

**Sec. Eduardo Romualdez:**

## THE ONCE AND FUTURE KIN

By MARIO PATRICIO

**W**HEN President Marcos first named the men who were to compose his Cabinet, Finance Secretary-designate Eduardo Romualdez had seemed at once to be an unfortunate choice, not because of any failing for the job but ironically because he happened to be related to the President. Many of the President's close advisers feared then that it was politically unwise, but the President named his cousin (by marriage to the First Lady) anyway, certain that Romualdez's qualifications and his subsequent performance in the job would blunt the criticism.

In the three years since his appointment, Secretary Romualdez not only blunted the criticism but was cited as well for his performance by the press and public alike. This, while other members of the Cabinet became the butt of criticism, and of harassment by the opposition. And for awhile, it had seemed as though the public and the President's perennial critics had forgotten that he was a Romualdez.

It came then as a surprise to many when the national dailies headlined recently the news that Romualdez was "irrevocably resigning" from the Cabinet. The news report mentioned no more beyond saying that the Finance Secretary was quitting for reasons of health. But coming as it did in the wake of the President's Cabinet revamp, the press and public alike speculated that Romualdez was resigning because of a conflict of policies with the President.

The President immediately issued a statement saying that he was rejecting the secretary's resignation. But this did not quiet down the fuss over the issue. Another story made the headlines, and this time it suggested that the finance chief had tendered his resignation because he (Romualdez) "was displeased by the President's alleged support of BIR Commissioner Misael P. Vera in the reorganization of the Revenue Office." The same story added



*WITH PRES. MARCOS, Sec. Romualdez and some government officials discuss a vital administration project.*

that Romualdez would "insist" on his resignation.

This drew another disclaimer from the President who stated curtly that Romualdez would stay as finance chief. But the alleged conflict had been fanned by rumors and speculations, and the men who had once seemed an unhappy choice for the finance portfolio now hugged the limelight because he did not want it.

When interviewed at his office at the Beneficial Life building in Intramuros, Secretary Romualdez seemed puzzled and dismayed by the fuss over his resignation. A big and apparently shy man, he seemed an unlikely man to hug the headlines.

"When the President first mentioned the projected Cabinet revamp to me," he began, "I expressed to him my desire to return to private life. I told him that my health was beginning to fail me. I have previously expressed this wish to him on past occasions, and I asked that he give the same his renewed consideration. The President rejected my resignation and requested that I continue as Secretary of Finance. I took his wish for me to stay as a command, and so I left him thinking that the matter of my resignation was closed.

"You can imagine my surprise when I found my name in the headlines a few days later, along with my reported insistence and my alleged conflict with the President. I believe that there has been too much speculation and conjecture on my resignation."

With regard to the so-called conflict over the BIR, the Secretary hastens to point out that the President has practically supported him in all his actions. He admits, of course, to an occasional difference with the President over certain questions, but he says: "This is to be expected. Members of the Cabinet are not blind followers of the President."

Does his kinship to the First Lady make him uncomfortable as a member of the Cabinet? "It's not that I feel uncomfortable," he answers. "I realize only too well that I am related to the First Lady. But I believe that when the President asked me to serve the government in 1966, it was because he felt that I can contribute to the work of nation-building." He admits to a fear that the President's political rivals might just use his presence in the Cabinet as issue in the coming Presidential elections, but since the President has insisted that he stay as Finance Secretary, he will continue to serve in that capacity.

He declines to comment on his performance as Finance Secretary beyond saying simply that he has tried to perform his work to the best of his ability. His record would seem to speak for itself. Indeed, a review of that record would reveal too much that is significant and would be wasted if he should resign simply because he happens to be a cousin of the President, or because his health is slightly failing him. **PM**