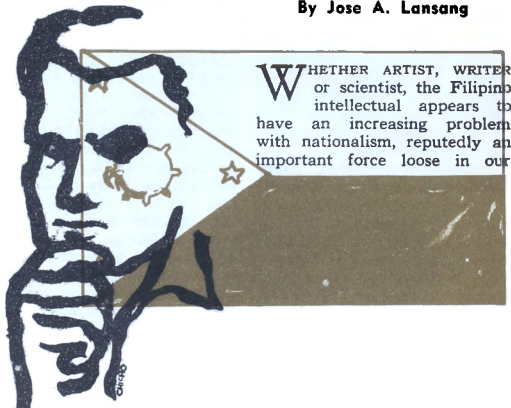


Seriously speaking

Nationalism and the Filipino Intellectual

By Jose A. Lansang



world today. And it has not become dear to anyone — certainly not to this writer — whether it is nationalism that creates the problem, or the Filipino intellectual that is maladjusted to this supposedly important force in our contemporary world. In view of this unresolved issue that serves as the start-observations and which has open-gni point of these rambling obed various trains of thought crowding in the mind, I will just go on, leaving the issue to fare for itself. In 1955, in our Philippines, a writer has to work in order to live; he would naturally prefer just to write, but necessity is a ruthless taskmaster, and Nick Joaquin has had to read proofs at the *Free Press*, Jose Garcia Villa at one time clipped newspapers for a living, N.V.M. Gonzalez teaches class, Amador T. Daguio writes press releases for the Armed Forces. And, it is more or less the same with the other writers, or those who are trying to become writers in our country.

While this is an old paint, dating back to Homer himself who had to sing for his meat and wine in order to live to compose epics, and at a time when nationalism as we know it today had perhaps not existed, it occurs to me now that one of the possible causes of the intellectual's maladjustment *vis a vis* nationalism might be the

probability that nationalism has some relation to economics, or economics to nationalism. However that relation is turned around, the fact that an artist or writer has to eat and remain alive and tolerably presentable to his fellow beings seems to argue that, whether he likes it or not, economic forces do entangle him, and perhaps has entangled him since Homer's days to ours.

The artist, writer or scientist never has lived by bread alone, but he must pursue the staff of life nevertheless in whatever the pursuit becomes a conscious one the seed of nationalism, or nationalistic feeling, is already sown, and beings to sprout willy nilly as the days go on. Until the day is inevitably reached when nationalism becomes some problem to the intellectual.

Looking back at what might losely be called the history of Filipino nationalism, one remembers that Rizal's motivating grievance was the usurious and later confiscatory treatment by the powers that be then of his family's lands in Calamba, and that Bonifacio, the fan-peddler and later warehouseman in a Manila foreign firm, sublimated his thirst for economic stability with deep draughts of night reading applied no less than the most subversive chapters of Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*.

AND SINCE Jose Rizal and Andres Bonifacio have been accepted by common consent as the fathers of our nationalism, with the significant incident that Rizal, by any standard, was irrefutably an intellectual, even if Bonifacio was not exactly one, I would offer the surmise that the land troubles of his family in Calamba might have had something to do with the feeling of nationalism which like a quick-growing vigorous plant, sprouted and matured in Rizal, nurturing his splendid intellectual labors for Filipino redemption; just as Bonifacio's futureless job as a *bodeguero* in an alien commercial house in his homeland may be surmised, in these Freudian times, as having had something to do with his leadership of the Filipinos' one and only Glorious Revolution.

Keeping such tentative surmises in mind, I am fascinated by the vague recollection that in order for Filipino intellectuals of Rizal's time to give free expression to their rising nationalistic sentiments, and to nourish such sentiments into further vigour, they had to go abroad, principally to Europe where, at the time, the social and political atmosphere appeared to be hospitable to their feverish intellectual activities. Some went only as far as Japan and Hongkong, but they seemed to have found the intellectual climate

there already much better than that in the Philippines.

My further fascinating thought about these Filipino intellectuals of Rizal's time who may be said to be among the founders, or at least harbingers, of Filipino nationalism: They seemed to have had the knack of going to the countries or cities where they could find nourishment, or at least sympathy, for their budding nationalism. They went to Madrid, Barcelona, London, Ghent, Brussels, Berlin, Paris, Tokyo, Yokohama, Hongkong. Rizal passed through New York and visited the Niagara Falls.

II

THE WORLD'S currencies were not yet inflated in Rizal's time and the Spanish *real* and the Mexican peso, I imagine, bought a lot more than what our peso today can buy; but still it must have meant some fair sums of money for a Filipino intellectual in those days to live, study, and carry on "propaganda" for Filipino rights and liberties in Madrid, Barcelona or Paris. It is known, of course, that Rizal lived frugally, Marcelo H. del Pilar starved on the sidewalks of Barcelona, and Graciano Lopez Jaena who Rizal, according to General Jose Alejandrino, rated as the most talented Filipino he (Rizal) had known, squandered all his money like a true

Bohemian in the cafes where he sat for endless hours and where he wrote some of the best editorials of *La Solidaridad*. Still Rizal and his family were not exactly poor, nor were the Lunas (Antonio and Juan), nor Mariano Ponce, and certainly not Pedro A. Paterno. These expatriate Filipino intellectuals received regular remittances from home, and it was not urgent for them to earn their daily bread.

They were all patriots and nationalists; or, rather they were consciously founding Filipino nationality. And economic status did not seem to have affected the degree of warmth or conviction of each patriot's championship of his country's cause. The well-to-do Rizal was no less uncompromising than the penurious Plaridel, and the bohemian Jaena was as conscientious in his advocacies as the fairly opulent Ponce. The common denominator of their individual drives, all sublimed into fiery championship of the Motherland's cause, was, I believe, the desire for human dignity. Rich or poor, landlord or starving artist in the Philippines under the Spanish colonial administration was equally treated an inferior, an "Indio"; and, how bitterly Rizal felt about this debasement of the Filipino may be felt, by contagion, so to speak, by any sensitive-minded Filipi-

no today reading his essay, "The Indolence of the Filipinos."

As long as the Filipino intellectuals who pioneered in the struggle for rights and liberties for their countrymen — in other words, for human dignity — were still remote from the fruits of victory, their nationalistic sentiments help them together, although rivalries such as those that developed between Rizal and Plaridel over the leadership of the Filipino intellectuals in Spain suggested that economic and ideological motivations were present, as potential divisive factors, albeit submerged for the time being by what Rizal wisely invoked as the need for unity as a prerequisite for the success of the Filipino community's labors for the Motherland.

Rizal, the intellectual genius and scion of a landed family, a deeply religious man in his own fashion — as all his writings show — would be called in today's terms a partisan of what President Eisenhower, for instance, has called "progressive conservatism"; Plaridel, the penurious journalist and founder of masonry in the Philippines would, on the other hand, fit into the category of what are called today "left-wing" democrats, or even "anti-Soviet" socialists. These economic and ideological undertones which characterized the intra-group

relations and activities of the Filipino intellectual community in Spain would suggest an expansion of my original surmise about the possible relationship between economics and nationalism. It may be said that nationalism, economics and ideology have perhaps intimate connections and even — *quien sabe?* as the Filipino intellectuals of Rizal's time used to say — organic relationship.

III

A WIDER VISTA of speculation now opens before us; and interesting features may be found if we glance briefly at the "social and economic landscape" on which Bonifacio's revolution was staged, and what transpired thereon immediately after. The interesting features may be best suggested by a number of questions. Aside from the amorphous, disorganized aggrieved masses in the country who rallied behind Bonifacio's revolt, who were the main supporters and moving spirits of the *Katipunan* organization, besides the Tondo proletariat? What was the social and economic status or standing of these supporters? What were their individual calculations, in so far as improvement of personal fortunes was concerned, if, and after, the organized revolt had succeeded? Were their ambitions merely political in character, or, were their aspirations colored and

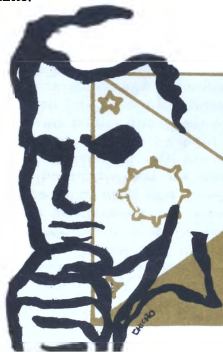
motivated by social and economic considerations?

It is one of the serious gaps in our historical record, of course, that facts and information on which to base more or less dependable answers to those questions are still awaiting to be unearthed and to be classified and organized by the historical researcher. And there are other questions. After the success of the revolution, there was the conflict between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio, and the unfortunate killing of the *Katipunan* founder and hero; what were the real causes of the conflict? Did the fact that, essentially, Aguinaldo was identified with the land-holding class while Bonifacio, the plebian, had little respect for vested interests in land have anything to do with the conflict between the two?

AN INTERESTING aspect of the rivalry between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio was the fact that neither was an intellectual. Aguinaldo, scion of a family of means, did not belong to the group which formed the Filipino colony in Europe where the ideological preparation for the revolution, so to speak, had been matured. What were the motivations of Aguinaldo, aside from the obvious one of patriotism, which made him dispute the leadership of Bonifacio? Were there social

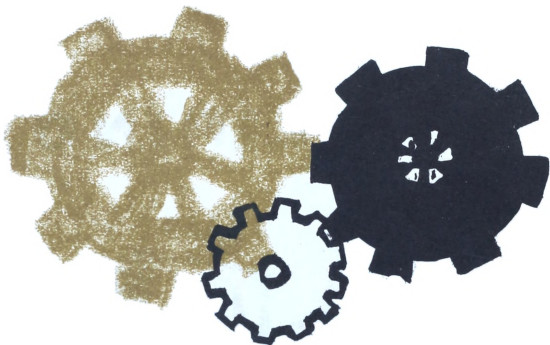
and economic motives involved? And again, what lay, really, behind the later conflict between Aguinaldo and Antonio Luna? To ask a more general question, were there social and economic cross-currents pulling as undertow beneath the storms of conflict on the surface between Aguinaldo and Bonifacio, and between Aguinaldo and Luna, indisputable nationalists and patriots all? And, a last intriguing question: How and why did the intellectuals lose control of the revolution which they had ideologically prepared for?

My own impression, after having asked the foregoing questions, is that to this day the substantial content of what we call Filipino nationalism is so shapeless and indeterminate because we have no informative answers to those questions. We have been let down by our historians.



IV

LACKING FIRM facts of his country's history to provide his nationalism with ballast and perspective, the contemporary Filipino intellectual is, I venture to say, a man without a cultural or political home. He thinks more often than not of human liberty as having been won at Runnymede and in the battles of Lexington and Concord — for he has committed to heart much Anglo-Saxon history — while he is confused about the issues of the battle of San Mateo or the bloodier one at Zapote bridge. He recalls Bataan and Corregidor, but their curious aftermath does not lift his heart, because it was not really his nation's own free decisions which had exposed his country to terrible devastation, and after the cruel ordeal was over Japan and the Japanese appeared to have received better treatment by the free world



itself than the Philippines and the Filipinos.

Filipino nationalism has thus been stunted and stultified, and the Filipino intellectual has not shown so far any strong inclination to look for ways of fashioning a political and cultural home buttressed by solid and autochthonous elements of sound nationalism. It is not young intellectuals of the Rizal type, nor even of the Bonifacio type, who, in the Philippines today, are developing a conscious nationalism that shows prospects of being seriously and sustainedly asserted, and there-

fore likely to result in the construction of a political and cultural home that Filipinos can truly call their own. The new conscious nationalists are found among the youth who are enlisting in the public service, or who are entering the technical professions, and perhaps the greatest number, those who are trying to find a foothold in the commerce and trade and productive industries of the country. Here, then, is a possible support to my earlier surmise regarding the connection between nationalistic feeling and economic factors.