



## **THE CORRUPTION NETWORK**

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In our country today, we are enmeshed in a dense culture of corruption as big financial scandals involving millions are the daily fare in the news. Political corruption or bureaucrat capitalism is the use of government powers by government officials for illegal private gain to enrich themselves or ensure their continuity in office. Corruption takes many forms-- bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, graft, and outright embezzlement. Even more, in our context, we are not faced with only petty or isolated cases of corruption but with a massive endemic phenomenon involving all levels of government and which is being institutionalized and normalized by the state in its function and practice of governance.

In the practice of corruption, the present government has steadily built an apparatus in a bid to legalize it. One feature is the gradual loss of transparency in order to conceal wrongdoing and make it appear legal and within moral bounds. What is invoked is the so-called “presidential prerogative” in which the head of state may determine certain actions, such as whether certain officials will or will not testify in senate investigations or will outright bar certain personalities from testifying. It may thus choose to withhold information from the public—as in the most recent instance of denying access to the police blotters under the pretext of protecting women and children bit so that the facts may be manipulated to favor the perpetrators of crimes sanctioned by the state. The government shifts the blame on journalists who seek to ferret out the truth which may turn out to be unfavorable to the powers that be.

The government thus seeks to strip away transparency and replace it with a thick blanket of denial, seeking to turn the public into the proverbial monkeys of no-see, no hear, and no-talk. The killing of journalists and their harassment by legal suits—as many as 72 have been slapped with suits in Southern Tagalog—completes the dismal picture. This government is known to be one of the most corrupt, if not the most corrupt, as well as the worst violators of human rights.

Any vision of government that works for the good of the people is not in existence today. Most officials of government use their office to exploit the people to the hilt, to deny their rights and insult their poverty by various means rather than improve their living conditions. Corrupt officials enrich themselves by every means, such as taxation, like the onerous E-vat which they refuse to withdraw because it is a source of easy money for the government, or deals in constructions, infrastructure, and telecommunications with foreign governments, such as the recent NBN-ZTE, involving kickbacks in millions or billions of pesos which they hope to grab at



all costs, or the Bolante fertilizer scam involving huge sums of money. In this highly exploitative situation, the state doles out Php 500 pesos for low users of electricity and distributes cheap substandard rice to see the poor form long lines in the sun, an insult to their human dignity. As De Venecia commented referring to the widespread bribery in government, “Everybody is for sale.”

As our leaders take pride in claiming that we are the closest to the United States, even “more American than Americans”, as the president declared in a recent trip to Hong Kong, the president’s recent trips to the U.S. show her eagerness to maintain this dubious position even with Bush out of the picture, since the government has most closely assumed the American system, to its benefit. What was particularly instructive in the past U.S. election were the many insights into U. S. political ideology that have been espoused by the present dispensation. George Bush’s admonition in the midst of the present economic crisis “to stick to capitalism” is probably ringing in the ears of high government officials. In connection with the recent U.S. election, we have also keenly and surprisingly perceived the use of two words in particular: “liberal” and “socialism.” Senator McCain, Obama’s Republican rival, described him as ‘the most liberal of senators’ thus declaring himself as conservative rightwing. Riding on religion, Sarah Palin, who was noted by a top American journalist for her “no-content” speeches, warned that Obama would experiment with socialism. It is thus a matter of note that the many Americans still attach negative attitudes and connotations to the words “liberal” and “socialist” in their political ideology.

Most particularly, the absence of a true political vision for the people on the part of the Filipino ruling class stems from the concept of state governance as a corporate capitalist activity and that running the country is like running a corporation for profit. In the recent crisis of Wall Street, it was also found out that the CEOs who headed big corporations awarded themselves with multimillions in salaries. This unbridled greed led to big cases of corruption like ENRON in which people lost their pensions, while more such cases eventually led to the downfall of Wall Street. And here in our country, the use of official position for personal gain is at its most furious and intense in the search for lucrative deals and discovering opportunities for plundering the national patrimony.

In this corporate state, all aspects of life are turned into commodities. There is a massive fetishization of everything including human relations, health, environment, education in which all these become objects to be bought and sold, thus resulting in moral corruption, the decline of human values, lack of regard for the good of others, and, at the end, a profound alienation from oneself and one’s basic humanity and that of our fellowmen. Individuals, families, groups are only viewed as opportunities for exploitation and money-making, thus market surveys are conducted to research on the profit-making efficiency of corporations

Because of this condition, the lives of the people are continually being jeopardized. In a time of lavish government spending and corruption, the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter are



neglected or not attended to by state institutions. Any concern to improve the quality of food and nutrition on the part of the state is a sham. There was a recent nutrition survey in the barangays where the interviewees were given a few packs of instant noodles, cookies and iodized salt to give flavor to rice. As though each family should at least have these. While on the contrary, Macapagal-Arroyo goes on junkets abroad with a big retinue, complete with gifts of shopping bags filled with branded items.

Shelter is largely an initiative of non-government institutions and it has not yet reached the numerous families who live in the slums and under the bridges. For many families, unaffordable rent makes them resort to squatting or living in the slums. Many, too, cannot afford health care and medical services, not to speak of expensive operations which are clearly outside the resources even of the middle class. What the government instead wants to develop is medical tourism meant to attract foreign tourists and retirees to avail of our medical services. In Asia, the Philippines has the most expensive medicines because it is in the grip of the foreign drug companies who impose their high prices in exchange for corrupt deals. Medicine and medical services are just another area for profit.

Education which should have to do with enlightening and nurturing the minds of the youth is also a big source of corruption. The educational system is in the grip of the World Bank which finances textbooks favorable to American interests. Primary and secondary education has not been upgraded and the general lack of competence in teaching mathematics and science has proven to be detrimental to the country's development. Thus, the country becomes, under the conditions of globalization, only a source of cheap labor and a market and dumping ground for First World products. In whatever system, progress cannot be possible without a solid basis in mathematics and science, but up to now educators are still bickering over the language issue, resulting in a setback and delay in learning. Also, since education is a market commodity to squeeze profit from, tuition fees in the universities and particularly in the University of the Philippines (no longer the state university but a national university) have been raised, in the UP by 300%, a huge increase which has effectively barred thousands of students from enrolling in college. To these high university officials is squarely laid the blame for almost a whole generation of youth deprived of higher learning, doomed to be OFW domestics in the absence of local opportunities, or salespersons, drug agents, call center youth, or unemployed housewives—a sheer waste of human resources. To bar the a significant section of the youth from education only shows a basic lack of faith in the Filipino—that these youth, many of them talented but poor are disposable and undeserving of higher education and may simply be consigned to the general pathetic lack of opportunity that is at the root of our underdevelopment. What operates is a policy of exclusion and not of inclusion, where people are discriminated against because of their inability to pay and where the elite are raised to be utterly indifferent to the poverty around them as they enjoy social privileges and their wealth through academic titles, connections with the globalist system, and executive remunerations.

The environment is likewise regarded as an area of great possibilities for corruption. The official frame of mind is to exploit the environment rather than to nurture it. Of course, one



began on the wrong foot with Parity Rights after independence when the Philippines gave the Americans equal right to exploit our natural resources to our great disadvantage. We have long been suppliers of raw material and a market for much more expensive finished products. Now, along this line of thinking, important mines are offered for exploitation or ownership by foreign corporations. Logging is again another destructive practice because, aside from denuding forests, it also removes the top soil, thus causing massive flooding in the provinces. Again, logging is mostly for the benefit of foreigners with their technology. There is also insufficient legislature for curbing pollution in the air or water. The residues of factories pollute the water which is a source of life. The reason why there is little improvement in installing anti-pollution systems can be the clandestine exchange of sums. All our rich natural resources, even possible oil reserves, are open to foreigners to plunder and profit from until these resources are finally exhausted.

The blatant graft and corruption in government and its unbridled rapacity is permeating people's lives and warping their values. It is effacing the values of honor, integrity, and honesty with the bad example of the ruling elite who cannot be models for the youth. The government officials who are addressed by the words "Honorable" show that the honorific label is only a formality, if not a hypocrisy. In this government, we are fast losing our pride and self-esteem which can be readily bought by government officials with bags filled with filthy lucre or foreign-branded luxuries. Thus has the government, knowing the difficult times which they themselves have brought out, has played on the weaknesses of people so as to justify their own massive corruption. In the newspapers, there is no end to the staggering cases of official corruption, the NBN-ZTE which the president herself signed in China, the Bolante fertilizer scam, the Eurogenerals who traveled to Russia bringing large sums. All these have called forth the slogan: "Moderate your greed!"

In this connection, it has been a lucky season for prominent criminals who have been coddled or released by the State. Let us not forget the midnight transfer of the rapist Marine Cpl Daniel Smith to the U.S. Embassy with the Jesuit Fr. James Reuter to comfort and speak for him. At the same time, there were negotiations with Spain to release a Spanish Filipino national to its custody, one of the murderers of the two Chiong sisters of Cebu and recently there was the release from jail of Teehankee with relations in high places, who was imprisoned for the murder of two young people. The precedent for this was the release of Manero who killed Father Favali and engaged in the odious crime of cannibalism. Whether rich or poor as in the case of Manero, these involved ruling class interests which could benefit from these actions.

Another deep flaw of governance is rampant nepotism where a family or clan is star-studded with one or several senators, congressmen, cabinet members, etc. This was true of the Marcos/Imelda conjugal dictatorship and their clan and of the Cory Aquino Kamag-anak Incorporated. Now, how could the training for public office leap from the hollow posturings of a third-rate movie actor to that of a congressman scion representing an invented constituency. A recent example is the presidential gift of 2 billion pesos to Bicol congressman and son Datu to spend on his province. The difficulty of expunging nepotism lies in the insufficient political



education of the people, especially in the provinces, which is taken advantage of by the state. Masses think that they are beholden to families and familiar names especially among the traditionally wealthy, with the notion that it is the rich class who are empowered to govern. So, in a town, the traditional landlords become their employers, bosses, and ninongs to whom they beg for sums in an emergency.

And so the cycle of the rich holding public office continues. The poor are kept in a condition of dependency beneficial to their officials. For, all in all, the country lacks a system of just remunerations and efficient wealth distribution so that the laborers and poor are always at the bottom rung. This may be only in keeping with the distaste of Americans for wealth-sharing that right-wing conservatives will not engage in, as well as for their primary principles of individualism and profit-orientation giving rise to billionaires who play an important in the economics of government.

The change of mentality is shown in the proliferation of words pertaining to corruption as in the book *Corruptionary*. But here we should also note that while many of the words have a touch of ubiquitous Filipino humor, there is also much of irony and sarcasm. The book describes the many forms that corruption takes and warns the reader of these scams of which he and Philippine society in general, may easily become victims of. With these officials, corruption has so deeply permeated society that it may become the governing principle to which lesser employees contribute or participate in their own way, thus perpetuating a government of kleptocracy from which the general masses can only feel a profound alienation as well as the powerful desire and initiative to recuperate our national honor.

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