

Who Will Fight for Forest Conservation?

For the past several years we witnessed the disappearance of our forests — the resources so vital to the national security. The Bureau of Forestry which was entrusted to protect it did not have enough funds to carry on its gigantic task. It appealed for support to the President and Congress but, what did it get? It met rebuffs and suffered frustrations.

The late President Magsaysay instituted his “Land for the Landless Policy” which turned out to be “land for the lawless,” a policy which emboldened not only the kaingineros but also the squatters and the land speculators in destroying the forests. During the Macapagal era the Bureau of Forestry had experienced having six directors in less than two years — an act that has demoralized every forester to the core. The Bureau asked for more funds to hire more personnel but what did it get? It received another blow on its face from Congress. Instead of giving more funds, Congress enacted two laws which, according to the director of the Bureau of Forestry Apolonio Rivera, will not only tolerate the so called cultural minorities to squat and make kaingin in our forests but also requires the Bureau to facilitate the granting of titles over the lands they occupied. Thus, the enactment of these laws made the President and Congress the worst enemies of forest conservation.

Why did the President and Congress remain deaf and blind to forest conservation? Was it because they did not feel the misery of the masses who had experienced floods and droughts? Or was it because, we failed to let them feel through our own fault the real significance of forest conservation? Perhaps the only way we can get the cooperation of the President and Congress is to act as a solid body and tell them in no uncertain terms what we really mean by forest conservation. But, who will lead the people and have them rally behind them in the crusade for forest conservation. The persons who are more qualified to lead the people are the heads of the different forestry agencies.

This year we witnessed the invaluable cooperation of the Press in focussing the attention of the public to forest destruction. Forestry information writers have strongly denounced forest destruction. They pointed out the reasons for the failure of forest protection, such as lack of funds and political intervention. Through the different media of mass communication they have created awareness on the part of the people to forest conservation.

What we need today is a man who will lead the fight, with a courage, will and zeal that will enlist the people’s support for a better forest service and conservation. Lip service to forest service has only brought disappointment. Action is the need of the hour.—A.C.D.

Conservation and Marcos’ Challenge to Greatness

President Ferdinand E. Marcos’ cancellation of the timber grants in Mt. Apo National Park right on his first day of office has injected a ray of hope and optimism to the forestry spirit already beleaguered by frustrations and disappointments.

Forest conservation was taken for granted during the past years. The Late Pres. Ramon Magsaysay instituted his “Land for the Landless Policy” which turned out to be “Land for the Lawless” and emboldened not only the kaingineros but also the squatters and land speculators in denuding the forests. No other period in the Philippine history have

the forests been so ruthlessly destroyed that all efforts to check the impetus of forest destruction brought about by the policy proved of little significance. Forest destruction did not also slow down during the Garcia regime.

Recovery from the demoralization of the forest conservationists as a result of the Mag-saysay policy was not yet attained when the Macapagal era set in. Demoralization among the rank and file of the forest protectors was further aggravated by frequent changes of the director of the Bureau of Forestry and placing non-foresters as directors. Of course, former Pres. Macapagal did not forget to put up a smokescreen to cover from the people's view what he intended to do. Although he declared in an Executive Order the period from August 1965 to July 1975 as forestry development decade, who would believe him that he was really sincere in conserving the forests and developing the forest industries after he had permitted the issuing of timber grants over half of the Mt. Apo National Park? Thanks to Pres. Marcos the licenses were cancelled and the National Park was saved.

President Marcos is indeed the new hope in the conservation of the Philippine forests. All the efforts of the Filipino foresters, including all other citizens in forest protection, are of no avail if the president does not cooperate. In one pronouncement or one stroke of the pen he can wipe out the entire forests. On the other hand, he can make conservation succeed if he continues to be sincere in implementing our forest laws and by giving more allotments for forest protection.

With President Marcos at the helm of government and the different forestry agencies cooperating, there is no reason perhaps why we cannot succeed in forest conservation. The U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt and Forester Gifford Pinchot were able to make unprecedented success in U.S. forest conservation. If Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos, with the zeal and sincerity of President Roosevelt and Forester Pinchot, will go after forest violators we shall have gained a beachhead against the enemies of forest conservation. Marcos is the new hope of forest conservation. Will our forests live again? — ACD

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D. G. Reyes Logging Ent.

565 Guerrero St.
Davao City

Tel. No. 6741

Cable Address:
"Reyent Davao"

Compliments of

ROMAN A. TIROL

Executive Vice President

Dalisay Invest. Co.