

# SONA – another song with bitter refrains

How many SONAs have been delivered by different Presidents all filled up with “empty” promises and a roll call of the so-called ‘achievements’ of the current administration? They have all mastered the art of deception as they deliver their pieces with eloquence and with that trademark smirk on their faces. Words create such a beautiful picture of contentment and peace in the lives of the people. Then we wake up and realize, we have been tricked again! We felt good at that moment in history – and when the lights and cameras went off, we are left with nothing but shattered dreams, profound regrets and frustrations.

The President should just play herself down this time when the country is obviously undergoing an “overlapping” series of crisis (rice shortage, overpopulation, poverty, unemployment, big time smuggling, maritime disasters, VAT issues, corruption, pollution, traffic, sex trade, escalating prices of basic commodities, public health, etc.) not to mention “moral crisis.” I suggest she limits her speech to save face.

Until the President stands true to herself – and deeply reflects on the country’s situation – no one will believe her anymore. The incessant demand for change and cries of the people in pain has remained unheeded and yet she continues to turn a blind eye to the ‘real’ picture and insists on living in a world of make-believe. She is like a cancer patient who is on denial stage, refusing to accept the truth. Whilst truth hurts, she must realize that her time is about to end and before then she should rectify her wrong doings and work towards leaving a legacy of honesty, love and peace. Stop telling people (and yourself) that we are fine and that we are on our way up the ladder of success. I guess from her point of view with all her friends and allies living in comfort she cannot see or feel the hardships that many Filipinos are experiencing. She should dissociate herself from what her advisers are telling her. She should feel the pulse herself so she could touch our hearts and make a difference in our lives.

Madame President, this is not a time for blatant egotism. Think of your fellowmen, the country you promised to serve. Today as the lords and ladies, solons and diplomats assemble in their fancy dresses and in the newly refurbished lateseng Pambansa – surely you will get more than a dozen interrupted applause (right on cue!) from your supporters. What about the lowly Filipinos? Will you get the same kind of response?

I am not saying La Gloria should tell the nation that she has failed. I am sure she will never do that. During a SONA, the President will always want to show a good report card. As my dad always says, “She will always see the doughnut, not the whole. She will inevitably find sunshine on a rainy day; the silver lining larger than the black cloud. All the media and political scolding in the world won’t ever get a chief executive to amend that upbeat approach to her ‘achievements’.” Take heed Mrs. President, I wish you luck.

The Philippine Star is celebrating its 22nd Anniversary today. My late father, Maximo V. Soliven believed that:

*For a newspaper to merit credibility, respect and freedom – it must responsibly pursue the truth, even the truth we may personally dislike. At times, admittedly, in these mortal pages we may falter, but this is owing to mischance, mishap and oversight, never by design or malice.*

*Our pledge, as always, remains that we will never back down from the ramparts we defend and from the pursuit of a square deal for the Filipino people, for every man and woman in this Republic.*

The philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed it most pungently: “Democracy becomes a government of bullies tempered by editors.” It will continue to be our wisdom to confront and temper bullying by government, as well as by thugs and hoodlums at every level of society, with editorial courage and ferocity. We live in tempestuous times, in a country with too many lawyers but too little justice. It shall continue to be our task to pursue that justice, elusive though it may sometimes be.

Let us return to the words of our great President Manuel L. Quezon who was the forerunner of our independence. “Under the Commonwealth, our life may not be one of ease and comfort, but rather of hardship and sacrifice. We shall face the problems which lie in our path, sparing neither time nor effort in solving them. We shall build a government that will be just, honest, efficient and strong so that the foundations of the coming Republic may be firm and enduring – a government, indeed, that must satisfy not only the passing needs of the hour but also the exacting demands of the future.”

What many decades after Quezon, is the State of the Nation? His challenge remains as pertinent today as when he first uttered it. We can seek no ease or comfort, we must demand of all both hardship and sacrifice. We still have not won that honest, efficient and strong government and the tranquility that he sought.

We are still a nation embattled. Dark clouds dim the horizon. We are prone to disappointment, unease and perhaps despair. After all the painful sacrifices and cherished hopes of our founding fathers, we find ourselves staring into what we may imagine to be the Face of Defeat. Will we forever hear the bitter refrains of an erstwhile song of hope? Before our fears overwhelm us, it is timely to remind ourselves that with every sacrifice and hardship in life, God brings out the best from each one of us. He makes us stronger, wiser, more humble and most of all – closer to Him.

Erratum on July 21 column: It shocked me to see a cop who did not stop or even run after a journey that was emitting thick carbon dioxide right into his sorry eyes. It should be carbon monoxide. I stand corrected.

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