

- The Professional opportunists now stand in fatuous splendor on the Philippine stage.

THE ERA OF THE TURNCOAT

In a society in which materialistic values predominate, the voice of the genuine intellectual seldom carries a commanding force. The reason is quite obvious: Its possessor usually dislikes bragging or exaggeration. He is averse to using his speech or his pen as a vehicle for either adulation or senseless condemnation. Whatever message he means to give out, it is intended to serve the cause of truth. It expresses its appeal in tones of moderation and modesty.

A social atmosphere in which political influence and material wealth are of prime importance, modesty is often mistaken for an admission of defeat or a silent confession of error. The job of the public relations man receives high recognition. It is the business of the publicity agent to offer his services to the man who craves reputation through popularity. In most cases, he is a man of

inordinate ambition but mediocre ability. By describing his petty accomplishments in glowing terms, he becomes a celebrity in the uncultivated minds of the populace. By securing the assistance of the organs of public communication, he often succeeds in making himself prominent in some field of his choice. Thus the newspaper is his most valuable friend; and so he has to pay court to the publisher, the editor, the reporters, the columnists. He is capable of doing this at all cost, publicity being his principal asset. He is well aware that the general public do not analyze, criticize, or weigh the contents of the printed page. Of course, they do not have the ability to do this work. And so more often than not, the reading public accept as true ninety-nine percent of the matters appearing in print. Hence, the lying individual and clever opportunist, who could get

the support of a tolerant and an unsuspecting press, manages to appear before the public as a prominent person and dedicated nationalist who could boast of having *walked with heroes* and of being a hero himself.

In recent Philippine society, the term turncoat has become quite popular from the occurrence of many cases of public men transferring their allegiance from one party to another for a consideration. This consideration could be the reward of a desired position, the avoidance of a threatened disgrace, the promise of non-exposure of a criminal act, or an outright payment of money. These men who readily shed their old party garments in order to put on new party clothes, in many instances without as much as a plausible excuse, are branded as turncoats. This is, of course, a term of opprobrium. One with some real sense of honor and dignity would have nothing to do with a turncoat.

But turncoats are not the particular products of the last two or three years. We have had in this country a few

well-known persons who have made it a habitual practice over the years to follow the profession of the turncoat. We have called them opportunists, a term which seems to be less harsh and less violent than turncoat. But in reality they are substantially the same. They have identical connotations of evil and moral filth. An opportunist is a turncoat, and vice-versa. He is a fraud, a phoney.

To be is to an opportunist a concept of no importance at all as compared with to have. Character to him has less value than reputation. He banks on fame produced by wide and frequent publicity, which he uses to blow up the tiny drops of his ability into large and luminous bubbles of phoney competence. The innocent onlooker is transfixed with amazement. The charm of his language and the rhythm of his voice as he delivers a speech, which for all we know may have been a plagiarized version of another man's address, impress the uninformed and uncritical listener. The true image of the opportunist is carefully concealed behind

the glamour of empty eloquence. How could men of honor and character trust a person of that mind, manner, and spirit? He could be for one party in the morning, for another party at noon time, and for a third party at dinner time. And tomorrow when the last party to which he attached himself last night has lost its prestige, he would offer his services to the new power with all sorts of blandishments and protestations of friendship.

This poor country of ours has been made the victim of wily opportunists. Some of them are crude and artless. But a few have the finesse of sharp diplomats whose insincerity, duplicity, and superficiality have been tolerated or ignored through the subtle use of extensive and intensive self-publicity. Those who should know better could render invaluable service to Philippine society by refusing to be blinded by the antics of the opportunist. It is not hard to expose him and his ilk. All that the educated observer need to do is to look up the actual record of fickleness, unreliability,

and egotistical behavior in the private and public life of such man. They are convincing evidence of an unprincipled spirit and an unscrupulous character, which are the tell-tale marks of the opportunist. The difficulties which the people of our country have been experiencing for the last 15 or more years could be largely traced to the active participation we have permitted the turncoat, the opportunist, to play in the management of national affairs.

The turncoat has made Philippine politics disgusting to men of principle and integrity. He has treated membership in our political parties merely as a means for promoting his personal comfort, convenience, material prosperity, and financial security. Hence, he is a Nacionalista today, a Liberal tomorrow, and a Nacionalista again the next day. He was pro-Garcia yesterday when Garcia was in power, and pro-Macapagal today as Macapagal is now in power. The tragedy is that he still manages to have a herd of admirers who see, hear, and

smell nothing evil in him as long as he retains the privileges, the prerequisites, and the prestige of office.

The turncoat in a purely political office smells bad enough. But when somehow he succeeds in occupying a position in an educational, a civic, or a religious organization for which strength and firmness of character are in-

dispensable qualifications, he becomes a veritable skunk. He infects the youth who take him for a model. As they may discover his record of mendacity and opportunism, their sense of values is apt to be distorted; and they are likely to become turncoats themselves. — V.G.S., *Philippine Weekly Review*, Dec. 3, 1963.

OBSERVATION

Before turning to those moral or mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the inquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's fingernails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boots, by his trouser-knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs — by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent inquirer in any case is almost inconceivable. — *Arthur Conan Doyle*.