

First Part of a Series on Overseas-Filipino Advocacy

{xtypo_quote} Perhaps advocates for change and political reform are simply idealists whom a people in the dark cannot reach, cannot understand—Jose Ma. Montelibano {/xtypo_quote}

When this writer was reviewing this manuscript about the reasons why almost all Overseas-Filipino advocacies geared for the Philippines fail, he came across the Jan. 15, 2009, “Glimpses” column of Jose Ma. “Boy” Montelibano. He was stunned to find that Mr. Montelibano wrote ahead most of the thoughts that he was trying to say. (The complete article of Mr. Montelibano is reproduced at the end of this essay.) I will not, therefore, repeat what Mr. Montelibano has written. I will just say, “Amen,” to almost all his thoughts expressed in the said column.

But I will touch on what Mr. Montelibano failed inadvertently to discuss. For instance, I have always maintained that former Filipino citizens who are now Americans—or Canadians or who have been naturalized nationals of other countries—have lost their right to meddle in the affairs of the Philippines. They have to regain first their Filipino citizenship (even as dual citizens), so as to have a say in what transpires in the homeland. One can read more of this position in this essay, [A Dose of Reality: Why Many Filipinos Remain Second-Class Citizens in America](#)

Written by Bobby Reyes

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Several of my friends and I believe that this is the primary reason why Overseas-Filipino advocates for change and reform fail to generate enough public support for their “imported” ideas. It is but natural for Filipinos in the Philippines to hate being told by visiting Americans – whether they are citizens of the United States of Filipino descent or not – what to do with their lives, so on and so forth. Some visiting Filipino-American leaders think that they know everything that ails the homeland and that they have a monopoly of Filipino patriotism. (If the Fil-AmBoys are indeed Filipino patriots, then why did they discard their Philippine citizenship in favor of an American passport?) It is like visiting the house of relatives or friends and telling them how to clean their abode or how to prepare their meals. It is not only disrespectful but also it is also a dumb move for it generates ill-will. And this is true whether the house being visited happens to be in the Philippines or in the United States or Canada for that matter. It is human nature to tell visitors, “This is my house and you do not have the right to tell me how to live my life and what to eat in my home, etceteras, etc.”

What my friends and I propose is to turn the Overseas-Filipino advocacies for the homeland into joint ventures after all everybody likes to ask since time immemorial this question, “What’s in it for me?” Especially if it were a business-oriented venture and done on a cooperative way (one man, one vote, irrespective of the amounts invested by all the co-op members), there should be better reaction – if not a proactive response – from our prospective partners in our homeland.

Here is the Jan 15, 2009, column of Jose Ma. Montelibano:

“Advocating Or Campaigning”

GLIMPSES

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QUOTE.

Whenever elections become a national focus, there is a lot of effort to teach voters how to vote wisely. It used to be more direct when voters were told clearly to vote wisely. Today, the messaging is somewhat distorted because the desire of political advocates, and politicians who are not in power but want to be, is for voters to vote in their preferred candidates and achieve good governance that way. I say distorted because the primary role of governance belongs to those who govern, and good governance

It seems that citizens are politicized because of bad governance, or bad politics. Citizens are roused to political exercise like voting when there are elections, and the backdrop is constantly negative. Citizens are motivated to become active only when they are angry or frustrated at serving public officials, or at the utter lack of better options even among those who want to run for office.

Politics, then, in the Philippines is not only very partisan and divisive, it is about bad governance rather than good governance. Any talk about good governance is misdirected to the wrong audience, not to those who ought to be taught about good governance, but those who are victims of bad governance. The main effect often is the changing of those who govern but not changing bad governance to good governance. The side effect is that Filipinos do not understand politics are a state of affairs that impact on a city, a province or a country – they only understand politics as a partisan activity and ultimately shy away from it. And the ultimate effect is that citizens know as little of responsibility as they see in those who govern them.

I have monitored advocacy groups for ten years. Most of them operate in the Internet because they are abroad. Some operate in the provinces and have limited reach. A few make their mark from the many groups which are active in Metro Manila because they can sometimes get interviewed on television and suddenly are known beyond their narrow audiences. And, then, there are the very few who are supported, or are extensions of, vested interests in business and the academe. These vested interests are not necessarily evil, but they are vested nonetheless and backed up by resources in cash, in kind and in facilities.

While the expressed desire of most is to start a movement, almost none of them succeed. The proof of this lack of success is the absence of any popularly known movement. When the target audience of these movements started by advocacy groups is the voting population itself, about 45 million Filipinos in all, there is not a single movement which one can say is known beyond a very small population circle.

Contrasted with traditional political parties, advocacy groups by themselves have little chance of making a difference. Political parties operate everyday, recruit and maintain people to their organizations, reward their key leaders and workers with jobs or projects, and are nationally represented or active even in between elections. They have grassroots presence even when their supporters are not formally registered and may have shifting loyalties.

Advocacy groups are dependent on media, on a few sponsors with funds and facilities, and the Internet for Filipinos active from abroad. Without media, without funds and facilities to host gatherings and conferences, and without the Internet to get free access to some attention, advocacy groups will have small constituencies, mostly themselves and personal friends. When

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they operate in Metro Manila and the Internet, they will have many common members as well.

And this is the crux of the problem. The advocacy hits the secondary market – the advocates and their personal networks of friends instead of the general public. Even with media support, the advocacy may find a wider reach but participation will hardly grow in proportion. Without the population itself agitated and ready to act, as in the two EDSA revolutions, advocacy groups accomplish little.

Their success rate is less from their performance and more from the state of emotions of their target publics.

I have often wondered if advocates for change and political reform are simply idealists whom a people in the dark cannot reach, cannot understand. There is this case of a doctor lecturing about sanitation and the consequences when people do not wash their hands before eating, when people do not wash themselves properly and regularly. Yet, the audience they lecture to have no regular supply of clean water. UNQUOTE.

“So, if there is little water -- whether clean or murky and stinking -- washing the dirty plates and public linens may be just begging the question—Bobby Reyes

□ □ **Editor’s Note:** *Mr. Montelibano’s metaphor on the supply of clean water is very similar to a description as found in this essay,* [The Parable that Is the Philippines \(ISRA Series, Part 2\)](#)

The essay carries these paragraphs: "Brother Sir Dennis perhaps has given the best rhetorical answer to Brother Sir Manny's own rhetorical question: 'Would we not, in good conscience start

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to wash the plates before we put the food we offer to the people?

' *Brother Dennis asks,*

'Shall we wash the dirty plates with murky, stinking water?'

"The Philippines is not only running out of clean-and-potable water, in fact there is also no more water -- stinking or not -- in many of the country's springs, brooks and streams because of wanton deforestation caused by illegal logging and burn-and-slash farming. Please read my essay, [The Filipino "Silent Springs" \(With Apologies to Rachel Carson\)](#) for more details."

Mr. Montelibano continues: QUOTE.

Citizens who have little knowledge that, in a democracy, they are the engine that drives a nation to productivity, to growth and development, to peace and prosperity have as little chance to be responsible. And they will not be accountable either except by the misery of their lives from bad governance, from corruption and from poverty.

Citizens who are not aware and ready to realize their responsibility can hardly influence their rulers to be good governors. The governed, to be the pressure point for good governance, must have equal or greater power than those who govern. An ordinary citizen attains extraordinary power only in unity with other citizens, enough of them to offset the individual advantages of a rich-and-influential person. And that unity, if only achieved and used in anger and without new enlightenment, will only pay homage to bloody revolutions that litter the pages of history and the soil of countries.

Advocates, by the nature of advocacy groups, gain power by influence. But influence needs reach so more will know and may be converted to the advocacy, and the advocacy or cause itself seen as the answer to a pressing need so that there will be commitment and action from the converts. Advocates cannot be simple technocrats, not when the state of our weak nation is concerned and the future of our children are threatened.

There is a great challenge to political advocates today. They cannot be elitist in perspective and behavior or they will be no better than those they complain about. If we reach out to the people, the people must be able to reach out to us. It is not only the favorite causes of advocates that the people need, it is also the pressing needs of the people that advocates must address.
UNQUOTE.

Yes, many Overseas-Filipino advocacies in the homeland are exercises in futility. But there are ways of improving the ways the exercises can be done and funded. In the following days, this writer will post the following parts of this series:

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- * Funding the Filipino Empowerment Fight
- * Empowering the Barangays
- * Financing the Empowerment of the Barangay
- * A Five-pronged Conceptual Approach to Socioeconomic-Political Empowerment
- * Other Topics as will be published in this section. # # #

(To be continued . . .)

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