

ABOUT FORTY years ago, I had the privilege, as a student of government in the University of the Philippines, to sit at the feet of the old master. Having then been the central figure in the Filipino-American controversy that had raged to critical and even racial proportions over the scope of supervision that Filipino government officials could exercise over their American subordinates, Dr. Jose P. Laurel had awakened our people into a new consciousness of national dignity, into a new and emotionally charged patriotic fervor. Personal contact with him at the time, and to the end of his days, was inspirational. He radiated influence that evoked deeper love of country and higher pride that one was a Filipino.

Dr. Jose P. Laurel **AND SOCIAL JUSTICE** Pio Pedrosa

To Dr. Laurel, education had only one function: the pursuit of truth, honor and justice; and only one sublime and overriding purpose: the recognition and dignification of the human personality.

Like a pure gem, his genius sparked from many facets. At the core of his preoccupations, however, regardless of the

field of activity in which he might for the moment be engaged, whether it was in education, in legislation, in the administration and dispensation of justice, in directing the governmental machinery at the most painful chapter in our nation's history, in his defiant struggles against every imposition that would subvert

or denigrate the Filipino race, his central thought was the welfare and well-being of our common people.

"After the sleep of generations", he once wrote, "our common people are awakening to their birthright of human dignity, entitlement to a decent social status, and attainment of a satisfactory level of livelihood. They are no longer content to remain poor and to appease hunger for material sufficiency with uncertain visions of blessedness in the after-life. They are disposed to fight for mundane needs and comforts in the here and now. They are beginning to understand both the promise and the validity of the democratic system, with its inherent possibilities of narrowing the gap between the misery of the farm tenant and the self-indulgent luxurious living of the absentee landlord, the political cacique or the merchant prince. More and more they are consciously demanding the fulfillment of democracy's promise and the actual realization of its possibilities."

Our Constitution directs that "the promotion of social justice to insure the well-being and economic security of all the people should be the concern of the State".

Because this precept was being proselytized by self-seeking elements as establishing the right, in the words of another Filipino immortal, Manuel L. Quezon, to be fed without working, to squat on property not one's own, or to take other short-cuts to competence, in the belief that the State owes every citizen a living without effort on his part, it was Dr. Laurel, the eminent jurist, sitting as a magistrate of the Supreme Court, who gave the definition that has become the classic pronouncement on the nature of this constitutional mandate.

"Social justice", he wrote, "is the humanization of the laws and the equalization of social and economic forces by the State so that justice in its rational and objectively secular conception may at least be approximated. It means the promotion of the welfare of all the people, the adoption by the government of measures calculated to insure economic stability of all the component elements of society, through the maintenance of a proper economic and social equilibrium in the interrelations of the members of the community Social justice must be founded on the recognition of the necessity of interdependence among the diverse units of society and of the protec-

tion that should be equally extended to all groups as a combined force in our social and economic life, consistent with the fundamental and paramount objective of the State of promoting the health, comfort and quiet of all persons"

This constitutional precept has been the guiding principle of our government since the implantation of the Government of the Commonwealth twenty-seven years ago, and of the Republic since 1946. The war destroyed and nullified everything that had been accomplished prior to its outbreak, and it must be said that the first five years at least of the Republic should be considered largely the period of reconstruction and rehabilitation from the destruction and devastation of that war. Indeed development projects were planned and implementation was started immediately after the liberation. But it is only in this past decade when measures to implement the development plans were freed of the preferential attention to the projects of reconstructing and rehabilitating the nation's economic life.

We see all over the country that substantial progress has been made in agricultural production, in industrial expansion and diversification, in

domestic and international trade, in capital formation, in technical and entrepreneurial progress, in the utilization of technological and scientific processes.

At the same time we can not be blind to the stark realities of poverty, insecurity, and misery among overwhelming segments of our population. We can not fail to see that the output of our development efforts is being produced at a much lower pace than the growing demand for bare livelihood being generated in our increasing population.

It is Dr. Laurel again who paints for us a vivid picture of present conditions. He asks the same question: "How far has our Government succeeded in its social justice functions?" "The answer", he said, "lies in the lips and hearts of the millions of unemployed who bitterly wonder why they are jobless when rich natural resources abound in their homeland; of the legions of graduates of secondary schools and colleges who tramp the streets and sidewalks and spend endless hours in waiting rooms of business offices, looking for jobs that do not exist; of the thousands in the rural areas and in the slums of cities and towns whose

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