

Let Us Make Haste Slowly

By Benigno Aldana

OF all public services, education is nearest the hearts of the people. It is also the largest single enterprise undertaken by the National Government, judging from the appropriation provided for it annually. For the fiscal year 1957-1958, the amount of ₱206,768,230 was appropriated for the Department of Education, exceeding that appropriated for the Department of National Defense by ₱37,000,000. For the school year 1956-1957, both public and private schools had an enrollment of 4,478,611¹, or 20% of the total population of the country.² In view of such circumstances, thousands of teachers are employed every year, hundreds of school buildings are constructed or repaired, and considerable equipment and supplies are acquired. All these represent an enormous investment of the people's money.

With so much at stake, therefore, it is imperative that a responsible and representative body should be entrusted with the formulation and implementation of educational policies and objectives. For this purpose, Congress passed Republic Act No. 1124 creating the Board of National Education. Section 5 of said Act provides that, subject to the constitutional authority of the President over the executive departments, bureaus, and offices, the Board should be the sole agency of the National Government for the implementation of educational policies and the direction and control of the educational interests of the nation. The Board is thus the supreme educational policy-making body of the land. But recent events tend to prove that it is not. Educational measures have been passed in Congress without their having been referred to the Board.

I wish to make still another observation in this connection. Education is an evolutionary process and, as such, changes concerning it should be sparingly made. No changes should be effected until after adequate provisions are made for their full and effective implementation. If I may cite the experience of other countries, educational changes are being contemplated at present in the French educational system and discussions in regard to them have been going on for some time. These discussions will continue before final voting in the Parliament is taken.

Then, too, the implementation will not be made at

¹ Enrollment in all schools, excepting the U.P. and the Philippine College of Commerce during the school year 1956-57. No data available for these college and university. No data available for all schools, colleges, and universities for the school year 1957-58.

² The population of the country as of July 1, 1957, was estimated to be 22,689,700.

once but after a number of years so as to prepare the ground, as it were, for the changes. The Educational Act of 1944 of England was similarly considered long before it was finally enacted, and its implementation was delayed several years in order to effect the training of teaching personnel and to enable the preparation of the necessary instructional materials and other matters.

In the Philippines, unfortunately, this is not always the case. Changes are made and effected almost at once, without considering whether conditions are favorable for such immediate implementation. I refer particularly to Republic Act No. 1425, commonly known as the Rizal law, which requires the Board of National Education to promulgate a set of rules and regulations to implement said Act within a period of 60 days from its approval. That this is easier said than done is attested by the fact that until now the details of such implementation are being discussed by the Board.

There is also Republic Act No. 1881 which made obligatory the teaching of Spanish in all courses of public and private colleges and universities. It was approved on June 22, 1957, but made effective beginning with the school year 1957-1958. Are the original Spanish versions mentioned in Section 1 as amended ready and available? Would it not have been better too if the law had been made effective at a later date so that the institutions concerned would be ready to implement it? I understand that the details of its implementation are also still under consideration by the Board of National Education.

The Revised Philippine Educational Program provides, among other things, for the use of the vernacular as the medium of instruction in Grades I and II in all public and private schools, and enjoins the school authorities to take practicable steps toward its implementation. Are the schools ready for this? Are materials of instruction available? Do we have the teachers to teach the native languages? What problems of administration, if any, should be considered? Again, would it not have been better if this matter had been postponed for some time in order to enable the school and other authorities concerned to study its effects upon the development of the Filipino National Language?

In making educational changes or modifications, sound educational statesmanship demands that they be made sparingly and only after deliberate study. Let us make haste slowly.