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SMORGASBORD

SUING VECO FOR OVERCHARGING

By: ELIAS O. BAQUERO

INTERNATIONAL boxing judge and radio broadcaster Edward Ligas launched a signature campaign against power distribution utility (DU) Visayan Electric Company (VECO) which he accused of overcharging, cheating, and defrauding the power consumers in Metro Cebu.

Aside from Ligas, those who supported him during a press conference were street vendor Rosalinda Nadera, farmer Gretchen Villahermosa, labor leader Arthur Barrit, Cielo Orias of the Cebu Concerned Consumers Association (CCCA), and Jaydar Medrozo of People's Oversight Watchdog for Energy Reforms (POWER).

As they campaigned to prosecute VECO for massive economic sabotage that could imprison the owners and officials, they asked for a refund of the payments made by power consumers of the excessive and unjustified power bills charged during the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) due to the pandemic.

“We ask the Senate and the House of Representatives for an inquiry on alleged overcharging, cheating, and

defrauding of consumers by VECO. The counterpart of VECO which is the Manila Electric Company (MERALCO) has been found overcharging during the inquiry of illegal power bills and the latter has refunded its consumers. This time, Congress must focus its investigation on VECO,” Ligas said.

In urging the public to sign the petition, Ligas said this is free and it can lead to the recovery of an estimated billions of pesos that VECO has illegally collected from the people.

Ligas said VECO officials failed to enlighten the power consumers because what the DU did was blatant cheating and robbery in broad daylight.

In a press conference at the labor office of the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP), Ligas presented Gretchen Villahermosa, a farmer, who accused VECO of illegally raising her power bill from P20 a month before the lockdown to P24,000 a month during ECQ.

Villahermosa said that because they are poor. They only have two light bulbs and no appliances. She said she was willing to have VECO cut

off her power connection because she cannot pay the bill anyway. They do not even have enough food on their table.

Street vendor Rosalinda Nadera also told the media during a press conference that she even came to the point of telling her family that she will commit suicide because of the high VECO electricity bill.

During the press conference, the advocates against excessive VECO power rates tore the electricity billings while urging the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) to investigate VECO's alleged glaring criminal act.

Aside from the signature campaign, Ligas has filed

a formal complaint against VECO before the ERC because of what he claimed as confusing bills, overcharging, and bogus power bill charges.

Ligas emphasized that the power consumers have the right to complain and air their grievances. They call on VECO to answer the power consumers' accusation, and to satisfactorily answer all complaints from all their small and big consumers.

Ligas said that although they anticipate that VECO has all the technical and legal answers to get off the hook in the eyes of the law and the ERC, they want to highlight what has always been the perennial problem of monop-

olistic utilities: their lack of accountability to customers like that of VECO and similarly, MERALCO and other power companies.

Ligas said that months ago, they saw the Senate hearing about MERALCO's “Bill Shock” which resulted in ERC slapping MERALCO a fine of P19 million.

Now in Cebu, Ligas said the Cebuanos are complaining about VECO's overcharging and confusing bill charges.

He said that on record, the people lost jobs and the economy sank because of Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of helping the power consumers, VECO sent bills with glaring excessive bills, ignoring the order of the government to soften electric bill payments as mandated by the second Bayanihan To Heal as One Act or Bayanihan 2.

In the press conference, Medrozo said they will continue to be vigilant and watch VECO and all other power utilities in the country. They will continue to pursue an energy sector that is sustainable and transparent, as well as promote an empowered consumer sector.



ELECTRICITY Advocate Edward Ligas, Labor leader Arthur Barrit and others tore alleged illegal VECO billings.