

OPINION & FEATURES

Power to the People

EDITORIAL

There's no better time to show how Filipinos value their hard-earned freedom.

Two days before the 111th celebration of Philippine Independence, the nation convenes for another freedom fight -- a rally to signify their protest against the constituent assembly of the House of Representatives.

The passing of House Resolution No. 1109, which empowers the House of Representatives to call a constituent assembly (Con-Ass) to amend the Constitution without the Senate, is clearly a violation of the original objectives by which the 1987 Constitution was made.

The preamble of the 1987 Constitution reads: "We, the sovereign Filipino people, imploring the aid of Almighty God, in order to build a just and humane society and establish a Government that shall embody our ideals and aspirations, promote the common good, conserve and develop our patrimony and secure to ourselves and our posterity the blessings of independence and democracy under the rule of law and a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace, do ordain and promulgate this Constitution."

Enacted during President Corazon Aquino's term, the Philippine Constitution was made under the issuance of Procla-

mation No. 3 -- "declaring a national policy to implement the reforms mandated by the people, protecting their basic rights, adopting a provisional constitution, and providing for an orderly translation to a government under a new constitution."

The 1987 Constitution is a product of blood, sweat and tears, undergoing much heated debates before its completion and ratification through a plebiscite.

The current outrage is, therefore, inevitable. Even business groups have expressed their disagreement in a joint statement saying, that they "are appalled at the indecency and blatant disregard of the Filipino people's will displayed by the House of Representatives in its adoption of House Resolution No. 1109."

The Constitution is the very core of our identity, the beacon of our independence as a nation. Our by-laws should exist for the people and by the people. For a country who has gone through more than 300 years of foreign conquest, 20 years of a dictatorship and an impeached president, it is our responsibility to remain vigilant in protecting our rights and securing our democracy. (AJ Press)



Source: Inquirer.net

SWS over Pulse Asia; Nograles vs media



NEWSSTAND
John Nery

I MUST quibble with my friend Manolo Quezon's assertion, in his column of June 4, that "the media were caught napping by the goings-on in the House," the night the administration coalition forced the vote on the constituent-assembly resolution. He was among those I followed online as the session neared its scripted end; some of the chatter on Facebook and

Twitter that I tracked attacked the absence of traditional media at the Batasan, "except for ANC." The *Philippine Daily Inquirer* was even mentioned by name. I was worried enough as to ask the newsroom, and immediately relayed the answer through my own Facebook update: there were at least three journalists from the Inquirer group present at the proceedings. Indeed, *Inquirer.net*'s Lira Dalangin-Fernandez posted a comprehensive report online a mere 10 minutes or so after the ignominious vote; the *Inquirer*'s Gil Cabacungan Jr. filed a report that became the next day's banner story; photographer Niño Orbeta caught vivid images (and was himself caught on ANC). I am sure the same thing can be said for other newspapers and media organizations worth the name; they covered the vote.

So why did quite a number of bloggers and

Twitters and plerkers think the mainstream media was missing in action? I can only guess why. Either they did not see reporters with conspicuous press IDs on the floor (for good reason: many of the reporters "cover" in the press room, where their computers and Internet connections are). Or they do not listen to AM radio (the major stations, including dzMM and dzBB, covered the proceedings live). Or they expect the mass media to reach them where they are, in the digital networks they have come to inhabit.

Only the third reason is the fault of mainstream media; media organizations must do a better job of engaging the so-called digital natives. But the first two reasons expose the natives' own shortcomings. Sometimes they cannot "see" other media like radio because their online focus imposes a kind of tunnel vision. And online's addicting promise of immediacy drives some of them to comment, vent, attack, with the speed of opinion.

How do we reconcile the latest divergent findings between Social Weather Stations and Pulse Asia on voters' presidential preferences?

At the current stage of the political cycle, I as a journalist would put greater weight on the SWS results. The SWS survey of Feb. 20-23 asked the following question (in Filipino): "Under the present Constitution, the term of Pres. Arroyo is up to 2010 only, and there will be an election for a new president in May 2010. Who do you think are good leaders who should succeed Pres. Arroyo as president? You may give up to three names."

In contrast, the Pulse Asia survey of May 4-17 asked, also in Filipino: "Of the people on this list, whom would you vote for as president of the Philippines if the elections of 2010 were held today and they were presidential candidates?"

SWS asks for as many as three choices; Pulse Asia asks for only one. Now, aside from core supporters of the various presidential aspirants, who do we know have already decided on their vote? I would like to suggest that, at this stage of the political cycle, most voters have not yet made up their minds. (I certainly haven't.) That makes the SWS approach more useful to journalists; it reflects the range-finding that I think many voters are engaged in, at this stage of the political cycle. We may already know whom we won't vote for; as for our choices, we may still be considering possibilities, from among two or three.

I realize that the five SWS surveys Sen. Manuel Villar commissioned, between June 2008 and May 2009, ask respondents to name only one preference: "who will you probably vote for as president of the Philippines, if elections were held today?" This phrasing, I would think, is useful to candidates; it gives them an idea of their core support. The other approach gives us an idea of potential.

When I guested, with Vergel Santos, on *Cheche Lazaro's* astute *Media in Focus* program last Thursday, I did not expect to engage in a fire fight with Speaker Prospero Nograles (I thought his participation, by phone patch, would precede ours).

When the chance arose to debate with him, I held my fire, and kept to explanations and clarificatory (if hopefully revealing) questions. Representing a profession that is often taken to task for perceived arrogance, I did not want to be seen as taking part in an ambush. (But one journalist—Vergel—tangling with the Speaker, now that was a duel.)

But Nograles' main points do need rebutting. Permit me.

That there couldn't have been a "gang rape" of the Constitution because the proceedings were transparent: Daylight is no deterrent. Many rapes happen in the open. Surely Nograles has not forgotten the horrifying case of the Australian missionary who was raped, repeatedly, in the open, when inmates of the Davao Penal Colony rioted, in the 1980s.

That Vergel and other journalists should first run for Congress before criticizing the House: Journalists should decline, not only because of the imminent danger of victory, but because criticism in a democracy needs no pedigree.

That the House majority knew what it was doing: In answer to my question about the House adopting a resolution despite disagreement about what to do afterwards, Nograles said that in fact the majority was agreed on what to do next. Not true: the likes of Pablo Garcia say the next step is for the House to transmit the resolution to the Senate, while Rody Antonino and his cohorts say the next step is to convene the constituent assembly. Sounds like an ambush to me. (*Inquirer.net*)

Apologies



THERES THE RUB
Conrado de Quiros

A COUPLE of weeks ago, the Japanese ambassador to the United States apologized for the Bataan Death March. "As former prime ministers of Japan have repeatedly stated," Ichiro Fujisaki said before the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor, "the Japanese people should bear in mind that we must look into the past and learn from the lessons of history." He said his country was extending a heartfelt apology for "having caused tremendous damage and suffering to many people, including prisoners of war, those who have undergone tragic experiences."

In 1942, the invading Japanese marched off 78,000 prisoners after they surrendered in Bataan and Corregidor to Cabanatuan. The march lasted six days, with the prisoners given no food, water, or medical attention, and bayoneted or beheaded where they fell. It led to the deaths of 12,000 Americans and 66,000 Filipinos.

Fujisaki's apology met with mixed

reactions. Some of his audience applauded while others remained unimpressed. "This young man knows very little of the atrocities," said one of the survivors. "They probably rehearsed him on it."

Well, it's not a bad gesture, rehearsed or not. If I'm going to quibble with it, it is only that it was addressed to the Americans and not to us, Filipinos. Which makes me ask: When will the Japanese ambassador to the Philippines make a similar apology? Just look at the death toll. If the Japanese owe anybody monumental contrition for that monumental atrocity, it's not the Americans, it's us.

In fact, this is yet another case of that residual discriminatory attitude we continue to see in American war movies involving Filipinos. Such a one we saw some years ago in "The Great Raid." Unlike the John Wayne movies of the past, this was far more appreciative of the contribution of the Filipino guerrillas to the resistance. As indeed the contribution of the Filipino actors to the making of the movie: The old movies only had Pancho Magalona as saling pusa, or an afterthought.

But the perspective remains problematic. The movie extols the "great raid" as probably the most successful rescue operation in the annals of the

American military, managing to rescue hundreds of prisoners while suffering only a couple of casualties. It forgets to add, other than as a footnote at the end of the movie, and a score of Filipino lives. It's not just that the Filipinos were American allies at the time, it was that the Philippines was an American colony at the time and the Filipino guerrillas therefore part of American troops. How can you say then that raiders lost only a couple of lives?

Fujisaki's apology shares those blinders, or that downright blindness. You get used to looking at the nationals of other than the most powerful countries in the world as collateral damage, you will find nothing wrong with that selective perception. As indeed most of us seem to do so, acquiescing implicitly, unconsciously, mindlessly, to that kind of judgment. When in fact we can always demand the same kind of apology, or more. We have been grievously wronged, we are grievously owed.

But like I said, Fujisaki's apology is not without its merits, even if rehearsed. At least Japan feels the need to apologize for its occupation of other countries; at least Japan feels the need to apologize for its atrocities in the course of occupying those countries. When will the Western colonial powers do the same?

When will America apologize to us for invading us, and at the very time we were poised to win our war of liberation against Spain, at the very time we were poised to gain our independence? We had in fact already declared it in Kawit at the height of our uprising 111 years ago a couple of days from now.

Japan has always been at the receiving end of demands for apology by the Asian countries it occupied during World War II. And for good reason: Its occupation was often brutal, leading to tortures, massacres, and unspeakable acts of barbarism. I knew Filipinos who never forgave the Japanese till their dying breath and could not comprehend why succeeding generations treated them hospitably, if not indeed admiringly. Trauma dies slowly, if it dies at all.

But for the same reason I cannot understand why the same Asian countries do not demand the same apology from the Western colonizers. The reasons for their occupation were pretty much the same: self-interest, expansionism, dreams of empire. Britain at least was forthright about the last, even if it invested the word "empire" with positive meanings: duty, honor, universal enlightenment. It was nothing of the kind to those it brought under it, as Mahatma

Gandhi protested.

Certainly, their rule was no less brutal than the Japanese. In fact, the only reason their rule now looks benign is that it took decades, or even centuries, to make them so. They were never so at the point of conquest when they had to "pacify"—a colonial point of view; the "pacified" could only have seen it as bloody murder—the resisters. Had the Japanese lasted longer, they would have been absolved as bringers of civilization too—or at least of sushi and tempura, apart from Zen and Kurosawa. Behind every great wealth is a great crime; behind every great empire is a greater crime.

Certainly the turning of Samar into a howling wilderness by the American occupation forces in 1899 testifies to it. As indeed the many massacres they wrought and the many revolutionary leaders they executed, not least of them Macario Sakay. The first was far more brutal than the Death March, little discriminating between civilian and combatant, man and woman, child and beast. I understand the Americans want to give a message to us this Independence Day as part of the dawning of a new era, a new beginning.

It can always start with that apology. (*Inquirer.net*)



Main Office:
1150 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90017-1904
Tel: (213) 250-9797 • Fax: (213) 481-0854
e-mail: info@asianjournalinc.com
http://www.asianjournal.com

Manila Office:
Suite 208, The Manila Bank Corp., Bldg.
6772 Ayala Ave., Makati City 1226
Tel.: (632) 893-1720 • Fax: (632) 813-8746

New York and New Jersey:
5 Penn Plaza, Ste. 1932, New York, NY 10001
Tel.: (212) 655-5426 • Fax: (212) 655-9241

2500 Plaza Five, Harborside Financial Center,
Jersey City, NJ 07311
Tel.: (201) 4 84-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

Las Vegas Sales Office:
3700 W. Desert Inn Road
Las Vegas, NV 89102
Tel.: (702) 792-6678 • Fax: (702) 792-6879

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