

'New Politics' Comes to the Philippines, As Plan To Subvert Constitution Fails

by Mike Billington

A dramatic victory for the Philippine nation was achieved during the week of Dec. 10, when, under the threat of mass demonstrations from nearly all the institutions of the state, the government threw in the towel in its effort to implement a charter change ("cha-cha," in popular usage, meaning a revision of the Constitution). But the real cause of the capitulation was in Washington—the fact that the government in Manila had suddenly lost its "protection," when the Bush/Cheney team was delivered a solid defeat in the Nov. 7, 2006 U.S. elections. Suddenly, the would-be Emperor in Manila had no clothes.

The cha-cha plan calls for scrapping the existing Presidential system, along with the checks and balances which go with it, to be replaced by a unicameral parliamentary system, in which both the Executive and the Legislative branches would be run by a single party. Included in the plan was the elimination of constitutional restrictions on foreign ownership of certain industries, properties, and mineral wealth.

The role of the Philippine LaRouche Society (PLS) in the victory against this plan was significant, if apparently marginal. On the day that Speaker of the House José de Venecia announced in 2005 his drive to ram through the charter change, the leading TV station in the Philippines, ABS-CBN, came to PLS leader Butch Valdes for his response, as Valdes was known for his strong opposition to the plan. Valdes described the effort as a "constitutional coup," demonstrated both by the dictatorial character of the proposal itself, but also by the character of its three primary sponsors: President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo; the power behind her throne, George Shultz-asset and former President, Fidel Ramos; and the long-standing front-man for Ramos in the Congress, Speaker de Venecia.

Since that time, Valdes has read a PLS statement on his daily radio show at least once a week, denouncing the cha-cha as an essentially fascist move, saying in part: "Make no mistake, the recent attempt by the Administration congressmen, and their lackeys in and out of government, to hijack the democratic process, is but the latest in a series of sinister moves to propel the nation towards further subservience to globalist forces."

When the Senate refused to go along with this constitutional coup, the ruling troika which had promoted it, Arroyo,

Ramos, and de Venecia, tried by various means to simply ignore the very Constitution they were trying to destroy. First, they ordered government officials to gather signatures on a petition and pass this off as a "people's referendum" for charter change. The Supreme Court denounced this scam in October 2006, ruling that it would not allow such an effort to "trivialize the Constitution by cavalierly amending or revising it in a blatant violation of the clearly specified modes of amendment and revision laid out in the Constitution itself."

Then President Arroyo mandated the House of Representatives, which, unlike the Senate, is controlled by the government party, to simply ignore the overwhelming opposition in the Senate, and proceed on its own, in disregard of the constitutionally mandated methods for changing the Constitution. In an all-night session of the House on Dec. 5, the House changed its own rules, essentially allowing itself to form a Consultative Assembly to implement the constitutional changes demanded by the troika. This was such an overt effort to subvert the Constitution, that even the institutions which have supported the President during her nearly six years of crisis-wracked rule, threatened to revolt.

Foremost amongst these institutions was the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines. Under the now-deceased Cardinal Sin, the Church had played a leading role in the so-called "people's power" revolts against President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, and against President Joseph Estrada in 2001 (bringing Arroyo to power), which were actually military coups controlled by former U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz and his minions in Washington, using their man Gen. Fidel Ramos to do the dirty work. However, partially due to the influence of the Vatican, the Church has largely stayed out of the multiple legal and extra-legal efforts by the opposition and some factions in the military to remove President Arroyo from power, efforts based on accusations of assuming her post illegitimately, corruption, vote fraud, and condoning military death squads which have murdered dozens of opposition politicians and journalists.

The recent drive to impose the charter change, however, was denounced by the bishops as an act of "indecent haste," ignoring the Constitution in trying to change it. A mass demonstration was called by the bishops to protest cha-cha, and

the mass-based evangelical movements on both the Catholic and Protestant sides, which had heretofore supported President Arroyo, joined in supporting the call for public protest. The leader of the opposition in the House, Rep. Francis Escudero, warned in the *Manila Times* that “the Administration is unwittingly courting another people power.”

President Arroyo knew that this time she had no one to appeal to in Washington, and gave in—even countering Speaker de Venecia’s effort to introduce yet another method to ram through the cha-cha.

Heritage Foundation Protection

Perhaps de Venecia could not see as clearly as President Arroyo that the new political reality in the United States meant that their game was up. De Venecia had famously offered to sell the nation to foreign speculators at a Heritage Foundation speech in Washington in September 2005. To the fawning crowd of neo-conservatives at the meeting, de Venecia promised to do away with the “disruptive” voice of the opposition in the Senate, which had held back the government’s implementation of the International Monetary Fund’s austerity “reforms,” including the lifting of Constitutional protections of key industries and raw material wealth. De Venecia also offered a “debt-for-equity” swap plan, making clear that he was not asking for debt forgiveness, debt reduction, or a debt moratorium for the deadly debt burden which is strangling the nation, but rather that 50% of the existing foreign debt be transformed into equity in valuable Philippine enterprises. He promised that the “return on investment” would far exceed the current returns on the debt: “Instead of earning 1% or 2% over prime as you do now, we are proposing debt-for-equity in very attractive, very high-yield projects, where real returns on investment can be over 100%, 200%, 300%.” He pointed especially to forestry and mining operations that would be up for grabs.

Nationalist economist Alejandro “Ding” Licahuco, in a Dec. 14 op-ed in the *Daily Tribune*, pointed to this side of the cha-cha as the core reality ignored even by most of the opposition: “The proposed shift from the presidential to the parliamentary system is actually intended to facilitate the implementation of the sinister agenda, an agenda which would remove the very economic underpinning of the people’s political sovereignty and make economic sovereignty itself a sham. . . . The real issue, in brief, is high treason, and not only corruption: The treasonous project to submit to international auction nothing less than the entire patrimony and territory of the republic in the name of globalization and development.”

The planned mass demonstration against cha-cha turned



OPS-NIB Photo/Michael Rey Baniquet

The troika pushing for a charter change to scrap the Presidential system (left to right), Speaker of the House Jose de Venecia, President Gloria Arroyo, and Gen. Fidel Ramos, have lost their neo-conservative sponsors in Washington to the “New Politics.”

into a “celebration prayer rally” on Dec. 17, with 50,000 people gathered in Manila, under the theme “Watch and pray—Be concerned for the country.”

The Economic Reality

Congressional elections coming up in May are now free of the cha-cha controversy, and can focus on the economic disaster brought upon the nation by subservience to globalization dogma. A recent survey showed that hunger has reached a record rate of 16.9%, or 8.5 million Filipinos. Manufacturing output collapsed by 8.3% in 2006, while the nation pays its foreign debts by shipping more and more of its citizens overseas to earn foreign exchange, breaking up families in the process. The only growing “industry” in the country is the foreign “call centers,” servicing the shopping whims of American families across the Pacific in a modern form of colonial servitude. Electricity rates have more than doubled in the past months as the privatized and deregulated power industry (President Arroyo’s first act as President) has now fully kicked in, allowing speculators to repeat the Enron process seen in the United States after the election of George W. Bush in 2000.

It is far from certain that leadership will emerge in the Philippines willing to tackle the globalization process which has destroyed so many nations. At least the opposition has preserved the American Presidential system, which will allow the Congress to reject treasonous policies, and, if they can find the backbone, take on the speculators and globalizers, foreign and domestic.

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