

On My Mind
5/14/99

Last week, this column talked about the plight of the Chinese boat-people on Tinian - whether anything was being done to keep them occupied. But many of the same concerns arise much closer to home. What do the inmates in our local prisons 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? Do they have access to self-improvement courses, sources, workbooks? Paper and writing utensils? Sports equipment, and space to set up a basketball court, or baseball diamond? Games to play - like chess, checkers, cards?

Or are they left to sit or lie on their cots with nothing to do, with nothing to occupy themselves, their hands, their minds?

Except, perhaps, for those in the detention center, the people in our prisons have been found guilty of some crime or other. But that is no reason to treat them as mindless, empty ciphers, to ignore their needs, their interests, their welfare.

The Public Defender's office has long championed the physical well-being of prison inmates. But what about their mental, emotional, economic, social, intellectual well-being? Who is seeing to those needs? At one time, for example, facilities were provided to allow the prisoners to do story-board carving. This kept the inmates occupied, helped them develop and maintain a craft, and to earn some money. In addition, it helped the Arts Council, providing the Council with a source of items to sell in its gift shop, at arts festivals. But that's been stopped, for what appear rather arbitrary reasons, so is no available to inmates.

As a former consultant to the Department of Corrections has said, many of the people in our prisons will eventually be released and again become our neighbors. It is in our best interests - as well as theirs - to do everything we can to make sure that when they do, they are good neighbors.

<center>* * *</center>

Speaking of the Chinese, concern has been expressed that China's anti-U.S. protests over the bombing of its embassy in Kosovo could put off resolution of the fate of the boat-people on Tinian. What is needed here is President Clinton's talent for "compartmentalization." Wonder if that's only an American, or western trait, or if it's something the Chinese could also practice?

<center>* * *</center>

And while on the subject of things political, isn't it wonderful how often that old adage about politics making strange bed-fellows seems to apply to local politics? Former governor Froilan Tenorio's endorsement of Anicia Tomokane as fellow "Reform" party member not only calls to mind that adage, but also calls to mind "roilin' Froilan's" frequent flip-flops of attitude and

opinion that were so typical of his administration. Can anyone seriously wish for more of the same?

For those who have since forgotten - or might not have witnessed it in the first place - Froilan fired Tomokane as head of what was then the Marianas Visitors Bureau during his administration (and it wasn't one of those last-days spite firings, either). Yet now he's supporting her for office.

The issue, though, isn't 'how strange,' but, what will he do next?

<center>* * *</center>

Those who defend the many bureaucratic restrictions the CNMI government has imposed on foreign investors as being a strategy for protecting local developers are right for defending the restrictions - but for the wrong reasons. On the whole, local developers lack the financial resources to undertake large development projects, so those restrictions as protection aren't really needed.

But what the restrictions, by discouraging foreign investors, do accomplish is slow development in general, and that is all to the good. Without a zoning code and other related controls in place, the CNMI, and Saipan in particular, had become victims of the worst aspects of uncontrolled development - unmanageable stress on island infrastructure, rampant destruction of natural resources, high rises in inappropriate places blocking sun, breeze and scenic vistas, ugly buildings, factories in one's back yard.....

Unfortunately, little has been done to develop proper controls since the investor restrictions were put into place. If restrictions are lifted now, uncontrolled development would again afflict the CNMI, would again threaten to destroy, deplete, the resources on which not only the culture, but also the economy, depends.

Regardless of why they were imposed, or what they were meant to accomplish, it's important to realize that lifting those restrictions without taking proper preventive measures to protect the community from the consequences could bring disaster.

<center>* * *</center>

The Visitor's Authority must have spent a fair amount of money to put out that multi-colored ad for "Taste of the Marianas" in the <I>Variety</I> this past Wednesday. Too bad it's so uninformative.

It appears that two different activities occur each Saturday: a "cook-off" contest between hotel chefs (two weeks ago, it was soup, but no one's telling what it was last week, what it will be this week, what it will be next week) judged by panel of presumed gourmets, and the sale, for coupons, of assorted foods by a variety of vendors. The first event is open only to pre-registered participants, but the second activity is apparently open to all who are interested (and hungry).

It's part of the MVA's "Visit Marianas 99" campaign. But in this case, it is apparently open to

locals as well. Only you wouldn't know it, judging from the ad - or from anywhere else. You'd think the MVA would be eager for maximum participation in such an event. But for some reason, it doesn't seem at all interested in having locals mix with the tourists. Too bad. No one wins in that kind of game - not the economy, not the hotels, not the vendors, not the local community.

<center>* * *</center>

On a more upbeat note: Librarians and book lovers will want to clip, share, read Tony Pellegrino's "Focus on Education" column in Tuesday's <I>Saipan Tribune</I>. I don't care much for the title - "Who is that gorgeous book I saw you talking with last night?" - but the paean he sings to the marvel of books is quite inspiring.

Less inspiring, though certainly thought-provoking, is his comment in an earlier column, that the enduring values of American culture are "success, achievement, competition, and individualism."

Ugh!

<center>* * *</center>

Also upbeat, and most enjoyable as well, was Mar-Vic Muna's column in this past Wednesday's edition of the <I>Variety</I> on "linguistic insanity." She quotes, at some length, an article from the Chicago Tribune - unfortunately, with unidentified author - that asks, for example, "How can a slim chance and a fat chance be the same - while a wise man and a wise guy are opposites? How can overlook and oversee be opposite, while quite a few and quite a lot are alike? How can the weather be hot as hell one day and cold as hell the other?"

Thanks, Mar-Vic. Wonderful stuff!