

IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL THE FAT MAN SINGS

by Jim Laico

*Americans are complaining they still have no president.
Filipinos are complaining they still have a president.*

*Why is it so hard for Erap to resign?
Because that would be the intelligent thing to do.*

These are exciting and crucial times again in the Philippines.

I thought I'd already done my share by participating in ousting a dictator during the 1985 Snap Elections and the 1986 EDSA Revolution, but I find myself out in the streets of EDSA and Ayala Ave. again, along with thousands of street parliamentarians. This time it's not to kick out a ruthless dictator, but to force an inept, incompetent, ineffective, and immoral president to resign. It's funny how history repeats itself in a relatively short time.

I think the real issue here is not the fact that ERAP is corrupt. So are most politicians in the world. It's not because he's got a lot of mistresses: He's a FILIPINO! Come on! I think most Filipino men would have a harem if they could afford it and get away with it, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF YOURS TRULY. (Don't worry Mary Ann. I'm part of the minority in this regard.) It's not because he's a drunk. What do you expect when the guy doesn't like to drink water. The guy is a gambler. So are all my clients. He's got a lot of cronies. So do I. I don't hold it against him if he loves to build a lot of mansions. Lola Luz did. And it's definitely not because of his poor, unfocused work ethic and the fact that he's undereducated. I know a lot of hardworking guys with MBAs who still have nothing to show. But when he brings all these remarkable traits into the presidency, WE'RE IN BIG TROUBLE. So much for good governance. You have to give him this, though, he's disarmingly charming and he's a loyal friend. He's not called ERAP for nothing.

Rallies today are unlike what we saw during the Marcos times. This is what some people and I have observed:

- Big businesses and organizations are now openly withdrawing their support for ERAP. Not only because they're on the brink of going out of business by next year, but because the captains of industry today and the middle managers are people who fought against Marcos during the 70's and 80's.
- You now see leftists and capitalists rallying together. Not only because of their common cause, but because their leaders fought together to oust Marcos in the past. They took a whiff of tear gas and washed it off with water cannons together. That's probably the reason why we have relative industrial peace.
- Before, you could sense anger in protests, but rallies today are very festive and peaceful. Marchers don't challenge police barricades, and permits are readily granted. You hear jokes in political speeches rather than hatred. We now have anti-atihans and marching bands leading protest marches while playing the theme of VOLIYES V. A lot of rallyists even bring their kids, and you can see a lot of expats and tourists weaving through

the rallies. Some of them actually like it here. They say we have a continuing SOAP OPERA. So forget about *Days of Our Lives*, *All My Children*, and *Rosalinda*. We've got the real thing down here.

- Fortunately, the police and military are at their height of professionalism. The police mingle in the crowd during rallies and nobody seems to be threatened by their presence. Besides, most of the police in the rallies are women, who now wear the helmets and carry the shields and batons.
- The military is nowhere in site. Partly because the government is scared of using them against protesters, and partly because we now have more enlightened officers and men. Maybe they don't want to be used the way Marcos used them in the past--the government might find itself facing the barrels of their guns.
- With current technology, rallies can now be organized within a couple of days rather than weeks. Announcements, news, rumors, and ERAP jokes can be sent to a dozen people within a few seconds through text messaging, using our cell phones. Within minutes these messages can reach hundreds, even thousands, of people.
- Rallies have reached another venue--cyberspace. There are a dozen web sites dedicated to protesting against ERAP. Through e-mail, senators are swamped with thousands of letters every day clamoring for ERAP's impeachment. I'm happy to note that some of these senators have replied to my pleas.
- Rallies used to be started by radical students wearing headbands, sandals, and plain T-shirts, but the rallies against ERAP were started by us veterans (professionals and businessmen) of the 3rd Quarter Storm and the EDSA Revolt. Of course, we have a lot to worry about. We might find ourselves self-employed by next year.

Don't think it's only the upper and middle classes that want ERAP out. These sentiments cut across society. ERAP still has a base of mass support, but most of his supporters are not organized, nor part of institutions; furthermore they're too spread apart. By next year, this support will have dwindled further, once people find they no longer have a livelihood due to an impending economic collapse.

What's the implication of all of this? Well, it's a really rough road to political maturity. We've already had a hated dictator; a sincere, saintly woman president; an effective, workaholic president; and a now a moron. I just wonder what the people will vote in next. At least my conscience is clear; I didn't vote for him. One consolation is that the next president will have to be very careful and make sure that he can live up to people's expectations. It's quite simple to launch an impeachment process. The next president should consider that it no longer takes long for people to get impatient and go out into the streets. Who knows, we might even learn to vote wisely.

What will happen if we don't get this guy out of office through protest marches or impeachment? I'm pretty sure there will be more protests and the president will have lost his capacity to govern. Anyway, it's always a pleasure to fight for the country you love, and it's all worth it. That's why we Filipinos with the capacity to leave are still sticking it out. Whatever the price.

SOBRA NG PAHIRAP! PATALSIKIN SI ERAP! ERAP RESIGN!!! (Fed up with hardship! Get ERAP out! ERAP resign!)