

"Dissenting Opinion" Column

As soon as the Manila Pen siege was over, there was a flurry of pronouncements from just about every political group as well as personalities from both sides of the political divide. Invariably, the statements depicted Trillanes and Lim as misguided, military adventurists (sic), rebels, criminals, or arrogant fools for repeating the same mistakes in Oakwood in 2006. At best, some would say they sympathized with Trillanes' and Lim's cause, but did not agree with their methods.

But why did they have to wait until the standoff was over before they spoke their minds? Simple. They weren't really sure about how the incident would turn out and they didn't want to be caught with their feet in their mouths just in case Trillanes, et al, prevailed.

Editor's Notes: This commentary by Enteng Romano inaugurates the "Dissenting Opinion" feature of our Op-Ed Section. We invite readers to send us their commentary, which is suggested not to exceed 1,500 words. They can send also their photograph or accompanying graphics. Please send manuscripts to the webmaster.

This is the same reason why no politician of significant stature came out during the siege. Most of them were probably somewhere in Makati, on standby, monitoring how things would develop. And if it looked like regime change was imminent, they were ready to make a grand appearance, abandoning all current loyalties, reminiscent of EDSA 2.

Even more worrisome, at least to the administration, was the non-appearance of military top brass during the critical, early hours of the standoff. The most natural thing for the administration to do in order to show that it was still in control of the chain of command was to arrange for some star-studded generals to declare their unequivocal loyalty. Esperon was in Mindanao. But where were the service commanders? They, too, were on standby, caught by

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Written by Vicente "Enteng" R. Romano III

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surprise, unsure if Lim and Trillanes had the numbers. They did not declare loyalty for either side, not wanting to be caught on the wrong side when the dust settled.

There was one text message I received from an unknown number that I found rather amusing, "Panawagan ni Trillanes na mag-aklas, dinedma! Sawa na sa gulo ang ating bayan, tama na! Magkaisa na lang sa pagsulong ng bayan."

I think that declaration was way off the mark. How do you explain the spontaneous show of support from office workers cheering and waving, motorists honking their horns in support as Trillanes and company were marching towards Manila Pen? How do you explain the surveys showing the people outraged at the impunity and brazenness of corruption by this regime?

I get these opinions all the time - text messages, email, or even chance encounters in public places from people I don't know, "You're doing the right thing. Don't give up. Keep the faith!" At times, I'm tempted to ask them, "What about you? What do you plan to do about it?" I don't bother, because I have an inkling of what they will say, "I'm sorry, but I'm busy. busy trying to earn a living, or trying to make ends meet." Was Trillanes misguided? Maybe. But not in the usual sense.

I think he read the people's mood correctly. They are outraged. They want regime change. But they're not willing to take an active role in effecting change. They just want to be saved from this wretched regime!

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I believe Trillanes was misguided, maybe even betrayed, by people who committed to give their support but did not deliver.

CHED Chairman Romulo Neri could have been an interested party. It was rumored that he was supposed to join the group at Manila Pen to finally reveal what most people already know anyway - that after he told GMA about the bribe offer by Abalos, she asked him to ignore it and gave specific instructions for him to work on getting the ZTE project approved by the NEDA Board in time for her China trip, which was only 2 days away.

In past interviews, Neri has refused to reveal what he knows, fearing that his revelations might trigger an EDSA-like uprising. He reportedly finds the idea of regime change with the same old, recycled politicians taking over, revolting (pun intended). However, rumors abound that privately, he has intimated to being open to a post-GMA scenario that would include his reform agenda.

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I do not know whether Neri has explicitly communicated these ideas to the Magdalo, but let us suppose that he did. These revelations and ideas by an official of this administration probably emboldened them to plot the Manila Pen siege. Now, the Magdalo had a just cause around which to rally the people.

Days after the standoff, there were news reports that there were possibly some unit commanders who were poised to leave their barracks to join Trillanes and Lim. They were perhaps waiting for Neri's defection as their signal to move. Instead, they saw Argee Guevarra and JV Bautista beside Trillanes at the Pen. To the military, these are the poster boys of communism. Seeing them would have planted seeds of doubt in their rightist hearts. "Are we risking everything, just to turn it over to commies?" they probably asked. The man in the wig was the clincher, turning the whole exercise into a farce.

And so, they all decided to stand by. But they waited too long. Esperon would later report, "the other group was "pre-empted", whatever that means. The rest of the story you already know.

Trillanes apologists will claim, "The end justifies the means," regarding his latest caper. I do not buy that. But I do believe that this administration has shut off every legitimate venue for redress.

What do you do when the major mode of making a President accountable - impeachment, is bastardized by a rubber-stamp Congress? Where do you go when an unimpeachable witness like Fr. Ed Panlilio testifies that bribery of the highest order may have occurred at the Palace involving scandalous amounts given to political allies? Certainly not to a Department of Justice headed by a GMA stooge.

When you have an administration that selectively applies the rule of law and methodically perverts it for self-preservation, you will, for the same reason always have people who will resort to extra-constitutional means to seek justice.

Personally, I think what Trillanes did at Manila Pen is not much different from what Ramos did at EDSA 1 or Angie Reyes did at EDSA 2. If EDSA 1 and 2 failed, Ramos and Reyes would have been labeled no differently from Trillanes and Lim – misguided, misadventurists (sic), rebels, or even fools.

What a difference success makes! Even heels (remember Chavit Singson in EDSA 2?) can become heroes. Failure does the exact opposite: would-be heroes are called fools.

Digressing a bit, I heard that Manila Pen is planning to sue for damages the rebel group. Nevertheless, the hotel is willing to give a 20% discount considering the participation of senior citizens like Guingona, Dodong Nemenzo, and Bishop Labayen. It would be truly comical, were it not tragic and pathetic, to see octogenarians leading the fight against moral bankruptcy in

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government.

Where are the youth in all of this?

Most of them are on standby, waiting for their work visas from various embassies. This is proof of the depth of hopelessness when the aspirations of our youth are reduced to wanting to leave the country at the earliest opportunity.

Well. I think I will just join the rest of our people on standby and wait for this regime to crumble from its own weight of greed and corruption. Already, there are cracks in the alliance in Congress, they're all fighting over the spoils. With Puno now ascendant at the Palace, the other officials will necessarily be diminished, if not completely defrocked. That spells trouble.

Greed and addiction to power will propel them to overstay beyond 2010. Already, charter change is back at the top of the agenda in Congress. I think the administration is already crafting a martial law template that will be declared at the flimsiest excuse. The unconstitutional 5-hour curfew was merely a trial balloon.

And then it will happen. It will reach a breaking point that will lead to a popular uprising. Such has been the cycle we go through in our modern history.

A new order will be established. History will be rewritten, and it will give a kinder account of the Manila Pen siege. It is merely a pre-cursor of things to come. Trillanes and company are not fools after all.

For now, all we can do is pray that God hasten the cycle of change. God bless our country.

This is Enteng Romano on standby. # # #

Note: From Enteng Romano: If you believe in what this article stands for, please join us by registering at www.elagda.net. If you want to receive announcements directly from this group, please send blank email to Moral-Majority-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

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