayno, alias Commander Dante. Twenty years later, however, the same peasants and the same leader are instead busy with a new project based on cooperative farming.<sup>31</sup>

While in prison (1976-1986), Dante produced new ideas but failed to change the line of the old RPMs even after the fall of Marcos.<sup>32</sup> He then returned to Tarlac to start anew. Here, the peasants had forced Marcos to implement a partial land reform, but now they faced exploitative businessmen with good political contacts and control of inputs, rice-mills, marketing etc. Like in Kerala, the farmers would have to come together. The new liberties under Mrs.

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Trivandrum, especially in close contact with its senior research fellows Michael Tharakan and Thomas Issac.

<sup>29</sup>See my "Philippine Left and Democracy." op.cit.

<sup>30</sup>The most important home-province of the Aquinos only some 75 km north of Manila.

<sup>31</sup>For more comprehensive information about the new project, see my "Philippine Left and Democracy" op. cit., and "Dante: revolutionären som blev kooperatör" i *SIDA Rapport 1/91* (Also in *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 30, 1990.)

<sup>32</sup>Despite the fact that he was, for instance, the most successful Left candidate in the 1987 elections.



Aquino made it possible for Dante's group to organise in late 1988 a legal cooperative among some 500 suspicious but loyal farmers and to ask for government credits. Already two years later the results were phenomenal: Some 8000 farmers with individual plots;<sup>33</sup> efficient and collective use of modern inputs and methods; drastically increased production; collective market arrangements; less indebted farmers and better paid workers; new jobs; a collective rice mill, a duck farm, a fish pond, and production of organic fertilisers; government credits repaid ahead of schedule... Moreover, this continued. And despite the devastating after-effects of the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo very nearby, Dante's is still the main success story under Aquino.

Critics say that the project cannot be replicated, since it is rooted in the previous successful struggle for land, Dante's charisma, his special capacity as a not always democratic leader and organiser, plus his good contacts with Mrs. Aquino. It may be difficult to sustain even the individual project when she is out of office. Some have it that, while Mrs Aquino (ab)uses Dante's success, he silently waits for protection, money, and the chance to run as governor in the 1992 elections. And maybe he will.

The main thrust of the project, however, is to demonstrate, firstly, that the critical contradictions are more and more related to the control and management of a lot of other resources besides land and to test a democratically oriented way of tackling this; secondly, that propaganda and "conscientisation" is a waste of time unless people first experience that, for instance, cooperation is good because it helps to irrigate and thereby grow another crop; thirdly, that one must work hard and rapidly to reach as far as possible under the present comparatively liberal conditions, because it is only when people face the limits, and have to defend their chances to improve their lives through their own joint hard work, that they will fight for radical changes.

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<sup>33</sup>Actually, the cooperative is larger than the famous nearby huge sugar-growing hacienda Luisita which is partially owned by Mrs. Aquino and cover some 6000 ha. While the cooperative is, of course, endowed with less capital, it has recently expanded even more.

Here is thus a unique chance to follow in what respects and why democratisation has and maybe will make sense within this consciously aimed and so far powerfully implemented rational and materialistic logic of the new RPM in Tarlac. Moreover, carried out in this way, plus independently and by myself, Dante and his close associates welcome the study.<sup>34</sup>

### Sub-case 1: Strengthening "civil society"

The second democratic tendency among Philippine RPMs is usually labelled the "popular democrats" and associated with leading dissidents of the orthodox Left such as Edicio de la Torre and Horacio Morales.<sup>35</sup> In the mid-1980s, 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". As their post-Marcos coalitions neither generated substantial gains from critical support of the early Aquino government nor 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.<sup>36</sup>

Various development projects are initiated and supported among grassroot organisations, simultaneously with efforts to promote

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<sup>34</sup>Over-all research affiliation in the Philippines is with the Centre for Third World Studies and its leaders prof. Randolf David and Alex Magno (Sociologist and political scientist respectively. Magno is currently directing a project on possible political alliances in face of the 1992 elections.), University of the Philippines (U.P). During this sub-case study I will keep close contact with research fellows Eduardo Tadem and Teresa Encarnacion, U.P, who do projects related to Tarlac.(Within a Dutch (Centre for Asian Studies, Amsterdam) - Philippine research project on agrarian issues in Central Luzon.)

<sup>35</sup>For a more comprehensive analysis, see my "Philippine Left and Democracy" op.cit. Father Ed. de la Torre among other things initiated the Christians for National Liberation in the early-70s; Horacio "Boy" Morales was a celebrated executive secretary under Marcos and head of the 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.

<sup>36</sup>The main national umbrella-institutions are the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) and the Institute for Popular Democracy (IPD) with a rural and urban bias respectively; especially the latter is also functioning as a research institute. Moreover, the "popular democrats" are organised politically and participate in elections.

coalitions and "people's councils". The international discourse on "civil society against the state" in general, and the role of NGOs and new social movements in particular has been adopted, as have the large sums of money available for such projects on the development-aid-markets.<sup>37</sup> One important question is thus if this deliberate attempt to develop civil liberties and certain other pre-conditions for democracy also harbour and breed efforts to promote democratic government.

The well articulated activities on the central level will only be studied briefly. I have instead been looking for a local and at least partly rural case which the main leaders themselves agree illustrate their ideas about democratisation – and thus also helps me avoid strawman arguments when carrying out a concrete critical study. The agreement<sup>38</sup> is that I shall approach some of "their" leaders, activists, and "targets" in Camarines Sur<sup>39</sup> – both in Naga city and in more rural areas – where even the governor supports "the strengthening of civil society".<sup>40</sup> The "NagaPopDems" are best known for their role in establishing a local peace zone between the New People's Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines, but also do development and action work. And the PRRM are involved in extensive NGO development projects.<sup>41 42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Actually, in the Philippines, as in India or Indonesia, almost every political force, including the religious institutions and some business factions, have created their own environment of so-called NGOs. And every cluster has its national and international patrons and financiers. I will pay attention to this. (Even president Aquino has formed a populist movement (*Kabising*) to by-pass sections of the central administration plus certain politicians and relate directly to governors, mayors, and friendly NGOs; which, of course, has caused other politicians to establish new NGOs.) However, within the framework of the proposed study, the "popular democrats" merit special attention because they are important and have developed their interest in certain aspects of democracy from within and in conflict with the mainstream RPMs.

<sup>38</sup>At first hand with Isagani Serrano, vice president of PRRM, and Clark Soriano, research director at the IPD. The general questions have also been discussed with Boy Morales and Ed.de la Torre.

<sup>39</sup>A province of some national importance on the Camarines peninsula some 300 km by road south east of Manila.

<sup>40</sup>His reasons merit a special story, but his name is Luis Villafuerte, his background is with Marcos, his present image is liberal, he is also head of the league of governors, and one of his assistants is a leading "popular democrat".

<sup>41</sup>I will be able to benefit from close contact with independent scholars related to the Institute for Popular Democracy. Among other things, this institute did reputed and most exciting studies of political clans in relation to the 1987 and 1988 elections. These will now be followed up in face of the 1992 elections and include contributions from scholars such as already mentioned prof. Randolph David and political science professor Francisco Nemenzo,

## Sub-case 2: Community action and urban expansion

The third democratic tendency among the RPMs is related to the socialists, who are sometimes influenced by Christianity and often strongest in urban areas, including among "victims of development". Their experiences from community development work, where the problems are often directly related to the state, seem to generate interest in democratisation.

The NGO *Hasik*<sup>43</sup> – which is headed by a leading scholar of community development, prof. Karina Constantino-David,<sup>44</sup> and is related to the socialist organisation *Bisig*,<sup>45</sup> which is in contact with the Scandinavian labour movement – is since some years supporting joint efforts by poor people of Welfareville, in Mandaluyong, Quezon City, Greater Manila. The inhabitants are squatting on government land and threatened by eviction. A minister in charge has tried to sell the land for the development of a modern residential area.<sup>46</sup> Also, if a road is constructed right through Welfareville, a new connection can be established with the fashionable financial centre of Makati next door, and landprices will sky-rocket. While people try to tackle this, they face also, for instance, employment problems and suffer from poor if any public services, as well as middlemen demanding high prices for products traded to the area. Unions related to *Bisig* therefore try to organise areawise; among others the many female garment workers living here. And collective efforts have been made to install some fresh water pipes and electricity, plus to tackle prices together with local stall-keepers and vendors.

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now chancellor of University of the Philippines in the Visayas, who first got me into studies of Philippine politics.

<sup>42</sup>After the eruption of Mt Pinatubo, the "popular democrats" have also been involved in extensive work nearby Dante's cooperative. This might make it possible to integrate the major case study of Dante's project with the sub-case study of the "popular democrats" and thus set aside Camarines Sur.

<sup>43</sup>*Hasik*: Harnessing Self-reliant Initiatives and Knowledge.

<sup>44</sup>Also under-secretary in the early Aquino government.

<sup>45</sup>This "Union for the Development 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.

<sup>46</sup>She tried to sell the land at a very low price to the Bank of Philippine Islands, led by her son.

I am welcome to study in what respects and why leaders and local activists plus some of their followers have found, and perhaps will continue to find, that democratisation within and in relation to the weak community is instrumental.<sup>47</sup>

### **3: Tackling authoritarian state-led development in Java**

Indonesia's post-colonial development is, especially after 1965, characterised by, on the one hand, the importance and tremendous growth of the state, and, on the other hand, the fact that most public resources and capacities to regulate have been captured by leading officials and their business associates at all levels. Moreover, the state, and those working from within its organs, penetrate and dominate most parts of what may in other countries be identified as civil society.<sup>48</sup>

These processes, however, have also generated centrifugal tendencies. There is now rather widespread opposition, although covert, divided, and organisationally weak. Army officers are losing political and administrative influence as well as business opportunities. Rapid economic development has generated businessmen and professionals who are somewhat less dependent on patronage than before and who are highly critical of the present monopolistic practices. Some foreign partners are also advocating modest liberalisation. Most NGOs argue in favour of human rights and "civil society against the state". They often relate to the "victims of development". A new generation of students rediscover radical perspectives and step outside their campuses, trying to link up with protest movements, for instance among the peasants.

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<sup>47</sup>The study has been planned in cooperation with prof. Karina Constantino-David and, in Welfareville, with area coordinator Berting "Teng" Garlits, who will be able to assist also in the future.

<sup>48</sup>For more comprehensive analyses, see my *Dilemmas...*, and *What's Wrong...Vol. I* and *Vol.II* op.cit.

The outcome is extremely difficult to predict, but among other things some kind of political democratisation may be envisaged. Initially, this is likely to follow from conflicts between already powerful factions related to the state. But will the popular movements – *which in the Indonesian context must claim modest radicalism* – at the same time be able to promote further democratisation? Or will they mainly relate to powerful patrons – or run "offside" and finally go underground?

To study this we need a case epitomising most of these conflicts and tendencies. The reactions of some of these movements in relation to a recent major conflict in Kedung Ombo, Central Java, constitute such a case.<sup>49</sup> Well before the present somewhat more "open" political situation in the country, thousands of peasants and other "victims of development" in the area opposed eviction without reasonable compensation as the state began to enforce the construction of a huge dam to improve rice production and generate hydropower; one of the largest projects of its kind in Asia. Until the mid-1960s, this area was a stronghold for Communists advocating struggles against landlordism. The contemporary movements, however, are new and primarily opposing the way in which the state is governed and much of its policies. Besides the local people themselves, almost all the previously mentioned forces of national importance have become involved: President Suharto and his different more or less official associates, the armed forces, including frustrated officers, various domestic and international NGOs, dissident intellectuals, radical students, and, finally, the main financier – the World Bank. Kedung Ombo may thus be studied both as an outcome of previous transformations *and* as the beginning of a new dynamic process.

There are three streams of movements in Kedung Ombo which, in different ways, maintain an interest in democratisation. In what respects and why have they focused and will they perhaps continue focusing upon democratisation? (1) *The grass-root tendency* with

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<sup>49</sup>For a somewhat more comprehensive analysis of this case, see my *Notes towards the study of popular movements and democratisation in Indonesia* Paper to the 4 th annual workshop of the European Social Science Java Network, Copenhagen June 12-14, 1991.

links to Christian community workers and local legal advisers who first attended to people in the area.<sup>50</sup> Their main thrust is to promote consciousness and organisation by tackling concrete problems on the very local level, so that democracy and another development may be built from bottom up. (2) *The NGO tendency* which is more based on dissident intellectuals with excellent networks who have since many years formed legal aid, research, documentation, humanitarian, and development organisations – some of which have been important for the people in Kedung Ombo.<sup>51</sup> They emphasise broad alliances and basic common interests in strengthening human rights and "civil society against the state". (3) *The radical activist tendency* with roots among students who argue, for instance, that daring joint demonstrations with peasants may create more room of manoeuvre and enable less radical people and movements to speak up and demand changes on the central as well as local levels.

Working relations have been initiated with leading members of these movements.<sup>52</sup>

### **Concluding words**

So much for my own tentative ideas of how one could contribute to a better understanding of popular movements and democracy via a critical examination of some most promising and politically significant examples. Of course there are other possible paths and approaches. Critical remarks and comments and, thus, most welcome!

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<sup>50</sup>One leading personality is Djoni Simanjuntak.

<sup>51</sup>Most prominent is the Legal Aid Institute in Jakarta (chaired by Abdul Hakim) and its local branches in Semarang and Yogyakarta. Its close cooperation with the efforts of Father Mangunwijaya in Yogyakarta, who, for instance, supports the "stubborn" peasants in the village of Kedung Pring, is especially interesting since legal aid, networking and local humanitarian work are thereby combined.

<sup>52</sup>I am cooperating with prof. Arief Budiman, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, and related partners.

