



## **A SOCIALIST MANIFESTO FOR A POST-COVID-19 PHILIPPINES**

**April 22, 2020**

As government and the private sector attempt to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic by instituting both health and social amelioration measures, the assumption reigns that when all this is over things will go back to normal and it will be “business as usual.” This means going back to the modes of economic and political life that have long defined Philippine society, one dominated by rent-seeking economic elites and rapacious political oligarchies.

This social formation mode has resulted in huge swathes of inequality, poverty, marginalization and disempowerment of the great majority of the people. The capitalist liberal regime and its unquenchable profit maximization goals built on liberalization, deregulation, and privatization, while sidelining social protection and distorting the health and medical sciences is, to a large extent, responsible for the lack of foresight, poor preparation and erratic direction in addressing the Covid-19 crisis.

The manner and disorder of these hegemonic players’ responses to the crisis proves beyond a shadow of doubt that the old order can no longer be restored and its ruling classes can no longer administer society in the old way. The chaos, uncertainties, and fears resulting from Covid-19, depressing and dreary though they may be, are also pregnant with opportunities and challenges to develop and offer to the public a new way of organizing and managing society and its attendant political, economic, and social components. As the socialist Albert Einstein pointed out: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

### **Introduction**

The Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is projected to infect 13.63 million people worldwide with 1.72 million deaths by May 2020. For the Philippines the projection is 73,800 cases with 2,215 deaths. This is the second super-crisis of the global capitalist system in slightly over a decade. The first was the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 that threw hundreds of millions of people out of work and sank the global economy into a recession and stagnation from which it had not yet recovered when Covid-19 hit.

These two crises illustrate what Marx said about capitalism being its own grave digger. The financial crisis underlined how the greed of a small number of speculators can destabilize the global economy, trigger widespread unemployment and the plunge to poverty of countless working people. The coronavirus pandemic, for its part, was triggered by the capitalist economy’s ruthless invasion and plunder of the habitat of wildlife and was transmitted at internet

speed to different parts of the globe by the “air connectivity” that was touted as essential to the success of globalization. It was compounded by the neglect and monetization of healthcare and the market orientation of medical education.

Other than contributing to the health crisis from Manila to New York, the global economy has also virtually ground to a halt because the global supply chains that were the pride of corporate giants like Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, Facebook, Toyota, Samsung, Alibaba, and Shell have become dysfunctional. Whereas the financial crisis was quickly mitigated by flooding the economy with trillions of dollars in bailouts to the failed giant corporations, the current pandemic is hampered by the shortage of health personnel, face masks, personal protection equipment, ventilators, and hospital and other care spaces. These necessities, it turned out, have been long neglected, taken for granted and abandoned to the callous and merciless laws of the market whose priorities lay elsewhere.

In a March 27, 2020 article in *Monthly Review*, the research science team of Wallace, Chaves and Liebman argued that “the failures to prepare for and react to the outbreak ... were actually programmed decades ago as the shared commons of public health were simultaneously neglected and monetized.” They also bemoaned how “current political structures allowed multinational agricultural enterprises to privatize profits while socializing and externalizing costs” provided by the context of pandemic infection” and must therefore be subject to “code enforcement that re-internalizes these costs if truly mass-fatal pandemic disease is to be avoided in the future.”

Governments label their anti-Covid-19 efforts a “war” in the literal sense with the Philippine efforts spearheaded by military and police officers and identified “frontliners.” Arundhati Roy, however, rhetorically asks: “If it were not masks and gloves that its frontline soldiers needed, but guns, smart bombs, bunker busters, submarines, fighter jets and nuclear bombs, would there be a shortage?”

The warning bells have long been tolled on the unpreparedness and inadequacies of existing health systems. As late as 2019, the Global Health Security Index, which assessed health security capabilities in 195 countries, concluded that “collectively, international preparedness for epidemics and pandemics remains very weak” and that “no country is fully prepared” for a major health crisis. For the Philippines, a 2018 UN WHO Report concluded that, despite achievements over the years, many concerns remain such as “regional and socio-economic disparities” that hamper “the availability and accessibility of resources, maldistribution of infrastructure and other resources,” inadequate availability of health professionals, the absence of an “effective mechanism to regulate private for-profit health-care providers,” lack of public knowledge of public health insurance benefits, and absence of an “effective mechanism to monitor the accreditation of facilities, and regulate the cost and quality of services.” In the Global Health Security Index, the Philippines ranks 53rd, lower than its Asean neighbors Vietnam, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand.

## **Opportunity Beckons**

An opportunity to create an alternative way of organizing society and economy presented itself following the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. That opportunity was squandered, however,

owing to the continuing political hegemony of the capitalist class, as well as the weakness of progressive movements. This explains why the impact of the coronavirus crisis is so much greater than the global financial crisis. This renewed opportunity to create a new system that the current crisis presents is one that humanity cannot afford to waste.

The prophets of capital acknowledge that the post-Covid-19 will be different and game-changing. *The Economist* refers to a coming new set of “radical economic policies,” meaning, increased government intervention and stimulus spending as a percentage of GDP to prevent firms from going bust and laying off workers, relief from household and individual debt payments, rent, and utility bills and even (heaven forbid) “heavier taxation of incomes and wealth of the rich!” The whole objective, however, of what appears to be a retreat from the forty-year-reign of neoliberal policies is to strengthen the capitalist state and assure the continued dominance of big firms and monopolies. In the words of the American president: “Government intervention is not government takeover. Its purpose is not to weaken the free market. It is to preserve the free market.” To this end, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank and the International Monetary Fund are all extending hundreds of billions of dollars in loans to hard-hit developing states to shore up the capitalist system and drive recipient economies further into debt. In other words, there is nothing radical in a capital-friendly state exercising greater control over the economy in order to protect its allies and patrons in the corporate world.

It is, of course, essential and crucial to assist in responding to the immediate and critical needs of those most severely affected by the pandemic crisis in terms of their health and basic needs. Popular organizations, civil society groups, and individuals (especially health care professionals) are acting in a variety of ways to assist in containing the pandemic. But progressive and socialist groups should also take the time to reflect on what a post-Covid-19 era should look like and imagine a different society and culture that create the conditions that will prevent recurrences of pandemics while constructing the building blocks of a truly participative, democratic, ecologically-friendly, gender-fair, and socially-just Philippines. More important and crucial is the transfer of political and economic power into the hands of the working classes whose interests represent the future of humanity. Only by doing so will a post-pandemic world be a genuinely radical departure from the old order.

Contrary to what the intellectual mouthpieces of capital and the oligarchic state allege, the basic elements of an alternative way of organizing our economic and social lives have been present in our societies for some time now owing to the innovative thinking of socialist, ecological, and feminist economists and activists. As opposed to the claim that these are “impractical” or “utopian,” these principles when translated into strategy, can, in fact, be more effective in bringing about results that better serve the needs of the vast majority of peoples and the needs of the planet itself. Additionally, in communities at the grassroots level and among organized popular sectors acting independently of the state and market, alternative practices abound that successfully challenge the assumptions of the neoliberal paradigm and lay in place the elements of a new and different social order.

These principles of organizing economic and social life and the practices must be embedded within a larger context of a broader, more comprehensive change that prioritizes values above interests, cooperation above competition, collective good above individual profit, and community above bureaucratic efficiency. In contrast to capitalism, the economy, instead of driving society, is subordinated to the values of equity, justice, community, and the enlargement of democratic space. In a word, a truly socialist way of life.

## **Principles and Strategies**

*Laban ng Masa* draws from this wealth of ideas in painting and imagining its vision of a New Social and Economic Order and drawing up the principles and strategies that undergird this vision. Set in manifesto form, this vision responds to what Jomo Sundaram calls a “crisis of humanity” that “has exposed fault lines in trust among humans ... and faith in many of our assumptions about life, beliefs, ... and knowledge itself.”

1. Radically restructure the health and medical sciences sector.
  - 1.1. Nationalize, institute and prioritize various modes and levels of public control over health services and the pharma industry.
  - 1.2. Provide free medical care for all.
  - 1.3. Ensure safe pregnancies and childbirth, and the availability/accessibility of family planning commodities.
  - 1.4. End gender-based violence.
  - 1.5. Emphasize community-based primary health care. Learn from and develop traditional health care systems.
  - 1.6. Ensure that advanced health research and biotechnology programs benefit primarily peoples health.
  - 1.7. Pay greater attention to the social and environmental determinants of health in development planning, since these account for 80% of people’s well-being.
  - 1.8. Re-direct infrastructure development towards building more primary care clinics and hospitals, especially in remote areas of the country.
  - 1.9. Develop appropriate mental programs to cope with the stress of modern living.
  
2. Focus on other social protection and public services programs
  - 2.1. Ensure the universal provision in education, housing, water, power, and a mass transport system.

- 2.2. Institute free education for everyone all the way to the university and graduate levels.
  - 2.3. The power and transportation systems must be transformed into decentralized systems based on renewable resources.
  - 2.4. Ensure decent housing for the poor and homeless population. Redesign government housing projects to make them more spacious, comfortable and with enough common public spaces. Upgrade blighted urban communities.
  - 2.5. Reorient and reallocate the government budget away from economic-growth-oriented programs, mega infrastructure projects and the military/police towards social protection, with immediate and greater emphasis on health needs and concerns.
3. Overhaul the education system so that it becomes truly rights-based and inclusive, with everyone benefitting from quality learning and aiming not to become cogs in or feed into economic production, but to continuously transform and make peoples' lives more meaningful through lifelong learning.
- 3.1. Provide options for different pathways of learning that are equally valued and recognized, whether through formal or non-formal education, and ensure that career paths of teachers for both learning modes are equally rewarding.
  - 3.2. Provide ample spaces and time for leisure, entertainment, and family-oriented activities, since these are where socialization and informal learning happens.
  - 3.3. Reorient core value systems away from cutthroat competition and self-absorbed individualism towards cooperation, solidarity, and communitarian ideas and practices.
  - 3.4. Strip down patriarchy and misogyny so that gender equality values can percolate through all levels of society.
  - 3.5. Implement comprehensive sexuality education in the school system.
  - 3.6. Bring back the concept of education as a social activity that is enjoyable and at the same time develops in our learners a culture of solidarity and resistance.
  - 3.7. Develop the arts, humanities, and literature towards a people-oriented culture, and eschew the World Bank's concept of a Human Capital Index that dictates our national education agenda.
  - 3.8. Make the internet accessible to all as part of the education commons.
  - 3.9. Realign scientific, technological, and social science education and research to serve the priorities and needs of the people and the requirements of the new development paradigm.

4. Discard the market-oriented and economic-growth-focused model of development.
  - 4.1. Explore and develop new indicators of development that directly reflect people's lives and aspirations. Discard purely economic growth indicators such as GNI, GDP, export figures, and investments.
  - 4.2. Focus on essential human development and peoples' well-being, emphasizing the upgrading of the quality of life of all.
  - 4.3. Abolish special economic zones (SEZs) as they distort sound national economic development and deprive the country of needed public revenues.
  
5. Develop and support ecologically sound agricultural & industrial policies, programs, and technologies
  - 05.1 A healthy balance must be maintained between society's population and ecology.
  - 05.2 In agriculture, assert food sovereignty principles and practices.
  - 05.3 Subsidize farmers in the form of outright grants and credit; recover the right to plant and develop sustainably food crops the country needs.
  - 05.4 Industries must be reorganized and redirected to meeting the people's need in food, health provisions, education, housing, etc.
  
6. The principle of subsidiarity should be enshrined in economic life by encouraging production of goods both at the level of the community and at the national level.
  - 6.1. Support family farms and rural micro-enterprises as the backbone of agricultural development. Encourage and support food production at the community level.
  - 6.2. Complete the redistribution of agricultural lands through a radical agrarian reform program that removes all exemptions and plugs existing loopholes.
  - 6.3. Support organic and environmentally-friendly farming research and technologies.
  - 6.4. Provide direct access between producers and consumers; curtail the role of the middle traders.
  - 6.5. Abolish all monopolies and business cartels.
  
7. Produce mainly for domestic needs rather than the global market.
  - 7.1. Prioritize production for social and ecologically sound goals.

- 7.2. Industrial and trade policies must utilize subsidies, quotas, tariffs, and trade to revitalize and strengthen the manufacturing sector.
  - 7.3. Protect the local economy from destruction by corporate-subsidized commodities with artificially low prices.
- 8.** Maximize equity to reduce social, economic and environmental disequilibrium.
- 8.1. Implement a wealth tax to address social and income inequalities.
  - 8.2. Institute a program for universal basic income for the most vulnerable sectors.
  - 8.3. Provide incomes and benefits for all workers and employees in both public and private sectors that meet the essential and necessary requirements for a dignified and sustainable quality of life.
- 9.** Protect and preserve the environment by ending its exploitation for profit.
- 9.1. Target mining, logging, agribusiness plantations, use of fossil fuels and toxic chemical inputs, etc.
  - 9.2. Aim for maximum renewable energy use in production, distribution, and household and community use.
- 10.** Radically transform the financial system from being a gambling casino of speculative and rent-seeking practices to a system that enables progressive investment in industrial and agricultural development to meet the needs of the majority.
- 10.1. Nationalize the banks, eliminate fractional reserve banking, and end the banks' power to create money.
  - 10.2. Extend loans based on meeting peoples' needs as opposed to repayment capacity.
  - 10.3. Eliminate illicit financial flows and prohibit the transfer of funds to tax havens.
  - 10.4. End tax holidays and other forms of subsidies for big business concerns.
- 11.** Emphasize public ownership of economic and public interest enterprises over private monopolies. Reverse privatization policies and process.
- 11.1. Develop state-owned industrial and cooperative enterprises including family-farm-based collectives.

11.2. Abolish private ownership of natural resources and of land beyond household and family-farm sizes.

11.3. Institute workers' control through direct ownership and management of enterprises.

11.4. In accordance with the mixed and diversified economy model, indigenous private enterprises are to be encouraged and transnational corporations are excluded.

11.5. Public ownership should extend to media enterprises through the transfer of majority shares of stocks to their workers and employees who will thereafter gain control and management but without prejudice to the principle of editorial independence.

**12.** Manage rationally the country's debt so that it fulfills and prioritizes social and human development goals over repayments.

12.1. Cancel and/or suspend debt repayments (principal, interest, and charges) for five years.

12.2. Repeal the automatic debt appropriation law.

12.3. Independently review and audit all existing debts to identify illegitimate, onerous and unsustainable debt transactions.

12.4. All succeeding foreign assistance should be in the form of untied grants, not loans.

12.5. All public debts (including official development assistance) must comply with standards based on social and environmental impacts, equitable distribution, popular consultative mechanisms, participative decision making, monitoring, and pre- and post-audit processes.

12.6. Abolish the practice of granting sovereign guaranty for private debts.

**13.** Strategic economic and political decision-making should be broadened so that all questions are subjected to democratic decisions and choice. Decision-making cannot be left to the market or to technocrats.

13.1. Support and strengthen autonomous civil society, popular, and sectoral organizations as vehicles for participatory bottom-up and grassroots-based decision making.

13.2. A gender lens must be applied in all areas of decision-making to ensure gender equity.

13.3. Ensure that the high education performance of young girls later translates to equitable participation of women in the economic and political spheres.



13.4. Deputize qualified and relevant civil society organizations and other mass-based groups to constantly monitor and evaluate the actions of the private sector and the state.

**14.** Recognize the right to self-determination of all ethnic nationalities and indigenous peoples.

14.1. End assimilationist and integrationist policies and programs.

14.2. Empower indigenous peoples by providing the necessary enabling mechanisms and support policies.

14.3. Empower and support indigenous peoples to determine their own path to development in accordance with their own worldview, indigenous political structure, and justice systems.

14.4. Ensure that there will be no discrimination or any form of violence against indigenous women in the name of culture and customary practices.

**15.** Uphold international solidarity, cooperation, and the common ownership and/or joint development of disputed natural resources. Discard ultra-patriotism and national chauvinism.

15.1. Support “globalization-from-below” through people-to-people networks and exchanges in the spirit of oneness with other peoples and societies.

15.2. Push for the replacement of centralized global institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and the WTO with regional institutions built on principles of cooperation and mutual benefit not on free trade and capital mobility.

## **Conclusion**

This manifesto lays down our ideological and strategic perspective in addressing program and policy issues and in mobilizing for our demands. Many of the above principles and strategies have been more commonly identified with generic socialist systems of thought and practice. But they also depart considerably and reflect lessons learned from socialist revolutions and “actually existing socialisms” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that have attempted to translate these ideas with varying degrees of successes and failures. Apart from these, they have also been culled from the lived experiences of peoples and their organizations in many contemporary societies struggling for a better and higher quality of life. They thus belong to a new socialist paradigm for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Covid-19 crisis has opened a national discourse, a debate on what the future should be for our country and the whole world. This Manifesto is a proposal to the entire nation. Never has the

noble purpose of saving lives require social equality, the transformation of the economy, the regeneration of our environment and human rights more than now. These proposals not only express the aspirations and struggles of the working class and the entire working people, the great majority and the biggest productive force of the nation and the world, and to which we belong. They are also derived from decades of scientific study by many intellectuals and institutions, and the best practices of societies that have achieved both equality, progress and the protection of the environment. We are prepared to reach out to everybody including those from the upper sections of society in the great *bayanihan* tradition of our people. But we will not allow a privileged few to narrow down and hijack the historical opportunity that has opened up to serve their selfish ends.

To paraphrase the great socialist novelist, Carlos Bulosan, we know that out of the pandemic will emerge a new generation of humanity, and history will continue. The old world must die, a new world must live. The struggle to live inspires sacrifices out of the ashes that we are loathe to see. The magnanimous gesture of care wrapped in the deceptive cloak of guns and bullets, the false promises and show of power, the data of deaths and contamination will energize our inner strengths into an unimagined bravery heretofore unseen. The old world must die so that the new world will live with a breathtaking force for those who will survive among us.

Finally, the words of Arundhati Roy brim with wisdom and acumen and reflect what everyone should optimistically be looking forward to:

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

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