

■ A young journalist peers into the local scene from the long perspective of history.

OUR YOUTH AND THE UNFINISHED REVOLUTION

ALFREDO R. ROCES

Revolution is a term applied to the overthrow of a government or a social system with another taking its place. The term unfinished revolution is new, first heard in a speech of President Macapagal last June 12. I have been asked to talk on this topic and I feel it is essential to state at the outset that I do not represent the present administration; what I have to say is not an official interpretation of the Liberal Party's unfinished revolution. I am not an apologist for the administration, neither am I a member of the opposite camp. I am a newspaper columnist who considers politics a source of amusing commentary. I turn my guns on whatever crosses my sight and I wish to retain this perspective, without political

color and with truth as my only interest.

Objective comment

Thus what I have to say about the unfinished revolution is a personal interpretation and does not carry the official imprimatur of the originator of this term. Neither is this talk the cynical brick-and-tomato-throwing opposition of those politically committed to pessimism about any program of the administration. What I propose to attempt is a serious and, as much as possible, objective comment about this term from a history and cultural context.

The revolution referred to is that which exploded in the late 1800's upon the premature discovery of the Katipunan. It is interesting to

point out what others have observed, that this was the first national uprising against a colonial power in Asia. But while most students recognize the political repercussions of such an armed desire for change, the desire for other changes in the social structure are seldom given their due importance. The revolution for one thing revealed two strong desires among Filipinos, aside from basic freedom and dignity, and these are opportunity for education and land. It was land that brought the first troubles between the rulers and Rizal's family. His tale of "Cabesang Tales" is the lament of those deprived of land.

Tragic history

Philippine history is tragic because each time the Filipino people reached a cultural level, wherein a maturity and flowering was in sight, a force outside itself nipped it in the bud. Thus our intellectuals who had been educated in the Spanish culture first found their talents needed to spark a national revolution and later found themselves with-

out anyone to leave a legacy to. The Americans had come, they had sunk the Spanish armada and, with the forces of Aguinaldo sweeping like a tide towards Manila, waited for reasons we perhaps can never really ascertain. Their mission to destroy the Spanish navy was accomplished and they watched the Filipinos fight their way to the Walled City of Manila. Soon American troops landed and assumed positions in front of the city. The Spaniards chose to surrender to the Americans after a mock battle. By right of conquest America claimed a foothold in the Philippines. Incidentally, Spain later contested the fact that Manila had surrendered to the Americans one day after the Treaty of Paris was signed, the peace treaty between Spain and the US, thus voiding the staged battle and the victory, on technicalities. Such is the way of history. We had little to say for ourselves.

Cultural gap

With the coming of the Americans there was a cultural gap created. The gene-

ration steeped in Spanish culture soon clashed with the younger generation who spoke English, drank Coca-Cola and danced boogie-woogie. It is the writer Nick Joaquin who has most poignantly written of this painful void between two generations, of revolucionarios who became useless old men instead of respected heroes, of poets who found there was no audience who read Spanish, and who had to turn to politics or business to survive. The unfinished revolution does not touch on these, rather it speaks of the many aspirations that died stillborn in the coming of the Yankees. Said General Aguinaldo when a clash between the US and the revolucionarios seemed inevitable, in his Otro Manifiesto del Sr. Presidente del Gobierno Revolucionario:

"My nation cannot remain indifferent in view of such a violent and aggressive seizure of a portion of its territory by a nation which has arrogated to itself the title: champion of oppressed nations. Thus it is that my government is disposed to

open hostilities if the American troops attempt to take forcible possession. I denounce these acts before the world in order that the conscience of mankind may pronounce its infallible verdict as to who are the oppressors of nations and the tormentors of mankind. Upon their hands be all the blood which may be shed."

Forgotten heroes

The bloodshed according to Leon Wolff in his book "Little Brown Brother" totaled 4,234 Americans dead and more than two thousand wounded at a cost of six hundred million dollars. Sixteen thousand Filipino rebels were killed, their corpses actually tallied by the Americans, and about 200,000 civilians dead of disease. The revolucionario turned from hero to a pathetic figure forgotten by the American-oriented generation and this is best expressed in the words of Apolnario Mabini, who after finally signing the oath of allegiance from his exile in Guam, said:

"After two long years of absence I am returning, so to speak, completely dis-

oriented and, what is worse, almost overcome by disease and sufferings. Nevertheless, I hope, after some time of rest and study, still to be of some use, unless I have returned to the Islands for the sole purpose of dying."

Three months later, at the age of 38, he died.

'Dimmed voices'

This was the unfinished revolution. The men who started it and who fought in it could have told us much about their aspirations. Some of what they had to say are available in documents, such as in the Malolos Constitution, but their voices have dimmed and been ignored. For we were learning about the three little pigs that went to market and the great American democracy. We were chewing gum, laughing at Charlie Chaplin and wearing coat and tie. We left Cervantes and took up Shakespeare, we no longer heaped praises on Magellan and Anda and instead talked about Lincoln and Washington and the cherry tree. In a little over 40 years we had forgotten the Filipino-American war, and, worse, we had

forgotten the Revolution. When the Japanese hordes came, the Americans had metamorphosed into allies, and after three painful years under the Japanese, the Americans returned as liberators. This caused even greater obsession with things American. They were the great golden gods. And what of the Revolution and the Katipunan? Aguinaldo still lives, an old veteran who saw our best boulevard named after Dewey — the admiral who raised the revolucionario's hopes of casting aside the Spanish yoke, only to dash it to the ground with the sudden desire of the Yankee to pick up the white man's burden. But today we are an independent nation. We have slowly and painfully looked long and hard at ourselves. And we desire to seek our roots, our neglected past.

The new concepts

It has been a strange twist of local history that those who have defied the conquerors and shut them out completely have slowly withered and died, while those who learned to take in the new ideas and the new cul-

ture managed to flourish. Thus, those who defied the Spanish regime and her culture still survive today only as cultural minorities. They are, for the most part, vanishing tribes. Only the Muslims remain strong and they are comparatively dis-oriented with the rest of contemporary Philippines. Those who fought the Americans, and tried to conserve the Spanish heritage are slowly withering away while those who learned to accept the new culture managed to prosper. But now we are independent and perhaps we should learn to adjust to the new concept of a young nation in Asia. Perhaps those who fail to see this and remain reactionary will find themselves bitterly lonely. Only time can tell. But the lesson of history is there.

The present trend is to reach back for our old ideals, to return to the values and aspirations of our forefathers who embodied our greatest moment as a people in the revolt of the Katipunan. And this is the unfinished revolution you hear about. In concrete terms there are

two points which President Macapagal underscored. These are land reform and a new concept of foreign affairs which will place us in our true geographic location which is Southeast Asia.

2 vital points

The unfinished revolution means a new look in our foreign affairs department in the sense that there will be greater interest regarding affairs in Asia. There will also be much effort towards getting to know our neighbors and much more importance stressed on Asian affairs. This we hope, of course is not at the sacrifice of losing Western military support which admittedly is vital to our security in this region at present. But it indicates that we now do not expect to live under the US patronage forever, and that we shall make efforts to strengthen our security on our own through allies and self-reliance in the distant but inevitable future. The unfinished revolution also seems to want to tackle the problem of land reform. In fact the bill towards such action, the Agricultural Land Reform Code which hopes to

abolish land tenancy, has just been signed. The merits or demerits of the bill I do not wish to discuss. Its implementation will also be something one must wait and see before giving comment. But its intentions are worthwhile. Land reform is not just a possible key to our economic plight; it has become the crying need of our present times. Every revolution in current history has tackled this problem of land reform. It just cannot be ignored in our present times. When Ben Bella took over Algeria from the French it was land reform he started at once, and it is the same in all emerging young nations. The Chinese lost the mainland and the lesson learned from it led to a land reform in Taiwan, their last island home. When Fidel Castro triumphed in the Cuban revolution, he immediately instituted land reform, an act which led to US enmity, for much of Cuban land was owned by US fruit and oil companies and hotel magnates. Unless we want to wait for a Fidel Castro to emerge in our country, one

who will push the entire nation towards communism with Russian nuclear rockets in our midst, we should look at our agricultural land system. We should awaken to current history.

Land reform

Land reform is necessary in the Philippines. But this is not enough. With land reform must go dedicated and graft-free government support to the tiller of the land, and likewise a strong educational program. Otherwise land reform will merely shuffle the ownership of lands without creating social progress, agricultural abundance, and economic stability. There should also be a system of just and speedy compensation for the landlords or a great injustice will have been committed. No amount of good intentions can justify an injustice. This, the unfinished revolution proposes to tackle. The coming years will be crucial. You should be aware of this for much of the future depends on the implementation of this program, its effectivity, equitable and just means,

and finally its desired effect which is the common good.
Graft remains

President Macapagal also mentioned a frontal attack on our economic problems through the removal of import controls. He claimed that graft and corruption was thus eliminated and that moral regeneration was on the way. But I feel it pertinent to point out that graft and corruption has remained. This time, instead of working for a license as in the days of control when wealth was assured through a dollar license, the greed for illegal wealth has shifted to our harbors. Now anyone can import anything provided he pays his taxes on it. The corruption has therefore shifted to the bringing in of goods without taxes or with a nominal amount of tax. Smuggling has become nationwide as never before. This aspect, which involves our law agents, should be looked into.

Search for soil

The unfinished revolution, to my thinking, is the crystallization of our various past,

vague aspirations. These were reflected in our nationalistic actions such as in the use of Pilipino and demand for a national language, street name changing, our so-called Filipino-first slogan and our research into our past. It is the inevitable evolution of the Filipino in search of his soul. He now finds himself more and more confronted with his problems. He must find solutions to them. No large power can be blamed for his ills. No large power can save him with foreign aid for his sufferings. No outside imperialist can now suffer the blame for our own indolence, or our own lack of morality. Our ancestors who fought for a united country free of oppressors have been rediscovered. They stand ready to judge us.

Challenge to youth

The future of this unfinished revolution belongs to you, the youth. It is hard to imagine that those of the pre-war American era will ever see the fruits of this. But you who belong to the true generation of an independent Philippines may at

last bring the Filipino race into full flower. God willing, there will be no outside force to nip your efforts in the bud. The land reform will be in your hands in its actual implementation. The moral regeneration is likewise in your hands. An awareness of Asia with a slight devaluation of everything imported and foreign, specially US, is needed. For we have adopted the bad with the good. In this sense, in being completely "westernized" we have betrayed those who fought the revolution. In neglecting our minority tribes, we have been traitors to our own race. In discriminately denuding our forests, we have defiled our own land. In succumbing to materialism and moral bankruptcy we have been traitors to ourselves.

Peaceful fight

You may ask, what have I to do with all these? The learned statesman, or if you are cynical, the politicians, have taken care of all these and they are cutting up the cake which I shall not see a share of. Allow me to repeat a thought once given by

Senator Manglapus: The men who fought in that unfinished revolution were young men. And they were not old intellectuals, they were young ordinary people like Bonifacio or better still like Emilio Jacinto who died at the age of 23. Bonifacio was 29 when he led the Katipunan. Antonio Luna was a general at 29. And Emilio Aguinaldo was the first President of the Philippines, after successful battles, at the age of 29. One who died for him, Gregorio del Pilar, was 24. Osmeña was Speaker of the House at 29, and so too Roxas. Jose Rizal wrote his novels in his late 20's and was killed at 35.

You may of course argue that you have no ambitions to be a hero, much less the kind who dies at 23 or be killed at 35. Remember, however, that the unfinished revolution was started by young men like you. And there is one important aspect of this unfinished revolution today, and that is that it is a peaceful revolution. The final fruits are to be achieved without recourse to force or violence. You

will be revolucionarios in peace. There is, of course, still violence in Ilocos, in the piers, in Intramuros, and the world outside. In Vietnam, in Korea, in Alabama. That is precisely why you must join. To put an end to violence. All revolutions are desirous of a quick end. Revolutions cannot go on forever, it is a phase in which a change is introduced as a

reaction. The peaceful phase could be a happier alternative to another bloody bath for other reasons and other changes if our system fails today or in the future. — *(Address delivered at the Fifth Annual Junior Members' convention of the Children's Museum and Library, Inc., at the FEU auditorium, August, 1963.)*

LIVE WITHOUT PRINCIPLE

If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, as most appear to do, I am sure that, for me, there would be nothing left worth living for. I trust that I shall never thus sell my birthright for a mess of pottage. I wish to suggest that a man may be very industrious, and yet not spend his time well. There is no more fatal blunderer than he who consumes the greater part of his life getting his living. All great enterprises are self-supporting. The poet, for instance, must sustain his body by his poetry, as a steam planing-mill feeds its boilers with the shavings it makes. *You must get your living by loving.* But as it is said, of the merchants that ninety-seven in a hundred fail, so the life of men generally, tried by this standard, is a failure, and bankruptcy may be surely prophesied. — *Henry David Thoreau.*