

## Arresting lies

Sunday 16 April 2006, by [Philippine Daily Inquirer](#) (Date first published: 12 March 2006).

APPARENTLY, the Philippine National Police's short stint as media overseer of The Daily Tribune has gotten to its head. Now police spokesmen feel they can insult our intelligence with Orwellian language games.

The day after the televised arrest of Akbayan party-list Rep. Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel, for leading a protest rally on the occasion of International Women's Day, the police chief of Metro Manila, Director Vidal Querol, tried to tell us not to believe what we had seen with our own eyes.

"Who says she was arrested? She was taken out of the rally site because of an impending dispersal," Querol said, with a straight face. This economical version of the truth does not square with the facts, or with Baraquel's revelation that a police officer had told her she was being arrested on charges of "illegal assembly 'ata (maybe)." Facts are exactly like street demonstrators: They are inconvenient, but can be easily routed.

Querol said the decision to remove Baraquel from the scene was emphatically altruistic. "She was taken out of danger," he told reporters.

Well, the party-list representative was not exactly spirited out of the rally site; she was bodily carried off it, and against her will. Facts, mere details. Small wonder the act of forcing her into a waiting police vehicle like a common criminal did not bother Querol or his conscience. He described the act, blithely, as mere "police assistance."

Apparently, Baraquel needed such police assistance to protect her from the permit-less street protest's imminent police dispersal. "She could get hurt," Querol said. "She might be wounded and get bloodied. All the more the police would be blamed."

To make sure the public got his drift, the unrepentant Querol repeated his, ah, creative misuse of language. He pledged to render police assistance to Baraquel every time she attends a rally without a permit; "we will do that over and over again to take her out of danger."

In his totalitarian fantasy, "1984," the great George Orwell invented Newspeak, political language designed to subvert meaning (the war department, for example, is called the Ministry of Peace). But the clearest exposition of his views on political language can be found in the classic essay from 1946, "Politics and the English Language."

"In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defense of the indefensible," Orwell wrote, exactly 60 years before Querol's daring doublespeak on behalf of the impossible-to-defend. Orwell then defined the essence of that defense: "Political language has to consist largely of euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness. Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification. Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called transfer of population or rectification of frontiers."

Or, to add Querol's contributions to the political lexicon: A member of Congress, with constitutionally guaranteed immunity from arrest, is arrested for leading an anti-administration rally without a permit; this is called taking her out of danger, with some police assistance.

Orwell again: "The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words [e.g., calibrated preemptive response] and exhausted idioms [ e.g., protect my votes], like a cuttlefish spurting out ink."

To be sure, Querol is not the only high official guilty of the use of doublespeak. Presidential Chief of Staff Michael Defensor defends the indefensible by calling the Hyatt 10, once the moderate members of the Arroyo Cabinet, the true hardliners. And the President herself defends the indefensible by describing the act of calling an election official a mere "lapse in judgment." Querol, in other words, was merely using the administration's lingua franca.

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\* Editor's Note: Published on page A10 of the March 12, 2006 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer. First posted 03:10am (Mla time) Mar 12, 2006.