

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Some reflections based upon more than twenty-five years of experience with programs aimed at bettering conditions of the rural poor in the Philippines

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PSS President, 1980

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are gathered here this morning in this Faculty Center of a great University to undertake a very worthwhile and valuable endeavor. As President of the Philippine Sociological Society, the convener of this set of meetings, and with the strong seconding of Dr. Sylvia H. Guerrero, our Vice President, who is also the Chairman of this Convention, and who (if I may be permitted to say so) has done a remarkably fine job in preparing this program for which she richly deserves the thanks of all of us, and in the name of all the other Officers and Board Members of the Society, it is my pleasant duty to welcome you to this Convention, and to promise you that we will make every effort on our part that they prove fruitful meetings for you, and that they truly come to grips with the important questions this set of meetings is designed to confront.

Our intent in gathering here today and tomorrow is to put our collective social science training, wisdom, and abilities at the service of the Philippine community by trying to shed some light on one of the most basic problems of contemporary Filipino society: how to confront the accelerating impoverishment and debasement of the Filipino rural family. That this growing impoverishment is the greatest problem of today's Philippines not everyone here may be willing to admit. That this accelerating pauperization is one of the greatest problems of our society today, everyone here will surely accept.

I do not know who worded the theme of the sessions of this year's Convention. When I came into office this year, thanks to your kind vote, it was already in possession, a legacy from last year's administration. Whoever so phrased it, I find it extraordinarily apt to express the realities confronting the rural Filipino family today. Three of its terms strike me as exceptionally pertinent.

The theme of course is, "The Filipino Peasant in the Vortex of Development." The first of the three terms that strike me is the word, "vortex." Funk and Wagnalls (1948: 1252b) define this term as a whirlpool, that is, a mass of rotating or whirling fluid, especially when sucked spirally toward the center. As one looks back over the past twenty-five years of development program history in the Philippines, the political pros and cons so loudly agitated, the controversies between schools of thought and the clashes between the bands, the confrontations between Christian settlers from islands north of Mindanao and Moslem kinship groups upon their ancestral lands, the struggles between sacadas and labor contractors, the conflicts between tenants and landlords, the battles between ideologies and theorists of the right and of the left which frequently left middle-of-the roaders feeling completely isolated, the term, *vortex*, appears to be a very happy choice to capture an exact shade of meaning.

The second term is "peasant." The same dictionary defines this word as a petty farmer, or an agricultural laborer. However, the term

peasant, has always had a distinctively European ring in my ears. It recalls to me the European history texts I used to read in New York City libraries during my undergraduate days at Fordham, texts which spoke of serfs and the vassals of the feudal Middle Ages, who later become landed peasants, except in Russia, up to the days of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. The word, too, seems very appropriate to my ears because much of the impetus for social reform, for amelioration of the lot of the poor, including the rural poor, came from Europeans like Owen, Bentham, Saint Simon, Le Play, and Marx. In fact, some of this impetus seems to have come from Marxists in the attempt to prove Marx right, and some of it from anti-Marxists to show that Marx was wrong and that other approaches than communism could provide better results.

The third term is "development." Many other terminologies to express the idea might have been employed, among which are "Economic change," "Land reform programs," "Agricultural or even 'Green' Revolution." The term, *development*, seems especially well chosen for two reasons.

First, the term *development*, is reminiscent of those prescriptions for the "national development" of "underdevelopment" countries filled and dispensed with such self-confidence by those esteemed apothecaries of the immediate postwar era, the economists. With one voice, the Classical, the Neo-Classical, and the Marxian economist prescribed, loud and clear, at that date, the same medication: urban industrial development. Investment of the net national product in the small-farmer rural sector of the economy was decried. The rural sector, it was argued, is a subsistence economy sector in developing countries. Subsistence farmers can never increase the net national product in any significant way. Funds invested in them will be wasted, as far as development goes. *Sayang*. Invest national funds instead in the urban industries. So this was done in the Philippines.

So too was it done in India, and to some extent in Indonesia. Today these countries are still poor, although possessed of rich resources. Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, on the other hand, went ahead and invested substantial amounts of their net national product upon their rural sectors in extension, education, roads, and other infrastructure. Today, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea have never been so prosperous. This is a somewhat simplistic statement of a complicated phenomenon but it brings out an important point. Problems of Asian realities have been shown by experience not to be solved adequately by pat solutions proffered by theorists or by the various ideologies of the right or of the left. The times call for fresh thinking on the matter, for new and creative approaches. Above all, they call for programs based principally, not upon mere theorizing, but also upon solid Filipino realities and facts, documented, analyzed, and evaluated.

Secondly, the term "development" is also suggestive of natural growth, of a coming to one's powers and maturity, of taking one's rightful place in the world in which we live. This is a very different concept than to be someone's creature, a yes-man, or a faceless soldier slogging through the mud with his belly full but with a mind vacant of any thoughts of his own as to where he is going or why he should be sent there.

As we prepare to give our attention, and to reflect upon, the research and position papers to be presented and discussed during today's and tomorrow's meetings, several thoughts upon attitudes for reaping the greatest fruit from these meetings come to mind, and several questions rise to consciousness.

The first of these is the wide disparity of views and positions of many of the people whose outlooks are known to me by personal acquaintance. To arrive at a mature and well-reasoned judgment based upon a broad knowledge of the facts, all the facts and

various views must be considered, even where some of these facts and views may be inconvenient to the listener's outlook at the particular time. Achievement of such an openness of mind can only be achieved by showing to each proponent the same courtesy in listening and reflecting upon his comments and data that each would like to receive for his own views.

Secondly, among the faces before me, I see some who have thought deeply and expressed themselves penetratingly upon some of the very problems under discussion these two days. Not all of these are enrolled among our speakers. It would be a great loss for our discussions not to hear their views — even in condensed form — during our open forums. We have the kind of people here who could make these forums the best part of the whole program. I hope that the people I allude to will be persuaded to set forth some of the richness of their reflections upon these topics.

Finally, several questions strike the mind as we begin the process of reflection upon what has been so vividly expressed in the metaphor of the Filipino peasant caught in his banks by the whirlpool of tides that may bear him on to prosperity and happiness, but which may also drag him deep down into some murky, underwater torrent of turbulence.

The first of these questions has to do with the two older ideologies of capitalism and communism. Have either of these, any place in the developing world, really brought an abiding solution during our times to the vexing problems of the increasing landlessness and powerlessness of the small farmer face to face with inflation, organized labor, organized management, and the organized market in both selling and buying of goods?

Second, is the government of a developing country the proper vehicle for the efforts of a people at self development, at the development of their peasant farmer sector? As John Cool (1979) has said, fifty years ago

it would have been unthinkable even to members of these governments themselves that they should add this responsibility to that they already had for maintenance of law and order, control of the currency, building and maintaining roads and ports, and national defense. What has happened to make it credible to us that they are capable of leading the people to the goals of prosperity and development. Would it be better to entrust our development goals to some other kind of an institution than the government? I do not answer the question but I suggest it to you for reflection. We are not without precedents for such an idea. The Population Center Foundation has already accomplished much in the field of population policy as shown by current demographic trends. Then in Canada, an example exists in the form of the International Development Research Centre, a completely private foundation instituted and endowed by the Canadian government with millions of dollars a year of government money set up by law with its own Board and able to act with complete independence from the Canadian government.

Finally, where does the motive power come from to drive us on to work for the progression and prosperity of our small farmer? If neither capitalism, nor communism, nor liberalism, nor humanism, nor any of the other isms that our teeming brains have been able to conjure up over the past hundred years have been able to generate enough real motive power to drive the wheels for real social betterment of the small farmer's lot, should we think of going back to the source of our outlook on our fellow man — to Christianity for most Filipinos, to Islam for a smaller group? There perhaps we may reinvigorate our jaded enthusiasm for an honest attempt to share more of the good things of life with the rural poor not through charity, but through real changes in opportunities open to them and in their levels of living, by the immersion of our own spirits in the fatherhood of a lovable God and in our brotherhood with every man.

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