

EN BANC

[A.M. No. 98-1-32-RTC, July 29, 1998]

**RE: INHIBITION OF JUDGE BIENVENIDO
R. ESTRADA, REGIONAL TRIAL COURT, BRANCH 57, SAN
CARLOS CITY, PANGASINAN, IN CIVIL CASE NO. SCC-1822**

D E C I S I O N

MENDOZA, J.:

Judge Bienvenido R. Estrada is judge of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 57 at San Carlos City, Pangasinan. On April 22, 1996, he inhibited himself from hearing and deciding Civil Case No. SCC-1822, entitled "The Umengan Estate, represented by Dra. Salud G. Umengan v. Rural Bank of Binmaley, et al.," on the ground that he was a member of the Board of Directors of the Rural Bank of Labrador, one of the respondents in that case.

In the resolution of February 17, 1998, the Court, taking note of the aforesaid order of inhibition, required Judge Bienvenido R. Estrada to explain why no disciplinary sanction should be imposed on him for holding a position in the Rural Bank of Labrador, even as it designated Judge Luis M. Fontanilla of the RTC, Branch 42 at Dagupan City, to hear and decide Civil Case No. SCC-1822.

In his letter dated March 13, 1998, Judge Estrada explains that:

[H]e has resigned [from] his membership in the Board of Directors in the Rural Bank of Labrador effective May 31, 1997. Since then undersigned has not maintained any position at the Rural Bank of Labrador.

This case was referred to the Office of the Court Administrator which, on July 9, 1998, submitted a report stating, among other things, the following:

. . . [T]he undersigned requested information from the Administrative Office, Office of the Court Administrator as to when Judge Estrada was appointed to the Judiciary. It was disclosed that he transferred to the Judiciary on May 17, 1994 from another government office.

A perusal of the record shows [that] Judge Bienvenido Estrada failed to comply with the directive of Circular No. 6 dated April 10, 1987. The fact that he has already resigned as a Member from the Directorship of the Rural Bank of Labrador does not excuse him from any administrative liability. As a Judge he should be faithful to the law and maintain professional competence. The present controversy could have been avoided had he kept faith with the injunction that as a member of the bench he must continuously keep himself abreast of legal and jurisprudential developments because the learning process in law never ceases (In Re: Comelec Resolution No. 2521, A.M. 92-12-916 RTC, July