

- This paper presents a novel and interesting angle on the problem of the Filipino national language.

A PROPOSAL ON THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE PROBLEM

One curious fact about the national language movement is that, despite the dictatorial methods employed by the original leaders of the movement and the tremendous pressure applied by their successors to propagate the national language based on Tagalog over the last three decades since President Quezon's proclamation of December 30, 1937, the national language so based has not as yet found general acceptance among the people in the non-Tagalog-speaking areas. And since it has not found acceptance in these areas of the country, the Tagalog-based national language cannot be said to have been useful in the achievement of greater national unity. As a matter of fact it has contributed to more dissension than to harmony on the national scene. Even among the Tagalog speakers themselves, there is

no general consensus as to which form of the language — the purist or non-purist — should be propagated as the national language.

So in the face of this widespread dissension about the national language, it should be time to re-examine the whole problem thoroughly so that a more satisfactory solution could be arrived at through general consensus. A plebiscite need not be resorted to obtain the majority opinion; it might give rise to unnecessary acts of hostility between the language groups. A far-seeing and firm statesmanship, which will reject dictatorial or short-cut processes, should be in a position to show the way to a peaceful and satisfactory solution to the problem.

I think that all thinking Filipinos, whatever be their native language, are agreed on the advisability of having

a common language of autochthonous origin which will eventually be used throughout the country. In the absence of a language which, from the outset, is acceptable throughout the country, the bone of disagreement for the last three decades has been the implementation of the Constitutional provision to the effect that the Congress was to take steps towards the development and adoption of a national language based on one of the existing native languages.

I have done a lot of thinking on the matter and I have come to the conclusion that the most advisable way of implementing the Constitutional provision is by means of the Constitution itself. Problems brought about by operation of the Constitution can best be solved by proper amendment or amendments to the Constitution itself. And since in three years we shall be amending the Constitution through a Constitutional Convention, it should be wise even this early to consider the matter of a national language.

To my way of thinking the most effective way of imple-

menting the Constitutional provision on national language, as well as the most democratic way of achieving national greatness, is to establish a federal republic in place of the present unitarian republic that we now have. Under the proposal, the existing provinces could be regrouped into autonomous states on the basis of the languages spoken by the inhabitants. All functions and powers of government except those relating to foreign relations, citizenship, national defense, currency, immigration and customs, are to be exercised by the various states. This scheme of government, I make bold to predict, will be able to achieve and preserve greater national unity and a more viable democratic way of life than the Republic under which we are living.

Under this proposal the Tagalog-based national language will continue to be developed as the national language of the Republic, with English as a second language which, however, should continue as the official language of the Republic until the Ta-

Tagalog-based national language has been sufficiently developed to serve as an adequate language of government; but the various states are to choose which local languages they are to use within the state, in addition to the Tagalog-based national language and English. This means that along with the literatures in the national language and in English, the literatures in the main local languages are to be cultivated and enriched, instead of being discouraged or suppressed as it seems to be the plan of the present leaders of the national language movement.

The indifference and sometimes hostility to the national language movement that one finds among speakers of the more important native languages may be traced to the ill-concealed intention of the Tagalistas to discourage the development and eventually suppress the various languages in order to give way to the exclusive use of Tagalog throughout the nation. To these Tagalistas, Tagalog is really the national language, the Constitutional

provision about the development and adoption of a national language based on one of the existing native languages being only a euphemistic way of warding off opposition from the non-Tagalog-speaking Filipinos. The development of the regional languages along with the national language based on Tagalog will remove the indifference and weaken the latent opposition to the national language movement and pave the way to greater national unity and the development and strengthening of our democratic institutions.

One could of course raise the question whether political and cultural decentralization, as proposed in my scheme, would be best for our people. It can be seen that it runs counter to the present political and cultural scheme, which is highly centralized.

MY THESIS

My thesis is the political and cultural decentralization, which will result in equitable distribution of political power among the more important ethnic groups, would bring about greater national unity

and a more viable democracy. The great problem of a multi-ethnic state, such as ours is, is how to distribute political power equitably among the several ethnic groups. Predominance in the membership in the powerful Senate, which is elected by the whole nation, has always tilted towards the Tagalog-speaking regions. If, as in the United States Senate, each state in the federal Philippine Republic will have equal representation in the Philippine Senate, then the distribution of political power will have been partly solved. In the House of Representatives, the principle of proportional representation will work as well as in the present scheme, if not more effectively, since the autonomous states will be more vigilant about their representation than the existing provinces.

SOME PROPOSALS

My proposal envisages the amendment of the Constitution to provide for the reconstitution of the existing provinces into countries and their grouping into ten states namely: (1) North Luzon,

(2) Central Luzon, (3) South Luzon, (4) Southeast Luzon, (5) West Visayas, (6) Central Visayas, (7) East Visayas, (8) East Mindanao, (9) Central Mindanao, and (10) West Mindanao. The cities of Manila and Quezon City are to be reconstituted into a Federal District, which will serve as the capital of the Federal Republic.

Since this political reorganization is designed to promote local autonomy and encourage the development of the cultural heritage of the various ethnic groups, then the regional language and literatures will have to be enriched through the help of the governments of the various states, which are enjoined to use the more important local languages as official languages within the state. Iloko is the dominant language of North Luzon, with Ibanag as second in importance; Tagalog is dominant in Central Luzon, followed by Pampanga, Iloko and Pangasinan; Tagalog is the lone dominant language of South Luzon, while Bicol is of Southeast Luzon. Hili-

gaynon dominates West Visayas, Sugbohanon the Central Visayas, and Samareño the East Visayas. Likewise Sugbohanon is dominant in East Mindanao; Magindanao and Maranaw are the leading languages of Central Mindanao, with Hiligaynon and Iloko trailing behind; and Tausug and Samal are most widespread in West Mindanao and Palawan.

With writing in these various languages encouraged by the various state governments, along, of course, with the national language which is based on Tagalog, hope is expressed for the flowering of the human imagination throughout the land in the not too distant future. Our democracy will have become more viable with its grass-roots strengthened through the exercise of local autonomy. Love of and pride in the local or regional community will blend naturally with love of and pride in the national community. It is in the nature of things for a person to take more interest in the things that are closest to his day-to-day existence than in

matters that are remote. Once you have developed his self-respect through local civic pride — that is once you have inspired in the Bicolano, the Ilongo, the Cebuano, the Ilokano, the Pampangan, the Pangasinan, the Maranao, the Tausug, or feeling of pride in his community represented by his autonomous state — you can expect the Filipino citizen in any part of the country to develop a greater love for and loyalty to the bigger community that is the nation.

Under this political organization and socio-cultural set-up, language movements for purism and anti-purism, like those of Mr. Gonzalo del Rosario and Mr. Geruncio Lacuesta, will no longer be necessary because the national language will follow a natural development. As a second language of the Republic and as an official language for some time, English naturally will continue influencing the growth of the national language, in vocabulary and in grammar. With the various states using their own main languages and

English, the local languages will have a rich opportunity to contribute to the enrichment of the national language. There will no longer be any reason for conflict between the local or regional languages and the national language, because the national language will have extensively borrowed from the regional languages for its own enrichment.

When that time comes — may be three to five generations from now, that is, if a

Federal Republic is set up through a Constitutional amendment — a Dante, a Chaucer, a Luther, a Cervantes will appear on the national scene to produce a masterpiece or masterpieces in the new language that will mark a significant take-off point for the growth of a greater national literature which our posterity will be proud to call its own. — *A Lecture by Leopoldo Y. Yabes, Professor, University of the Philippines, at the Y.M.C.A., Manila.*

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