VINTAGE RECTO

Memorable Speeches and Writings

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Our Lingering Colonial Complex

This speech contains many valuable insights into the roots of the Filipinos’ colonial mentality. Considering that it was delivered during the height of the Cold War, when the writ of habeas corpus was suspended and when criticism of the United States was still regarded as a form of subversion, Recto’s articulations on our psychological subservience and material dependence on the United States were courageous indeed. Shrewdly, he suggested that it was in the Americans’ own best interests to encourage rather than restrain the development of nationalist assertiveness by Filipinos as well as by their government. In later speeches, Recto would criticize American policies more directly.

Address delivered before the Baguio Press Association on June 24, 1951.

IN A LITTLE MORE THAN A WEEK, WE SHALL CELEBRATE THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR INDEPENDENCE, AND I CAN THINK OF NOTHING THAT SHOULD BE CLOSER TO THE HEARTS OF ALL FILIPINOS THAN THIS APOTHEOSIS OF OUR NATIONALISM. NEWSPAPERMEN, IN PARTICULAR, CAN CLAIM A PLACE OF PREFERENCE AND HONOR BY RIGHT OF SUCCESSION, IN ANY COMMEMORATION OF OUR INDEPENDENCE, FOR, TO A GREATER EXTENT PERHAPS THAN IN OTHER COUNTRIES, NEWSPAPERS CARRIED THE BRUNT OF OUR FIGHT FOR LIBERATION.

At the very start it was La Solidaridad that raised the cry for reforms in the nerve-center of the Spanish metropolis, voicing the vibrant protests and demands of Rizal, del Pilar and Lopez Jaena. The revolution itself was bred by the Katipunan in a printing press, and when the nation finally took up arms, first to win freedom from Spain, and later to defend the First Republic from its American allies, three newspapers, La Revolucion Filipina, La Independencia, and the Columnas Volantes de la Federacion Mahaya, followed the fortunes of the armies on the field, and preached the ideals for which our heroes were fighting and giving their lives, as those ideals took shape in the massive and indomitable intellect of Apolinario Mabini.

Other newspapers, notably the gallant El Renacimiento and Muling Pagsilang, kept alive the spirit of nationalism during the long period of constitutional agitation for independence, until the day of their glorious immolation upon the altar of imperialist intolerance, and, as recently as the Japanese occupation, the hope for freedom shone secretly in a hundred anonymous publications, written and read under the ominous shadow of the executioner.

Divided Loyalties

Now that our independence has been proclaimed, however, it would seem that the traditional mission of our press has been at long last accomplished, and newspapermen may turn their skills and enthusiasms to other objectives; but I am inclined to disagree, convinced as I have come to be that our nationalism has in fact entered into another period of crisis, all the more grave because it is subtle and generally unrecognized.

This crisis does not arise from the growth of internationalism.
It comes, if I may put it, from the stubborn remnants of binationalsim. We are afflicted with divided loyalties. We have not yet recovered from the spell of colonialism.

The flagstaffs that still stand, two by two, in front of our public buildings, are the symbols of this psychological phenomenon, this split personality, of our nation. Too many of our people, in their heart of hearts, profess allegiance not only to the Republic of the Philippines, whose sun and stars wave alone in this fourth year of our independence, but unconsciously also to the United States of America, whose stars and stripes may have been hauled down in fact, but not in spirit, and which, by an optical illusion induced by long habit, are imagined to be still flying from the empty flagpole.

Even the most significant date in our history contrives to strengthen this feeling of unchanged relationship, for, by the terms of an American statute, we cannot even celebrate the rebirth of our republic, without automatically commemorating also the declaration of American independence. For the proclamation of our independence, the anniversary of the first republic, would have been a date more in keeping with historic justice, and the anniversary of Rizal’s martyrdom, chosen in our Constitution to mark the beginning and the end of presidential and congressional terms of office, would have been recommended by logic and expediency, as well as by veneration for our national hero. Not these dates, however, but the greatest official holiday of the United States, their “glorious fourth,”* has now become the climax of our own national calendar.

Our peculiar situation has been heightened by the unique circumstances in which we attained our independence. The other liberated Asian nations have been spared the ambiguities under which we labor; they faced issues that were clear-cut; blood and tears, exploitation and subjugation, and centuries of enmity, divided the Indonesians from the Dutch, the Indians and the Burmese from the British, the Vietnamese from the French; and their nationalist victories were not diluted by sentiments of gratitude, or by regrets, doubts, and apprehensions.

*The colonial complex still lingers on: the erstwhile Independence Day has been renamed “Philippine-American Friendship Day.”

Union Instead of Separation

But an intense and pervasive cultural colonization, no less than an enlightened policy of gradually increasing autonomy, dissolved whatever hatreds and resentments were distilled in the Filipino-American war, and, by the time of the enactment of the Jones Law, promising independence upon the establishment of a stable government, an era of goodwill was firmly opened, one which even the cabinet crisis under Governor General Wood could only momentarily disturb. A system of temporary trade preferences, under which our principal industries were developed, cemented the relationship with the hard necessities of economic survival, for it was belatedly realized that the same system of so-called free trade had made us completely dependent on the American market. The vicissitudes and triumphs of the common struggle against the Japanese Empire completed the extraordinary structure, and it was not at all strange or unexpected that, when our independence was finally proclaimed, it was not so much an act of separation, as one of “more perfect union.”

Great numbers of Filipinos, therefore, pride themselves in professing fealty to America even without the rights of Americans. Their gaze is fixed steadily and unwaveringly on the great North American Republic, which is to them the alpha and the omega of human progress and political wisdom.

Great expectations may lead to disillusionments just as great, and the experiences of both Filipinos and Americans in the last war, when the promised aid upon which such fanatical faith was placed did not come, and after “liberation,” when the exaggerated hopes for total rehabilitation and vast benefits, bonuses, and pensions, were disappointed, have already suggested the extent of the danger.

Habits of Dependence

The habit of continuously and importunately soliciting American assistance, and of running to the seemingly inexhaustible treasury in Washington whenever faced with financial difficulties, has only fostered a thoughtless and irresponsible prodigality, which has already been condemned by the most responsible among the Fili-
pinos and the Americans, and led to the preaching of the new

But sometimes I fear that the nature of the problem that is
inherent in our relations with the United States, is not thoroughly
understood, and that the responsibility for its solutions is not
equitably shared.

For the problem is not ours alone. What is for us a problem of
independence and self-respect, is for the Americans a problem of
true and enlightened leadership. For them the Philippines con-
stitute a test of the great mandate which destiny has thrust upon
them, as the acknowledged leaders of the western democratic
system.

Here, under the most favorable circumstances, with a people
perfectly conditioned by half a century of indoctrination to
accept their guidance and assistance, the Americans are expected
to prove that their patented 'way of life can be practised by an
Asian nation. Here, in a client Republic committed to their cause,
they are expected to show that they can resist the temptations of
unchallenged power, and that they can be trusted to be mindful
of the rights of the weak as much as they must respect the rights
of the strong.

The Americans will judge for themselves how they can best
meet this challenge. Surely they themselves must realize that a
spoon-fed capitalist democracy, unable to survive outside the
colonial incubator except through artificial respiration and periodic
injections of borrowed dollars, will not strike the other peoples
of Asia as a model to be followed. An illegitimate administration,*
maintained in power through terrorism and wholesale fraud,
and sacking the public treasury to finance futher perversions of
the popular will, is not a very convincing specimen of western
democracy.

Official corruption only becomes more reprehensible when
it feeds upon the illegitimate diversion of borrowed funds, and
Americans should feel insulted, rather than gratified, when a
dishonest and inefficient administration loudly proclaims that it
reflects American institutions.

*Recto regarded Quirino as a usurper because of the notorious 1949 presidential elections
which were marked by massive frauds and terrorism.

Conflict of Interests

For it would seem indisputable that the best proof of the
excellence of American ideals would be their actual realization,
and that Americans should most regard and encourage those who,
like them, believe in and practice economic independence, national
self-respect, honest administration, and genuine democracy
through free and clean elections.*

The interests of the United States in the Philippines and in
Asia would best be served by the establishment here of a truly
independent government that could stand on its own feet without
the need of continual American assistance, relying on our own
resources and on the support of our own united people.

Yet it seems that there are not lacking Americans who allow
themselves to be blinded by systematic flattery, and who believe,
on the one hand, that any Filipino who calls himself a brother
American is automatically a good Filipino, and, on the other hand,
that any Filipino who is not unquestioningly pro-American is,
ipso facto, hopelessly anti-American.

These Americans do not seem to recognize the fact that it is
possible for a Filipino to place the interests of his own country
over and above even the interests of the United States, without
necessarily being actuated by hostile motivations.

No one needs to be reminded of this fundamental postulate
of any nationalism. Unfortunately those who still live in the
memories of the heyday of imperialism in the unincorporated
territory of the Philippine Islands, think that the United States
should expect or demand the same unceasing chorus of unanimous
flattery that is raised by the satellites and protectores of the
Kremlin. They are on the verge of the psychopathic state that has
found its Soviet expression in purges and public confessions, when
they look upon every criticism of American policy, and every
display of Filipino nationalism, as a dangerous deviation from the
democratic line, to be labelled as pro-Communist or anti-American,
just as similar deviations are branded in Russia as Titoism, Trotz-
kyism, fascism, or imperialism.

*Recto regarded Quirino as a usurper because of the notorious 1949 presidential elections
which were marked by massive frauds and terrorism.
Friendship Is Not Conformism

What these frustrated imperialists fail to realize is that, if America stands for anything, it is for the self-determination of peoples, for self-reliance and self-respect, and for the equality of races and nations, and that, if America needs friends here, she needs friends, above all, who will have the courage to point to the mistakes and shortcomings in mutual relations, and to suggest formulas for their improvement.

Indeed the most searching test of American policy in the world today is whether the United States, in their quest for security, will follow, for the sake of expediency, the short-sighted and fatal course of supporting reaction and putting up puppets, without will to resist alien dictation, or authority to command the allegiance of their own people; or whether, in the true legitimate tradition of their great Republic, they will take the harder but nobler and ultimately safer course of encouraging and respecting genuine governments, truly representative of their peoples, whose just demands may perhaps result in temporary inconvenience, but are the best measure and test of their legitimacy and democratic character.

Servile Mentality

Yet the crisis of our nationalism is created by the fact that many of our countrymen have assiduously cultivated a servile mentality, and no less than many Americans, they too have identified pro-Americanism with patriotism. They resent criticisms of American policy in the Philippines as if it were our own, and, on the other hand, they regard the most deserved condemnations of their own incompetence and dishonesty as if they were somehow indirect attacks upon the United States.

The convenience of this none too subtle confusion, carefully contrived to whitewash misgovernment, cannot, of course, be denied. Culprits in high office can wrap themselves in the stolen mantle of Americanism to protect themselves from exposure to popular contempt.

Attacks upon the administration are decried because they allegedly imperil American assistance, as if the Americans would be so illogical that they would deny us their assistance, not because of official incompetence and dishonesty, but because of its exposure, and as if the ones responsible for the denial of such aid would be, not the malefactors in high office, but their accusers.

In the same way criticisms of our foreign policy are rejected and deplored as anti-American, as if the security of the United States themselves did not depend on the strength, internal and external, of each and every one of their friends and allies.

We have become engaged in a great national contest of pro-Americanism, to the extent that a tradition is being built up that a-candidate for the Chief Magistracy of this sovereign Republic must somehow or other, if he is to secure his victory, secure the blessings of the White House and the support of the local American community. Every day on every hand, we find many of our own people in the highest places obsessed by the question of what the Americans will think or say about this or do about that, as if American interests and American public opinion were the only things that mattered, and the only standard to be followed, in the management of our own affairs.

It is in this field that the press can still serve the cause of nationalism in the spirit of its heroic predecessors. Let us rid ourselves of this insidious servility that does no good and gives no credit, either to the Philippines or to the United States.

Second-Hand Citizens

We are not Americans, and those of us who pretend to be Americans risk only the ridicule and laughter of their so-called brothers behind their backs. We could not in fact become Americans, even if we wanted to, to the discomfiture of some of our countrymen, and I suggest therefore that we cease thinking of ourselves as some sort of second-hand citizens of the United States.

There are fundamental factors of race, geography, culture, and tradition, which cannot be legislated or negotiated out of existence, and the gulf that sets apart our nation from all others, including the Americans, may not be bridged even with dollars, Hollywood pictures, and borrowed political institutions. It is a gross mistake to believe that Filipino nationalism is now completely tamed, and there is no doubt in my mind that the masses of our
people, given the opportunity to decide, will give the same nationalist verdict which they have always given in our long political history, from the repudiation of the Federales, who believed in our annexation to the United States as the sumnum bonum for our country, and the defeat of the Democratas in 1922, as the alleged pro-American friends and supporters of Governor-General Wood, down to the full vindication in the national poll of 1946 of those who served in the occupation government to protect the people from the rigors of enemy occupation, and insure their survival, even at the risk of being accused of disloyalty to the United States.

**Fool’s Paradise**

Our nationalism cannot be written off, and we should not lose faith in the independence we proclaimed, five years ago.

It may be that the future of world democracy calls for an ever increasing measure of international cooperation and organization, for which each and every nation, without exception, must contribute a portion of its sovereignty, on a basis of equality as a condition sine qua non. Our nationalism, as I have already shown, is not incompatible with this sound internationalism. But no sane or true internationalism calls for the subordination of our vital national interests. Internationalism is not just another name for imperialism, and it cannot justify our willing reversion to the status of a colony.

Our flag flies alone in our skies, and we call ourselves a sovereign Republic, whose achievements it is proposed to recount before the world on the fifth anniversary of our independence. We may expect to hear a recital of new loans promised or secured, renewed pledges of ECA assistance, a balanced budget and an austere and honest government, and a better situation of law and order. But achievements accomplished through the grudging bounty of another state, temporary prosperity attained with borrowed money, a budget balanced only on paper, deficit spending — proclaimed as a great principle in public finance, and practiced in the true tradition of the drunken sailor — official honesty and austerity by mere lip service, and peace and order maintained, not by regaining the confidence of the people and reviving their faith in democratic processes, but through military operations carried out with foreign assistance, are achievements, if at all, which are neither permanent, nor legitimate, nor truly our own. To present such fictions or pretenses under the guise of achievements is to stultify ourselves in the eyes of our foreign friends, who know better, and to evidence once more our determination to make the classical fool’s paradise our permanent abode.

**Surviving Despite Leaders**

Indeed, if there have been any real achievements in the past five years, the credit for them must be given to our people, whose native resourcefulness, patience, resiliency, good nature and good sense, have managed to eke out a measure of recovery and progress under the most discouraging misgovernment in our history. But those achievements were attained, not because, but in spite, of this administration, which seems to be determined to prove that the Filipino people are such a hardy and indomitable race that they can survive the soft and insidious corruption and patent inadequacy of their own leaders as successfully as they defied and outlived the crushing tyranny of alien rulers and invaders.

As far as the present administration is concerned, when one considers its melancholy record in the past five years, it would seem to be more proper for it to organize, not an achievement program, but one of national Atonement, and not for a week alone, but for a whole Lenten season, when it should put on sackcloth and ashes and do penance for its innumerable sins of commission and omission, that they may not be visited upon our people, for the bankrupt national treasury, for the wholesale election frauds and terrorism, practised by armed civilian guards — the resurrected guardias civiles of old — and the spurious government resulting therefrom, for the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, for the surplus property and the school supplies scandals, for the immigration, import control and dollar exchange control racketts, for the Buenavista and Tambobong estates raw deals, and for the dishonesty, tax evasion, incompetence and corruption of our leaders.

Thus they may hope to atone for paying so much lavish tribute to our heroes and martyrs with their words, while continually
desecrating our ideals of a free and sovereign Filipino nation with their actions.

*Resurrection of Our Freedom*

Only when we rise from the knees we have bent in beggary, and stand beside the other nations of the world, not on crutches but on our own feet, thinking and speaking and acting as free men and as free citizens of a true Republic, in name and in fact, with undivided loyalties to our own sovereign nation and people, and under a legitimate regime dispensing justice and promoting the general welfare, then and only then can we rightly claim to have achieved and deserved our independence, and have cause to indulge in a national celebration of the glorious resurrection of our freedom after the long and mournful season of its betrayal, passion, and crucifixion.