

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

### *Looking at the 'Reform Agenda'*

This issue of *Public Policy* is concerned with three peculiar facets of political reform germane to the Philippine system. While not exhaustive, these political reform aspects can certainly constitute the key elements of an alternative “reform agenda” for the country.

The first kind of reform has broadly to do with the issue of instituting electoral reforms. Mindful of the faults inherent in the country's electoral system and processes, Ramon Casiple's “The Party-List Path to a Broadened Philippine Democracy” examines a specific and crucial aspect of the country's electoral political troubles and the effort to address this. Casiple tries to look at the historical underpinnings that brought about the emergence of a more grassroots-oriented party-list electoral politics and how the country's traditional elitist democracy and experience under the Marcos dictatorship prompted the framers of the 1987 Constitution to include provisions mandating the election of party-list representatives in Congress. However, it was only in 1995 that Congress actually enacted the law that implements the party-list provisions of the 1987 Charter.

Casiple's contribution discusses the significance not only of the provisions of the Party List Law of 1995, otherwise known as Republic Act (RA) 7941, but also the dynamics of the implementation of this enabling measure in the 1998 and 2001 elections. While the results may not be encouraging (there were only 14 party-list representatives in the 1998 elections, a number which was down to seven by 2001) and the obstacles confronting party-list electoral participants are certainly daunting, Casiple sees the “potential to build the political capabilities of grassroots-based parties [that] can pave the way to broaden and strengthen democracy in the country” in the future (p. 17).

The article looks at the need to reform the country's party-list system from two perspectives – as an alternative to the prevailing elitist democratic political system and as a means to strengthen the positions of those coming from the margins and the largely disenfranchised grassroots. Although he does so only at the end of the piece, Casiple raises the question of instituting a party-list system within a parliamentary political framework. Indeed, he argues that “a definitive gover-

nance framework for the party-list system... is not the presidential system” (p. 19) – an intriguing subject that invites critique and reexamination.

The second type of political reform discussed in this issue concerns the country’s economic development agenda-setting institutional mechanisms. Eduardo Tadem’s “Official Development Assistance to the Philippines: Can it be Reformed?” explores the immediate issues attendant to the granting of such ODAs “in light of state policy pronouncements and announced shifts in donor policies” from 1986 onwards (p. 26). Tadem contends that current policies in the Philippines in regard to ODA generation and utilization point to “disturbing characteristics... despite policy pronouncements... on shifting towards more social and human development-oriented activities” (p. 55).

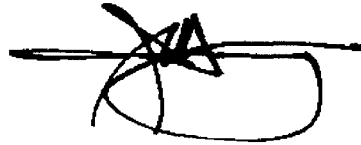
Indeed, he argues for the need for government to adopt “serious, meaningful and substantive mechanisms and structures for more participative and transparent ODA processes”, (p. 57) globalization notwithstanding. This would certainly require a major overhauling of the country’s development agenda setting institutions and process, particularly the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), a subject that very few national leaders since Marcos have had the courage or wisdom to tinker with.

The contribution by Sabrina Querubin, et al. entitled “Legitimizing the Illegitimate: Disregarding the Rule of Law in Estrada v. Disierto and Estrada v. Macapagal-Arroyo” journeys into a third aspect of the political reform agenda by reviewing the Supreme Court in its decision to legally acknowledge the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Inasmuch as the contribution puts into questionable light the integrity of the High Court, it does underscore the need for the country to reform its judicial system. The Querubin, et al. contribution discusses the case of former President Joseph Estrada and his bid to regain the presidency of the Republic after the January 2001 uprising.

Coming in the wake of the publicly perceived intransigence of the Senate impeachment trial of Estrada on charges of corruption and other violations of the Constitution, the so-called EDSA II that led to the ouster of another president from office is described in the article as being “barely bloodless and definitely not a revolution” (p. 66). Apart from indicating the propensity of the Supreme Court to disregard the rule of law in the cases cited, the authors contend that “perhaps

the ultimate casualty ... is the judicial system's credibility and the confidence and assurance it once provided to the ordinary Filipino" (p. 111). Surprisingly, the article does not provide a way out of this politico-juridical problematic.

It is hoped that with these contributions, new and contending insights will be gained on how the Philippine political landscape can be transformed, the extent of the transformation to be made, and in what direction.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a horizontal line with a large, stylized, scribbled mark above it and a loop below it.

