

Federalism will cement dynasties

Australia has a federal system of government which evolved from six British independent colonies. A federal constitution was framed, the colonies surrendered some of their powers to a central government, and retained those that were not conceded. Over the years and with the historical experience of wars and the economic cycles, there emerged a strong federal system, with a national government and the now six states and two territories within the Commonwealth of Australia.

The success of the federal system in Australia is founded on the inherited British Westminster conventions and strengthened by a strong two-party system. While there are written federal and state constitutions and codified laws, there is strong reliance on uncodified conventions, practices and precedents. In practice, these are as forceful and sometimes stronger than the statute laws and their interpretations. These very much define the behavior of people, the officials and their constituents, under the federal system.

In Australia, people often refer to, and rely on, the Westminster conventions in assessing the conduct of parliamentarians in the performance of their duties and

COMMENTARY

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their relations to the body politic. There is a strongly defined Cabinet responsibility. Each Cabinet member bears a collective responsibility of government policies inasmuch as these are arrived at by consensus.

Recently in Australia, a senator had to resign from the Shadow Cabinet and eventually from the Senate because of alleged corrupt conduct and undermining the work of the Australian intelligence agency.

Two years ago, elected members of Parliament in New South Wales either had to resign from Parliament and/or be expelled from their political party after being named in an investigation for corruption by the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

There have been many more examples of public officials, both elected and appointed, compelled to leave office for alleged corrupt conduct or for having failed to uphold the standard of the Westminster system. I remember well many years ago when a Minister of the Crown had to resign

for not declaring a television set at Customs on his return from an overseas trip.

There is a strong two-party system in Australia. Switching from one political party to the other party means death in politics and happens only in extraordinary circumstances. The two major political parties are clearly distinguishable by their core values and principles and how they are applied when in the government or in opposition.

It is not only on the issue of the conduct of officials and the role of political parties that the Philippines is not ready for a federal system of government. There is also this: The majority of Filipinos still have little understanding, or culture, of the Westminster system. These are actually what prevent political dynasties from succeeding in Australia.

If the push for a federal system succeeds, the Philippines will end up a virtual dictatorship and cement dynasties that control political power, similar to the countries that have adopted the federal system such as Malaysia, Cambodia, and Singapore, to name just a few.

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* FEDERALISM