

## COUNTER REACTION

### F. RABANG

Shall we be serious this time?

Director Cañete mentioned about the present energy crisis and what the two autonomous regions in the south could possibly do about it.

Initially, I could say that this particular question involves diplomacy, rather than foreign policy. Under that particular law creating this autonomous government we are technically prohibited from passing measures or delving into this particular matter of foreign policy. But I suspect that the President is contemplating to eventually use these two regions for purposes of solving in part at least this energy crisis. I can say this because on at least two occasions when the Sangguniang Pampook of Regions IX and XII were in Malacañang, the President talked about the oil crisis. You must remember that the President has been giving emphasis to the Muslim problems in the south. I could remember for one that the President talked to Speaker Abdul Taer Alonto of our Sangguniang Pampook with a mission to the Middle East. That was a month ago I think. Of course, these are not first hand information, but Speaker Alonto told me that in about seven days' time from there he was supposed to be sent abroad to the Middle East to make certain minor negotiations about oil because at that time, the government of Iran threatened to cut off the oil supply to the Philippines. I have a great suspicion that the President will eventually use these two regions if only to solve, to a certain extent, the oil crisis in the Philippines. Of course there is no specific directive or request from the President to do this but in some way, I honestly believe that he will do it.

Regarding that matter on vehicle, the Lupong Tagapaganap ng Pook (LTP) has been given that particular power to allow or to disallow any request for a purchase of a capital equipment. I cannot remember the particular provision but under the law, all requests for purchases of vehicles will be coursed through the LTP

and through a resolution. We have to approve the request or disapprove it. Regarding this investigation, this particular power is foreign to other regions. Under Presidential Decree 1618, all administrative complaints against governors, city mayors, and local officials are to be coursed through or submitted or to be lodged to the LTP. We have the power to suspend, for not more than sixty days, any public official without prior clearance from the President. In the event that we will convict the respondent or impose some penalty, that is the only time that a clearance will be obtained from the President. Well, I think this was not given to the regional autonomous government by way of a concession so that this rebel movement should cease but rather it forms part of an autonomy. If you must give somebody some authority, you must at least give him some freedom to exercise that authority. Of what good would autonomy be if our hands will be tied all the time? That is why whenever we meet we call certain directors like the Civil Service Director and then he will always say that there is this regulation here. The COA will do it and then sometimes we have to react, not very violently though, but we are sort of irritated. We remind the Director that you have to do this, you have to amend your regulations in accordance with the concept of autonomy — that is the law. If you are not given the law, we will give it to you. Of course, sometimes you cannot also blame these regional directors. They are so used to this centralized form of government that they would not wish to understand autonomy if that will mean diminishing their power. Under that decree the regulations of the Budget Ministry, the Civil Service, and the Commission on Audit are supposed to be amended to conform with the concept of autonomy. We are sort of spoiled. But that is the spirit of autonomy. How can we claim ourselves to be autonomous when everything that we need had to be asked from the central government? In fact we petitioned the President to broaden our powers to let us delve on certain other matters aside from those enumerated. Well, of course, no matter what they say, no matter how many hundreds of times we mention autonomy we are not really as autonomous as you believe we are. I think it will take a few years more. This is still an experiment and I remember Minister Barbero once said, "You cannot finish this problem in a very short time, I'm going to quote what my colleague in congress, Congressman Laurel once said, "We have to do this gradually." So really we are facing a lot of problems.

The granting of autonomy in the south did not just crop up. As we have said, we were born and conceived the hard way. It took thousands of death, sufferings, for Regions IX and XII to be born. Sometimes I could even say, it's all the fault of Assemblyman Al Caluang for going to the hills together with Nur Misuari. At any rate, the granting of autonomy to the south was sort of a compromise. Do you remember that Nur Misuari was demanding outright secession from the Philippines — the whole of Mindanao including Palawan—thirteen provinces? They wanted to establish their own army, a Supreme Court; their own money is the seal. This was sort of a compromise. Even then it took a lot of negotiations in Tripoli.

As to the success of this form of government, we can only cross our fingers. We really hope that this will succeed. Again, I remember Minister Barbero when he said, "Assemblyman, the President has high stakes in this government of yours. He's betting all his money on you. You cannot afford to lose because if you will lose, that fellow beside the Pasig will also lose all his money. The President is betting everything for the success of these two autonomous governments." He told us time and again, "If you will fail, I will fail because the people of the Philippines are not the only ones watching you. There are the countries of the Middle East and I know that many of them are praying that you will fail and you will fail miserably. So please take good care. Forget about your quarrels there. I've heard that you have been quarreling. You have to have that government succeed." I hope we will not fail the President. At any rate that is a form of an experiment. Well, every now and then we commit errors; we have some excesses. It is perhaps because of our desire to exert this concept of autonomy which is not really concrete in existence. But somehow we manage to make amends. But the main purpose of this autonomous government is to establish peace in Mindanao. Even if the amount involved is rather big, it is worth it. As what the President said, "I would rather spend money for the bullets, but not for the coffins. I have had enough of these sufferings."

In Region XII, at least, the Christians are aware of the thinking of the President, all other things being equal, to give preference to our Muslim brothers. We know this, that is why even in the selection of the candidates for the regional assembly, there were more Muslims taken than Christians. In the regional assembly, there are eleven Muslims and only nine Christians. In the Executive Coun-

cil, three are Muslims and only one is from the Holy Land.

To make this rather clear to our Muslim brothers, we have passed a bill in our assembly, naming the Cotabato-Lanao Highway that is to be constructed, which is around 168 kilometers. We named it the Sultan Kudarat Highway in honor of our hero Sultan Kudarat. Formerly, we proposed to name it the Cotabato-Lanao Peace Connection Road but we changed it to Sultan Kudarat Highway in order to show how we understand our Muslim brothers.

As far as employees are concerned, we still have some quarrels about how we employ people, how we help supervise the employment. We were already able to convince the Civil Service Commission that even if all matters are not equal, we should give preference to the Muslims. Only two weeks ago when Commander Ronnie came out from the hills, he brought along with him 256 men. A good number of these people are literate enough, educated enough to be employed. We made representations with the Civil Service to make them close their eyes for a few moments, at least in the acquisition of the appointments. Somehow, Director Lakuna (not from the Holy Land, agreed on condition that we will back him up in the event that there will be some problems later. We assured him that we will do that. Of course, we did not threaten him that if he will not do that we will recommend him for transfer. Under Section 38 of that law, the Lupong Tagapagpaganap ng Pook is empowered to recommend for the transfer of any regional director whose face we do not like. I think we have been dangling this sword of Damocles over the heads of a number of directors and somehow we have succeeded. You see the situation is not really as normal as they are in other regions.

At present, there is no particular legislation about these positions but the law itself states that the Civil Service Commission should amend its regulations. It is stated in general terms and we prefer to interpret that the Civil Service should approve our recommendations, as non-eligibles, as long as they are Muslims. After all, the wording of the law is not specific. The Civil Service Commission should amend its rules in accordance with the concept of autonomy and we prefer to insist to the directors that even if a fellow is not so qualified, in the sense that he has no civil service eligibility, as long as he is employed in Region XII, he is still safe, he will not be questioned. Of course, you cannot say that in Luzon but in that abnormal place of ours, we can always hide under that claim of experiment. If we make certain errors, if certain tubes will be busted, we

can always say "experiment *lang kasi*." But we are really hoping it will succeed. Little by little, it is succeeding. But to tell you the truth, this concept of autonomy in our place is so new that even many professionals even lawyers in our regions are not yet very conversant about this. I think you have to give them handouts. Whenever we have speaking engagements we always make it a point to delve into this autonomous government by way of information drive. Teachers, even lawyers still inquire, "*Ano ba ang ibig sabihin ng autonomous government na ito?*" Well, of course, there are those who are really conversant. But I think it will take time for people to really understand this autonomous form of government.

## OPEN FORUM

*Eugenio U. Silang:*

Is the power to tax on the part of the regional autonomous government in lieu of the national power to tax or is it in addition to that power?

*Rabang:*

Under the law authorizing the Sangguniang Pampook to pass a tax measure, it provides that that particular measure, in order to be applicable, in order to be enforceable, has to be approved by the Minister of Finance. That is what we are trying to amend — the clearance from the Minister of Finance whether to make it effective or not. Of course we are not supposed to impose a tax on something that is already being taxed because that will be double taxation. But what we do not seem to like is the provision in the law which says that before that measure could be effective it has to be cleared with the Minister of Finance.

*Miguela Pineda-Roldan:*

I would just like to ask on programs and its implementations in relation to the autonomous government. If we say we have programs for the region, what particular body prepares these programs? What is the difference between a non-autonomous government and an autonomous government in so far as programs and implementations are concerned? How about the supervision made by different regional offices as well as the case of regional autonomous government?

*Chairman Tugung:*

There is no difference because even under the law, the autonomous government is only required to supervise on projects of national orientation or funded by the national government to be implemented in the autonomous government. We simply supervise in the preparation of programs of work or strategy of implementa-

tion. We usually leave it to the agency concerned. But as a matter of practice in order that we always keep on knowing their activities we usually require them to submit their activities every month for us to know what projects they intend to implement. Through this, we can also inform the different governors and the mayors since frankly speaking, a governor of a province does not know what projects of the national government are to be implemented in his or her province. We feel that the governor should be involved. We gather all the data from the different regional agencies. As soon as we have these, we forward them to Province A to inform the governor with the hope that he will be able to see whether the projects are fully implemented or not.