

On My Mind
5/7/99

What do all those Chinese boat-people now on Tinian do all day? From the little we've been allowed to know, they are confined to a restricted area, and knowing Tinian's topography, it's probably pretty hot, flat, and dry - with not much of interest to look at. So what do they do all day?

Three times a day, presumably, they line up to get fed. But the rest of the time? Do they get newspapers? Do they have radios or tv? or video-cassette players, and video-tapes? Do they have books, magazines to read? Games to play - like chess, checkers, cards? Sports equipment, and space to set up a basketball court, or baseball diamond? Paper and writing utensils?

Or are they left to sit or lie on their cots with nothing to do except worry about what will happen to them next? With nothing to occupy themselves, their hands, their minds? On Guam, some of the boat-people have been put to work on various maintenance projects just to give them something to do. There's been no report of such activity on Tinian.

The boat-people may be illegal, but that is no reason to treat them inhumanely. Except for perhaps a few, it is not the boat-people who are the crooks, the scam artists, the "snake-heads." They are the victims, not the perpetrators, of the scam.

Thanks to the civic-mindedness of members of SGMA, the boat-people have been provided with some clothing. Perhaps Karidat, or the Chinese Association, or the Red Cross could organize a drive to collect books, or games, or pens and paper, or the funds to purchase cassette players and cassettes to give the Chinese on Tinian something to do while they sit there?

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The spat between Tinian's small restaurant owners and the Dynasty Hotel over the contract to feed the Chinese boat-people poses an interesting dilemma all its own. With such an increase in customers, and, presumably, an accompanying increase in profits, there is no question that local restaurants could do very well for themselves. On the other hand, it could become an organizational and accounting nightmare to have half a dozen or more small businesses all providing meals, when uniformity of both the meals and the service would seem to be required.

It's far simpler to contract with a single vendor, who obviously is well-equipped to handle such large numbers. And while the Dynasty is apparently viewed as an "outsider," nonetheless, it is a locally-based business, which could be expected to purchase food from local farmers, and even to hire locals (if they were willing to work) to assist in preparing and delivering the meals. Moreover, if feeding the boat-people brings in the funding to allow the Dynasty to survive until the needed infrastructure is in place to allow it to succeed in its own right, all of Tinian - as well as the rest of the CNMI - would benefit.

There is, of course, the disadvantage that payment for services will not be prompt - as is already evident - and may never be made in full. Once again, this is situation that a larger concern could absorb with far less damage than could a smaller business.

The answer to the dilemma? A Solomon I am not!

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The quote about "killing the messenger" comes to mind in reading about Congressman Palacios' unhappiness with OSHA's announcement that yes, there still are a few sweatshops in the CNMI. Wouldn't it be a far better use of one's energy to identify and solve the problem, rather than to criticize the bearer of the bad news?

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And speaking of bad news, seems the publisher of the <I>Tribune</I> is not above passing off as his own something that was written by someone else. The latest evidence: the front page story of the 4/29/99 issue, "Why is Rep. Franks supporting Clinton's tax agenda?" The entire article, word for word, was lifted from a press release issued by Americans for Tax Reform and written by Peter Ferrara. Even the headline is copied. Yet the paper gives the name of the publisher as the writer of the article.

That's a violation of ethics of the grossest sort. Copying someone else's writing without acknowledging the source, passing it off as one's own, is called plagiarism. It is unacceptable in any field related to the written word, be it fiction or non-fiction, be it prose, poetry, drama, journalism, history, science..... It is, in addition, also a copyright violation.

With information as important a commodity as it is, and with so few sources of local information, it is deeply disturbing to discover that one such sources could be so badly tainted.

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Yet the following week the same newspaper carried an excellent thought-provoking article, this time naming its source - the Lost Angeles Times - and duly identifying its author - Earl Ofari Hutchinson. Hutchinson comments on the assumption most of us make that such violence as occurred at Littleton, Colorado, doesn't occur in genteel white neighborhoods, but only in ghettos and barrios. "It shouldn't matter what the income, status, or color of the victims are," writes Hutchinson, "[B]ut the nagging suspicion is that if the dead and wounded had been black or Latino kids at an inner-city school, there would not have been the intense and prolonged national agony and outrage."

And if the perpetrators of the assault had been black or Latino, they almost certainly would have been lambasted as gangsters, thugs, terrorists and predators instead of merely two members of a

benign clique gone haywire, Hutchinson concludes.

Also a troubling article, but for totally different reasons.

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On a different note altogether, the PSS Board might want to change its approach in deciding where to build the proposed new junior and senior high schools. The PSS Board Chairman has been quoted as saying that the Board needs to consider "where the movement of the population is going" in deciding where to build the schools.

But just as the old saying about "if you build a road, people will drive on it" predicts, it is also true that people will move to where the good schools are. One doesn't have to look any farther than Saipan to find proof of this behavior - just look at the increase in the population of San Vicente, where the school has an excellent reputation.

It might be more appropriate to ask, therefore, where it is most advantageous to PSS to build new schools. Assuming the new schools do have improved facilities, there is little doubt that the population will follow.

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This year's Flame Tree Festival seemed bigger and better than ever. Certainly, despite the damp weather, more people attended and more people participated - as performers, and as vendors. I don't know that everything went as it could have and should have. It seldom does, in such affairs. But overall, it clearly was a great success.

What was also impressive was the thorough job done in cleaning up afterwards. Two days after it was all over, there was hardly a trace of the throngs of people who had crowded the path through the trees in Memorial Park. Congratulations, Rob! And a big thank-you to all involved!