

The Declining Clans

The old political clans who lorded it over municipal and provincial elections could not have survived a prolonged dictatorship and an insurrectionary reversion to formal democracy unscathed.

Although it is handy to point to familiar names and say that the new liberal democratic arrangement brought the old political elite back to life, the claim shall not be entirely true. Many of the traditional political clans lost in the last elections. Many with old clan ties who managed to survive the electoral exercise have had to win by new means. Only in the most marginal areas did traditional clan dominance over political power remain basically unaltered.

The indications are that the traditional political networks have been significantly eroded and the composition of the voting population has been substantially altered.

The centralization of patronage during the period of dictatorship seriously undercut the position of local elites who relied on control of state resources to sustain clientelist networks. Local executive power was curbed by the necessary prerogatives of autocratic rule. The redistricting of seats in the Batasang Pambansa, along with the basic impotence of that institution, made municipal bailiwicks rather irrelevant. Access to the top more than control of small grassroots constituencies decided who would occupy seats in the rubber-stamp parliament.

More decisively, over the long term, the traditional constituencies of the old political clans appear to have diminished as a percentage of the voting population.

The old political clans that used to dominate Filipino politics were invariably from the landowning gentry. They had the leisure to dabble with politics and a tenant bailiwick with which to begin cultivating a political base. Relatively stable agricultural populations allowed extended ties of patronage to develop over time.

The decreasing significance of traditional agricultural production, the expansion of mercantile and manufacturing interests, the geographic mobility of the population, the growth of the urbanized sector, the increasing significance of middle-class voters and over-all changes in the political pre-

disposition of voters all conspired to undermine the influence of the traditional political elite.

Many from the old clans who reappeared for the local elections deployed what was left of their old networks as seed political capital with which to establish new factions. They contested the elections on a new basis -- the old clan network playing a secondary, if not marginal role. Many who depended exclusively on the old clan networks lost the elections.

The increased segmentation of the voting population along with a changed economic terrain featuring decreased social dependency on the old families opened wide spaces for new political forces. Into these spaces poured movie stars, popular sportsmen and occasional personalities from the cause-oriented movements. New political blocs, expressive of a fluid political economy, have emerged quite distinctly.

The underdevelopment of the political party system in the Philippines prevented the crystallization of definite party constituencies, the clear possibility for such notwithstanding. Relatively more adept political party formations -- such as Jovito Salonga's Liberal Party -- anticipated the mushrooming of new political factions and took advantage of the local elections to build nationwide electoral networks.

In the urban and semi-urban areas, the effective decline of traditional clans in the face of a socially mobile voting base favored the establishment of clear political party apparatuses and the gradual emergence of a significant party vote.

Over the long term, the transformation of the social structure shall become more pronounced. Changes in land-based production shall continue to erode the bailiwicks of traditional political clans. The segmentation of the voting population makes sectoral constituencies a closer possibility.

But a working class constituency can become an actuality only when a working class electoral party effectively crystallizes and mobilizes support in the electoral arena.

Stung by the experience of an open Left party during the congressional elections and haunted by right-wing vigilantes, the progressive forces failed to utilize the openings offered by the last municipal elections to develop more advanced constituencies where traditional clan influences have declined. **K**