

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 Proclamation 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)

EDITORIAL



Source: Inquirer.net

Modesto Farolan and Philippine Tourism

AT the close of the 19th century, the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American war gave the Philippine Islands to the United States for \$20 million. US President William McKinley appointed Judge William Howard Taft as head of a commission to establish civilian rule in America's new possession. Maj. Gen. Arthur MacArthur had just succeeded Maj. Gen. Elwell Otis as military governor and commander of US forces in the Philippines. Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo, President of the new-born Philippine Republic, was holed out in the remote village of Palanan in the province of Isabela.

At about the same time, in the small town of Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, Marciano Farolan and Escolastica Racela, middle-class landowners, welcomed their fifth and last child, Modesto, who was born on June 12, 1900. The latest addition to the family had two older brothers, Ramon and Felix, along with two sisters, Agatha and Cristeta.

It was a time of turmoil and change in the Ilocos region with the declaration of independence from Mother Spain. In the wake of the revolution, Filipino priests were also discussing severing ties with the Vatican after years of second-class treatment in a religious organization dominated by Spanish friars. The new colonial power which had scored a decisive victory over Spain set out to "uplift and civilize" the Filipinos.

Modesto Farolan grew up in this new environment and he was sent to Manila to study at the University of the Philippines High School where he would be one of its first graduates. With no formal education other than a high school diploma, he rose through the ranks until he became editor and later general manager of the El Debate, Mabuhay, Herald and Monday Mail (DMHM Publications) chain of newspapers.

During the Japanese occupation, he worked for the Madrigal-owned Jai Alai Corp. and was involved in Red Cross activities. Unknown to Japanese authorities, he was also listening in to Allied short-wave broadcasts and passing on this information to guerilla

units outside of Manila. Before the Kempeitai (Japanese version of the Gestapo) discovered this clandestine work, President Jose Laurel appointed him governor of Ilocos Norte, a move that saved him from the clutches of the Japanese secret service.

After liberation, he served as press secretary to President Manuel Roxas, who later sent him off as the first Philippine consul general to Honolulu, home to the largest overseas Filipino community in the United States. It was during his stay in Hawaii that he started to appreciate the potential of tourism as a foreign exchange earner for the Philippines.

In 1949, Farolan returned to the Philippines to re-establish the Philippines Herald as its editor and publisher. It was at the Herald premises in Intramuros where, as a young boy, I first met many of his fellow journalists like Doroy Valencia, Teddy Benigno, Henry Quema and Joe Lansang, to name a few. Oh, I almost forgot, also Mary Joaquin of the advertising department, who was to become my mother-in-law.

I remember quite clearly an incident during this period of his life because the first edition of the Herald almost never made it off the press on time due to a boo-boo on my part. I had signed for a cablegram while playing in the yard of our home in Pasay City. Not knowing what it was all about, I set it aside somewhere, forgetting to show it to anyone. It turned out to be the congratulatory message of Gen. Carlos P. Romulo from Washington, DC that was going to be featured on the front page of the Herald's maiden edition. The whole news organization had been waiting for this message, not knowing where it was delivered or who had received it until the cable office showed them my signature as the recipient of the cablegram a few days back. Then all hell broke loose on me!

Modesto Farolan was a close confidant of President Elpidio Quirino. When Ramon Magsaysay defeated Quirino in the 1953 presidential elections, I could sense his disappointment as well as hurt as old friends made themselves scarce or unavailable. In one of his few letters while I was a cadet at the Philippine Military Academy, just a few weeks after the elections, he wrote of how "when a tree has

fallen, everyone makes firewood of it." The Spanish version which he used escapes me now but I understood his feelings of sadness and isolation.

Out of government, he plunged into an entirely new field of endeavor—tourism. His involvement and accomplishments in this pioneer activity earned him the title "Father of Philippine Tourism." In a remarkable display of political maturity, President Ramon Magsaysay appointed him as the country's first Commissioner of Tourism (forerunner of today's Cabinet position) in spite of his close association with Elpidio Quirino. In 1990, he was awarded posthumously the Lifetime Achievement Award by President Corazon Aquino for his efforts to "develop and promote Philippine tourism as a means of bringing in foreign exchange so essential to the economic stability and prosperity of the country."

In 1962, Farolan rejoined the foreign service when President Diosdado Macapagal appointed him ambassador to South Vietnam and Cambodia. He later served in Switzerland and Austria and was accredited to United Nations agencies in Vienna and Geneva. President Ferdinand Marcos would bring him closer to home as our envoy to Indonesia and here he spent his last years of public service.

Having worked under six Philippine presidents from Roxas to Marcos, my father would always remind me that "as a public official, you do not serve any individual. You serve your country and your people."

This Friday, June 12, the family marks his 109th birth anniversary.

Last month President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo signed into law the Tourism Act of 2009. The state declares "tourism as an indispensable element of the national economy and an industry of national interest and importance which must be harnessed as an engine of socio-economic growth and cultural affirmation to generate investment, foreign exchange and employment and to continue to mold an enhanced sense of national pride for all Filipinos."

The "Father of Philippine Tourism" would have been pleased to note that the work of a lifetime was continuing to bear fruit. (Inquirer.net)

REVELLE

Ramon J. Farolan

Opportunity



SKETCHES

Ana Marie Pamintuan

THE move to convene a constituent assembly (con-ass) is uniting forces opposed to the administration, according to some members of the opposition coalition.

Whether the hopelessly fragmented political opposition seizes the opportunity remains to be seen.

Even key supporters of the administration, among them some Catholic bishops, have added their voices to the chorus of opposition to con-ass.

So far the bishops' response as a group has been cautious. I suspect the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) wouldn't mind seeing Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in power for life. While the President doesn't listen to spiritual advisers when it comes to lying, cheating and stealing, she prays a lot and shares power with the CBCP, giving the Catholic Church the last word on policy-making in matters such as population control. This is in violation of the separation of church and state, which is enshrined in the Constitution, but who said the Charter is inviolable?

The Church is one of the staunchest supporters of the Arroyo administration. How far will it go to prevent a revision of the Constitution that will allow the President to hold on to power beyond June 30,

2010, if her congressional allies can dredge up a legal justification for it? CBCP support will be fine, but the political opposition should be ready to fight its own battles.

Knowing how fragmented the opposition is, Speaker Prospero Nograles Jr. is shrugging off threats of mass protests over con-ass. He has fulfilled his end of the bargain. While his masters assess public reaction, he can rest easy with the thought that the first order of business when the Third Session opens won't be his ouster as speaker.

Nograles' support for con-ass has always been tepid; political survival is his principal concern. He would hardly be bothered if con-ass finally unites the fragmented opposition.

The protests against the latest incarnation of Chacha provide an opportunity for the opposition to unite in time for the 2010 elections. The opposition should not squander this opportunity, but so far this seems easier said than done.

The man who is being blamed for the defeat (or cheating, depending on who's telling the story) of the opposition in 2004 has dropped out of the presidential race early.

Sen. Panfilo Lacson cited the headaches of fundraising for dropping out. But because his announcement was made a day after his former police aide arrived to testify against him in the murders of publicist Salvador Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito, the inevitable suspicion is that legal problems

forced Lacson to drop out.

Lacson announced his decision last Friday in a message played at the start of the second ANC Leadership Forum where he begged off from participating.

Former President Joseph Estrada, one of the guests, could not resist recalling that the divided vote in 2004—with Lacson refusing to give way to Erap's bosom buddy Fernando Poe Jr.—worked against the opposition.

This time Erap says he wants a united front for 2010. But watching his body language, listening to his answers at the forum, you can't help suspecting that what Erap really wants is for the opposition to unite behind his second bid for the presidency.

Erap was fully prepped for the forum, mouthing statistics about his administration's achievements, even dropping his pretense at "carabao English" that he once told reporters he used to endear him to the masses.

And he needed no special preparation to charm the audience. The guy is a natural entertainer; a facial gesture could get the audience roaring with laughter. Even my former professor, forum co-host Cheche Lazaro, said she was charmed.

Beside Erap, the other guests stood no chance in the charm department. But it remains to be seen whether Pinoy voters will go for charm in May 2010, or for the serious business of governance that is promised by the likes of most of the other presidential aspirants.

Erap cannot easily shake off his plunder conviction, made possible by the painstaking spadework done by excellent legal minds led by Simeon Marcelo.

With about a tenth of the Philippine population

overseas, many of them voters, Filipinos may believe that the country needs a competent professional manager, one who understands the demands of globalization and can afford to govern with vision instead of focusing on day-to-day political survival in decision-making.

President Arroyo in fact has that competence, but is saddled with immoderate greed and many other evils. So in addition to competence, voters want the next president to be relatively clean (there are no saints in this country). Does Erap fit the bill?

Several opposition members are hoping, some of them openly, that Erap will have the grace to step aside and give others a chance.

Erap can instead use his still immense popularity—a political reality that cannot be ignored—to serve as kingmaker and truly work to field a common opposition presidential bet. There is no dull moment around him; Erap's formidable charm is an asset on the campaign trail.

The nation has had enough political controversies for the past eight years. There should be no legal questions about the legitimacy of the next president.

If Erap runs, as he and his legal advisers believe is possible, and if he wins, which is not impossible in a multi-cornered fight, he will start his term fully distracted by legal challenges to his mandate.

There are certain competent, relatively honest individuals in the opposition camp who will not be saddled by that kind of divisive baggage.

The protest against con-ass is providing an opportunity for the opposition to unite. If the opposition wastes this opportunity, the Arroyo administration is truly blessed. (Philstar.com)



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