

The Honorable Doy Laurel



"Ang Bayan Higit sa Lahat"

Somewhere in the pages of our history, there was once an honorable man who exemplified supreme sacrifice as a public servant. A man who chose to set aside his dreams and personal ambitions when he stepped aside and agreed to have Cory Aquino run for President against the incumbent President Ferdinand Marcos under his own political machine. That man is no other than the late Salvador H. Laurel or simply "Doy" to many.

Despite all of his achievements and recognition as a public servant, Doy Laurel's legacy as the beacon of light during the darkest days of martial rule has received not much attention from contemporary history writers. More than this, his sacrifices and efforts to help install the Aquino government after the February Revolution were brushed aside and spurned by President Cory Aquino's "inner circle." Let us then revisit his legacy as one of the political titans of Philippine politics.

After the assassination of Senator Ninoy Aquino on August 21, 1983, anti-Marcos protest all over the country soon escalated more than anyone could ever imagine. The opposition bloc, although splintered in many ways, saw this as an opportunity to consolidate its forces and challenge President

Marcos' *Kilusang Bagong Lipunan* candidates in the 1984 legislative election. To solidify the splintered opposition parties, Doy Laurel painstakingly spearheaded the formation of the **United Nationalist Democratic Organization** (UNIDO) as the umbrella organization of various opposition parties such as the well-entrenched *Liberal Party*, Raul Manglapus' *National Union of Christian Democrats* and Nene Pimentel's *Partido Demokratikong Pilipino-Lakas ng Bayan*. His tremendous and tedious efforts to unify the opposition against the Marcos-controlled Batasan Pambansa proved to be successful when majority of UNIDO candidates won in the 1984 legislative elections. The opposition then seized this victory to challenge the mandate of President Marcos in a presidential election. Ever conscious of his image as a benevolent dictator in the prying eyes of the international community, President Marcos had no choice but to seek for a fresh mandate from the people. And the only way to this, as the opposition would like to believe, was to call for a snap election. But who could possibly run much less win, against the incumbent President Marcos? To many, Doy Laurel was the logical candidate for the opposition following UNIDO's victory during the 1984 legislative elections. But some quarters believed that Cory Aquino, owing to her popularity as the widow of a slain martyr, was the right candidate to defeat President Marcos in the polls. Nonetheless, Cory kept her silence amidst the overwhelming clamor pushing her to run for the presidency in the event President Marcos calls a snap election. Meanwhile, Doy Laurel, the driving force of the opposition, moved quickly to unify anti-Marcos camps to push for his candidacy as the opposition's standard bearer. But before accepting any nomination from the UNIDO, Senator Doy wanted to make sure that no other presidential candidate would run outside of UNIDO. He was convinced that, given the peculiar circumstances at that time, the opposition could never risk of having two presidential

candidates for the opposition bloc. He feared that with two presidential candidates, the end result would be catastrophic for they would split the vote of the opposition and eventually lose the election. President Marcos, with all government powers and resources at his disposal, could simply smash them in the polls with impunity. Clearly, the overriding objective then was for the opposition to have a single candidate backed up by a potent political machine such as UNIDO. Such was the opposition's master plan.

Amidst rumors that Cory Aquino might eventually run for the presidency, Senator Doy wanted a confirmation straight from the horse's mouth. And he did. To avert any possibility of a divided opposition, Senator Doy advised Cory that even with a single opposition candidate the chances of the dominant opposition against the incumbent were slim. Cory then assured Doy "more than a dozen times" that she would never seek nor accept any nomination to run for the presidency. Unbeknownst to Senator Doy, that false assurance made by Cory was only the first among the series of reneged promises which will adversely rock his political career in the years to come. In a convention which was widely considered as the most colorful nominating convention in contemporary Philippine political history, Senator Doy Laurel was eventually nominated as UNIDO's presidential candidate. To prove her point, Cory even made an appearance and delivered a speech supporting the opposition's presidential candidate to run against President Marcos. Expectedly, to reassure the American government of domestic political and economic stability, President Marcos announced on November 3, 1985 via American television that he was conceding to the opposition's call. He desperately announced that snap elections will be held on February 7, 1986.

Senator Doy's high hopes to become the opposition's leading candidate in the 1986 snap election soon waned. Cory had a change of heart. Two days after President Marcos announced the date of the snap election, Cory suddenly heard the voice of God while praying at the Pink Sisters Convent. Out of the blue, Cory announced her divine anointment from above and offered herself for the presidency if presented with a million signatures. The fact of the matter is, after the blatant assassination of Senator Ninoy Aquino, the Aquino family and the opposition continued to inflame the hearts and minds of the people by enhancing the martyr's image. Anti-Marcos rallies were soon everywhere. Most of the time, Cory Aquino would deliver speeches and poignantly narrated how her husband suffered in the hands of a repressive dictator. Overnight, from an obscure plain housewife, Cory became more and more visible in anti-government demonstrations calling for the restoration of democracy. She promised, as she always does, to continue the legacy of her husband. Obviously, it did not take too long for Don Chino Roces to gather the required number of signatures when Cory imposed this as a condition for her to run as president.

Meanwhile, amidst this turn of events, Senator Doy laurel was already busy campaigning as the opposition's standard bearer under UNIDO. As soon as he heard the news, he immediately went out of his way and met Cory at her house on Times Street. Senator Doy tried to dissuade Cory from running. He told her that she should not run and instead remain as the people's symbol against the perceived forces of evil. "*Let me do the fighting and take the blows for you,*" said Senator Doy but Cory remained unperturbed.

Fearing that the Marcos government would eventually collapse and no definite opposition

candidate yet, Cardinal Sin decided to mediate between Doy and Cory. Initially, Cardinal Sin never asked anyone of them to withdraw from the race. He warned them however, that should both of them run for the presidency the people will be sad because surely, both of them will lose in the snap elections. In the fifth meeting held at Puyat residence in Quezon City, Cory finally spoke of her true intention in running for the presidency. Accordingly, she was not really interested in running the government. **All she wanted was to be a mere instrument or symbol to remove the ailing dictator and restore democracy. She then offered Doy the Prime Ministership and promised to step down after two years or so.** In addition, Cory offered

“thirty percent (30%) of the Cabinet to Doy and the remaining seventy percent to be appointed after prior consultation between them.” Present during this meeting were, Doy’s elder brother Senator Sotero Laurel, Cory’s daughter Ballsy and the late Vicente Puyat. Based on the truthful account of Doy Laurel, the agreement was reduced in writing and Cory initialed them item by item “on the left margin of the document.” Doy, believing that he had a better right to be the opposition’s presidential bet, simply asked for more time to decide.

Indeed, it was perhaps the hardest and the most crucial decision that Doy Laurel could ever make during his lifetime as a public servant. Alone in a beach house, Doy wrestled with the following questions which will determine his decision to step down in favor of Cory: *I knew Ninoy well. His word was good. But I did not know Cory well enough. Could I trust her? Would her word be good as Ninoy’s? Or was she a mere instrument of her family interests and her hidden advisers?*

But more importantly, Doy remembered the sacrifices of his esteemed father, the late President Jose P. Laurel, when he chose to give way to Ramon Magsaysay to go against the ailing incumbent President Quirino. Doy pondered, *What would my father do if he were in my place? How would he resolve this dilemma?* It was at this moment that Doy made the historical decision to step down in favor of Cory Aquino all for the termination of dictatorship and restoration of democracy.

The following morning after his brief sojourn at the Matabungkay beach house, Doy went back to Manila to meet Cory. During that meeting, Doy laid down his cards. He told Cory that he had decided to give way to her but on one condition: She should run under the dominant opposition party, UNIDO. But proud Cory sensed sinister motives on Doy’s proposal. She declined to run under UNIDO! This turn of events left Doy with no other choice but to run. In his statement before the press, Doy passionately exclaimed, **“I can sacrifice myself. I can sacrifice the presidency. But I cannot sacrifice the people who have suffered so much and worked so hard all these years , risking life, liberty, even honor, to put up the political machine that is now capable of toppling the Marcos dictatorship.”** That same day, Doy Laurel filed his certificate of candidacy with the COMELEC as UNIDO’s standard bearer for the upcoming snap elections.

But then again, Cory changed her mind. This time she was willing to run under UNIDO. She further reinstated her proposal that she will be a mere ceremonial president in the event they will win the elections. In a matter of time, both camps finalized their agreement. In Doy’s account what transpired that day was this: *Cory then turned into my two brothers and said, “i-formalize na ninyo and ating pinagkasunduan. But kuya Pito replied, Hindi na kailangan i-formalize pa iyan. Lalong masakit lamang kapag hindi tinupad. I reminded Cory that she already initialed all the items we had agreed upon on a piece of paper at the residence of Teng Puyat. Maliwanag na*

maliwanag na naman an gating pinagkasunduan. Ang mahala'y and nilalaman ng puso." On that same day, Cory and Doy went to the COMELEC and filed their respective certificates of candidacy as the official candidate of UNIDO.

After the February revolution, Cory and Doy were catapulted to power as President and Vice-President respectively. Whether Cory and Doy truly won the snap elections still remains a disputed question to this very day. But in truth and in fact, the 1986 snap elections had been clearly superseded by virtue of the people power revolution. Nonetheless, **it is worth noting that none of Cory's supposed pre-election promises to Doy were ever implemented.** In less than a month after the EDSA People Power revolution, Cory Aquino "unilaterally" abolished the 1973 Constitution and installed a revolutionary government via Proclamation No. 3. From the legal standpoint, although the snap elections were held under the auspices of the 1973 (Marcos) Constitution, Cory and Doy however, finished the electoral race outside of it. Consequently with the abolition of the 1973 Constitution, the *Batasan*, the Supreme Court and all national (including the Prime Ministership) and local positions were likewise abolished. For a time and prior to the ratification of the 1987 Constitution, Cory Aquino wielded extraordinary powers. Doy Laurel, Cory's Vice-President maintained that he was never consulted nor made to participate in any of the decision-making process leading to the establishment of a revolutionary government. Vice-President Doy Laurel, despite his brilliance and not to mention, the sacrifices he made for the country, was clearly out shadowed by Cory Aquino's *cordon sanitaire*. To make matters even worse, Vice-President Laurel had undeservingly earned the sobriquet of being a "wimp" under the Aquino administration. Up to his dying day, Vice-President Doy Laurel maintained that Cory Aquino had broken her promises to share power with him if they won. Cory Aquino on the other hand believed that the revolutionary nature of her rise to power had given her direct mandate to rule. ***"Whatever happened to all those promises you made, Cory? Said Doy. Cory then gave a halting reply, "I was told...that the EDSA revolution...erased all those promises."***

I never met nor talked to Vice-President Salvador H. Laurel in person. But there is one specific encounter which I would like to share. Back in 2001, VP Doy was invited as guest in *Cito Beltran's ANC* television program. There, VP Doy exuded his brilliance as a lawyer and a public servant. His razor-sharp intellect was very much intact despite years of retirement from actual public service. I got lucky when Cito Beltran allowed viewers to ask questions thru text messages. And so I hurriedly framed my question but I was not quite sure what to ask so I settled for a simple one: What was your favorite subject in law school? I was elated when the text message was read by Cito and VP Doy politely answered, *"Thank you Chris, mine would have to be constitutional law."* The mere mention of my name alone was enough to cause shock waves in my ears. Then he recounted his law school adventures and his teaching career when he was still professor at Lyceum Law School. I was surely elated by his account. Then he proceeded to talk about what truly happened after the EDSA revolution and the way he was treated during the Aquino administration. I couldn't help but question what made Cory Aquino pushed a brilliant and statesman-like Vice-President away from her administration. Now, I could safely say I know the answer: a symbol is a symbol, no more, no less. I hope other Filipinos will find time to remember a person named **Salvador "Doy" H. Laurel-a true statesman and a nationalist.**