

WOMEN IN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

TECLA SAN ANDRES ZIGA*

There was a time when people found nothing wrong with women being referred to as the "weaker sex" for then the husband was the sole authority and leader in the house. Women then did not complain for they had been taught by their mothers that God and Nature had destined them for that specific role.

But this state of things did not last forever for as a result of women's agitation for equality, women now enjoy equal rights to a certain extent in employment, educational opportunities, in politics and in law.

Since the United Nations began in 1945, much progress has been made in improving the status of women in the world. The laws of nations have been and are being changed to accord women equal rights with men in political, economic, social and family life. Despite all the efforts exerted, however, by the United Nations and international women's groups, age-old traditions, attitudes and practices are slow to change, and the gap between law and reality remains very wide.

Today even as the world marks International Women's Year, women in various parts of the world remain disadvantaged and are victims of discrimination. For the most part they neither fully participate, nor share equally in economic and social development. Another glaring illustration of discrimination is that no adequate statistics have been gathered to give an accurate picture of women's contributions to society. This is a clear proof that the contribution of the housewife to the national economy is not measured or recognized by the economist and national planner.

In recent years, however, there has been a growing awareness that women's contribution is essential to the progress of society and could play a major role in solving crucial world problems. The United Nations citizens, concerned about the status of women, look to International Women's Year as the time the world may make a major breakthrough in the fight for women's rights.

The Filipino Woman

Historians say that before the coming of the Spaniards, Filipino women enjoyed equal rights with men — female children could succeed to the headship of the barangay and could become priestesses, Filipino folklore also traces the creation of the first man and woman as emerging simul-

**Professorial Lecturer, College of Law, University of the Philippines.*

taneously from the two identical halves of one huge bamboo. Until today, the Filipino husband or wife refers to the other as "*ang aking kabiyaak*."

But western civilization soon changed this with new laws which then proceeded to relegate women to a subordinate position.

If we are to ask the men in our country, however, they will unhesitatingly say that the Filipino women does not need to be emancipated because she already has the status other women seek. Some may even jokingly add that it is the Filipino man who needs to be emancipated.

For it is pointed out that in the Filipino home, the wife holds the purse, manages the house and controls her husband's expenses. Filipino women also occupy a high position in society and are active in the political, civic, social, religious, educational and other fields. Filipino women have also attained high positions in the professions, in politics, in business, in government service and others.

Here in the Philippines some women have occupied high positions in government. Since 1946 up to 1969, (the last national elections), we had on record eleven women elected to the House of Representatives, and they are:

1. Remedios Fortich, Misamis Oriental — 1946
2. Medina Lacson de Leon, Bataan — 1949
3. Carmen Dinglasan, Capiz — 1953
4. Tecla San Andres Ziga, Albay — 1955
5. Josefina B. Duran, Albay — 1961
6. Aurora Abad, Batanes — 1965
7. Magnolia Antonino, La Union — 1965
8. Salud Parreño, Leyte — 1965
9. Juanita Nepomuceno, Pampanga — 1965
10. Gloria Tabiana, Iloilo — 1965
11. Corazon Primicias, Pangasinan — 1965

Seven women were elected at large to the Senate of the Philippines:

1. Geronima Pecson — 1947
2. Pacita Madrigal — 1955
3. Maria K. Katigbak — 1961
4. Tecla S. Ziga — 1963
5. Eva Kalaw — 1965
6. Magnolia Antonino — 1967
7. Helena Benitez — 1967

Six women were elected provincial governors:

1. Teresa Dupaya, Cagayan — 1963
2. Carmen Crisologo, Ilocos Sur — 1963
3. Adela Serra Ty, Surigao — 1963
4. Consuelo Caro, Agusan — 1971
5. Irene Balite, Samar — 1971
6. Salvacion Iñiguez, Leyte — 1971

and two women city mayors:

1. Beatriz Durano, Danao City, Cebu — 1963
2. Amelia Gordon, Olongapo — 1971

and a good number of vice governors, members of the provincial board, municipal mayors, vice mayors and councilors.

In the Judicial Department, we now have the distinction of having the first woman member of the Supreme Court, the highest court of the land, two woman justices in the Court of Appeals, four woman judges of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court and five judges of the Court of First Instance and a good number of municipal judges.

In the Executive Department, we now have two women Ambassadors namely, Ambassador Rafaelita Hilario Soriano for Israel and Ambassador Leticia Shahani for Romania and two consuls general: Belen Bautista, New Orleans and Julita Palarca, Seattle. On the Department level, except in one instance, a woman has always been appointed to the Department of Social Welfare. In the Department of Education where more than half of the teachers are women, we have had only thirteen women division superintendents, namely:

DIVISION	NAME OF INCUMBENT	HEADQUARTERS
1. Antique	Mrs. Josefina P. Palanog—Asst.	San Jose
2. Batanes	Mrs. Lolita B. Galita	Basco
3. Batangas I	Miss Melecia M. Macabuhay	Batangas City
4. Bulacan	Mrs. Felicita G. Bernardino	Malolos
5. Davao del Sur	Mrs. Alfreda O. Alcantara — Asst. Div. Supt. Schs. In Charge	Digos
6. Guimaras	Mrs. Concepcion R. Llavare Head Educ. Supv. I In Charge	Jordan
7. Ilocos Sur	Miss Rosalia Albalos	Vigan
8. Laguna	Mrs. Elena L. Benjamin — Asst.	Sta. Cruz
9. Nueva Vizcaya I	Mrs. Magdalena P. Castillo	Bayombong
10. Occ. Mindoro	Mrs. Purificacion T. Abeleda	Mamburao

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| 11. Quezon II | Mrs. Josefina B. de Villa
(On detail) | Lucena City |
| | Mrs. Lourdes N. Veluz — Asst. | |
| 12. Quezon III | Miss Rita J. Ramirez
Gen. Educ. Supv. I In Charge | Mauban |
| 13. Zambales | Mrs. Carmen Mercado
Chief Educ. Supv. I
In Charge (on detail) | Iba |

and fourteen women city superintendents:

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| 1. Baguio City | Mrs. Aurea A. Lopez — Asst. |
| 2. Batangas City | Mrs. Juliana A. Espina — Asst. City Supt. of Schs.
In Charge |
| 3. Cabanatuan City | Mrs. Sabina J. Ferrer |
| 4. Caloocan City | Mrs. Modesta Boquiren |
| 5. Dagupan City | Mrs. Heriberta M. Caquiao — (on detail) |
| 6. Iriga City | Mrs. Felipa Ocampo — Pub. Schs. Div. Acad. Supv.
In Charge |
| 7. Manila | Dr. Josefina R. Navarro |
| 8. Olongapo City | Miss Fe Manza
Miss Paulita Esteban — Asst. |
| 9. Oroquieta City | Miss Victoria V. Loreto |
| 10. Quezon City | Mrs. Conmemoracion M. Concepcion
Mrs. Atanacia O. Dorado |
| 11. San Carlos City
(Pangasinan) | Dr. Adelina P. Mil |
| 12. San Pablo City | Miss Angelita M. Pulgado
Pub. Schs. Div. Acad. Supv.
In Charge |
| 13. Silay City | Miss Pura Benedicto |
| 14. Toledo City | Mrs. Augusta L. Dimataga |

one superintendent of normal school, namely, Mrs. Obdulia R. Cinco of Leyte Normal School and two women bureau directors namely, Dr. Liceria B. Soriano of the Bureau of Public Schools, and Mrs. Lucina Alday of the Bureau of Woman and Minors. Atty. Raquel Fidelino is Chairman of the Wage Commission under the Department of Labor.

In the Philippine National Bank, for the first time in its history, we have one woman vice president, Mrs. Felicidad Diaz, Chief of the Trust Department.

In the Department of Trade, formerly Commerce and Industry, the Chief of the Legal Division is Atty. Felicidad Calip, and Atty. Rosario Lopez is also the Chief, Legal Division in the Securities and Exchange Commission. Mrs. Razon Haresco is Chairman of the Tariff Commission, Atty. Virginia Biaquis, Executive Director, Fair Trade Board and a good number of women lawyers occupy the position of Chief or Senior Assistant or senior executive in the various departments.

In the Central Bank, the highest financial institution of our government, we have Belen E. Gutierrez occupying one of the highest positions which is that of being a member of the Monetary Board. Two special assistants to the Governor are in the high positions also in the Central Bank and they are both occupied by women: Escolastica Vince for Research Sector and Carlota Valenzuela for Supervision and Examination Sector and a number of positions of bank executive and director and associate director of departments are also occupied by women.

In the Development Bank of the Philippines, one woman occupying a high position is Alice Reyes as the manager of Industrial Projects Department I in charge of loans of more than one million.

Women in Other Parts of the World

What about the women in other countries? Only very recently foreign wire dispatches hummed with the news of the election of Margaret Thatcher as head of Britain's opposition Conservative Party. Much of the joy and hope springs from the possibility that the 49 year old Mrs. Thatcher could become Europe's first woman Prime Minister if her party wins.

In Italy, of the 950 members of the Senate and the lower chamber, only 30 are women. Moreover, Italy has never had a woman cabinet minister. There is one woman undersecretary in the labor ministry and in San Marino on eastern Italy, considered to be the world's oldest and tiniest Republic, Miss Clara Bossaglia made history last year when she became public works minister — the first woman ever to hold such a position since the Republic was founded 1500. The Danish women were very much in the political minority but in the 1971 elections they increased their number of seats in Parliament from 17 to 30.

While in all probability Mrs. Thatcher may not win the elections and thus be the first woman prime minister in Europe, in at least two of the less developed countries of Asia — Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mrs. Bandaranaike have been elected to the highest post.

Although, in 1973, women were legally eligible to vote in all elections and to stand for election on equal terms with men in 124 countries, there

are still limitations on these rights in five countries (Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Nigeria [in six states], Saudi Arabia and Yemen). The percentage of women who hold policy-making posts in the legislative, judicial, and executive branch is growing, yet it remains pitifully small in the vast majority of countries, even those where they have long had the right to vote. Moreover, it has been pointed out that where women have been appointed as government ministers, they have often been entrusted primarily with responsibility for women's affairs (France) or with "female-related subjects", such as social or child welfare or social affairs.

Women often hold back, preferring to campaign for a male rather than a female candidate. In some instances they are hesitant to leave their homes and children, while in others, they do not fully grasp the importance of involvement at the decision-making level both to themselves and society. In Chile and Peru, for example, only 20 per cent of the women surveyed in one study had a genuine desire to pursue a political or civil service career. The factor of choice is an important one in evaluating women's participation in development and the extent of control over their own future.

Recent estimates show that the percentage of women elected to national parliaments remains small in most countries. This may in part be due to the reluctance of political parties to support women candidates. The highest percentages are reported for the USSR (35), the Ukrainian SSR (34), Finland (21.5), Denmark (17), and Poland (15).

In recent years India, Israel and Sri Lanka have had women prime ministers. At the local level where the participation of women is greater, 47.4 per cent women were elected in the USSR and 45 percent in the Ukrainian SSR.¹

Woman Power

Today 51 per cent of the country's population are women. The power of the Filipino woman at the polls is therefore tremendous. But statistics gathered from 1953 to 1971 by Dr. Irene Cortes show the large disparity between the number of women elected as against the number of men.²

As shown above: Since 1953 to 1971 there have only been 7 women senators elected as against 66 men senators; 129 women mayors as against 1,444 men mayors; eleven congresswomen as against 407 congressmen.

¹THE SITUATION AND STATUS OF WOMEN TODAY: SOME ESSENTIAL FACTS, U.N. OPI/Dec. 1974.

²"Women Power at the Polls," Times Journal, February 19, 1975, p. 1, 10.

COMELEC statistics also show that in eight of eleven elections there was a comparatively higher turnout of women voters than men. It is a fact though that notwithstanding their number-power in elections, the women of the Philippines have never banded together to rally on any issue nor to back up a particular candidate. Had they done so, more women would have been elected. This may mean many things but what surfaces is that in elections, the Filipina assumes the role of being more of a conscientious voter than a woman. Or, as some men are wont to say, perhaps it is because deep within her the Filipina still believes that politics and government should be left to the men, and it is enough that a few women get elected or appointed to high offices, if only to show the rest of the world that the Filipina is just as "liberated" as they are.

The Filipino Woman's Contribution to National Development

Through the years, the Filipino woman has shown an amazing ability to run a household, rear a large family and at the same time engage in a full time profession or occupation. In the urban areas where social mobility is marked, many Filipino women, even with financial constraints and with large families, are actively engaged in social and business ventures. Today, though, there is a marked increase in the number of women workers because of poverty, economic pressures and rising expectations.

The involvement of more and more women in various fields of endeavor has caught the attention of "women watchers" from all over the world. It is quite correct to cite supportive legislation for education and employment, and the influence of mass media as among the factors that contributed to the development of the Filipino woman. I believe though that most of the credit for the emergence of the Filipina from her cocoon of reticence to the bustling world of politics, business and government should go to the years she spent in the home where she was trained for her role as keeper of the home and preserver of the time-honored values of our race.

This should be the thrust of women's participation — not just "women's liberation" *per se* but in the creation of greater opportunities to contribute more fully to national development and not to be relegated to professions that are traditionally "for women only professions" like social work, teaching, nursing and the like. It means their greater participation in national planning, the formulation of government policies; it means widening the opportunities for rural women to improve themselves and their families' levels of living. I read sometime ago a statement by a President of an American University embodying this thought relevant to

day, that if the world must be saved from a third world war, if humanity must be redeemed from so much ignorance, poverty and degradation, let us have women in the highest councils.

While it is true that the Filipino woman has not yet been granted full equality under Philippine laws, the burden of responsibility to help achieve this equality rests on us, the women, ourselves. The first step is for us to exercise the equal rights already assured us and make our woman power felt in the avenues opened to us and join forces to combat the ills of ignorance, poverty and corruption.