



**Perry Diaz**

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## *The Looming Battle Royale*

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- One of the questions that came to the forefront of debate after the death of former president Cory Aquino was: Who will pick up the mantle of leadership of the unfinished “yellow revolution” that Cory championed? With Cory gone, a power vacuum was created that could easily be filled by those who advocate for “status quo” and “business as usual” way of governance.

The 2010 elections could thus become the battle that would pit the forces of “status quo” against the proponents of genuine change which has gained popular support when Cory passed away last August 1, 2009. Suddenly, the crusade that she started in the aftermath of the “People Power” revolution in 1986 comes to life again. Cory’s last breath of life gave her “yellow revolution” a new breadth of life.

The 300,000 people who joined her nine-hour funeral procession is a testament to the people’s desire for change. But with Cory gone, her “yellow revolution” -- leaderless and rudderless -- could crumble and disintegrate in the face of a formidable oligarchy that has entrenched itself during the presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. The oligarchs never had it better since the Marcos dictatorship. In fact, during Gloria’s presidency, the Arroyos have nurtured and developed a strong bond -- political and economic -- with some of Marcos’ former cronies.

It will not then come as a surprise if the 2010 presidential election becomes an “Armageddonic” battle royale: good

versus evil . . . democracy versus oligarchy . . . compassionate government versus corrupt government . . . change versus “status quo” . . . honest leadership versus opportunistic leadership. The question is: Who are the candidates who would lead the opposing forces?

The newly minted Lakas-Kampi-CMD which Gloria forged into a mega political party with 11,000 elected officials under its umbrella -- from the national level down to regional and local levels -- would be so imposing and intimidating that it could just blow the opposition to smithereens by its sheer size.

Strangely, however, Lakas-Kampi-CMD doesn’t have anybody within its ranks who is considered a “winnable” presidential candidate. Recently, Defense Secretary Gilbert “Gibo” Teodoro bolted his uncle Danding Cojuangco’s Nationalist People’s Coalition (NPC) and joined the Lakas-Kampi-CMD hoping that -- with Gloria’s anointment -- he would be the party’s standard bearer. But as soon as he joined the party, word started circulating that there were powerful members close to Gloria who would not allow him to be their party’s presidential candidate. The fact that his popularity rating is only 1% further heightened the kingmakers’ negative perception of Gibo.

But what is very strange is that some Lakas-Kampi-CMD stalwarts are still waiting for Vice President Noli De Castro to make up his mind about joining their party and “compete” with Gibo for their party’s nomination. In my column,

“Gloria’s Gambit” (May 2009), I asked, “Would De Castro kowtow to Gloria? If he does, he will be taking a great risk of losing his base of support because Gloria’s ‘anointment’ might turn out to be a ‘kiss of death’ which could put an end to his political life. And what would happen to Teodoro? I would not be surprised if Gloria would use him as a pawn to sacrifice in her opening gambit. . . unless he changes his mind and settles as De Castro’s vice presidential running mate.”

While De Castro was the frontrunner in popularity rating at that time, his rating has since plummeted down, joining the second-tier wannabes. At this time, his “market value” has gone upside down and I doubt if any other party would take him as its standard bearer. His only viable option would be to kiss up to Gloria and join Lakas-Kampi-CMD. But that would be like getting sucked into a black hole. And Gloria, smart as she is, knows that.

So, who do you think Gloria would support knowing that whoever her party’s candidate will be, would lose. There is only one person who would fit the mold of the candidate that Gloria would support. . . secretly. And that is Francis “Chiz” Escudero. Your knee jerk reaction might be, “What? Are you crazy!” I am not crazy and I’ll tell you why Chiz could be Gloria’s “secret candidate.”

While Gloria cannot openly abandon her party’s candidate -- De Castro, Teodoro or Fernando -- she knows that their chances of winning is pretty slim. Chiz is her perfect candidate for several reasons: (1) Chiz has an Obamanesque charismatic appeal (2) Chiz is NPC’s presumptive presidential nominee; (3) The power behind NPC is Danding Cojuangco who has strong economic link to the Arroyos; (4) The Escudero political dynasty had strong ties to the late dictator Marcos and now to the Cojuangcos; and (5) With the financial backing of former Marcos cronies and, secretly,

the Arroyos, Chiz would be a formidable candidate.

Chiz might attempt to assert his independence if he wins but that’s wishful thinking. The Arroyos and the Cojuangcos will own him and nothing will change. It will be “business as usual” with the Arroyo-Cojuangco business empire controlling the government. . . and the country.

And who would be the candidate to lead the “yellow revolution”? There is a groundswell of support for Senator Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III, the only son of Ninoy and Cory Aquino. Noynoy would be the perfect person to take on the mantle of leadership of the “yellow revolution.”

Noynoy’s experience with the loss of his father by an assassin’s bullet in 1983 and his own survival from near death has tempered his psyche. In 1987, during one of the seven coup attempts by rebel soldiers who attacked the Malacañang Palace, Noynoy was hit by five bullets -- a bullet is still embedded in his neck today -- which nearly killed him. Three of his four escorts were killed and the fourth was wounded. It must have been fate that saved him that day and destined him for a greater calling.

That “greater calling” came when Cory passed away. While Noynoy is hesitant right now to step up to the plate and run for president, my take is that eventually he will run. And when Noynoy runs, the battle royale will rock the country to its foundations and will change -- for better or for worse -- the way of life of the Filipino.

Before returning to the Philippines to meet his fate, Ninoy said, “The Filipino is worth dying for.” Would his son Noynoy say that the Filipino is worth fighting for? If so, then Noynoy doesn’t have to blink an eye, he should -- nay, must -- run!