

Partido ng Masang Pilipino: Party of Many Promises?

(Lecture series XV, July 18, 1991)

Editors' note: Senator Joseph "Erap" Estrada agreed to speak in this forum but failed to. He had to attend an emergency meeting of government officials called by President Aquino to discuss the demand of the welgang bayan (people's strike) being successfully held that day to roll back oil prices. Instead, he sent his party's spokesperson, Mr. Reli German.

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Prof. Alexander Magno (Acting director, Third World Studies Center): Today's lecture is part of the *Academe Meets the Political Parties* series on the leading political parties for the coming 1992 elections. Today's session will feature the newly formed political party of Sen. Joseph Estrada, the PMP. We invited the spokesperson of the party, Mr. Reli German, a familiar figure especially for those who closely monitored national political events since the assassination of the late Sen. Benigno Aquino, Jr. in 1983 up to the EDSA uprising. He was one of the leading figures who organized the August Twenty One Movement (ATOM). Today he will enlighten us on the PMP.

Mr. Reli German: Some people see Sen. Estrada as unsophisticated, incapable of leadership, and has not introduced any bill and has done nothing in the Senate. But in truth, Senator Estrada has filed, authored, and co-authored exactly 101 bills and resolutions, majority of which are pro-poor. He has not authored or co-authored a bill changing the name of a street, school, or hospital. He does not indulge in such stupidity. All the bills he has authored or co-authored are substantial and most of these are focused on the problems of the poor. They are mostly pro-poor because ever since he entered public service, he was known as "*Erap para sa mahihirap*" (Erap for the poor). This is how the people know him. This is his personality. And so he is fulfilling this role in public service.

How is this relevant to the PMP? It is said that it is about time that the majority had a voice. We have to face the fact that it is those from above; the rich, the multinational corporations, and the powerful countries which dictate what happens in our society. Meanwhile, the poor majority have no voice. They are the ones who suffer and yet they are not represented. They have their supposed representatives in Congress, but what do the majority of these representatives do? They change names of streets, airports, and schools.

When he was still with the Liberal Party (LP), rumors spread that the team-up of Senate President Jovito Salonga and Erap was a strong one. It was going to be the Salonga-Erap combination, and was referred to as the "deaf and dumb combination." So what happened then? Sen. Salonga presented to Sen. Estrada a document concerning the process of selection of candidates of the LP and said "Erap, read this. If you agree with it, sign it." While it was taken that the LP process of selection of candidates for the coming elections was to be democratic, the document given by Salonga to Estrada empowered the LP president, Sen. Salonga, to appoint who his running mate would be. In other words, the selection would not be through a democratic process. And so Erap said to Salonga, "Mr. Senate President, I cannot sign this. We are already being called 'the deaf and the dumb.' You may be that deaf, but I am not that dumb." However, the problem was that Salonga was not able to hear what Erap said. And so, Erap had no recourse but to submit his resignation from the party.

He did not like being called by Sen. Salonga to be told, in so many words, that Salonga did not want him as his running mate. This happened

inspite of his loyalty to the old man. When he resigned from the LP, Sen. Estrada asked, "I already said I will not run for senator again, what will I do?" He had only two options: to retire and play grandfather roles in the movies or to continue his public service. But he does not want to be a senator again because he does not feel comfortable being one. He will admit this to everyone. He does not feel at home being a legislator. He is more of an action man, an administrator, and this he has proven during the seventeen years he was mayor of San Juan. This turn of events pushed him to consider running for president. Moreso, because he had programs of his own and he thinks that if he would just run for vice-president his recommendations would remain merely as recommendations. The only programs that get to be implemented are those of the one who gets to be president. It is different though if the vice-president and the president are of the same mind and are in good terms. But if Erap becomes vice-president but will not be in good terms with the president, then he would become another Doy Laurel condemned into six years of political oblivion.

Now, practically everybody is saying that Erap is a sure winner as vice-president. In the meantime, even with the fact that he was partyless, survey after survey of different groups would show that he was consistently either number one or number two choice for president, not vice-president. So he said, "It looks like fate is calling me again." And he is a strong believer in fate.

Erap believes that his platform and program are sound. He was optimistic about forming a political party. Others advised him to think twice or even thrice about forming a party overnight. He responded by saying that the present multi-party system would make things easier unlike before when the two-party system favored only the LP and the Nacionalista Party. In the present multi-party system, there will be a fair chance for everyone. All parties will have equal rights in the eyes of the law. All the parties would be entitled to election watchers and inspectors. So, Erap decided to go ahead with his plans to organize the PMP.

What platform are we talking about? What Sen. Estrada has in mind is simple. It comes in the form of a triangle. At the base of the triangle is the objective to achieve stability or *pagpapatatag* – economic, political, and social stability. Before we can think about doing anything else, our country must first achieve stability. Once we have achieved this, it will necessarily lead to the second part. The second part of the triangle is growth or *pagpapaunlad*. Growth, however, is not enough. Growth is never effective unless this is felt by all sectors of society. You need the third portion of the triangle, and this is equity or *pagbabahagi*. In other words, growth must be felt not just by the Forbes Park people but also by the Smokey Mountain people. Growth must be felt and savored by all the people.

Let us start with the political program. First, what we want to achieve is political reconciliation. It is hard for a government or a country to move forward if the people are not united. As what Sen. Estrada has said in one of his speeches, never in the nation's history have we been so divided. There are so many kinds of Filipinos nowadays: leftists, centrists, loyalists, Coryists, and

many others. They all forget that we are all Filipinos. Let us all forget about these "-ists" and remember that we are all Filipinos. Let us unite.

How are we going to do that? Total and unconditional amnesty. Amnesty will be granted to all who stole from this country with the condition that they bring back the money and invest in the Philippines in a manner that is legal, legitimate, and correct. We do not stop there. After you grant amnesty, then you tell these guys that we are going to apply the full force of the law on them even if it is merely for jaywalking. Amnesty only comes once. They must put to mind that for the second time around, even if they just commit a minor offense, they are dead.

Can this be done? It can be done if there is political will. Senator Estrada did this in the tiny municipality of San Juan where graft and corruption was rampant, where the police were in conspiracy with lawless elements. What did he do? Simple. He applied the full force of the law and the full force of his fists on these people. Those people who cannot be convinced with a word or two were beaten up. Can this be done in a national level? Certainly. All you need is the political will to do it.

Second, there must be respect for law and order.

Third, the administration of justice must be improved.

Fourth, there must be decentralization in the operations of the government by strengthening local level institutions.

Fifth, transparency in government operations and transactions must be ensured.

Sixth, an independent and pro-Filipino foreign policy must be pursued.

Now we go to the economic program. Let me just give it all in a nutshell.

The PMP will opt for total industrialization. We cannot go on living with the situation where we import nails, hairpins, and staples. And after we have industrialized we will encourage industries that are manpower-oriented. This is so because the number one problem of our economy today is unemployment.

We will not promote a state of mendicancy. We believe in the saying that "Give a man a fish and he will eat for one day, teach him how to fish and he will eat forever." We want a state that is self-reliant. We will create the opportunities and the business climate to allow the people, especially the poor, to help themselves so that they can improve their lives.

We will also seek debt-relief from our foreign creditors, promote export especially of manufactured goods, and ban the importation of grocery items.

Now we go to the social aspect.

Agrarian reform was supposed to be the centerpiece of the present

administration. What we have now is not what the people have hoped for. The PMP will examine the present program and identify where the administration failed in the implementation of a genuine agrarian reform. One defect that we can identify now is the failure of the administration to provide support services to the beneficiaries of this reform program. Because of this, beneficiaries will just eventually end up selling their lands. Therefore, before agrarian reform can be launched, it must be studied well. What is happening now is that the program is reduced to a mere press release program.

On social services, the PMP would ensure the adequate delivery of education, housing, and other social services by giving the poor access to these services. We will observe the constitutional provision that education must have the highest priority, not debt servicing nor defense. On labor, PMP will uphold the rights of labor to full protection, self-organization, security of tenure, humane conditions of work, and living wage. And lastly, the PMP hopes to foster the enrichment of a Filipino nationalist culture by recognizing the contributions of our creative artists and indigenous cultural communities.

So broadly, this is the program of the PMP. What should be put in mind is that this is focused on the welfare of our poor countrymen.

Prof. Felipe Miranda: The part of the PMP program which is long and informative as contained here in its pamphlet is the one focused on reconciliation. It was mentioned that there is a need for us to put aside our differences and to remember that we are all Filipinos, and that the aim of reconciliation is national prosperity. I believe that the PMP's point on reconciliation does not necessarily mean indifference to the cause of justice. The point of reconciliation after all is not only the jailing of people who must be jailed, but the attainment of justice as well. Even on matters concerning the changing of street names, justice must be served. Here in Diliman, there is a street that its name should have been changed by now. This is the Don Mariano Marcos Avenue. I do not use this name and when Sen. Diokno was still alive, he also did not use the name.

If we are to reconcile, amnesty or "forgetting" is not the key to our progress. What is needed is a keener and stronger grasp of the lessons history offers. This is the point of reconciliation. I believe that reconciliation should be a part of the programs of all the political parties. However, caution must be made so that the people will be given a proper perspective of what amnesty is, so they will not forget the true meaning of reconciliation.

Who are the Filipino masses? When talking about the masses, it is common notion among people here in UP and to those people demonstrating in the streets that this category does not include the likes of the Ayalas, Zobel, Sorianos, and the Marcoses, nor those students who belong to brackets five to nine in this university's socialized tuition fee program.

The operationalization of the phrase Filipino masses often depends on whose data you are using. If you use NEDA (National Economic Development Authority) figures, the Filipino masses compose 49% of the population. The

fact that the percentage was reduced from a level of 59% is being claimed to be a major accomplishment of the first three years of the present administration. However, we have separate studies that would suggest that the figure could be within the range of 70% to 75% of all population. The operational indicator used here is the income that each family earns, that is if it earns at all.

In Metro Manila, one must earn at least P5,000 a month to be above the poverty threshold. If you use that as a basis, then in Manila 70% of the people are poor. At the national level, the operationalization of the term poor is even lower, at around P3,000 a month. However, even if you use that level, 60% of our ten million families are poor. So you are talking roughly of about forty-two million Filipinos. This is the simplest operationalization of the term poor, the masses in Sen. Estrada's party. They are those whom the PMP wants to have a voice. However, a voice is not enough. What is needed aside from a voice is the masses' actual empowerment to formulate decisions and realize them.

The explanations given by Mr. Reli German and the PMP pamphlet are lengthy. However, much still needs to be explained. But I guess what is also important to know is how far will these people who wish to speak for the masses go. How much are they willing to gamble? This is not just a matter of programs. There are already many political programs and for sure all the parties that will be formed in the next six months will have their own political programs.

What we should ask from these people who profess to have programs are clear targets so that we could really determine if these are met if ever they should come to power. This we cannot do with President Aquino. In her administration, there are no objectives, no targeted achievements. What are offered are merely beautiful programs and visions.

As a comrade in the movement for change I would like to ask Reli and Sen. Estrada -- if he were here -- to consider the following and include it in their talks with the public. Why not offer the people something concrete and measurable, like telling them that in the first year of the term of Sen. Estrada as president he will reduce the 70% living below the poverty line by about 2%.

I would like to share a story to drive home my point on the need for measurable programs. I once briefed President Aquino regarding our surveys at the Social Weather Stations (SWS). Former Executive Secretary Macaraig who was present then asked me what they could do to salvage the president's waning popularity. I told them that they could announce to the people that in a month's time they would reduce the rate of crimes in Metro Manila by about five percent. The president looked at me as if she was wondering whether what I was saying was credible. I told her that such kind of targeted program would make an impression as it was sure to be done. Any police or military commander can achieve that if he is required to. The same goes with the issue of roads full of potholes. You can set a target time for the repair of

a percentage of these roads.

For the farmers, you can set a target of how many will be beneficiaries of land reform in your first year in office. For the workers, you can set a target of how many will be unionized since membership in a union is crucial for workers to have a voice in society. For the youth, how many of those who cannot afford education can be given free education?

We can do the same for income distribution. Since 1956, it has been determined that the richest 20% of families in the Philippines earned fifteen times more than the poorest 20%. Those figures have not changed up to 1986, when Mr. Marcos was overthrown. Did they change now? If so, was the change for better or for worse? If for better, was the change substantial?

For local autonomy, what indicators can we use to determine if those granted with autonomy are actually functioning autonomously?

I think this way of setting objectives is only proper during this conjuncture because our people had had enough of beautiful dreams. What they need are specified programs with measurable objectives. This kind of approach is actually nothing new. The Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL: New Society Movement) did this when they were forming their platform in 1981. I am not making the KBL the model but if they can do it, why not the PMP which seems to be capable of achieving more than this?

My final point has something to do with Sen. Estrada's chances in 1992. Based on our studies, Sen. Estrada is popular not only with one sector of society. A former UP professor who is now connected with the business of running elections told us that Sen. Estrada has performed well in every presidential survey because many of the respondents were housewives or household help — in short, women. But I told him that his observation was not entirely correct since the senator is also popular with the men.

One advantage of Sen. Estrada over the other "presidentiables" is that his popularity is felt all over the Philippines. His political base is more extensive than that of Miriam Defensor-Santiago. Ms. Santiago still has to devote so much time to establish bases in the Visayas and Mindanao.

All that I have said here are observations based on our studies and surveys among the people. Maybe the PMP no longer needs to find out for itself the true character of our people since they know a lot about it. Filipinos, in the presence of politicians, are respectful. But once they are at home, they would start complaining about politicians not offering anything again but promises. All I am saying is that political parties should present concrete objectives, realistic and measurable as targets. If you set clear targets, I guess no one will doubt your sincerity and capacity to get things done.

Dean Nestor Pilar: I am happy to observe that political parties that are being organized now are attempting to come up with platforms because as we all know, in the past, our political parties had no platforms. The question came from Mr. German himself when he raised the question of whether this party

is based on a personality -- hence a short-term party -- or on a platform -- hence long-term. So what is needed really if it were to be a long-term party is an ideology. And Mr. German has laid down the program of the party in a triangular form.

My first question is what aspect of its program is really distinct from the other parties' programs, one which would make the PMP stand out? What is that program for which you will be remembered? For example, President Magsaysay is remembered for changing the campaign aspect of the electoral process by going to the grassroots, shaking hands with every Filipino, and then opening Malacanang to the people. I am not saying that you should also open Malacanang to sell *galunggong* (a popular fish viand) and offer free circumcision operations to the public, like what the Aquino administration did. But what particular concrete programs can you offer the people? Then again we are talking about the 70% majority. What about the 30% minority?

Secondly, on the social aspect. You were saying that we should help the poor majority. But what is PMP's stand on the population problem since it is apparent that it is this poor majority which keeps on multiplying?

Thirdly, it was mentioned that this party is not personality-oriented. But it appears that the leadership of the party is identified only in the person of Sen. Estrada. Who are the other leaders of the party? Who are the members? Do they actually consider themselves loyal party members considering the fact that these members have different affiliations?

And lastly, if Sen. Estrada is running for president, does he have a complete line-up of candidates who will run with him? Will this line-up extend to the local level?

Mr. Alexander Pabico: I have always been indifferent to elections because our electoral process has always been dominated by those who possessed the three g's -- guns, goons, and gold. My hopes were raised when the *Partido ng Bayan* (PnB: People's Party) entered the electoral arena introducing what it called "new politics."

Unfortunately, the PnB failed to gain political mileage in the face of traditional politics, i.e., the well-entrenched politics of personalities and patronage. Unfortunately again, the PnB could not field candidates in the 1992 elections although there were pronouncements to the effect that the party may support Sen. Estrada or Sen. Salonga.

First of all, I would say that the program and vision of the PMP are progressive. I cannot think of a more progressive program among the existing parties, excluding the left. But the party is confronted with the stigma of an outgoing regime known for its incompetence and mediocrity, traits which are also attributed to Sen. Estrada. Thus the cruel reaction of people to Sen. Estrada's intention to run for president -- "What, another dumb president?"

I hope the PMP counters this impression because I believe that it deserves much more considering the fact that the principles it espouses are

congruent with those being fought for by the students. I see no reason why the PMP should not be praised for these principles. Unfortunately, there is no yardstick with which to measure the future performances of the party.

But I am bothered with the timing of PMP's founding. It is so near election time. Does this mean that the PMP is merely an expression of personal political interests? We all know the crisis confronting the Philippines long before. Why is it only now that the PMP was founded to provide a solution to this crisis?

Finally, why was people empowerment not mentioned as a program of the PMP? I hope that whether the PMP wins or loses, it would take as its foremost challenge the need to continue the process of popular empowerment.

Mr. German: The advice of Prof. Miranda is a very valid one. We will set targets of what should be accomplished at the end of a specified period of time.

With regard to the question of image Dr. Pilar has raised, as I explained earlier, Sen. Estrada identifies himself as pro-poor. So if we can follow the advice of Prof. Miranda so that the party can deliver to the masses, then that is the image we would like to project, that here is the president who has truly helped the poor.

On the question of whether he will definitely run for president, Sen. Estrada considers no other option.

On the point that the PMP might just be another personality-oriented party. Definitely we would like to avoid this kind of perception. But let us face the fact that a party needs a personality to promote the kind of program it wants to promote. There is advantage in having a crowd-drawer who at the same time believes in your program. And this we have found, very luckily, in the person of Sen. Estrada.

On the issue of population, will we opt for population control? We believe that everybody should exercise freedom of choice in this matter. It is up to the government to help the people improve their standard of living so that we can no longer make silly statements like "Population is a problem of the poor because they have no television sets and therefore have more time to have children." If we could help the poor get jobs and earn more and thus be able to feed their family, afford housing and clothing, send their children to school, and be able to buy a TV, maybe our population will go down.

On Senator Estrada's public image. Alecks asked what the party is doing to counter the public perception of Sen. Estrada being supposedly dumb. To the people who say this, we ask if they know who they are calling dumb. The person they are criticizing is a very successful movie producer. You cannot be a successful movie producer if you are dumb. It takes brains to run a film production outfit and not lose money. Sen. Estrada ran for mayor of San Juan as an independent, won, and became a TOYM (Ten Outstanding Young Men)

awardee for public service. After seventeen years of being mayor, his track record is unquestioned. We can see his achievements, the paved roads, school buildings, public markets, etc. The bills he authored or co-authored at the Senate were mostly pro-poor. Is this the picture of an idiot? He may not engage in floor debates since that may not be his forte. But he does his homework.

We resent it when people compare him with Pres. Aquino because there is a whole lot of difference between the two. He has the experience and track record.

OPEN FORUM

Question: Your party seems to have very idealistic visions. Will you be able to implement these and will these not change through the years?

Mr. German: The condition of our country calls for idealism. Our programs, idealistic as they may be, are not impossible to attain. All it takes is a team working together under one leader headed towards one direction.

Question: If the Nacionalista Party invites Sen. Estrada to be the running mate of either Laurel, Enrile, or Cojuangco, what will happen to the PMP?

Mr. German: I do not see that possibility.

Let me disclose to you the result of a nationwide survey recently conducted by the *Iglesia ni Kristo* (Church of Christ) among three thousand respondents from different sectors nationwide. Sen. Estrada topped the list of presidentiables with 31%. Miriam Santiago followed with 27%. Sen. Jovito Salonga was third with 14%. The others which included Vice-President Laurel, Mr. Eduardo Cojuangco, and Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile made up the balance. Why would Sen. Estrada run for the vice-presidency under either of these men when they do not even fair well in the surveys?

Question: What is the stand of the PMP concerning the *welgang bayan* (people's strike) presently being waged by the different sectors?

Mr. German: The purpose of the *welgang bayan* is to pressure the government to roll back oil prices. As far as the PMP is concerned, we are with the participants of the *welgang bayan* in this demand. Finance Secretary Jesus Ebanista claims this demand cannot be met as the government cannot afford it. We are for a rollback because we have studies based on computations which say that the government can afford to roll back oil prices.

Our hearts are with the masses because the price of oil really has to be decreased. But our minds are not closed in the sense that we listen to

Estanislao when he says that reconstruction could not be implemented if we rolled back prices especially in the light of the calamities taking place. So let us hear them and see how we can solve this problem which is the concern of everybody, not only of Malacanang.

Question: Is there a possibility for a Miriam Defensor-Santiago- Joseph Estrada team-up?

Mr. German: Personally, I do not see that possibility because Miriam Santiago and Erap have completely opposite views on major issues particularly on the US bases and the foreign debt.

Question: What is the stand of the PMP on the RP-US Treaty of Security, Friendship, and Cooperation?

Mr. German: PMP is against the prolonged stay of the US bases after September 16, 1991. We hope that the Senate rejects the proposed treaty between our government and the US government. This treaty is nothing but a stupid and treasonous act against us.

Question: If PMP comes to power in 1992, how will a PMP administration deal with the insurgency?

Mr. German: We will declare unconditional amnesty for all rebels. We will hold dialogues with the insurgents to see where we could meet and unite as Filipinos. This is a general statement but few would like to give it a try, the government being one of them. They just want to outdo the rebels. The problem is that it is the people who get caught in between.

Question: What will you do with the budget of the military?

Mr. German: We will uphold the constitutional provision that education be prioritized over debt-servicing and defense.

Question: Why did Sen. Estrada fail to come to this forum? Can it be attributed to what was said that he does not face debates and fora?

Mr. German: Sen. Estrada had all the intentions of coming here this afternoon. In fact, last night, we had some sort of a rehearsal. We agreed that I would present the program of the party while he would answer the questions. We tried to think of questions that might be raised. Unfortunately, he was called by President Aquino to Malacanang for an emergency meeting. He does not avoid fora. He has enough confidence to answer questions.

Two weeks ago, he had a meeting with some one hundred women professionals. It was an informal one. I talked with the ladies afterwards and they were quite impressed with the senator. This is the nice thing about Erap. People expect so little from him thus are impressed when he shows off.

Question: Where will PMP get its campaign funds?

Mr. German: Actually, that is our big problem.

Question: Is the PMP serious in fielding a presidential candidate considering that it does not have a well-oiled political machine?

Mr. German: That is also a problem for us. It is hard to organize if you do not have money. One advantage that we have over other parties is that while people go to them asking money, people come to us offering help, not necessarily in terms of finances but manpower-wise, like distributing leaflets and posters.

Question: Before we achieve economic, social, and political development, the participation of the masses in this development should be clear. It is not clear to me how to operationalize the concept of people's organizations. And if we look at the PMP, we cannot determine if it is actually composed of the masses.

I think that the system of organizing of the PMP is territorial. It is per province. PMP does not organize by sector which to me is the more important type of organizing. To be a genuine party of the Filipino masses, you should include the different sectors of society such as the workers, urban poor, women, etc. It seems that the PMP presents itself as a party of the masses without actually being one.

Secondly, how do we democratize education? It is not enough to provide the budget nor subsidy. It is also important to change the orientation of the educational system to a more nationalist one.

Mr. German: The PMP does not function on the basis of territories. We are different from other political parties in that we do not focus on approaching congressmen, governors, and the like. We first approach the people at their barangays and in the organizations to which they belong. We cannot see the point in approaching the politicians. So we do the opposite. We let our presence be felt among the masses. We approach the barangay captains and mayors so they will tell their congressmen and their governors that they are for the PMP instead of the congressmen and governors telling them what party to support. We counter the traditional process in living up to what our name stands for.

Question: If Senator Estrada wins the presidency, would you be his executive secretary?

Mr. German: I would rather be a private individual. My two-year experience in the government brought me a lot of frustrations.

Question: From the time we assumed the status of political independence, each succeeding administration has invariably used national security as a justification for our relations and dependence on the US. This is just a proof that our independence is still nominal and that the US is still always a factor in our national life. To ensure peace and order, will Sen. Estrada make our country independent in all aspects?

Mr. German: The answer to that is certainly yes. Even as of now, there

are people who offer help, but with strings attached which favor the foreigners. No way. We tell them that they just pretend that we never had the conversation.

Erap and I were together in school. But I did not know him during our schooldays as much as I know him today. We never associated with each other after school. He went to pursue a movie career and I went to private business. The time that we got together was when the *Anti-Baseng Koalisyon Demokratiko* (ABAKADA; Anti-Bases Democratic Coalition) was formed. I asked him if he were sincere with his conviction against the bases or if he were just making a political gimmick. He said, "My friend, if I were to put up a show, why would I choose one which is unpopular? It is not the smart thing to do."

From our discussions, I discovered that we agreed on major issues specifically that of nationalism and sovereignty.

Prof. Magno: That would close the afternoon's session. In the name of the Third World Studies Center, I want to thank Mr. Reli German, our panelists, and all those who joined us in the discussion.