

COMMENTS AND REACTIONS

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As I register my reactions to the speech of Chairman Tugung, I'm trying to hold myself to see if I can pull back a little bit and look at it from a more dispassionate standpoint. I necessarily, and perhaps inevitably, fall back on my training as a student of political science and its principles, in order to comment on the paper.

I had expected that, by virtue of the title which says "The Economics of Development in Autonomous Regions," there would be a lengthy explanation of a cost-benefit type of analysis. Well, it was not like that at all; it might be deficient in that respect. Perhaps I did get much more than what I expected. For the student of politics and political science, the first-hand approach of somebody who is right there where the action is, is something that for me is quite refreshing, it is a very good learning process for somebody who is mostly steeped in academe. What interests me here is not only the economic implications of that type of development but also the political implications of regional autonomy. This is the case because right now as you all know our government, our people, whether they are conscious of it or not, are beset by such fundamental questions, searching questions as those which relate to national unity, political integration, or nation-building, to use the more popular term. Sometimes we wonder just how we can bring about a unified nation especially in the face of seeming diversity. For after all, as a people, we are not only similar in many respects but also different in many respects and divided in this case in terms of geographical location — the Muslims in Mindanao versus the rest of the Philippine population in Visayas and Luzon. We do talk once in a while in regional terms such as the "GI's" from Ilocandia,* represented here, I think by

*A jesting epithet meaning "Genuine Ilocano."

our eminent PPSA President Dr. Alejandro Fernandez, or "the Tagalogs" or "the fun-loving Visayans." But yet we are all fond of identifying ourselves with practically the same adjective. Sometimes we say that we attach the adjective "fun-loving," "carefree," to the Visayans; very often we try to extrapolate and apply it also to the rest of the Filipinos especially when they go abroad. A universalistic type of characteristic, like being industrious or conscientious, is applied no less to the people in Mindanao as it is to the Ilocanos of the north. Perhaps even Tagalogs could be described as hard-working and industrious. So what I'm trying to point out is that we are similar as much as we are different. Perhaps our very diversities are precisely the catalytic incentives to inspire us to look for these things that we do have in common, one of which is the desire to be able to participate and act more or less independently or in a more self-reliant manner, especially as regards things that concern us. And this brings us right back to the question of autonomy. How much or how little of autonomy do we have to have?

I would like to tie this up again with the question of political integration. I'm not going to provide the answers; I just want to ask questions. I will not stress regional autonomy, as it may run counter to our equally strong desire to be united as a people. Or perhaps it does not. I guess it all depends on how we use our capacities for independent action in building towards a common goal. But one trouble that I do want to point out at this point, not because I am against regional autonomy — I think in fact I favor it — is that the way Chairman Tugung presented it can be anything but discouraging. Indeed, it may be too encouraging. It's really a very enticing call to respond to. This is simply to point out an observation. But there seems to be some kind of resistance or reluctance or hesitation on the part of the central government to grant the same kind of autonomy or extent of political participation and decision-making to other regions. The fact is that they are ambivalent to the whole scheme although it's a very appealing idea. At the same time, our history tends to dampen enthusiasm for this sort of thing. At the very least, and this I think Chairman Tugung himself pointed out, there is the fear on the part of the central authority that if we allow people at the local level to exercise much of, let us say, powers with regards to finances we will have a very good tendency to revert back to the practices of the Old Society. It is at this point where we do have a dilemma.

We have been searching but we have not yet found any feasible means whereby we can assure ourselves that there will be no return to those pernicious Old Society practices. Perhaps it is in this connection for one thing, that this forum can be very helpful in proposing mechanisms whereby our local governments can be helped towards that end — whereby they will have the necessary or the requisite values as well as appropriate behavior to go with an increased amount of responsibility and, thereafter, decision-making authority. But then just granting powers or responsibilities, without concomitant authority will be at best something only on paper. The right to control or the ability to control the means whereby one's decision can be implemented is important. So in that aspect, the dimension of granting financial authority to local governments is very important — taxation perhaps, or things like that. So far, as you very well know, local governments have been very dependent on central government. The system so far has been simply a how-much-can-you-give-me type of system. But this brings again the question that I mentioned already. Will the grant of wider fiscal and financial powers not bring back the good old days of the "spoils" system? Certainly we don't want that and again we are hard put to come up with appropriate mechanisms. But "hope springs eternal" and I suppose that even on that issue we can easily devise or think of appropriate methods to correct the situation. This again brings into question the effects that we have in the relations between the national and local government. Autonomy really paints a very optimistic picture about how the task of the government would have to be carried out. I'm pleased to hear — and it's interesting to note — that, according to Chairman Tugung, the MLGCD has practically relinquished its job or responsibilities to the community development people. Well, that sounds like a hopeful point. I'm just wondering if the MLGCD people would not resent having to be legislated or worked out of existence.

But there is a very interesting aspect of regional autonomy that was mentioned a while ago and that has to do with education, like Regions IX and XII are allowed to establish their own schools. Again, to somebody like me who sees the importance of recognizing and giving full expression to cultural practices, customs and mores, precisely to help us in identifying ourselves, this is a very salutary bit of information indeed. But again knowing that these cultural exoticisms carry within them elements of differentiations or variations, I am wondering not really worried,

just wondering, what effect this will have on our socialization process including the sub-area of political socialization. It could be that I have been miseducated all along about the values of our Muslim brothers. If that is the case then, I'm glad in a way because it will disabuse me of the wrong impression that Muslims have entirely different values from lowland Christians. I'm not even sure that I can be very much more specific at this time.

Certainly, whatever the means that we will finally come up with, the idea is toward giving opportunities to exhibit more self-reliance on the grassroots level. Perhaps regional autonomy may be one answer, perhaps it can be some other way because after all we have to recognize that in some areas we may not have the required expertise to govern ourselves on a more autonomous basis. More time might be needed in some regions than in others. Presumably, Regions IX and XII have a headstart based on the historical presentation of Chairman Tugung. We don't know about the others. We hope that as we progress in our research, as we try to find some kind of baseline for each or all the regions we will be able to determine just at what point these powers of self-reliance can be given. The use of the word "given" is deliberate because historically again the process can only be that of devolution because, as you very well know, it is very different from the kind of autonomy that is displayed or exhibited in federal types of government where historically the local government established first their rights to oversee, undertake and set aside for themselves certain tasks which the central government is not supposed to touch. It is the reverse of what we've had. Here, we have a listing of what the local government cannot touch, to use the expression used by Chairman Tugung himself.

Only in the West, India, and other federal types of government do residual powers accrue to the local government. Our history has been different and so we also have to take this into consideration although the final or ultimate end in view will be the same: to try to teach our people to rely more on themselves, not to wait so much for action from the central government before anything is done to solve local problems. I don't know if the speech delivered by Chairman Tugung is going to start a scramble for regional autonomy but, whatever it is, all I can say is that I have no profound slogans nor homilies to offer. I can only express the fact that we can all contribute, in our own little ways towards finding the appropriate mechanisms to teach our

people more self-reliance, whether in terms of regional autonomy or some other appropriate mechanisms. Thank you very much.

TEODORO CAÑETE

I'd like to greet our distinguished speaker for opening some eyes which have been closed before he came, and when the eyes are opened the mind follows to be opened.

When I came to this room, before I entered that door I had already been focusing on the portion of that speech which caused a reaction from me with regards to the search for national identity. The Chairman will admit, and some of you will admit painfully, that we are not getting into the right national identity. As I recall, the distinguished speaker said, "Let us not thank the Americans for the education they give us." To a certain extent I would like to agree with him because when I was a little boy in the grade school, I was taught a song that was American in characteristic — that I was poorly born on the top of the mountain, although there were rolling plains in the place where I was born; that I should live in a small nipa hut. I would like to invite your attention to this small nipa hut and a little movement to the right, a little movement to the left, the man is found on top of the world. But that is an American introduction.

I also partly agree with the distinguished speaker that we should not thank the Spaniards for the religion that they introduced to us because before the Spaniards came we were so very religious and even our animals, like the chicken, look at the heavens when they drink. I think we are on the same wavelength, distinguished Chairman, although physically speaking you are much younger than I, but we who are on the twilight side of the hill still have enthusiasm for stars that tremble in the sky. I almost got married to a Muslim. But because even as early as that year, she wanted to exercise her own feminine autonomy, when she told me, "You must take life as it happens," I answered, "True, but let us try to make it happen the way we want to take it."

The second action that aroused in me the desire to come forward here is this: is the desire for autonomy a mild rebuke to our national government that it has not responded to the people's desire for a government capable of immediate action on your needs there? Is it a mild rebuke to our national government that it could not comply with the demands and aspirations of the people now within the ambit of the autonomous government?

I feel that these questions are really thought-provoking and instead of the reactor to react to this, those who were encouraged to propose this autonomous government and those who are now benefiting from this autonomous government should further elucidate on this matter especially that the Honorable Chairman accepted the fact that there are no specific and clear guidelines on what administrative matters you are going to exercise. You have admitted in your speech that the autonomous government, in the exercise of its powers, is limited to the exercise of administrative matters but not those within the jurisdiction of the national government like foreign policy and others. Now, the point I am trying to emphasize here is, has the Chairman and other members of that autonomous government ever requested the President of the Philippines to make a bolder, clearer and more politely brutal statement of facts so that there will be no confusion in the exercise of the powers of those running the autonomous government?

Others and I also reacted because of this establishment of the autonomous government, (without offense to Governor Yñiguez and other governors who are here). We are indeed convinced of the advantages of the autonomous government but there is some apprehension in us that will this not, in a certain measure, cause a diminution in the individual provincial government powers if the exercise of power belongs to the autonomous government? I recall, as stated by Dr. Sicat, that before the federal government was established in America, there already existed the state government and they were in a certain area of administration — even in political and other governmental aspects of the government — they were also independent. I wonder if this relation between the states in the United States and the federal government will at least be approached approximately in the relation between the autonomous government and the individual provincial government within the ambit of the autonomous government. Or, are we providing another layer of power between the provincial government and the national government? That, I really have to analyze very deeply. Is the autonomous government an in-between layer between another local government and the national government? If it is a layer, what will be the relation between the layer government and the provincial government within the autonomous government?

However, the most important thing which I will consider and which may also concern you is this: we are in search of a unity of

reactions towards just one Filipino people. I am bothered by the consequences that the autonomous government will bring about in bringing into just one single brotherhood the Christians and the Muslims. Iran has emphasized the identity and isolationism of the Muslim. It has said that because of what is happening in Afghanistan, Muslim people should come around and assert themselves against the invaders — the Soviets. Is this feeling the same feeling now that is the undercurrent of the autonomous government? I would not like to make an indirect statement that the future has come so fast. I do not want to say that I am very much shocked by the coming of an event that should not yet come, what Mr. Toffler calls the future shock. The point that I am trying to drive at is this, how will our church in order to produce one national citizen, be affected by the autonomous government that now exists?

I would like to believe that there is no Muslim, there is no Christian, there's no cultural minority. In fact we have deleted the word cultural minority because in this country nobody is a minority. I'd like to erase from the vocabulary of each person words like Muslim, Christian, cultural minority — there should be only one. It is because of these terminologies that we give this separation by ethnical distinction that some problems arise.

There are also some questions that arose out of this economics of development in the autonomous regions about taxes. The only things that cannot be avoided in life and death are taxes. Sometimes they say you can avoid death but not taxes.

One of my employees is always giving an excuse to attend to something during office hours. One time he asked my permission for him to attend the burial of his grandfather. So I asked, "Do you believe in life after death?" He answered, "Yes." I said, "So we are together because just when you left yesterday afternoon, your dead grandfather came around to my office to find out whether you were here."

In my office, we do not have minorities, the janitor is not a minority. We do not have Muslims, even though there is Presidential Decree No. 1125 granting second grade eligibility to Muslims who have returned to the government. But even probably without that special Presidential Decree, if they have the qualifications, we could have accommodated them. The Civil Service looks at people, Muslim or not Muslim, belonging to the autonomous region or not, equally. For God did not allow to

tumble out of his fingers ordinary people. A Muslim is a miracle by himself. During that supreme moment of his father's love four hundred million seeds of love flowed into the warm body of the Muslim woman. All of these perished except one Muslim sperm. It persevered in swimming in the vast darkness of disaster and nothingness, wiggled up the fallopian tube and wedded with a Muslim egg cell — the first monogamous wedding that ever happened in the life of the person. Then they agreed to come down along the same fallopian avenue and agreed to have a honeymoon for nine months in Hotel Uterus.

So, as far as the Civil Service is concerned — and I know what the Civil Service Office is doing in the autonomous government — there is no Muslim to me for there is no ordinary, no minority Filipino just as there is no ordinary thing even among the inanimate things. God did not create an ordinary inanimate thing. Even that lowly dew drop that rests on the lambent petal of a rose in the morning sunlight, takes on the exquisite beauty of a pearl.

I would like to inform you that I will visit your area to introduce what we are doing in Tacloban. We do not send our employees at once to autonomous tables and offices. We have special room in our heart for mother employees. We have told regional directors that the mother employee is more burdened than the father employee, because when the mother Muslim employee leaves the home, the Muslim father shouts, "Holaloma, my socks." But never in the history will it happen that when the man is leaving the door of the home for the office will the wife shout, "Haji my bra." Then this poor woman employee will wiggle into a sardine-packed fierra that's full of bearing fruits, human fruits and by the time it arrives in that office she is the most disorganized human being in this world. So that I have advised the regional directors to allow them to replaster themselves in some corners, allow them to repaint themselves and above all, allow them to re-upholster themselves. That happens in a government that is not autonomous.

The Chairman of the Civil Service Commission invited our attention about this autonomous government and I told him that one of these days I will introduce a certain practice that we do in Tacloban. We do not send them to the typewriters at once at eight o'clock in the morning because I know that the night before when the lights were low and the passions were high, they might typewrite into the communications what should not be there.

When I was asked, "Can you do that in the autonomous government?" "Yes," "What is your spiritual basis?" I say, "Even the sun that rises behind the eastern hills delays its glorious ascent to the heavens longing to linger awhile with the burlings and the dewdrops, at the same time carpeting the hillside with the shadows of dancing leaves." We will do that in your autonomous government and I hope that will be introduced there. I have more to say here but it was taken up by Dr. Sicat who seems to have known what I would say.

While men have the so-called extra sensory perception, this perception is dwarfed before a woman's intuition. So I am looking forward to that day when we will meet again in one of the rooms of your autonomous offices. Thank you.

AGRIPINO GALVEZ

I am not a student of politics or of political science. My orientation is mostly or basically accounting and law. Therefore, I cannot give insights into the wisdom of being in the autonomous government or in our present government. But I know that experiments are necessary for change and growth. This is one experiment, if I get the Chairman right, which could be successful. Therefore, I would like to hope that Region VIII will be an autonomous government.

I would just like to say one thing about the speech of Chairman Tugung. I know you are already very hungry and I do not have the language of Director Cafete, who can make you laugh and yell over his poetic edicts. I'm more concerned with what the Chairman said about their approval for any regional director who would go into Region IX. If I get this statement right, again he said that even if he did know me, he knew that I was as creative as an auditor. Therefore, I would be acceptable to the autonomous government in case the Chairman would reshuffle me to Zamboanga. But definitely, I would tell the Chairman that by twist of circumstance I would have really been in Zamboanga but on the last minute, the Chairman changed his mind and sent me to Region X in Cagayan de Oro City. But now I would know that if the Chairman ever decides to reshuffle me I will tell him I'm acceptable to the autonomous government of Region IX.

But joking aside, the Commission on Audit is a constitutional body. Under PD 1445, the Chairman can sign the appointment and

can send the regional directors or the auditors to any place without need for approval of the agency as it used to be. This is so because, an auditor or a regional director should have independence of mind and since independence is also a state of the mind it can be made less independent by some outside factors such as that being liked or appointed or approved by the agency or the autonomous government.

Reading PD 1618, there is a section there which says that the transaction of the autonomous government shall be audited by the Commission on Audit. Even reading between the lines, one cannot say that the auditors or the regional directors should be approved by the autonomous government. Even assuming PD 1618 would give them the powers to approve. I would still say that the independence of the Commission on Audit is the responsibility of each and every citizen of the country regardless of whether it is an autonomous government or a non-autonomous government — whether a government under Martial Law or a government under a parliamentary government. Mr. Chairman, I beg you to respect PD 1445.