

OPINION & FEATURES

Power to the People

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.

EDITORIAL

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

Complicated plot



STREET TALK
Greg B. Macabenta

BACK in the days when I was battling out stories and screenplays for Tagalog movies, the challenge we always faced was how to come up with original and interesting twists on the plot, dealing with a variety of complex characters and yet succeeding in fitting all the dramatic elements together to bring the story to a logical and gripping climax.

One time, a producer who fancied himself a writer decided to change some of the elements in a plot that I had so laboriously crafted. The result was that he didn't quite know how to solve a particularly difficult situation in which I had cast the hero.

Rattled, he sent for me and asked me to unravel the complicated scenario. "You created the problem," I replied, "You should solve it yourself."

Then I told him about a similar situation in which a playwright found himself dealing with too many complicated characters and sub-plots. "You know how he resolved it?" I told the producer, "Towards the end of the play, a new character went onstage and shot everyone dead. Then he turned to the audience and introduced himself: 'I'm the author. I didn't know how else to end the play.'"

That desperate playwright would have found himself even more confounded by the plots and sub-plots that have now begun to unfold in Philippine politics.

First of all, the characters that populate the Philippine political drama are straight out of a Machiavelli primer on intrigue, double-talk and double-cross.

In politics, you never know whom to trust. There are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies. That is never more true than in the Philippines. You never know whose side someone is on. Except when it comes to cheating and stealing from the Filipino people. They are all on the same side and the poor masses, the victims, are on the other side.

Take the so-called opposition party and what is supposed to be the other bastion of independent thought and of principles in our benighted country, the Senate. With so many of them insisting on running for president, they are guaranteeing that they will all lose.

As a matter of fact, the way some of the senators are cutting up each other, they're not being subtle about wanting their own opposition party mates to lose.

Now, does a politician really run to lose? Not on your life. That makes you think that, maybe, someone is assuring them that, if they lose, they will still win. And we all know what that means.

I knew a candidate for senator who was aware from the outset that he had no chance of winning. But he ran anyway, and not just on one ticket but on two. He lost in the votation but went home with loads of cash.

Listening to the speeches of these politicians is enough to make your stomach curdle. The language they use is straight out of *The Prince*.

Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo delivered one of those speeches at the LAKAS-KAMPI merger. Here's what she said: "Cynics and detractors love to paint grim scenarios about a cancellation of the 2010 elections. Let this merger of LAKAS and KAMPI be tangible proof of the Administration's readiness, nay determination, to help ensure that the elections do push through."

That, of course, is verbal sleight of hand. She didn't say presidential election. It could be a parliamentary election.

No, Arroyo and her cohorts haven't given up yet. This is the one issue on which the congressmen and the local officials are on the same side -- against the Filipino people, that is. A parliamentary election will give them an opportunity to extend their term of office while Arroyo disposes of the constitutional impediment to her remaining on the throne.

But wait—she's also talking to "presidentiables" like Noli de Castro and Gilbert Teodoro and, on the side, Manny Villar. And she's encouraging the governor-priest Among Ed Panlilio to run. In fact, she's encouraging many others to run for president.

The candidates are playing along, as well as a number of wanna be senators and congressmen and wanna be vice-presidents. What's the game plan? Heads they win. Tails, the Filipino people lose.

If there's no election, you can bet your life they were bought off. If the election happens, because the people decide to stand their ground, you can bet your life that the candidates will buy the voters off. Whichever way the plot goes, she and her cohorts win.

Here's what Arroyo said about this: "The emergence of LAKAS-KAMPI-CMD as one party is our finest weapon and perhaps our best guarantee for

success in the 2010 elections. I look upon LAKAS-KAMPI, moving as one, fighting as one, as the instrument and vehicle for electing the best, most qualified and the worthiest leaders of our country. Let us strive for victory which not only our party but the entire nation and our democracy can claim as their own."

It doesn't require reading between the lines to know what she means. Forget about clean elections in 2010. Whether it is a20presidential or a parliamentary contest, the capos and the torpedos who run the Malacanang Mafia know exactly what they need to do to win.

It's simple. This country is divided into fiefdoms. At the local level, the political warlord will have the guns, the goons and the gold to ensure victory.

The trouble is, the unfolding drama on the political stage leaves the Filipino people totally confused over who the heroes and the villains are. The result is that they will simply allow their votes to be bought because, hey, if you're going to be raped, you might as well profit from it.

Ask the folks who adjudicated the rape case involving a US soldier and a Pinay.

In other words, it all boils down to the people. The reason the politicians are so bold and brazen in their cheating, double-crossing, stealing and killing is because the people allow it.

So how would you resolve the complicated drama unfolding on the Philippine political stage? My answer to the Filipino people is similar to what I gave the producer who messed with my script: "You created the problem. You should solve it yourself."

And, no, I'm not suggesting the recourse of the desperate playwright. (gregmacabenta@hotmail.com)

Have we reached the tipping point?



ANALYSIS
Amando Doronilla

SIGNS portend that the administration has entered into one of the most inauspicious periods to change the Constitution. I am not referring only to the unrest triggered by the fast-tracked House Resolution 1109 convening a constituent assembly to amend the Constitution, without the participation of the Senate.

The Catholic bishops have called upon their constituents to take to the streets to protest against the unilateral action taken by the House. Up to this time, it is not clear whether the bishops can mobilize mass action in numbers that would engage the army and the business community—two strategic sectors crucial to the overthrow of government—in actions demanding either the resignation of the government and the withdrawal of their support for it. The planned rallies in the next few days will show if the outrage is growing and the protest movement is gaining. The protest could gain momentum and draw wider participation and bring crowds to the streets on a scale that sparks military intervention in the form of withdrawal of support for the government.

Such a potential for intervention now appears to exist. The government cannot afford to take acts that would provoke further outrage. It is obvious that the House majority has tested the limits of the public tolerance to a reckless political scheme to change the Constitution that is now widely perceived as an attempt to introduce amendments that would include a shift to the parliamentary system of government, which would allow President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to extend her term beyond 2010.

It may well be that HR 1109 has touched the tipping point of the public and, worse, ignited the flash point against repeated assaults on the Constitution over at least the past three years. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has thrown its weight behind the call by opposition leaders for a mass protest. They said the rally today would mark the start of nationwide protests until the President's State of the Nation Address in July. Jaro Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, CBCP president, has issued a statement calling on the people to join the "peaceful" protest actions. This will be the first time the Church has called its troops to join mass protests since the calls issued by Jaime Cardinal Sin in 2001, when people rushed to the streets in spontaneous protests following the suppression of the evidence in the impeachment trial of President Joseph Estrada.

The House resolution came on the heels of the May 4-7, 2009 Pulse Asia survey showing that 48 percent of Filipinos had little or no trust in President Arroyo while only 25 percent had much trust and 27 percent were undecided. Although the President maintained the same percentage of trust and approval for her performance, the slight decline in the number of undecided respondents increased the number of people who distrusted her. A Pulse Asia survey conducted in February showed that 45 percent did not trust the President, 25 percent trusted her and 30 percent were undecided. In the same period, 46 percent disapproved of her performance, 26 percent approved and 28 percent were undecided.

What's amazing and adds to the outrage is that the presidential spokesperson, in a display of insensitivity, dismissed the results in this manner: "We're really not focused on being popular, but rather on providing jobs and completing all the unfinished work." The presi-

dential mouthpiece said the results were but a "perception that may not necessarily be true." Apparently, the President has gotten used to ignoring the surveys that have shown her having the lowest approval ratings among presidents since 1986.

Political pragmatism dictates that it is extremely disastrous to tinker with the Constitution when a government's approval ratings are low. The government needs a broader constituency and public opinion support to help swing the constitutional change being pushed by the President's allies. There has been widespread criticism among a broad range of institutions, including the Church, trade and chambers of commerce and industry, civil society organizations, of the House resolution. It would be foolhardy to dismiss their expression of outrage as "perception."

Malacañang's reaction to the survey results is unlikely to enhance the President's popularity and calm public unrest, unless it is the Palace's purpose to fuel discontent.

A usually supportive institution to the administration on economic issues in a time of the global economic recession, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas through Gov. Amando Tetangco has warned that the House campaign to change the Constitution could put more pressure on economic growth. He said investors' risk perceptions would be affected if changes in the legal framework lead to economic policy shifts. "The way the market will look at this...will affect economic policies and therefore the performance of the economy," he added.

Tetangco's warning followed a statement by Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Ralph Recto that changing the Constitution is likely to disrupt economic activity.

The statements of these economic managers echoed criticisms of the trade chambers. The Makati Business Club and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry have criticized what they called an "ill-timed" plan to rewrite the Constitution, when the economy is "on the brink of recession." (Inquirer.net)



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