

On My Mind  
8/18/00

One of the more popular sayings tells us that if it's too good to be true, it probably is (too good to be true, that is). Has anyone taken a look at the campaign promises "Roilin Froilan" is making? The promises first appeared earlier this week in stories that were so similarly worded it was clear that they'd been based on a press release from his campaign office. Apparently, Froilan - or his supporters - were not satisfied with the coverage, for those same promises have now appeared as full page ads in both papers. According to the stories and the ads, he's promising to work closely with the Chamber of Commerce, the Hotel Association, and other business and professional groups.

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Excuse me? Froilan work closely with others? When during his term in office the egocentrism was so overbearing you'd think he'd been made king?

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The articles, - and the press release - also have Froilan promising to work with parents, teachers, the business community and others to improve the quality of education in the islands. I beg your pardon? Froilan willing to be cooperative, to listen to others, rather than take the high-handed road of "I know best?"

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Froilan said he would consult with the man'amko and seek their advice on matters of public policy. Froilan? Seek others' advice?

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I'm sorry. I thought those ads the funniest thing I'd read in ages.

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How far should party loyalty go? Perhaps the question should be: is there a relationship between the local Republican and Democrat parties and their counterparts in the U.S.? And if so, what is it? I don't think I'm schizophrenic - that is, with a split personality, or some such. But I find myself more sympathetic with, supportive of, one party in the CNMI, and the other party on the mainland.

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Hence the question: do the parties on island really relate to their counterparts on the mainland? Unfortunately, name recognition does carry some weight. Introduce one's self as a Republican to a Republican member of the U.S. Congress, and that U.S. Congressman will immediately lend a sympathetic ear. (He, or she, might not do much else, but that's a different story.) On the other hand, introduce one's self as a Republican to a Democratic member of the U.S. Congress, and it's almost certain that the U.S. Congressman won't even lend a sympathetic ear.

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The suggestion has been made before, but it deserves being made again. The CNMI would be far better off with two parties whose names bear absolutely no relationship to either the Democratic or the Republican Party on the mainland. That way, CNMI government officials would not languish unheard should their party not coincide with the one that happens to be in power on the mainland.

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The challenge would be to come up with acceptable party designations. It could - heaven help us! - take as long as it is taking to agree on street names.

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One of the many attractions of the place I now live is that it's quiet. So quiet that I can hear the rooster flap its wings as it gets ready to crow. I can hear the rain coming. The difference in incoming and outgoing tides as the surf grows more or less thunderous. The breeze rattling the banana leaves. The plop of a ripe breadfruit as it hits the ground.

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All of which is in sharp contrast to where I lived before, right on the highway, right next to a restaurant and karaoke bar, where the noise was constant - from cars and busses speeding down the road to the clatter of plates and glasses, the chatter of diners, and the late night caterwauling of drunken tourists pretending they could sing.

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Which makes it all the more disturbing, disruptive, upsetting when, in my new, peaceful setting, someone comes along, parks his or her car, and leaving the volume turned way up, starts setting up for a cook-out, a barbecue, a party on the beach. As the day progresses, and others join the party, the noise increases - sometimes there are two cars with two radios (or tape decks), each blaring its separate cacophony.

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Or when someone several houses down the road, turns up the volume on his/her hi-fi/stereo to accompany washing the car, hacking at weeds, or preparing a cook-out for friends and family.

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Of course, if I were living in an air-conditioned house, their noise probably wouldn't be so bothersome. My windows wouldn't be wide open to catch whatever breeze there is. I'd have the insulation of glass, and maybe drapes, to baffle some of the noise. And then, the "white noise" of the air conditioner would help, too, to drown out the noise from outside. But I don't have air conditioning. So far as I know, most of my other neighbors don't either. Though I don't know whether the loud music disturbs them as much as it does me.

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Much of it is probably generational - my taste in music does not include either the volume level, or the predominance of the bass, much less the inanity of the lyrics or the seeming lack of melody that much of the popular so-called music of today features. But there are also health issues involved, as well as issues of privacy.

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People are entitled to listen to whatever music - the term being used rather loosely, here - they want. But I would argue that they don't have any right to invade my privacy and force their music into my consciousness against my will, to impose their taste on my eardrums. They have no right to turn up the volume until I can, from two or three blocks away, hear an announcer's every word clearly and distinctly. They have no right to turn the bass on so high that it reverberates until it feels my heart is beating to its tempo. Where is their respect for others' comfort?

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The CNMI Constitution prohibits unnecessary noise pollution. Unfortunately, there's never been a definition of what constitutes noise pollution, much less "unnecessary" noise pollution. If the legislature is not too busy, I sure wish they would do so now. It's high time that such invasive noise pollution be curbed, that people's right to quiet be enforced.

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None the less, it's worth noting that such noise pollution is, at least in part, due to the tropical setting; when everyone spends as much time out of doors as is done here, enjoying one's music raises different problems than in more temperate climates. It is, however, also a matter of old-fashioned courtesy, consideration for others, manners - values that , unfortunately, seem to be in all too short supply of late.

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I should have kept my doubts to myself. Or not been in such a hurry, and taken time to think about what I was writing. Or, since I had doubts, not been so lazy, and gotten up to check the dictionary. But I didn't, and so I let it go. Yes, ma'am. I should have known better. "High ideals" may be redundant, but an oxymoron it ain't. Thanks for calling it to my attention.