

Youth and Democratization

by Isidro Florendo

TO SAY THE LEAST, Philippine democracy has not come of age. A small segment of the youth and studentry, regardless of their opportunism, adventurism and messianic tendencies, has become politically mature. The elite — politically empty; the masses — worse!

But the Philippines must change. And it seems it is a fundamental necessity to recognize the problem of the country. But not a big segment knows, so that one can conclude of the long and arduous task we still have to face. The so-called politicians, even the nuns and priests, manifest their ignorance (if not their insincerity) about the true nature of the country's problem. A small band of students seems to be mouthing the right phrases — and these are the only people in the country who are politically mature. Politicized, they recognize the problem of the country as the problem of the power relationship between the rich and the poor, exploited masses.

The Students

When the big riots were staged (and are being staged) not a few students were awakened to the country's problems. The only trouble is many of the so-called christian-oriented students, being just reactionaries, of course, were awakened not to the problem but to the so-called communist menace! This is understood since those who directed them were also having the same phantoms.

These students are engaged in social action work and many others. If one recognizes the problem as that of a political problem, then one concludes that this is mere lip-service to the problem. However, this persists because the nuns, priests and school authorities regard this kind of work as the work of a "christian-oriented" group.

There are students with christian orientation who are sincerely working with some labor and farmer groups. One, however, can still question the direction of these groups. The messianic tendencies are there. One observes, for example, that labor pickets of a "good" labor

union are dominated by the students. Where are the workers? One hears also of some decision-making of a priest, and justifies it by saying, "what can I do?" Priests and nuns in youth groups can stifle the growth of the young people, whether we like it or not and whatever they say. Young people have to be on their own. We must not commit the mistakes for them.

But this involves only a few of the students. Where are the majority of the students? If we take a look at campus elections, we can have an index of the politicalization of the studentry. Some campus parties have sound platforms which, however, are above the heads of many students. Some do not have any at all.

There are boycotts and demonstrations. Practically, these are organized by a minority who are often branded as trouble-makers, peace-breakers of the "peaceful" university. The minority breaks in, a good number may join in, otherwise the boycott or demonstration flops. But the minority, although most of the time sincere, often commits the crime of adventurism and messianism. They usually do not ventilate their issues properly. In other words, they always fail as leaders, in that they do not try to exert a little effort or use proper means to rally the mass of the students to the cause. Their most important fault, however, is the short-ranged picture they always give. These minority groups have always failed to relate the issues of the schools to the capitalistic and authoritarian bourgeois system of our society which is the root cause of these school problems. These groups also often reflect that bureaucratic system many involved students are against.

The majority of the students can be herded into the non-aligned. Thinking of getting a degree or earning money after graduation, these students are committing the biggest crime of all times — that of neutrality and participation in the Establishment. Although this reflects the thinking of many of their school administrators and professors, it is also a subproduct of

that system in our society which is basically profit- or money-oriented. These students seldom think that there might not be anymore a society after they graduate which can house their money-oriented thinking.

The University

The university system in our country is only a reflection of the social system. A priest-educator once wrote in an article that education is not anymore a privilege of the elite. There is a good number of students in schools. In terms of statistics this is certainly true. But in terms of products, education is still a high-priced commodity. One can see schools for the rich and schools for the poor. This is undebatable. But the other reality is that only those who graduate from the so-called better schools can get jobs after they graduate!

The university system in the Philippines therefore which accepts both poor and rich into the university is again paying lip-service to democracy. What it aims at actually is the education or training of the members of the elite class to take over the ruling class. And the poor are just there again to grease the wheels of this capitalistic, feudalistic, imperialistic and bourgeois authoritarian social system. The poor in the university are just being conditioned. Look at the kind of graduates we have. Look at the curricula. Administrators, of course, can easily find justifications, but whatever they say that system is there. Educators can also opt to say we cannot change in one day. But when shall we change? The trouble is, the reasons are given not out of convictions but as rationalizations of the present system.

School administrators are often also reflections of bourgeois authoritarianism. These people think they have the values and that they are the guardians of values. What values are there? One can ask because these are often identified with the preservation of the status quo and the suppression of legitimate rebellion against the present system.

There is also that authoritarianism in the name of Christianity — of love, peace and harmony. But the trouble in the Philippines today is that our problem is confounded by this kind of preaching. We want to preserve peace but actually we are stabilizing class struggle. We preach patience to the exploited. We also preach love and charity to the rich. And we promise heaven to both. Which is which? Are both moral? Is it Christian to stay neutral in the face of exploitation in the name of love and peace?

The posture of neutrality is said to be the posture of the administrators and the professors of the university. But in their neutrality they are really siding with the status quo. Class lessons whether in Economics, Sociology or Theology, are stabilizers of the Establishment. The neutrality of the professors demands that they do not say in class that capitalism is pagan, unchristian and that it should be changed by all means; that the rich are exploiting the poor; that there is not such thing as democracy in the Philippines; that Christianity demands that we must not be of the present system; that as Christians we are always in search of better structures; etc.

The foreigners in the schools do not recognize that they are counter-revolutionaries. The thinking and culture they espouse are oftentimes against the motives of the nationalist movements. We can count on sincerity but it is nothing without proper direction. One student wrote something about the white God the whites are presenting to us. To some extent it is true — we have been presented with the white God!

The problem of the University is only a part of the social problem. One can be misled into trying to solve it isolated from the national problem. There is one factor, however, that should be considered. The university is a potent force for social reform. Students pass the university and for the university to remain apathetic to this is an unforgivable crime to society. The university must take sides and recognize the problem of Philippine society!

Liberation

The present system is one of exploitation. One can talk about social justice. But what does this mean? Look at the laborers, field or factory. We talk about economic exploitation but the real root of the problem seems to be political exploitation. Social justice, therefore, is

primarily justice which contemplates power distribution.

Because we talk of democracy, power must be in the hands of the people. Each citizen has political power. The power and authority of the government emanates from the people. But power in the hands of the few, as the case is in the Philippines, is not political power but tyranny! This is compounded by military power, injustice or power, maldistribution or mal-placement is maintained by the military.

The relationship between the poor and the rich in the country is blessed and looked upon with approval by the Americans. Economic imperialism in the country is bad enough, but when the Americans twisted historical facts, it is worse. They have tampered with our educational system and systematically adjusted our culture.

The realities of American blackmail of our country are intolerable. We must get out of them. We must get the peso out of gradual devaluation. We must get out of economic and cultural dictates. We must be able to guide our own selves!

The development we are sponsoring faces some negative elements. The structures which stifle the present Filipino — those perpetrated by the national oligarchs and the foreign imperialists — must be destroyed. To talk about technological development now is futile because one can always ask the question "for whom?" and the answer "for the rich" can always be given. Let others talk of peaceful revolution. But there is no such thing as peaceful revolution if, we recognize the problems. We may labor for the Constitutional Convention. The most it can afford is a paper revolution. The problem is not in the relationship of power within the government system as what some candidates for delegates to the convention would want us to believe. It is in the relationship of power between those in the government who are the rich and the masses.

We must not believe in the differences of class interests, but the years have proven it. We have had always the elite in the government to represent the masses.

We may not believe in the differences of class interests, but the years have proven it. We have had always the elite in the government to represent the masses. But we are now in the worst situation. The laws are perfect and even the Constitution is basically all right. Laws are passed and nobody cares about them. Will

the implementation of the Land Reform be better if it will be incorporated in the Constitution? Nobody cares to ask the question why the laws are not implemented. It has always been implied that there is something wrong with the laws. Is there? Or, is there something wrong with the people behind them?

Liberation from all these economic and political exploitation by the rich and the imperipist is of first necessity. But the present Filipino has also to liberate himself from psychological and cultural exploitation. He must find his personal identity if he ever has to talk about his dignity.

Democratization

The essence of liberation is only for democratization to start. And people is the essence of democracy. In the present structures, the need is to bring power down to the people.

The student is faced with this challenge: the realization of the fact that change can never come from the youth or the studentry. Change can come only from the masses — the farmers and the laborers. Because we talk of democratization, it is certainly another great injustice to the name of democracy and to the name of our people if we arrogate to ourselves the mission of changing society.

The temptation to create another class of innovators, reformers and revolutionaries should be guarded. These people will have to be prepared to become servants of the people. Let us not make the mistake we are trying to correct.

The student is faced with a mass. But the mass he is supposed to politicize is not for the student to make into a malleable mass but into a powerful mass, thinking and arrogating unto themselves the power which is supposed to be theirs. The leadership of the youth is only an intellectual leadership. The vibrant young student must go out and tell of the exploitation of the people and preach power — power that changes society because the majority of society are these people.

But the student faces lack of knowledge. University education has not brought us closer to the people instead it has drawn us away. We must recognize that there is no other way of knowing except by coming in contact with or living or practising in the situation. We must know and understand the people in

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order to effectively exercise leadership.

Social organization seems to be the only way of exercising political power. Alone, the poor farmer or laborer will just succumb to the suppressions of the system. We must help the people organize. There is no other way of doing it except by organization. They must organize themselves independently so that they can decide for themselves, so that democracy can function.

The organization of the masses seems to be effective in any situation. In any given situation the people can decide what to do about any problem. Situations can make them take up arms. Then, it is legitimate. The people would have legitimized it. But the situation now seems to call for an armed revolution, if the elite will continue resisting and if the so-called christians will also resist change in the name of peace and love. The present institutionalized violence has to be shattered. The long-standing tyranny will have to go. And it seems it is the obligation of every christian to reform the present power structure.

(We used to hear the story of a man who destroyed his boat because it was so old and had holes in its sides. He didn't live long enough to build a new one. - Ed.)

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