

- A critical comment and analysis of the slow development of the Philippines and its causes.

## THE CHALLENGE OF NATION-BUILDING

Twenty-one years have come and gone since the founding of our Republic, and still our task of nation-building remains unfinished. Painful though it is to state, the sad truth is that in economic and social progress we are far behind other newly-emergent nations with poorer and lesser natural and human resources than ours.

Let me cite a few of these other nations that have progressed much faster than we.

Take first the case of Israel. She was a land of desert and sand dunes when she emerged as an independent state in 1948. In less than two decades she had been transformed into a land of flourishing gardens and plantations. In size she is only 7,993 square miles as compared to our area of 115,758 square miles, or about 1/16 our size. Her population is only 2 1/2 millions as compared to our

population of 32 millions, or about 1/13 our population. And yet, she has progressed by leaps and bounds. So much so, that recently she startled the whole world by defeating in battle in six days the hostile Arab nations surrounding her with an aggregate population of 60 millions.

Then take the case of Taiwan, our neighbor to the north. She is only 13,886 square miles in area, or about 1/10 our size, and only 12 million in population, or about 1/3 our population. And yet, her production of rice per hectare is about 4 times greater than ours, and she has progressed so well that the United States considered it unnecessary to continue extending economic aid to her since last year. I was invited by her government to go there in 1964, and I was jolted when I was told by one of their

agricultural experts that if they could borrow three of our big provinces in Central Luzon, they could make these three provinces produce enough rice to feed our entire population.

Then there is Japan and there is West Germany, both of them defeated in the last war, both of them suffering heavily from carpet bombing and from atom bombs in the case of Japan, both of them demilitarized after their surrender and subjected to military occupation by the victors. And yet, both of them have risen from the ashes of their defeat and destructions, both of them have startled the world by their rapid strides not only towards an economic prosperity even greater than they were enjoying before the war. Today they are categorized among the rich and highly developed nations, needing no aid from others, and even able to afford to extend aid to poor and underdeveloped nations.

It cannot be due to our natural resources, which are rich and which we have in abundance.

It cannot be due to the

extent of our human resources, for we have them in vast numbers.

I attribute the slow pace of our economic progress to lack of proper orientation and to lack of proper training of our human resources.

We spend too much of our time, too much of our energies, and too much of our money, in politics. We profess interest and concern in the development of our agriculture, industry, and commerce, but read the daily newspapers, turn on the radio or television, listen to conversations in the street, in coffee shops, in business offices, in government offices, and what do you read or hear? Very little, if any, of economics, and much too much of politics.

We have elections every two years. We just had an election this year 1967, and the air is already filled with talks of who will run against whom and what will happen in 1969.

The mind reels and the imagination staggers when we read and hear of the money spent by the government and by the candidates in every election.

Take the last election for instance. The Comelec chairman was asked by the President to account for the millions spent by the Comelec, and the Comelec chairman countered by asking the President to instruct his Budget Commissioner to give an accounting of the millions spent for public works during the last election campaign.

It would even be harder to get a true and correct accounting of the expenses of candidates. We have a law making it a criminal offense for a candidate to spend more than one year's salary corresponding to the office for which he ran. Naturally, in the affidavit that he files after the election, the candidate certifies that his expenses did not exceed the limit fixed by law. It is an open secret however, that this law is honored more in the breach than in the observance. It is an open secret that the candidates who get nominated and elected are, more often than not, those who have the money to burn and/or who are backed by party machines or personal machines. The

ever-mounting expenses of candidates in party conventions and in elections are shocking and dismaying. We hear of senatorial candidates spending millions of pesos, of gubernatorial candidates who spend as much, of congressional candidates who spend as much, of candidates for city mayors and for municipal mayors who spend hundreds of thousand of pesos.

Where do these millions spent by candidates in conventions and elections come from? Only God and the candidate know.

We all do know, however, that if this unlawful, corrupt, and scandalous spending continue unabated, only millionaires or the tools of moneyed and vested interests will be nominated and elected to public office. The democracy ordained in our Constitution will be reduced to a mockery and a farce, and in its place will be erected a government of plutocrats, and for plutocrats.

Surely, we do not want that to happen.

We do not want this orgy of over-spending by the government and by the candi-

dates in times of election to continue. We want election expenses to be reduced to reasonable proportions, so that a larger part of the financial resources of the government and of the private sector may be used to accelerate development of our agriculture, industry, and commerce.

We do not want such electoral over-spending because it causes inflation which is the worst thief of the purchasing power of the masses of our people. Over-spending by the government in times of election works hardship on the private sector and on the poor, because when inflation results, the usual remedies resorted to by the Central Bank and by the government is to impose more restrictions on private credit and to levy new or additional taxes which weighs heavily on the poor.

We do not want such electoral over-spending because it breaks the moral fibre of the corruptors as well as of the corrupted involved in the evil practice of vote-buying, it destroys the honor of the vote-buyer and the self-respect of the vote-seller, and

when people lose their sense of honor and of self-respect they cannot be expected to be enthused to join in any undertaking designed to make the nation great economically or otherwise.

We do not want this over-exertion and over-emphasis in politics because it only increases the number of our professional politicians, and it only multiplies the number of spoilsmen and job seekers after each election who invoke alleged political services rather than fitness and merit for their appointment to government offices. What our country sorely needs today are not political hacks and parasites, but first-rate entrepreneurs, honest and competent administrators, responsible labor leaders, agricultural experts, engineers, chemists, skilled technicians, laboratory workers and researchers, knowledgeable men in science and technology who can plan well and build well, whose crowning achievement is the fruit of their labors rather than the sound and fury of their words.

It is high time that the habits, the attitudes, and the

mores of our people and our leaders be re-oriented, and their training and everyday activities readjusted and attuned to the needs and exigencies of the times.

To you, the graduates we are now honoring, I appeal to you in particular, and I charge you to rise up to the challenge and lead in this vital task of reorientation and readjustment.

In the 1970 election of delegates to the coming Constitutional Convention, support and vote for those who can be relied upon to work for constitutional amendments which will lessen the frequency and bring about synchronization of elections, which will insure the holding of elections free as much as possible from over-spending by the candidates and by the government and from the evil of vote-buying and power play in conventions and elections.

As you go to your respective communities, use your talents and skills not only to project yourself and to advance your own interests, but even more so to promote the common good especially to minister to the needs of

the least of your brethen. Practice more and preach less about the imperative necessity of abandoning the bad habits and wrong values which afflict our present-day body politic, and of developing instead the virtues of honor, self-respect, and self-reliance. Lead people to engage in home gardening, cultivate farms, turn to poultry or piggery or cattle raising, construct fishponds or engage in deep sea fishing, invest in any other productive enterprise which will make them as self-sufficient as possible in the necessities of life. Help in the establishment of home and cottage industries which can provide means of livelihood to our womenfolk. Help disseminate information regarding better methods of farming, and the credit facilities afforded by government agencies and the rural banks to small farmers and merchants.

Be the first in patronizing locally made goods in preference to imported ones whenever the quality and the price are more or less the same. Stress the need for diversification, exploring the

things we can produce with comparative advantage in the competitive world market, so that if and when we lose the U. S. market we would still have other export goods to sell in the other markets of the world. Help organize cooperatives to do away with alien middlemen. To the extent that we succeed in making our people do these things, to exactly the same extent will we succeed in

hastening the day when the task of nation-building will have been brought to a successful conclusion.

In so doing, you will have justified the faith of Rizal in the youth of our land, and will have reflected honor and credit to your beloved alma mater. — *Senator Lorenzo Sumulong. From a speech at the Far Eastern University, December 9, 1967.*