

WHEN DEMOCRACY FAILS

An Environmental Opinion

By Evaristo Avella

You may be wondering what the title of this paper has to do with Environmental/conservation issues. To find out, read on.

In 1954, a politician in Guatemala by the name of Jacobo Arbenz, was elected he President of Guatemala in one of the few democratic elections to take place in that country at that time. Arbenz saw the need to fight for the poor and oppressed, he need for radical change such as land redistribution. Since at that time the cold war was at its peak, the US government via the CIA, worked towards overthrowing Arbenz. After removing him and installing a dictatorship government, the country commenced a long struggle for freedom and independence from US backed military dictatorships.

So commenced one of the nastiest civil wars in Latin America. Later, the US government itself admitted and recognized that Arbenz had little or no ties with communist regimes. He was just foreseeing the future and trying to avoid the very same poverty that currently exists in that country. The CIA saw him as a threat; as someone threatening U.S. interests in that country. They did not see him as a worker fighting for the poor and oppressed. He was an elected President, duly elected by the People of Guatemala. In this instance, democracy failed. The sad thing about it is that it failed as a result of interference from the most powerful democracy on earth - the U.S.

Recently, with Government's commitment to support the development of the Chalillo Dam, it reminded me of similar situations when democracy can fail. This paper is no way advocating for or against the dam. My decision on the dam will be made only after the EIA process has been given a chance. After working with the EIA process for years, I am a firm believer in the process, and unlike those who have already decided, I will wait until the final documents are out.

However, similarly as in 1954, there are always powerful interest groups, sometimes with their own agenda, with access to substantial financial resources, and with connections high up in the US Corporate arena. These interest groups are powerful, particularly those that enjoy the better of two worlds - Belize and the US or another country. It is important to point out

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that it is not all of them that are selfish, and, therefore, not all of them fit this description. Along with the advantage that dual benefits allow them, comes added lobbying powers beyond our borders. Some of these interest groups have exhausted their local lobbying powers and find themselves in the minority position here in Belize, and can no longer lobby in favor of their special interests at the local level.

These interests groups want us to live a lifestyle of their choice; a lifestyle, which even they can no longer enjoy in their country of origin. They want what we have - a pristine natural environment. They want to force us to convert the entire country into a zoo. You see, our country is beautiful, and they can make money from keeping it

"pristine". While nothing is legally wrong with that, We the natives don't have the money to invest in our country, so they buy the best of land and give us the demeaning jobs such as common laborers while their people get the better paid jobs, the managerial positions etc. However, these people are the minority. Their voting power would lose here in Belize. So what do they do?

They do what the CIA did to Arbenz; they take their cause to these powerful groups outside of Belize. Essentially what they have done is betrayed the Democratic process.

Unfortunately, however, what about our democratic process? Because they are afraid of losing grounds here, and are within the minority bracket, is it ethical for them to use outside power? And if so, what about the rights of Belizeans to decide their own fate, how to use their resources, when and so on? In reality the use of outside organizations to further your own self-interest, follows the same principles as that of military dictatorships.

This is the case with the groups fighting the Chalillo Project. It is my opinion that as long as Belizeans want to fight any project, as long as it follows a democratically based process, and peaceful means, then it is his or her right to fight, so let him fight. However, when agencies such as the NRDC, WWF, TNC (all respect due to them for what they represent in the environmental arena), become so powerful to influence local decision, then the question we must ask ourselves is: are we still free? At what point in time do we Belizeans lose our right to self-determination? And if we do accept these corporate-backed giants to decide for us, then when does economic independence begin?

When groups refuse to respect our democratic process and being the minority still choose to dictate or influence how to use our resources and how to run our affairs, then, ethically, there is no difference between dictatorship governments and these powerful organizations, especially when their self-interest is a priority over a national interest. To make matters worst, the leaders of these organizations, themselves professionals in the conservation field, have obviously forgotten the principle of objectivity. They have deliberately distorted information, often claiming to be representing "many Belizeans".

and "many" Belizean organizations.

We should demand to see who are the members of these organizations, who are the board members and which foreign based organizations is funding them. There are organizations in this country with five members and the same board members comprise its board members. Of course, this is not illegal; any amount of organizations can form to fight a cause. We, the environmentalists or conservationists, should realize, that even the native Belizeans belonging to this group do not form the majority. In a decision that is of national interest, it would be a betrayal of the silent majority if only the powerful vocal groups influence the outcome of the decision.

This is true despite their opinion that we don't know any better and they should decide for us. Environmental organizations are powerful because they are vociferous and have the resources to be heard. Some of them also have the foreign accent to back it up. However, environmentalists or conservationists do not form the majority of Belizeans in this country. The environmental/conservation sector should not decide what the fate of the country should

be. This is especially so when powerful foreign-based organizations are influencing and funding these groups. Belizeans need to learn, listen and use what we know best: the common sense approach. Only so will democracy not fail. Think about it. This is my opinion, and I have a right to it. If it offends you, then perhaps you need to decide on whose side you are: Belize or that of another country.

Please let democracy prevail.

BASKETBALL EXCITEMENT IN PORT LOYOLA

Belize City, Saturday April 14, 2001

The vibes were positive in Neal Pen Road on Holy Saturday, April 14th as a one-day tournament kicked off sponsored by Area Representative, Dolores under a hot and windy conditions.

Organizers for the event was Sharon Burgess and some ten teams from Neal Pen Road, Kraal Road and Central American Boulevard participated. By the end of the day, a huge crowd had gathered to witness the sports and partake of food and drinks provided by the Port Loyola Women's Group. Stephen Rhamdas' box was in attendance and it was a positive and peaceful day for the youths of Neal Pen Road.

First Place in the senior division was taken by the Neal Pen Road Seniors, with 2nd place in the senior division going to the "Nets" also of Neal Pen Road. In the under 17 junior division the Neal Pen Road Jr. team took the honors.

Participants and spectators alike are calling for more sporting activities at the Neal Pen Road court because Saturday's event went so

well.

Not to be outdone Earl "Ajax" Requeña organized another tournament at the West Lake/Faber's Road Extension Court with sponsorships from Area Rep. Dolores and various business houses.

Participating in the exciting West Lake tournament were 4 under 13 teams and 4 under 15 teams. At the end of the strenuous fun filled day, the Caesar Ridge Road team captured 1st place in the Under 13 with "Ajax Paradise" setting for 2nd. "Players" also participated with one team and "West Lake" entered two teams.

In the under 15 action 1st place went to the Caesar Ridge Road team with West Lake taking 2nd. "Seven Stars" and "Dodgers" also participated. Area Rep. Dolores has pledged continued support for the Basketball tournaments especially for the under 15 boys, and at tournaments in the summer Ajax has pledged to bring out an all women's team

Holy Saturday was a great day for youths in Port Loyola.



"Under 13 Excitement" youth basketball West Lake - Port Loyola

U-Ming jacked at guest house

Robbers ditch checks but keep cash

On Saturday April 14th, British National Paul U-Ming reported to police that about 5 PM that same evening, he was at the Down Town Guest House located on Eve Street talking to the manager's daughter, 17 year old Helen Chang, a senior at St. Catherine's Academy, when they were approached by a male person of brown complexion who asked for two ideals and then began a conversation with the pair. The man however, later drew a silver gun which he pointed at U-Ming and then demanded money.

Chang said that at that time she sounded an alarm at the guest house, but that did not stop the robber from proceeding with his

mission. "He turned to Paul and said you know all I want is money".

When Belize Times asked Chang what the robber looked like she said that he was about five feet three inches tall, "red skinned", slim built and has three short dreadlocks in the back of his head. He was wearing a colorful Bob Marley hat and a Bob Marley shirt.

U-Ming was relieved of a black waste bag that contained his British Passport, \$800 US currency, 300 British pounds and \$1,300 in travelers checks. On the following day, April 15th, the proprietor of the Guest House, Miss Kenny, reportedly found the passport and travelers checks in the yard. Police continue to investigate.