

# Colonialism and Elitism in Philippine Political Development: Assessing the Roots of Underdevelopment

RIZAL G. BUENDIA\*

*Philippine political development has been shaped by its colonial history and postcolonial elitist political system. As the country is ushered into the 21st century, the problems of underdevelopment remain. These problems are rooted on the unresolved question of nationhood, skewed concept of public service, alienated political system, and ambivalent political culture. These problems contributed significantly to the weakness of the country's political and economic institutions. If national development has to transpire, the spirit of nationalism subdued by long periods of colonialism must be revived, the political system must be democratized, and an ethic-oriented politics towards the well-being of the people must emerge. Through these efforts, Philippine sovereignty can be defended, foreign intervention can be curtailed, national honor and pride can be redeemed, and a better society for the coming generations can be created.*

## Introduction

Among the Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines stands distinct from the rest. It is the first country to stage a revolution against Western colonialism; the only predominant Christian nation; an English speaking country; and a country rich in natural resources and yet the people are poor.

This paper attempts to describe and analyze political events and phenomena in the Philippines which delivered the country into its present state of underdevelopment. The development of Philippine politics cannot be separated from its colonial history. Likewise, the continuing search for development cannot be divorced from its search for identity and nationhood.

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\*Master of Public Administration student, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines and Lecturer, Political Science Department, De La Salle University.

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The history of Philippine colonialism left an indelible impact into the nature, character, and dynamics of its socioeconomic and political system. To a great extent this has defined the kind and level of development and underdevelopment that the country has attained. The Philippines has yet to achieve its political and economic independence. However, the more basic question which it has to address is: can there be substantial and lasting development in a nation which failed to become?

It is hoped that this paper can illuminate the attempt of the country to answer its problems from the perspective of nationalism.

### **Historical Background: The Making and Unmaking of a Filipino Nation**

Political development involves the aspects of nation- and state-building. As such, the difficult but exciting process of progressively welding the Filipinos into a national community must be addressed. State-formation or political institution-building does not necessarily and immediately create a national community, although it does hasten its eventual formation. The inchoate development and stunted growth of Filipino consciousness as a result of colonialism which has been comprehensive and total in all aspects of Filipino life, made state-building and political development artificial and arbitrary as it was imposed and induced from outside. This has been made possible as the inhabitants of the Philippines did not possess a high degree of civilization and social structure during the preconquest times as did their Southeast Asian brothers (Constantino 1974:2).

The country as a whole was subjected to western colonialism before it was influenced by the great culture of Asia, (Weightman 1970:25; Fox 1968:70, 90) except the Muslim communities in the South which were within the orbit of Islamic proselytization activities as early as the 14th century and exhibited more advanced social formations.

While the non-Muslim natives who were fragmented and disunited living in small socioeconomic and political unit (average size of about 30-50 families each) were easily subjugated and proselytized to Christianity, the Muslims were able to form their own national consciousness and identity. From the perspective of nation-building, the Muslims by themselves were able to form a nation not only in its objective but subjective sense as well.

In Hans Kohn's (1961:15-16) framework, the "objective" factors of nationhood are not really essential to the existence of a nation or definition of a nationality. Rather, it is the subjective factor, the determined will of the people to live as one with one definite and definable goal which is the

essence of a nation. Kohn says that it is the "living and active corporate will" which makes a nation. Nationality is formed by the desire to form a nation. It assumes a common conception of the identity, the purposes, and future prospects of the people.

The consolidation of Moro nationhood has been effected by the subsequent creation of the Moro State based on kinship ties. This process of nation- and state-building had effectively thwarted Spanish colonization, confining Spanish control to a few coastal areas. Apparently, had the Spaniards not arrived, a Muslim nation would have emerged and thoroughly exposed to the great Asian traditions.

The advent of Spanish colonialism aborted the quasi-indigenous development of the country and reversed the historic trend. The costly wars stirred up by the Spaniards between the Christianized Filipinos and Muslims shaped our political destiny. Had these peoples accepted each other and coexisted in peace, a fraternal union of two or more independent states would have probably emerged in the archipelago rather than one republic today (Corpuz 1989:x).

The institutionalization of a highly-centralized unitary form of government and the proselytization of the non-Muslim peoples of Luzon and Visayas were deliberate Spanish colonial policies to keep the two peoples divided in spite of their precolonial cultural affinities and geographical proximity. Catholicism was emphasized as the factor that made all the difference. Apparently, as long as the natives of Christian and Muslim communities had no conception of a Filipino nationality and as long as the identifying factors were religion and bifurcated political loyalties — one to the Spanish King and the other to their own sultans, the internecine conflicts between the Christian and Muslim Filipinos benefited only the colonial masters.

One of the prominent features of Spanish colonialism was its theocratic nature, i.e., the union of church and state (Abueva 1988:27). This union meant the active participation by the friars in the colonial administration. Real power in the localities was vested on the hands of the Spanish parish priest or friar. However, such power was not exercised with prudence and within legal and ecclesiastical bounds as this was characterized by acts of abuses, immorality, acquisition of lands, and discrimination against Filipino clergy (Abueva 1988:28).

Whatever improvement in the modes of production and economic system in the country was dictated by its interest to enhance her economic standing in international trade (Fast and Richardson 1979:4-6, 10). The exposure of the economy into world capitalism made the islands dependent on Western capital and markets. Moreover, the opening of the local economy to

international trade laid the formation of a national economy which led to the emergence of a new Filipino middle class known as the *ilustrados* or the intellectuals who enjoyed a higher economic status.

By virtue of their social standing compared to the rest of the Filipinos and liberal policies on education, especially the Education Decree of 1863, adopted by the Spanish regime in the mid-19th century, the rich families (*ilustrado* class) were able to send their sons to study in Manila and even abroad. These young men eventually were exposed to liberal and revolutionary ideas of the Western countries.

The exploitative, oppressive, and iniquitous law-and-order government was in contrast to the political system that newly-educated Filipinos read about or observed in Spain and other European countries. These stark contradictions sharpened the awareness of the *ilustrados* of their separate national identity, a consciousness which was transmitted to them by the Spaniards. Such reality led the *ilustrados* to spearhead the reform movement not only for their own class but the entirety of the Christianized Filipinos. The reform movement finally sparked the 1896 national armed struggle for liberation.

The concept of nationhood evolved as a result of colonialism. Its growth was coterminous with the development of the concept of Filipino which started as a concept with narrow racial and elitist connotation. Later, through the propaganda work of the *ilustrados*, the term Filipino was infused with a national meaning to finally include the entire people and became a means of national identification regardless of racial strain or economic status (Constantino 1974:25).

The role of the Filipino elite in the history of Philippine politics is something to ponder on. They possess a dual character — an articulator of the peoples' sentiments and disseminator of liberal ideas and at the same time a capitalist, collaborationist, and compromiser. During the early years of Spanish colonization, the Filipino elites served as the transmission belt of the colonizers' oppressive policies and culture of submission to the masses. On the other hand, when they in turn suffered discrimination from the hands of the colonizers, they demanded fairness and justice leading initially into a reform movement and finally participated in the revolution when the movement for reforms were met with violence. However, their participation in the revolution was short-lived when a promise of substantial role in Philippine governance was offered by the new colonizer.

In 1897 (a year after the revolution commenced) the *ilustrados* led by Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, already negotiated a compromise, known as the Pact of Biak-na-Bato, in which they agreed to voluntary exile in Hongkong and

the cessation of hostilities by the revolutionary forces in return for an indemnity of 800,000 pesos by the Spanish authorities. On 12 June 1898, the independence of the country from Spain was declared by Aguinaldo but "under the protection of the Mighty and Humane North American Nation," referring to the United States (US). Thus, in December 1898 when Spain ceded the Philippines to the US through the Treaty of Paris at the cost of US\$20 million (the amount includes the cessation of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the islands in the West Indies), the country was forcibly annexed to form part of the US territorial domain.

Although the territorial boundaries of the Philippine archipelago were defined by the treaty, the determination of civil and political rights and status of the Filipinos was left to the US Congress to decide. This meant that Filipinos are not necessarily considered as American citizens as a result of the cessation nor the ceded territory fall in the same category as the territories which were part of the United States with reference to its Constitution (Mendoza 1988:3)

On 23 January 1899, the new Filipino nation-state was born with the inauguration of the First Philippine Republic at Malolos, Bulacan with the Malolos Constitution as its charter (the Charter, however, does not contain the territorial jurisdiction of the Philippine State) and Aguinaldo at the helm. On this occasion, the ilustrados who betrayed the revolution at the Biak-na-Bato enacted the electoral laws which limited the right of suffrage to the leading citizens (principalia) of each town. Likewise, confiscated friar lands were not distributed to the peasants who formed the bulk of the revolutionary forces, but rewarded to the elites as "men of means" and "local chiefs" to administer the estates (Abueva 1988:32).

The imposition of American sovereignty in the country and subsequent defeat of the Filipino forces in the Philippine-American War, however, prevented the implementation of the Malolos Constitution, thus we have a republic which failed to become.

The quest of the Philippines for nationhood took two forms: one developed through the indigenous process as exemplified by the creation of the Moro nation, and the other through a revolution as a result of colonialism. The Muslims had not taken part in the Revolution because they were not colonial subjects in the first place.

The dichotomy of Philippine nationhood needs to be understood for a better appreciation of the country's political character and dynamics. It must be noted that while the Christian and Muslim Filipinos are now under a single government and sovereignty after 1914, the separatist rebellion of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) which broke out in 1972 and

continued to be waged to date is a clear evidence not only of the neglect by the Christian government of the worth and integrity of the Muslim Filipinos. It is an arbitrary and artificial political unity created by the American government and continued by the present government.

Direct American colonial rule in the Philippines lasted for 46 years with a brief interregnum of Japanese occupation in 1942. Although US colonialism is much shorter compared to the Spaniards, its impact on the country's political system, structures, and institutions is greater and more intense. The indelible mark of American colonialism remains long after the last American Governor-General left the country and granting of independence in 1946.

During the early years of colonialism, the Americans emphasized education, public health, public works, but de-emphasized politics. It was believed that economic stability was more important than self-rule (Abueva 1988:43). It was believed that if the powers of government were to be transferred to the Filipinos, education was essential to public administration and wise direction of the government. For these reasons, the Americans made it a colonial policy to establish, maintain and expand the public school system from the primary to tertiary level.

Through the institution of a nationwide public school system and the use of English as a medium of instruction, the Filipinos not only began learning a new language but a new culture which advanced the process of Americanizing the Filipino consciousness. Education became mis-education because it de-Filipinized the youth, regarded American culture, values, lifestyles, and standards as superior; glorified American institutions and heroes, and promoted the American society as the model par excellence for Philippine society (Constantino 1974:39; 1975:312-313). Moreover, competence in English became the basis for opportunities for employment and promotion in government and in private firms. Civil service examinations were conducted only in English. The English language opened the door to cultural penetration and facilitated the transformation of the Filipino into consumer of American goods and proselytizer for the new consciousness.

The Americans brought with them their concept of liberal democracy and introduced political institutions which loomed largest on the postindependence regimes such as the electoral process, party system, the legislature, strong presidency, independent judiciary, and professional civil service (Wurfel 1988:10-11). Although the Americans spoke of political participation as the process of training the Filipinos for self-government, the privilege of suffrage was limited to those who had held office under the Spaniards, to the educated class, and propertied class (Tancangco 1988:81-82). Politics therefore is for the elite.

Political parties were formed but from 1907 to 1946, the Nacionalista Party was the only significant political party in the country. Philippine politics became one-party politics with two separate levels in the struggle for power: one, the internal struggle among party leaders specifically Sergio Osmeña and Manuel Quezon; and two, the struggle of the Assembly for increased power vis-a-vis the Philippine Commission and Governor General (Grossholtz 1964:25-26).

By the 1930s, the party system had merely strengthened the political hold of dominant, landed families, which had used quasi-feudal techniques to gain an electoral following and could hold national power through a system of one-party dominance (Wurfel 1988:11). Parties were essentially parties of politicians rather than mass parties whose power rested on wealth and the size and loyalty of personal followers in their respective localities as well as the politician's shrewdness and dexterity in using the people's culture for the benefit of wielding power.

During the Commonwealth period (1935-1946), the Nacionalista Party virtually dominated party politics and maintained a monopoly of political power entrenched under the leadership of President Manuel L. Quezon (President of the Commonwealth Republic). While remaining subservient and responsible to the American Flag, Quezon ruled as a semi-dictator lording over the other branches of government that it was supposed to be coordinate and coequal with (Brillantes 1988:117).

In spite of Quezon's strong leadership, he failed to transform the predominantly agrarian economy into an industrial economy. Several progressive policies and programs to promote social justice for the poor and disadvantaged were insignificant and did not alter the iniquitous socioeconomic and political order which breeds mass poverty and agrarian unrest in the countryside. Apparently, Quezon was never serious about his call for "social justice" and the socioeconomic development of the country and instead was "more concerned with improving preferential trade relations with the United States" (Friend 1965:156). The Commonwealth President was no different from the American Governor-General whose role was to assure sovereignty over the Philippines.

Apart from a strong presidency, an "independent" judiciary and civil service system were likewise instituted. Elements of common law, excluding the jury, were grafted into the Spanish law tradition. Given the strong system of presidency, the independence of the Court from the executive branch and other political influences was highly doubtful. Inasmuch as the present judicial system is a creation of the American government, the discharge of judicial power and judicial review are limited to the western concept of justice which excludes the Filipino concept of social equity (Diokno 1987:16-31). The exclusion

of social equity as a broader concept of justice led the judicial system to be more concerned with individual rights rather than the social or collective rights of the people.

The Philippine civil service system is, likewise, a creation of the American regime. It was essentially a "finished product" where efficiency, economy, merit, and political neutrality were the dominant values (Endriga 1985:140). The civil service was broad in coverage and centralized in organization. Despite the efforts to filipinize the bureaucracy (1913-1921) and enhance the capabilities of Filipinos to run their government, the situation up to 1935 was colonial — the Filipino bureaucrats were still accountable to the colonizers and not to the people.

In spite of the trappings of civil and political institutions introduced by the Americans, ancient familialism, personalism, and parochialism persisted and failed to develop among the Filipinos the concept of "social well-being or national welfare" (Abueva 1971:1-24). Although the democratic institutions taught civil and political rights in the context of modern governments, the values of nationalism, patriotism, and social justice were completely ignored. Democracy as an ideal and a political concept was understood within the colonial framework rather than its essence. Abueva (1988:47) underscores this flaw:

An evident lesson of Filipino democracy under American guidance and thereafter is that no one but the Filipinos themselves, if they really wanted to, could develop a political and economic system that would enable the people at large to participate in, influence, and benefit from the processes of decision-making affecting them all. Democracy requires the freedom and the ability of its citizens to participate in ways that count, and on the patriotism, vision, and selfless service of its leaders. *The Filipino leaders, along with the American governors, were responsible for much of the nation's problems (italics supplied).*

The Americans found it necessary and expedient to form a tacit alliance with the Filipino landowning elite and thus retain the oligarchical politics and centralized administration which were part of the Spanish legacy, and leave largely untouched the class structure, poverty, and inequity in the countryside (Abueva 1988:45). In other words, the Filipino leadership and politics during the American regime ruled through a class that was created — a pro-American elite who had to subdue their nationalism to advance their interest.

The struggle for Philippine independence, as what the Nacionalista Party and Quezon did, do not necessarily mean an act of nationalism. It is a well-behaved struggle for independence and does not have an iota of nationalism.



The dichotomy of the Philippine history — one, the history of the conquered, Christianized, and acculturized Filipinos; and the history of the unconquered and uncolonized exemplified by the Muslims and other major ethnic groups like the Cordillerans of Northern Luzon — explains the division of the country between the majority and minority peoples. Inasmuch as the former eventually became the dominant force in the country, it is the shaping of their political development that will be the concern of this paper.

From the historical perspective, it is evident that the Filipinos' quest to become or failure to become a nation has greatly affected the nature and character of Philippine political development.

### Features of Philippine Politics and Its Roots

The development of Philippine politics is inseparable from the growth and development of the country's social structures which take place within a political system. Given the long periods of colonial history (333 years under Spain and 46 years under the Americans), social and political structures were shaped and formed in accordance with colonial interests.

Political development, whatever form it may take, is a type of *structural* change. A change that is incremental or dialectical, producing development or regression (decay), besides periods of stagnation. When it happens in and to society, it is subject to the principle of congruence (Jaguaribe 1973:190). Equally important social changes to be considered are historical changes which condition or directly influence the subsequent course of a society. Moreover, social changes are subject to the laws of cultural evolution or patterned sets of behavior and social processes. The principle of stability whereby political development or decay operates implies that the social adaptability of change is increased.

Political development therefore is a process of change where growth of institutional capability with legitimacy is manifested, i.e., capability to channel rising participation through stable political parties, interest groups, or legislatures; capability to formulate and implement socioeconomic development programs; and capability to defend national autonomy when it is threatened (Wurfel 1988:xi). This process, moreover, takes place within a broader context of modernization but without necessarily sacrificing the ideals of democracy, social justice, and development.

Given the aforementioned context of political development, the distinctive features of Philippine politics as well as its historical formations will be dealt with.

*Neocolonial Politics*

The deeply ingrained colonial mentality that regards anything foreign, especially if American, as necessarily superior has developed political servility of the country to the United States — the docility that characterized Filipino nationalism in the early years of independence, at least in comparison with nationalism in most of postcolonial Southeast Asia.

The neocolonial character of Philippine politics is best manifested in major economic and trade policies designed and formulated by the government which sacrificed the interest of the nation and promoted the interest of western-capitalist system, specifically American interest. Political servility of the country to the US has been apparent in spite of its political independence or Flag Independence granted on 4 July 1946.

The first act of political subservience was made when Philippine President Roxas worked for the amendment of the 1935 Constitution negating those provisions that reserved the right to exploit natural resources to Filipino nationals, and extending this right on a "parity" basis to Americans while denying similar privileges to Filipinos in the United States.

The parity rights of the Americans was embodied in the Philippine Trade Act of 1946 also known as the Bell Trade Act. This Act created a monopoly of the principal Philippine products that favors American business interest established before the War, and thus, obstructed the development of new Filipino enterprise. This prolonged free trade between the US and the Philippines until 1954. In 1955, the Bell Trade Act was recast to mollify some oppositionists who resented the pernicious provisions of the Act but only to be replaced by the Laurel-Langley Agreement which continued the unequal trade relations between the two countries until 1974.

In 1962, President Macapagal adopted the Decontrol Program which abolished foreign exchange controls on imports and devalued the peso by 50 percent relative to the dollar (import controls were adopted in 1949 as a result of a foreign exchange crisis brought about by the free-trade policy under the 1946 Bell Trade Act) in exchange for a stabilization loan of US\$300 million from the US and World Bank-International Monetary Fund (WB-IMF) Group. The decontrol and devaluation were part of the IMF's strategy of "liberalization" and foreign exchange controls. Controls are considered as obstacles to the "free flow of capital and commodities," i.e., the unrestricted entry of foreign capital and goods into the Third World. Furthermore, as a result of the decontrol program, foreign debt grew four times from US\$150 million in 1962 to US\$600 million after three years the program was adopted.

In 1970, President Marcos devalued the peso by over 60 percent relative to the dollar and adopted the floating rate system in exchange for a US\$37 million stabilization foreign loan from IMF. This was in response to the 1969 foreign exchange crisis. The floating rate system required the country to abstain from directly placing limits on imports to enable the currency to find its true value on the basis of market forces working freely. It virtually ensured the continuous devaluation of the currency, a standard prescription of the IMF to stimulate exports, and for making it progressively cheaper for foreign investments to buy into the economy (Lichauco 1986:43).

Another condition for the loan was the installation of an IMF "resident officer" in the Philippine Central Bank and the creation of a "joint Central Bank-IMF Commission" tasked with the management of foreign debt policies of the country. This gave the IMF the opportunity to gain access to the country's sensitive documents relative to the economy. In short, the IMF has been involved in the management of the country's economy to safeguard the interest of foreign capital and to assure the country's integration into the world capitalist system.

The two-pronged policy aggravated the debt problem. Prior to the adoption of the policy in 1970, foreign debt stood at only a little over US\$1 billion and grew to US\$26 billion after 16 years, yet no basic and capital-based industries emerged.

During the entire era of martial law (1972-1986) President Marcos committed the government to the US/WB-IMF development model characterized by labor-intensive and export-oriented (LIEO) economic strategy. The regime represented the coercive use of state's power to crunch nationalistic forces to bring about a development anchored on the free enterprise model (Bello, Kinley & Elinson 1982; Jose 1982; Lichauco 1986; 1988; Stauffer 1976, 1979, 1981; Brillantes 1987). The US government, WB-IMF Group and foreign investors gave their material, military, and financial support to Marcos dictatorship in exchange for governmental/political policies which guaranteed foreign investments, repatriation of profits, liberalization of imports, and free trade (Lichauco 1988:203).

As a result of this exchange, the US/WB-IMF model consequently created a new type of dependency, deepening foreign penetration into the country's political economy and closer integration into the capitalist world economy and frustrated the country's attempt to be another "economic tiger" in Asia (Stauffer 1981:16-36). The American neocolonial development policy did not promote economic growth nor the transformation of the agrarian economy into an industrial one but froze the economy in its preindustrial mold.

The free trade component of the LIEO strategy wrought havoc on domestic industries as the country was swamped with imports which exacerbated the problem of chronic trade deficits, unemployment, and constant need for loans. The attempt to solve these problems through foreign borrowings, floating rate, and devaluation of the currency greatly contributed to the impoverishment of the people. Furthermore, LIEO committed the country against heavy industries which constitute the essence of industrialization. The country was confined to development projects whose productivity depends mainly on labor power, thus, commanding low level of industrial technology. The strategy kept the country as a ready source of cheap labor and raw materials and market of industrial goods from western countries.

Aquino's economic policies to promote exports and lift import controls; maintain "realistic" exchange rate; dismantle agricultural monopolies and privatization of government owned and controlled corporations; negotiate for more foreign borrowings; and encourage foreign investments, adhere even more closely to the philosophy of free market economics and free trade than the Marcos regime. With these policies, the Aquino government is no better than the Marcos government.

Evidently, these economic, trade, and fiscal policies remain to strengthen the neocolonial character of the Philippine state. These were adopted by the Marcos regime and continued by the Aquino government not simply because of the economic and political pressures exerted by the US government and US-dominated international financial institutions, notably the IMF and WB, but because the Philippine government allows it or is not determined enough to resist these pressures.

Perceptively, the strategy of economic colonialism was made possible because of a political system devoid of a sense of nationalism. The failure of the country to achieve national industrialization, which will lead eventually to economic independence, is linked to the neocolonial nature and character of Philippine-American relations. Unless the next administration after Aquino (in this case, the Ramos administration) embodies the ideals of nationalism, the nation will be in deep economic and political crisis. And the inability of the vast majority of the people to identify themselves with the nation is a constant threat to the stability of the political system.

### *Patronage Politics*

In a predominantly agricultural economy where tenancy dependency on the landlords is the main feature, a patron-client relationship prevails. In this setting, the landlord is considered the patron while the tenant is the client. The former dispenses favors and the latter reciprocates it through

services and loyalty. This interaction simulates a kinship dimension with the paternalistic landlord acting as the father and the tenants as his children (Villacorta 1990:44).

In Philippine politics, the patron-client relationship is reflected in the politician as the dispenser of power and favor while his followers and constituents express their loyalty to the patron in political support by way of delivering votes and personal service. To a large extent, the dyadic ties with significance for Philippine politics are vertical ones, i.e., bond between prosperous patrons and their poor and dependent clients (Lande 1966:1). This suggests a symbiotic relationship between the patron and client.

It is important to note that political patronage is the flavor of traditional relationships. O.D. Corpuz (1957:161) in his account of the history and development of the Philippine bureaucracy states that the practice of nepotism is rooted on close family ties:

Filipino families are large and close knit groups. Membership is based on consanguinity as well as on affinity. Membership in these groups as a rule involves the duty of members to help each other in a multifarious variety of ways. Successful members, whether in the field of business or private profession or politics are under obligation (and) seldom shirked, to extend aid to less successful relatives. The assistance would be in the form of loans or outright money gifts or the taking in of the relative ... or if one occupied in influential public position, seeing that the relative is placed on a government job.

The patron-client relationship which originated as a social custom became entrenched in politics. Allegiance to kinsmen and political leaders became dependent largely upon debts of gratitude arising from the ability of a patron to confer benefits upon his clients. On the other hand, the clients could discharge their debts of gratitude with their votes along with their *compadres*, friends, or tenants they might in turn be able to influence. Governor Luis Villafuerte (Provincial governor of Camarines Sur in Southern Luzon and former Chairman of League of Governors of the Philippines) admitted in an interview that in Philippine politics, vote-buying is less significant in electoral contests than the sense of gratitude of the people to the patron long before the election. He said that "voting for a patron is not considered obnoxious" (McBeth 1991:26). The patron-client relationship continues as long as the Filipinos remain to limit their loyalty to an individual.

Of equal importance to Philippine electoral politics is the role played by local clans and dynasties, i.e., warlords and regional kingpins. Given the size of Filipino families and matrix of interrelationships that bind them, this ensures not only the political continuity and dominance of a particular clan in local politics but play a major role in supporting the ascendancy, continuity, and downfall of Philippine presidents. Furthermore, the support of local

clans for a particular politician running in a national election is indispensable in trying to convert mass popularity to actual votes. This is where the party machinery and local dynasties in particular come in, operating within the context of patronage (Brillantes 1990).

Although in the 1988 local elections, new and nontraditional politicians emerged while traditional kingpins suffered some setbacks, political analysts remain unconvinced that this represents a significant and progressive indicator. In fact, majority of the seats in the local governmental units (LGUs) remained in the hands of the traditional politicians. Likewise, the 1987 Congressional elections results depicted the same political reality. It exemplified the return of the premarital law contests among the oligarchs. The landlords, compradors, and traditional elites were back to their old power bases after the downfall of Marcos.

Social scientists explain this tendency to cling to old political traditions as emanating from the old feudal structure of Philippine society where the economic power of the landlord over the tenant spilled into practice; the dynasties are accepted by the tenant/voter as givens in Philippine politics (Buendia 1987b:2-3).

As a result of this traditional system of social values, the Filipinos approach political life in terms of personal relationships which would yield benefits to himself or his family rather than create a sense of community strong enough to foster mutual trust between persons without dyadic ties. Apparently, this prevents the Filipinos from looking beyond personal interest and achieve for themselves a sense of a nation.

Patronage-clientelist politics, however, is not only limited to Philippine internal politics. Given the neocolonial context, these extend to and involve national patrons in clientelist relations with powerful American authorities and lenders, who in turn become their patrons. Evidently, the external patron-client relationships must be recognized in order to understand the internal dynamics of domestic politics. Constantino (1978:3-4) for instance asserted:

By a shrewd system of political favors granted or withheld, the colonizers kept a firm though concealed hold on (the Filipino leaders). Philippine politics became a colonial version of American ward politics and features a perpetual scramble for position and patronage which the colonial power satisfied as a reward for acquiescence to its own political and economic objectives.

*Elitist Politics*

Elitism in Philippine politics is linked with the traditional patronage system in the Filipino society. Patrons are considered the elites in the community to whom the people gravitate on for economic or personal benefits. Political elites, however, during the precolonial period are governing elites bestowed with authority and power as defined by the tribal tradition. The authority of a tribal chief is clothed with legitimacy. This implies a recognition of moral order underlying the exercise of political authority.

Decisionmaking process in the barangay is not monopolized by the governing elites but is one through the method of consultation with the Council of Elders or Leaders. This is a manifestation that political democracy is a tradition in the Philippines. Furthermore, the pragmatic bargaining of interpersonal relationships and the ability to acquire political status through achievement as traditional traits provide the underpinning for modern democracy (Arcellana 1969:39-42). The vestiges of pristine democracy remain among the non-Hispanized and non-Islamized communities in Northern Luzon, specifically in Cordillera, whose struggle for self-determination marks their distinct identity from the rest of the Christianized Filipinos (Buendia 1987a:157-187).

The foundations of elitism in politics and practice of elite democracy in the Philippines were institutionalized under the direct American rule. The political institutions introduced by the Americans such as the electoral system, party system, legislature, presidency, judiciary, and civil service became structures dominated by the elites. It is an undeniable reality that the elite — political, economic, and even sociocultural elite — have played an important role in the determination of the country's national and local political leaders and thus, shaped the history and perhaps the future of Philippine politics.

The Marcos 21-year authoritarian rule stands as a good example of how the formal and nonformal institutions of the elite-power blocks supported the ascendancy, continuity, and demise of the regime (Brillantes 1987: 1990). On the other hand, Aquino's phenomenal rise to power was likewise engineered by the counter-elites who were either displaced from their power bases as a consequence of Marcos' oligarchical rule or shifted loyalty to an emerging political leader to safeguard and protect their economic and business interests.

Given that the 1986 queer revolution was supported by the masses and the middle class, they were denied effective participation in the political processes toward structural changes in the society. Political decisions and policies instituted after Aquino was installed, e.g., Comprehensive Land Reform Law, external debt policy, wage policy, foreign investment program, fiscal

policy, and foreign policy, only serve the interest of the elites and foreign nationals. Perhaps, the 1986 peoples' power uprising and the promise it held was merely a historic aberration. Despite Aquino's highly-praised sincerity, she is foremost a member of the ruling elite.

The overt use of "guns, goons, and gold" by the politicians during elections have been the traditional fixture in Philippine politics since 1946. The electoral process simply became an institution which legitimizes the transfer of political power from one elite to another. Elections have not become, as yet, an effective means of expressing public opinion on national issues, being a little more than a way of choosing political leadership who belong to the same class.

Despite safeguards established by election laws and regulations, fraudulent election practices remain. It is difficult to prevent a voter from registering in several places, and registration lists are padded to an unknown extent. Vote buying is customary, with as many as 33 percent of all votes cast in an average election being purchased in cash. Coercion of voters and terrorism against precinct inspection boards are also obstacles to free, honest, orderly and peaceful elections (CIA 1980:48-54).

Inasmuch as Philippine elections is elite-based, it goes without saying that political parties competing to control governmental operations are organizations of the elites. A two-party system did not really emerge from 1900 by virtue of similarities of two major parties — Nacionalista Party and Liberal Party (Milne 1969:182-183; Locsin 1969:201; Ventura 1986:52). Rama (1965:2) described the tradition nourished by the so-called two-party system as a:

Tradition of the two-party system that offers only sterile, if not evil, choices at the polls; the tradition of pork-barrelism; the tradition of an overcentralized form of government; the tradition of weak, shameless dependence on the national politicians; the tradition of dole-outs for the people; the tradition of landlordism; the tradition of surrender to the cycles of fate, of superstitious fatalism.

The nature of the Philippine party system remains largely a one-party/two-faction system. Despite the formalisms of political parties, i.e., formal distinctions and seeming differences in party platforms and programs of government, the dissimilarities among the dominant parties (Liberal Party and Nacionalista Party) are largely superficial. Their commonalities, however, lie in their class bases and elite origins, and the interests they represent.

When martial law was proclaimed in 1972, the two parties were extinguished from the political landscape and a monolithic party controlled and headed by Marcos rose to power. Towards the final years of Marcos dictatorship, however, opposition parties emerged. In the 1986 snap presi-



dential elections, these parties coalesced into a single anti-Marcos party, the *Lakas ng Bayan* or *LABAN* (Fight), to challenge the regime through the electoral process. The EDSA uprising preempted the results of the election and President Aquino assumed power through extra-constitutional means. The ouster of Marcos led to the collapse of the coalition party and instead worked for their individual party consolidation in preparation for the 1987 Congressional and 1988 local elections.

Results of the 1987 Congressional elections attest to the resurrection of traditional politics after 14 years of hibernation. The traditional elites and higher income class continue to be overrepresented in the legislative body. Majority of the senators belong to the upper income class of society. Of the 22 senators, only one is not a multimillionaire. Five of the wealthiest senators belong to the families of landed oligarchs and the prominent political class that have dominated the country for many years. In the House of Representatives, more than three-fourths are millionaires and out of 200 representatives 130 belong to traditional political clans and 39 are relatives of traditional clans (Caoli 1989:111).

### *Politics of Butterflies*

The absence of any discernible ideological or philosophical differences between political parties, traditionally controlled by the Liberal and Nacionalista parties (LP & NP), made party-switching or "turncoatism" a common feature of Philippine politics. It is common among all elements from voters to senators and even Presidents (two of the five post-War Presidents were elected immediately after deserting their previous parties).

What is important to the life of Philippine political parties is the accession or defection of village leaders, mayors, governors, congressmen, and senators toward the party with the spoils. After elections, politicians feel no obligation to their party, whether they had been official candidates or not, which was contrary to self interest. Loyalty shifts are justified by the "requirement of our constituents" or "dictates of patriotism" (Quoted in Villacorta 1990:45) while political principles and party affiliation take the back seat.

Although the country is strewn with experiences of a third party trying to challenge the dominant political parties in electoral contests, they were unsuccessful in distinguishing their identity, vision, and programs of action from the rest of the parties, except the Democratic Alliance in mid-1940s and *Partido ng Bayan* (Peoples' Party) in 1987 which were ideologically-based. Apparently, a significant factor which prevented them from wielding political power was their inability to match the financial resources of the two other parties. Moreover, they were not able to get the endorsement of an external patron — the US.

Examples of these third parties which emerged were: the Democratic Alliance which was supported by the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* (Communist Party of the Philippines established in 1930); the Citizen's Party of Claro M. Recto and Lorenzo Tañada Sr. in 1957; Carlos Romulo's Democratic Party in 1953; the Philippine Progressive Party of Raul Manglapus in 1965; and the Partido ng Bayan in 1987 which was supported by the Communist Party of the Philippines (reestablished in 1968).

In 1972, when martial law was declared and an authoritarian government was established, several politicians abandoned their respective party affiliations and joined the monolithic party of Marcos — the KBL or *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (New Society Movement). Former oppositionists began to jockey for recognition and positions in the KBL leadership, bringing about disunity in the opposition party.

In 1986 when President Aquino assumed presidency through extra-constitutional means, a massive exodus of known KBL politicians who defended Marcos even in his last few days in power were able to successfully slip into the coalition party of Aquino under the wings of "reconciliation and redemocratization." In the 1987 congressional elections and 1988 local elections, several KBL stalwart politicians ran under Aquino's coalition party and reassumed power by riding on the crest of the regime's popularity. Moreover, several "Marcos boys" were even appointed to Cabinet posts and other high-ranking government positions. Several senators and traditional politicians who abandoned the people during the dark years of martial rule decided to return from the United States only when the downfall of Marcos has been imminent and are now back to power.

The recent study on the political programs and membership of these parties reveal marked ideological differences — the conservatives, socialists, and communists (Villacorta 1990:43-54) which indeed a good sign for the emergence of a multi-party system in the country. Despite the visible division of political parties along ideological lines, the traditional mode of political contest will still be the major factor in Philippine elections. Traditional politics which is deeply entrenched into the structure of the society and consciousness of the people remains the circumscribing factor in development.

### *Politics of Pragmatism and Opportunism*

The politics of pragmatism and opportunism is a result of the lack, if not absence, of ideological differences of Philippine political parties. Short-term political benefits remain the guidepost in determining political affiliation. Careful calculations will eventually lead politicians as well as electorates to shift party loyalties and support for the wealthy and powerful who are most likely to be able to repay generously a favor, either in economic

or political terms. Moreover, pragmatism leads to caution and the avoidance of great risk — constraining resistance to strong government, even if unpopular (Wurfel 1988:36). This what makes factionalism, division, and disunity even among members of the elite political party a common occurrence in Filipino politics.

Electorates take advantage of election period by selling their votes to the highest bidder, businessmen support candidates whom they believe have the high probability of winning in an election in exchange for contracts and similar favors beneficial to their businesses. Likewise, election is also an opportunity for civic organizations to ask for donations from candidates in exchange for votes while small businesses make windfall profits through contracts with individual candidates to provide them with campaign gimmicks like t-shirts, calendars, balloons, pencils, and basketballs with their names emblazoned on it.

### *Politics of Personalities*

Selection of political leaders in the country revolves around personalities rather than issues. It is a common perception that a leader should be endowed with characteristics and traits like courage, influence and prestige, economic power, political astuteness, oratory skills and social privilege. For a poor country like the Philippines, only the rich constitute the aforementioned popular personalities.

For the Filipinos, leadership is equated with “hero worship” or the Robin Hood style. This has three dimensions. First, a leader must possess transactional leadership wherein the electorates endow a candidate with legitimacy because of his ability to produce tangible benefits for them (positive transaction) or inflict harm or punishment to those perceived to be their “enemies.” Two, a leader must be inspirational or is able to articulate or to some extent personify the hopes and aspirations of the people. A candidate must be able to impart meaning to the actions and sufferings of the masses. Third, a leader must be charismatic or is able to satisfy certain highly psychological needs among his constituents.

This psychological make-up of Filipino electorates is rooted on a culture of patron-clientelism which in turn is anchored on the socioeconomic underdevelopment of the country. Among other factors, the politics of personalities explain the election of Presidents Quezon, Roxas, Quirino, Magsaysay, Macapagal, Marcos, and Aquino. Likewise, the election of traditional politicians who have mastered not only the art of politics but the political psychology of the Filipinos. It is also an explanation why movie actors, actresses, TV personalities, basketball players, and comedians are elected to public offices.

## Philippine Underdevelopment and Politics

Political institutions play an important role in a political system in articulating and expressing the aggregate demands, needs, and aspirations of the people, and convert them into goods and services that would benefit the majority of the population. It is through these institutions that development goals and objectives are attained.

Political history and politics in the Philippines have been marked by powerful continuities and discontinuities witnessed by both periods of development and regression. From the colonial period, the country inherited a constitutional democracy dominated by the elites and oligarchs buttressed by patronage and continued dependence on the former colonial power, specifically the United States. Whatever economic progress and political development achieved in the 1950s and 1960s were, however, obliterated in 1972. The political crisis brought about by the declaration of martial law exacerbated patrimonial politics and the neocolonial relationship of the country with the US.

Under President Aquino, the government resuscitated the premartial law political institutions and promised to reverse all the economic and political policies instituted by Marcos which brought bankruptcy to the country's coffers, extreme poverty to the people, and political conflicts which divided the nation. However, after five years, the indicators of economic recovery and development and political stability failed to show up, instead indicators of worsening economic and political conditions were apparent (De Dios n.d.).

While the economy posted positive signs of growth in the initial years of the Aquino administration, these have been short-lived and temporary, similar to the economic upsurge at aggregate levels during the first few years of martial law, not considering the issue of equity and distribution of benefits and income to the people. In 1988, the country's Gross National Product (GNP) registered a 6.7% growth rate but plummeted to 5.5% in 1989 which is 6.5% below the annual target set by the government up to 1992. In 1990, GNP further went down to 3.4%. Preliminary estimates indicate that real growth rate is only 4.1% on an annual basis. Evidently, the development strategy of economic liberalism is unsustainable (*Nat Sit Update* 1989:4).

Poverty haunts the lives of the Filipinos, Economic inequality is growing over time. Over the past two decades, Philippine society has been plagued with a steadily widening gap between the rich and the poor. The top 20% have an annual income of P732,000 while the poorest 20% only earn P15,000 in 1989. The top 30% of the social pyramid account for 63% of the GNP, while the 70% share the remaining 37% of the country's resources. To date 60% of the total population (estimated to be 64 million) live below the poverty line (*Nat Sit Update* 1989:5).

In 1990, the Philippines only had a per capita income of ₱ 1,800. Should the country achieve a 3 to 3.5% economic growth over a long-term period and the population grows at 2.4% annually, the per capita growth is only about 1.1% yearly (*Daily Globe* 1991). With 3 to 3.5% growth this year, the country is expected to restore its 1979 or 1980 per capita income level. Experts believe that measures to increase the poor peoples' purchasing power, i.e., increasing their assets, land reform and the development of the domestic market are needed. However, the most distressing aspect of Aquino's program is the total lack of progress on the issue of land reform.

The ranks of the unemployed swelled. About 26% of the labor force are without jobs and are actively seeking employment (*Daily Globe* 1991). More are believed to be underemployed and would like to find a second, even a third employment. Graft and corruption remains the malignant cancer that has been consistently gnawing after the bureaucracy. There is a common perception that graft and corruption is worse today than during the time of the dictatorial regime of Marcos.

Trade deficit in 1989 was registered the biggest ever in the country's history. Deficit amounted to US\$2.51 billion, with imports of US\$10.35 billion exceeding exports of US\$7.84. This is more than double the US\$1.08 billion deficit of 1988. As a result, the deficit on current account rose to US\$1.47 billion which is four times the current account of US\$373 of 1988. In 1990, trade deficit has been estimated to be US\$3.5 billion which is significantly worse than the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) target of US\$2.1 billion. To fill in the yawning trade deficit, the country continues to resort to external borrowing both from foreign banks and governments (De Dios & Bautista 1990).

The magnitude of the country's external debt, now close to US\$30 billion, has been both a cause and consequence of the present economic crisis. It is to be noted that during the time of Marcos, the government incurred huge amounts of foreign public borrowings expended in unproductive or nonproduction related projects. Some were dissipated in investments riddled with graft and corruption, while others were used to benefit narrow private interests especially to Marcos' and Romualdez' cronies.

The position of the Aquino government to honor and pay all external borrowings incurred by the Marcos regime regardless of its beneficiary mean a repayment of bad debts out of its current budget. In 1989, 44.03% of the budget outlay or US\$4.1 billion went to debt-servicing, with interest payments at US\$2.4 billion. This amount registered an increase from US\$3.0 billion in 1988. As a percentage of goods export, this was 52.3%, a figure 14% higher than the level in 1988. Average debt service burden for 1990-1992 is estimated at US\$4.6 billion. In spite of new borrowings, the net

resource outflow from the country totaled an average of US\$1.67 billion annually over the same period.

It is projected that the total net resources transferred from the Philippines to its foreign creditors will have reached US\$16.3 billion by 1992 (FDC 1990). In effect, the country would be paying an equivalent of 7.1% of its GNP, more than what it receives in new loans from the creditor banks and governments. This resource transfer represents the single most important obstacle to growth and development for the country. Moreover, the government admitted that the country's external debt is projected to increase at 3% annually.

One apparent result of huge debt-servicing has been the precarious level of international reserves. As of the last quarter of 1989, reserves were down to US\$670 million, or just 1.3 months worth of imports. It was only the influx of official loans from IMF that turned the balance of payments into a surplus.

Looking at the 1990 budget, debt servicing ate up the largest share at 38.3%. The budgetary allocation placed on debt-servicing is unconstitutional and sacrificed the peoples' welfare as these financial resources should have been used to augment the much needed social, economic, health, and educational services to the people.

Obviously, the link between the foreign debt and poverty is clearly seen in the large net resource outflow which takes place. This severe hemorrhage of resources from the country has caused and continues to inflict untold sufferings on the poor majority of Filipinos. The priority given to debt-servicing at the expense of the peoples' well-being is most uncalled for and unjustified.

The structural adjustment programs recommended by the IMF continue to impose conditionalities that assure the contraction of public sector spending, wage restraints, increases in the prices of basic commodities, increases in the prices of services of government corporations like power rates, water rates and other public utility rates, and higher tax revenues.

Under the bind of structural adjustment, the country has to effectively and efficiently utilize all its productive resources — natural, technical, manpower, and financial — to produce to the hilt not for the benefit of its people but to satisfy the needs of the industrialized countries in exchange for the precious and mighty dollar it needs. The export-oriented, import-dependent Philippine economy leased its life from the dollar transfusion resulting in the alarming levels of irreversible environmental degradation and export of migrant workers employed as construction workers, domestic helpers, entertainers, and prostitutes.

Today, signs of economic growth are unfolding. The seeming improvement in the country's economy is a result of adjustment programs with growth as the aim prescribed by the multilateral lending institutions and supported by commercial bank creditors and creditor countries. Adjustment policies were implemented by debtor countries as a conditionality for additional loans. The new money from the commercial banks are contingent on the successful implementation of adjustment programs which are closely monitored by the multilaterals, the IMF and WB. These structural adjustments, according to the World Bank, includes:

a range of measures intended to reduce internal and external deficits, increase efficiency in the economy, and reduce government expenditure. Typically, they would include: (1) changing the exchange rate to reflect more closely the true value of the currency; (2) reducing government payrolls; (3) selling to private interest or dismantling government-owned enterprises; (4) raising agricultural prices closer to world market levels; and (5) reducing subsidies both on consumption items, including food, and to producers (Quoted in Briones n.d.:4-5).

While the objective of the program is to "adjust" the economy, the people are paying for the adjustment program with their lives. They are thrown out of jobs; pay more for basic commodities and goods; and receive less public services from the government in spite of increased tax payments.

Inasmuch as the neoclassical model has linked the Philippine economy to the world capitalist economic system, it becomes more vulnerable to the effects of economic crisis encountered by the industrialized countries. Oftentimes, the Philippines bears the brunt of extreme economic difficulties as the crises suffered by the developed countries are simply passed over to the underdeveloped countries. The Philippine economy is virtually a hostage of world capitalist system and lives on foreign debts.

The real question regarding Philippine development is not whether the economy can sustain its positive growth but whether the economy can liberate itself finally from the "boom-bust syndrome" — the chronic foreign exchange crisis which has hit the country every decade, even less, since the post-war era: 1949, 1961, 1971, 1983, and most recently in 1989.

Using the UN definition of development (UN Declaration on the Right of Development) as the parameter in gauging Philippine development, thus:

Development is the comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free, and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom (Quoted from Briones n.d.:7).

Clearly, the Philippines has never experienced development. The Philippine government, in its varying political regimes, never abandoned the classical and neoclassical growth models and strategies.

The Philippine case of underdevelopment is best explained by the neo-Marxist model. This model attributes the problem of underdevelopment to the effects of the neocolonial order characterized by the intervention of rich and industrialized countries (normally these are the former colonial masters of the Third World countries) perpetuating an inequitable and exploitative economic structure to support the world capitalist system. The relationship between the developed and underdeveloped countries is one which is of domination and hegemony of the former over the latter. Cohen (1973:15, quoted in Reyes 1989) describes it as "a relationship of effective domination or control of political or economic, direct or indirect, of one nation over another."

The production pattern of the country has been directed to the needs of the international market rather than the consumption needs of its population. The economic process ensures the dominance and control of the former colonizing power. The political system is designed to protect the interest of world capital and its subservience to the interest of the imperial authority. Moreover, there is the increasing cultural penetration that follows closely on the heels of conquest that spreads through the control of the political process and institutions.

The successful economic domination of the Philippines by its former colonizer, multilateral lending and financial institutions, and other Western capitalist countries cannot be solely attributed to the acquisitive values associated with Western capitalism nor mainly responsible to the country's underdevelopment. The Philippine political system and the character of Filipino politics, i.e., neocolonial, elitist, patronage, and lack or absence of nationalism, are equally accountable to the state of the country's underdevelopment.

A dialectical relationship exists between economic dependency and political dependency. The dependent character of economic policies were institutionalized simply because the government allows it. As a result of centuries of colonialism, the political leaders have assumed that the interests of neocolonialism are identical with the national interests. This is what makes the struggle to shake off the yoke of external domination and national independence more difficult and liberating the country from the quagmire of poverty and underdevelopment elusive.

However, it does not necessarily mean that once the Philippines has gained its unconditional economic and political independence, the country would be able to join the ranks of the developed and industrialized countries. On the other hand, it does not also follow that the country needs to attain



economic and political development before it can gain strength to realize genuine independence. In both respects, this is a case of "egg or chicken syndrome," or an issue of which comes first: independence before development or development before independence; or can these two important interests be achieved simultaneously given the socioeconomic and political idiosyncrasies and vagaries of Philippine society. Probably the more basic and fundamental question is: can political and economic independence and development be achieved in a nation which failed to become?

There is no single route nor a single prescription to attain development; not even a single definition. The path towards development must be defined by the collective interest of the polity and follow the contours of the society's historical, social, economic, political, and cultural formation. No country has the moral authority to define for one's country the road towards development nor impose its own concept of development.

The failure of the Philippine government to realize its much desired development lies in the lack or absence of nationalistic commitment on the part of the national leadership to embody the aspirations and ideals of the masses. Although this is understandable considering the economic class from which majority of the national leaders come from, it does not absolve them from their responsibility of neglecting the interest of the majority.

The absence of a nationalist sentiment among key government officials has hindered the effective and efficient delivery of public services and has allowed the deterioration of civil service. Inasmuch as the concept of nation is nebulous, neither can the concept of public service be clear. The government offices are viewed as employment agencies and market places where everybody can sell anything to everyone from jewelries to underwears, from dusters to shoes, on an installment basis. Until government employees transcend the satisfaction of their individual interests over public welfare, the bureaucracy can never be an effective tool to translate national interests into concrete programs and projects for the poor.

The patron-client relationships have destroyed the time-honored value of neutrality in public service. Concomitant with the destruction of nonpartisanship, erosion of efficiency resulted. The politization of the bureaucracy through letters of recommendation and pressures from political leaders have become a common feature and have been decisive in appointments to key career positions in government. The politization of public service has not only demoralized professional and career public servants but has made the bureaucracy a political instrument serving the narrow interest of politicians.

The corruption in government has reached an alarming level in the late 1980s and measures to control it under the present regime have not been successful. This is attributed not only to the lowly salaries of government employees but to the continued withering away of the value of "publicness" in government service. Positions in government have been regarded as investments and a high return on investments is imperative for government officials. The galloping corruption only meant the omission or failure to provide basic services to the lower classes, especially the rural poor. The denial of public services to the people is institutionalized social injustice — the foundation of social and political unrest in the Philippines.

The party system has been remiss of its societal function, which is to ventilate political issues and structure public opinion in order to produce electoral decisions about the vision and direction of the national life. Political parties and politicians view the masses as votes rather than as hearts and minds of Philippine society. The party system has become a convenient mechanism of the political elites to legitimize their power and authority.

The periods of colonialism in the Philippines have shaped the country's political culture. The superimposition of political institutions, structures, and systems which are alien to the Filipinos resulted in skewed development of the country. The elitist party system, damaged civil service, social injustices, foreign debt, and the alienation and indifference of the masses have contributed to the continued infirmities of the political system. The incapacity of the political system, both leadership and institutions, to serve and deliver the fundamental services and goods to the people threatens the legitimacy of the present government.

Nationalism, as a value in development, is usually lost in the debate over the issue of socialism and capitalism without understanding that nationalism includes the realization of social justice and democracy. It must be posited that nationalism is not merely being anti-United States or anticolonialism but the power to direct the affairs of the nation towards a well-defined vision and collective aspirations of the people, free from foreign intervention. The inability of the government to take the decision to sever itself from dependency and to promote the peoples' interests has plunged the country into deep political and economic crisis. Consequently, the crisis gave the left-leaning political groups the opportunity to advance their political agenda. In assessing this predicament, Corpuz (1989 II:569) says:

The abandonment of nationalism by Filipino governments, specifically vis-a-vis the United States, had the inevitable result. Since all the governments were controlled by the center or right, the nationalistic role fell by default to the political left. The situation remained unchanged into the late 1980s. The jerry-built coalition that deposed Marcos in 1986 included no nationalistic parties. It was simply anti-Marcos. Thus, *if the political center and right would persist in*

*shunning nationalism, the left, either legal and non-communist, would continue to be the voice of Filipino nationalism (italics supplied).*

Although the left does not have the monopoly of nationalism, it persists to be the most vocal, articulate, and organized force which the government has to contend with. However, the type of nationalism espoused by them is confined within Marxist dogma or socialist framework. It contends that development can *only* transpire after a violent upheaval; while the social democrats, Christian socialists, and others of similar genes advocate a "peaceful" revolution where the contradictions between the ruling and ruled classes will be resolved. Furthermore, it clings to the belief that the disintegration of the world capitalist system is the primordial task of Third world countries to bring forth a new economic and development order that is socialist in nature.

The development order in the aforesaid framework would have to be operationalized in a highly-centralized political system with the State (assuming to be representative) performing a dominant role in the political, economic, social, and cultural affairs of the people. However, the experience of Soviet Union and eastern European countries over the past 80 and 45 years, respectively, proved this political setup to be counterproductive, erroneous, and antidevelopmental. The resurgence of nationalist and democratic movements in these countries indicates that development cannot grow under a constrictive political structure. Given such predicament, there exists a greater need to make a reassessment of the ideological basis of the statist model of development adopted by the socialist countries. The Philippine political left's suggestion to follow the path which these countries pursued to achieve the interest of "national development" is obviously a dangerous proposal.

The Philippines for a time tried to undertake development under a controlled political system and emasculated trade unions during the Marcos regime, but it failed. The democratic tradition of the people to live in a free society, notwithstanding the roles performed by the counter-elites and the US, overpowered the authoritarian rule. The antifascist struggle, however, was bereft of nationalism.

A balance must therefore be created and political democracy, justice, freedom, and economic progress must harmonize together within the context of national growth and independence. Excesses of political democracy may bring about anarchy, while undue emphasis on material prosperity may dehumanize man entirely. Development-oriented actions must first consider, among others, the greater humanization of man. Equating development with material wealth is the objective and quantifiable dimension of development. This is the concern of most countries regardless of ideological persuasions, i.e. capitalist or socialist, including the Philippines. However, development can also mean the capability of the society to define widely shared objectives

for itself and demonstrate the means to achieve those objectives as a people and as a nation reflective of their own history, experiences, and social dynamics. This is the subjective or nonquantifiable dimension of development. This is what the Philippines needs.

It is true that most people would prefer to have higher incomes, better clothing, comfortable homes, better quality of education, satisfying jobs — in short a better quality of life. However, more than these individual comforts and amenities, people would also prefer to feel that they are a part of a national community that gives them a sense of belonging; of importance and value in their homeland; that they have power and control over their destiny and future; that the society where they live cares for the sick, old, young, poor, physically handicap, and other disadvantaged sectors and less fortunate individuals; and that they are a part of a community that utilizes the political institutions and processes to promote social justice and equity. In other words, the people would also prefer to feel that they are a nation with identifiable interests and aspirations and are free to realize them by themselves.

The Philippines' quest for development and nationhood can only materialize by transforming the anachronistic and dysfunctional political system into one imbued with nationalism. National leaders must be able to relive the nationalism of the 1896 Revolution. It is worthy to note that great nations today were able to consolidate and form themselves into a nation before they were able to achieve the development which the underdeveloped countries envy today.

The problems of underdevelopment continue to exert extreme pressure on the present political institutions of government. Unless it transforms itself into one which is democratic, representative, and nationalist, it may not be able to remain intact. An extra-constitutional political change may create either a new set of democratic leaders or dictators. Authoritarian leaders may not be viewed as worse than their predecessors who ignored the national quest of the people but it does not make them any better either.

Inasmuch as democracy is a tradition in the Philippines, perhaps it can be an instrument in molding Philippine nationalism. Development must have a national character and oriented towards the economic and political upliftment of the greater mass.

### **Assessing the Future of Philippine Political Development**

The Filipinos' quest for national development remains. However, it is imperative for the government to define national interests behind "developmental" goals. Oftentimes, the goals of development have been equated with

national interest, which is misleading. The Philippine experience has shown that in the pursuit of achieving the goals of development, the interest of the nation is sacrificed. In other words, the national interest must be the starting and end point in the formulation of development plans.

Evidently, the fundamental reason for the country's underdevelopment is its failure to define what it wants, the lack of a national purpose and the commitment to pursue something that it believes in. Landes (1991:71) made a succinct description of underdevelopment among former colonies which is most apt for the Philippines:

It is a fact of history that most developing countries are also new countries. They have young, untried institutions and administrative structures that fall far short of the task implicit in their ambitions for power and wealth. *In many instances, they still have no firm identity, no sense of national purpose, no common interest. On the contrary, they suffer the pains and after-effects of colonial arrangements imposed without regard to reason or circumstances.* Government is unstable or, even if enduring, essentially brittle. The regime may call itself democratic, but the people are subjects rather than citizens. As a result, *whatever the economic gap that already separates many of these countries from the rich states, it is even bigger for the want of direction* (in both senses) of the would-be followers (italics supplied).

The imposition of political institutions and structures in the country was simply accepted but not appreciated by the people. These institutions were supposed to perform political functions in pursuit of development but instead were used by the elites as instruments of coercion and fraud to protect and preserve their interests. Thus, it precipitated the alienation of the people from the government and prevented the social integration of the country.

The long-term stability of the State persists to be the growing concern of the country's leaders, and in turn rests on maintaining the legitimacy of political institutions and the capability to accept social change — to respond properly and creatively to the demands of an increasingly vigilant public. This is the basic requirement for effective governance. The legitimacy of political institutions is lost once it ceases to be representative of the peoples' interest. An illegitimate leadership would in the end collapse either through an overt overthrow or covert indifference of the people. In such political reality, it becomes incomprehensible for a long-term development to proceed.

There is a direct relationship between political development and economic prosperity. The economic structures and institutions must embody the political interests of the nation and contribute to the greater aspiration of political independence. Any attempt to sever the umbilical cord which ties these

interests will result in underdevelopment. Likewise, an emphasis on the political dimension while neglecting the economic aspect or vice-versa will consequently lead to a disproportionate type of development, leaning either to the consolidation and strengthening of state power to the political and bureaucratic elites or a society considered to be economically progressive but whose people are politically disenfranchised.

It must be understood that political institutions are indispensable instruments in state- and nation-building. It must be able to mobilize the active participation of the people in the political process and increase the accessibility of the masses to the benefits of social life. Philippine political institutions must work towards these directions. This would need changes in the political system and political ethic to something that is reflective of the peoples' distinct historical development, culture, and idiosyncrasies.

In summary, the Philippine case of underdevelopment is rooted on its (1) unresolved question of nationhood; (2) colonial nature of its political institutions; (3) skewed concept of public service; (4) alienated political system; and (5) ambivalent political culture. These problems contributed significantly to the weakness of the country's political and economic institutions. If long-term development is to be pursued and the legitimacy of the present government is to be strengthened, the process of decolonization and nationalization must take place. This includes the transformation of political culture from subservience to independence.

In line with the decolonization process, the democratization of political institutions and empowerment of the basic governmental units will have to transpire. The elitist nature of Philippine politics is anathema to national development and breeds authoritarianism. The democratic tradition of the Filipino people, its concept of social justice and equity, the inherent sense of nationalism which were all subdued by long periods of colonialism must be revived and reflected in the country's political structures and institutions. It is perceived that with a heightened spirit of national consciousness, a more democratized political system, and a political ethic oriented towards the well-being of the people will satisfy the multi-dimensional demands of development, strengthen its resolve to defend Philippine sovereignty, and mitigate foreign intervention.

Finally, the complexities of Filipino politics pose an enormous challenge not only upon the leaders of this country, but to its people and more so to the coming generation which is bound to inherit the problems or benefits of development. The quest for a better future is an undying task for the Filipinos. The development of the country, though a difficult undertaking, remains to be the continuing and primordial responsibility of the people. After all it is the only country we have.

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