

■ Commencement Address of Vicente G. Sinco delivered at Foundation College of Dumaguete, April 30, 1967.

THE FLIGHT OF LOCAL TALENT AND MANPOWER

It is high time that we take note and consider with some degree of apprehension the way population movement within our own country is taking today. This subject is just as important as the high rate of our population growth which has been characterized by some as approaching the point of explosion, whatever that means. Certain phases of it are fraught with compelling significance as they touch vital problems related to particular groups. Let us begin, however, with the observable fact that there has been a general tendency in most of our communities for people to drift from the farm and rural areas to the urban centers. Not a few people have felt and followed an urge to move from the barrio to the poblacion of the town; and not satisfied with life in an ordinary town, others often-times transfer their work and

residence to the provincial capital. And there are still others who go even to other provinces or other islands.

This marked desire and decision of many of our people today to move from one place to another in our country was not noticeable about 50 or 60 years ago. Popular education is undoubtedly one of its causes. It has been producing a yearning to improve one's lot in life in a way that makes the pastures beyond the river look much greener and fresher than the pasture where one is on. Better roads, faster means of locomotion and transportation, cheaper fares have given this spirit for change an impetus and an actual and practical feasibility. Under these conditions, one ceases to think of the inconvenience and trouble of travel. Trucks, busses, automobiles, motor boats, and airplanes have erased impediments and

obstacles from the mind of those urged by the spirit of adventure in the hope of locating their fortune somewhere on this side of Paradise. Not a few have reached even remoter places to satisfy the stirring of the wanderlust.

In the history of human progress, migrations from communities with poor natural resources or limited improvement opportunities into new and open territories have frequently occurred. They have promoted the tremendous development of such countries as the United States, Canada, Brazil, and other continents. In our own land, they have made Mindanao and other parts of our country more populous and more alive. In the case of Mindanao, the migration of our own people into its vast but once sparsely inhabited areas has had not merely social and economic implications but also a distinctive political significance in the sense that it could prove a protective potential against a possible occupation of portions of it by unfriendly aliens. It could forestall unforeseen troubles and con-

flicts which are likely to arise when a large and open territory is left vacant and untouched by the industry and the watchfulness and care of its owners over a long span of years.

This dispersion of our people over all parts of our country has had beneficial results not only to the region receiving the newcomers but also to the places they vacated. It relieves population pressure on food, standard of living, and other economic needs in one place and opens to enterprising immigrants opportunities or possibilities for development in the other. The process is comparable to the free and balanced distribution of the blood in a healthy human body. Its even distribution over all the vital organs strengthens the whole system, prevents ordinary diseases, improves the color of the skin, keeps the luster of the eyes, produces a pleasant feeling, and increases the joy of living and loving. Comparable to these conditions is to be found in the country whose people are evenly and widely distributed over the entire expanse of its territory, without con-

gested ports, crowded cities, and crammed communities.

But culturally and socially a significant problem has been created by what appears to be a flight of certain elements of our people from the provinces and provincial cities to our national metropolis, Manila. It involves men of higher intelligence, individuals of higher than average talent, and potential leaders. They are drawn to it by what they deem to be better educational and cultural institutions, greater opportunities for personal or professional improvement, and wider fields of operation and service. These appear to be laudable motives. But it is highly doubtful if in the majority of cases, these motives are realizable in the City, or if most of them are really capable of making the most out of the opportunities there. It is quite certain that in many instances they are merely drawn into the metropolis by its gay lights or by a sense of what is known as prestige value derived from the so-called experience of Manila, education, Manila job, Manila residence.

There is another group involved in this flight to the metropolis. They are not really highly material and relevant to the purpose of our discourse this evening but they should be mentioned here even only in an incidental manner as constituting another problem worth knowing. I refer to that much larger group made up of the rank and file of ordinary citizens, manual workers, semi-literates, illiterates, and parasites. Without first finding out the truth of the stories they hear about the numerous jobs available in Manila, they swarm into the capital with high hopes for a better life but only to discover that the stories they heard were mere fairy tales. Manila is indeed a business and industrial center, but it is still industrially and commercially incapable of giving jobs to one million workers and government and political positions are not unlimited in spite of the fact that Congress, the Central Bank, the Philippine National Bank, and a few other institutions have some openings at times, but oftentimes they are swarming with male

and female clerks, receptionists, secretaries, typists, messengers guards, janitors, and other employees.

This group of ordinary, simple, untrained, and gullible folks is the principal cause of the heavy and speedy concentration of population in Manila and suburbs during the last 20 years. When before the War Manila with its principal suburbs had but 4 or 5 hundred thousand residents, at present its population is fast approaching the 3 million mark, most of whom are huddled together in crowded residential houses and apartment buildings and many thousands are mere squatters barely existing in miserable barong-barongs located in filthy surroundings. The resulting condition has been the creation of an environment in which disorder, filth, unemployment, and crime have made parts of the metropolis patently unsafe and undesirable.

Unlike the drift of our people into the less populated parts of our country which has been necessary and beneficial, this movement to the Metropolis is uncalled for and has not advanced and

does not promise to advance the interests and general well-being of the Filipino people. It began as a necessary consequence of the last War when Manila was destroyed and depopulated. As the seat of our government and the principal business, center of the nation, its activities at the time called for more helpers than the City could supply for the repair and rebuilding work that had to be done. But what began as an unavoidable movement, which should have been temporary and regulated, has continued since then in a disproportionate scale and thus has produced a condition which may be considered socially alarming.

Considering the question by itself, the centralization of a country's business, culture, and education in one fixed city or community is not that desirable condition which can place the entire national structure on a high and solid plane. It is conducive to the neglect, in various degrees, of many or even all other areas of the country. Politically it could have certain definite advantages to be derived from

unity of planning, administration, and decision. But in most other matters, centralization can easily result in plugging springs of fresh initiative in other places, or in depriving other groups and communities of opportunities to develop their strength in their own ways and for purposes most suitable to their conditions and needs, or in dwarfing the sense of responsibility of communities to work out their salvation.

Coming back to our own particular problem, it is quite obvious that, as it is, the concentration of our interests, talents, and attention in Manila will continue to produce an unfair distribution of opportunities among the people of this country. Those living in that center and its environs enjoy more opportunities for material growth and comfort than those living in far away places. And yet the average man living outside of Manila is as much a taxpayer and a loyal citizen as he who has his residence in Manila. He is as much in need of the benefits of good hospitals, schools, social and cultural

centers as any one living in Manila. He is as much in need of economic assistance in one form or other as he who lives in our Metropolis.

That this condition of things is bad enough. That it has given rise to an odious comparison is in some sense painful and galling to those who have given this matter some thought. But the situation is rendered more difficult to change by the flight of talent, superior intelligence, and high skill from the provinces to Manila. Coupled with this is the disinclination of the products of the educational and training centers of Manila to go back to their provinces and to live there and help actively in the work of improving their communities.

But the adverse effect of this socially egotistical decision is aggravated at times by certain events and consequences that are not often clearly envisaged. When, people of high competence, talent, and ambition leave or ignore their communities, the tendency is for these places to fall into the hands of people of lesser abilities and lower ideals. These charac-

ters are often indifferent to the general welfare and development of the community or are not sufficiently motivated to strive for its social, economic, or civic improvement. Thus, these self-seekers intentionally or not, are left free to take advantage of the flight of the competent and their absence from their midst. These men of lower caliber are prone to assume the leading role in the local activities without knowing exactly what goals they should strive after and what means should be employed. In many cases their principal objective is to gain power and to enjoy the privileges and perquisites of public office without conscientiously observing the obligations and responsibilities that should inseparably go with every power trusted to every man. Under men of this type, the community may not necessarily go to seed but its growth is bound to be slow, uneven, and grossly disproportionate to the amount of time, effort, and money actually spent.

The strength of a country does not depend upon one man. Napoleon did not win

the victories of France alone. The health, happiness, and glory of a nation depend upon a contented and educated citizenry well and evenly distributed socially, culturally, and geographically over its entire territorial extent. These elements of greatness depend upon an equitable dispersion of able and honest leadership over its inhabitants. A person cannot be physically strong when only one particular part of his body, such as the heart or the stomach, is developed while the rest of his organs and limbs are neglected, and, therefore, sluggish, slow, and feeble. The Philippines cannot be truly strong when talent, high competence, and demonstrated skill are concentrated in her metropolis. A well-balanced national development may not be expected to take place when towns and provinces of the country are left in the hands of second- or third-rate men and women intellectually immature, morally myopic, and emotionally incapable of those ineffable feelings of altruism and love that can compel one to suppress his personal and selfish motives

for the good of his fellow-men and his native land.

This flight of talent to our metropolis is more detrimental in its effect on the Filipino nation than the so-called brain-drain of Filipino professionals from the Philippines to the United States. Resorting again to a loose analogy, this constant flow of qualified men from the provinces to Manila is like the case of internal bleeding that happens to an individual in distress. Physicians tell us that internal bleeding is hard to control and is often fatal in its results. The so-called brain-drain to countries abroad, on the other hand, has a number of definite advantages to the individuals involved and to the nation at large. In many cases the ability of the individual professional is enriched and his economic position is improved. In the great majority of cases, his foreign sojourn is temporary, oftentimes lasting but a few years. In most instance they are doctors of medicine and nurses invited to the United States or Canada because those countries need their personal services, services

which are distinctively and indispensably humanitarian. Even in the case of other types of Filipino professional, invitations are almost always extended to them from the countries that desperately need technical assistance. As a whole, this migration of our talented men and skilled women in answer to invitations from other nations should be a cause of pride to us. They signify an act of international recognition of Filipino competence, talent, and ability.

The flight of the talented to the metropolis drains the provinces of many of its best men and women. It will continue as long as certain factors persist in leading the provincial population into the belief that the best things in our country are obtainable only in Manila — the best schools and libraries, the best hospitals and physicians, the best engineers, architects, dentists, and other professionals, the best theaters and entertainments, the best stores and dwellings, the most beautiful parks and garden. There is a great deal of truth in this; and, in addition, the seat of our national govern-

ment and most of the country's industries are there.

These advantages and attractions are real. Their pulling power cannot be denied and ignored. But neither should their baneful effect be ignored on the towns and provinces deserted by talented sons and daughters who are greatly needed to lead in their educational, civic, economic, and social development. After all what we need is a nation flourishing and happy in its entire length and breadth and not just a flourishing but lonely metropolis standing as an oasis in the center of a huge cultural desert.

The problem is, therefore, one of dispersion of activities of different varieties. The government cannot do everything, but it can do much to promote an effective policy of development. Perhaps a system of dispersion of economic, cultural, and social institutions could be profitably studied and introduced. It is clearly not politically objectionable as is the widely discussed and described system of decentralization of political authority. The metropolis should not

have all the monuments, parks, museums, and other cultural institutions that enhance civilized ways of living. Provincial communities should have their share in these symbols of refined and sophisticated material and spiritual development. Government support should be generously given to provincial or local schools, hospitals and other institutions, both public and private, so as to spread as widely as possible the use of the taxes collected from the people for their benefit.

The effectiveness of any government decision and action, however, depends upon the attitude and the conviction of the individual. And this is the thought I wish to leave with you for your consideration. The community and province in which you and your parents are settled should be your seat of operation. It is there where you can do the best for yourself, your neighbor, and your nation. Opportunities abound in the towns and provincial cities awaiting to be discovered and used for good purposes by the enlightened and honest indivi-

dual, the inspired worker, the good neighbor. Outside the shadows of our great Metropolis, on the dusty streets of our towns, in their shops, schools, hospitals, and offices, and on their farms, you and I should live and enjoy the strenuous but fruitful life.

Wise men have proved to us that oftentimes acres of diamonds are right under our feet in the place we have actually been living. In the Vision of Sir Launfal, we read about the great and noble Knight wandering for many years all over the world looking for the precious Holy Grail only to find it in his

old age right in his own ancestral home. These and other instances are not suggestions that we must live a life of withdrawal and seclusion, that we must turn our backs to the challenge of distant assignments and stations, but rather that we should not overlook or belittle the opportunities, the call for service, for happiness, or fulfillment which confront us as men of thought, of developed curiosity, of trained imagination, of firm resolve and decision right in the provincial community, large or small, where our skill, our talent, our training, our education could be of real and effective use. — *V. G. Sinco.*