

- This memorable speech delivered by Senator Claro M. Recto at the Philippine Columbian Club, on the 75th birthday anniversary of President Manuel L. Quezon is a remarkable analysis of the political life and genius of Quezon as compared to the record of his successors of today.

## THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF MANUEL L. QUEZON

I have been asked to speak to you tonight on the political philosophy of Manuel Luis Quezon. If by political philosophy we mean a system of integrated principles consistently followed as a guide for political action, then Manuel Luis Quezon had none. As I recall our association in the past, both as habitual antagonists and as occasional allies, that is the only conclusion at which I can honestly arrive, and it finds support in his own autobiography, *The Good Fight*.

No slight is meant by this assertion upon his illustrious memory. As a politician, Quezon was, first and foremost, a realist and there is nothing wrong with a politician being a realist. On the contrary, politics is one struggle theorists can hardly survive. Senator Tañada's Citizens will do well to ponder on this eternal truth.

I was saying that Quezon had no political philosophy, practiced or avowed. If he had a philosophy, it was empiricism in its most rudimentary and instinctive form. In any particular political situation, Quezon did what was politically useful and convenient, whether or not it was consistent with any preconceived and formal program of action. He was a good fighter, and, above all, a master political strategist and tactician whose consuming and overriding objective was victory.

Every politician, if he is to be successful, must be an opportunist in the better sense of the term, and Quezon, the consummate politician, knew best of all how to take advantage of every opportunity. That is not implying that he was unprincipled. He believed in repre-

sentative democracy, and, I shall show later on, preserved and guarded the electoral processes with loyalty and sincerity. He believed in our political independence, in the historic destiny of the Malayan race to which it was his pride publicly to proclaim that he belonged, and built his entire career on the ideal of nationalism.

But these beliefs, these convictions, these principles — if you wish to call them that —, did not and could not provide him with a political philosophy, distinctly his own. Every Filipino was for democracy and a republican form of government. Every Filipino was for independence and national sovereignty. After the death of the "Partido Federal", which occurred before the elections for the First Philippine Assembly, the political battles of his time were fought, not upon these issues, which could not divide the nation, but upon the rivalry, more or less concealed, for factional power and personal leadership. In those circumstances a political philosophy was unnecessary; it might even be a disadvantage.

Thus Quezon was pro-American when the American administration was favorable to his party and to his leadership, and anti-American when it was not. He was pro-American under the Wilson administration and its Quezon-made representative in the Philippines, Governor Francis Burton Harrison; he was anti-American under the Republican administrations of Coolidge and Hoover and their rugged pro-consul here, General Leonard Wood; and he was pro-American once more under the Democratic administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his faithful vicar in Manila, our beloved Frank Murphy.

When he quarrelled with Governor General Wood, he announced dramatically his preference for a government run like hell by Filipinos — a desire, I might observe, that at long last has been satisfied — to a government run like heaven by Americans, and accused his political opponents, the Democrats, of cooperating with the Americans against the true interests of the nation. But having won his point and elected Ramon Fernandez

over Juan Sumulong in a special poll in the old 4th senatorial district of Manila, Rizal, Laguna and Bataan, he promptly proceeded to cooperate with General Wood's apparently more complaisant successors, like the aristocratic Governor Stimson, whom he proclaimed the best Governor-General the Philippines ever had.

His party was brought to national power by the slogan of "Immediate, Absolute, and Complete Independence," but, when he was resident commissioner in Washington, eager to return home with a personal triumph, he endorsed and won congressional and presidential approval for the Jones Bill, which made independence contingent upon the vague condition of the establishment of a stable government, and later he again gave his support to the Fairfield Bill, which provided for independence at the end of a 25-year transition period.

We are still familiar with the historic controversy over the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Bill. Quezon secured its rejection by the Philippine Legislature because he foresaw correctly

that his political leadership would be threatened by Osmeña and Roxas, who had obtained the approval of the independence act in the American Congress. He excoriated the bill as a fraud, denounced the retention of American bases as an intolerable infringement on our future sovereignty, and foretold the darkest calamities if Independence were accepted upon its terms.

But when he himself brought back in triumph the Tydings-McDuffie Act, he proclaimed it to be entirely satisfactory although it did not differ in any essential from the bill he had so vehemently assailed.

This was, in my considered judgment, the finest hour of his long political career. The Hare-Hawes-Cutting bill had been maneuvered through the United States Congress only with the greatest difficulty, to the extent of that Congress repassing it over the veto of President Hoover. Osmeña and Roxas had powerful friends in the American Congress, and Roxas was so sure Quezon would never be able to secure another independence act after the re-

jection of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting bill, that he publicly promised to go on bended knees to the pier and kiss Quezon's foot if the latter succeeded in doing so.

It was a challenge that no one, perhaps not Quezon himself, believed could be met. But Quezon, ever the realist and empiricist, raised here a fund of about half a million pesos, and by judiciously expending it in Washington performed the political miracle of the decade by securing the enactment of a new independence bill: the Tydings-McDuffie.

With such masterful and spell-binding victories, what did Quezon care if some disgruntled enemies accused him of inconsistency? He was a political philosophy unto himself. He must have drawn inspiration from those Whigs in the early years of the English Parliament, who, in the words of Maurois, showed "a ceremonious respect for the Crown even when they were dethroning kings", and who could "advance the most daring ideas in the most archaic style, and utter the word democracy with an aristocratic drawl."

It is about time that we scrap the legend that Quezon was a sincere and a frank, brutally frank, politician. It was the silliest, shallowest judgment ever passed upon that great man. It does him an injustice, because it charges him with naivete, the worst insult to a brilliant and skillful player in the game of power politics. Quezon was a successful politician precisely because he was a master of political intrigue. He knew how to build strong and loyal friendships even among political opponents, but he knew also how to excite envy, distrust, ambition, jealousy, even among his own loyal followers. Many a garden of Eden was lost to the unwary politicians that inhabited them, because of the serpents he quietly let loose and nurtured there. He played Roxas against Osmeña, Yulo and Paredes against Roxas, Sumulong against Montinola, the *Herald* against the *Tribune*, the Alunan group and the *plantadores* against the Yulo group and the *centralistas* in the sugar industry, dominating both by means of the loan-giving and loan-denying

power of the Philippine National Bank. He caused General Mascardo to form his own organization of veterans to counteract the one founded by General Aguinaldo. While Doña Aurora was a fervent and devoted Catholic, he had on his side the Masons and free thinkers, Protestants and Aglipayans, until he himself became a Catholic convert some time before he ran for the Presidency of the Commonwealth. He combined with the Democratras against the Osmeñistas in 1922, and then nimbly abandoned them in the same year and coalesced again with the Osmeñistas to organize the House of Representatives, only to desert the Osmeñistas and again combine with the Democratras in 1934 for the rejection of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting law.

If political philosophy requires consistency, then Quezon never allowed it to bother or disturb his plans. When he challenged the leadership of Osmeña, he attacked it as dictatorial, "unipersonalista," and rallied to his side all the discontented members of his party with the pledge of a collective lea-

dership, a leadership that would be "colectivista." But having won his fight, and Osmeña having humbly accepted his defeat, while giving Quezon an oblique lesson in party discipline by relegating himself to the self-described position of a buck private (*ultimo soldado*), Quezon became even more "unipersonalista" than Osmeña, although he concealed his stranglehold on the party with more finesse, contriving to make his followers believe that they themselves were deciding what he had already determined in advance. But, as Disraeli said of Sir Robert Peel, protectionist in the Opposition, free trader on the Treasury Bench, "you must not contrast too strongly the hours of courtship with the years of possession."

In that same struggle for party leadership, Quezon did not hesitate to use the State University as his political forum, and raised the enthusiasm of the students in his favor. But when Roxas, during the Pro-Anti fight, turned the trick against him, he castigated the students for meddling in politics, hotly advised them to stick to their

books, and criticized their mentors for allowing the academic sanctum to be sullied with politics. In those days the rule of decency still prevailed, and Quezon's reproof was sufficient to bring about Rafael Palma's resignation as President of the University of the Philippines.

He made the ringing declaration that his loyalty to his party ended when his loyalty to his country began, in order to justify his revolt against Osmeña. But having established his own leadership he enforced loyalty to party so effectively that no one of his followers thought it could be different from loyalty to country.

And yet his penetrating political intellect sometimes betrayed him. When we were writing the Constitution he was in perfect accord with us that we should provide for a single presidential term of six years, but having been elected president, and having served four of those six years, he allowed himself to be, so to speak, flattered by a group of sycophants into having a constitutional amendment adopted to permit his reelection and lengthen his term

to eight years. He sought my support believing I could lend authority to the amendment because I had been the President of the Constitutional Convention, but I curtly declined. This brought a breach in our friendship which was never healed. He died before we could become frankly reconciled, but not before, in pursuit of the same obsession, he had persuaded the United States Congress into suspending our Constitution and allowing him to remain as president-in-exile for the duration of the war.

But the usually sagacious and provident Quezon had not made allowances for the inscrutable decrees of destiny. Exile and later death removed him from the presidency upon the expiration of his original 6-year term. I am convinced that a mysterious providence has given its sanction to the original decree of the Constitutional Convention that no president shall be reelected, and it cannot be defied with impunity. Osmeña lost the 1946 elections, and Roxas was suddenly struck down in 1948 in the midst of his own preparations to run for a second

term. The over-ambitious, the over-reaching, the power-mad fools who now live in a paradise of their own imagining, might do well to beware of this historic taboo and this fateful curse against a presidential reelection.

But no grim foreboding haunted Manuel Quezon in the days of his power and glory when he was putting into practice the charming and elegant motto of Disraeli: "Life must be a continued grand procession from manhood to tomb." Like the great English premier, Quezon also believed that "life is too short to be little." He ruled in the grand manner, relishing to the full the glittering appellation of "Excellency," which only colonial governors had worn before him, in the sumptuous palace of Malacañan. He loved his titles, loved them so much that he had legislation passed providing that municipal executives cease to be called "Presidentes" like himself and content themselves thereafter with the modest title of "alcaldes."

Quezon loved power, and he knew how to keep it. But he kept it, like the realist

that he was, in the only way in which it can be kept in a democracy, by winning the faith and love of the people. There must be some psychological similarity between love and politics, between women and multitudes, because Quezon was fortunate with both. He had the instinct for the right approach, for the cajoling phrase, for the charming attitude. He knew when to wait, and when to dash in for his prize. He knew how to couch his desires in accents seemingly irreproachable and sincere. He knew when to command, and when to obey; when to resist, and when to yield; when to begin; and when to stop; when to give the winning embrace and when to deliver the *coup de grace*.

His present-day successors have his appetites without his potency, his ambitions without his wit, his love of power without his conscience, his human afflictions without his magnificence. The same providence that gave us yesterday the Quezons and Osmeñas and Sumulong, has given us, to test our endurance, the Neros and Caligulas of the present.

Although he was a realist and an empiricist, Quezon was fortunately endowed with a democratic conscience. He did not hesitate to use the full powers of the administration against his political opponents. He was lavish and calculating in his exercise of the rights of patronage and allocation of public works funds. But he never overstepped the bounds of these legitimate forms of political warfare. He was zealous in maintaining the purity of electoral processes. This was the heart of democracy, and Quezon guarded it even against his own party and his own immediate political interests.

I have in mind one particularly dramatic election, when former Senator Alejo Mabanag, defeated the Nacionalista candidate, Alejandro de Guzman, in the old second senatorial district composed of Pangasinan, La Union and Zambales. Mabanag, a Democrata, was duly proclaimed and seated, but a protest was filed by De Guzman. At that time, if you will recall, there were no electoral tribunals, and protests were heard by a

committee of the corresponding chamber, which afterwards made its report for the approval or disapproval of the whole body. In the Senate, as in the House of Representatives, the Nacionalista Consolidado Party was in the majority, and naturally they also controlled a majority of the committee that heard De Guzman's protest. The completely partisan conclusion reached by that committee was that Mabanag had lost the election, and should be unseated, allegedly because of various irregularities, among them the misreading of ballots in his favor. Now, this was plainly impossible because De Guzman, as the majority candidate, had two of the three inspectors, and it was inconceivable that the lone minority inspector of Mabanag had been able to misread ballots on the gigantic scale necessary to give him a fraudulent victory. In fact, the contemplated report of the committee was such a flagrant piece of party injustice that three Nacionalistas, Senators Briones, Vera and Generoso, crossed party lines to support Mabanag.



I was then the *de facto* minority floor leader in the Senate, and, knowing Quezon's character, I took the matter up with him. I suppose that any other party missed me, but Quezon proved to be, as I knew he would be, an honorable exception to the rule. He listened attentively to my argument, but inclined to feel that he could do nothing to interfere with the judgment of the committee. Finally, knowing that he had an implicit faith in the judicial mind, I suggested that an umpire be appointed among the judiciary, to go over the evidence and, in a purely personal and unofficial capacity, determine which of the two candidates, the majority or the minority man, had really won. With characteristic rapidity of decision, Quezon accepted my proposition, and then added, with a smile, that he nominated my brother, Judge Alfonso Recto of Laguna, for the job of umpire. Naturally, I protested that any decision reached by my brother would be suspect to the majority party, but Quezon insisted,

reminding me that my brother Alfonso was a Nacionalista, and I had to yield. I do not think it was because he was my brother, but rather because the evidence was inescapable, that Judge Recto ruled in favor of Mabang. Immediately, just as I had expected, the majority party members protested that the decision was partial and prejudiced, and Quezon agreed to appoint another unofficial arbitrator. This time another Nacionalista judge was chosen, Judge Carlos Imperial, later to become an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, and he, in turn, decided in favor of De Guzman. It was my turn to protest, and, knowing the profound respect in which Quezon held the then Chief Justice Ramon Avanceña, I suggested that we secure a final decision from him, again of course, in a purely personal and unofficial manner.

What followed was certainly a test of Quezon's impartiality and statesmanship. Avanceña, taking strong exception to being dragged into that sort of partisan struggle, had to yield to Quezon's

earnest appeal, and consented to take the case under advisement. First he gave his opinion in favor of Mabanag. Then the majority Senators headed by Benigno Aquino somehow were able to convince him that he had been wrong, and he changed his decision to rule in favor of De Guzman. We were taken aback by this change of heart, but Briones, Vera, and Generoso, all, it should be remembered, Nacionalistas, assisted me in persuading Avanceña to change his decision all over again in favor of the Demócrata candidate. We were successful, and I asked the Chief Justice to write Quezon a short note, which he did, saying that Mabanag had really won, and that this time his opinion was final.

It was a terrible blow to those intransigent Nacionalista Senators. What complicated matters was that De Guzman was, by marriage, an *ahijado* of Mrs. Quezon, who had already presented him with a new suit for the special occasion of his oath-taking. The Nacionalista Senators, excepting naturally those three who took Mabanag's side, were on the verge

of rebellion. They were determined to have their own way after so many delays and complications, and to unseat the opposition candidate. A ~~less~~ <sup>flatter</sup> reader than Quezon would have found it easier to go back on his word, and to listen to the dictates of party interest and convenience. Instead, Quezon took it up as a challenge to his leadership. He asked for the papers of the case, and told his Nacionalista followers that, sick as he was, he would have himself carried to the Senate on a stretcher, and there he would make a speech and vote for Mabanag, staking upon the vote his own presidency in the Senate. It was one of those admirable gestures that made Quezon truly great, and it was one of his moments of true greatness. In the face of his intransigence, the members of his party retreated, the committee report was changed to conform with Justice Avanceña's final findings, and the Senate voted to maintain Mabanag in his seat.

I have recounted this episode in our political history at some length because I think it is a model of that

devotion to the sacredness of the popular will, which we all need in these trying times. What was Senator Mabanag to President Quezon? Mabanag was a Democrata, a member of the opposition, an antagonist of President Quezon himself in the Senate. In fact, afterward, during the Pro-Anti controversy, this stubborn Democrata whom Quezon saved from being unseated, refused to take the side of the Antis, and went over to Osmeña and the Pros. Yet, for the sake of this political opponent, or rather for that of the people who had cast their votes for him, and whose will had to be respected, Quezon defied the members of his own party, disappointed his own wife, whose sympathies were naturally with her *ahijado*, staked his Senate Presidency, and refused to sanction any subversion of the popular mandate. Of what a different breed are the successors of President Quezon in power!

Again to quote from Disraeli, "when the eagles leave, the vultures return." Quezon's present-day successors are not birds of the same noble breed. Quezon's scorned

frauds, as he would have not only scorned but punished terrorism in the most exemplary manner, because he firmly believed that without free and honest elections no republican form of government could survive. And besides, he knew his own strength. The eagle does not stoop to eat carrion. That is for vultures alone. But lesser politicians, conscious of their weakness, suffering from incurable complexes, take on more ignoble parts, and must let cunning and treachery and mendacity make up for courage and sagacity and truthfulness. They are content to feed on the sores and ulcers of the body politic, slowly pecking it to death in the grisly expectation of fattening on the corruption of the corpse.

But if Quezon had no political philosophy, he surely had a political conscience and a personal decorum which have been stunted in his successors. The magnificent political era which he began in manly challenge, noble pride and great intellectual power, is now coming to its end in malice, imposture, lunacy and cowardice.

Quezon did not hesitate to allocate public works funds and distribute patronage for political purposes; his present-day successors do not hesitate to spend even money that has been set aside for different purposes, and spend it on fictitious public works with brazen manipulations of vouchers and payrolls. He was not above intrigue; but his successors have developed intrigue into blackmail. And while Quezon held at bay frauds and attempts at terrorism, they have not been deterred by the scruples that were his and have assaulted, with every illegitimate weapon they can wield, the very citadel of democracy.

It is time for this era to end. Or rather, *it* is for us now to end this era. A political philosophy may have been unnecessary, even a hindrance, in the long decades when we were a subject people, free from ultimate responsibilities for the conduct of our government, and when rival leaders could play the game of power for its own sake. But now that we are an independent republic, entrusted alone with our own destinies, we must have lea-

ders with a consistent and fundamental view of humanity and the world, a philosophy which shall guide them unerringly and steadily through all the vicissitudes of the nation's existence.

Quezon himself, if he were alive today, would have been the first to perceive the coming of a new age, for, although it was mercifully concealed from him by providence, a terrible price for his political realism and opportunism was to be exacted by a mysterious destiny from those he loved best on earth.

At the very summit of his career, as President of the Philippines, driven by a consuming desire to serve all the humble people who had stood by him in his long and arduous climb to power, driven also perhaps by the instinctive realization that power carries with it a commensurate responsibility, Quezon embarked upon his famous campaign for social justice. But he conducted that campaign with his usual pragmatism, ever obsessed by the actual, the local, and the immediate. He lambasted judges who, in his opinion, were not sufficiently sympa-

thetic with the lot of the workers; impulsively promoted those who glibly parroted his program; and, in the political field, flattered and pampered new forces that he neither understood fully nor could hope to control. In Pampanga, he openly displayed his sympathies for the fledgling socialist-communist group of Pedro Abad Santos, playing host to and breaking bread with him in Malacañan, and, in frequent visits to that province, honoring him with his company to the extent of ignoring the local authorities.

Undoubtedly, to Quezon's shrewd practical mind, the socialist-communist movement never seemed to have a deeper significance than that of a visionary political faction, useful as a counterweight in partisan struggle, while, to his warm and generous heart, the same movement appealed as a sincere demand for relief from feudal injustices. His lack of political philosophy blinded him to the irreconcilable differences between the ideology of representative democracy and that of totalitarian communism, which cannot

stop at the mere reform of the social structure, but is pushed relentlessly by its own inner logic to the seizure of complete power in order to subvert the entire social order, recognizing in the pursuit of this supreme objective neither human rights nor human liberties.

I do not think that either Quezon, or after his death his widow, the beloved Doña Aurora, ever fully realized this. They felt that no Filipino would ever do them harm, least of all the dispossessed and the humble for whom they had shown such constant solicitude. But ruthless and fanatical descendants and disciples of the very men whom Quezon had flattered, pampered, and encouraged in Pampanga, waited one fateful day beside the lonely road to Baler, Quezon's own town, and there, in pursuance of what appears to have been a cruel little plot to dramatize their cause, they butchered the widow and the eldest daughter of the former friend and protector of their political forbears and mentors.

The **Bongabong** massacre was the tragic epilogue to

the life history of a master politician, an epilogue which brought to a grievous and sanguinary close the Quezonian era of political pragmatism. Quezon, the man who best of all could read the human heart, the matchless interpreter of popular feelings, the superb strategist of political war, did not foresee that a new force, a militant political philosophy had arisen in the land, which would be met and defeated, not with the skillful combinations and alliances of which he was so fond and which is so thoroughly mastered, but only with an equally vigorous, integrated, political program inspired by a profound and all-pervasive political faith.

Thus, in paying tribute to the political genius of Manuel L. Quezon, we should not forget that, with our emergence as an independent nation into a world of divided loyalties and mortally conflicting ideologies, we have entered a new age and we must face it by casting off habits of personal enrichment and vain-glory, factional convenience, and lust for power, by dedicating ourselves wholly and without reserve to the supreme national interest that we may realize our ideals of freedom and happiness under the sustaining care of the God of Nations. — *From Manila Chronicle, August 20, 1953.*