

## **New ways, new methods**

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Conrad de Quiros' article, *Madness in the method* (19 July 2012 issue of the PDI), sums up the way we practice politics, which in the words of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "has been most hurtful of us as a people...(and) is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving of full human development" (Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics, 1997).

De Quiros cannot be more precise when he characterized the "notion of ensuring victory at all costs," by well-known and "winnable" persons in politics, which "sounds like the sanest thing in the world," as "in fact the maddest thing the world."

Such kind of (traditional) politicians and their political parties alike was best described by Dwight D. Eisenhower, who in his speech on March 6, 1956 said: "If a political party does not have its foundation in the determination to advance a cause that is right and that is moral, then it is not a political party; it is merely a conspiracy to seize power."

What is our political culture and attitude toward political parties? The first focus of attention is on getting oneself chosen as the candidate of a party. A candidate seeking support from the "kingmakers" is advised that he must learn to deal with "political reality" and he is supposed to do this by adopting the traditional method of political horse-trading, of promising patronage to financial supporters, of buying the loyalty of local traders. Soon enough he becomes adept in the ways of self-serving opportunism and he looks for a party that can help him fulfil his ambitions without regard to ideology and platform. Thus it is commonplace to see or hear of disappointed candidates switching party affiliations or founding their own parties. There is also no difficulty whatsoever for an office-aspirant to be sworn into one party after another, no real stigma being attached to "turn-coatism".

A political party, as it ought to be, is an organised group of people with at least roughly similar political aims and opinions – representing a general view about the relationship between the government and society – that seeks to influence public policy by getting its candidates elected to public office.

People thus get more actively involved in public life via political parties, which allow them to identify with a general approach to public questions, to organize, to find strength in numbers, and to support candidates and parties that reflect their views and interests.

Voters ought to rely on party platforms to enunciate a political philosophy and clarify positions. Knowing that a candidate is a member of one party provides an introduction to the kinds of positions he or she will support. In any given election, there are hundreds of candidates, and it is very difficult (if not impossible) for a voter to judge the individual record and platform of every eligible candidate. Party identification allows a voter to make an informed choice without researching every detail of a campaign.

Parties provide a brand identity so that voters have some idea what they are getting when they support a vote for a candidate.

This country has remained the same because there's madness in the method, de Quiros asserts.

Nonetheless, the future can be different if we make the present different, both in the manner political parties conduct themselves, and voters get involved and exercise their vote.

The good news is there may already be viable alternative party(ies) where the organization is bigger than its members rather than the other way around, and anchored on a set of principles and platform with clear and specific policy objectives (not motherhood statements) all aimed at enhancing the common good and that members and candidates must support and abide by in their entirety.

The only question is: are we (the voters) aware of and ready for this new kind of politics?

Change calls for new ways and new methods – the only antidote to make obsolete the madness in our traditional practice of politics.

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