



“The pen is mightier than the sword.”

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Slot Machines in the City

By: Ben Emata

The city has grown a lot in the last two decades. There is no dispute about this. What was not good for the city before is now a necessity. And growth and development is definitely irreversible.

Who would imagine that the city which used to be weak and sleepy would spend a lot of money to construct the third bridge in Kauswagan to ease traffic from the Metropolitan area to the western side of the city? And who was talking about traffic congestion during those times? Nobody ever predicted that the bushes and thorns in the olden days that surround the vicinities in Kilometer 5 that were dark and deserted after twilight would ever become the sites of numerous modern villages? Did we ever think that someday specifically ten years later such gigantic malls would settle a big project in the area? That a movie house would establish its location just few meters upward from the Chinese cemetery? Did anyone of us ever see the future of the city that looks like a big city of Hongkong now?

People multiply in number nonstop. This is a natural law that no one on the surface of this planet can argue. Civilization has improved! Every inch of Cagayan de Oro will soon be occupied by important buildings that no one ever imagined many years ago.

The city government is leaving no stone unturned in its desire to improve tourism. We are aware that many tourists are wealthy investors and certainly are eyeing on something they can put their money. Tourism as an industry is definitely a top earner anywhere in the world. Many countries in the Latin America had for its major earner the tourism industry. The Philippines has gained a lot via this scheme in terms of dollar income, exchanges of culture, tradition and history.



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But are we ready to meet the heavy influx of tourists from all over the world should they come to our shores? Yes we have beautiful beaches, resort hotels, first class restaurants, fishing grounds, scenic spots and nearly everything except the entertainment by night that is offered only through operations of casinos. Tourists are hungry of entertainment. They need a place where they can throw their dollars in exchange of pleasure and joy. We need neon lights from the casinos to shine in the city so we can stand shoulder to shoulder with such famous, wealthy places as Reno, Las Vegas, Paris, Monaco, Toronto, Atlantic City, etc.

The city is badly in need of a first class casino that can meet the need of the tourists especially from Europe, Canada, Latin countries and USA. The city has nothing to offer to its guests when darkness falls except cold beer and food. We lack sport fests like basketball, football, baseball, soccer, tennis, etc. Middle-aged tourists as well as the elderly love to play cards, slot machines and other gambling paraphernalia that a casino can offer.

I have nothing against the religious orders and civic clubs that now oppose the establishment of a casino and slot machines in Cagayan de Oro City. I consider myself one of them in their crusades against anything especially if it pertains to morality. I will stand proudly with them and fight to the finish if the issue involved is about abortion, corruption in the government and other important matters that relate to human rights, future of our city and its people.

What about prostitution? Why this oldest profession left undisturbed. Is the city without these irritating women with bad habits who practice their professions in broad daylight? Plaza Divisoria, for instance, has been the property of prostitutes since time immemorial. It is like a fishpond of ill-repute girls where the poor sex-starved men can hunt and pick up day and night. But why zero your campaign against the casino? What about the illegal number game where even some of the broadcast media give hints of probable winning numbers? This is the culprit that truly impoverishes the poor people in the depressed areas of Macabalan, Puntod, Lapasan and elsewhere. And what about the big time businessmen in the city who control the prices of commodities by hoarding merchandises and the like as well as the movement of the



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economy that is highly detrimental to the consumers? Everything is growing and I think rallyists and activists should also grow and trend their guns on something big and really immoral. There are so many ugly matters that need to be addressed to by activists - - more pressing than the establishment of a small casino.

I am not really a gambler. I do not go to cockfighting much less play black jacks or engaged in the illegal number games that is now prevalent in society. I never played *masiao* and instead criticized the operators thereof for giving more difficult life to the poor who think it was a poor man's game. I do not smoke either. But for one thing, I occasionally enjoy playing the slot machines in many casinos. To me casino is a place for people who have enough cash to spare to while away their extra time instead of going to red light places like nightclubs, bars, and others. This is invigorating for retired people, or for seniors while waiting for the sunset to begin its daily cycle. This is also a good way of relaxing for people so preoccupied with their business activities, for people to enjoy in whatever way.

I speak with sadness that I will be stepping on the shoes of many of my brothers in some religious organization where I also belonged. But as a working journalist, my ideals and aspirations would be more in vain if I just keep my mouth shut and not participates in healthy debates over issues that pertains the life of society. My opinions may not be so acceptable to many but I still believe I have the right to say so and perhaps some people might benefit from them as well as the government coffers. What civilization needs is for people to say something to contribute to the development of society rather than be silent and be contented for nothing. Certainly, I have admiration for the activists for doing something to stop the evils. I agree we must put to a brake the evils and it is only by putting a resistance that we can achieve something. Besides, words of wisdom sometimes come from small groups of people or individual that opens their heart and mind with sincerity and share their stands to others. We learn lessons from the dumb too because no matter what they also have minds capable of exposing something that is beneficial.

Honestly, I have gone to many casino centers in the world like the sprawling Las Vegas in the state of Nevada; Reno in the same state that is widely known as the biggest little city in the world; the floating casinos in New Orleans, Louisiana; in Lake Charles; in Atlantic City, in



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Denver, Colorado, Hongkong and even those in European cities like Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, Prague, Czechoslovakia, Monte Carlo and others. I have also visited the Philippines' finest casinos in Paranaque and one at the United Nations Avenue in Manila and none of them has ever been frequented or visited by people who have nothing to invest. I saw the players and they look decent enough and probably having earning in the above average category. So far, I have not won a big jackpot but for one thing, I always enjoy playing and got home happy even if I lost few dollars. The amount I parted away was so small in comparison to the joy and pleasure I have for hours of playing. It makes my day happy and I feel confident of myself. Casinos are for entertainment pure and simple.

I have yet to see poor people especially those from the slums getting inside these casinos nor have I read news stories about gamblers engaging in slot machines, going high into robbery or committing any crime related to, or as a result to gambling. Likewise, I have yet to see young kids playing the slot machines as the opponents or protesters in Cagayan de Oro would speculate. Minors are strictly prohibited inside and they could not just pass unnoticed by dozens of security guards. Slot machines and other games in casinos are not the kind of gambling paraphernalia that would develop criminals. It is not like those in cockfighting or those games played in carnival grounds. Most criminals are molded right in the home because of inadequate parenting. Many parents never have a chance to even talk to their kids when they were young. They were too busy with their business or job or other matters and failed to attend to the needs of their kids. As a result, children resort to bad influence from friends in school or elsewhere and become criminals in so short a period.

Slot machines are small-time gambling gadgets that truly entertain responsible aficionados. The machines are so designed that they look like video games for kids while they also make you happy when you hit the jackpot. Some machine sport comic characters that make you laugh at first sight even before you even drop your first coin. They are really intended for people who want to be entertained or need some kinds of company while alone and had nothing to do. It is not meant to develop bad kids because they can not even be permitted inside.