

Voices FROM THE SOUTH

E-Newsletter -March 2017

Different but same-same? Movement building in times of far-right populism

In this month's "Voices from the South", Tetet Nera-Lauron of IBON International in the Philippines reflects on the question of how social movements and peoples' organizations can build power in times of a wave of far-right populism, a populism that is marked with protectionist governments and rhetoric, blatant xenophobia, sexism and discrimination, and power remaining in the hands of the wealthy elite and corporations. Tetet explores the question of whether this wave of populism is new at all, or if it is the same tendencies of power and distribution the world has seen for decades with a different packaging. She also explores the question of how we confront these challenges whilst holding onto our vision of long term systemic economic and political change.

Tetet will speak on this theme at the upcoming conference of the EDGE Funders Alliance, "Reorganizing Power for System Change", which will be held in Barcelona in April 2017.



**By Tetet Nera-Lauron
IBON International**

We find ourselves in very strange and difficult times now—with the rise of protectionist governments and rhetoric; blatant xenophobia, sexism and discrimination; governments

turning their concerns more and more inward (and backward, in most instances) to the detriment of the world at large, and power remaining in the hands of the wealthy elite and corporations. And in communities around the world we see this manifest as environmental destruction, violation of human rights, privatization of public goods, and even further decreases in access to public services. In these conditions—in these times—it's sometimes hard to see even a ray of hope at the end of this tunnel.

Populism, by definition, is "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homog-

enous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people".

Populism in itself is not a dangerous thing. It is the *combination* of populism and a host ideology that one should be weary of.

While the world is deeply worried about what is happening in for example USA, waves of various populisms appeared in Southeast Asia in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997, which also signalled the abrupt end to the spectacular rise of the so-called 'Asian tigers.'

What we saw were populist 'crusaders', who mobilized for electoral aims by using nationalism, an attack on the national elites, and an attack on neoliberal globalization. They were eventually elected into presidency. Many of these had relatively short and unsuccessful terms of office, like Joseph Estrada (the Philippines) Roh Moo-hyun (South Korea), Chen Shui-bian (whose "govern-



THE
KARIBU
FOUNDATION

Founded in 1985, the Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

<http://www.karibu.no>
voices@karibu.no

The Karibu Foundation
Kirkens Hus
Rådhusgt 1-3
0151 Oslo
Norway



IBON International is a service institution with an international character and scope of work. In our advocacy, we cooperate mainly with social movements and civil society constituencies in all regions of the world, especially in the global South and among marginalised groups.

More info:
www.iboninternational.org

SUBSCRIBE TO
"VOICES FROM THE SOUTH"
AT WWW.KARIBU.NO



ment of the people” in Taiwan collapsed just after five months), and Thaksin Shinawatra (ousted as prime minister of Thailand after large protests and a military coup).

And now, we have Rodrigo ‘Digong’ Duterte, the Philippines’ 16th president, whose overwhelming victory has changed the political landscape dramatically. He was not the smooth and suave politician; on the contrary, he was rough and crude. He promised change – and the people, tired and weary from decades of broken promises wanted change and reason to be hopeful. And while there have been some whiffs of fresh air, nine months into office is ample time to get to the fundamentals.

What we are seeing in the Philippines is a continuation of the neoliberal economic agenda of previous administrations that will deliver the same kind of exclusionary growth, in a new packaging. His strategies to achieving the AmBisyon Natin 2040 goals (the government’s long-term vision for development) will fail to bring about national development. Their focus is on attracting investors with low wages and fiscal incentives, removing Constitutional limits on foreign capital, and a focus on better infrastructure. The strategies promote economic growth and profit-seeking, but they do not promote inclusiveness or majority benefit. And of course, human rights are another casualty of the administration’s ‘drug war.’

And so the new wave of populism is different, but “same-same”, as we say in Asia.

So how do we confront these challenges whilst holding onto our vision of long term systemic economic and political change, and what are we fighting for?

The populism we see now suggests there is an even greater need to reorient economics, especially because the neoliberalization of the economy is a major factor giving rise to populism.

It entails making institutions fully accountable and responsive to needs of people especially poor, vulnerable and marginalized. It means decisions are to be taken at local level whenever possible rather than by central authority, thus recognizing the grassroots as viable starting point, focus and locus of power. This means promoting interface at all levels (local, subnational, national): countrywide, localized dialogues needed to promote democratic ownership with spaces and mechanisms for citizen input, debate and negotiation.

Reorienting economies means the we need to uphold genuine economic democracy – and put in place structures and processes that secure equitable distribution of economic power (ownership over productive resources and income) among people. It should enable people to collectively exercise authority over production, consumption, distribution at multiple levels (workplace, community, country, globally). It means that we need to break free from unequal structure of trade, production and credit imposed by the global economic system upon poor/developing countries.

It means reimagining the future. Then things *can* be different, and not same-same.■

Tetet Nera-Lauron is the Programme Manager of IBON International’s Climate Justice Programme; Coordinator of the Peoples’ Movement on Climate Change (PMCC); CSO representative to the Building Block on Climate Finance; and facilitation group member of Climate Justice Now and the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice. She is also one of the Co-Chairs of CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness, an open platform that unites civil society around the world in the subject of development effectiveness.

Tetet can be reach at: tlauron@iboninternational.org.

Photo credit:
Page 1: Roscoe Myrick, Shotboxer.com
Page 2: Tetet Nera-Lauron

