



## *Razor's Edge*

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# *There She Goes Again*

**NEW YORK, NY Aug 12 (PinoyGlobal)** - Over a century ago, Ella Wheeler Cox said, "Weep and you weep alone. Laugh and the world laughs with you." This profound observation still rings a bell today as it aptly describes the unconscionable dinner party at which Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo was the honored guest in New York last week. According to her damage control team that justified her presence in that night of shame, it was Congressman Ferdinand Martin Romauldez, nephew of former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos, who footed the astronomical amount of \$20,000 (P960,000) at the exotic French restaurant Le Cerqui.

This springs to mind that ex-Pres. Fidel Ramos also paid \$6,000 for a night at Waldorf Astoria Hotel on one of his junkets abroad, which he did in 31 countries at the expense of poor Juan de la Cruz. I guess this virus of spending and traveling on taxpayers' money is very virulent because invariably our chiefs of state are infected.

In the case of Gloria she could be liable under the anti-graft law that penalizes receiving gifts or any material benefit from any person for whom the public official has secured or obtained, or will secure or obtain, any government permit or license. It also bans receiving gifts in connection with government transactions.

In particular Presidential Decree No. 46 punishes public officials from receiving gifts on any occasion, as well as private individuals, who give the gifts to officials.

President Arroyo was joined by her globe trot-

ting entourage of bootlicking cabinet members, congressmen and bureaucrats along with their business cronies at said restaurant. They merrily wined and dined through the wee hours of the night while former Pres. Corazon "Cory" Aquino hung by a thread to dear life. The extravagant dinner merely accentuated the disparity between the occasions.

As if that was not enough disgrace, right after that evening of shame GMA and her cabal of high society merry-makers flew straight to Manila to pay their last respects to Cory Aquino.

Quite frankly, I don't enjoy criticizing Pres. Arroyo, but she leaves me no choice with the multifarious indiscretions she commits that undermine the economy and national stability, let alone our international respectability, if we still have that. This is precisely why I scrupulously select the issues I discuss, lest my motives are misconstrued as personal when nothing could be further from the truth. Truly, no citizen with a modicum of nationalistic spirit in his heart would deliberately vilify his president at home or abroad unless he has a valid reason.

GMA felt snubbed by the White House a couple of months ago, when she was not granted an audience by the U. S. President. Thus, to refurbish her sagging image back home she prioritized her personal desire to vindicate herself by flying back to America to meet Pres. Barack Obama, and that she did through the U.S. ambassador to the Philippines. Hence, Gloria's photo-op session she just had with Pres. Obama.

Meanwhile, the New York Times, New York Post and the

mainstream newspapers as well as radio and television networks found out about the disgraceful dinner she attended. They mercilessly pilloried her for the extravagant party she and her cronies splurged at one of the 40 most expensive restaurants in the entire U.S. – Le Cerqui in New York.

Reportedly, Pres. Arroyo and her retinue dined that night before she flew back to Manila hoping to see Cory Aquino alive. But if the shindig she came from was her idea of a tribute to her modest predecessor she certainly dishonored Ninoy's widow. Cory was extra careful not to hurt the feelings of the humble masses by not wallowing in luxuries that she could easily afford, while they were miserable being very poor.

She expected her successor would look after the welfare of the 85 million Filipinos most of whom are living below the poverty line. Displaying extravagance is incongruent with the hunger of the suffering people. It is rubbing salt and vinegar on the open wound of poverty.

Millions of these people who live in shanties made of cartons and mud go to sleep at night hungry. This is not to say they do not even have wooden slippers to protect them from rusty nails and broken bottles in the filthy muddy pathways of their surroundings.

I already mentioned earlier the scandalous evening of extravagance was so costly only because the Krug champagne alone was \$510 per bottle and they ordered many. The Wild Golden Osetera Caviar was \$1,450 per serving. Add to that the Chef's Tasting Menu and a three-course Chef's Seasonal Menu, which came up to \$20,000 all together.

Granting that it was Congressman Martin Romauldez who forked over the money to pay the bill still it does not exculpate the lady president for gracing the occa-

sion, which her damage control team says was to celebrate the First Couple's wedding anniversary. That is hogwash!!! As the leader of a Third World country who perhaps was here to panhandle for alms for her impoverished people, there was no excuse for her attempt to boost her sagging image in the Philippines with her American junket. Not while there are earthshaking problems she has failed to resolve back home.<sup>20</sup>

Who cares if as president she has the lowest survey rating in history? Isn't that part of being head of state? People are not always happy with what you do. Nevertheless, she must persist doing what she thinks is best for the country and let posterity judge her. Cory did not aspire to be respected but the nation gave her the fitting tribute of marching under adverse weather conditions during her funeral procession to show their gratitude and deep appreciation for restoring democracy in the country. That is the best honor they can give her.

Even assuming that Congressman Romauldez paid for the exorbitant dinner from his own pocket, nevertheless it was incumbent for GMA to request that Romauldez keep the occasion on an even keel with the economic conditions under which the nation reels, reminding him that the hungry and forsaken are ultra-sensitive to extravagance. They feel insulted because they hardly eat one square meal a day. Romauldez would have obliged, after all he was trying to please Gloria.

Is it expecting too much for the president to remember that caveat during the hectic days of her visit to the U.S.? Not really. A good and responsible leader must always have the interest of her people at heart, careful not to hurt their feelings. Prudence and consciousness of our plight as a Third World country, if it is in her heart, could have spared her this round of attacks.

Dear readers, ego is the root of all evil.<sup>20</sup> Avoid it as you would a plague.