

“. . . What kind of government, the question must finally be raised, do we have? Is it worth defending? Is it capable of true reform? If there was a one-party system, true reform would not be possible except by some stroke of magnanimity on the part of the party in power . . .”

THE SO-CALLED TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES *

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USUALLY A SPEAKER is expected to tell people things instead of asking them questions. I am afraid I will raise more questions today than I shall answer.

Our government is supposed to rest on the separation of powers. The separation of powers among the three branches of our government—the judiciary, the legislative, and the executive—coordinate but independent of each other. This is insurance against one-man rule. It makes possible, the due process of law, which in turn insures our constitutional rights—freedom of speech and of the press, freedom of assembly—the right to assemble and petition the government for relief of grievances; the writ of *habeas corpus* and the opportunity to change administrations through free elections. All these are supposed to rest on the doctrine of separation of powers.

And this doctrine, we are told, is maintained by the two-party system. One-party government would mean dictatorship, as in Portugal, Spain, Indonesia, not to mention the communist states. Now, do we have a two-party system? If we have none, then how can we call ourselves a democracy? But if we have a two-party system, how explain the constant political turncoatism, the interchangeability of parties? Why do Filipinos change parties as often, it sometimes seems, as they change their shirts? Is it because Filipinos are less honorable politicians than others of the breed? You may recall what President Macapagal said about turncoats, about people who manage to jump on the bandwagon of the political party in power? How deplorable their conduct! And you have noted how the President embraced them enthusiastically when it was his turn to be in Malacañang.¹

* Condensed from an extemporaneous speech during the Seminar on *Politics in Asia*, November 29, 1963, in connection with the celebration of Asia Week in the University of the Philippines.

¹Note: A statement attributed to the President, said that those Nacionalistas who joined the Liberal Party were patriots (Ed).

Or is there only one party with two sections, but representing the same vested interests? Two sets of gangsters instead of good men and bad men? Do we have here a contest between the "goods" and the "bads," or merely a quarrel over spoils?

At the same time, we are told by political scientists, the sophisticated intelligentsia, to vote not for men but for parties. And this advice to vote straight in elections brings together intelligentsia and party hacks, independent voters and blind party followers—all voting the same way, voting for party rather than for the candidates on the basis of their individual merits. We are told by the sophisticated that individual merits are an irrelevance. "Good" men can do nothing for the people in the wrong party. Democracy is party government. The naïve vote for men, and the non-naïve vote for party. On the other hand, is it not also true that there is no basic difference between the Nacionalista party and the Liberal party?

Let us consider the history of the two parties. The Liberal party was formed in 1945 when the late President Sergio Osmeña, Sr. refused to step aside in favour of Manuel Roxas, causing split in the Nacionalista Party. And so the Liberal party was born. It was called the Liberal wing of the Nacionalista party—Liberal, with a capital L. And at that moment they were split over various issues, one being the collaboration issue. The collaborators, or those accused of treasonable collaboration with the Japanese enemy, rallied to the banner of Manuel Roxas who ran on the Liberal ticket. The anti-collaborationists, the guerrillas—(Montelibano, etc.)—joined forces with the Nacionalista party. Collaboration was an issue. The Liberal Party maintained that there were no collaborators, and that collaboration was a myth. Yet, not many years later, the principal collaborators or those accused of collaboration such as Claro M. Recto and Jose P. Laurel, Sr. became the leaders of the Nacionalista Party, the anti-collaborationist Party. So, for one year, the Nacionalista Party and the Liberal Party were divided on the issue of collaboration, and two three years later, the so-called collaborators were leading the Nacionalista party against the Liberals! Take another example, the issue of Parity² and puppetry against the Liberal Party. The Liberals were in favor of Parity, the Nacionalistas against it. The Liberals were accused of being compulsive puppets of the United States, and the Nacionalistas liked to describe themselves as truly for Philippine independence. And that was developed later under the slogan of 'Filipino First' under the Nacionalista regime of President Carlos P. Garcia. It was on the issue of 'Filipino First' that President Macapagal accused the Nacionalistas of veering away from the

² Note: Refers to Parity rights granted the Americans in the exploitation of natural resources in the Philippines (Ed).

United States and leaning toward neutralism. And yet under President Macapagal, we hear the Foreign Office speak of a 90° turn in the U.S.-Philippine relations. From personal knowledge, I would say that the 'New Era' really made the U.S. government, not to mention the British, very unhappy over Malaysia. Now, is this being a compulsive puppet? And still another issue that proved in time no longer an issue: It may be recalled how the Nacionalista Party and the Democratic Alliance, among whose leaders were Luis Taruc, Jesus Lava, etc., joined forces. And their platform included, I think, Land Reform. And now the Liberals have taken up Land Reform! The Nacionalistas are opposing it vehemently and have termed it unconstitutional and, together with Senator Lorenzo M. Tañada of the Nacionalist Citizens party are fighting it tooth and nail to stop its passage. I was denounced by the Nacionalistas, I am happy to say, twice on the floor of the Senate for advocating Land Reform.

And of course, the issue of graft and corruption. Interchangeable, the Nacionalista and the Liberal policy have been the same. Are the two parties, therefore, the same? If they are the same, then what makes rampant political turncoatism, an awkward word, easily understandable? And it makes party loyalty, a mere matter, if you want to use the word 'mere,' of personal honor, of individual loyalties. A man may be too honorable to change allegiance just like that. A man may consider it dishonorable to join the party in power and consider it beneath his dignity to be an opportunist. But actually, no political principles would be involved if the two parties were the same.

But if the two parties are one, then why don't they get together and establish one-party rule, ultimately dispensing with elections with their terrific expenses and, of course, the anxiety of losing? Is the reason perhaps this, that if we have two parties instead of one, it is because there is really no ideological differences but the fact that there are not enough spoils to divide? Abraham Lincoln is reputed to have described the problem of a winner in a presidential election in these words: Not enough teats for everyone. Take a pig, and there are too many little piglets, not enough teats for every one—not enough offices, not enough favors, not enough loot to be distributed to everybody.

If the two parties are really one, then should we vote? If the two parties are really one, and we should vote for party and not for men, then why vote at all! If the two parties are really one, why bother. Whoever wins, it would be the same party in power. Or, should one vote for money? Then one would get some benefit out of the casting of one's vote. Or, should one then, not the intelligentsia, but the naïve, go to the polls to vote for candidates on the basis of individual merits? But the election re-

sults, if there was only one party instead of two, would not disturb the social order. The poor would still be poor, the rich as rich, if not richer than ever. Reform, true reform, would be more hopeless than ever. What would be the agency for change if there were only one party? The social order would be frozen in eternity.

Hence, the need, if we want reform from a true opposition, a true two-party system, a party representing the common people. In the American set-up, for instance, there are the Republicans and the Democrats between whom, I understand, are real differences. One is more liberal and the other more conservative—two concepts of government. In the Philippines, however, is there any such true difference of attitude to social and economic problems? If there is none, there is indeed a need, it would seem, for another party—a party of the people. What are we to do, meanwhile, pending the formation of a truly effective, significant party of the people. How are we to vote while the choice is limited to the Liberal and the Nacionalista tickets?

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On the other hand, if there were only one party, then how explain civil liberties? How explain judicial independence. The constant reversal, for instance, of President Macapagal, by the Supreme Court? And the Supreme Court getting away from it? Why do we have no police state which is usually identified with a one-party system? Do we have here democratic ritual without democratic substance? If so, then there should be no change. Has there been change, however, since independence? Yes, I think. Nationalism has become respectable, that is change. Land reform, too. Since Macapagal is for land reform—he managed to push land reform—watered down though it may be but not too bad, through Congress—to vote against his candidates, would that not be to vote against land reform?

Ah, what agonizing reappraisal I went through! I may not like his guts, I may hate his guts. But if I voted for those no good Nacionalistas, those no-good anti-land reform legislators, would I not be voting against land reform which is so necessary for democracy to have meaning and substance for millions of Filipino peasants?

Maybe we have won a measure of freedom—impossible under a merely ritualistic democracy. And we have the 1965 elections which Mr. Macapagal may lose. Is this possible under a ritualistic democracy? They say that in Mexico whoever is nominated by the dominant party is sure of winning the election. The convention is a preview of the election. The convention is the real election, and the election is merely a ritual. But

here, we know that whoever is nominated by the party in power usually loses. How do we explain this if there were only one party? Incidentally, some professors from the University of the Philippines told one of the writers of the *Philippines Free Press* that Mr. Macapagal was performing a very healthy and good service for democracy because he disturbed the social order and created healthy tensions. Without tensions, there would be no reform and no true change. But if tension is a healthy element, a necessary disturber of social order, making possible social change, why then should we not vote for the person responsible for it or his candidates? Yet, the same professors said they would vote Nacionalista.

There is a cultural lag, it seems to me, a disparity between principle and conduct. What kind of government, the question must finally be raised, do we have? Is it worth defending? Is it capable of true reform? If there was a one-party system, true reform would not be possible except by some stroke of magnanimity on the part of the party-in-power. If our government is democratic, then it is capable of reform and, therefore, worth defending; assuming of course that one believes in democracy and reform. But what kind of democracy, do we have? With its questionable claim on the two-party-system, with its convertible politicians, with its rampant political turncoatism? What is the difference between the Nacionalista Party and the Liberal Party, a real difference if any? Do we have here merely a case of 'ins' and 'outs'? Does the election issue, election after election, boil down to this: throw the 'in-rascals' out by voting the 'out-rascals' in? The constant change of rascals, is this the foundation of our democracy, on which our constitutional rights rest? Or has the superstructure of a libertarian tradition become the base on which is being built a new society? A regime increasingly responsive to the needs of the people, the demands of a nation? Does consciousness determine being? Do ideals determine the establishment of social order? In contradiction to the Marxist dialectics, or in accordance with it? I do not know really. Which comes first, which is dominant, ideals or class interest? If ideals, then the unfinished revolution may be finished by non-violent means. Institutions may be changed without overthrowing them. This is the question that I want to leave with you: What kind of government do we have? Is it a democracy? And as we usually associate democracy with the two-party system, do we have the two-party system? If we have none, then we should have no democracy and if we have no democracy at all, why then, what do we have that is worth defending?