



Garcia Speaks to the Teachers

By Benito Mencias

Well, not actually. As he stood at the Luneta in white tie and tails delivering his inaugural address as fourth President of the Third Republic, Garcia was speaking to all the people. But he stressed moral values so many times he sounded like a teacher conducting a teacher's seminar on social science.

Come to think, this should be no surprise to you. Carlos Polestico Garcia was plain Mr. Garcia when he was handling an elementary school class in his hometown of Talibon, Bohol. That was how he started his career in public life. But probably because of the local prestige that a teacher quickly develops, the political bug got him. His fellow teachers soon learned that he had left the service and was now working for a law degree in Manila. The news after that was incredible: he had been elected governor of Bohol, representative, senator, Vice President of the Philippines. Now he was at the Luneta starting his administration — as other Presidents of the Philippines had done before him — with a definition of the objectives of his magistracy. But he still sounded like a teacher.

Except for the drone of warplanes overhead and the rumble of military vehicles during the long parade, the inauguration was quiet. If there was a surge of public enthusiasm over the installation of the new President, it was hard to detect. Hundreds of thousands of people milled at the Luneta in December 1953 when Magsaysay was inaugurated. Compared to the throng that fought to touch or at least get a close look at Magsaysay, the crowd that turned up for Garcia was a mere handful.

Yet it was Garcia who seemed to be in contact with the situation, who could articulate the needs and planning required in a time of trouble.

The character of the inaugural, as some critics have pointed out, was incongruous. This was true enough. After announcing a policy of austerity, the least he could have done was to be consistent by dressing up and celebrating the occasion simply. By example he could then have dramatized the precept. Instead, he showed up in white tie and tails — the very antithesis of austerity — and hosted a glittering reception at Malacañang.

But this can be attributed to the expansiveness generated by political victory and easily forgiven.

At all events, it is doubtful if his words would have been less cogent if he had turned up in simpler attire. In one of the shortest inaugural addresses on record, he left no doubt that he knew the nation's problems and exactly how he would deal with them.

He had words especially for the teacher:

"The education of the youth, being essential to the progress of the nation and to the preservation of the freedom we have won, will receive increasing attention from this administration.

"I believe in preparing the youth of the land intellectually and morally for the responsibilities and leadership they have to assume later in life. Since our economic development is the center of our common effort at this juncture of our national life, the education of our youth should henceforth lay emphasis on science, industrial and agricultural technology.

"But with all our preoccupation with the national wellbeing, we cannot afford to neglect the moral and spiritual aspects of our national life. Together with the increasing abundance, we need to

strengthen our moral fiber. Our spiritual virtues must be constantly fortified. A nation does not live by bread alone, and no profit is gained in strengthening its economy if in doing so it loses its soul. "The ruins of once mighty empires now buried under the dust of oblivion constantly remind us that material progress, unless based on a foundation of morality, eventually destroys itself."

You might with profit read that paragraph all over again. It was Garcia's central thought. Around this central idea everything else in his address revolved. "I serve notice that the war against graft and corruption will continue with unabated zeal without fear or favor. Dishonesty and inefficiency in public service will be dealt with firmly but justly. By the same token honesty and efficiency should be rewarded generously. In dealing with these things I intend to use preventive measures to minimize, abolish, punitive measures."

He developed his economic program in this fashion: "As a people we prize highly the moral and spiritual values of life. But the realities of the moment have made us more preoccupied with economic problems chiefly concerning the material values of "national life."

"It is a strange paradox that while the basic articles in our fundamental economy are rice and fish, we are not self-sufficient in both from time immemorial. We have gone into extensive plans and schemes in industrialization, foreign trade, foreign exchange and similar matters, but we have not given sufficient thought or incentives, nor have we done enough to provide for the fundamental need of national life—food stuff. In the midst of abundant natural resources for rice culture and fish production, we still have to import from abroad a substantial part of the supply to meet these absolute and irreducible necessities of life. Thus, in case of a blockade as dramatically shown in the last world war, this can be a serious weakness in our national defense. What happened in the last world war with tragic consequences to our army and our people should spur us to the high resolve never again to neglect this essential side of our economy.

"It is, therefore, imperative that we lose no time and spare no effort in reorienting our national policies towards doing first things first. We must first produce here, by and for ourselves, enough to provide for the fundamental needs of life—food, shelter and clothing. The country now has the natural resources, the means and the modern know-how to do it. Let us summon then from the spiritual reservoir of the nation the collective will and determination to make our country self-sufficient in foodstuffs, shelter and clothing. Our freedom must be nourished from the wealth of our own soil and by the labor of our own

manhood. This is the key policy of this administration in the field of economics. To this I give my heart and hand."

This was the way he phrased his swing away from the Magsaysay policy of public borrowing: "There has developed of late some apprehension arising out of the austerity measures adopted by the administration to arrest further deterioration of our international reserves. I hasten to tell the nation that while the present financial situation calls for sober and realistic reappraisal of our policies and actions, there is no real cause for alarm. There has been no dissipation of our dollar reserves. But in our overeagerness and enthusiasm to push forward our industrialization program, we transgressed the eternal laws of measure and proportion. As a retribution reality now constrains us to restore the correct proportion between dollar reserves and industrialization and also between these reserves and bond issues and other forms of public borrowing. To achieve this end, it behooves us to submit temporarily to measures of austerity, self-discipline and self-denial. "We have to sacrifice for the larger good of the greatest number. Nonetheless, we must continue our industrialization program with daring and courage. Let us not forget, however, that discretion is still the better part of valor. Our mistakes should not make us weaker in spirit. Rather recognition of these should inspire us to strengthen our dedication and with the proper rectifications made, we shall carry on stronger in faith and confidence, and with clearer vision."

This was how the future looked to Garcia: "In the light of our experience it has been dramatically pointed out that a well-balanced agro-industrial economy is the best for the country. Rice is still the center of gravity of our agricultural economy as steel is of industrial economy. On these two basic factors, we build our agro-industrial economy. We have to step up the tempo of establishing the agricultural industries to utilize with the least delay the abundant natural resources which a bountiful Divine Providence has endowed us. We have the land, the climate and other favorable natural conditions to produce ramie, cotton and other fibers to feed our textile industries with raw materials. We have the land and the natural conditions to produce raw rubber to provide steady supply of raw materials to our rubber and tire industries that minister to a nation on wheels. We have abundant flora and fauna for supplying the materials of drug and chemical industries.

"And now what resources have we for our industrial economy? We have some of the world's biggest iron deposits and abundant coal and manganese to provide the raw materials for the basic

steel industry rightly called the mother of 101 other industries. To complement this, it is definitely known that the bosom of our earth contains unlimited mineral oil deposits to turn the wheels of industry and the propellers of prosperity. We have the natural hydro-electric resources which can be harnessed as a number of them already are to supply cheap industrial power. The power-harnessing program will be kept up with increasing momentum to realize our desire for rural electrification.

“With all these elements at our command, and with our youth acquiring the needed industrial technology and with the increasing demand for machineries and other steel products for our industrialization, it has become imperative for us to build soonest the steel industry. Out of the womb of steel industry we hope to generate here the machineries for the entire Philippine agro-industrial structure. Out of steel we will create the sinews of the nation.

But, fellow countrymen, iron is only one of our principal mineral resources. We have practically all minerals used by present civilization, ferrous, non-ferrous and miner oils. The mining industry, therefore, has the potentiality of becoming the premier dollar-earning industry of the Philippines. This administration commits itself to giving all possible incentives and support to private enterprises which may invest and work to make mining the biggest of industries. The broader motivating spirit of modern Filipino industries is no longer money profit first, but rather the joy of creativeness and the exultation of the soul derived from the consciousness of having contributed to human happiness. May this spirit forever grow!

This administration is fully aware of the difficulties in financing our ambitious industrialization program. We have realized that our dollar reserves can no longer continue with the double role of providing for the normal requirements of our foreign trade and the tremendous financing of our industrial and economic development. The time has come to provide separate development funds to attend exclusively to the economic development and release our international reserves of this burden. I am fully convinced that we can generate development funds from sources other than taxes and the proceeds of our present exports. Development loans can be liquidated by the same industries they are intended to sustain.

“An essential aspect of the program I have outlined if we are to achieve optimum results is the role of scientific and industrial research. No industry of any importance in the world today can afford to exist without it. This is our serious deficiency that we must immediately correct through collaboration of government and private enterprise.”

But the policy pronouncement of immediate interest to teachers was this: “The Government will continue its low-cost housing projects and its land redistribution and resettlement program. We shall exert greater efforts so that more of our poor will eventually acquire homes and lands that they can call their very own. Home-and-land-owning citizens possess not only a sense of stability and contentment but also that practical patriotism to live for, and if necessary, die for home and country. For upon the face of the patriot must have shone first the firelight of home.”

May this be soon!