Political Development: The Current Philippine Experience

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Many scholars speak of development in systemic and wholistic terms. They maintain that movements or changes in one sphere, say in the economic, could affect the other spheres, the social, the cultural, and the political. It is thus, for example, that political development is viewed "as a state of the polity which might facilitate economic growth."[1]

This paper deals not with development in general but only with contemporary Philippine political development. How such development affects or is affected by the other specific aspects of Filipino life will be touched upon only in broad terms.

An Interpretation of Western Thinking

A noted American political scientist views political development as "a long range linear process of meeting new goals, demands, etc."[2] Another scholar believes that the process is concerned with 1) the expansion of the functions of the political system, 2) the attainment of new levels of integration concomitant with the expansion of functions, and 3) the increase in the capacity of the political system to cope with the new problems attendant to the subprocess of political integration.[3]

Two other authors list some of the specifics constituting presumably indicators of political development. They claim that the process "involves the development of a capacity to maintain certain

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[1]Jason L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable, *Political Development and Social Change,* John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966, p. 83.

[2]Dwight Waldo, *Temporal Dimensions of Development Administration,* Duke University Press, 1970, p. 101.

[3]Claude E. Welch, Jr., *Political Modernization,* Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc. 1967, p. 153.

kinds of public order, to mobilize resources for a specific range of collective enterprises, and to make and uphold effectively types of international commitments."[4]

At the level of the citizen, the process calls for "new standards of loyalty and involvement."[5] This could mean, as another writer puts it, that political development is the "institutionalization of political organizations and procedures."[6]

The definitions just cited are either complementary or supplementary to each other. At the same time, all of them taken as one, provide the elements of political development as seen by Western scholars. They likewise imply that the age-old dream of an ideal state is the objective of political development.

Political development, as cited earlier, is a long-range linear process. This may connote not only that the rate of movement could be slow at times and fast at other times but also that the movement could be forward or backward at various periods. The reason for this will be explained in a later part of this section in relation to the notion of political retrogression.

The linearity of the process does not mean that there is only one possible route towards the effervescent and elusive goal of perfection in the political sphere. Indeed, the definition of what is perfect or ideal could differ from one society to another. The needs of people are at least qualitatively different; and the resources and means at their command to satisfy such needs are both qualitatively and quantitatively different too. This explains in part why there are various shades of democratic-capitalistic and socialistic governments.

This is not to say that governments the world over are destined to be differentiated from each other by various types of ideology. It could very well be that as the world approaches the millenium, there will be a confluence of the various linear routes taken by the different nations. The point, however, is that each nation has the opportunity to choose its own route and its own pace to reach political utopia; and the choice could depend on circumstances obtaining within their geographical boundaries and in their external environment.

The notion of process could imply that there is a sequence of steps. Each forward step is marked by new demands which could be

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[4]Finkle and Gable, *op. cit.,* pp. 83-90.

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Harvey G. Kebschull, *Politics in Transitional Societies,* Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970, p. 54.

the by-product of cultural borrowings and acculturation. As the eyes of the people are opened to new possibilities through their own innovative genius or because of demonstration effect, their aspirations could grow in intensity and in number. But those aspirations could become the generators of frustrations if the polity and the society in general do not have the institutional machinery, the resources and the will to satisfy them.

Of the three elements needed to fulfill the aspirations of the polity, the will to bridge the gap between the things aspired for and reality is perhaps the most vital. A society may set up political and administrative structures and institute processes to meet new and increasingly intense demands and goals and in fact may have the technology and resources to support the task of such structures, but if the personnel who man those structures perform lackadaisically and if the citizenry does not give the moral support necessary to institutionalize the process, then there will always be a large measure of unsatisfied demands. Correspondingly, therefore, there should be a redefinition of the roles and responsibilities of the citizenry in relation to their demands and aspirations. This is to prevent a sliding back; for when the citizens' support is much less than their demands, the stress on the political system could be too much to bear and may result in instability.

The firmness of each step forward and upward is a function of the degree of the institutionalization of both demands and support. Institutionalization could therefore be viewed in terms of the capacity of the political system to meet the growing demands and, contemporaneously, in terms of the identification of the citizenry with and their support of the activities of government and the goals of society. The more closely identified the people are to such societal goals, the stronger is the integration of the polity.

One often hears of political retrogression in the sense of a phenomenon which is the obverse of political development. There is an insinuation of a backward movement along a linear route. The thesis of this paper is that the use of the term political retrogression should not refer to the adjustments being taken in order to decrease the incongruencies in society. This is to say that if the norms of the sociocultural and economic orders are far behind the norms demanded by a particular stage of development in the political sphere, there are bound to be societal imbalances. A society cannot preserve its integrity for long if such imbalances continue to erode the fabric of national identity and security. It becomes imperative,

therefore, for that society either to develop in the sociocultural and economic sectors at a rate fast enough for the norms that correspond to them to catch up with the more advanced political norms or for the political movement to go back as many steps as necessary so that all normative aspects of life could be more or less abreast of each other.

Normative imbalances could lead to political instability. In turn, efforts to stabilize the political system could lead to political retrogression. This happens when the measures intended to effect stability or to implement political reforms actually require the internalization by the citizenry of political norms which are not at par with the normative requirements of the sociocultural and economic sectors. For example, it would be political retrogression if the American people were in effect made by legislative fiat to change from a representative system of government to another one in the name of reforming the electoral process. This is on the assumption that right now the normative mix in all sectors of the American society is probably just right for a representative form of government. This mix is uniquely American and is the product of the evolution of the society from colonial times to the struggle for independence then through the westward push of the frontier, the industrial revolution, the Civil War, and the emergence of the United States as a world power after the Spanish-American War in which the Philippines was a prize. In all of those periods, the American people underwent political, economic, and sociocultural vicissitudes. But they managed to reach their present state of balanced development because they built upon their gains at each successive step.

Not all countries have had the good fortune and the time that the Americans and some European peoples had to effect development almost simultaneously in all sectors. Many countries in South America, Africa, and Asia are undergoing political instability as exemplified by *coup d' etat* and rapid changes of government because development in the various sectors are not mutually reinforcing of each other or because development in some sectors are far advanced of the development in others.

It may be asked why this is so; or, to put it in another way, why imbalances among the normative aspects of the sociocultural, economic, and political systems exist. These imbalances could be the result of an outright transplantation of models which the society may yet be in no position to accept. This transplantation could be a

part of the country's colonial heritage or the offshoot of foreign assistance. But whatever may be the reason for this, it would seem that political and administrative systems are easier to transplant than economic and sociocultural systems. Given this, it would not really be strange if political development tends to outpace development in other sectors; hence the imbalances.

The superimposition of political models, therefore, could lead to ambivalence and formalism or to a condition where the formal structures exist in the host country but where the philosophical, cultural, and social underpinnings are nice to hear about even if they are actually inexistent or at best weak. In brief, it may be inferred that political development has to be based on phenomena and variables which are indigenous to or have been indigenized by a people — on their prevailing value system, world view, social institutions and norms, and level of economic development. This therefore means that a people are the best judge of their own political destiny and that the state of political development they find themselves in should be, in many respects, culture-bound.

Current Philippine Experiences In Political Development

One question which may be raised at this juncture is: If the interpretation of Western thinking on political development were indeed correct, what then would its implications be for the Philippines? The answer to this question is found in the sometimes exasperating penchant of some Western scholars and members of the press to make judgment of other peoples' ways in terms of their (Western) premises as if those premises were the only ones that matter in all countries. For example, some American scholars regard political development in terms "of the typical kind of politics basic to already industrialized and economically highly advanced societies" because the "advanced nations are the fashion makers and pace setters in most phases of social and economic life, *and it is understandable that many people expect the same to be true in the political sphere.*"[7] The implication here is that a people who know no better than to be in the van of the fashion setters are not exactly blameless if the fashion does not fit them.

One possible reason for the virulent attack of the American press on our current political experiment is their realization that their political fashion is not four-square with Filipino culture and with our

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[7]Finkle and Gable, *op. cit.*

social and economic institutions. The American brand is based on certain assumptions; but those assumptions are not necessarily valid in the Philippine setting. The American nation has a strong middle class while we are still in the process of reducing the marked dualism in our social and economic existence. The American society is largely impersonal while we are a people with strong attachments to family and clan. The American electorate is well informed of issues affecting them; our people are not so well informed. Interest articulation and aggregation is strong in the United States while here the formation of articulate interest groups among the masses is apparently only in its infancy; so that here a doubt may be raised as to whether the articulators of some interests really speak for the majority of the people or have the welfare of the masses at heart. It may be noted that the so-called articulators in our country almost invariably belong to the moneyed and educated class.

In the light of our political history, there seems to be no other recourse but for us to develop politically in our own mode. In this regard, President and Prime Minister Marcos should be credited for leading the nation to take this course of action. In his 12 June 1978 address to the Interim Batasang Pambansa (IBP) and to the Filipino people, he said: "It is my considered view that our own experience as an independent and sovereign nation should ultimately give us the form of government we desire and need for our people." He therefore exhorted the nation that in our political development "we ought to be bold in our imagination, and in the process of experimentation we should not fear to innovate, neither fear to discover a system *uniquely our own.*"

It should be emphasized that we have the sociocultural elements to bring this bold experiment to a successful conclusion. Let us mention a few aspects of such experiment.

When martial law was declared in 1972, the general reaction was enthusiastic and hopeful. Of course, the segments of our society whose thought processes are steeped in Jeffersonian, liberal democratic tenets, and in the communist ideology did not agree. Among them are what a noted Filipino columnist calls the "steak commandos." At any rate, the question which one can pose is: Why was the reaction of the majority of the people positive?

The answer lies in the fact that the emergence of a strong leader obsessed with the desire to bring progress and social justice to all the Filipino people is in keeping with our indigenous culture and social norms. As one reviews the accounts of our pre-Spanish era and as

he analyzes the folklore and sagas of our people, he would notice that an element which stands out prominently in our social relationships is the concept of a strong and benevolent leader. This concept was reinforced by the Roman Law principle of *bono pater familia*. This principle was embellished in our legal system through the adoption of the Spanish civil law.

The paradox of it all is that the American press and scholars consider the declaration of martial law political retrogression. In our view, however, it was a break away from the American political route which did not suit our temperament and tradition. It should therefore be considered the taking of a new linear path in our political development.

When President Marcos defined the concept of baranganic democracy, not a few were skeptical. And yet, if the concept is analyzed in the light of our cultural history, one would note that it is no more than a resurrection of an aspect of the Filipino way of life as exemplified in the term *bayanihan*. It may be stated at this juncture that the spirit of bayanihan behind baranganic democracy is not the commercial, *quid pro quo* type which has crept into the hearts and minds of people who operate in an atmosphere of impersonalism; rather it is one premised on neighborliness, or *pagtutulungan*, or a desire to help others because it is a moral obligation to do so. That moral obligation is defined by the members of small groups or communities.

The resurfacing of baranganic democracy is a decisive step in our political development because it builds up the capability of small social groups within the polity to cope with demands which are best satisfied at the lowest level of our political hierarchy. It is also a step towards the integration of common aspirations and a process of strengthening the identification of the people with the activities, projects, and programs of government. In Western terms, this is essentially participative democracy. In our perception, the institutionalization of baranganic democracy would mean the development of a viable and vigilant political will based on national interest.

One other case which can be cited is the inauguration of the IBP. Many self-anointed political theorists consider the IBP a strange creature. Here again, one may note that such judgment is based on the fact that its features do not conform either to the American model called the Congress of the United States nor to the parliaments of Great Britain, India, and some other Western-inspired

legislature. But the so-called strangeness is precisely what makes it a truly Filipino experiment. It is with diffidence that we had to use the term parliament which conjures to the mind certain characteristics and procedures; and yet in actuality we perforce have to use it because in the English language it is the nearest to the kind of law-making body we would like to develop on premises which we ourselves have defined or have to define.

What we are developing is a legislative body wherein decisions are based on consensus rather than on the Western practice of majority rule. We have seen that the practice has had a divisive effect on our people. The result has been delay in the implementation of government programs intended to raise the economic and social well-being of the people.

Finally, we may cite the administrative reforms pursued since 21 September 1972. All of them are designed to develop in the bureaucracy, the implementing arm of government, a strong commitment to national interest through the rendition of high quality public service. It is in this area, however, where much has to be done and yet have remained undone in spite of the repeated exhortations of our top leadership. Apparently, the bad habits of some public functionaries formed during the pre-martial law days are hard to eradicate. That is why there is still so much lethargy, waste, and inefficiency in the government sector. This also accounts, at least in part, for the tendency of some government officials to be more concerned with their privileges than with their responsibilities as servants of the people.

We have been promised that the national leadership is taking steps to bring us to normalcy. All of us can appreciate the efforts taken so far towards normalization. But normalcy should not be taken to mean a return to the debilitating atmosphere before the declaration of martial law; rather it should mean the successful conclusion of our experiments to develop a political system based on the normative underpinnings of our culture, social relationships, and stage of economic development. The transition period we are in now is really the time of experimentation wherein all of us should be active participants. The termination of this transition period will therefore be a function of the degree to which the citizenry will internalize the attitudes and commitments needed to establish a uniquely Filipino political system.

The Independence Day address of President and Prime Minister Marcos assures us that we are well on the way to becoming a

politically-mature society. For in the final analysis, a people who are no longer afraid to go back to their roots and build thereon their national institutions have attained that degree of sophistication characterized by the ability to discriminate and differentiate and to adapt on the basis of selective choices. This could be considered political development in its pristine form even in the context of Western definitions.