

**EA:** You did not read the article then. You read this article?

**FM:** I read part of it. But it was only referred to me by the Minister of Justice. He asked whether I disapproved of the letter that he sent to General Menzi. And I said, "That's your business, if you think that you should send that letter. It is of no concern to me because, after all, it doesn't affect me." Because I understand the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Justice were attracted by the statement to the effect that there were people who were incarcerated, but against whom there were no charges. That particular portion. And they felt that that was libel.

**EA:** Thank you very much.

**FM:** What are the other magazines that engaged in this?

**Answer:** WHO.

**FM:** WHO. Even Time Magazine and Newsweek. I am referring to the libel case that I filed against Time Magazine. For the same reason, which they tried to compromise. I don't know, we keep and maintain good relations. No problem. That is a matter between Gen. Menzi and the editor.

**EA:** Well, it affects everybody also. . .

**FM:** How did it affect you?

**EA:** . . . because the principles and the ideals involved we thought affect the entire press.

**FM:** Very refreshing.

**EA:** In fact, the National Press Club made a statement on this.

**FM:** Yes, I think the National Press Club made a statement. I have not even read the statement. How did it go? Is it something in which I should be interested?

**EA:** Yes, because of the pressures, the use of pressures on newspaper people from the authorities. From Malacanang. From ministers.

**FM:** You speak categorically.

**EA:** Yes.

**FM:** Suppose I were to ask you to prove that?

**EA:** That?

**FM:** That pressures from Malacanang? I mean, did the National Press Club say that? If the Press Club said that, I will ask them to prove it.

**EA:** They had copies of the Comelec and the Puno letters that were circulated.

**FM:** The Puno letter and the other letters were received after she had submitted her resignation. Did you know that?

**EA:** That they were circulated?

**FM:** They were received after the resignation.

**EA:** I was not ware of that, sir.

**FM:** I think you should study law a little bit. I was taken aback when they said that the National Press Club has made a statement that . . . I am used to it already. It doesn't concern me too much. I am sure that the National Press Club will, in the long run, understand my position and the position of everybody. Why don't they talk to Puno? Why don't they talk to Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and the Comelec? Anyway, why don't we go to more important subjects?

## Why is Tony Nieva in Jail?\*

LEONOR J. AUREUS

A red streamer flaps outside the third floor of the National Press Club building. Yellow words on a red background, the streamer reads: "FREE TONY NIEVA." Another red streamer, a bigger one, hangs across the Press Club's iron fence facing the traffic that speeds on to Jones Bridge. In big, yellow and white letters, it says: "PALAYAIN SI TONY NIEVA."

On any other week, the red streamers flapping in the wind outside the Press Club would have flapped unnoticed. But this week marks an important national celebration — Press Week, which begins April 25 and climaxes on May 1, Labor Day, so the "Free Tony Nieva" streamers take on an ominous significance: it seems doubly ironic that as the government extols the virtues of press freedom and the rights of the working man, Antonio Ma. Nieva, a respected member of the Philippine press and an active media union leader, should be spending the week behind bars, facing charges of "conspiracy to commit rebellion and overthrow the government."

Friends and colleagues of Tony Nieva ask themselves the question: Where do press freedom and labor unionism end and subversion begin? Should Tony's arrest be taken as part of a pattern of events which started with the forced resignation of Letty Magsanoc as editor of *Panorama*

\*Published in Mr. and Ms., May 10, 1983

in 1981, followed by the arrest and filing of subversion charges against *We Forum* publisher/editor Jose Burgos, Jr. and his staff, the filing of a libel case against *Panorama* editor Domini T. Suarez and writer Ceres P. Doyo, the military's questioning of *Bulletin* columnists Arlene Babst and Niñez Cacho Olivares and *Mr. & Ms.* Editor Publisher E.D. Apostol and Managing Editor Doris G. Nuyda, and women writers Suarez, Doyo, Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, and Jo-Ann O. Maglipon, and the controversial "resignation" of *Tempo* editor Recah Trinidad? Should Tony's indefinite detention be taken as a portent of more arrests to come?

Significantly, as this article is being written to meet this week's deadline (April 26), Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile is meeting with members of the Philippine press on April 27, on invitation of the National Press Club. The journalists are optimistic that this meeting with Minister Enrile will be a "real dialogue" which would not only shed light on the questions raised in the wake of Tony's arrest but also bring about his release before Press Week is over.

Some of the statements or resolutions passed by writers' and union groups urging the immediate release of Tony:

From the *Women Writers in Media Now (WOMEN)*: "Tony's detention is still another violation of the right to free expression and free organization guaranteed by our Constitution. Not only is Tony an invaluable asset to Philippine journalism and literature, but he is also a responsible family man, the sole breadwinner for his young brood of six."

From the *National Press Club*, a cautious request: "At this stage of the government inquiry into charges of subversion against Mr. Nieva, the National Press Club requests the President to order his provisional release pending investigation of the charges against him."

From the *Philippine Center of International P.E.N.*: "The arrest and detention of Mr. Nieva constitutes a grave injustice to him and to his family of which he is the sole support; it strikes fear in the hearts of all our writers who see in his arrest a grave threat to their Constitutional right to free expression."

From the *Brotherhood of Unions in Media of the Philippines (BUMP)*: "We view his (Tony's) arrest and indefinite detention as a blow to the cause of press freedom in the country and the promotion of the rights and welfare of workers in media. We know him as a respected and crusading journalist, and an ardent and sincere union leader who was not only concerned with the Bulletin Employees Union which he steered through so many years of labor struggle, but with the problems affecting the media industry as a whole."

From the *College Editors Guild*: "The arrest of Mr. Nieva reflects

the uneasiness of government with journalists and writers whose burning desire is to tell it like it is. For the media is a very powerful venue that can make or break government."

In a statement worded in Pilipino, the Bulletin Employees Union questioned the propriety of the government's linking Tony Nieva with the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) whose leaders were arrested eight months ago in September, 1982. It said that "Tony's arrest happened at a time when he was very busy and involved with work for the welfare of newspaper people and media unionists." The BEU asked: "We are wondering why Tony was arrested now that Labor Day, May 1, is approaching."

According to a BEU spokesman, as Bulletin Union president, Tony successfully led a collective bargaining negotiation in 1979 which gave economic and work benefits to Bulletin employees. "No other BEU president has been able to do this," the spokesman said, "so when Tony ran for reelection, he was overwhelmingly reelected for a second term."

Tony was arrested April 13 by six Metrocom operatives in plain clothes. According to a news account, Metrocom chief Prospero Olivas said "evidence gathered by the Metrocom and intelligence authorities, corroborated by witnesses well-informed of activities of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), showed that Nieva is a ranking officer of that organization." The government has claimed that the KMU is a front for the communist-oriented New People's Army. Tony denies any involvement with the KMU. His wife, Connie, says: "Tony is not that dumb to get involved with anything anti-government. *Ang dami-dami niyang anak* — he has six children to support! All his activities in the union have been open and well-known. The KMU issue in fact was never mentioned in the original charge against him. We learned about it only later, through the papers."

Connie relates the events surrounding Tony's arrest:

At about 3:30 in the morning of April 13, she and the children were rudely awakened by some 20 military men armed with armalites who raided their apartment looking for evidence. They got a copy of Tony's bio-data and took his picture. Tony was not home. Like on many occasions when he was busy working late on his writing and union projects, he had stayed at the Bulletin Union office in Intramuros. His well-known hang-outs are the BEU office and the Press Club.

Gigi Santiago, BEU secretary, says that Tony was working late that Tuesday night on the constitution of the BUMP which he was instrumental in getting off the ground on March 27. He had scheduled the induction of its first set of officers on April 25, to coincide with the first day of Press Week, at the Press Club. Labor Minister Blas Ople was to be inducting officer and guest speaker. (The induction never took place; the

program was cancelled with no explanation.)

Tony did not learn of the early morning raid on his house until he came home around noon time. Because of the raid, Connie asked Tony to go to Camp Crame immediately to "clear things up." After eating lunch, Tony walked to his car and had just barely put the key into the ignition to drive to Camp Crame when six Metrocom men surrounded him and told him he was under arrest by Presidential Commitment Order (PCO).

"Tony asked them what he had done to merit a PCO," Connie says. "He believed he was innocent; he was very optimistic that he was going to be released that same day, so he did not even bother to bring a change of clothes."

Prior to her husband's arrest, Connie says she had sensed "something would happen," ever since Tony led a strike of the Bulletin Employees Union last Feb. 5-6. One night in early March, while Tony was walking along Mabini St., someone tried to slash his right hand, cutting a deep wound in the palm side of his fingers. Their apartment had been stoned several times. They've had strange phone calls at odd hours of the day and night, some asking for Tony's whereabouts.

On the Monday of the week of Tony's arrest, Connie was scheduled to leave for the United States to attend her mother's funeral. She decided not to go. "*Para bang kinakabahan ako.*" She had been to see a doctor about her heart condition and was under medication. So when the military men raided her house, she was terror-stricken. "*Nanginig ang tuhod ko. Ilang basong tubig ang nainom ko bago ako na-kalma.*"

Connie says she and the children cannot help but cry and be scared over Tony's arrest. They are terrified of knocks on the door, especially at night. "*Anong mangyayari sa amin?*" she asks. There are six children — 5 girls and an only boy, Karl Marx Ibrahim, 3, who has refused to go in to visit his father in his prison cell. "*Baka hindi na ako palabasin,*" he cries to his mother. The eldest girl, Aleli, 18, has plans of enrolling in U.P. this June to take a computer course. Michelle, a pretty and outspoken 15-year-old junior at the Arellano High School, likes to model and collect and write poems. She wants to work in a newspaper when she grows up, despite what happened to her father. "*Basta alam kong wala siyang nagawang masama,*" she staunchly defends Tony. Grace, 13, recently graduated from the Epifanio de los Santos Elementary School and will be going to high school. Ramona, 12, who has her father's inclination and talent for writing, will be entering Grade VI; and Maria Aleta, 8, will be in Grade II. Aleta is allowed to stay with her father to keep him company at Camp Crame.

According to Connie, after Tony's arrest, their housemaid went

home to the province in Bicol. "*Natakot kasi baka daw siya mapadamay.*" Business in the little *tienda* that the family runs in front of their apartment has also suffered. "*Wala na yatang gustong bumili dito — kasi branded na kaming subversive. Nakita yong retrato ni Tony sa TV.*"

Tony is the son of a writer in Spanish (now deceased) who brought up his family to value integrity. At 38, he has been a newspaperman for the last 23 years, starting as a young cub reporter for the *Zamboanga Times*. Twenty years ago, he dropped out of the Ateneo de Zamboanga and arrived in Manila fresh from the province, "a frightened 17-year-old wearing frayed hand-me-downs." From cub reporter in the *Philippines Herald* in 1963, he rose to copy editor, then assistant news editor in 1970. From 1970 to 1972, he wrote for *Depth News* and edited the world section of *PACE* magazine. In late 1972 when the *Bulletin* was reopened, he joined the staff as copy editor until he was made senior deskman and columnist.

It was in 1978 when he was elected president of the Bulletin Employees Union that his troubles began, resulting in his being blacklisted from the newsdesk in 1979 and his termination from the *Bulletin* recently. As BEU president, Tony led a union strike which paralyzed Bulletin's operations for 21 hours.

Tony is also a creative writer and a member of the Philippine P.E.N. He is a Palanca prize-winner for short story writing and won first prize in the first Asiaweek Magazine short story contest in 1981 with "Pasilyo 8", a story about the slums. He helped organize and was unanimously elected president of the BUMP which is the first time the unions of the Bulletin, the Philippine Daily Express, Liwayway Publications, Business Day and Philippine Journalists joined together under one umbrella union.

A statement Tony wrote from his cell last April 14 recalls similar words said by another respected journalist, Letty Magsanoc, after she was forced to quit *Panorama*: "*All I want to be is a journalist, to be free to write out of the purest of motives, and not to be tagged or labelled pro or anti anything.*"

Two years later, Tony Nieva who alternated with Letty in a *Bulletin* column called "The Passing Scene," would echo those words. Both are now out of their jobs as journalists.