

Philippines: `Let us now begin the Revolution for Change`

Tuesday 16 June 2009, by [LIM Danny](#), [MELENCIO Sonny](#) (Date first published: 1 June 2009).

Opening talk by Sonny Melencio to the “Pagbabago! No More Trapos in 2010!” forum.

June 1, 2009 — On behalf of Partido Lakas ng Masa (Party of the Labouring Masses), I would like to extend our thanks to our two guests here who will be speaking together with me in this forum.

One has already symbolised the struggle against the trapo [elite politicians], and I refer to Among Ed. Among Ed has in fact defeated not only the three Gs that have come to symbolise the "guns, goons and gold" wielded by the trapos. In Pampanga, Among Ed has beaten the five Gs - which includes two more Gs representing Philippines President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and the gambling lords.

The other one symbolised the call for change, in fact the call for the ouster of the Arroyo regime, during the Manila Peninsula rebellion on November 29, 2007. He is not with us today, because he's still in detention, but he is represented by his lawyer Attorney Trixie Cruz-Angeles, who's going to give us the message from Brigadier General Danilo Lim. [See following article.]

Together with our two speakers, I now announce the initial steps in the formation of a broad anti-trapo, pro-masa [masses] movement that we will expand in the coming months leading to the 2010 elections. The anti-trapo, pro-masa movement will aim to expose the trapo candidates in the election, and will also promote the anti-trapo candidates like the guest speakers that we have now. We have not yet firmed up our standard-bearer in the 2010 election, but we will give all the non-trapo candidates the chance to guests in our forums and activities.

This is a forum off-limits to the trapos but let me speak first about what we mean by the trapos and the kind of rule they represent.

The trapos

Trapo means traditional politician. In its narrow meaning, the trapo is the political representative of the Filipino elite. The trapos are the political clans and the political dynasties which the clans have established in several areas of the country for long years now. Some clans have in fact been holding political power for centuries.

According to the Citizens Anti-Dynasty Movement, at least 120 families control political power in more than 75 per cent of the country's 81 provinces. They also reported that practically 100 per cent of the major cities are under the control of one or another political clan that passes down power almost as a right on inheritance. This is what we mean when we say these are the people who are "born to rule".

Just to give you a rundown of the trapo clans. The most prominent from north to south are the Dys of Isabela, the Marcoses of Ilocos Norte, the Singsons of Ilocos Sur, the Josons of Nueva Ecija, the

Magsaysays of Zambales, the Cojuangcos and Aquinos of Tarlac, the Macapagals of Pampanga, the Osmeñas of Cebu, the Rectos of Batangas, the Gordons of Zambales, the Duranos of Danao City, the Antoninos of General Santos and the Lobregats of Zamboanga City.

In recent years new dynasties have emerged like the Estradas of San Juan, the Arroyos of Pampanga and Negros Occidental, the Angaras of Aurora, the Defensors of Iloilo and Quezon City, the Villafuertes of Camarines Sur and the Akbars of Basilan.

If we look at today's election, the trapos are back in business once more. And we mean not just the trapos of the Arroyo administration, but also the trapos from the opposition.

The list of today's presidentiables reads like a who's-who on the top trapo families:

* Gilbert Gibo ' Teodoro, one of the main presidential contenders of the Palaka (Partido Lakas at Kampi merger), comes from the clan related to Danding Cojuangco, who's the brother of Gibo's mother. Teodoro's wife, Monica "Nikki" Prieto, is a congresswoman from the first district of Tarlac, which is the bailiwick of the Cojuangcos and now the Teodoros. * Manny Villar (Nacionalista Party) represents the clan which has been holding power in Las Pinas City. His wife, Cynthia Aguilar-Villar, is the congresswoman in Las Pinas. The Aguilars, together with the Villars, are the politically incestuous clan in Las Pinas. * Mar Roxas (Liberal Party) is the grandson of former president Manuel Roxas, who was suspected as a collaborator during the Japanese period but was cleared by US General Douglas MacArthur, and then became the first president after the war. His father was the late Senator Gerry Roxas. * Chiz Escudero (Nationalist People's Coalition) comes from the Escudero clan which has been holding power in Sorsogon. The father was the former congressman in the first district of Sorsogon; Chiz uncles were the mayor and vice-governor in Sorsogon. * Joseph Estrada (Partido ng Masang Pilipino) is trying to make a comeback. He has built his own dynasty in San Juan. His son, JV, is now the mayor, the other son, Jinggoy, and his wife Loy have both become senators. * Perhaps, Noli de Castro is the only one who's not identifiable as a trapo. He came in power in 2001 as a senator, and became the vice-president in 2004, so he has already eight years in the government. But what has he done in these eight years, and whose power has he been serving all through these years? If not President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, is it the oligarchs who are reputed to be supporting him? {{Some points to clarify}} Sometimes there are newly emerging trapos (who are the scions of the political clans) who have not been involved in any traditional political and corrupt activities, and who therefore resist the tag of belonging to the trapos. Although the tag may not seem to fit them yet as separate individuals, they are trapos in the sense of being members of the clans which perpetrate elite rule in the country. The trapos are usually seen as the most corrupt and warlord-like representatives of the elite. But some of the elite may be benign and modernising, but they are trapos nonetheless, as they represent the dominant forces in a system that oppresses and marginalises the broad masses. Sometimes they are not really part of the political clans or the economic elite in the country. But they become trapos because they have given their services to an elite group in order to be voted to and remain in power. While the trapos may vary in their viciousness as a trapo, the point we are making is that: * First, the people deserve better. Some trapos may be benign and modernising, but even the monarchy of

the old days have kings and queens which were benign and modernising. But even then, who needs a monarchy/dynasty-type of rule today? * Second, the trapos/ the trapo clans have been given all the opportunities in the world to serve in the government. In fact, the government has become them. The trapos have become the government, and the ways of the trapos have become the ways of the government. While monopolising power, the trapos have failed to provide for the needs of the people, they have failed to provide for employment for the labour force, they have failed to provide affordable food and services for the poor, affordable housing, land for the landless farmers and agricultural workers, education for the young people, hospital care, and others. They are a failure. They have become the stumbling block to development. They in fact have become the problems, and not a solution. What we are saying is that enough is enough. *Sobra na, tama na. Pagbabago na.* No more trapo in 2010. {{The masa}} The solution to the country's problems lies not in the trapos but in the antithesis of the trapos, the non-trapos or the genuine representatives of masa (the masses). That's why we're bringing here the non-trapo candidates who represent the masa. Not in the way in which Erap has come to represent the masa, and even named his party Partido ng Masang Pilipino, which was a misnomer given that Erap was not of the masa (in his films perhaps). We are referring to candidates who come from the masa, and are still with the masa, and therefore can properly represent the masa. The other side of the anti-trapo movement is the pro-masa movement, which means that in defeating the trapos, we have to ensure that we put the masa in power. We do not believe in another EDSA (the uprising that overthrew the dictator Ferdinand Marcos) in which we overthrow a dictatorial and corrupt government only to install a more corrupt one. We are fighting the trapo precisely to promote the needs of the masa. But first we have to expose the trapos, because they have used the media and the three Gs to project themselves as the ones fit to rule the masa. {{Platform of government}} One best way to expose the trapo is to do away with personality-oriented politics and to look into the platform of the candidates. Let us pin them down on their platform of governance. The trapos get away with motherhood statements because the masa fail to concretise what they want. And this is the challenge we pose to all, even among the non-trapos and the masa that are gathered here: Are we going to look for leaders on the basis of their clan, their education, their wealth, their connections, their money? Or are we going to test them on the basis of whether they can solve our long-term problems, and therefore contribute to the development of each one, and not just a few lucky bastards? This test would mean asking the candidate whether his or her platform of government is based on, for instance: * An immediate moratorium to the closures of factories and lay-offs, and a program towards full employment for the labour force. We mean not partial employment, not temporary employment, but full, long-term employment based on wages that can provide for the needs of the families. Not employment outside the country, but employment in the country, in the Philippines, right now. * A program of delivering basic services to the poor, such as free education for the poor children; no demolition but decent housing for the urban poor; genuine and comprehensive agrarian reform that provides land to the tillers and the necessary support infrastructure for agriculture; free health care and hospitalisation; provision of doctors' services at every barangay [or barrio, the smallest unit of administration in the Philippines]; the setting up of

government-run stores at every barangay which carry items that have affordable prices for the poor. * A program of political reforms, which include the democratisation of Congress or the formation of a People's Congress which will reverse the setup where a few trapos rule our politics while the majority of the population do not have political power, and are even called themarginalised sectors". We must also have a program to disconnect the barangay councils from the control of the local government trapos, from the trapo mayors and congressmembers, and the replacement of the barangay council with a barangay assembly that represents the entire families in a barangay much like the neighbourhood councils.

These are just some aspects of the pro-masa platform that we should ask each of the candidates whether he or she can deliver. And we know that these demands of the masa are not impossible. All these things are possible. We know the government has the resources to provide for the needs of the people, except that it has no political will and the trapos have no personal will to provide for the needs of the people. And this is because this is a government of the trapos where the trapos do not serve the people but their clans and immediate friends and cronies, and their own pockets.

But where can we get the money to provide for the masa? In Venezuela, they say, they have oil, so Hugo Chavez can use oil money to provide for free health care, free education, free housing and massive government subsidies to basic necessities. But we also have that money. For instance, we have been automatically appropriating 40% of our national budget towards payment of foreign debts. These are erroneous debts which have been incurred by successive administrations starting with Marcos. Debts which have ballooned to US\$55 billion or 3 trillion pesos in 2007. We now know the figures, but we don't even know what these debts are and how were they spent by the government. To provide for substantial social welfare projects, we can do what Argentina did. Declare a moratorium on debt payment and shift the debt payment to these projects. It has been done and we can do it here, if we have a government which has the will to do it.

Revolution for Change

Last, the building of an anti-trapo, pro-masa movement corresponds to our call for a "Revolution for Change". We declare that from hereon, we will be launching a revolution, a genuine one compared to the series of so-called Edsa Revolutions. The Edsa Revolutions were fake revolutions where incumbent trapos were overthrown to give way to other trapos.

We should be reminded that a revolution is an act where a ruling class is overthrown by another class which takes power. What could be more revolutionary today than dismantling trapo rule and putting the masa in power? Let us now put in place the building blocks for a new future.

Tunay na pagbabago! No more trapo! The masa should rule!

[Sonny Melencio is chairperson of the Partido Lakas ng Masa.]

Beginnings

General Danny Lim's speech, read by Trixie Cruz-Angeles

Good afternoon fellow citizens.

This is a nation of ironies. A country rich in natural resources and creative, intelligent citizens is governed by vicious, self-serving politicians who seem to live forever – that is, they seem to, like the Terminator, regenerate and live on and on. A further irony is that in the midst of our resource wealth, the poor and hungry dominate the landscape and still constitute the majority of our people. Even stranger still is that we call ourselves a democracy, when in practice, we are an ill-disguised monarchy, where political power is inherited and the system perpetrated by only a few.

But you already know this. You also already know that because of this, all government policy and perspectives are geared towards maintaining the status quo, keeping wealth in the hands of a few while the teeming masses are relegated to the hard-scrabble life of perpetual poverty. All of us, and especially those of you there at the forum, are aware of the inequality, yet are seemingly tied to its inevitability, despite cycle after cycle of elections, claimed revolutions and other world-changing events.

Now what?

President Gloria Arroyo, while being the main proponent and beneficiary of this system, is not the sole answer. That is, her removal, while desirable due to illegitimacy, is not the panacea that this country needs. She is representative of what is wrong with this country and therefore she, and her ilk, must be removed from the reins of governance, to allow equal opportunity to those who face the very real effects of government authorities' malicious impositions on the poor, the ordinary and the un-pedigreed. We are of course, talking about removing that most insidious of all political phenomena: the trapo.

The military is not immune to the effects of the trapo system. In fact, this same system pervades in our ranks when officers offer their loyalty to wealthy businessmen and politicians, becoming like vassals or mercenaries in the paid service of a feudal lord. The system corrupts military discipline and makes the officer or soldier beholden not to the constitution, but to personalities and sometimes, sadly, to the highest bidders.

Even sadder is that the officers who do this are guaranteed the protection and promotions offered by their patrons. And, since nothing succeeds like success, the truly principled are the ones who get left behind.

In short, whatever dissatisfaction there is in the military is not caused by the reform-minded officers or soldiers. It is caused by the trapo and patronage system. The rise of reformist officers has, in fact, had the effect of posing a check on the unabated patronage system. Public support heaped on the reform-minded also shows that they -- the so-called military "rebels" -- have an audience in the general public, an audience that agrees with them, an audience that cheers them on, and an audience that is willing to take action with them, or rather, with us.

And so, we come to elections. While it certainly proves to be a means of easing out the trapos from our political system, we should also recognise that is not an easy fight, entrenched as they are not only in governance, but in our culture as well. Their wealth and our economic system ensures that we can do little without the largesse that these trapos distribute to ensure that their power is maintained.

But we are not powerless. We have the people and we have the moral high ground. In the end, I am confident that this will be enough.

And this is where it will begin. Good luck to us all.

P.S.

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