

On My Mind  
12/13/02

One can only say "Thank God Super typhoon Pongsana missed Saipan and Tinian!" The stories and pictures of the damage done to Rota and Guam that are beginning to come through - to the people, the businesses, the hotels, the infrastructure - are shocking. They make me feel guilty that I have a roof over my head, glass in my windows, water in my faucets, gas in my car.

<br><br>

Kudos to House Speaker Heinz Hofschneider for taking the lead in organizing a way for all of us to help. According to today's <I>Tribune</I>, the Speaker is encouraging House members and staff to take part in a drive to provide food and other needs, such as batteries, to Guam and Rota. House members will also broadcast appeals for help over KCNM/KZMI, and to identify designated drop-off sites for contributions.

<br><br>

Other government agencies are doing their share, of course, sending manpower and equipment to both islands to help in the reconstruction. But Hofschneider has opened the way for all the rest of us to help as well - a way to express our sympathy and support with more than words - for which I am grateful.

<br><br>

What has not been mentioned so far, but also deserves attention is that Christmas is less than two weeks away, and for most residents of Guam and Rota it will be a grim holiday indeed. How to devise contributions that will be appropriate, provide at least a token Christmas for all who've suffered, and that can be afforded by the rest of us is a challenge still to be resolved.

<br><br>

<center>\* \* \*</center>

<br><br>

On a more mundane level, one can only hope that the Secretary of the Department of Lands and Natural Resources is not deceived by the "survey" taken on whether fish-nets should be banned. A story in the <I>Variety</I> this week reports that more than half of the 250 people who responded agreed with the DLNR proposal that gill, drag and surround fishing nets should be banned.

<br><br>

But how was the survey distributed? to whom? when and where? how representative of those most directly affected, the fishermen, were the respondents? As those who did protest have already said, the ban is too onerous. Certain restrictions should be imposed, and certain areas should be closed to net fishing - perhaps on a rotating basis? - so that fish stocks may regrow - but certainly not all nets, throughout the entire CNMI, all at once.

<br><br>

DLNR has also gone too far in banning access to Forbidden Island other than two days a week to its "overlook." Access to Forbidden Island has always been self-limiting - open only to those hardy enough to make the climb back up. The possibility that access will only be re-opened once a path has been engineered to make it more accessible to more people - as some have rumored - is alarming, to say the least.

<br><br>

Not only will easy access hasten trashing and destruction of the site, but easy access will deprive

locals and tourists alike of the pride and satisfaction that comes with having overcome a challenge. Having everything made simple, passive and easy engenders boredom, not enjoyment.

<br><br>

<center>\* \* \*</center>

<br><br>

Question of the week: will the governor raise a hue and cry over the “resignation” of NMC’s Barbara Moir? and/or the firing of her two cohorts? (Of course, he’ll have to stay on Saipan long enough to learn that they’ve taken place. Imagine, going to Rota TWICE to view the damage!) If he did, that would fit right in with the pattern of micro-management that is beginning to become all too clear as his style.

<br><br>

He objected to the firing of Mariana Public Lands Authority Commissioner Bertha Leon Guerrero. He has objected to the hiring of Deputy Attorney General Clyde Lemmons. He has “ordered” the re-writing of Frank Guerrero’s contract with the Public School System. He has insisted on usurping the role of Pete A. Tenorio, the CNMI’s elected Washington Representative. And those are only the high-profile actions.

<br><br>

Then there’s the pattern of amatory peccadillos he’s establishing. Everyone is entitled to his own life style, so long as it doesn’t break the law. But - despite Bill Clinton - there’s also a concern about honoring the dignity of the office. Granted it keeps the coconut wireless humming, but it sure doesn’t do much for respect.

<br><br>

<center>\* \* \*</center>

<br><br>

Another leader for whom respect is eroding is Northern Marianas College’s president, Dr. Wright. One arbitrary and autocratically designed reorganization plan is bad enough. But two?

In just a matter of months? Handed down without rationalization, without consensus of either the immediate community or the broader one? That’s a most peculiar management style, for sure!

<br><br>

And then to fire recently promoted staff on no other grounds than “guilty by association”? Tut, tut, Dr. Wright!

<br><br>

There’s also his ploy to cut costs by turning NMC’s lab school over to the Public School System, saying NMC has no business operating a school. But most schools of education do operate lab schools. Besides, with PSS in charge, how can NMC control the teacher training that is supposed to take place?

<br><br>

<center>\* \* \*</center>

<br><br>

On a different note: In *Ecclesiastes* it says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun...” It would appear that the time has come to make Martin Luther King Day an official holiday in the CNMI. There is now an understanding - that was not evident before - that Martin Luther King was more than a champion of equal treatment and equal rights for Afro-Americans; that his fight was for equal treatment and equal rights for all people, regard-

less of their color or their race or their beliefs; that his words, and his beliefs have relevance for the Chamorro and the Carolinian as well as the Hispanic, the Asian, and the black.

<br><br>

It is equally appropriate that the observance of Martin Luther King Day take the place of the Columbus Day observance, as Senator Pete P. Reyes has proposed, since Columbus Day has so little relevance to the CNMI.

<br><br>

Observance of Martin Luther King Day as a CNMI holiday has been proposed for many years. As I recall, at one time, the legislature debated whether Good Friday or Martin Luther King Day should be added to the CNMI's holiday schedule. At the time, I supported the former rather than the latter, because it seemed to me more important that the people of the CNMI make a statement about their own needs, beliefs, feelings, rather than follow, once again, a pattern set by outsiders.

In addition, at the time awareness of or familiarity with Martin Luther King and what he stood for was not widespread. Insularity was much more prevalent than it is today.

<br><br>

But times change. Today it seems more than fitting that the CNMI also honor Martin Luther King.

<br><br>

<center>\* \* \*</center>

<br><br>

On the subject of attitudes and points of view, it's interesting to note columnists' very different reactions to the situation in Nigeria that started a riot and caused the Miss World contest to move to London. Ellen Goodman, a well-known writer for the <i>Boston Globe</i> thinks it's deplorable that the reporter whose observation that Muhammad might well have chosen a bride from among the contestants has been threatened and forced to go into hiding. To Goodman, whose column appeared in the 12/6/02 issue of the <I>Pacific Daily News</I>, this is an abuse of freedom of the press. She notes that "the West has had more success exporting its [sexual] images than its ideals."

<br><br>

Ira Rifkin, a writer for the <i>Baltimore Sun</i>, takes a different position. In a column reprinted in the 12/09/02 issue of the <I>Tribune</I> he describes the Miss World debacle as a "testament to insensitivity and greed....an example of cultural globalization's inherent dissonance." Despite Muslim objection to the holding of the beauty contest in Nigeria as an immoral parade of nudity, Rifkin says that Nigeria's Westernized elite supported the contest to show that their country was "progressing as a democracy and worthy of foreign investment and tourism."

<br><br>

The Miss World contest was, in effect, a ramming of Western cultural norms down non-Western throats, Rifkin says. Rifkin argues that if economic globalization more directly helped the world's poor, the encroachment of cultural globalization would be better tolerated. But with economic globalization of so little benefit to the developing nations, cultural globalization is resented all the more. And thus the hostility against the western values represented in the beauty contest, against the western attitude expressed by the columnist.

<br><br>

In short, Rifkin feels it wasn't a question of freedom of expression so much as a question of

violating others' beliefs. Western ideals are not universal, nor need they be.