

The UP and Lean Alejandro: Correcting Injustice in Our Homeground

(Eulogy delivered for assassinated BAYAN Secretary-General Leandro Alejandro by P. N. Abinales)

Faculty members who will superficially peruse through Lean Alejandro's transcript of records may be appalled to discover that he never completed his academic requirements. Thus, one can easily come to the conclusion that he followed the route a lot of activists in this University go through: ending up as sanctimonious flunkers. Lean never finished his degree in Philippine Studies opting to temporarily leave the academe to pursue a different level of serving our people and fighting for their liberation. Besides he confessed that he cannot imagine himself going through two years of military training under a CMT program which basically reflected the militarization of society.

Yet, to those who were acquainted with Lean, they would know that he did not fit the commonly-perceived notion of the contemporary student activist. In his own right, he was a fine example of the scholar in the UP tradition. Having worked with him at the Third World Studies Center and having shared a room with him at the Narra Residence Hall for more than three years, I can attest to the intellectual rigour Lean Alejandro placed himself into in order for him to better analyse the society he wanted to change.

Unlike most students and academics who sit content with their mediocrity, Lean sought to abide by the basic UP traditions of excellence and critical thinking. Notwithstanding the demands of his political work, he was constantly conscious of the fact that both academic and political learning demand a certain rigour from the committed. While some radical intellectuals in the University refuse to read beyond Marx or Lenin, Lean embarked on a reading program that would familiarize himself with the constantly changing Marxist tradition after Marx. He voraciously devoured whatever new book on Marxism that was available at the Third World Studies, preparing long critical notes on each and comparing whatever epistemological breakthrough or whatever revision these new works made on the growing Marxist intellectual tradition. He likewise prepared his own research agenda, foremost of which was his intention to study the historical development of the Philippine student movement to determine its contributions to the broader struggle for nationalism and democracy. And in between, he would make intellectual potshots at anti-Marxist critics like that overrated Opus Dei

praye Joseph De Torre, who insulted even the anti-Marxist tradition by failing to conform to a basic methodological premise in research: that of knowing first what you want to debunk before writing your "criticism".

Throughout all these, he was constantly guided by two of Marx's foremost dictum: to conduct an "unceasing criticism of everything existing" and to be always aware that in the struggle, "ignorance has never helped anyone yet". He thoroughly understood what it meant to be a UP student and a scholar of the people. He deeply appreciated his UP years and longed that one day, when the struggle will be over, he'd like to go back to his first love and mistress, the academe.

In the few times we saw each other after he left UP, Lean would muse about the things he misses at the academe. He was particularly concerned that he could never complete that research agenda he had in mind. He constantly inquired about the status of the University library, and whether, in the future, he could return to those dusty corners in the archives to continue his research. He also missed the classes that he would have wanted to attend, foremost of which were his first course, Chemistry, literature, and the foreign languages (he wanted to enroll in German and Russian language courses to enable him to read Marx and Lenin, respectively in the original). Most importantly he missed talking with the best minds of the UP faculty, discussing with them the latest in literature, politics and even the fantasy world of J.R.R. Tolkien over cups of bland coffee at the FC canteen or bottles of Scotch at Dodong Nemenzo's.

Lean had a vision of UP after national liberation. While orthodox radicals, once they come to power, are feared that they would reformat institutions of higher learning to conform to the demands of the times, Lean always impressed on me the importance of keeping UP as a haven for critical and competent thinking. He used to say that after the revolution, the State should do everything to keep the best minds of UP — from the conservatives, the liberals, down to the orthodox and heretical radicals — and to make them continue with what they love to do: teach, research, discuss and debate. For instance, while he disagreed with Prof. Agpalo's theoretical explorations, he saw the importance of keeping liberals like Agpalo in the University. "For how else can we radicals in

academe get to know more of our radicalism if not through an intense debate with the likes of Agpalo et. al.?", was how he put it one night. He even expressed a certain fondness towards famous and infamous crackpots of the UP, hoping that one day they can return to share their wild ideas with colleagues and students all in the name of "higher learning". Lean believed that after the total liberation of the people, the faculty and students of UP could now meaningfully proceed with actualizing the goals of the University unburdened by such "private rascalities" as low pay and inadequate facilities.

He always bewailed what the Marcos dictatorship did to UP; eroding its academic freedom through budget cut downs and through veiled and actual threats of repression, destroying the integrity of its faculty by turning them into academic mercenaries, ghostwriters and mental prostitutes and preventing ideas critical of the status quo and capable of expanding student and faculty imagination from taking root in the academe. He vowed that such will never happen in the alternative society that he sought to realize.

I share these private thoughts of Lean not only to reveal to you that there is more to him than the political figure we read in the newspapers or hear in symposia and rallies. He was also an avid fanatic of the ideals and tenets of the University.

With his death, he may have indirectly imparted the message that at this juncture it becomes imperative for us to revive the UP tradition of excellence and critical thinking and to defend this vigorously against any future effort to destroy it.

For some time, this University had given honorary doctorates to despicable creatures like Imelda Marcos. It has acquiesced to the whims and caprices of the powerful by accepting professors and academics who get promoted by virtue of presidential decrees and executive orders, and it has allowed the worst of academics to become instant celebrities over a few spoken thoughts and subjects they never seriously studied. I think that times of crisis like what we are facing now are an opportune moment for UP to correct the many injustices in our homeground by giving due recognition to those who have stood for its tradition. Many of UP's best and brightest remain unrecognized and their works unappreciated if only because they refused to chase that piece of paper called the diploma or ignore many of those formal academic prerequisites that do not necessarily reflect knowledge or intelligence.

If we do this, then I think a small part of the quest of rendering justice to Lean Alejandro shall be fulfilled.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

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KASARINLAN is the Filipino word for *autonomy*. Webster's Third New International Dictionary lists at least three important meanings of the term which resonate fundamental Third World aspirations: "1. the quality of being independent, free and self-directing; 2. the degree of self-determination or political control possessed by a minority group, territorial division, or political unit in its relations to the state or political community of which it forms a part; and extending from local self-government to full independence; and 3. the sovereignty of reason in the sphere of morals or possession of moral freedom or self-determination."

Why *KASARINLAN* then? Why autonomy? Because this single word epitomizes the historic quest of all Third World peoples — of nations in search of nationhood, of ex-colonies seeking to complete the process of de-colonization, a quest that has been intercepted at almost every point by modern imperialism. The term also affirms the right to life and to self-directed growth, not only of individuals but also of entire nations and communities who must often exist in an environment characterized not simply by diversity, but by the hegemony of one group over others. And lastly, the word underscores the primacy of reason, a lesson that needs to be constantly reiterated because the process of history-making and history-writing in which we are engaged is so often fettered by the easy recourse to dogma, whether moral, intellectual or political.

KASARINLAN is a quarterly publication of the UP Third World Studies Center. It aims to present an intelligent analysis and interpretation of Philippine conditions and relevant Third World experiences in all spheres of society, from the perspective of a people constantly struggling for real autonomy and independence.