

Closing Address

Reflections on Power and Social Responsibility

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When Dr. Gabriel Iglesias first suggested that I give this closing remark, I did not know how to react to his suggestion. For one thing, the only formal exposure I had to political science was a year of undergraduate work in a principles course—and that was nearly 25 years ago! This probably explains why in the past I have never quite managed to pull myself together to come to speak before a group of political scientists. Moreover, as an economist, I have been raised around the idea, perhaps a rather narrow-minded idea, that the job of the economist is to indicate the optimal course of action for getting at an objective, in the formulation of which he has no special role to play.

Of course, that was a long time ago, up on an alien hill overlooking a valley that grew more daily cows than people and hardly raised any questions about power, on how its exercise in one way or another modifies relations between persons even among the same people. However, ever since I got down from that hill and back to my own valley, which incidentally raises more people than cows, the issue of power and its exercise has loomed increasingly larger in my own consciousness, so much so that the original distinction I used to see in my own mind between politics and economics is blurring and slowly giving way to some integration.

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This direction towards integration of the politics and economics of a situation is probably one of the most compelling demands upon a community that wants to make a fairly swift transition from subsistence production to a modern economy. This is because the community no longer has all the time to make the transition. Modern communication has beguiled its members into thinking that the transition can be made in a short time. It also tells them that other communities in other parts of the world and in similar conditions as their own are desperately trying to make the adjustments in no time.

In short, the present situation in which the developing countries find themselves almost always compels their politicians to exercise some economics and their economists to get into politics, or that social process which sets priorities for the collective resources of the community to support and achieve. There is no doubt that, as both the politicians and economists grapple with the social priorities for the community, power has to be exercised. And the issue here is not whether power is exercised one way or another way; but, rather whether in the process of exercising it, power eventually leads to the achievement of the social priorities and the kind of transition that every developing community works so hard to achieve. It is in this that one must eventually evaluate whether the integration of politics and economics has been a worthwhile or a futile exercise.

While we cannot predict the outcome of such an effort, we can probably suggest the direction it should take by an understanding of the nature of power, as manifested in human discretion. At this point, perhaps I should make a number of disclaimers, one of which is that as an economist I should probably be the last person in this world to give you a talk on the nature of power. However, you will probably agree with me that every instance where power is exercised, the effect is always some rearrangement in the way persons, individually or collectively, become related to one another. Moreover, the way one person exercises power often reflects the way he has been raised in community with other persons. In short, whether in its origins or in its effects, power is fundamentally a social process. It has an indelibly social character. The imponderable question, then, is whether it is exercised in a socially responsible way.

Obviously, this question cannot be properly answered unless there is a clear idea of what constitutes a socially responsible exercise of power. It is here, perhaps, where human learning becomes inarticulate, not so much for lack of knowledge, but,

probably because the content of social responsibility itself gets modified with every exercise of power over different moments of time. This, I venture to say, is what makes political science seem like an eternal quest. It is our hope in the Philippine Social Science Council that this quest will be supported, even if it succeeds only in arriving at rather relative and no absolute answers to the problem of a socially responsible exercise of power.

I thank you.