

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.

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-

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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 a 20presidential 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)

Best proof of 2010 elections

JUNE 10'S rally against the railroad of House Resolution 1109 by the House of Representatives notwithstanding, there were many assurances that the 2010 elections would pull through. Most significant was Comelec Chair Jose Melo's observation that there's no more time for a plebiscite on amendments to the Constitution and that the elections will go on as scheduled, as he announced the award of the P7.2-billion automation contract to a Philippine-Dutch consortium. Still the best proof that there will be elections in 2010 is that politicians in various places are gearing up to run and there seems to be no stopping them.

In Dagupan City last Sunday, June 7, Gina de Venecia, former Speaker Jose de Venecia's better half, declared before mayors, councilors and barangay (village) officials in Pangasinan's 4th district that she's accepting the challenge to seek JDV's seat when he finishes his third term. An emotional *Manay* Gina tearfully confessed that the death of her daughter KC four years ago had taught her the "very important lesson" that we live on borrowed time, so that we have to make the right decisions. The audience also became emotional as she related how she agonized over whether to enter politics or not, after playing a supporting role to JDV during his five terms. She had two options open: to run for the Senate and push for legislation on the advocacies she had espoused as president of the Congressional Spouses Foundation, like protecting abused women, abandoned children and senior citizens and promoting livelihood, or to run for a House seat to ensure that JDV's programs are continued. She related that over the past weeks she had joined former President Joseph Estrada's thanks-

giving sorties to get the pulse of the people, but while there was enthusiastic grassroots response to herself, with Estrada trying to convince her to join his senatorial slate, she decided to go for JDV's seat instead. Gina's announcement was greeted with thunderous applause, but the happiest that day was JDV, for no one in their family can secure a firm grip on his old seat than his attractive and vivacious wife, who's expected to run against LTO chief Arturo Lomibao. With their formidable machinery there, JDV can foresee a return to the 4th district in 2013 while Gina runs for the Senate.

Talk is rife in Manila about a return bout in 2010 between Mayor Fred Lim and Environment Secretary Lito Atienza, whose son Ali was defeated by Lim in 2007. In Taguig City, there's talk that Energy Secretary Angelo Reyes would run for mayor. With Mayor Sigfried Tinga ending his third term, his father, recently retired Supreme Court Justice Dante Tinga, might run against Reyes. But if the elder Tinga chooses to just relish his retirement, it was broadly hinted at the recent "Taguig Night" at NBN Tent that the mayor's elegant wife, Kate, a master's in education graduate from Fordham University, might throw her hat into the ring.

Cecile Alvarez and I recently invited Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, SJ, Ateneo de Manila University's president since 1993, to our dzRH Sunday evening talk show to shed light on preparations for the 150th anniversary of the return of the Jesuits to the Philippines, as well as on the Ateneo's outreach programs for the poor and marginalized. The Jesuits first arrived from Spain in 1581 and built two schools and many churches around the country, but in the late 18th century they were expelled from the Philippines and the rest of the world. After they returned on June 14, 1859, they founded the Ateneo Municipal, which became the

training ground for many of our heroes, including Jose Rizal, Gregorio del Pilar, Antonio Luna, Claro Recto, Ninoy Aquino and Evelio Javier.

The "Sesquicentennial" (Latin for 150 years) reunion of Ateneo professors, alumni, partners and friends this Sunday kicks off with a Mass at the Manila Cathedral in Intramuros, to be followed by a visit to the old site of the Ateneo (destroyed during the last days of the Battle of Manila) and the ruins of the old Jesuit Church of San Ignacio.

Father Nebres, one of about 350 Jesuits here, related that two years after he assumed office, it became evident that Ateneo had to help close two gaps: RP's lagging competitiveness with its Asian neighbors in education and the economy, and the gap between the Ateneo and public schools. For some time it sought to close the local gap by offering of 1,000 scholarships. Then Ateneo started to work with the Lupang Pangako School in Payatas with its 3,500 to 4,000 students. It signed an agreement with Mayor Feliciano Belmonte to help upgrade public elementary and high schools in the city, and then organized the parents, principals, teachers and barangay chairmen to secure their cooperation. The result was dramatic: from being 94th among 96 public schools in Metro Manila, Lupang Pangako rose to 3rd or 4th, while Quezon City rose to No. 1 in the elementary level, where before it was 13th or 14th in the NCR. Ateneo's Center for Educational Development under Carmela Oracion is also helping schools in Parañaque and in San Jose City in Nueva Ecija.

Another project is Ateneo's "Leaders for Health Program," which sprang from the belief that a poor Filipino with no training or who is sick with TB won't achieve much in life. The Ateneo School of Government helps local officials develop health modules that would address such problems as the lack of sanitation facilities. It has worked with city governments of Calapan and Iloilo and is now active in Nueva Ecija and La Union. (Inquirer.net)

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

district that she's accepting the challenge to seek JDV's seat when he finishes his third term. An emotional *Manay* Gina tearfully confessed that the death of her daughter KC four years ago had taught her the "very important lesson" that we live on borrowed time, so that we have to make the right decisions. The audience also became emotional as she related how she agonized over whether to enter politics or not, after playing a supporting role to JDV during his five terms. She had two options open: to run for the Senate and push for legislation on the advocacies she had espoused as president of the Congressional Spouses Foundation, like protecting abused women, abandoned children and senior citizens and promoting livelihood, or to run for a House seat to ensure that JDV's programs are continued. She related that over the past weeks she had joined former President Joseph Estrada's thanks-



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) 484-7249 • Fax: (201) 484-7201

Las Vegas Sales Office:
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