

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Nene" Q. Pimentel, Jr. (PDP-Laban) today said he doesn't mind if politicians are relegated to the background during protests rallies against the Arroyo presidency as workers, students and other people who used to be among the silent majority are now more willing to go out to the streets to express their outrage over the excesses of the administration.

Mr. Pimentel said the disenchantment over the sad state of affairs in the country is driving the ordinary citizens to join street marches and protests, inspired by the call for change and action by the Catholic bishops, priests, nuns and other influential leaders of the community.

"In fact, it is my suggestion that we politicians should lay off from visible participation in protest rallies because the people seem to be turned off by our presence," he said.

He said it may be better for politicians to leave to the bishops, Bro. Eddie Villanueva (of Jesus is Lord Movement) and Bro. Mike Velarde (of El Shadai charismatic group) the task of mounting massive demonstrations so as not to inject partisan politics into these activities.

"The more we keep ourselves out of sight in mobilization and demonstrations, I think, would be for the better," Mr. Pimentel said.

"Perhaps, we should stay away from these demonstrations because, otherwise the impression is that we may be manipulating the process to our advantage," Senator Pimentel said.

He said the "critical mass" would be there to compel President Arroyo to heed the calls for her resignation on Feb. 29 when Bro. Eddie and Bro. Mike are expected to join forces with the Catholic bishops and heads of other religious groups in mobilizing their members for a massive prayer rally in Rizal Park.

"That may yet be the tipping point as regards the political fate of Mrs. Arroyo. And perhaps that is why First Gentleman Mike Arroyo is already paving the way for change by going to Hong Kong," Mr. Pimentel said.

Senator Pimentel said that through people power "we have shown to the world that we are capable of changing our government without bloodshed."

He reacted to the frustration expressed by Archbishop of Jaro Angel Lagdameo, president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, that the President of the republic installed through the EDSA-2 People Power, turned out to be "the most corrupt."

"It is not the fault of the people power that the leaders who benefited from people power turned out to be worse than the ones they had replaced," Mr. Pimentel said. # # #