

Sunday, March 18, 2001



Follow di Leader!

Editor Sir,

The other media houses need very much to follow your lead in being impartial in both its reporting and commentary.

A strong democracy is dependent on an independent media willing to be objective in providing news and opposing ideas. Here in Belize though it appears that everything is subservient to political interest, even the special interest. This absence of check and balance is detrimental to a young democracy and can only lead to continuous erosion of our personal freedoms and liberties and public sector corruption.

It is sad, but ironic, that special interest groups abandon the interest of their members to stay in the politically correct path. Therefore the teachers union was eager to castigate a potential ally fighting against BSSB and NHI taxes but absolutely quiet about one of their own teachers being victimized because of his willingness to speak freely. One environmental lobby group is willing to repudiate from its larger lobby group because its leaders are apparently compromised in their stance against Chalillo. Chalillo, and now Vaca Falls, dams will be the worst environmental assault ever seen in the history of this country and some environmentalists are willing to highlight relatively inconsequential benefits and ignore their members' principles. For the independent media, though, to reject fairness in their reporting is inexcusable.

My point is that the media has a responsibility to the public, not politicians, in order for us to support them by our purchases and ads. Some time ago when *Amandala* made the claim that it was raising its already high price even higher because the *Reporter* was selling more, I published a letter indicating that readers will see through such nonsense. I contended that while it was true that the *Reporter* was selling more, it was inflationary pressures largely due to increase government taxes that has forced *Amandala* to raise its prices.

Reporter's success has been garnered by considerable investment in equipment and strong credibility among readers. Incidentally it is because they don't say one thing and then say another that their credibility has soared. By that letter *Amandala* tried to attack me even though they didn't know me to the point that they claim I was using a pseudonym. Nevertheless, when *Amandala* increased advertising rates a few months later they then admitted that it was a direct result of inflation and the increasingly high cost of living and doing business, agreeing to my initial assertion.

Why then the hypocrisy and double-talk? It goes right back to who pays the piper calls the tune. *Amandala* has enjoyed substantial advertising revenue from this government since 1998, largely through the Ministry of Housing and Education, and therefore cannot forcefully criticize the government even if criticism is due. Both health care and educational quality deteriorated drastically. We have pinned our hopes on improving education by changing the name of our institutions, but still education costs have gone up. The shift system is in shambles. Internet access is still a promise, and the majority of poor children find they have been left behind.

The media has a responsibility to report and evaluate these areas of serious public concern, but all we seem too be getting is pretty personal agendas.

For the sake of our country and the future of Belize let us hope the other media houses follow *Reporter's* lead in being both independent and objective.

Signed: Robert Tillet