

Cha-cha for Parliamentary Government? - MabuhayRadio

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

Monday, 26 January 2009 14:09 - Last Updated Monday, 26 January 2009 14:13

How nice and proper, and, some even say, cute, for the press secretary of President Gloria Macapagal to say, that matters concerning the Cha-cha initiative are only to be decided by Congress and the lawmakers alone. He added: "Whatever the decision of Congress is, the people, ultimately, have the sovereign power." This is his response to the popular clamor for the President to declare her stand on the debate between a constitutional convention or constituent assembly to amend the 1987 Charter.

But the opponents to the initiative are worried that the Charter change would pave the way for the extension of the President's term beyond 2010 despite the statement of Cha-cha proponents that they would only revise the economic provisions.

I don't blame the Filipinos if they don't believe the President. They are already weary and wary of her. Only the most-naïve or the utterly trusting among them would take her word at its value, especially on a matter which means a lot to her own political survival.

They know her to be shrewd and the most clever among the Philippine politicians. And she's at her best when her own political life is at stake when her term will end in 2010. The members of Congress also realize that it's no longer politically viable, and, in fact, already becoming ridiculous, for them to keep on fielding their wives, children, and sibling to run in their place, when they have completed consecutive three terms in congress, in observance of the constitutional limitation.

Cha-cha for Parliamentary Government? - MabuhayRadio

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

Monday, 26 January 2009 14:09 - Last Updated Monday, 26 January 2009 14:13

In a sudden touch of shame or fear of an outbreak of long suppressed public revulsion, the President and her cohorts have to come up with something fast for their political survival. News reports of political maneuverings in Manila are the staple of the talks in campuses and coffee shops. People are impressed by the craftiness of the politicians. When one alternative plan becomes untenable, or dismissed, for being too offensive or vulgar to the people's good sense, they come up with what's believed to be more palatable.

They toyed at first with getting the 1987 constitution amended. When this was met with public resistance, the politicians shifted gear. They are now going for a radical change calculated to make the people believe that when the country's form of government is overhauled, the new one put in place after the surgical operation will be better.

Right now, the presidential form of government in the Philippines is under heavy artillery fire. All the President's men, and even some from the opposition, are behind the bombardment since their common agenda has become even more ambitious. A parliamentary form of government is now the centerpiece of their plan of action. Under this system, they will not only have a cover for perpetuating themselves in power but also the ultimate power will be lodged in their own hands.

The Philippines has had the presidential form since it has had an organized government. Even the authority of the pre-Hispanic chieftains was in a sense presidential. They probably consulted with their council but without really sharing power. And although it was said that the archbishop of Manila had more power than, or struggled for power with, the Spanish governors general, still the office of the governor general was the symbol and the power that wielded authority. That's also true with the American governors general. The difference was that they had to contend with the legislative branch which passed the laws for execution. This system has been carried over to the Commonwealth, and, then, the Republic when we had Presidents for better or ill.

Given the history of the Philippines, and the propensity of the Filipinos to personalize elections rather than look at them as an expression of the popular will over national issues, has the time come to entrust the people's life and fortune in the hands of their congressmen? More so to the members of a parliament? The lot of the Filipinos over the centuries under this system has not really been pleasant, but the fault lies not in the system, but in the political leaders, who do not want to make it work for the country's interest. These are the people hanging around the chief executive, mostly congressmen, now lusting to have their hands at the ultimate levers of power. These are the warlords or the caciques in their home turf who have been promoted to serve in Congress after years of paying-off the voters, or lawyers and businessmen who somehow always find themselves with the parties in power.

Our readers of course know that the prime minister or premier in a parliamentary form of government is an elected peer chosen by the representatives to head the government. When the people vote for them, they not only send to Congress a legislator but also an elector of the head of the government, like in Canada, India, Pakistan, and Thailand. But the historical experience of Filipinos with their legislators has been outright anomalous and outrageous. Most of them are the warlords who spread terror throughout the countryside and lawyers thriving on greasing the slow moving wheels of the bureaucratic red-tape. Businessmen cower in terror of their constant fact-finding investigations and tax-law writing powers.

A good example was the young congressman who later won a place in the Guinness Book of Records for stealing. He supposedly made his first buck bilking money from the Chinese who were threatened yearly with retail trade nationalization laws. This was, of course, enacted, finally, but only after the Chinese were left hanging and twisting in the wind paying ransom money every year trying to stop it.

Cha-cha for Parliamentary Government? - MabuhayRadio

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

Monday, 26 January 2009 14:09 - Last Updated Monday, 26 January 2009 14:13

A senate president was once heard to say "what are we in power for?" Right now, there's a revolving door of senate presidents who have alternated in power for just a few days or months. During the last few years alone, the Philippine senate has had several senate presidents, namely Salonga, Gonzales, Angara, Ople, Fernan, Maceda, Pimentel, Drillon, Villar, and now Enrile. That is also true in the lower house where the greatest anomaly for all time happened. When Rep. Jose de Venecia was elected speaker, he had only a handful of his partymates who made it in the previous election, but he got himself elected anyway. Only God knows what kind deals were made. He himself has recently been deposed and a new speaker installed, Prospero Nograles.

The experience of other countries having a parliamentary government is enlightening. The model that comes to mind right away is the British House of Commons, which is known as the mother of all parliaments. It propelled England to the zenith of world power because the system suited their temperament. But it's not the best example for the advocates to cite as a case study of the superiority of the parliamentary system which took roots in fertile British soil.

The Filipinos on the other hand are the unruly type. A Philippine parliament will be closer to the bewildering change of governments in Pakistan or India or Thailand, where the parliamentary struggle is more on personalities rather than on national issues. Any attempt to install a parliamentary government should therefore draw a dreary example, and not inspiration, from those countries which have identical social and economic background and characteristics as the Philippines.

Given the history of the Philippines, and the propensity of the Filipinos to personalize elections rather look at them as an expression of the popular will over national issues, the time has not yet come to entrust the people's life and fortune in the hands of their congressmen. More so as members of the parliament. # # #

Cha-cha for Parliamentary Government? - MabuhayRadio

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

Monday, 26 January 2009 14:09 - Last Updated Monday, 26 January 2009 14:13

[Joomla SEO powered by JoomSEF](#)