



Razor's Edge

By
Joe Mari Mercader
Executive Editor
FILIPINO TIMES
New York-New Jersey

Who Can We Turn To?

NEW YORK, Sept. 15 (PinoyGlobal) - My late father, who was a legal luminary when the law profession was a respected institution and shysters, pettifoggers and ambulance chasers were unheard of, used to tell me public officials are honorable people and that the primary function of government is to protect the citizenry. I never dreamed of the day when I will see my beloved father's doctrine shattered by a generation of scalawags with official trappings. But to my utter dismay that bitter day has come, albeit to put things in their right perspective.

Frank Sinatra himself must have foreseen where the Philippine government under Madam Arroyo was going when he sang, "Who can I turn to when nobody needs me?" The song can very well be the supplication of our neglected masses who have nobody to turn to for their dire need for medicine, hospitalization, food and financial woes with the national coffers scrapped from the bottom by crooked officials.

This is precisely the country's plight today because public officials from the president down to congressmen and members of the judiciary have dismally failed in giving exemplary honesty to the nation.

It is incumbent upon the president to set the luminous example of integrity and competence in the high office because what he does the lower echelons rubber stump his actions into their ways. To elucidate my point, a janitor for instance will follow his boss's wicked ways not his words. Thus corruption is exacerbated in the government.

This is how it came to pass that the president's ill-gotten billions emboldened her subordinates to do the same resulting in the numerous scandals in GMA's governance like the Fertilizer Scandal, billion dollar gold mind awarded by Trade Sec. Peter Favila to ZTE, the multi-million double entry in the 2008 national budget, which Sen. Lacson exposed as having been smuggled into the budget, to mention a few.

There are a lot of more and one is right before our eyes, which is the national broadband network notoriously known as the ZTE deal rescinded last year because of its foul smell that spread around the globe. Imagine overpricing that deal by \$139 million perking up what originally cost \$200 million and turning it into the monstrosity it orbited to. Mind you this is only the tip of

the iceberg – thousands of similar deals passed under the bridge since Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became president seven years ago. Is it surprising that she is considered the most corrupt lady president in Asia?

It really does not take much to prove corruption. Through the years I have been saying in previous columns that if a man does not have a female goat but has a baby goat where did it come from? You do not have to be a genius to know where public officials whose salaries are only so much could afford to live in mansions. They got it through corruption of course! Supreme Court Chief Justice Puno says; check the lifestyle of government people. Hey that is a cinch. Why not? Is it because the reason is quite obvious that this is not done?

With the scourge of corruption plaguing the country would it not be appropriate to say that the Philippines is not only going to the dogs but is already doggone! Even the last bulwark of democracy, the judiciary, is infested with “hoodlums in robes,” as Erap – the Pacquiao in politics who rose to be president from being a school dropout, once pointedly quipped.

It seems everybody in the bowels of bureaucracy and congress is neck deep in corruption. What is unfolding in the Philippines today is a melodrama too good to be true for our beleaguered Juan de la Cruz who has been hoping for something like this to happen.

Out of 23 justices of the Court of Appeals, almost a dozen have been either reprimanded, suspended or dismissed on the recommendation of the investigating panel empowered by the Supreme Court to probe the Meralco bribe scandal case in which CA justices are allegedly involved in bribes, negligence, indiscretion or inaction. Further it recommended CA Justice Vicente Roxas' dismissal for taking “undue interest” in the case and of committing grave misconduct, dishonesty and

conduct prejudicial to the best interest of the service, according to the investigating panel.

Our people are delighted but for how long. Is this scenario for real or is it fiction that before we realize everything has backslide to the old syndrome: discredited officials are back in harness because political interests always weigh more on the scale of justice than what is legal. The punitive action taken by the Supreme Court on the Court of Appeals justices was only for cosmetics nothing concrete.

Incidentally, there are unverified wild rumors that administration people are harassing the Court of Appeals, because it is not totally under the control of someone very powerful who is more comfortable with the Supreme Court (whatever that means). Personally, I will not waste time contemplating on this because SC Chief Justice Puno is nobody's toy boy. No sir. In fact, he is the anathema of Malacanang's wiles and insidious politics.

On the flip side of the coin there is the news that the Sandiganbayan has convicted two congressmen from six to 10 years for graft and corruption. The legal battle will still continue because these people have the wherewithal to spend on lawyers to drag the case into another millennium. These convictions took place after sixteen years of legal skirmishes in court. Heaven knows how long will this continue after they post bail and wind the fight.

The representatives are from Mindoro Oriental – Rodolfo Valencia and Alfonso Umali Jr. who were found guilty under the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act by the Sandiganbayan for misusing provincial government funds amounting to P2.5 million in 1994. As usual their defense is that they were the shortest men in the totem pole: Valencia says he was only the administrative officer and just followed the order of the provincial board and the governor. Umali has his own excuses as most inmates in

Muntinglupa have. Unfortunately, their cases already broke the benefit of the doubt when they were convicted.

They may have valid reasons of unwittingly committing the crimes attributed to them. The bottom line however is that besmirched officials have assumed an epidemic proportion in public office because the electorate keeps electing them. Enriching oneself in the service of Juan de la Cruz is the in-thing and it seems they went for it head long. Money is aphrodisiac to perverts apart from opening doors for great opportunities besides appending the badge of honor to one's name once he is elected with money stolen from the people.

This reverts us to the electorate in whose hands rest the authority of those who will govern. Unless they value their right of suffrage and use it to elect qualified and honest people during elections the nation will never extricate itself from the rotten officials we have and leap out of the quagmire of corruption.

For those who cannot get a copy of Filipino Times since it is devoured by the reading public once it is dropped in our outlets, go to your internet at www.filamimage.com. All my columns are there. #