

■ To avoid election irregularities, here are some suggestions.

## IMPROVEMENT OF VOTING SYSTEM

Why don't our politicians behave the way American or English politicians do? Why can they not learn the art of losing? The obvious answer is that if our elections were *relatively* free and clean — I use *relatively*, because American elections are not completely clean — it should be easy for any politician to concede defeat, it should be easy for the loser to accept the popular verdict.

That is the reason why I am for the recasting of the rules on elections — recasting them in such a way that the victor need not be ashamed of his triumph, since it is genuine, and the vanquished can graciously accept his defeat, since it is true.

I propose the following:

1. Voters should be registered only, as before, in the precinct of the place where they reside. Thousands of people in Manila, Quezon City, Rizal, Davao, and many other places did not know

where they could vote. The spectacle in the 1967 elections of a Commissioner of the COMELEC, not knowing the precinct where he could vote, is no longer funny. It could be tragic. A close fight in the United States may not culminate in violent uprising; but a closely contested electoral fight in the Philippines, with a razor-edge majority of 20,000 votes, let us say, in a Presidential election could spell violence.

2. Registration should stop well ahead of time, say, 60 days before the elections, and the voters' list should be immediately prepared so as to give the courts ample opportunity to decide inclusion and exclusion cases.

3. With the use of modern electronic machines, it should be possible to have a complete list, a master-list, of all voters in every city and municipality, indicating dates of birth, residence and other personal circumstances. It

would then be easy in every precinct to catch phantom and flying voters.

4. The rampant and expensive use of sample ballots can be avoided by a new system of paper ballots, such as they have in Los Angeles, California, which would allow for the use of mark-sensing machines.

5. With this system, polls can be closed earlier — say at 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and thereby avoid mischiefs committed in many places where there is no electricity.

6. Through the use of mark-sensing machines, which are relatively cheap, results can be immediately transmitted to regional centers in Mindanao, Visayas, and Luzon, where computers can be installed for immediate computation. These computers are available in the Philippines and can be had for rent. It should be possible to know the election results throughout the Philippines in 24 hours.

It is passing strange that in India, with such a tremendous area and an electorate much bigger than that

of America, election results are known within 24 hours. Certainly, there can be no excuse for slow, inaccurate returns in the Philippines.

But even with the use of mark-sensing machines and computers, it is still necessary — and probably even more imperative — that the polls be guarded zealously to prevent terrorism and mass frauds. The use of modern machines will be futile if voters are terrorized and precinct officials made to perform their duties under the gun. For no computer, no matter how sophisticated, can save us from the weight of our own vices and follies. If, as stated by the present COMELEC Chairman, the Philippine Constabulary can no longer be relied upon because of their partisan activities in the last elections, it should be possible — and I believe they will welcome it — to have our youth — particularly, the ROTC cadets, imbued with idealism and untouched by the long arm of corrupting politics — man the polls in 1969. This could be our most critical hour.

Involvement of the youth in public affairs could be the means of our redemption as a people. It is, to my mind, an oversimplification to say that they should avoid political activity. Millions of young Czechs, Vietnamese, Hungarians, Poles, and Africans are dying everyday for the right of a free and unfettered vote. It will not be too much — and I think they will want it — for the youth of the land to secure the exercise by the nation of free suffrage so they do not have to fight and die for it in the mountain fastnesses if we should by our own lack of vigilance and resourcefulness, lose that right.

In the last analysis, it is this that differentiates us from a dictatorship, whether of the extreme left or of the extreme right — namely, the right of a free, liberty-loving people to hold their public officials to account and to change them, at given intervals, of their own voluntary will.

Where our elected officials are elected through the ho-

nest and free exercise of the popular will, they are not beholden to the manipulators and agents of force and fraud. They do not have to enter into secret conspiracies after the elections to reward them for their notorious activities. They can exercise the duties of their office as free agents of the popular will, bound only by the dictates of their conscience and the mandate of a sovereign people. It is high time, I submit, we made politics — up to this point a term of disrepute — a respected and respectable calling in this land. Whether we like it or not, politics means public affairs, and as long as we are in society we cannot escape involvement in matters that affect the entire community. It is our joint responsibility — one that is both onerous and exalting — to spend the resources of mind and strength and spirit to bring about a more responsible, a more decent, and a more responsive governance of public affairs. — *Senator Jovito Salonga, portion of a speech, Manila Times, November 28, 1968.*