



“The pen is mightier than the sword.”

Ben Emata Jr.

ben_emata@yahoo.com

THE NIGHT BEFORE

By: Ben Emata

The most delicate matter in any Philippine elections is the night before the voting day. Most voters make the decision on this day. The night is engulfed by total darkness. There is hardly music around or bright lights but it is noticeable that some people seem busy. People meet inside cars, in dark corners, inside homes and everywhere. They discuss things and all about the elections. This is the real day of reckoning. They meditate and examine their conscience too. To them, the issues they heard during the hot campaign, the advertisements, the debates, the speeches and everything the candidates had spoken or presented have no bearing at all. They have nothing to do with their business. It is the power of money now that truly makes command. It is the flow of cash that makes the candidates what he will be after the canvassing. And this is the time that money flows rapidly but quietly.

At this juncture, everybody seems busy from the candidates down to the campaign leaders, the coordinators, the errand boys, the vote-buyers, the voters, etc. It is full of excitement to everyone especially the candidates. Whoever releases more cash can safely spell his victory.

In a talk recently with a professional vote coordinator who is now in America, he said on voting day, the electorates hang around the precincts waiting to be ambushed by the vote buyers. The negotiation is simple and quick and money passes hands almost immediately. Voters who can be trusted are given money in their homes and to watch them voting is not necessary. My informant



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revealed he used to carry money as much as half a million pesos in small bills for distribution.

This is the full scenario of the elections. One week before the voting, the candidates release their money in bulk to coordinators in the municipality or city who deliver this to the assigned leaders in the barangay level. The instruction is to review the master list of voters in their respective precinct and possibly see the persons whose names appear in the list. The actual release of the money to the voters takes place two days before the big day. The busiest moment is the night before Election Day. It is at this time that the leaders who are responsible of the money must see to it everyone in the list gets his cash.

Voting day is a funny day. The chief vote coordinator who gave the money in that particular precinct is responsible to watch the voters inside the polling place. Together with his staff, they make it sure that the voters really go inside the polling place and vote. They watch him write the names of the candidates and in some cases the voters are being watched behind the paper walls. If an electorate does not vote the candidates as agreed upon, he is watched outside of the precinct and asked that the money be returned.

According to the old timers in this game, this year's cost of ballot is a little bit higher than the previous elections considering the outcome of a better economy in the country. It was said that for town mayors, the price is P50 in smaller towns and P100 and up in bigger towns per ballot; for governor, it is P50; for congressman, it is now P50. For minor members of the city council, P10 or P20 per head will suffice. These were the tag prices of vote buying in the last elections. A single voter, therefore, easily gets more than a hundred pesos for the day.



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I really don't know when and who started this business of vote buying. I remember when I was a little boy; the candidates had very few issues to discuss before the electorates during public meetings. They just promise about delivering the “aguas potables” or water system, materiales puertes or public works for road and bridges and a few others. There was no vote buying. They never mentioned about education, school buildings, books, or about jobs, wages, etc.

Politics then was very simple. No TV ads, no radio broadcasts, no newspaper advertisements. The electorates depend on public meetings that the candidates had to hold in their towns and barrios. People attend public meetings and listen to arguments and nothing else. Vote-buying was never heard. (BEN EMATA)