

The Role of Government —(2)

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The Aquino government must contend with competing new forces in addition to societal groups that are permanently hostile to any government that is not their own. In order to effectively govern, the government must maintain a decisive dominance over these forces. The following are necessary: (1) a solid party structure; (2) monopoly of the state on the use of arms; (3) harmonious relationship with the Church without compromising the separation between these two institutions; and, (4) government as a partner instead of competitor to private business.

This paper aims to provoke more discussion to help the administration formulate necessary reforms to strengthen its position, in the face of competing groups promoting different interests.

It should be recognized that these competing groups will always be there. Thus, there is a need for a standardized arrangement by which decisions affecting the common national interest are made and implemented. This standardized arrangement, which we call government, must always be the product of social consensus, so that while government regulates the form and scope of society, the processes it employs will always conform to what the society itself wants or approves. The political order must flow from the social fact. Only by ensuring this relationship between the political order and the social fact will the people be able to identify with government. Only then will official authority command obedience, not out of fear but out of common commitment. As the principal organ of the state, the government's main duty is to harmonize private good with public good. It best performs this duty by stimulating the free play of private initiative anchored on social responsibility or awareness of the common good. Some people will identify this as the interplay between the principles of subsidiary and solidarity.

The civil government is not the place where one defines or proclaims ultimate truths. This is the duty of the Church. But it is not the place where ultimate truths are bashed either. The government exists as part of the divine government of the entire universe, and it is its duty to show this by keeping alive the primacy of man over the goods and structures or institutions that he creates.

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This should not be confused with the primacy of the public good over private good. The state has a right to require every male citizen to enter military service in defense of the state. This is a public good taking precedence over the private good (some male citizens may want to do something else). But the state, contrary to what China and Singapore and some international and anti-population program tell us, does not have a right, for instance, to dictate how many children a married couple can have. The right to bear children is a right that pertains to man as man, or as being superior to the state. Government is part of a universal human and divine order which rests on morality; it cannot therefore invent any functions outside of, or divorced from it. Whether or not the masses participate in a particular government, whether or not the leaders of government inherit their positions or are elected in regular elections, the ultimate test for government is whether it helps the people live their lives not only as taxpayers and citizens, but above all, as men.

There is no need to discover anything new to point out the distinction that exists between the citizen and the human person. The old text suffices. It is the citizen that pays his taxes and votes, it is the man who embraces his wife, listens to poetry and music, helps his brother, and worships in adoration, petition, and thanksgiving to his God.

The Aquino government is committed to most of the propositions above. It wants to be known as one that governs on the basis of consensus in a pluralistic society where the mass of the public participate in the decision-making process, and where the people give their allegiance and obedience to it not on the basis of coercion or fear but because they feel they are part of it. It is a government that is *theirs*.

As the February revolution and the failed putsch of July¹ have shown, the government must contend with competing new forces, in addition to the forces that are permanently hostile to any government that is not their own. It must maintain a decisive dominance over these forces in order to effectively govern.

For this, several things are needed. The first requirement is a well-defined core from which all responsible actions and pronouncements of the government will emanate, and which will provide the base of presidential leadership. This is supplied by the Cabinet regardless of how effective it is. This is not what is referred to. More important though, is a solid party structure, upon which the Aquino government must anchor itself. In most governments, the Cabinet is an extension of the ruling party, and the position it takes on issues, reflects the party position on the same. The party is the organ responsible to the electorate for the success of government.

Aquino won the presidency without having to be a member of a political party until the last minute. It thus had no political platform binding

her and those who supported her cause. Even after having adopted United Democratic Opposition (UNIDO) as her party, as the price of Laurel's withdrawal as presidential candidate and his acceptance of the vice-presidency, she refused or failed to identify with the UNIDO program of government. Proof of this is that five months after her ascendancy to the presidency, she has not yet put together a comprehensive program of government.

If the government is to rest on strong foundation, it must rest on a strong party base, a single party if possible, or, a real coalition of parties that supported Mrs. Aquino in the last election. If the institutions that had been systematically destroyed by Marcos are to be restored and rebuilt, Mrs. Aquino will have to give it priority, just as her competitors, actual and potential, are giving it priority. The fact that she may regard herself as no more than a transitional figure is no argument for not doing it. It is a serious demand of government. She has to consolidate the political base of government, even if she does not intend to stay beyond a few years.

The second requirement is for the government to maintain its monopoly on the use of arms. It simply cannot coexist with other forces, be they pro-Marcos loyalists or communist-led guerillas, who profess an independent right to maintain their own armed forces. Not even in a country where every citizen has a constitutional right to bear arms, such as in the United States, would that government tolerate a situation where an organized political group, with well-defined political objectives and activities, would have an army of its own to challenge the armed forces of the government anytime it so decides.

The third requirement is for the government to maintain harmonious collaboration with the Church, without blurring the distinction between Church and State. This means that the government should not speak for the Church or on church matters, and that the Church or churchmen should not speak for the government, or on matters purely within the competence of the state.

The fact that a personally devout President was catapulted to power by popular action with the active support of the clergy and religious makes this a little difficult. But clericalism, or impressions of clericalism, should be avoided at all cost. The principle and practice of separate competence for Church and State are pretty well established; what is needed is a special effort to live the distinction on the part of all concerned. The President should recognize this as a particularly urgent and special challenge in the light of recent suggestions that Iglesia Ni Kristo (INK) militants were involved in the Manila Hotel failed coup, on July 6-7, 1986 and Islamic militants in kidnappings in Mindanao.

The fourth requirement is for the government to do what it preaches with respect to having less presence in business. The smallest thing that is

done here would immediately represent an improvement. But the situation has unfortunately been compromised by the series of sequestrations, which prompted prospective foreign investors to put a brake on their initial enthusiasm about investing in the Philippines, and compelled some key advisers of the President to propose a terminal point for the exercise of the sequestration powers. This does not necessarily suggest a completely hands-off policy from business. If it suggests anything at all, it suggests providing leadership and active intervention in behalf of business, rather than against business.

Endnote

¹In February 1986, Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Armed Forces of the Philippines Vice Chief of Staff Fidel V. Ramos staged a military rebellion that led to the ouster of President Marcos. Consequently, the widowed housewife of assassinated former Senator Benigno Aquino assumed the presidency. Less than six months later, a splinter military group known to be loyal to the deposed President attempted a coup by taking over Manila Hotel, in a bid to restore the old order. The attempted power grab failed.