

HONORING LEANDRO L. ALEJANDRO

Died, 19 September 1987

Privilege Speech

Rep. Lorenzo R. Tañada III

17 September 2007

“The struggle for freedom is the next best thing to actually being free,” is one of my favorite quotes from a student leader and a dear friend who made an impact on the lives of the student activists of the 1980’s. He was one of the two prominent personalities who were extra-judicially killed or executed immediately after EDSA I. On Wednesday, the 19th of September, the protest movement and civil society would be commemorating the 20th death anniversary of Leandro L. Alejandro or simply “Lean” to those who marched with him in the “parliament of the streets”.

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to give honor to Lean, a great man who was killed at the prime of his youth by a hail of bullets --- too young at the age of 27. He was a young man who lived his life with so much passion, patriotism, love and hope for our people. He would have been 47 had he been alive today. But as Civil Service Commissioner Karina David and a good friend of Lean said, ***“Hindi nakasabay si Lean sa pagtanda natin but he will outlive us all.”***

Mr. Speaker,

Lean was a quintessential youth activist and student leader during his time. I have no doubt in my mind that the student movement of the late ‘70s to the mid ‘80s would not have grown by leaps and bounds had it not been for Lean and his brand of leadership. He has shown and mustered the power of the youth to stand up to tyranny, challenge a dictatorship and prevail.

Lean’s style carries a lot of wit, disarming charm and respect, for not only was he able to present sharp yet simple analysis of the festering problems of the educational system and our society, he constantly

tried to learn from the very people he wanted to serve. **A genuine leader, who not only worked for the people, but he worked with the people.**

Lean was like family to us, the Tañadas. He was a proud right-hand man of my Lolo, the late Senator Lorenzo M. Tañada in political rallies at the height of the repressive dictatorship of the Marcoses. When he was not in political rallies, and he was not evading arrest nor organizing students and the urban poor, Lean was in my Lolo's house, analyzing Philippine political developments over shots of brandy. Lolo treated him as if he is one of his grandchildren.

My father, former Senator Wigberto E. Tañada was his lawyer when he got incarcerated, together with another student leader and former Sanlakas party-list Congressman JV Bautista in February 1985 for leading one rally in Aurora Blvd.

Lean, was a colleague in the student movement. I was graduating High School when I met him in 1981 in one of the rallies I attended with Tatay and Lolo calling for the boycott of the Presidential elections that year. When I was in College at the Ateneo and became a student leader, I would go to Vinzon's Hall in UP to meet and discuss politics with him and other student leaders. He advised me on how to mobilize Ateneans to participate in the student movement and in national issues. We became close friends because of my frequency in UP and his closeness to Lolo and Tatay.

There were so many issues Lean fought against. He tackled anti-imperialist issues during his student days, as chair of the youth for nationalism and democracy (YND) in 1981 and later as chair of the University Student Council in 1983-1984. He fought against IMF-WB loan conditions on the educational system particularly the Education Act 1982 that was directed at commercializing the educational system. He also fought against continued harassments of student organizations and campus journalists by the Marcos government.

In 1981, he formed the PEOPLE's MIND with another well-admired and deeply revered Senator, the late Ka Pepe Diokno and my Lolo to expose the sham presidential elections that year. He was part of the

National Council of the Nationalist Alliance for Justice Freedom and Democracy.

In 1983, he was instrumental in forming the Justice for Aquino Justice for All. We were together in the Student Leaders' Forum. We were also together in 1983 in the preparation for the revival of the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP).

In 1984, he was the Assistant Secretary-General of the Coalition of Organization for the Restoration of Democracy (CORD) while I was one of the student representatives.

In 1985, as the Secretary General of a multisectoral formation – the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan or Bayan, he led the campaign for the removal of US military bases, reject the operations of the Bataan Nuclear Power Plant and exposed the fraudulent debts that the Marcoses incurred which left our country with a huge debt burden to date.

Mr. Speaker,

A lot of student leaders and protest leaders much older than Lean admired and continue to admire Lean for his courage and conviction. He fought political repression, militarization and hamletting. He continuously faced threats of arrests throughout his student days. He went into hiding for a few months. Their house in Navotas was raided. When he went to student forums or rallies, he had to speak and leave right away to avoid possible arrest during the Marcos regime.

Lean's brilliance, charm and charisma were a threat to people who could not understand nor tolerate a different point of view. Lean's ideas and vision were a threat to people who are afraid of meaningful societal change. In fact, I think that had he been not murdered twenty years ago, he may be a statistic as one of those extrajudicially killed during the present administration or may be missing as the case of Jonas Burgos.

His killers of 20 years ago are still unpunished. Yet those who thought that by killing him, Lean's aspirations for justice and democracy would die with him are wrong, dead wrong.

Lean continues to inspire many of us. And as I would want him to inspire the youth of this generation, my 13-year old son and 8-year old daughter, as well as future generations, I today filed House Bill No 2543, which seeks to declare September 19 every year as Leandro L. Alejandro day. What Lean has done should properly be recorded in our nation's history. As my good friend JV Bautista crisply said, "Lean does not belong to any one of us, not one group, not one faction. He does not belong to any political ideology nor one political line. He belongs to the Filipino people."

By quickly passing **House Bill No. 2543**, the next generation will hear about him, will be inspired by his ideas, courage and love of country. His spirit will live on and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, my dear Colleagues,

Today, I likewise seek your support in seeking justice for Lean whose assassination 20 years ago remains one of the great unsolved crimes against Filipinos who have been campaigning for pro-people and pro democratic change. I likewise enjoin you to seek justice for the long list of similarly committed Filipinos who have suffered the same fate as Lean.

Before I end, Mr. Speaker, allow me to recognize and pay tribute to the parents of Lean who are with us in the gallery today – Aling Sally and Mang Rosendo Alejandro as well as to his wife – Lidy Nacpil and daughter Rusan. *Aling Sally at Mang Rosendo, maraming salamat po sa pagpapalaki at pag-aaruga ninyo kay Lean. Kami po ay sumasaludo sa inyong katapangan bilang mga magulang ng isang tunay na bayani ng ating bayan.*

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Thank you my dear Colleagues.