

The Filipino Middle Class

THE role of the middle class as agent of political and social change has at best been hard to define. Who compose the middle class and the scope of the space it occupies in the scheme of social classes are equally hard to quantify.

On the other hand, one of the more widely-held caricatures of the middle class is that it is the most politically active class wedged between the wealthy upper classes and the larger mass of the poorer classes occupying the bottom of the social pyramid. The middle class, according to this profile, is politically dangerous and opportunistic in the sense that when its upward mobility path is blocked by either economic reverses or political restrictions, it becomes the hotbed of unrest and political agitation. Its readiness for political mobilization cannot be taken for granted. Indeed, the middle class is credited as the dynamo of the French Revolution, which some historians have described as a "bourgeois" revolution.

In the lead essay in this issue, Maria Cynthia Rose Banzon Bautista moves forward the literature on the Filipino middle class by describing in some detail the composition of the middle classes in Metro Manila. Her study is backed by surveys portraying an upwardly mobile class, the mobility being

a consequence of the jobs opened by the establishment of new industries and services in the 1950s and 1960s. The essay notes the changes that have taken place in the middle class' mobility chances on the basis of economic change. The essay then attempts to answer the question, what are the prospects for Metro Manila's middle classes in the light of the 1997 Asian financial crisis that hit the incomes, lifestyle and career mobility chances of this class.

The essay depicts the middle classes of Metro Manila as politically and socially aware. From its perspective, the four most serious issues are corruption, environmental pollution, public safety and crime and prostitution. These issues have been salient in the priorities given by the metropolitan press, which is the bastion of middle class issues more than it is for the upper classes or lower classes. The essay recognizes the ambivalent politics of the middle class—an ambivalence that poses a daunting challenge for political leaders seeking the social mobilization of this class for urgent and long-term action.

Also in this issue is an analysis by Nathan Gilbert Quimpo on why long-term peace in Mindanao seems a remote possibility even after three years since the signing of the peace agree-

ment between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front. The essay points out that the peace accord failed to bring into its framework the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and the Abu Sayyaf, and their refusal to be part of the peace accord foreshadows problems of rebellion from this group. The essay argues that in the interests of lasting peace, the government must adopt a more nuanced approach to Muslim rebel groups, taking into consideration the differences between the MNLF, the MILF and the Abu Sayyaf toward a political settlement of the Muslim separatist movement.

T Ruanni F Tupas surveys the results of 25 years of Philippine bilingual education policy in a context characterized by a decline in proficiency in English, which is considered (wrongly, says Mr Tupas) as the global language, and pervasive codeswitching between English, Filipino and the vernacular languages in Philippine classrooms. His essay identifies the

limits of the bilingual education policy and proposes an alternative paradigm—the adoption of multilingualism in Philippine education. This essay is certain to provoke further debate on the language policy.

Finally, Amado M Mendoza Jr's essay foregrounds how innovations in communication and information technology have given rise to a number of security and other issues, prompting moves to regulate the use of these innovations. Economic sabotage, piracy, pornography and other crimes perpetrated through the Internet are compelling arguments for regulating cyberspace. These issues must be addressed, but not to the point of violating the rights to privacy and free expression of individuals. In any case, those sitting on opposite sides of the debate on whether to regulate cyberspace must face the fact that while it is a virtual world, cyberspace involves real people engaged in real world transactions with real world consequences.



