

HUMAN FACE

Remembering Lean

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The youth of this generation ought to have and ought to know someone like him, someone so passionate and dedicated to a vision and a cause — and yet so endearingly likeable. Ask his friends and comrades.

He was the quintessential student or youth activist. Leandro “Lean” Alejandro was all of 27 when he was killed in a hail of bullets 20 years ago. He was emerging from his organization’s office when the forces of evil swooped down on him and gunned him down. The predators had caught up with their prey and would turn him into mincemeat. What they did not know was that the spirit of this young man would live on and beyond, while the rot in his attackers’ murderous souls would continue to fester as long as they lived.

To quote writer Jo-Anne Q. Maglipon who made a moving testimony at Lean’s 47th birthday: “Someone else like Lean had to take more.” Lean is now beyond it all, and yet his example remains within reach. Will someone like him again emerge on the horizon?

Two nights ago, Lean’s friends from a wide spectrum, mainly political activists of all shapes, sizes, stripes, colors, ages and advocacies, gathered to celebrate his life and also their own. “Gabi ni Lean: Isang Pag-alaala” was a night of remembering. Words, music, food and drinks flowed at the Peta theater in Quezon City. There was much laughter, and sometimes tears, as people recalled the life and times of Lean through live and video testimonies. This was to again connect to this young man who lived intensely, bravely and romantically.

How to introduce Lean to those who did not or do not know him if not through his own words? Here is something he wrote to Lidy Nacpil, who was going to be his wife, widow and mother of their only daughter. This says a lot about who he was and is food for thought for those who are still wondering about the hierarchy of things in their lives. This is vintage Lean, a classic.

“The socialist man must know how to compute the distance of the stars, how to differentiate a fish from a shark, a mammal from a reptile. He must know how to distill wine into liquor and how to arrive at $e=mc^2$. He must know how to cook bacon, butcher a pig and roast a lamb. He must be capable of leading armies into battle. He must know how to follow orders, give orders and he must know when to disobey them. He must be able at debate, at lobbying, at open struggle. He must know how to analyze difficult political situations, how to get out of one and how to convince others that they must do the same. He must know how to sail a ship, dig a latrine, construct a pigsty, wash clothes, wash dishes, plan an offensive, plan a retreat, mix martinis, drink martinis, differentiate brandy from whisky, keep quiet, participate, take care of babies, manage a state bureaucracy, soothe pain, comfort the sorrowful, maintain his composure in hot water, when to watch, when to participate, repair appliances, maintain a car, purge revisionists, ride a horse, run from a bull, swim, play tennis, drown gracefully, sink with his ship with honor along with the mice, discuss Mao, debunk Zinoviev, ridicule Stalin, appreciate a beehive, raise chickens, cook chickens, play boogie (respectably), correctly read Mabini, recruit members into the movement, motivate members to struggle, host a party, play at least one musical instrument, be critical, self-critical, honest... The

socialist man is the total man. Specialization is for ants.

"It is Marx who teaches us the real meaning of creativity, of true sentiment and communist passions. I expect Marxists, or those who profess to go by that title, to be most sincere, honest, dignified, humble, cultured, mature and sensible. Marxists without an ethic are Stalins. Marxism teaches man to be total. Marxism enables us to develop into the total human being. Liberal humanism tried to do this but failed because they did not know how to go about it. Again, only a Marxist ethic is truly humane... I can be pretentious enough to conclude that I am a Marxist. And it is precisely because of this fact that I can appreciate Tolkien and appreciate him unabashedly."

Yes, Tolkien. Several of those who spoke about Lean that night expressed regrets that Lean did not live long enough to watch the "Lord of the Rings" movie trilogy. Lean had known and fought battles with class and heart.

By the way, the soundtrack of the musical "Lean" which was staged 10 years ago has been reissued and is available on CD. How to make Lean alive again on stage was a difficult task for its creators and the actors. The right music, words, choreography and everything else could have come only after everybody had resurrected Lean in their minds and in their hearts and knew him again. For Lean was many things to many people. As Cookie Chua (who played Lidy) sang so soulfully, "Paano mamahalin ang katulad mo?"

Oh yes, Lean had a lot to say about love, romantic love. His treatise on traditional and radical romantics could be enriching for both Valentine's Day homilists and hard-core revolutionary pedagogues. But let's save that for February.

But love, indeed, was at the core of Lean's commitment to the cause of justice and freedom. He saw beyond his time. "I am quite convinced that in a few years' time, the nature of our struggles will change drastically. We shall have to launch a democratic version of the socialist revolution. The national democratic struggle will be left behind by history and we shall be buried with it in the heap of antiquity if we do not shake ourselves awake and really lead."

Yes, and really lead with integrity. Lean showed how.

P.S.

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