

Philippine Chief Justice's Dramatic Testimony
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By Edwin Espejo

Weakened Corona attacks lawmakers, President Aquino, almost collapses

By the time he took his leave from the chamber where the Philippines Senate is seeking to convict him on corruption charges, Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona was already a picture of a defeated man, far from the powerful figure many thought he was or he thought he was.

And on the 40th day of his impeachment trial, Corona may have just started his own political demise. He denied that he possessed illegally acquired funds, saying he would open his bank accounts for inspection if the 188 members of the House of Representatives who voted to impeach him would do the same. He accused President Benigno Aquino III of conspiring to remove him from office. Impeachment proceedings must be initiated by the Congress under Philippine law.

After reading a lengthy statement, Corona abruptly asked to be excused, leaving the Senate without permission and before he could be questioned. Senate President Juan Ponce Enrile ordered security guards to shut the building to prevent Corona from leaving. The 63-year-old chief justice later returned in a wheelchair and his lawyers said he felt weak because he was diabetic and did not intend to flee. He was later brought to the intensive care unit of a Manila hospital and his spokesman Midas Marquez said that his diagnosis was “a possible heart attack.”

Corona stripped himself of all judicial decorum and courtesy when he began to speak in defense of himself. He insisted on reading an opening statement and proceeded with a lengthy narrative of his own appreciation of things. Despite being courteously reminded to proceed with his testimony, Corona lashed out at his perceived political and personal enemies.

As promised, he was accorded all the respect and allowed to do his act despite continuing objection from the prosecution, which was barred from interrupting to manifest their objection to hearsay and irrelevant testimonies of the Chief Justice.

Corona, ironically, resorted to the very tactics he is accusing his detractors of. He resorted name-calling, even washing dirty linen in public, desecrating the memory of the dead and using the language of the bully, and exposed his true character – a man not worthy of his position.

He also displayed a manifest lack of the intelligence required and expected from the highest magistrate of the land with the way he conducted himself after delivering his scathing monologue. He took all 23 senator-judges, including politically-reborn Juan Ponce Enrile, for a ride and led them into believing that he is fully submitting himself to the jurisdiction of impeachment court only to arrogantly walk away with a smug on his face.

What a pathetic sight it was when Corona was finally brought back to the Senate impeachment court. Contrived or not, his being led into the room in a wheelchair instantly

reminded everybody of his principal benefactor Gloria Macapagal Arroyo who was also denied exit (escape, too?) at the Manila International Airport. It seems flight was always the option for those who enjoyed power, too much of it, during the previous government.

It now matters no more whether Corona is guilty or not of all the charges hurled against him by the House of Representatives. By his own doing yesterday, he proved he really did not deserve one day as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippines.

Corona came into the Senate session hall waving his hands to the public and his few supporters. When he arrived, he was full of swagger. He left limping, though, in a wheelchair.

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