

■ This is part of an address of President Ferdinand Marcos delivered at the YMCA 55th anniversary program, November 10, 1966.

THE REPUBLIC AND ITS YOUNG MEN

The vitality of our nation, compared with other developing countries, has often elicited admiring remarks. There is the energizing and catalytic effect of a broadly based educational system. And there is the vitalizing influence of volunteer civic movements.

Up to 70 per cent of our population, I have been informed, are below thirty years of age. This makes us one of the most youthful nations in the world today.

Even the heroes we revere most are taken from the ranks of youth. Jose Rizal, who first defined Filipino nationality, was only 35 when he was martyred at Bagumbayan field, and he was only 25 when he completed his major work, the novel *Noli Me Tangere*. Andres Bonifacio was only 29 when he headed the Katipunan, and his trusted associate, Emilio Jacinto, was only 19. Apolinario Mabini was just thirty when he framed the struc-

ture of the first Philippine Republic. And both Quezon and Osmeña were in their early twenties when they asserted their claim to the leadership of the nation.

The modern youth is of course epitomized by the college student. I am informed that the Philippines today, although still a developing country, already ranks with the top ten or so countries in terms of college enrollment per capita. This is a matter, of course, over which some of us may have some deep reservations. The high proportion of youth in college is an indication of a quantitative success. The qualitative aspect may be another matter altogether — this we must admit with becoming modesty and candor.

It is entirely possible that without proper channels of development, the youth will be more of a prey to their own destructive impulses. For it is when the energies of youth are inhibited, or

are circumscribed by lack of opportunities for their exercise, that the spirit of youth takes on a negative and destructive aspect. Then youth collectively becomes a source of grave danger to the whole society. We have seen this happen, with catastrophic consequences to social and political stability and the sanctity of human life, in some other countries in our own time.

The magical property of youth which all others envy is its overflowing energy and enthusiasm. It was this that made George Bernard Shaw remark so aptly that the time of youth was such a wonderful thing, it was such a shame it had to be wasted on the young. When this strength and enthusiasm are misdirected, the result is juvenile delinquency, immorality, vandalism, and assorted types of antisocial behavior. On a large scale, such misdirection of youthful energy can threaten the very fabric of the state and the foundation of existing society.

The qualities of prudence and tact are of course not associated with youth. An excess of prudence can perhaps be called a perversion of

youth; but an excess of zeal can be worse because it is self-defeating. What the adult community deplors in student demonstrations is not the liberty to demonstrate but in the capacity to maintain demonstrations on a responsible level. Where such demonstrations deteriorate into mob action, youth discredits itself and sullies the brightness of its own idealism. I also believe the authority of our laws must not be flaunted. I believe that our sovereignty is real and that the Republic should command the allegiance of all dissenters and its integrity must be maintained. I wish that all dissenters, especially among the youth, could honestly tell themselves, in their hearts, that they render due allegiance to the flag of the Republic of the Philippines. Dissent expressed within the framework of our common allegiance to the Republic is welcome; it is not only welcome but necessary. But any dissent which presumes the unlawfulness of the Philippine Republic, in favor of another, perhaps now latent, sovereignty, borders on sedition, and those who do so must be manful enough to

face the consequences of their own acts under our laws.

Ours is a young society. Previous to 1872, there was no distinct Filipino nationality. The thing the people of these islands had in common was the common experience of suffering, humiliation and degradation in the hands of the foreign tyrants that ruled us. Then in 1872, this experience of common suffering reached a point of combustion in the execution of the three priests, Gomez, Burgos, and Zamora. In view of Rizal, the sense of Filipino nationality emerged at about this point. Then this led to the Propaganda Movement and the Philippine Revolution. Our country's founding fathers, from Burgos, through Rizal, to Quezon and Osmeña, were invariably young men below the age of thirty-five.

The Philippine Republic, as it now exists, is the material result of all those labors of so many dedicated men and women. Its forerunner, the Malolos Republic, was the first constitutional government in the history of Asia. With such a distinguished heritage, our Republic faces its own sup-

reme test whose significance can affect the history of the world. This test lies in our ability to build a workable democracy in spite of the mass poverty, ignorance and disease which constitute the conditions of underdevelopment. The academies say this cannot be done; that underdevelopment is incompatible with democratic institutions; that despotism is a necessary stage in a nation's political evolution; that it is not the ballot but bullets that should arbitrate the issues in the life of a developing nation.

The Filipino people do not bend to this defeatist view of democracy. This is not the influence of America, which helped us develop some of our democratic institutions. This is the influence of our own authentic national experience. For if in 1898 our ancestors could assert the claim of 7 million Filipinos to the right to be self-governing democracy, why should our people now abdicate this challenge in 1966? Of all the developing countries in the world today, the Philippines has the longest democratic tradition. It has the social and economic

and political qualifications to succeed as a democracy. And if we cannot make a going concern of our democracy, what other country in the world can do so? Certainly not Vietnam. In the end, therefore, the Filipinos must bear the burden of proving that democracy can work even against a heritage of mass poverty, ignorance and disease. If we can prove this, we shall render the cause of human freedom a genuine service which no military exploit can ever match.

This is the burden of the Philippines, but this burden in immediate terms, becomes the mission of our generation — and the younger one that is immediately coming after us. The future of this nation belongs to the generation that is now in the elementary schools, the high schools and the colleges. The next twenty years are

the crucial years of transition; they define the decisive period for Philippine democracy. The task is so immense that it will defy all the energies and the best efforts of both the older and younger generations. But we must be mindful above all, of our own responsibility as the adult generation. We cannot plead any excuse for failure. We must provide principle and wisdom to the youth's energy and strength. There was something Henry Thoreau said that struck me as so apt that I memorized it. He said: "The youth gets together his materials to build a bridge to the moon, and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a wood-shed with them. . ."

Our task, my friends, is to build the woodshed with which our generation is charged. Let us build it well.