

BILLIONS FOR PHILIPPINE EDUCATION

It is needless to say that the leaders of our country, the leading men in our society, and all those who are concerned with the present development and the future improvement of our nation have been concentrating their attention and labor on the physical and visible aspects of our economic and social life: the production of the food we have to eat, the clothes we need to wear, and the transportation facilities our farms and factories require. Consequently, the great pride of the present government administration of this country lies in the claim of having increased the production of rice and corn and of having constructed more roads, bridges, port-works, airports, and other material factors that come under the impressive term infra-structure. To the extent that this achievement has been shown in a concrete, visible, and finished

or partially-finished form, the present government leaders could fairly claim some measure of success in the management of public functions. To close one's eyes to the reality of this record is to deny deliberately and foolishly the facts of actual performance.

Beyond this enumeration of accomplishments, however, there is very little, if anything at all, that may be claimed with genuine pride. Those who disagree with this statement are likely to tell us that we seem to forget the hundreds, nay thousands, of new schoolrooms and schoolhouses that have been built during the last few years. They would tell us that over a million more children have been accommodated in our public schools. They would remind us that two or three cultural structures and lovely parks have been or are being erected in the metropolitan

center of the country. Let us grant that these features of social growth, these outward signs of educational and cultural activities appear to give a certain completeness and outward counterbalance to the infrastructural development and grain production brought about in several parts of our country.

Having made these admissions, however, a thoughtful and serious observer of the overall scene cannot help but agree with the critics that these gains and benefits claimed by our political leaders as the fruit of their labor and their dedication to the public weal are outweighed and outbalanced by the losses suffered and the liabilities incurred by the country on account of their shortcomings, their selfish decisions, and their socially nearsighted acts. Collectively, these capital deficiencies have depressed the mood and the spirit of the individual citizen, have placed in jeopardy the safety of his body and the security of his hard-earned possessions, have deeply disturbed the peace of his mind, and have un-

dermined his faith in the observance of equal justice in his dealings with his fellows and his government. Fundamentally, they are traceable to a general moral anemia caused by inadequate and meager educational program.

In the field of culture and education, it is no exaggeration to assert that very little may be pointed out as real accomplishments achieved by our Government through sound planning and effective execution on the part of our leaders during the last 25 years. Of course, they are primarily political leaders; but unfortunately they do make decisions in areas which are beyond their competence in which they should not therefore interfere but leave them to those qualified by proper expertise and experience. The mere fact that they, as political figures, have succeeded in winning elections, in placing their friends in public positions for which many are not sufficiently qualified, and in raising the salaries of government employees through wasteful use of public funds, does not make them experts in all

other human activities or in all public affairs. In the lexicon of men who value the work of the mind and appreciate the higher things of life, nothing of concrete excellence, solid worth, and lasting importance has been satisfactorily achieved so far by any of our political leaders. It is not easy to find exceptions among them if by important and lasting achievement we mean acts that raise the moral atmosphere of our country and the educational qualifications of the great majority of our people.

For our present purpose, it is quite enough to point to certain unfortunate conditions which may be safely stated as evidence of the failure of leadership in this country. Among them the following are well known: The incidence of crime is extremely high in a nation that claims to have been civilized and christianized over three centuries; the rate of illiteracy among the inhabitants is close to 40 per cent; out of a population of almost 34 million inhabitants barely one million could be counted as intelligent voters

in public elections; public offices are often held by their occupants not as public trust but as opportunities for enriching themselves directly or indirectly; the term graft and corruption has become a popular byword in relation to the conduct and management of government work.

Why are these things happening among a people who are supposed to be adequately provided with schools and teachers? With this state of things existing as background, we cannot conscientiously declare that this country is largely led by active and thoughtful guides; that it is under the influence of able and high-minded citizens; and that it enjoys the inspiration of morally responsible and conscientious leaders. Yes, we cannot sincerely proclaim that our people have been choosing clean intelligent, and unselfish leaders.

Under these circumstances several questions then meet us face to face: Is there something inherently wrong in the mental and moral upbringing of the Filipino people? Is there something

missing in the total preparation of our country for an independent national life? Is there something in our national Constitution that has caused the rampant cases of misery, disorder, and tragedy that beset the Filipino people? Is there a serious gap or a defective principle in the educational philosophy of our institutions of learning.

These are questions that should challenge every thinking and responsible Filipino, particularly every college and university graduate. Scholars in the field of history, sociology, and psychology may well give us a convincing or at least a plausible explanation of this plethora of national illnesses. One thing, however, seems certain in the opinion of careful and responsible observers; and it is this: There is nothing radically wrong with our national Constitution although some of its provisions are alien to our cultural and social conditions. The trouble is that the Constitution has not been religiously or faithfully observed by leading citizens of the nation; and that these

individuals as a group have lost much of their sense of values in their frenzied efforts to acquire power and prestige and to possess money in abundance. Not contented with violating the terms of the national Charter, a select group of them have gone to the extreme of proposing amendments to certain parts of that document to enlarge their power and influence further and to remain longer in the seats of authority. Our innocent and unenlightened voters who form the bulk of our electorate are oftentimes misled by clever and unscrupulous politicians into choosing not the men with high intellectual and moral qualifications but the mentally and morally mediocre who make opportunism and greed their ruling norm of personal political behavior. It is bad enough that they form an influential part of our governing class but as constituting a visible sector of the Establishment they are taken and followed by young and older people as living models of practical behavior.

The most effective and lasting remedy of these ills

may not be found in a strong police force inasmuch as policemen may themselves become active authors of crime and disorder. Neither does it necessarily lie in the supply of food or in the completeness of the so-called national infra-structure. It lies primarily in sound and nationally total education. Hence, for a healthy national growth, our people must insist that the nation's education be undertaken by the government with vigor and intelligence and promptness. Similar statements have been repeatedly expressed by many Filipinos in different walks of life. Indeed, we seem to have a legion of experts on the subject. But it is not difficult to discover that the ideas that most of us have about education are generally superficial and vague. They are oftentimes confusing and even idiotic. In fact not a few of us who are known as educators in this country think of education in terms of the pre-Sputnik educational ideas of many Americans. But while most American educationists have already modified their obsolete notions and have

adjusted their methods, techniques, and aims to the changes of modern science and scientific discoveries, most of us in this country, including those in education work itself, are still firm in our conviction that what we had learned and had known in the days before the Second World War are still good enough for all of us.

If we really desire to give the highest priority to education in our national program of work, it is incumbent upon every responsible Filipino leader or official to grasp the meaning of education as an idea, a concept, a principle, an accomplishment, or a quality in the light of modern science and scholarship. We should understand that education does not result from being merely physically present in the classroom of a college or university, and neither does it necessarily result from the receipt of a diploma and from the acquisition of a degree. It does not even result from our ability to retain in our memory an accumulation of facts and information of different kinds. Education, above all, should

not be treated as an ephemeral phenomenon, a passing event in the life of man. It is not an object to be pursued and prized today and then abandoned and forgotten tomorrow.

In a word, we should understand that education is a life-long process. It should serve as a running stream in every person's life, changing and receiving fresh water as it flows, otherwise we will find ourselves drinking, as it were, from a stagnant pool, filthy, unhealthy, and even poisonous. Commencement in the high school, college, or university does not mark the termination of the process of education. An individual and a nation may rightly claim as being educated only to the extent that they continue their efforts to learn and to improve their educational competence throughout their life-time.

Education is endless as long as inventions, discoveries, and the search for new and better processes, new and better ideas continue to excite human interest and curiosity; it is endless as long as the freedom of man's

spirit is unshackled; it is endless as long as man's thirst for truth and beauty and nobility remains unquenched. Graduation day may only be rightly understood when considered as a forward step towards individual fulfillment. To regard it in any other manner is to court educational disaster and intellectual death.

This is the only conception of education that can make a country great. This is the conception of education that should have the highest priority in the schedule of activities for any good administration of this country. This is the conception of education that deserves a budget of billions, a budget equal to the total expenditure of the national government for all of its other activities. This is the conception of education that should transform our present near-sighted philosophy of education and our wasteful school system into a life-giving process of individual and national growth. This is the conception of education which when carried out leads us to greatness.

Quantitatively, this new

philosophy of education involves an activity and service for all the elements of the entire Filipino people — the children, the youth, and the adults in both middle and old age. To be faithfully and properly carried out, the educational operation involved is not to be limited as it is now to primary and elementary schools, to high schools and vocational schools, and to colleges and universities. It includes the training of all citizens who are out of school or who are through with formal schooling.

To produce the best overall results, the successive stages and parts of the educational plan based on this philosophy, from childhood to old age, should be coordinated and integrated in order that a unified and strong educational structure may be formed, a better utilization of available resources may be secured, and a reduction of wastage in money and effort may be effected. Pertinent to this subject are the words of an important UNESCO Committee report in December, 1965, which reads as follows:

In a new context — one where education takes its place in every sector of existence and throughout the whole period of the personality's development — many of the walls by which the different types and phases of educational activity are sealed off, often hermetically from one another must disappear, giving way to active and lively communication. Henceforward, education may be conceived as a coherent structure in which each part is dependent upon the others and has no meaning except in relation to the others. If one part of the structure is lacking, the remainder is out of balance and none of the parts is equipped to provide the specific services for which it was devised. What is needed, then, is a series of harmonizations with respect to theory no less than to practical work.

Qualitatively, it calls for a program of studies that fit our needs and conditions

and direct our efforts towards our social, economic, and cultural goals. For the fact is that our educational system, organization of courses, and ways of evaluating educational growth have been almost mere carbon copies of American ideas and techniques. We adore that system and follow it thoughtlessly without considering that such an imitative procedure is basically undesirable for several reasons: one is that the American system is based on conditions, social, historical, cultural, and economic, very different from ours; two is that we often overlook its changing character right in its own native environment and we consider it largely unchanging from decade to decade; and three is that we are not keeping ourselves aware of its particular purpose and we assume that what is good for Americans is good enough for Filipinos also.

All these defects proceed from our uncritical attitude that as America is strong and rich and healthy, her educational institutions, methods, practices, and aims are worthy of being imitated

and adopted in the Philippines and by the Filipinos. We do not even try to understand and remember that Americans have had their educational shortcomings, cultural failures, economic disasters, moral delinquencies, and unsolved social problems. We do not even try to understand and remember that what is distinctly an American civilization is relatively new and fresh and as yet untested in the crucible of long centuries of struggle, strifes, difficulties, and sufferings; and so the American experiment in education is hardly deserving as an ideal pattern for us to follow completely in our educational program for national development.

This is not to say, however, that certain American influences have not brought improvements on certain aspects of our national life. But they have also brought much confusion in our sense of values. They have impressed upon us the great benefits of individual freedom. But they have not sufficiently emphasized the virtue of self-restraint and self-effacement. They have given

us an exaggerated appreciation of money and material values.

A plan based on this new philosophy of education should be of vital concern to us for the growth of our social order, for the development of our national potentialities and inherent qualities, for a widespreading moral and cultural development, and for a fruitful exertion of efforts at building a virile nation possessed of its own distinctive genius. No thinking Filipino would want to see his country developed as a mere replica of any other nation.

Fortunately for us under the provisions of our own Constitution we may adopt a system based on a new educational philosophy such as what we are at present discussing. Any decision to take full advantage of it depends upon a wise and farsighted educational statesmanship and upon some boldness of planning and execution by enlightened leaders. These constitutional provisions read as follows:

“The government shall establish and maintain a

complete and adequate system of public education and shall provide at least free primary instruction, and citizenship training to adult citizens.”

All these many years our system of education has been neither complete in its scope nor adequate in its nature and purpose. Its coverage has been extremely limited and its performance undeniably inadequate. The terms of the provisions of the Constitution contemplate a comprehensive educational work which should specifically include children and adults. To put this into effect our educational program should be promoted with imagination, boldness, and creative thinking. It has to take into account the realities of the vital changes that have been taking place in the ideas and the new knowledge acquired during the last 20 or 30 years. Our present system has been wasting much money and time in its failure to discard the non-essential and the unimportant from prescribed courses and studies.

It has been largely limited to the training of children in elementary schools; and any further instruction has not gone beyond the education of groups of adolescents in secondary schools and of young men in higher institutions. But citizenship training which the Constitution expressly enjoins the government to give to adult citizens is almost entirely neglected. Continuing education for past college graduates and older people who have failed to keep up with the advances of learning has never been thought of.

What our Constitution contemplates in providing for a complete and adequate system of education is a program of sound, useful, and up-to-date educational training for all Filipinos of every age, sex, and social station throughout life. Intelligently interpreted in the light of this age of science and learning, the Constitution has to be understood as embracing the new philosophy of education. This is an idea that takes into account the need for constant educational growth of all the people of the coun-

try from the early years of infancy to the last minutes of the active life of every Filipino citizen. Any other system, particularly what we still hold and follow, will make it impossible for us to meet the demands of a modern community and to respond to the requirements of a democratic government.

To carry out this new educational philosophy the major fraction of the financial resources of our government should be devoted exclusively to the work of education for all the elements of the population. To push the plan into reality and to make it the basis of a new educational system, the leading citizens of the nation should support in word and deed the democratic principle of free private enterprise. By its strict observance we shall put an end to the proliferation of governmental functions by doing away with those activities which the government itself should not and cannot properly and effectively perform and so has regularly wasted vast amounts of public funds in addition to the

mounting corruption and oppressive taxation it has caused.

These ideas should be broadcast among our enlightened and responsible citizens for them to consider so they may, if convinced of their validity, demand that they be carried out by those in charge of

the administration of our government.

We should face this challenge and meet it with hope and determination; for it is by its prompt and effective fulfillment that the roots of progress will grow deep and strong to support a happy people and a vigorous society. — V. G. Sinco.

THE VERMIN OF STATE

And so I fear, my country, not the hand
That shall hurl might and whirlwind on the land.
I fear not titan traitors that shall rise
To stride like broken shadows on our skies;
I fear the vermin that shall undermine
Senate and school and citadel and shrine;
The worm of fraud, the fatted worm of ease
And all the crawling progeny of these.
I fear the vermin that shall honeycomb the towers
And walls of state in unsuspecting hours.

—*Edwin Markham from The Bell Tower of Venice.*