

PRIVILEGE AND STATUS

The responsibility of leadership shrugged off in the name of patronage, political expediency, and general *pakikisama*, is falling under harsh light. The national mood is to be less tolerant and more demanding of leadership. Now from the halls of congress comes the call for austerity and our only reaction is to throw back the challenge to them. The ills of this country, it is by now evident, are directly traceable to our elite, or more precisely to the privileged class. The persons who are privileged change with each change of administration and ruling family, but by and large they thrive as a class on privilege. The legislators may change with every election, but the protection of their group privilege is perpetuated. The *malakas-mahina* syndrome is nothing but the conflict for privilege.

This is something our society should seek to shatter.

The great love for public office along with grandiose display of the swearing-in ceremonies, is nothing but the mad aspiration for privilege, rather than desire to serve. Recent public encouragement given to the appointment of technocrats, the emerging group of trained young men who function outside the dynamics of personalism and party politics (concentrating on performance instead), is one healthy sign. Similar direction could help make privileged status anachronistic and extinct. On the other hand, one must point out that it is the heady irrelevancies of privilege that has caused the decay of once-principled reformers and even technocrats.

By privileged we mean the powerful and wealthy who fatten and become even more wealthy and powerful by brazenly placing themselves as exemptions on the simple basis of official posi-

tion, class status, or technical legalism. Legislators, for example, obtain various exemptions, e.g. franking privileges, ₱2-to-\$1 exchange rate, when they should set the example in order to demand sacrifice. It is generally the influential who frustrate the law. It is only the public officials, including law enforcers, who can make crime pay. Kinship is regarded as a privilege even when it is against the common good. The corruption of segments of the society, such as law enforcers and-or the press, is done by providing them

with privileged status. Any austerity program must begin with the removal of privilege because of official status. When one tries to compare the Communist countries with the Philippines, it is the dedication of the leadership in some of these countries premised on the removal of privilege, that makes the difference. We cannot change this nation and the quality of leadership, until we renounce the social status of privilege. — *The Manila Times Editorial, December 19, 1968.*

THIS OUR TIME

This is not a time for malice, but for magnanimity; not for propaganda, but for patience; not for vituperation, but for vision. — *Lyndon B. Johnson (in his speech as U.S. President on June 19, 1967, at Washington)*