



“The pen is mightier than the sword.”

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The media and elections

By: Ben Emata

In the Philippines, journalism is almost always the first victim during elections season. In many instances, the truth is sacrificed in favor of money. A lot of politicians reserve a sizeable budget for the first class journalists, a lesser amount for the second class and so on. To them, getting into its fold active journalists is better than putting up commercial advertisements, in term of effectiveness and expense. In so doing, the candidates reach the cross-section of the general public and gain wider edges.

The law on electioneering is strictly enforced by the authorities and surely, members of the media cannot put up a stand on which side they want to support. But just the same working in favor of some politicians is done under the silhouette of darkness and the show goes on. Of course, it is discreetly maneuvered in such a way that nobody would ever suspect there is arrangement between the candidates and the news reporters.

I cannot figure out where the difference lies but for one thing, the media in the United States of America are free to endorse any candidate during elections. It is neither immoral nor illegal. There is no such thing as electioneering. There is no law that prohibits them. To the Americans, the journalists, like any man in the streets, have their right too, to express their preference during elections.

There is practically no concrete reason why this practice of the media endorsing the candidates is allowed. It could be because most of the members of the media are responsible people. A quick glimpse of history, a lot of journalists have gone to jail already for lapses and irresponsible reporting.

Politicians here do not maintain reporters in their stable. They don't give cash at anytime during the campaign or after any interview or press conference. They respect reporters and everyone in the media. I have attended many press conferences here and we were not given anything to drink even coffee unlike in the Philippines where lechons and bottles of beer meet across long tables in hotel or restaurant. There is no *envelopmental* journalism here. After the 30 to 45 minutes press conference that usually is informal, we get nothing but smiles and sincere expression of gratitude from the politicians. If a candidate is lucky enough to get the



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endorsement of a publication, it is because he is the best to the mind of the endorsers. The endorsement usually comes out in form of editorials that argue the issues involved and reasons why a certain candidate should be voted upon.

There is not much difference between the practice of journalism in the Philippines and here in the United States. Journalists in both countries strive hard to exercise freedom of the press with outmost honesty and honors. After all this exercise is a profession and it is a source of livelihood. If one chooses to be bad, whether he is a lawyer or a doctor, he will really be bad and certainly his income is affected. And one of the most dreadful matters in this country is for one to be jobless. Nobody here wants to be without an income because he has to meet the numerous bills on account of his living in standard and comfort. Maintaining a job, therefore, is foremost for everyone even the disabled. Most Americans hold two or more jobs.

The citizens are so conscious of their right to vote and they make it sure ballots cast really serve the purpose. There is no vote-buying here much less money or favors given to anyone during election campaigns. No blind voting! The electorates are very careful in selecting the candidates. Most election results are known in 48 hours after balloting. Literacy is high in this country and elections are taken with pride and honor. Notorious criminals cannot even have a look of what running a government is all about. Nobody behind bars run for public office. Dishonest and immoral people have no place in American politics.

If we notice America is wealthy. It is a strong nation. It is highly respectable. It is a world figure. It has excellent leaders who work with competence, sincerity and diligence. Leaders with top records. The country provides everything to its people especially security and freedom guaranteed in the Constitution. This is utterly the result of having clean and honest elections.

I see there is a need for the Philippines to defeat electioneering law and allow the media to take sides during elections. Only this group of people can truly make things clear to the general public by way of press releases and commentaries. One sure thing, the electorates look up the media as very reliable and credible through which they get information. In the present set up, there is that law that forbids the media from indulging in elections except for news purposes. Just the same this scheme is always railroaded because of corruptions. Payoffs are obvious to a lot of media folks but surprisingly none ever went to jail. (BEN EMATA)