

The Philippine democratic uprising and the contradictions of neoliberalism: EDSA II

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ABSTRACT *Select responses to the January 2001 uprising against the government of President Josef 'Erap' Estrada in the Philippines demonstrate a great deal about certain contradictions and paradoxes implicit in neoliberal conceptions of democratic governance. This paper presents a critique of these conceptions, based on a radical democratic outlook. Dubbed EDSA II—given its location at the same place as the 1986 Epifanio de los Santos uprising against President Ferdinand Marcos—the uprising resulted in Estrada's replacement by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and a different faction of the Philippine political elite. Despite never seriously threatening the hold and influence of traditional political elites in the Philippines, the uprising was criticised by some Western commentators. Their criticisms were founded on mistaken interpretations of events and are a reflection of these commentators' increasing reluctance to endorse any forms of popular political mobilisation and resistance. Their reluctance is a reflection of their neoliberal conception of democratic governance, which privileges the building of institutions to promote market efficiency over issues of power and social change.*

The mass uprising against and subsequent collapse of President Joseph 'Erap' Estrada's government in the Philippines provides both an illustration of many of the main forms of and prevailing attitudes to political struggles for democratisation in the contemporary Third World. Occurring in late January 2001, the uprising generated responses on a variety of overlapping scales: international, regional and national. Simultaneously it demonstrated the increasingly limited capacity of elites committed to neoliberal development policy to endorse or countenance the use of democratic methods of mass mobilisation as a means of securing political and social change. Many proponents of the neoliberal commitment to market-orientated approaches to development and economic growth—purportedly achieved through price stability, trade and investment liberalisation—are increasingly finding themselves opposed to the demands and methods of democratic mass movements.¹ This opposition contradicts their avowed commitment to democratic forms of governance.

The Philippine uprising that commenced on 21 January 2001 was the culmina-

tion of a long campaign to force Estrada to resign. Estrada, elected in 1998, received considerable support from a base of rural poor. An ex-movie star, he had been a supporter of the Marcos dictatorship in the 1970s and was vice president between 1992 and 1998. His ruling coalition successfully established control over the House of Representatives and Senate against the Lakas (National Union of Christian Democrats) opposition party. By early 2000, however, revelations of Estrada's receipts of illegal gambling proceeds from the 'Jueteng' syndicate resulted in an impeachment trial. The prosecution abandoned the trial when pro-Estrada senators voted to withhold crucial evidence. A broad coalition of opposition groups successfully gathered over one million protesters at the Epifanio de los Santos (EDSA) Avenue shrine—the site of the 1986 Manila-based uprising against President Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship. The uprising was subsequently dubbed EDSA II, given its similarities to the 1986 anti-dictatorship movement. Within three days Estrada's government had collapsed and both the Philippine National Police and Armed Forces of the Philippines declared their support for the opposition. On Saturday 21 January the opposition-aligned Vice-President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, was sworn in as new President while Estrada ambiguously 'stepped aside'.

The international responses to the Philippine political crisis, especially from the Western media, were revealing. Within the Philippines there was widespread elation, shared with ambivalence to Arroyo's new presidential regime. Such attitudes contrasted distinctly with the cooler regional and international reception. Surprisingly perhaps, some Western observers seemed highly unenthusiastic about the turn of events in Manila. *Time* reporter Anthony Spaeth lamented that the removal of presidents by mass uprisings in the Philippines had become a 'bad national habit'. Unusually, given that judicial approval was granted Arroyo's succession over Estrada, Spaeth proceeded to rebuke what he considered the protesters' the lack of respect for constitutional processes.² The *Far Eastern Economic Review*, likewise, derided the uprising as 'rich people's power'.³ Many Filipinos had engaged in immense efforts and sacrifice to secure Estrada's ouster and were extremely elated at the outpouring of democratic opposition to the discredited president. To them the response of the 'Western-liberal' press was both insulting and perplexing and prompted responses from national newspapers.⁴

This paper considers the paradoxes that are implicit in both the national and international reception to Arroyo's succession and is concerned with two questions. First, what were the factors that led to the uprising against and collapse of the Estrada government and to the emergence of Arroyo as the new President? Second, why, despite the widespread enthusiasm within the Philippines, were the responses by Western and pro-Western elites so negative? It consists of two parts. The first part examines the context and background to the anti-Estrada uprising and a narrative of the events that culminated in Arroyo's succession. The second part proceeds to develop an analysis of the limitations of and responses to the uprising.

The paper argues that the anti-Estrada uprising and the Western media and other institution's responses reveal much about the limitations of democratisation in the contemporary world. It maintains the stance that, increasingly, the resolu-

tion of issues of development is intrinsically interrelated with the need to formulate alternative modes of democratic governance. Radical democratic processes are necessary to resolve long-standing issues of social exclusion and inequality concerning women, indigenous people, labour and farmers' groups and the environment.⁵ Implicit within a radical democratic model is the construction of forms of economic, political and social institutions that are based on constituencies and movements of subaltern classes.⁶ Such institutions and processes would be largely incompatible with currently hegemonic neoliberal models of governance. The basis of such an alternative politics is already present in the operation of popular and social movements, which are increasingly mobilising against the impacts and practices of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism elevates a reified notion of the sovereign consumer exercising choice through the market to conceal the class-based and exploitative nature of both the assumptions and impacts of its policy prescriptions.

Moreover, there is increasing anxiety among Western elites about democratic mass movements. Mounting resentment over the failures of neoliberal policy prescriptions, hegemonic in much of the advanced and developing capitalist world and increasingly so since the 1997 crisis in East Asia, has resulted in numerous outbursts of political anger and protest. There has, more recently, been a series of militant protest movements in opposition to the impact of neoliberal policies on a global scale within the advanced capitalist countries themselves. In the context of this mounting resistance, Western elites are increasingly circumspect in the amount of support they will give to mass democratic movements even when, as in the case of the Philippines, they don't fundamentally threaten the parameters of neoliberal policy.

The context: rent capitalism and elite transition

The background to the Estrada crisis needs to be understood in two contexts: the specificities of capitalist development and the nature of elite politics and succession in the Philippines.

In broader historical context, the Philippines has long been considered to be a relatively exceptional nation-state within the East Asian region. The basis of this exceptionalism is the country's limited economic performance, which contrasts sharply with that of other high growth economies such as Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and to lesser degree some areas of China and most ASEAN states.⁷ The correspondingly limited development achievements of the Philippine state appear especially acute given that it was the second most industrialised Asian country after Japan in the late 1950s. A significant literature exists that has examined the reasons why the Philippines fell behind other comparable states. Many regard the principal reason to have been the failure of the Philippine state to build on the basis of the import-substituting industries that were established in the 1950s. In contrast to the newly industrialised economies (NIES), the Philippine state never integrated or nurtured Philippine industry in the manner of the Korean *chaebols*. Instead, import and currency controls were dismantled under pressure from land-owning capital under the previous Macapagal administration in the early 1960s. A major reason for the enduring role of landowning capital, again in

contrast with the NIES, was the failure of successive Philippine governments to enact a programme of serious redistributive land reform.⁸

The resulting coterie of social relations—which can be termed rent capitalism—tended to act as a barrier to industrial capitalist accumulation and was composed of four factors.⁹ First, the weight of absolute and differential rents in agriculture were exaggerated. A classical ‘double loss’ to industry resulted from the impact of land monopoly and price distortions. Second, and as a consequence, terms of trade tended to favour agriculture, tending to further act as a barrier to industrial accumulation. The main spheres of capitalist development instead centred on real estate, distribution and state-created monopolies and contracts. All these processes reinforced the social and political power of non-industrial capital since the 1960s.

Third, this political power found its ideological expression in the hegemonic development policy of the Philippine state. Widely regarded as the exemplifier of the Anglo-American model of development, Philippine policy diverged significantly from the state-led paradigm of the NIES.¹⁰ As Robert Wade has argued, even the World Bank was forced partially to recognise the ways Korean development planners distorted market processes to favour industrial accumulation.¹¹ In contrast, economic policy in the Philippines was almost completely confined to a strictly neoclassical framework. The kernel of policy emphasised the need to focus on the Philippines’ purported comparative advantage in agriculture and as such both reflected and added to the hegemony of land-owning and rentier capital in the Philippines.

Fourth, processes of internationally sponsored neoliberal restructuring and liberalisation, which intensified in the 1980s, further reinforced both the hegemony of these sections of capital and policy prescriptions. Criteria imposed by International Monetary Fund supervision restricted the capacity of the Philippine state to make strategic interventions in the development process and reinforced a semi-permanent status of conservative fiscal and monetary policy. Political elites in the Philippines, given their social basis in certain sectors of capital accumulation, have been ardent implementers of neoliberal policy.

These broad development processes both created the context for and were amplified by changes within the public political sphere. Philippine political history can usefully be divided into pre- and post-martial law stages, President Ferdinand Marcos’ suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in 1972 being the crucial juncture. Marcos’ invoking of authoritarianism was an attempt to reconcile the contradictions that developed in the late 1960s, as export-orientated agricultural development failed to generate significant economic growth and benefits.¹² Marcos’ resulting ‘great society’ programme did little, however, to alter the course of Philippine development. Substantial external finance instead contributed to the further growth of quasi-monopolistic and rent-seeking accumulation in the non-industrial spheres.¹³

These broad trends shaped the evolution of Philippine politics in the post-dictatorship era. Marcos’ development policies played a major role in contributing to the economic and political crisis of the early 1980s, when output contracted by over 30%. Marcos was overthrown by a mass uprising in 1986 that resulted in the return of constitutional democracy. However, the return of

democracy was not matched by a corresponding improvement in economic conditions. The extent of the crises largely overshadowed policy measures taken during Aquino presidency (1986–92). Aquino became preoccupied with a number of intractable problems resulting from natural disasters and the acute impacts of Marcos' economic mismanagement and longer-term fetters on development. As such, policy measures tended to reinforce rather than conflict with a neoliberal and market-orientated strategy.

Ferdinand Ramos, the immediate predecessor to Estrada, at least gave the appearance of trying to implement a rounded development plan. Called 'Philippines 2000', the plan centred on the aim of 'achieving newly industrialised country status by the year 2000'.¹⁴ The actual outcomes were varied. On the one hand, the plan suffered from a familiar ill-conceived commitment to the main neoliberal assumptions of Philippine economic policy. A rhetoric of national industrial expansion coexisted uneasily alongside very orthodox commitments to both intensified import liberalisation and conservative fiscal policy. Understandably therefore the goal of NIE status was never reached. On the other hand, sustained economic growth did resume after 1992 until the Asian currency and financial crisis of 1997–98. The benefits of this economic growth were, however, unevenly distributed. Adding to this was the failure of the government to seriously deliver on its poverty reduction-focused Social Reform Agenda. Moreover, attempts by Ramos supporters to extend the president's allowable term in office, requiring the alteration of the Philippines 1987 'freedom' constitution, met with substantial protest. Such manoeuvres by Ramos helped to further discredit the government.

These longer- and immediate-term processes therefore provided the context for Estrada's presidency. Development processes in the Philippines remained significantly constrained. They both created the basis for and had been amplified by substantial political crises, with entrenched rule by political elites occasionally being interrupted by mass political protest and agitation. The Ramos administration, which preceded Estrada's, while delivering some semblance of economic recovery, was largely unable substantially either to address issues of long-needed structural change to foster industrial accumulation or to implement the need for measures of poverty reduction and social reform.

Estrada: from populism to popular revolt

The emergence, exhaustion and collapse of the Estrada government was both in continuity with and a break from the experiences of previous regimes. In many ways Estrada's emergence represented a reaction to the failures of Ramos's neoliberal programme. However, Estrada's lack of a clear alternative set of policies and his poor performance would eventually accelerate the frustration of different sectors of the population and hasten his government's collapse.

Estrada's government reflected a contradictory social and political base and correspondingly an even more conflicting policy combination. The main focus of Estrada's election rhetoric was his emphasis on supporting the *Masang* (masses) and the need for 'pro-poor' policies, as encapsulated in the '*Erap para sa masap*' (Erap for the poor) and other slogans. The pro-poor discourse was popular, given

the combined effect of the widespread perception of failure by the 'elite-focused' Ramos administration and the impact of the 1997 regional economic crisis. The pro-poor emphasis, combined with Estrada's popularity as a movie celebrity, resulted in him attaining a substantial majority in one round of voting.¹⁵ At the same time Estrada openly referred to his support for the former Marcos dictatorship. Central business allies comprised Lucio Tan and Eduardo Conjuangco, who had both established their wealth in the Marcos period. The basis of his ruling Lapiang ng Masang Pilipino (LAMP) coalition was three political parties: the largest, Laban Pilipino Demokratiko (LDP), was the main Congressional opposition party during Ramos' administration. The other was the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) (established primarily by Conjuangco), which was the main remnant of Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship-era Kilusang Bagong Lipunan. The third and smallest party was Estrada's own Partido Masang Pilipino. All three formations were solidly within the boundaries of 'Trapo' (traditional politician) politics, which tend to operate on a 'patron-client' basis.¹⁶ It is useful to regard Estrada's 'pro-poor' rhetoric in this context: it was aimed at extending a model of personalist support among the country's rural poor as a counterweight to various provincial and other loyalties.

Yet Estrada also co-opted important figures from within the non-governmental organisation (NGO) and 'civil society' sectors. Notable examples included the appointment of Horacio Morales, one-time member of the Communist Party of the Philippines and later leader of the Movement for Popular Democracy, as Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform.¹⁷ Morales projected a political orientation of comprehensively incorporating agrarian reform within macro-economic strategies.¹⁸ A range of other traditionally 'progressive' groups and individuals initially supported Estrada.

However, support from these sectors began to wane rapidly during the early part of Estrada's administration. First, during 1999 and 2000 there was little evidence of any concrete measures of poverty reduction. The measures that were taken, such as low-price village '*sari-sari*' stores for the poor, were largely symbolic.¹⁹ The slowness of economic recovery—GDP growth was 3% and 2.3% in 1999 and 2000—combined with the lingering effects of a climate- and economic-induced contraction of 6% of the agricultural sector in 1998 accentuated the poverty problem.²⁰ Second, there was a widespread perception of a failure to implement any programme of substantial social reforms. Nowhere was this more so than with agrarian reform; rates of land title transfer actually declined *vis à vis* the time of the Ramos administration.²¹ Third, the Estrada government in early 2000 engaged in an opportunistic escalation of the war against the long-standing Moslem insurgency in Mindanao. Using the pretext of combating the deeply unpopular Abu Sharif group, the government launched a major offensive against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. This led to substantial casualties and disruption in many areas of Central and Western Mindanao. These factors combined to make the Estrada government increasingly unpopular by mid 2000. The perception of this unpopularity was probably a factor that led to major moves within political elites to prepare the way for Estrada's ouster.

Estrada's successor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's decision to resign from the cabinet and re-join the opposition followed a considerable period of

manoeuvring. Estrada had appointed Arroyo Vice-President, in spite of her role in the previous Ramos administration and her allegiance to Lakas. Her appointment was mainly because of her experience in economic management (she has a doctorate in economics and is also a daughter of a former president). Her decision to resign from the Estrada cabinet was in response to concerns over corruption. Estrada would become the decisive issue that caused the collapse of his government. The immediate cause of Arroyo's resignation were allegations by the Governor of Ilocos Sur Province, Luis 'Chavit' Singson, of Estrada's involvement in the illegal Jueteng gambling syndicate. Questions had already arisen over the president's involvement in corruption, especially in relation to the BW Resources scandal that emerged in late 1999.²² Arroyo admits that discussions surrounding political succession had already commenced in early 2000, including with various Armed Forces of the Philippines and Philippine National Police factions.²³ Lakas politicians and former president Fidel Ramos were undoubtedly co-operating with Arroyo from an early stage.

With Arroyo established as a potential constitutional successor to Estrada, the attempts to remove the president followed three main strategies. First, there was an organised campaign of protests aimed at securing Estrada's resignation or ouster. The regime responded with its own counter-rallies, under the banner of the 'guardians of the constitution'. The latter events were generally quite small and relied on mobilisation of poorer communities through bribes by local officials.²⁴ Second, the opposition within the House of Representatives proceeded to pursue Estrada's impeachment and succeeded in November 2000 in obtaining the necessary two-thirds vote by house members. The conclusions of the resulting impeachment trial, presided over by Chief Justice Hilario Davide, would ultimately be subject to vote by the Senate. Third, there was always some threat of military intervention to resolve the conflict either in Estrada's favour or otherwise. There was continual suspicion of coup plots by various factions of the military and police. Some members of the circle around former president Fidel Ramos were known to be assessing the feasibility of a Pakistan-style civilian-supported military government.²⁵ The momentum of the mass protest movement, however, tended to conflict with any strategy that relied on overt authoritarianism. A major factor holding back anti-Estrada factions, besides divisions within the military between pro- and anti-Estrada groups, was the resistance that would have been mounted to a military regime.

Moreover, a review of the components of the various opposition coalitions tends to confirm that the capacity of the Arroyo-Ramos opposition leadership to enact an authoritarian course of action was substantially constrained by its allies. The official Lakas and other opposition politicians and business groups formed the United National Opposition. This, in turn, included organisations such as the 'Erap resign' movement that was initiated by the leftist Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN) federation of people's organisations.²⁶ The latter and other sections of the revolutionary and social-democratic left were also united with the church and with followers of the former President Corazon Aquino in the Kompril 2 alliance.²⁷ Still other more radical forces were united in alliances such as the Anti-Trapò Movement. They demanded the removal of all corrupt politicians—including Arroyo!²⁸ What was significant within these various

coalitions was the involvement of an array of political forces, which included the political left, and a common feature throughout all the opposition was the memory of the anti-Marcos dictatorship movement of 1972–86. Both these factors meant there was a reluctance to countenance the establishment of a military-established regime. The left, which was generally the most ardent opposer of such a scheme, was such an integral part of the opposition coalition that its presence acted as a further block to military action. Moreover, an outright anti-government coup may have resulted in divisions within the opposition that would have been to Estrada's advantage.

The immediate catalyst for the eventual revolt was the vote by pro-Estrada senators to withhold crucial evidence from the impeachment trial on 16 January 2001. The trial had proceeded slowly throughout late 2000 and early 2001. The constant broadcast and publication of transcripts, containing verbose legal terminology and cross-examinations, generated more confusion than indignation against Estrada among much of the population.²⁹ One result was a relative decline in political mobilisation as the process of investigation into Estrada was seen to be operating within constitutional and judicial channels. The government almost certainly felt relatively secure in the knowledge that, whatever the outcome of the trial, the pro-Estrada majority among the 21 sitting senators could vote to reject impeachment. It was probably this sense of security that led to the senate voting 11 to 10 against allowing crucial evidence: the opening of an envelope containing details of a bank account that was allegedly held by Estrada under a pseudonym.³⁰ The result was the collapse of the impeachment trial after the resignation of the Senate president, and then the entire prosecution team, in protest. The pro-Estrada senators probably did not foresee subsequent events.

Indeed, following the Senate vote there was a series of mostly spontaneous demonstrations that centred on a mass assembly at the EDSA shrine. An important figure in the first EDSA uprising, Philippine Catholic Archbishop Cardinal Sin, had called for mass demonstrations on 12 January in the event of Estrada's acquittal. He added his authority by calling for a mass 'prayer session at EDSA on 17 January. Over the succeeding days numbers gradually increased at the shrine, while other rallies occurred at other areas within Manila such as Monumento, Makati and Mendiola Bridge. Other protests occurred outside Manila in provincial centres.³¹ Pro-Estrada elements organised much smaller protests, occasionally resulting in minor clashes with anti-Estrada forces in places such as Makati. The stage at the EDSA shrine became a centre of opposition activity, with an array of leaders addressing the crowd. The Kompil 2 coalition was the main force that organised the programme of activities, which alternated between prayers and speeches from various opposition entities.³² Individuals who had been loyal to Estrada, such as Defense Secretary Orlando Mercado, began increasingly to defect to the opposition. By Friday 19 January the crowd had swelled to over one million, while a significant portion of the rest of the population watched the constant broadcasts on the main television channels. Once the protests reached this size a series of events ensued that ensured Estrada's replacement by Arroyo.

Consequently, three main processes coalesced to ensure Estrada's ouster without the use of substantial force. First, and most decisively, was the with-

drawal of support for Estrada by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. Armed Forces commander General Angelino T Reyes was eventually swayed to back the anti-Estrada opposition by retired generals and possibly in order to prevent a coup attempt by lower-level officers.³³ Failure to defect to the opposition would have marginalised him in the post-Estrada regime and destabilised the situation considerably. Second, the main reason for the military's defection was related to Estrada's retreats and increasing weakness. Estrada had already responded to the mass mobilisations by asking the Senate to revoke its decision and reveal the withheld evidence. Estrada capitulated even further after the subsequent resignation of most of his cabinet by announcing a 'snap' presidential election to correspond with Senate, House and Municipal elections in May. Given the momentum of the protest movement and its backing by the military, however, the opposition quickly dismissed the possibility of Estrada holding on to power until May.³⁴ Third, the final motion for Estrada's collapse came from contradictory forces. On the one hand, the Chief justice Davide declared his opinion that the resignation of Estrada's cabinet meant there was 'no legal basis' not to allow Arroyo's swearing-in as president.³⁵ This occurred at midday on Saturday 20 January. On the other hand, the leftist and more militant section of the protest again played a significant role. Against the insistence of Sin and other moderates, these forces left the main part of the rally that morning to march on the Malacanang presidential palace.³⁶ The marchers increased the pressure on Estrada to vacate Malacanang, forcing him to leave just after 2pm. Otherwise, Estrada may well have stayed there and continued to claim to be president. However, the combination of events ensured that Arroyo was sworn in and Estrada was forced to accept that he had, at least 'temporarily', stepped aside.

The aftermath was very much characterised by Arroyo's and her main supporters within the political elite's further consolidation of power. Arroyo's cabinet appointments, in a process referred to as *balimbing* (opportunism), have been for the most part former supporters of the Ramos government. 'Civil society' groups and the left were largely excluded.³⁷ On 2 March the Supreme Court, in response to a legal appeal by Estrada's lawyers, declared Arroyo's swearing-in as legal. This, combined with the absence of any significant pro-Estrada factions in the military, effectively closed off any immediate possibility of Estrada regaining the presidency.³⁸ In the aftermath Estrada has been denied any right to leave the Philippines and will face charges of corruption. Meanwhile Estrada's LAMP coalition largely collapsed and its successor Puwersa ng Masa (Power of the Masses) coalition faces probable electoral defeat in the May 2001 Senate, House of Representatives and Municipal elections. Underlying Arroyo's legitimacy and the electoral support for her Lakas-based People's Power Coalition, is the acceptance of much of the population of the manner of Estrada's ouster. Arroyo was and still remains a relatively unpopular figure. For instance, her speeches were received with little enthusiasm during the EDSA uprising. Opinion polls placed her as even more unpopular than Estrada just before his departure from Malacanang. Yet polls after the uprising clearly demonstrated a majority of Manila residents supported the uprising and correspondingly there was a significant boost in the 'net trust' rating of Arroyo.

Events in the aftermath have largely confirmed the popular acceptance of Arroyo's succession as president. In April and May, when corruption charges were laid against Estrada, there was a short-lived 'EDSA III' uprising. Between 20 000 and 50 000 Estrada supporters rallied briefly at the EDSA memorial. A march by around 2000 supporters clashed with riot police at the Malacanang Presidential palace. The protest rapidly dissipated. Arroyo responded by declaring a state of rebellion and the government laid sedition charges against high-level Estrada supporters. The May elections, however, did not deliver a substantial majority to Arroyo in the Senate elections, mainly because of a still high vote for Estrada's party among sectors of the rural poor.³⁹ Arroyo won a narrow majority in any case. Subsequently the resurgence of activity by the Abu Sayaf rebels has diverted attention away from the election outcome.

The uprising therefore led to the decisive end of Estrada's government, as Arroyo was able to mobilise a substantial opposition coalition in a series of mass mobilisations. Given both the originally popular and elected character of the Estrada government, these events did not garner much approval or enthusiasm in some places.

Neoliberalism and democratic revolt

Indeed, an analysis of both the responses to and the limitations of the uprising indicate a great deal about the relationship between current development processes in the Philippines and their relationship to democratic governance. These responses present a series of contradictions that imply the notions and categories used to define 'good governance' derived from neoliberalism.

Nowhere were these contradictions and limitation more explicit than in the negative responses of the 'Western-liberal' news magazines *Time* and *Far East Economic Review*.⁴⁰ While not opposed to Arroyo's new government, they presented an extremely downbeat appraisal of the process of Estrada's removal. As tempting as it is to dismiss these views as all too typically Eurocentric and chauvinist, they do represent an important example of what remains orthodox thinking concerning democratic governance. These magazines play an important role in informing English-speaking elite and middle-class opinion internationally and in the East Asian region. Their political position and outlook has arguably played an important role in reinforcing the hold of the neoliberal policy consensus internationally.⁴¹

Among the coverage, Spaeth in particular expresses dismay about the manner of Estrada's removal, categorising the uprising as a 'popularly-supported coup'. Spaeth argues that the main historical legacy of the first EDSA uprising in 1986 against Marcos was the acceptance that it created within Philippine politics of the use of force and unconstitutional measures to remove presidents from power. Yet as evidence of the coup-prone nature of the Philippines he cites the numerous failed attempts to depose the Aquino administration *after* its coming to power in 1986. While the first EDSA uprising started as a revolt by sections of the military in 1986, it was different from the subsequent coup attempts in the extent and depth of civilian support the rebels received. The depth of this support was such that the nature of the first EDSA rebellion was transformed into a popular uprising

rather than a coup. What, by and large, characterised the subsequent coup attempts by anti-Aquino factions was their failure because of the popular opposition to a return to authoritarianism that existed. Thus the main legacy of the first EDSA uprising was actually the consolidation of deep-seated opposition to military and authoritarian rule within the Philippines. The opposition to authoritarian or military rule was clearly present in and was deepened by the second EDSA uprising. It was precisely the popular nature of the uprising that prevented a coup by either pro- or anti-Estrada factions of the military. The military, far from initiating the uprising at EDSA II, only defected to the opposition *after* the size of the protests clearly indicated the extent of the anti-Estrada mood among the population. The character was more that of a popular uprising that led to the capitulation of the military than a 'civilian-backed coup'.

Spaeth also argues that the uprising usurped constitutional processes. Yet, as the above account indicates, the impeachment trial process had already collapsed with the vote of pro-Estrada senators not to release vital evidence. Moreover, it was the Chief Justice Hilario Davide, one of the main authors of the 1987 constitution, who gave the go-ahead to allow Arroyo's swearing-in as president. Davide's legal opinion was upheld by the Supreme Court, which found that, with the resignation of much of Estrada's cabinet, he was no longer able to govern. On the contrary, it was Arroyo's succession as president according to constitutional conventions which possibly conflicted with the sentiments of much of the EDSA participants. They were not enthusiastically pro-Arroyo; rather they wanted Estrada out of office. Contrary to Spaeth's and the *Far East Economic Review's* claims, it was precisely the constitutional nature of Arroyo's succession to Estrada that was a central factor ensuring the rebellion remained within the confines of 'rich people's power'. In other words, the uprising's political direction of not conflicting with the constitution was an important reason why it ultimately remained under the Trapo (traditional political) elite's hegemony. Given that the critics of EDSA II's arguments are, by and large, logically and factually erroneous, it remains to be asked what the source of their concerns over the EDSA uprising is.

Answering this question requires engaging in another level of analysis, one centred more on the ideological underpinnings as well as on the interests and experiences of these media critics' arguments. These underpinnings reveal an entrenched opposition to almost all forms of popular mobilisation and resistance, which are increasingly being conflated with authoritarianism and 'lawlessness'. The source of this opposition is two-fold. First, ideologically much of these analysts' perceptions and arguments, while not necessarily explicitly stated, are firmly embedded within the framework and influence of neoliberalism.

The influence of neoliberalism operates at the general level of development strategy in the Third World and correspondingly presents distinctive views concerning forms of governance. On the general level, neoliberalism argues for a strategy and policy based on openness to global capital flows and commitment to market-centred economic policy. The Philippines has, to a large degree, been committed to such strategies since the early 1960s dismantling of exchange and import controls. All the administrations in the period since the early 1980s economic crisis in the Philippines have intensified this policy orientation.⁴²

Correspondingly, the neoliberal approach to issues of governance is both a continuity and discontinuity with the lineage of liberal–modernisation approaches to governance and development management.⁴³ The neoliberal development strategy approach to issues of governance centres on the promotion of legal certainty and the creation of institutional frameworks for the efficient operation of the market. While recent theoretical modifications and variations, promulgated in particular by hegemonic multilateral development organisations, emphasise the need for a more conscious approach to building sound structures of governance, along with fashionable concerns for sustainability, participation, rudimentary labour rights and poverty reduction, neoliberal approaches overwhelmingly emphasise a primary goal of market efficiency.⁴⁴ The neoliberal focus on democratic governance is therefore less concerned with issues of sovereignty and power than with creating efficient institutional structures to facilitate the operation of the market. Some examples of institutional reforms advocated by neoliberal approaches include legal certainty, (a currently fashionable concern for) reducing corruption and, above all, *stable* political institutions. The difficulty for neoliberalism is that democratic openings in many developing nation-states are often induced and reinforced by popular movements and mass uprisings. The mass constituencies of these uprisings are usually concerned with issues of power and quality of life, as opposed to establishing the preconditions for efficient markets. Indeed, they have a tendency to emphasise social and economic demands that regimes pursuing neoliberal development strategies are either incapable of meeting or are reluctant to meet. Hence behind the inability of many of the proponents of neo-liberalism to countenance a role for mass political uprising is a contemporary form of the ‘over-load thesis’.⁴⁵ Too much democratisation leads to the pressing of ‘unsustainable’ demands by popular sectors that is destabilising.

Second, neoliberalism’s ideological hostility towards popular mobilisation has been compounded by other experiences in recent years. Within East Asia since the economic crisis of 1997, the growth of popular mobilisations, often against corruption and in favour of democratisation, has met with contradictory responses. For instance, the ousting of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998 resulted in two conflicting reactions. On the one hand, there was an enthusiastic welcoming of Suharto’s resignation as a ‘good signal’ to the ‘markets’. Suharto’s resignation supposedly indicated that political change and reform would proceed in Indonesia—allegedly easing the concerns of currency traders and investors—and accordingly help to stabilise the value of the rupiah and increase general economic confidence.⁴⁶ On the other hand, there was a continual concern expressed about the impact of the mass student-led demonstrations aimed at ousting Suharto. There was a constant theme expressed by commentators that the demonstrations should not be allowed to move beyond certain political limits. Such limits, in the case of Indonesia, involved a sanction on any action that would substantially challenge the entrenched power of the Indonesian military and Golkar party, instead of allowing a ‘managed transition’ to free elections.⁴⁷ The result was that student and popular demands for ‘reformasi total’ (total reform) were never met. Indonesia remains in a state of considerable instability, which is partly the consequence of the destabilising efforts of military and Golkar

forces still loyal to the ousted president. A democratic government, established by insurrection, may perhaps have been better able to defeat the power of various elements of the old 'new order' regime such as the local and provincial officials who largely remain patrons of the old Golkar network. In the instance of political reform in post-Suharto Indonesia, the influence of neoliberal policy has been negative. The neoliberal preoccupation with gradual institutional and legal reform, promulgated by commentators and Western backers of the Habibie and Wahid governments, ignores the necessity for the political and social defeat of the social forces and groups loyal to the old regime. The reticence of Western supporters of reform to countenance more radical measures also flows from their fears that a popularly established government would be under pressure from its constituents to undertake measures that would undermine the influence of neoliberal policy and its associated aims of ensuring openness to off-shore investors and the continued fulfilling of debt-service obligations.

Moreover, the growth of popular movements is now no longer confined to regions such as East Asia. There has been an increasing wave of popular protests within advanced capitalist countries, of which the largest and most well-known remains the November 1999 mobilisations against the World Trade Organization negotiations in Seattle.⁴⁸ Subsequent protests have occurred in Washington, Melbourne, Prague, Nice and Seoul. They are significant in that they represent a substantial popular movement, though its demands remain confused and diverse, that is openly opposed to the neoliberal policy consensus. Moreover, their location within advanced capitalist countries gives these protests a substantial profile and a sense of presenting an immediate threat within the very nation-states where most multinational firms and multilateral development agencies are located. Dubbed anti-corporate movements in the USA and elsewhere, they are opposed to the impact of market-driven policies on labour rights, human rights and environmental standards.⁴⁹ The size and focus of these mobilisations have therefore added to the unease felt by proponents of the neoliberal model. If the momentum of these protests continues, it is possible that the neoliberal preference for governance that emphasises the efficient operation of markets may indeed result in calls for the curtailing of democratic rights. In some instances, governments have already resorted to measures of repression against demonstrations.

Moreover, the contradictions that are implicit within the neoliberal model are also being displayed within the Philippines. The *Far Eastern Economic Review's* response to the uprising, as well as expressing disdain for the manner of Estrada's removal from office, alluded to some of these difficulties.⁵⁰ Arroyo faces a contradiction between the neoliberal focus of her economic and development programme and the aspirations of some of the constituency that brought her to power. The focus of Philippine development planners on market and export-orientated production will most probably further re-enforce the power of land-owning and rentier capital in the Philippines. As the analysis above has argued, the power of these social groups is a significant factor that contributes to the Philippines' enduring problems of poverty and a largely stagnant industrial sector. Arroyo, accordingly, is most likely to continue a similar set of policy goals. Therefore the likelihood is that political opposition from sectors may grow

against the direction of Arroyo's policy orientation, with the result that there may well be an EDSA III. Such groups have probably developed further confidence and support through the anti-Estrada mobilisations. The momentum of such a rebellion from these sectors may significantly diverge from the pattern of elite control that has predominated in previous uprisings. Such a popular uprising seems to be the only way that a government could be established that could enact the forms of social and economic transformation required to resolve the enduring problems of the Philippines. It is difficult to envisage this occurring without a radical rupture from the current neoliberal policy consensus. It would no doubt result in even more hostile responses from the media and other Western institutions than that which EDSA II received.

Insurrection, democracy and neoliberalism

EDSA II was, therefore, a political movement and popular mobilisation that demonstrated many aspects of the contradictions that confront neoliberal conceptions of development and democratic governance. These contradictions have become apparent by considering the character of the uprising and the ideological context and responses that emerged.

First, EDSA II follows a pattern of economic, social and political development within the Philippines. Since the early 1960s the country has fallen behind many other East Asian states in terms of development indicators. A substantial reason for this has been the dominance of non-productive sector capital within the Philippine political economy. While there have been considerable political changes and crises—martial law, uprisings and return to constitutional democracy—these have not substantially altered the composition and nature of the economic and political elites of the Philippines. These elites have loyally implemented neoliberal economic and development policies as they tend to further reinforce the power of these unproductive social strata.

Second, EDSA II did not deviate substantially from the pattern of elite control in the Philippines. Momentum developed increasingly for President Estrada's removal throughout 2000 and culminated in an uprising in early 2001. Originally Estrada was elected with a base of popular support among the rural poor and appointed a cabinet that included representatives of the 'civil society' sector. The trajectory of Estrada and the ruling LAMP coalition's rule, however, gradually alienated many of these supporters. This alienation was qualitatively exacerbated by the allegations of Estrada's involvement in illegal gambling syndicates. Sensing the opportunity that the mounting opposition to Estrada constituted, Vice-President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo resigned from Estrada's cabinet so as to take advantage of the Philippine constitution's provisions that would allow her to assume the presidency. At first the impeachment process contained much of the growing anti-Estrada sentiment. The pro-Estrada Senate majority appeared not to be overly concerned with the trial's outcome, knowing that the impeachment verdict would ultimately require a two-thirds Senate vote to be accepted. When the pro-Estrada Senators voted not to allow crucial evidence, however, this action precipitated large-scale street demonstrations. Centred primarily at the EDSA shrine commemorating the 1986 uprising against Marcos, these demonstrations

called for Estrada to resign. After four days the military and police command withdrew their support for Estrada and subsequently much of his cabinet resigned. Arroyo was, as a consequence, sworn in as president on 21 January, while Estrada 'stepped aside'. The Philippine Supreme Court later upheld the legality of the Arroyo government and it is likely that her Lakas party-based 'People Power Coalition' will have gained significantly in the scheduled May elections. The political uprising was therefore characterised by a contradictory combination of popular revolt and elite control. While it may have been potentially the case, the politics of the mass movement did not venture outside the confines set by Arroyo and her coterie of traditional political supporters.

Third, aspects of the local and international responses to EDSA II demonstrate certain paradoxes within the neoliberal development policy paradigm. In particular, some journalists and other Western commentators lamented the fact that popular mobilisation occurred which resulted in the ousting of Estrada. These concerns were combined with erroneous assertions about the role of the Philippine military and the relationship of the uprising to the constitution. While playing a decisive role by withdrawing support for Estrada, the military's role was secondary to that of the over one million Filipinos who mobilised over several days at EDSA and elsewhere. Indeed, the size and depth of the mobilisations was possibly a major factor in preventing the resolution of the political crisis by a pro- or anti-Estrada coup. Likewise, the arguments about the unconstitutional manner of Arroyo's succession are largely without foundation. The Supreme Court's ruling on the legality of Arroyo's government confirms that her installation was a logical consequence of the collapse of Estrada's government. On the contrary, the uprising's confinement to constitutional processes was an important reason the revolt culminated in Arroyo's succession as opposed to the establishment of a provisional revolutionary government. Arguably the latter remains a necessity in the Philippines because of the enduring weight of social forces that act as a brake on development and as a source of corruption.

Instead, the hostility of these observers to EDSA II is based on their acceptance of neoliberal models of democratic governance. As with the broader lineage of the liberal-modernisation paradigm, neoliberalism conceptualises and appraises structures of governance according to reified notions of administrative rationality. Neoliberalism develops these notions further by advocating structures of governance as appendages with a primary aim of facilitating the efficient operation of markets. Because of neoliberalism's one-dimensional approach to democratisation, it tends to be hostile to forms of popular political mobilisation and direct action. This hostility is particularly pronounced when confronted with democratic contests that threaten the balance of class and other social forces in a way that may adversely affect neoliberal models of capital accumulation. These concerns have been amplified in recent years by the growing frequency and scale of protest movements, which increasingly are not only confined to areas such as East Asia but are appearing within advanced capitalist countries themselves. The anxiety of Western and other elites over political mobilisation is the source of their concerns over EDSA II, even though the uprising never actually took substantial political measures to threaten Arroyo, the political elite or the neoliberal political hegemony in the Philippines.

Indeed, any fair appraisal needs to recognise that EDSA II was a contradictory movement. On the one hand, it remained ultimately an elite-controlled process. On the other hand, the model of popular mobilisation and empowerment demonstrates some of the potential of an alternative paradigm of radical democratic governance to emerge in the Philippines. The antipathy of much of the Philippine nation to corrupt leaders and its readiness to use direct action constitutes a basis from which a political alternative may emerge that can begin to challenge the hold of neoliberalism within the Philippines and internationally. It was this potential that was no doubt the source of the anxiety felt by many media and other Western elites to the uprising.

Notes

- ¹ For an account of the emergence and development of neoliberalism and its influence over development policy see R Peet & E Hartwick, *Theories of Development*, New York: Guildford Press, 1997, pp 48–64.
- ² See A Spaeth, 'Oops, we did it again,' *Time*, 157 (4), 2001, p 22.
- ³ D Sheehan, 'More power to the powerful', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 February 2001, pp 16–20.
- ⁴ A Doronila, 'EDSA II worries Western media', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 January 2001, p 9.
- ⁵ See Peet & Hartwick, *Theories of Development*, pp 195–210.
- ⁶ See B Reid, 'Philippine Left: Political crisis and social change', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 30 (2), 2000, pp 178–192.
- ⁷ L Angeles, 'Why the Philippines did not become a newly industrialising country', *Kasarinlan*, 7 (2 & 3), 1992, pp 90–120.
- ⁸ Reid, 'Philippine Left', pp 110–119.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, p 106.
- ¹⁰ For an analysis of the Philippine state's economic policy biases see M Montes & J Lim, 'Macroeconomic volatility, investment anemia, and environmental struggles in the Philippines', *World Development*, 24 (2), 2001, pp 341–357.
- ¹¹ R Wade, 'Japan, the World Bank and the art of paradigm maintenance', *New Left Review*, 272, 2001, pp 3–36.
- ¹² See A Doronila, *The State, Economic Transformation and Political Change in the Philippines, 1949–1972*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp 102–116.
- ¹³ See W Bello, D Kinley & E Elinson, *Development Debacle: The World Bank and the Philippines*, San Francisco, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1982.
- ¹⁴ See F Ramos, 'Philippines 2000: our development strategy', *Kasarinlan*, 9 (3), 1994, pp 118–123.
- ¹⁵ See R Tiglao, 'Gloria "para sa masap"', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 January 2001, p 9.
- ¹⁶ E U Gutierrez, I C Torrente & N G Narca, *All in the Family: A Study of Elites and Power Relations in the Philippines*, Quezon City: Institute for Popular Democracy, 1992.
- ¹⁷ Morales and the Movement for Popular democracy broke from the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines after the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship in the late 1980s. The popular democrats' strategies have been predominantly centred on strengthening the capacity of NGOs to win reforms in the agricultural, environment, gender and human rights spheres. The DAR was established under the Marcos dictatorship and became responsible for implementing the Aquino government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (DAR). Both CARP and the DAR have been widely criticised as inadequate by farmers' organisations. See Reid, 'Philippine Left', pp 37–38, 92–96.
- ¹⁸ See H Morales, DAR, *Muhon Supplement*, Quezon City: DAR, 2000, pp 3, 4, 20.
- ¹⁹ See Tiglao, 'Gloria', p 9.
- ²⁰ World Bank, *World Development Indicators*, www.worldbank.org/data/countrydata/countrydata.html, 2001.
- ²¹ D Gatmaytan, 'Concessions, Compliancy and CARP: the dooming of agrarian reform', *Conjuncture*, 12 (4), 2000, pp 10–13.
- ²² The Jueteng syndicate operates illegal lotteries. In return for protection, the syndicate contributes funds to local politicians and cash-strapped local authorities. The BW Resources controversy centred on allegations of Estrada's involvement in stock price manipulation.
- ²³ *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 'GMA reveals support of 5 military groups', 22 February 2001, p 1.
- ²⁴ J Pilger, *Hidden Agendas*, London: Vintage, 1998, p 152.

- ²⁵ In 1999 the Pakistan military deposed the Muslim League government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the basis of widespread accusations of corruption and incompetence. See A R Khushab & M Punjab, 'Elite's loss, Islamists' gain', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 January 2001, p 17
- ²⁶ BAYAN is a legal grouping that encompasses the Kilusang Mayo Uno trade union federation and other similar farmer, women's and student groups that are aligned with the CPP. Its origins were as an anti-Marcos dictatorship coalition in 1985. CPP activists were widely criticised for driving out more moderate forces and effectively rendering it a front for the underground revolutionary left. See Reid, 'Philippine Left', pp 29–33.
- ²⁷ See G A Bagayaua, 'The forces at EDSA 2: "Estrada United us"', *Newsbreak*, 1 (1), p 10.
- ²⁸ W Da Silva, interview with the author, 4 February 2001.
- ²⁹ P Riordan, 'Impeachment: the view from outside', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 14 January 2001, p 8.
- ³⁰ The Senate had to vote to allow the evidence because of legal technicalities. The account was held in the name of Joseph Verlade at the PCI Equitable bank. See E Danao, 'Impeachment trial hangs, prosecutors withdraw', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 18 January 2001, pp 1, 4.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, p 4.
- ³² S Melencio (Partido Socialystang Pabawa), interview with the author, 1 February 2001.
- ³³ 'Gloria, G.M Angie's coup, the inside story', *Newsbreak*, 1 (1), 2001, pp 2, 3, 23; and M V Soliven, 'There is already a coup in place against Erap...', *Philippine Star*, 24 January 2001, pp 8, 9.
- ³⁴ 'Erap government collapses', *Philippine Daily Enquirer*, 20 January, pp 1, 4.
- ³⁵ 'Davide's administering the oath was a measure to prevent not only the possible violence between pro- and anti-Estrada groups but also the vacuum of leadership resulting from Cabinet officials' resignation and the military's withdrawal of support from Estrada.' C Avendaño *et al*, 'Erap out, Gloria in', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 January 2001, p1.
- ³⁶ N Perlas, 'Ousting a president—a report from Mendiola', *The Philippine Star*, 22 January 2001, p 11.
- ³⁷ P Echmeminada, "'Balimbing" season in full swing—Nene', *The Philippine Star*, 22 January 2001, pp 1, 7; and J Esplanada, 'Cabinet: charge of the Ramos brigade', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 8 February 2001, pp 1, 5.
- ³⁸ C Yamsuan, 'It's 13–0 for Gloria', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 3 March 2001, p 1.
- ³⁹ See W Bello, 'Results reinforce political and social polarisation', *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 21 May 2001, p 4.
- ⁴⁰ See Spaeth, 'Oops, we did it again', p 22; and Sheehan, 'More power to the powerful', p 17.
- ⁴¹ See Pilger, J, *Hidden Agendas*.
- ⁴² See Reid, 'Philippine Left', pp 125–132.
- ⁴³ Berger, M T & Beeson, M, 'Lineages of Liberalism and Miracle of Modernisation: The World Bank, the East Asian trajectory and the international development debate', *Third World Quarterly*, 19 (3), 1998, pp 487–504.
- ⁴⁴ See Berger & Beeson, pp 497–501.
- ⁴⁵ The 'over-load thesis' was formulated in the early 1970s as precursor to the emergence of neo-liberalism. It argued that the economic and social crisis in advanced capitalist countries at this time (manifested in mass strike waves and protest movements) was the result in an 'over-load' of demands on the democratic state which it was unable to fore fill. Hence there was need for more social discipline. Critics pointed to other causes, such as structural change brought about by the end of the high-economic growth years of post-war period. See Mesarovic, M D, *Mankind at the Turning Point: the second report to the Club of Rome*, New York: Dutton, 1974.
- ⁴⁶ Daly, M T & Logan, M I, *Reconstructing Asia: the economic miracle that never was, the future that is*, Melbourne: RMIT University Press, 1998, p 102.
- ⁴⁷ For various accounts on Suharto's fall see Budimen, A, Hately, B & Kingsbury, D (eds) *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1999; and Forester, G & May, R J (eds), *The Fall of Suharto*. Bathurst: Crawford House Publishing, 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Cockburn, A & St. Claire, G, *Five Days that Shook the World: Seattle and Beyond*, New York: Counter Punch, pp 16–34.
- ⁴⁹ Starr, A, *Naming the Enemy: Anti-corporate social movements*, London: Zed, 2000.
- ⁵⁰ Sheehan, 'More power to the powerful', p 18.