

Laban Ng Demokratikong Pilipino: Ideology Or Idiosyncrasy?

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Guest Speaker:

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Discussants:

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Moderator:

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Prof. Alexander Magno: This afternoon, we are privileged to have as our guest a distinguished member of the House of Representatives. He has been in the public service for quite awhile, serving from 1955 to 1957 as councilor of Paniqui, Tarlac and from 1957 to 1959 as vice-mayor of the same town. From 1960 to 1961, he served as mayor of the town, then represented the first district of Tarlac for the first time from 1962 to 1965, and served a second term until 1969 for the same district. He again represents the first district of Tarlac in the present Philippine Congress. Our guest today was president of the *Partido Demokratiko ng Pilipinas-Lakas ng Bayan* (PDP-Laban: Democratic Party of the Philippines-Strength of the Nation) before it split. And from February 1989 to the present, he serves as the secretary-general of the *Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino* (LDP:Fight of the Democratic Filipino).

It is my pleasure to present to you today, Representative Jose Cojuangco, Jr.

Cong. Cojuangco: As I speak to you today, may I start by saying that the opinions to be expressed here need not necessarily be those of the occupant of Malacañang nor the position of the party.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the national elections of 1987 for senators and congressmen, most of the winning candidates were members of the various political parties belonging to the coalition *Lakas ng Bansa* (Strength of the Nation) supporting President Aquino. Again, in the local elections of 1988, a big percentage of the winning candidates belonged to these same political parties.

The results of these two elections could be attributed to: 1) the support of the electorate for these fighters of democracy, coupled with the people's distaste of the past dictatorship; 2) President Aquino's overwhelming popularity; and 3) in most areas, the political parties of the coalition managed to reach an agreement as to the official candidates of the coalition.

But as time passed, and as there appeared to be no common opponent, the leaders of the various political parties of the coalition began to jockey for position. At the same time, when the people began to realize that there truly was freedom and democracy in our country, members of the coalition began to sort themselves out according to their political creeds and according to the kind of leadership they opted to follow.

Slowly but surely, especially in the House of Representatives, support for the administration and its programs came in varying degrees. The majority still gave their 100 percent support, but there were already a number who chose to support the administration with certain qualifications.

There were many instances when members of the coalition opposed some administration measures more vehemently than the opposition

did. There were those members of the coalition who not only did not support but publicly criticized the administration's program. The number of those critics increased as the administration continued to treat coalition members in the same manner as everyone else.

Then it happened. In the beginning, a few leaders who continued to lend their unqualified support to the president started to meet. There was a need to draw the line. There was likewise a strong clamor from many sectors to unite all who believed in giving the administration their unqualified support. It gave rise to serious dialogues among the leaders of the PDP-Laban and the *Lakas ng Bansa*. They believed that something had to be done if this administration were to succeed. There were also those who felt that a strong united political aggrupation was imperative to combat the coup attempts.

After many and serious deliberations, the leaders of the PDP-Laban and the *Lakas ng Bansa* decided that the two political parties should merge to form a united party. It was a move that opened avenues for other leaders of varied political parties who strongly supported the president. Members of the United Nationalist and Democratic Opposition (UNIDO), the Liberal Party (LP), and a group calling themselves independents likewise manifested their desire to be counted in.

Thus, in September 1988, in a gathering of all these leaders and members at the Philippine International Convention Center was born the LDP.

It might have been the unqualified support for the administration and a common stand against the various attempted coups that brought these leaders and members together. But a new political outlook also came into being. From the LDP's birth arose the system of consultation with its members on major issues. Decision-making powers were given to the national executive committee and ratification to the national council. Local councils likewise enjoyed such powers when local issues were involved.

The party wanted to make sure that there existed within it a very democratic system of consensus and a true decentralization of powers. It was envisioned that the party should not be dependent on nor dictated upon by any one person. The party believes that for democracy to really take root in our country, it must lead by example.

Everyone was convinced that a system wherein the silent majority had no voice was an outrageous anomaly in a democratic form of society. A system must be developed so that the voice of even the lowliest members can be heard. The party leaders wanted to make the people feel that their government is there not to govern but serve them.

To give flesh to this spirit of democratic reform, and to lead by example as well, the LDP has established guidelines whereby all positions in the party are filled through elections. From the chapter level to the

highest position in the party, all officers must be elected by their respective councils. No one in the party has the power to appoint any officer in any level of its organization.

The reason is clear. Many of us, at one time or another, belonged to a political system wherein *turo-turo* (hand-picking) was the name of the game. The present leaders and members of the LDP wanted to do away with this undemocratic manner of choosing their leaders and candidates. They wanted to do away with the tyranny of a few who dictated orders from their headquarters in Manila. For the LDP to be truly democratic, it must involve the rank and file.

In this exercise towards giving more powers to its members, there is one guiding principle which has been incorporated even in the oath of affiliation – the rule of the majority. If decentralization or more autonomy were to succeed, everyone must be committed to the rule of the majority. Otherwise, decentralization will simply result in fragmentation and the eventual demise of the party.

It was noted that, at times, local autonomy was interpreted to mean independence. How many organizations, political or otherwise, have we seen breaking up after the election of officers is held? The losing group usually ends up forming another organization to make room for the losing set of candidates. The LDP makes sure that its members are aware of the connection between decentralization and the rule of the majority.

The basic principles on which the LDP is anchored as it seeks to achieve its objectives and programs are the following:

1.) *Theism*. The LDP acknowledges God as the Supreme Being and the human person as a creation in the image of God.

2.) *National Sovereignty*. The Philippines is a sovereign nation and upholds the ideals of international solidarity and peace.

3.) *Popular Democracy*. Because sovereignty resides in the people, the LDP endorses decentralization of power and the rights of indigenous communities to autonomy within the framework of national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

4.) *Social Justice and Responsibility*. The LDP believes in the equality of everyone before the law and the people's right to equitable access to resources and opportunities.

5.) *Economic Self-Reliance and Efficiency*. The LDP approves of the private sector taking the lead in economic development efforts with the government performing a supportive and moderating function. It encourages a mass-based ownership of strategic industries and development of cooperatives and people's organizations.

From these basic principles, there were many who wanted an evolution of party ideology. The truth is most ideologies of different organiza-

tions or parties are formulated by the elders or the more learned of the group. And this is forced down the throats of their members. Many times, this ideology is copied or based on existing ones from other nations. And as we often observe, such ideology cannot be adapted to our existing cultures and traditions, much less in the rural areas.

It is the hope of the party that once there is an avenue of communication between the lowest members and the topmost leaders, there would be a smooth flow of ideas and opinions such that it would be easier to formulate an ideology that would reflect the minds and aspirations of all its members. The LDP then would have a truly representative ideology it could live with.

Personally, I believe that the divisiveness in our body politic can be partly blamed on the system of government our people were forced to accept. In fairness to the idiosyncracies, the cultures, and the values of our people, I believe we must allow some kind of an evolution, however long it takes, in order to have a government that is truly responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Filipino people. We must exert all efforts to help in the evolution of a system of democracy that will suit the Filipino way of life.

Now that we have this opportunity to guide and shape our own destiny, the LDP would like to lead in the struggle towards the evolution of a democratic system of government that our very own people would have pieced together and built through their own sweat and labor, and not a system merely copied from other nations.

Today, we consider ourselves the majority party but not necessarily the ruling party. I say the majority party because we have as members 5 Senators, 150 Congressmen, more than 50 governors, some 35 city mayors, no less than 1,100 municipal mayors out of a possible 1,600, and easily 75 percent of all elected barangay officials. A few members of the Cabinet come from the LDP though the party does not dominate the Senate.

We do not claim to be the ruling party because the president is apolitical.

Although not the ruling party, the LDP has now and again pledged, and continues to give the president its total support. There have been many instances when the party has been thought to be the ruling party because of this support. But we are quick to correct this wrong impression. The party's main objective is to contribute towards the success of President Aquino's administration for we believe that its success is also the success of our new-found democracy.

For the 1992 elections, the party will field candidates in all levels of government. Our electoral college will meet by the end of this year to select our candidates for president, vice-president, and twenty-four

senators. We hope our organizational efforts would be completed before the campaign period of the 1992 elections.

As the party's secretary-general, I am confident that the party will be ready not only to meet the demands of the forthcoming elections, but will also be able to face the people whose cause it has always upheld.

Dr. Reyes: I was earnestly listening to the speech of Cong. Cojuangco and I suppose we have some questions about the LDP which remain unanswered.

Cong. Cojuangco said that the LDP is the majority party and not the ruling party but I am sure we have to concede that probably that is not true. It reigns because it is part of that group that is now perceived to be supportive of the incumbent administration.

First issue that I would like to ask would be the most basic of all. How would the LDP be distinguished from the other parties other than being perceived as the party that is supportive of the present administration? What is its difference? What is its philosophy? What are the views it embodies and holds to be distinct from that of other political parties?

Cong. Cojuangco: One of the things that we are thoroughly proud of is our organizational set-up.

Our organizational set-up must emanate from the bottom going upwards as opposed to other political parties where the organization emanates from the top going down. This is why we find it difficult to organize. The most that we could do was to appoint organizers but not officers. It has been very difficult in the sense that people are so used to having someone with a title organizing a party. The people that are posed to organize our party have no title at all.

We feel that we distinguish ourselves from other political parties this way because what we would like really is to do away with dictations coming from headquarters. If the local constituency would have no say as to who would be the official candidate of the party there, only then would this be decided at the headquarters in Manila.

Dr. Reyes: The other impression, and you may wish to correct it at this point, is that the LDP is similar to the *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* (KBL:New Society Movement) of the bad old days of the Marcos regime, both parties good only for the incumbency of the current administration.

In this arrangement, party members are enticed to remain, as a matter of convenience, because it is better to stay in the ruling majority to be able to avail of certain privileges that they may use in order to enhance their image. Thus, there is a common impression that the LDP is just a party of convenience, so that when President Aquino is no longer

the president, the party would just break up into pieces. What would happen to it is similar to what happened to the KBL.

I think there should be a clarification on this because if the LDP is to be considered a serious political party that deserves the people's support, it must be a party that represents an ideology.

Cong. Cojuangco: First of all I would deny that this is like the KBL for the simple reason that we are not the ruling party because we are just a member of the coalition. In other words, whatever benefits there are of being attached to the administration are enjoyed by all the members of the coalition; sometimes more for certain parties than for the LDP in spite of the fact that we are the majority party.

If we were a party of convenience, we should have lost a lot of members by now because many of us were not getting what we needed. But in spite of this, we have managed to stick together.

Why do we have former KBL members in our party? Well, we have former KBL members like every other party has former KBL members.

But I would like to make certain distinctions. For example, we had as member the late Cong. Moises Espinosa. During the campaign in the snap elections, he was KBL but gave me his assurance that no one in the opposition would be hurt during the campaign. I had talks with Mayor Bagatsing and Insan Amado. When it was very difficult to get permits to conduct meetings in Metro Manila, they gave us permits to conduct meetings. Even the late Makati mayor, Yabut, was also very cooperative. That is why when we talk about "This one, this is a KBL member. He is an evil person," we should know the specific contexts first.

Dr. Reyes: About the point that the LDP is supportive of the president and the incumbent administration, the question is: does the LDP give advice to the president on sensitive issues like the military bases, foreign debt, letter of intent, economic stabilization program, position on the parliamentary system? What explicitly are the stands or would be the stands of the LDP on these particular issues?

Cong. Cojuangco: We are party to the advisers of this administration. Unfortunately, the situation is that the only time that we can advise is either when we are called or when we are asked.

With regards to the bases, the party has already taken a position. In our national convention in September last year, we came up with the resolution that we are supportive of the position to be taken by our bases negotiating panel. The decision is this because our feeling is that while they are negotiating, at least let us give them the strength, that here is the majority party in support of whatever the panel is going to do. After which we hope that when their final agreement has been completed, we would get a copy of this and it would be taken up again by

the party in the national council for decision. That is the position of the party.

On the question of the foreign debt and the letter of intent, the party does not take any collective position because there are those of us who believe in this line and there are those who believe in another line, so since it has not been very necessary to make any major decision, the party has decided to let each member speak out his own opinion. In short, there is no collective decision as yet until such time that it is necessary. I guess then the party will call on its members and decide.

Dr. Reyes: How would the LDP relate with the *Kabisig* (companion; comrade) which Speaker Mitra calls the "shadowy unelected and unelectable officials in Malacañang." How does the party view *Kabisig*? Are they your allies or enemies?

Cong. Cojuangco: You assume that the *Kabisig* is another political party. It is not. The *Kabisig* is a system that is to be employed by politicians and non-governmental organizations working together in order to carry out certain programs for their constituencies. Like in my district, we have *Kabisig* with its livelihood programs.

Unfortunately, I think there were certain early statements on the *Kabisig* that were misinterpreted, misread, or misprinted that had caused this kind of misunderstanding. But I think rather than continue to try and explain who is right and who is wrong, we decided that all those who felt that the *Kabisig* way would work satisfactorily in their particular area may so adopt such track.

Mr. Alampay: I am taken aback that the ideology of the LDP is still being formulated. I came here wanting to find out what is really the ideology of the LDP because it is one of the most impressive parties in terms of machinery. Its influence is wide-ranging and because of this, I would even think that the LDP could both be credited and blamed for starting the election fever more than a year ahead of time. And now it would seem that a lot of people, a lot of parties, a lot of groups, are more interested in pursuing the presidency rather than programs.

The question of what is the ideology of your party remains unanswered. I would insist that we bring this up again because it is basic. What really sets the LDP apart from the other parties, ideology-wise?

Of course, the LDP says it is pro-people! I think any political party would say that it is pro-poor, pro-people, or pro-democracy. The question is again how would you operationalize a pro-poor policy? How do you operationalize a pro-people policy? How do you operationalize a pro-democracy policy?

In your constitution, you speak of social equity and responsibility. But how do you reconcile the idea of social equity with the reality that the very programs of agrarian reform are far from being satisfactory?

Cong. Cojuangco: I think I mentioned the five basic principles of the ideology of the party. And I added that there are some of us who believe that it is also a part of the objective of our constitution that we should allow the evolution of a certain ideology that could be more apt to our conditions. That, I would like to make very clear.

Why is it that the agrarian reform is not satisfactory? Well, naturally, all of us are after perfect societies. Naturally also, all of us would like to have, as soon as possible, that which our people would need.

But I would like to know from you, how do we do that? Because I think it is vested upon every citizen to contribute towards achieving that objective. I do not think it is proper for anyone of us to say, "You are the political party, you are the government, therefore, you do it."

Maybe we cannot blame our people because of our history. Under 400 years of Spanish rule, somebody speaks up, he gets thrown in jail. After that, the Americans. Okay, it seemed like it was better but you still cannot talk too much. Then, the Japanese came. Under Marcos, whenever we looked at men in uniform we thought, "they are not the ones who defend our life, they are the ones who take advantage of us." This is the way we all grew up that is why our response is, "Let us not give a damn. Let us just bear the hardship. We just let it be. Anyway, we will still get over this." I think this is what is wrong with this country.

Everybody must become active. Now, how do we play an active role? Any which way but the point is we must get involved. Whatever it is, however difficult it is, someone must start somewhere.

The way I look at it, there is already a twenty-year gap in the leadership of this country. Why? Because Marcos made sure that there would be no political leaders that would rise up to challenge him. Thus now, it is very difficult to find a good leader that would be nationalistic enough to lead the country.

In other words, what I am trying to say is that this is your generation. It is your world that is at stake. So that whatever is the matter, start speaking up, start writing your comments, start writing your senators. Maybe sometimes, you do not get any reaction, but that is how it is at first. At the start it is difficult.

Let me tell you a story. When we started the *Laban* in 1978, our candidates were talking to dogs and children! The people refused to even show their faces. But before the election was over, we had the noise barrage which I do not think would ever be duplicated again.

That is how the people responded: slowly. After that, it died down. Many were imprisoned, but after that, there were people who became active again. After Ninoy died, people were active again, then we had the EDSA revolution.

What I am saying is this, I know it is difficult, I know sometimes it is frustrating but the thing is, what can we do? This is our country. We cannot go anywhere else. What is important above all is that our countrymen feel that they belong in this country.

Suppose I am authorized by other foreign countries like the US, Australia, or Canada to give you permanent residency in those countries, I wonder how many people here would raise up their hands and fill up the application. That is the sad part. It is as if this is not our country; and we cannot blame the people because they feel that this country does not belong to them. They feel that it is just the country of the elites.

These are the things that we have to correct. How is it to be corrected? Efforts. We just keep on trying. We just keep on moving. When is it going to happen? We do not know, but we have to do something. If we do not do anything, nothing will happen.

Mr. Alampay: Your advice is well-taken. But sadly, the situation is not that simple.

It is so easy for the government to admonish the people to try harder, but in a national situation that continually causes deep despair, disillusion, and confusion, on what basis could we still expect people to try harder by themselves? Just start somewhere, yes, but where? There are many different and contradictory roads to social change, and it is the role of the government to provide the best perspectives and serve as the leading inspiration towards their achievement.

Besides, I believe many people are trying hard only that the odds are stacked against them. For example, you say to us students to study harder. Fine, but where would students study when they could no longer afford an education?

Cong. Cojuangco: First of all, we came up with a law providing for free secondary school education. What we are now looking at is the budget for state colleges. How do we approach this? Should we continue the state colleges? If we remove the state colleges, what happens to the locality? We have a committee on education which is studying how to approach this. We know the problem. We realize that we need to give our people education for this country to rise up.

Mr. Alampay: Does the LDP as a party have complete proposals?

Cong. Cojuangco: Not as yet but as I have told you, we are studying that.