



The Kind of President We Need

By Benito Mencias

WELL, they've nominated Garcia and Yulo and shall have proclaimed Manahan by the time you read this. There are two other candidates in this race — Recto and an ex-judge with a sense of drama by the name of Antonio Quirino. All five gentlemen are running with one thought. To win.

Of course, as in 1953, you'll want to be where you can see them strain their muscles. After all, this is a spectacle which happens only once in four years. But watch their smoke. The cinder might get in your eye.

The track is the entire country, not just the important parts of it. Garcia and Yulo are planning cross-country drives and apparently are looking at the race this way. All along Manahan has been behaving as though this is the general idea. You can depend on Recto to get the jump on these other guys if that can be managed. As for Tony Quirino, he'd be crazy not to cover as much ground as he can.

What this amounts to is the likelihood of each of these candidates showing up in town between now and November for the usual oratory before the folks. This ought to be good. It should give you a chance to see the candidates in person, hear them talk, size them up. Nothing like personal contact, I say, to help the voter make his choice.

But precisely for this reason we'll have to be on our guard. It's very easy to be taken captive by delightfulness of personality and warmth of handshake. What we'll get mostly is smiles. Smiles and a good deal of back-slapping and nice talk like you-look-fine-today-and-how-is-the-family-getting-along. If you don't watch out, you'll soon get to thinking all the candidates are nice guys.

Which is probably right. But have you ever sat down to think that all the candidates will try to look nicer than they really are? A candidate won't be smart if he doesn't try to do this. Your job as a voter is therefore to cut through the artifice and try to put your finger on the man inside.

It can be done. People have an instinct for distinguishing the phony from the real product. The phony is reflected in the *palabas* that he does. Throw him out.

All five will talk about the same things. They'll talk about good government ("just wait and see what I'll do to those crooks"). They'll enlarge on the problem of defense ("you deserve peace to work for the prosperity of country and family") and the need for

really close relationships with neighbors and allies. But mostly they'll talk about *your* economic needs. They'll say — and there will be no debate on this point — that the major concern is the economic problem: unemployment (2.5 million people out of jobs), underemployment (can only be guessed), cost of living (rising).

Oh yes, they'll be polite. Candidates for high office must, first of all, be gentlemen. You can expect their words to be well measured. But what each candidate will tell you in effect is that it is he — and he only — who can provide the workable solutions. The other fellows are nice people, but what a confused lot they are! Why, only the other day this guy delivered himself of this fantastic approach to the dollar situation! Wasn't that very foggy thinking? Now, says he, let me dispel the fog by cutting straight to the core of the problem. So you listen to him. By the time he is through, the fog has grown thicker.

So, you see, it's very important that you size up each candidate as objectively as you can. Forget the warm way he smiled at you and shook your hand. Take a hard look. *Feel* him. If he is a man of sincerity and purpose, interested in power not for power's sake but for that of the community, something in you will respond. The man you want is a big one— big in sincerity, courage, earnestness, resolution. He has great honesty, a sense of mission, a tremendous capacity for moral leadership.

No, I'm not being platitudinous. People of this mettle have been cast in roles of leadership throughout history, but the need for them in the Philippines is greater now than ever before.

Consider the economic problem. This is an exceedingly difficult thing to solve. We are a growing nation of 22 million people, and our capacity to produce the things that we need — food, clothing and shelter — is not increasing proportionately with our population. This, of course, affects us and our neighbors deeply. It is immediately related to our personal income — to our ability, in other words, to buy the goods and services that the family needs, to provide insurance for the family and education for the children. Will they grow to adulthood like 2.5 million of our people who are without employment and about to lose their hope and self-respect? The problem is so big and its implication so vast that very often we don't even know where to begin.

All this does not imply that the situation is hopeless. Quite the contrary. Our productive power, both

in farm and factory, is increasing fast. We can make it catch up with the requirements of our growing population, make it generate prices well within our income and provide jobs for our children. If we are as strong a people as we think we are, we can do it in less time than we might suppose, possibly in five years. But this will demand great sacrifice. That's why we need strong moral leadership.

The economists disagree with you too strongly if you assume that the basic factor of the Philippine economy right now is our dollar reserve. You have to have United States dollars to carry on international trade. The U.S. dollar, you see, is the world's most easily convertible currency — you can exchange it for any kind of money you wish and do business with it anywhere. Our peso is good money, but the foreign businessmen with whom we have to deal want dollars, not pesos.

You'll want to know what we need dollars for. We need dollars to import (1) consumer goods such as cloths and various food products that we don't ourselves produce in sufficient amounts, (2) machinery and facilities that we have to have to industrialize, to produce with locally available raw materials the things that we now have to buy from overseas markets. Our dollar reserves are vital to our economic growth.

We get dollars through our exports — copra, coconut oil, sugar, hemp — which we ship to the U.S. and Europe. We get \$567 million every year out of this. In addition, we get an average of \$376 million from the U.S. government in the form of U.S. military expenditures, veterans benefits and economic assistance. This would suggest a strong dollar position. The trouble is that our imports on the whole are bigger than our exports. This means that our dollar expenditures exceed our dollar income.

We'll admit that our dollar spending has never been 100 per cent wise. As long as human beings remain imperfect things, this would be a fair assumption. We are still importing many articles that we don't really need. But as a rule we have been careful with our dollars.

It has been just a short 11 years since the Japanese were driven out, when we resumed life as a Commonwealth and later as a Republic. We had, you'll recall, very little to begin with. Our economy was a complete mess. We couldn't produce our own food, and we had to buy cloth from overseas to make new shirts to put on our backs. In the face of this, we had to rebuild. We had to get new equipment and facilities to reconstruct our physical plants. All this required dollars.

We are still rebuilding. But this is no longer the word to use. The word now is *build*. We must build new enterprises for our expanding population. This also will require dollars.

Thus we find that the strain on our dollar reserves now comes from two sources: (1) the continuing need

to import consumer goods and (2) the need to buy capital goods (such as machinery) to make our economy move forward. The result has been a steady depletion of our reserves. From roughly \$669 million in 1945, some \$620 million of which came from the U.S. government in war damage payments, the level has gone down to less than \$190 million in September 1957.

I wish I could update you on the statistics. But the wife did a good job of cleaning up the work desk, and the result was that this Central Bank pamphlet was mislaid. But the 1954-55 figures tell the substance of the story.

In 1955 the gross domestic investment was ₱800 (\$400) million, 10.6 per cent bigger than during 1954. This shows you the rising curve of domestic investment in industry.

On the other hand, exports in 1955 amounted to \$349.15 million, compared to \$335.01 million in 1954. Imports in 1955 amounted to \$527.68 million, against \$473.54 during the previous year. This shows a slight rise in exports and a substantial increase in imports.

Of the 1955 import payments, \$98.72 million was spent for capital goods (against \$77.26 million in 1954), \$253.46 million for raw materials for various manufactures (against \$229.26), and \$173.84 million for consumer goods (against \$163.21 million).

We thus have a pattern of increasing dollar outflow for capital and consumer goods, no appreciable increase in exports (and therefore a static level of dollar earnings) and increasing imports (more dollar spent). This results in a difficult situation which can easily become untenable if we don't do something drastic about it.

The solution, as you must be deciding by now, is austerity and increased production. We'll have to consume less and produce more. This way we can save dollars (by not importing stuff that we can do without) and earn more dollars by increasing the production of export goods.

We'll just have to stop thinking about that Palm beach suiting we saw at the display window and be contented with khaki or ordinary linen. New earrings for the wife and Chanel No. 5 are out. We'll have to be happy with the old car. We'll have to save and put our surplus in the bank. We can then make more money available for production.

But for us to do this willingly and effectively, we have to have a leader who is strong enough to sacrifice with us and for us and courageous enough to tell us, when the going really gets tough, to sacrifice some more.

This is the kind of leader that we need in these times of uncertainty and trouble. If a candidate tells you life will be simply rosy for you if he gets elected, you can be very sure he is not giving you the facts. I doubt if you would want to do anything with him.