

- Flag saluting has a place in our national life and it is only fitting that we pay tribute to what we ourselves have built.

FLAG SALUTE AND PATRIOTISM

Once in a while one reads heartening stories about some bureaucrat eschewing official and generally petty trappings in order to do "justice" and in the process, uncover a gem — sparkling and revealing in its wisdom. So it was with a fiscal who dropped deportation charges against five members of a religious sect who had allegedly ordered their congregation not to salute the Filipino flag. Explaining the dismissal of the case, the fiscal said: "For all the practical value of the flag salute law, it does not necessarily follow that those citizens who refuse to salute the flag for being contrary to their religious precepts are less patriotic law abiding than those who do."

The statement will surely set no precedent though it may receive the acclaim of many. To be sure, Philippine law on the matter is clear enough. The Supreme

Court, in a couple of prosaic decisions, has held that refusal to salute the flag for the reason only that one's religious beliefs forbid it is not a valid enough motive. While unhesitating in its affirmation of religious freedom, the court saw fit to draw a distinction (conveniently clear-cut because artificial and generally arbitrary) between belief and advocacy. The court also declared that saluting the flag does not constitute a form of worship and, therefore, can not be taken as violative of a person's religious creed.

The official stand of the state to the contrary notwithstanding, the statement of the fiscal — additionally revealing in that it stands out of the well-known drabness of legalese — should provide food for thought for those who would insist that all there is to patriotism, nationalism, and what-not are flag-

raising rites, passports and traffic signs in the national language, and what have you.

The petition of the fiscal to have the deportation charges dropped is, of course, based on more solid grounds — in the language of the law, meaning that the arguments and reasons are “expressly or impliedly provided for by law” and not ephemeral and opinionated such as the statement quoted here. Thus, the fiscal said no penalty is imposed on whoever refuses blatantly to salute the flag.

But lifting the petition from its legal context and viewing it against the broader background of a people's mentality and attitude, one realizes that, after all, it is what the fiscal said about there being no causal connection between saluting and patriotism which really matters. Certainly, even those who insist that symbols and rites have their function in building a national sentiment will not be foolhardy enough to maintain that these are all that are necessary in cultivating that love for one's country.

But when these people pre-

occupy themselves with nothing else but ritualistic activities such as flag ceremonies and fail to provide a more substantial basis for loving one's country, one comes to believe that perhaps one reason for this country's backwardness are people like these who think as they do. There is indeed little physical and mental effort required to pause and assume a respectful attitude while the Filipino flag is being raised up its gleaming pole. But more dedication and deeper affection for all that the flag is supposed to symbolize is necessary to wrench this country out of its rut and send it along the path to progress.

When we, as a people united by common aspirations and problems, finally realize that flag saluting has its proper place in our daily existence and that only hard, sacrificing work is the answer to the varied ills obstructing national progress, then we may sincerely stand and face the national emblem as it is slowly unfurled, comfortable in the thought that we are simply paying tribute to what we ourselves have built.