

## OPEN FORUM

*Moderator:* Atty. Alcantara is now ready to answer your questions. I have an opening question. You mentioned something about economic liberalism and political liberalism, can you explain further what these two are about? How is one related to the other?

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, when we talk about economic liberalism we talk mainly about the free enterprise system, the free market system — where individuals are free to go into whatever economic ventures they may want to engage in and in what direction they should go. This attitude has been said to foster to a great degree the idea of the dignity of the individual, individual freedom and the rights of the individual as against those of government, and the responsibility of the government to maintain this dignity of the individual. And it has developed correspondingly in the political field.

*Moderator:* Thank you.

*Mr. Alexander Magno:* I have one short question followed by a long question. The short question is, have you ever come across an interesting book entitled *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler?

*Atty. Alcantara:* I'm sorry I haven't read it.

*Mr. Magno:* Here's the long question. I've been going through *Mein Kampf* and the essential documents of the German Nazi Party. I am struck by the similarity between the rhetorics of the German Nazi Party and the rhetorics of the New Society. Essentially, this is a complex point at the developmental attitude of our dictatorship here and the social analysis done by the Nazi Party which rests on a basic conceptual framework. And it is that politics exists autonomously of economics. These two enter into a dualistic relationship where either economics absolutely determines politics or politics absolutely determines the economic structure. Now, at the core, government planning meets on the assumption that the political organs of the state would enable it as an entity independent of the social structure to determine the economic process. After I've gone through all the materials on the theories of the New Society, the logic of this theoretical paradigm escapes me. How could essentially absolutist and totalitarian processes eventually lead to democratic structures?

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, as I've pointed out to you in the paper that I presented, our Martial Law is Philippine-style Martial Law. It allows the free enterprise system to continue to exist. This means a certain amount of regulation from government. And as you see, the President has never in the past pointed out that free enterprise is to be eradicated in our society. He has insisted time and again that it will continue to exist. As I've already explained, political liberalism is kept alive by economic liberalism. Well, I still do not believe that ours is a totalitarian society, since the President continues to insist on activities that reflect accountability to the people, and political activities that admit the ultimate control of the citizenry.

*Moderator:* Now Professor Aguilar has something to add to the question or to the explanation.

*Prof. Aguilar:* I just thought that maybe we can explain some more political liberalism and economic liberalism in the context of the question of Mr. Magno, since he was referring to *Mein Kampf*. But rather, I would look at the bureaucracy and the goals of the bureaucracy at this period of Martial Law as the goals of development which has a political underpinning. I suppose that the question is really in that direction. Now, it appears that development as economic liberalism, if I understood it right, is supposed to refer to development goals of the New Society — the extension of what Atty. Alcantara refers to as economic liberalism. The kind of society that we have is development-oriented. That in effect results also in the political underpinning of legitimization of the Martial Law regime. And so, if economic development which is the goal of the New Society which is promoted by the bureaucracy is effective, then the Martial Law regime is at the same time politically legitimized. Well, of course, we are not saying that that is the total goal but it is one of the goals.

*Dr. Corsino:* I would like to make the observation first of all that Adolf Hitler did not want to do away with the capitalist system. He insisted on free enterprise closely monitored and controlled by the bureaucracy so that I would agree that the similarities between Hitler's Germany and the subsequent characteristics of Fascism are very similar to what we have now. But my question here is on your definition of political development which remises the participation of the governed in the acts of governance. To me this is a direct repudiation of Martial Law, because Martial Law presupposes the entrenchment of the governed. You also mentioned something

about equality. There is no precedence in the history of Democracy where a single family or person has been kept more or less above the law for a very long time. And there has been a new elite, the cabinet members, some technocrats, some military personnel. Where is the equality here? Policies have been flowing downward, rather than upward. Now we have been talking about normalcy, but in my opinion normalcy should mean at least two things. First, no person or members of a family should be more or less above the law for as long as they live. Second, there should be freedom of expression of conscience, and people should be freed from hearing only one-sided opinion.

*Atty. Alcantara:* May I interrupt? I am wondering whether this is a series of questions or just one question you are coming up with.

*Dr. Corsino:* This is in connection with your definition of political development, which is the increased participation of the governed in the affairs of government. There are things which do not seem to be fulfilled in terms of this definition. One of these is that people shall have the freedom to express their conscience, and shall be free if they are to participate in government. They shall be free from being given only one-sided or slanted information in the media. In other words, if they are to increase their participation in the government there shall be freedom of the press. There shall be a valid and legal opposition voice in the government either in the coming IBP or in other agencies of the government, for purposes of fiscalization. The opinion of the people cannot be really expressed, they cannot really participate in the government unless they have a venue by which opposition can be expressed. What is your comment on this?

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, that was a long statement. I'm trying to concentrate on some of its aspects, and I'm lost with the others. Anyway, you were pointing out that my definition of political development did not somehow meet with the actualities, the realities in the Philippine situation today. Well, I would like to say that Martial Law has been declared as a result of a crisis situation in the country and it has not been lifted up to the present, which indicates that the crisis continues. Within this background there is, however, a legitimate and sincere attempt to still allow political development and to nourish it. To somehow see that it continues and grows I see, first of all, the importance being given to the Barangay, the participation of the people of the Barangay in decision-making on the municipal, city and provincial levels. More sectors of the community are being

allowed a voice in decision-making in local communities, the regional levels and even the national level in spite of Martial Law. Martial Law is a reality, although we cannot go into the reasons for its being declared. However, within that context, within this framework, we can discuss the idea of political development.

*Dr. Corsino:* May I just say something following your logic. You said that our Martial Law is Philippine-style. But according to your logic the United Kingdom and the United States will be more politically developed if Martial Law is declared in these countries and their bureaucracy, political systems and economic systems are reorganized in accordance with the pattern that is established in the Philippines.

*Atty. Alcantara:* No! I'm merely pointing out that the background for all our discussion of political development must be premised on the fact of Martial Law. It has been declared and that is the situation and it is with reference to Martial Law that I discussed political development. I was talking of the barangays as a means of participation. Their powers and their ability to participate in decision-making have been increased. I was talking in that sense. Not barangays merely as barangays, but barangays as means by which the people of the localities are given voice in the decision-making.

*Dr. Corsino:* My last comment here is that, as pointed out yesterday, barangays are more instruments of control rather than decision-making.

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, that is a matter of opinion. I believe for instance that today more people have become interested in the barangay. More people find identity with the barangay than before. A lot of people before used to think of themselves as alienated from the barangay when in fact they are members of the barangay. They are not concerned with barangay affairs. I can remember talking to teachers, professionals, lawyers who when asked about barangay affairs knew nothing at all about them. But today they are very much concerned with barangay affairs. The interest in the locality and the governing of one's own affairs in that particular locality is I believe a sign of political development.

*Moderator:* This question has something to do with Dr. Ventura's paper yesterday so I think we are going to give her the floor to say something.

*Dr. Ventura:* I think I will follow up the question of Dr. Corsino here because that is only one side of the picture that I was pointing out. I

discussed all of these structures within the context of the concept of political development. As you pointed out, these are instruments for participation. However, I pointed out also that the barangays could be a means of control in the sense that the members of the Sangguniang Bayan (who are elected supposedly from the bottom and on upwards) cannot formally assume their position or start their official terms unless they have been formally appointed by the President. Isn't that so?

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, actually, while it is the President who appoints them, the choice of these barangay officials has been intimately connected with the implementation of Presidential Decrees 86 and 86-A. The choice of these officials actually comes from the people within the barangay. We hold meetings in the barangays and ask them to come up with people who they think shall be their barangay officials. On the basis of this, we present the names to the Mayor who in turn submits it to the Department of Local Government, and so on up to the President. The President confirms these appointments. In fact, these people are all chosen by their barangays. However, I do believe also that there are instances when the respective councilors of the districts who are in charge of those meetings at which the barangay leaders will be picked may have picked out their own leaders or people in the area without consulting the general populace of the locality. I believe that can happen. Still, the fact is that, for instance, in Iloilo City, there used to be only 36 barangays and there are now 182 of them. Is there actually an increase in participation? Perhaps, yes, quantitatively.

*Dr. Ventura:* There is no quarrel about that—that there are avenues through which the people can participate, particularly in the lowest level. I pointed out, however, the influence of particular values of our society; there are those who feel it might not be of any use to them to take part because of their own experience. These are part of what I pointed out as certain undevelopmental values in our society that contradict the positive aspects of political development. I just want to clarify that, although I said it is a means of control, these structures have been actually created for purposes of more effective implementation of national policies, and the localities have to decide on their own what they feel are their priorities and what they would like to undertake. So there have to be two sides to the coin. There are instances when the leaders themselves, in wanting to play heroes in the eyes of their superiors particularly those in the highest level, use certain tactics or strategies that may be authoritarian in nature.

They tell the people that to keep peace or to be able to implement their projects, they have to do this and that, otherwise they don't get the funds. What I like to find out, however, is what has been done in the development of regional assemblies and whether the Regional Sanggunians have really been effective or in fact formally instituted.

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, this is a question which concerns my office very closely. There has been a Presidential Decree creating the Pampook na Katipunan ng mga Sanggunian which is composed of all the Sangguniang Bayan members within a particular region. This Pampook na Katipunan ng mga Sanggunian has a regional executive committee which is composed of one governor elected from among the governors in the region; one Kabataang Barangay Federation president elected from the regional Kabataang Barangay presidents; one barangay captain elected from the Association of Barangay Captains in the region; and three others. In our case, we have a Regional Executive Committee composed of Governor Norada of Iloilo; Councilor Reyes of the Sanggunian Panlalawigan of Capiz; the President of the Kabataang Barangay of Antique; and then Councilor Divinagracia of Iloilo City; and three others. There are seven of them and they constitute the Regional Executive Committee. Now it is the work of the Sangguniang Bayan Secretariat, my office, to see to it that the Regional Katipunan ng mga Sanggunian meets at least once a year at the call of the Regional Executive Committee. The Regional Executive Committee meets at least once a month for whatever purpose they have agreed upon to plan their activities. But while this is what the Regional Secretariat is supposed to do, it is limited in its activities by lack of funds. And we have been trying to get the Regional Katipunan ng mga Sanggunian to meet even just once. We haven't had a meeting of the Regional Katipunan ng mga Sanggunian for the past two years. However, with the Regional Executive Committee we have had two meetings, mostly on the problem of funding. We are trying to come up with a budget for the Regional Executive Committee's activities. But somehow we have not been able to get the approval of the Department of Local Government and Community Development. We are trying to see if the local governments that make up the Regional Katipunan ng mga Sangguniang Bayan will be able to find means of funding the endeavor of the Regional Katipunan and the Regional Executive Council. The Regional Executive Committee did pass a resolution asking for aid from the members, and from the local government units that are members within the Region of the Katipunan ng mga

Sanggunian. Up to this time, however, we have not received any answer from the local Sangguniang Bayans.

*Moderator:* The gentleman over there.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Firstly, I would like to say something with regard to the statement and questions of Mr. Magno and Dr. Corsino from Silliman. Why must we insist on the manifestation of the full attributes of democracy when we really know we are under Martial Law? Secondly, I direct this question to Atty. Alcantara: Just how effective is the plan or the implementation of the bureaucratic revolution of our system as shown by the creation of the barangays and the different Sanggunians? I am not trying to say that the people are not interested in the barangay especially in their participation. However, it is not without whim or caprice that the UP Local Government Center declared that, presently, those who are occupying positions in the different barangays and Sanggunians are still the same political leaders before martial law. So how can we really realize the declaration of President Marcos that the barangays and the sanggunians will serve as effective instruments in the goal of democratizing the people?

*Atty. Alcantara:* There are so many approaches to this democratization process especially in terms of political development. For instance, there is a training program being put up by the Department of Local Government and Community Development for all barangay officials. Our own City Government here in Iloilo is also putting up or about to put up a training program for barangay officials especially in terms of budget-making and involvement with projects, project determination, project feasibility studies, and so forth. Another thing is the fact that planning is now a matter that is going on at all levels — from the barangay level to the regional level. For instance, here in the city of Iloilo as the Chairman for Urban Planning and member of the City Planning and Development Staff, we actually went out with a survey team to all barangays in the City of Iloilo and asked them questions. We had a set of questionnaires on their aspirations and these questionnaires were disseminated throughout the City of Iloilo. We had perhaps a thousand students working for us in this endeavor to come up with the framework plan for the city. I can say that the people participated in our framework plan especially those from the barangay. This is the plan we intend to implement. We intend on seeing to it that it is not merely a piece of paper, but an industrialized Iloilo City in the year 2000. And so I say

that the present government has within the context of Martial Law many approaches to genuine participation by the citizenry in decision-making.

*Moderator:* Well, there are still many questions to ask. But I'm sorry the time is up. Thank you very much Atty. Alcantara.

\_\_\_\_\_ : This is still in connection with the definition of political development and a comment presented by our friend there. I think he is right in saying that the definition of political development is a repudiation of what is presently existing. That is right because we are under Martial law. However, it could be justified by saying that the President has to exercise powers though political development may be defeated because of the crisis government. And it is a must under a crisis government. Now another comment is, I think it is quite illogical to draw an analogy of political development in other countries with the Philippines, considering that we have different idiosyncracies, different values and different systems. But so much with the comment, the question is: Considering that bureaucracy is very vital in political development and it is also an accepted fact that bureaucracy promotes red tape, how can we maintain bureaucracy but eliminate red tape so that political development can be promoted?

*Atty. Alcantara:* Well, red tape is caused by so many things. Our bureaucracy has a tendency to be legalistic. You talk to any Filipino in the government and he talks like a lawyer. Everything must be done through this and that; they never seem to think much of the substance and the objectives of the law. They think that the law is the law. Of course, we need a change of attitude and this is what the government is trying to do away with. I have never witnessed a government yet which is so concerned about the training and development of the bureaucracy than the government we have today. I notice that almost every week there seems to be a training or a seminar going on in Western Visayas for the development of the people in the bureaucracy. And so I think the change of attitudes will come although it may not be immediate, but it will come. I see a lot of changes already in the attitude of the bureaucracy. Since the bureaucracy could be the main obstruction in political development in their interpretation and application of policy, there is a need of changing their attitudes.

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