

WOMEN IN POLITICS

With this issue, *RWS* launches its series on topics of particular immediacy and currency to women's concerns. The series refers to a number of articles on one or more identified women's issue(s) that will appear together occasionally as special features in *RWS*. A major source of material for the series would be papers presented at different fora sponsored and participated in by women's organizations where a mine of ideas relevant to the feminist project should be tapped and shared with readers of *RWS*. We start off with the first three articles in this issue which consist of papers read at a panel discussion on the Role of Women in Electoral Politics co-sponsored by UCWS and the Department of Political Science of the College of Social Science and Philosophy, U.P., in March, 1992.

PROFILE OF WOMEN POLITICIANS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Acceptance of Women in Electoral Politics

Qualified women in the Philippines have been allowed to compete in electoral politics since the time that they gained the right of suffrage in 1937. The test case of a woman's acceptability at the polls was hurdled by the late Carmen Planas who won in an election as the first woman councilor of the City of Manila. Since then, there have been more women who competed in local and national elections, specially since 1946, not only for councilorship but for all other electoral positions.

Winning in an election has always been a challenge to women career politicians. Election costs are tremendously high, despite election rules against expenditures, and only those with money can equally compete.

Women politicians must also be acceptable to the network of patronage politics prevalent in the country which is dominated by seasoned male politicians.

Often, these women politicians come from the affluent socio-economic class or the country's elite; they have been recruited into politics by male politicians who have their political network and party machinery. Male politicians had not been quite explicit on the reason for their recruitment of women into their political parties, whether it is because of women's competence and functional roles in certain areas of decision making or merely for the tactical reason of attracting the support of women voters.

Electoral Performance of Women For National and Local Offices

Since 1946, women have won positions in the National Legislatures and in the local governments. The electoral records, however, in terms of the seats gained and in proportion to that won by men, are very disappointing.

For the period 1946 to 1969, in the House of Representatives, the ratio in favor of the male members was 119 to 1 or 118 to 2 and only once was it a 114 to 6—in 1965. In the Senate, the ratio was 23 to 1 all the time and only in two elections in 1967 and, in 1987, was it 22 to 2. During the Batasang Pambansa elections in 1978 and in 1984, there were 10 women who won seats in the Unicameral Assembly. But still, this number was only .05 per cent of the total number of seats, despite the political dispensation's toleration of women in the Assembly at that time.

In the 1987 election for the House of Representatives, women won 18 seats and one woman was appointed as the sectoral representative, a gain of 19 seats in all. While there was an improvement in the women's electoral performance, the ratio with the total 195 elective and appointive representatives, was only 9.23 per cent of the membership. The two women in the Senate in 1987 constituted 8.6 per cent of the Senate membership.

The main reason why there were very few women in the Legislature was because only very few of them competed for the higher national positions. Another factor was that the male-oriented political machinery had been very selective in recruiting women into their political parties to compete during the elections. For the first time, however, the country had a woman presidential candidate in the 1986 snap election. She subsequently was proclaimed President of the Philippines. The event was doubly historical because not only was a dictator ousted from power but this was achieved by a woman. However, it must be noted that the various political groupings and parties were led by men politicians who provided support for Mrs. Aquino's presidential bid.

Women have also made encouraging breakthroughs in their electoral performance in the local elections since 1946. During the first post-war election, there were five women mayors who were elected in 1947; 11

mayors in 1951; only five in 1955; nine in 1959; 17 in 1963; 29 in 1967; and 39 in 1971. These women mayors held on to their posts for ten years like the rest of the local officials because President Marcos suspended the local election in 1975. By the next local election in 1980, there were 80 women mayors elected. In the local elections of 1988 under the Aquino administration there were 88 elected women mayors, which was more than a 50 per cent jump from the previous electoral record.

For the elected women provincial governors, it was only in 1963 that there were two women who made it to the post. In subsequent elections, women governors were elected as follows: five in 1967, four in 1971, five in 1980, and four in 1988.

Since 1947, however, there have been more women vice-mayors than women mayors: in 1947, there were 23; in 1951, 22; in 1955, 23; in 1959, 19; in 1963, 29; in 1967, 45; in 1971, 48; in 1980, 86 and in 1988, 88. While the number of women local executives has increased, there have been more male mayors elected, serving as the major local executives while the women as vice-mayors only played a second-rank role in the community. The number of elected councilors though had steadily increased from 273 in 1947 to 1,588 in 1988. Alice Herrera of Quezon City, a speaker in this symposium, is the national President of the Women Councilors League of the Philippines. The elected women provincial board members also increased steadily from two to 61 in the period covering 1947 to 1988.

While the statistics on women's electoral performance appear encouraging, the elective positions occupied by women is only within the nine per cent level of total seats available compared to more than 90 per cent of elective positions which is still the domain of male officials. The women, however, who made the grade in the electoral competitions should be commended for their competence, cleverness and compassion, the three C's on which voters usually base their judgment in selecting public officials. The voters also judge them by the quality of service which they perceive the women candidate would be capable of rendering, once elected.

Who Are the Women Career Politicians?

The election trends in the Philippines point to the difficulty for a woman to gain consistent electoral support from the constituency. Yet some women national politicians who have proven themselves to be credible leaders merit reelections. The women who served as senators of the Philippines in the past were Geronima Pecson, Pacita Madrigal-Warns, Tecla San Andres-Ziga, Eva Estrada Kalaw, Magnolia Antonino and Helen Benitez. Currently, our women senators are Leticia Shahani and Santanina Rasul. It must be noted that these women have common backgrounds: they belong to the elite socio-economic class in the country; they are members of established political clans; they have been quite socially prominent prior to their election to the Senate; each one has a particular expertise to speak of which people

recognize without doubt.

The former women senators had substantially built their political careers and were therefore re-elected to office. Some of them are still actively involved in politics today. The only exception is Magnolia Antonino who served for only one term. Her political career was a result of the accidental death of her husband, re-electionist Antonio Antonino of the Liberal Party which fielded Mrs. Antonino to replace her husband. The voters who sympathized with Antonino's death and in recognition of his outstanding performance in the Senate during his incumbency, cast their votes in favor of his wife. While Mrs. Antonino did not seek a second term, her performance in the Senate nevertheless was not questionable. It must therefore be noted that in the Philippines, women's entry into politics can also be due to sympathy votes through the demise of a politically prominent husband as in the case of Mrs. Antonino in 1969 and that of Mrs. Corazon Aquino in 1986. Some of the women leaders, however, have also been subjected to black propaganda by malicious opponents; this is probably the most difficult experience for a woman career politician.

While the senatorial candidates are elected at large by qualified voters, the representatives to the House are elected by the constituent districts. During the First Congress (1946-1949), there was one woman representative from the lone district of Bukidnon (Mrs. Fortich). During the Second Congress (1949-1953) another woman won the seat for the lone district of Bataan (Mrs. Lacson-Medina). For the Third Congress (1953-1957), a woman won a seat from the first district of Capiz (Mrs. Dinglasan). For the Fourth Congress (1957-1961), another lone woman won a seat representing Albay in the Bicol Region. Later, this woman became a senator in 1967 (Mrs. Ziga).

During the Fifth Congress (1961-1965) there were two women representatives, one representing the third district of Albay (Mrs. Ziga) as a re-electionist and the other, the first district of Pampanga (Mrs. Nepomuceno). The lady from Pampanga was also a former governor of the province. In the Sixth Congress (1965-1969) there were six women winners, two of them re-electionists. The districts that these women solons represented were the lone district of Batanes (Mrs. Abad), the first district of La Union, the third district of Albay (Mrs. Ziga), the first district of Pampanga (Mrs. Nepomuceno), the third district of Iloilo (Mrs. Trono), and the second district of Leyte (Mrs. Yñiguez). For the Seventh Congress (1969-1972), two women winners represented a district in Iloilo (S. Aldeguer) and the other a district in Pangasinan (Ms. Nancy Sison). The members of the Seventh Congress did not finish their terms because of the declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972 by former President Ferdinand Marcos.

The women members of the House of Representatives, like the women in the Senate, belonged to the elite class. They were college educated and endowed with special expertise. They also belonged to established political

clans. The women members of the Batasang Pambansa, ten in 1978 and ten in 1984, had the same socio-economic backgrounds as the women of previous Congresses. Moreover, those who belonged to the Kilusan ng Bagong Lipunan (KBL) were specially recruited by the party leadership. It must be noted, however, that former Supreme Court Justice Cecilia Muñoz Palma won as a member of the Opposition Party in 1984 and maintained that role in the Batasang Pambansa until the body was abolished in 1986.

The majority of the winners in both the Congressional and local elections held in 1987 and 1988, respectively, were from cause-oriented groups who belonged to the broad coalition of groups riding on the popularity of President Corazon Aquino. The party affiliation of the women in 1987 while campaigning for their election to Congress were as follows: UNIDO - 4; UNIDO-LP - 1; LP-Salonga - 1; PDP-LABAN - 5; LP-PDP-LABAN - 2; NP - 1; LP - 1, KAIBA - 1; and Independents - 4. After two years in office, because of the political polarization in the Senate followed by a similar activity in the House, the party affiliation of these women changed as follows: LP - 2; UNIDO - 2; LDP - 11; KAIBA - 1; NP - 1 and Independent - 1. By the end of the 8th Congress preparatory to the 1992 election, the party affiliations are as follows: Lorna Verano-Yap and Socorro Acosta remained as LPs. The two women Senators are now both members of the Lakas ng EDSA - National Union of Christian Democrats (Lakas-NUCD) Party. One woman is an NP. The rest of the women are members of the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino or LDP.

Ninety per cent of the women politicians in the national and local governments since 1987 have had no lengthy career in politics as stepping stones to their new positions. In the past, at least, 20 per cent of the women national politicians built their political careers by serving first in the elective local government offices. Some of those women had been re-electionists and presumably had learned the political game through the process. Some of them had also been in office for several terms and had developed competence for the job after sometime. There were instances when political clans dominated politics in certain places and women politicians were also part of the structure. Women politicians thus perceived that the sources of their political support not only came from their friends, the general voters, the youth, and the women but also, of course, the men.

Performance in Office of the Women In the National Legislatures

The women legislators took their jobs seriously in terms of legislative output but they were handicapped by the system of politics in House Committees. For instance, proposing a bill did not mean that the bill would immediately become law. Among the obstructions were: existing similar legislations in subject matter of the bills they were introducing; need to coordinate with other authors to integrate similar bills; bills that may not be

priority legislations; bills that may not be viable enough, i.e., the sponsor may not have been as influential as to merit having her bill attended to by the Committee on Rules which calendared and scheduled committee and floor discussions on preferred bills.

For women legislators during the period 1978-1984, their legislative output was affected by the prevailing trend at the Batasang Pambansa to give more priority to Cabinet bills while individually-introduced bills encountered difficulty of passage. Aside from this, President Marcos had already been issuing Presidential Decrees from the time of the installation of Martial Law until February, 1986. The women legislators' accomplishments during this period included the introduction of bills of local application such as those having to do with the changing of names, creating municipalities, upgrading the status of schools, creating health centers or hospitals and adding more hospital beds; related welfare and livelihood projects, among others. Only two women legislators introduced bills on women. Oftentimes, the women legislators became co-authors of bills that male legislators had sponsored. For the period 1978- 1984, a total of 1100 bills were introduced or co-authored by the women members of the Assembly, out of which only 103 became actual Batas Pambansa. The women legislators also contributed to the passage of 174 resolutions.

During the 1984-1986 Batasang Pambansa, there were a total of 488 parliamentary bills and 196 resolutions that the women legislators initiated or co-authored. The second Batasang Pambansa was prematurely abolished in February, 1986 and no bill sponsored by the women became law.

The record of the 8th Congress which opened on July 26, 1987 indicated that the legislators proceeded at their tasks with enthusiasm. In terms of general legislative output, by the end of February, 1990, the Upper House (Senate) had introduced 1,420 bills, out of which 41 became laws. The Lower House (House of Representatives) had introduced 28,091 bills, out of which 208 became laws. The women members had affixed their names to 1,517 bills and 160 resolutions either as sponsors or co-authors.

The women legislators had indicated that upon their assumption to office, they would pay attention to the following issues: environment, human rights, no to nuclear weapons, anti-bases, anti-pornography, foreign debt, economic problems, rights of government employees, agro-based industrialization, improvement of investment climate, food production, agricultural improvements, agrarian reform, education, health, and autonomy for local governments. What was sad about these efforts was that some bills that were passed into law on the above topics notwithstanding that the women had also worked for them, were authored by and therefore attributed only to the male members of Congress.

The women members, however, introduced bills of local application which merited passage into laws. Congresswoman Acosta worked for bills on agro-industrial development and food production in Mindanao. Congresswoman Glenda Ecleo worked for a law on mining development in her

area. Congresswoman Hortencia Starke also worked for a law on livestock development in her district.

With regard to bills on women's concerns, by December, 1988, in the Lower House, there were a total of 152 bills that were introduced. Out of this number, 126 were sponsored by men members and only 26 were introduced by women members. The subject matter of these bills, some of which have been incorporated into laws, can be summarized as follows: the need for day care centers, standardized salaries for domestic helpers, equal rights for women and men, more protection for women in family relations, protection against illegal recruitment for overseas work, ban on mail-order brides, maternity benefits for both parents, protection for nurses working overseas, population issues, social problems such as drug addiction and rape as crime. The legislative agenda of the Senate on women's concerns had a total of 25 bills and 14 resolutions, out of which, three laws were passed.

Among these laws on women concerns that have taken effect are :

●R.A. 6725 - An Act Strengthening the Prohibition on Discrimination Against Women in Terms and Conditions of Employment, (May 12, 1989).

●R.A. 6949 - An Act Declaring March 8 of Every Year as National Women's Day, (April 10, 1990).
Senate Sponsor - Santanina Rasul
House Sponsor - Consuelo P. Reyes

The original resolution was authored by the late Congresswoman Estellita Juco.

●R.A. 6955 - An Act Declaring Unlawful The Practice of Mail-Order Brides, etc., (June 30, 1990).

Senate Sponsors: Maceda, Herrera, Mercado, Romulo, Tamano and Shahani
House Sponsor: Lorna Verano-Yap

●R.A. 7192 - The Women On Development and Nation- building Act, granting equal rights and opportunities to women
Co-authors - Raul Roco\Santanina Rasul

●R.A. 6972 - Establishing Day Care Centers in Every Barangay
Senate Sponsor: Ernesto Maceda
House Sponsor: Lorna Verano Yap

Rape as a crime against persons was not passed into law.

Who Are The 1992 Women Candidates to National Office?

Of the eight presidential candidates recognized by the Commission on Elections, two are women. One candidate is Miriam Defensor-Santiago who served as the first woman commissioner of the Commission on Immigration and Deportation and the first woman secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform. If she wins as president, considering the claim that she has been topping the electoral surveys, she will only be the second woman President of the Philippines. Mrs. Imelda Marcos, the other woman candidate, was the first governor of the Metro Manila Commission.

There are 13 women senatorial candidates. With the Nacionalista Party (NP) is Nora V. Daza, a culinary expert. With the Liberal Party-Partido ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LP-PDP) are Lorna Verano Yap, a Congresswoman from Pasay and Florangel Braid, a former member of the 1987 Constitutional Commission. With the Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino (LDP) are Leonor Ines Luciano, a former judge and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, an undersecretary for trade. With the Nationalist People's Coalition (NPC) are Dominique Coseteng, a Congresswoman from Quezon City, Katrina Legarda Santos, a civic leader, Elsa Payumo, a councilwoman of Makati and Vivian Hultman, the mother of a murder victim.. With the Lakas ng EDSA-NUCD are the two lady senators, Leticia Shahani and Santanina Rasul and Marietta Primicias Goco, a specialist in cooperatives and organizing. The woman senatorial candidate of the Kilusan Ng Bagong Lipunan is Nora Petines. It is curious, however, that despite the fact that there are two women presidentiables and 13 senatorial candidates, the women's organizations have not really come out publicly endorsing any of the women candidates.

Conclusion: The Challenge to Women Politicians

The challenge to the women career politicians is *not just* winning the election. The most important consideration is to prepare sensible and functional subjects for legislation, and to be the author of laws that will really serve the nation — and the women. This is an important concern to which the women national leaders must give priority in order to create respectable public images of themselves as significant national legislators and career politicians.