

- These are ideas of a careful and courageous Filipino thinker who writes a daily column in a well-edited newspaper.

## PUBLIC TRUST?

A prominent person wrote the other day that in order for this country to get moving the people should repose trust in our public officials, or something to that effect.

Aside from the patent fact that the idea is very old and stupefyingly unimaginative — because everybody is saying it and its wisdom as a principle has long been completely accepted — it leaves a bitter taste in the mouth if repeated over and over, in the face of the *kalokohans* we see roundabout us.

Of course, there ought to be public trust in our officials. A government without that public trust will just disintegrate. It is said that in Britain there is plenty of public trust because it is an honor to be a public official there. To be a British public official means great integrity, competence, unquestioned private honor, dedication and loyalty to high principles — in a word, genuine exemplariness.

Now it is easy to preach to us common people that we must trust our public officials. We are willing to give that trust any time, but before we give it we have a few questions to ask. We may be common, but we are not stupid.

When we talk about trust — whether it be trust in government or trust in an individual person — is it not that trust must first be deserved before it can be given? Is it not that if trust is forced because of pressure brought to bear, it is meaningless? Like other good things, trust must be earned and, when earned, the means of earning it must still be examined before it can be judged to be deserved.

If we use this rationale and accept it as our guide, do many of our public officials deserve public trust?

When we read everyday about public officials being investigated for the accumulation of easy wealth, when

we use public office to promote the interests of our family and friends, when we disguise our hollowness and lack of integrity through "public relations" and adroit publicity, when we can turn about face and change our political party on a mere personal pique, when public funds are wasted like water and we squeeze the people to keep paying their taxes religiously to support extravagance and other brazen forms of saturnalia, when we use authority to persecute and bamboozle and harass — when we do these things, and more, how can you in the world generate public trust?

What I am saying and repeating is that if the government desires public support — and thereby public confidence — it must go into ho-

nest-to-goodness reforms. Its officials must be exemplary. Many of our public officials never had it so good. The life of self-denial and thrift and self-effacement is a life despised. In its place is held aloft a life of garish show, the stress on facade, cheap publicity, the cornering of unusual privileges, the abuse of authority, the feathering of the nest, and wrong appointments for important offices.

Yes, indeed, I agree that we common people must shore up our government and officials with our unqualified trust, but the first move to merit that trust is clearly on the part of the government and the officials themselves. — *Manila Bulletin*, Apr. 18, 1966 by Rex D. Drilon.