

COMMENTS*

Bishop William Brasseur, CICM**

You have just heard NPC President Itchon speak about the Bishop of Baguio, and he gives the impression that I am one of his agents. Well, to clarify that matter objectively, allow me to present the matter exactly as it happened. One day I was asked if I could receive the President of the National Power Corporation. I consented as I did not see any reason why I should not. For the meeting, I invited Fr. Patricio Guyguyon and the Assistant Director of Social Action to be present and to listen to what Mr. Itchon had to say. Mr. Itchon explained the same things he mentioned this morning, and he added that he would like very much to have an opportunity for a dialogue with the true leaders of the barrios affected. As the priests in these places knew best who the true leaders are, the true *pangats*, and not those who are sometimes elected by the officials and are politicians, he would want to have a dialogue with the Fathers of Kalinga so they could help him arrange a meeting with the true leaders. He wanted to know when it would be possible to meet them. He said he was willing for the meeting to be held at any place convenient to the Fathers. However, he expressed a preference for Bulanao, Tabuk. Mr. Itchon mentioned that he was an honest man and I must frankly say that I consider him as the most honest man that I have encountered. He wanted this dialogue with the true leaders to know their attitude regarding the dam and to help them.

In our meeting with Mr. Itchon, after hearing his explanations, we proposed some conditions for the building of the dam and for the success of the meeting with the leaders. First of all, considering the great tension of the people in Kalinga, there is need of a moratorium on the project to calm the people down. We explained that for the moment the people are too excited on account of the many harassments from the PANAMIN and because of the killings that had happened there. The Kalingas are a revengeful people. They are prone to take revenge even by killing; hence, the need for a moratorium. When Mr. Itchon asked how long this moratorium should last, we answered for at least fifteen years. To this, Mr. Itchon said that the time was quite long and not possible inasmuch as he had received orders and had a duty to see to it that the dam is finished within a certain period of time. He added that it is beyond his authority to grant such a long moratorium.

Secondly, we said that we would have to ask that the army, the PC, and the PANAMIN leave the place for the moment because as long as they are in Kalinga, the leaders will never talk openly, as they are afraid of reprisals from

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the military. We asked that at least all those who would come for the dialogue would have the guaranty that they will not be embarrassed or harmed when they return home because they had the courage to tell frankly what they have in their hearts. With the presence of the army, and the PC, they will not dare to tell the truth because of fear; they would never be at peace to tell what they have in their hearts.

Third, no politician would be allowed to attend the meeting or dialogue because the politicians already have their own ideas how they will try to enrich themselves at the expense of the ordinary people.

There is a fourth condition, which for the moment I cannot remember. In connection with the talk of Mr. Itchon, I would like to add that the first year they started the survey for the dam and the PANAMIN went to Kalinga, I told President Marcos, whom I met on the occasion of the graduation at PMA: "Mr. President, I am afraid that there will be bloodshed in Kalinga." He answered that he had received good reports on the situation of the dam and the people. To this I said: "I know that you must have received good reports but I know also from whom you have received these reports. Only our priests are in continuous contact with the people. They know what the people are suffering and how they resent the dam. The President did not completely believe what I said; nevertheless, he asked me to see Mr. Barbero. I was called to the office of Mr. Barbero in Camp Crame. I went there with one of my native priests, who stayed in Lubuagan, and with some others who had been invited. We had a long discussion in the office of Mr. Barbero. We explained everything that has happened in Kalinga; how the people have been exploited and deceived by PANAMIN. Mr. Barbero was convinced of the truth of what we said. He gave a personal report of our meeting but unfortunately nothing changed, no action was taken.

Later there was a time that the relationship between the Kalinga and the military became very tense. There was armed conflict between them, so I sent a telegram to the President about the gravity of the situation. No answer was given. Neither was there a change in the situation with the PANAMIN and the military.

In all sincerity I must confess and declare that we the clergy have not changed our attitude with regards to the question of the dam. We have always said that the question of the dam is not ours to answer—it is for the people of Kalinga. We are not supposed to decide. The people affected are the ones who must decide. The only thing we have done so far and will continue on doing is to defend the rights of the people; to see to it that their rights are recognized. We are always ready to intercede for them. But we priests are not going to decide anything about the construction of the dam itself.

I just wanted to clarify my position because you may have had the impression that the Bishop of Baguio has now become an agent of Mr. Itchon. Thank you.