

Mr. Ricardo Labez ●

Address of Ricardo Labez, Public Relations Director, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, before the Annual Convention of Masonic Lodges of Cavite held in Imus, Cavite, November 30, 1967.

When I was asked, over the telephone, about speaking here today, my impulse was to say no, I am not the man for you. I stopped to listen only when community development was mentioned as the subject you are interested in. It happens that community development, especially in the rural setting, is something I am willing to talk on anywhere. To be able to discuss it with Freemasons, I regard as a particular privilege. That we would do this in Imus, Cavite clinched my acceptance.

For Imus has a special meaning to me and to my family. To me, because years ago — so many years ago he probably no longer remembers it — your erstwhile mayor and the then governor of Cavite, Mr. Camerino, suggested that I come and see this great, historic province. Curiously, we met in Bacolod on one of those occasions when he was with the late President Quirino and I was there for our newspaper. The then Senator Montano, too, invited me, fully assuring me that, contrary to the general impression, this was a peaceful province.

Perhaps both Mr. Camerino and Mr. Montano, the loyal and faithful Caviteños that they are, will be happy to know that I have come — I have become an adopted son of Cavite and an active member of CASE-DEC — and what is more, I bear personal testimony from my extensive travels and community development work in all three regions of the coun-

try that, indeed, Cavite is one of the most peaceful and certainly one of the most promising provinces.

Cavite interests me for another reason — my wife was born here, in this very town of Imus. Her father, the late Col. Garma, was then PC provincial commander. Mrs. Garma was a public school teacher and I would not be surprised if some of you here were among her pupils.

But, more than this, Col. Garma regarded as his greatest fortune that he belonged to Pilar Lodge and counted it his greatest honor that he had been given the privilege of serving it as worshipful master.

Now, if all this is not enough to qualify me to appear before you, there is the additional fact that Andres Bonifacio, in whose honor today is a holiday, started out as a commoner, in view of which perhaps we can afford at least this day to be charitable to commoners, including your speaker. This is not suggesting a comparison to the Great Plebian. I am only submitting that, now and then, it may be well for our leaders to turn to the common people and listen to their common sense.

The great lesson to be drawn from the life of Andres Bonifacio is that commonness is no bar to greatness. It is my humble understanding of your great order that Freemasonry is built on precisely this assumption.

Another lesson from Andres Bonifacio I am invoking is that of fear-

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lessness. Ordinarily, your VWB Pisig, the manly and military man he is, is to be feared; so when he said I should speak for 20 minutes to one hour, I interposed no objection, though usually I am good for not more than one-half that time. But, fear not. I will not have you standing out there in the scorching sun that long. In the spirit of '96, I shall defy Brother Pisig. With all due respect to him, I hardly think this is the time or place to discuss with any practical thoroughness, as he said I should, community development and how Freemasons should get involved in it. My suggestions on that would be wiser given and better received in each individual lodge.

Brother Pisig prepared me for this address by pointing out that the principal tenets of Freemasonry are *brotherly love, relief and truth*. I should like to relate community development to them.

In the modern context, community development, like rural reconstruction, is concerned with maximizing the efficacy and efficiency of the democratic process or, as the IIRR and PRRM put it, with "building democracy from the bottom up." Its focus is on fundamental values and the right beginnings with *people*.

The truth is that in a fundamental way you are being true to Freemasonry in your interest in community development. If Freemasonry is a system of morality, community development is a system of community service. As pointed out by an United Nations expert on the subject, "Community development, pure and simple, is the improvement of local conditions by the community's own effort and industry, and not by some outside agency." Therefore, in essence it is *brotherly love* expressed in acts of giving *relief* to the needy. Scientifically thought out on the basis

of observed and evaluated experience, this has brought emphasis on *release* — *release of the potentialities of the people for economic productivity and social and political responsibility* aimed at the *balanced growth* of the individual and the *total development* of the *community*.

What is the truth about our communities? How do our people measure up to the constitutional requisites of a good citizen — personal discipline, moral character, vocational efficiency, civic conscience and the discharge of the duties of citizenship?

What is the truth about what each and everyone of us is doing about the nation's shortcomings?

What is the truth about the national leadership on those deficiencies?

We are heartened by the spirit and sweep of administration efforts. The recent polls gave proof of the people's profound approval. Still, we must ask whether administrators would do their programs the same way if they had it entirely in them to decide on policies and procedures, let alone budget limitations and pressures of politics.

To be sure, there is much firing. What of strategic aiming?

Are we reaching, hitting or missing our marks?

Are the people cooperating enough with the government in ways they should?

The truth is that we do already have most of the blueprints necessary for progress. Ours is not a problem of lacking *know-how*. Ours seems a simpler case of being short on *do-it*. Let us do what we can do for ourselves — for our community — our country — the world.

We can do what we determine we must do. In 1896, our national forbears felt they had to declare themselves politically free to maintain

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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT...

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their self-respect. They preferred certain death to continued subservience to tyrannical foreign rule. If we are to achieve economic dignity in our day, we must be ready to suffer and endure the temporary hardships and privations of a principled, disciplined nation in transition. It is the price we must pay for what we want and what we want is worth it.

Let no one deter us from the path of principled, disciplined action our forefathers wisely laid out for us to follow. We must not be short either of vision or of action. The little things the littlest among us do for the good of our country can be as the single candles that, lighted together, light up a whole length of darkness.

What can each of us do to lighten the load of our leaders — to light up their way that their stewardship of our national independence may be a true one — brightening our corner of the world for peace and freedom?

Let me congratulate you of the fraternal order of Freemasons on your sterling example of soul-searching and service. The truth is that members of this great fraternity were not only among the first to sound the cry of revolution in our country's early days, but were also among the first to embrace the cause of community development and rural reconstruction in recent years.

Key to national development is not the sending of more workers to the rural areas but getting the *people themselves to undertake development programs*. Getting government service to the people is but one task and the earnestness of our government on this is admitted. However, equally important, if not more fundamental in a free society, is finding democratic and effective ways and means of inducing the people into community

development activity or developmental efforts *on their own initiative* or largely on the principle of *self-help*.

For the latter, volunteer, non-governmental, private citizen example is demonstrably desirable. As has been observed, dedication, enthusiasm, idealism, energy and drive are the hallmarks of volunteerism, and as Dr. Yen of the IRR has said, "Technical know-how can be taught, but the crusading spirit must be caught" — from those aflame with it. In the final analysis, what will build a nation — any nation — will be in direct proportion to the *spirit of the people generated and harnessed behind the national purpose*.

Today the ideal of freedom is under crucial challenge mainly because it means nothing to one who is hungry, homeless, hopeless. Only in utter hopelessness will a man lose faith in freedom, lose faith in himself, lose faith in God. Thus godlessness, the antithesis of Freemasonry, is usually the product of helplessness.

More than a race to the planets in the universe, the ideological struggle is a battle for economic supremacy on earth. That side will win that satisfies the stomach, wins the heart, excites the mind and strengthens man's faith in his future.

Let me suggest that community development may have a real message for you, for it addresses itself in particular to those who wish to share but don't know where; who can help but don't know how; who for community service will volunteer — and endure — because the cause of peace and freedom and brotherhood means that much to them.

It is to the everlasting credit of Freemasonry that the first PRRM barrio in Cavite — Barrio Quintana in Trece Martires — was sponsored by the Grand Lodge of the Philip-

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pines. This was in 1957 or a full 10 years ago. Out of this joint effort a soil-brick barrio center was constructed, higher-yielding rice varieties were introduced, and cultural revival begun.

What has been started can be followed through.

This is your moment of truth. Let the truth be a firm commitment to community development.

Let me suggest that the Cavite Socio-Economic Development Council offer strategic involvement.

In all free communities, there will always be political and personal differences. Whatever they are in ours, let us remain united on the objectives and values we can agree on as citizens of the Republic and, deeper than that, as sons and daughters of a Common Creator.

We may disagree on details — even on principles — but agree always we must on loyalty to country and community. Let us fight, as members of a family often do, but let no one take the family lightly.

Or Cavite.

Let it be said of everyone of us

that we have both the ability to think and the courage to say what we think. But never let it be said of any of us that we did not know how to appreciate the good in the worse of us.

Be it on the international or on the local community level, the danger lies, not in our differences, but that, differing on non-fundamentals, we destroy each other.

Let us differ where we must, but let no differences tear us apart completely. As much as we may distrust or even despise another, let us recognize the great truth that he remains, in the eyes of God, our brother.

As such, let us never waver in the trying to understand him. Let there be true humility in our humanity.

Let ours be a *cry of reconsecration* to God, country and community built on *unity — liberty — fraternity*. Unity in diversity. Liberty for all. Fraternity not lodged in the few but flowing out to the many.

Brotherly love expressed in shared community development activity.

Relief through release of human potentials.

Truth to keep us free. Δ



Knights of Rizal arriving at the Luneta, 7:00 AM, Dec. 30, 1967. Every year the Knights commemorate the last journey of WB Jose Rizal from Fort Santiago where he was imprisoned to the Luneta where he was shot on Dec. 30, 1896.