

## COUNTER REACTION

ULBERT ULAMA TUGUNG

I was telling Assemblyman Rabang that this time I will violently react.

### *On national integration*

From our point of view, there is no danger to national integration. On the contrary, this will strengthen the love, the loyalty of the people in Southern Philippines. Our system of government today is no longer presidential but parliamentary. Strictly speaking, the system that we have adopted in Southern Philippines is in conformity with the parliamentary system of government. Take the example of Malaysia where they have a lot of internal governments because theirs is presidential, like the state of Sabah. Internally, they govern their own people yet they are loyal to their Kings; they are loyal to their Prime Minister.

So, it is not correct to say, with due respect to Dr. Sicat, that it will disintegrate. It will even strengthen them because, in accordance with the program of the President, we are now tested in the field to be self-reliant, to be dependent on our own. When before, everytime we cry we go to Malacañang and ask for something. This is not the essence of Filipinism so to speak. We should be able to stand on our own. We could not depend on the resources of the national government, or for that matter any other foreign country.

This is also in accordance with the democratic philosophy to widen the base of development, the base of participation. In the old system, the base is really hollow. It was an inverted pyramid where everything is in the national government, nothing is left to the rural areas. All developments should be set by the central government.

I would like to call your attention to the experiment or the experience of the government in West Germany. The commune system that they have is very effective. In the commune, it is like

self-government. They have the say in the development in their own area; they have a bigger share in terms of taxation. Look at what is happening to Germany. It is a progressive country. In the Philippines, we are not so progressive because of some fears. If we always have the fear or sort of negative attitude, we will never succeed. We should always be risk-takers. We should be willing to gamble.

Under the law, we can establish our own schools. But it does not necessarily mean that we will not follow the national policy. The only difference is, it is wholly funded by the autonomous government. The central government will not give us any single centavo. Therefore, it is but natural that since it is wholly funded by the regional government, we should be the one to manage it in the administrative arm; we dictate whatever manner we feel is very effective, in so far as reaching the people is concerned. But we do not deviate from the national goal in so far as the educational system is concerned.

*On the fear of going back to the old practice.*

We have good laws in the Philippines; we have old, good system. Sometimes, it is not in the system but it is really in the people. We have implemented the New Society. All of these are implemented by the President and by his duly authorized representatives.

We have only two systems of government in the world today: capitalism and communism. If you are capitalist, communists will criticize you. Similarly, if you are communist, the West will also criticize you. Where are you going to stay now? Where are you going to stand? Definitely these two systems of government are not perfect systems. The President, for that matter any leader of the country, is in search of\* an alternative. We cannot coin a word for the kind of government we have. We just put it into practice and it evolves a system of its own; the term will come later. But the trouble with us Filipinos is, we first coin the term and then look for the system.

*On the issue of no specific guidelines*

We have guidelines, more or less. For me, it is on the

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\*(N.B. The equivalent, alternative, grammatical expression is: "is searching for . . .")

interpretation of the law. For example, under the PD particularly section 24 on national aid going to the autonomous government in terms of budgeting which states: "It is the Lupong Tagapagpaganap that prepares the budget for the autonomous government and then to be submitted to the Sangguniang Pampook for enactment into law." Normally there is no conflict here. If we have the money now, we can do the same. As the chairman of the Lupon, I will estimate the budget. Or let us prepare the budget of the Sangguniang Pampook and the Lupong Tagapagpaganap, integrate the two then we submit it to the Sanggunian for deliberation. When they are through, they can submit it to us and we can approve or disapprove it. But the trouble now is in our system — the autonomous government has no money to start with. We are depending on the national government. So the Sangguniang Pampook prepares its own budget; the Lupong Tagapagpaganap prepares its own budget. The Sanggunian wants that the budget of the Lupon should be given to them for enactment. In the same manner of course, we could also ask the budget of the Sanggunian to be given to us and then we will approve or disapprove. But they think that it is not sensible. In effect, Section 25 of the PD, by its own self, is not operational. This pertains to a situation when we have our own money which is basic in budgeting. If you have no estimate, you cannot prepare any budget. What system are we adopting now? We prepare our own budget, submit it to the Ministry of the Budget then attend the budget hearing. This will in turn be submitted to the National Parliament for enactment into law. We enact but then there is another enactment. There is no subject or substance that is subjected to double enactment. There should only be one. So this is, more or less, to me a matter of interpretation in this particular section.

Of course, the other one is regional budgeting which is adopted here just like in Southern Philippines. The Sanggunian wants this to be passed through them and then it will be subjected to certain processes just like any other legislative act — some parts are deleted, amended, etc. But we objected, since this should not be the case because this one is only a matter of coordinating with other agencies to know what the development aspects are — the things that they have recommended. The Manila people will have the final say, of course, on the basis of our own plans and programs in the region. Now, you could just imagine — we enact and then Minister Paterno will disregard it. That would be embarrassing to us.

But what's good in democracy lies in our desire to get that authority so that we can do our work. We do not interpret this negatively but rather as one of the fruitful successes that we have attained in Region IX – the participation of everybody to assert himself.

*On the diminution of local powers*

With the establishment of the autonomous government, not a single authority has been removed from any governor or any mayor. They continue functioning. Our function is to coordinate all the activities of these governors and mayors. The powers that we have are the powers of the President, either expressly provided in the Constitution or inherent in the position of the President. We have not taken the powers of the executives in the lower level of the organization. There should be no fear that the governor will be restrained from exercising his power.

Look at the case in the region with five governors. Who coordinates all the activities of these governors? How can we strengthen camaraderie not only in internal or personal relationships but also in terms of development? If we have the RDC, which is a loose organization, this is only on planning. There is no coercive authority or coercive power imposed upon the RDC. For instance, if the Mayor wants to develop something, he can do so.

Before the establishment of the autonomous governments, Zamboanga del Sur and Zamboanga del Norte, the two provinces that are dominated by our brother Christians – Muslims there are only about 10-20 percent; in the provinces of Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Basilan the Muslims are also dominated – their thinking is more Cebuano because they speak Visayan. They do not relate with these three provinces; rather these provinces relate to each other – in development, going together, etc. In other words, there is disintegration as if we do not belong to one region. But with the autonomous government, we learned to love each other. There is no jealousy in the allocation of funds unlike before, when one governor gets P1 million, another one wants to get P1 million also to show the people that he is very powerful.

For me, Islam is a third branch of ideology, next to capitalism, and communism as systems of government. The Holy Koran is the bible of the Muslim, that's why we said Islam is a complete way of life: from birth until death. All the development and things pertain-

ing to property and relationship are there. It is all about life. That is why it is a way of life. The third alternative, an acceptable alternative, is "the Islam theory" — the system of government that is now being adopted in Iran. But I beg to disagree with Ayatollah Khomeini. He is not a true Islam because in Islam you cannot afford to order the killing of somebody. This is un-Islamic, we do not sanction that. That's why according to President Sadat he (Khomeini) is a lunatic. Perhaps that is true because of his age. Islam doesn't tolerate killing. We condemn killing. Now there should be no fear like the killing that happened in Afghanistan. In Islam, a Muslim is not a citizen of a particular country. He is a citizen of the entire world. This is a thinking from the point of view of the Divine God. He is free to move around the world. He is a citizen of all countries. The second principle in Islam is, for as long as he is a Muslim, even if he is in the north, I'm in the south, we are brothers. We could not fight each other although, oftentimes this is violated. But that is the basic principle in Islam — we are brothers such that when this handful of Muslim militants cried and told the Arab world, "We are being mal-treated; we are being massacred; our religion is eliminated. (Of course that is false. That is a propaganda.) The Arabs came to their rescue, gave them money to fight because that is the principle, the philosophy of Islam. Just like what Secretary General Chatti in his speech during the Islamic Conference said, "Islam will always protect the Muslim minority wherever he is and whenever he is being oppressed. It is our concern because they are our brothers." Although the propaganda generated by Nur Misuari of the University of the Philippines, is really wrong, he totally disturbed the actual situation in Southern Philippines. But the question is, can you blame him? If you are in his side, you'll do everything possible.

But when the Arabs were convinced by the First Lady, they did not give any more support. So, Misuari and others could not do anything but attend the meeting of the Rabita — Rabita is an Islamic organization of religious leaders that is recognized even by Saudi Arabia. When they represented themselves they said, "This is our last meeting. If we cannot get what we want, we'll go home." The Arab said, "We cannot give you anything; just standby we are still negotiating with the Philippine government." The spokesman said, "Tomorrow we are going home to the Philippines. As soon as we arrive, we will change our religion. All Muslims should be

Christians." "No," the Arabs cried, "No, no, do not change your religion. We will give you money." The implication of that statement is, if they come back, they will be forced by the President to change their religion — as if we are coercing people to change their religion. But it's only a matter of propaganda. So there is no fear that in spite of this increase of militancy on the part of the Islamic world, we will be like Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a different situation — an invasion of Russia, a powerful country against a poor country. That's why I told Secretary General Chatti that there is no threat to Islam in the Philippines. contrary, since the declaration of the Martial Law, we have convinced many people; we give more adherence to Islam. If they are not Muslims at least they believe in the philosophy behind Islam. Where can you find a government helping to construct a mosque, a madraza? That is actually, basically unconstitutional. Government funds cannot be used for this kind of projects. But they circumvented just for us, for the brother Muslims to strive, to improve. It is different here in the Philippines. I hope I can convince the members of the Islamic countries to support the program or the policy of reconciliation of President Marcos. Thank God they are going a little bit slow now. There are more Arabs that are convinced on our side because they are recruiting laborers/workers to Southern Philippines. We always solve them. When we brought the Arabs to a housing project of the First Lady grouping the Muslims, along the coastal area, Saudi Arabian Ambassador Saboski said, "Why are the Muslims driven to this kind of land? Can they not be given land here, somewhere here?" I said "No, your Excellency, I was born here, I'm a Muslim, I was born on a house on stilts in the sea because to us the Muslims, this is the cleanest. It's very clean — the air, the sea breeze. That is the custom of the Muslim. We do not love to stay in land even if we have property. Look at their pumpboats. They park it just below their respective homes." But then he was not yet convinced. He wanted to see a project for the Christians. We have no housing projects for the Christians. But there is a private subdivision — no government has ever interfered with this; no funds come from the government but from the private sector — where the Muslims and the Christians live together.

We are not the majority in Region IX, just like in Region XII. Our brother Christians are the majority. In the Sangguniang Pampook there are only nine Muslims out of twenty-one. Even if

we combine the votes of the provinces of Basilan, Tawi-Tawi and Sulu, we could not match the votes of Zamboanga del Norte. Where Christians are, we cannot win. But despite of these divergence in religion and many other things, we could be one. We never quarrel. In terms of work, I was appointed as Chairman of the Executive Council; another member is a Muslim; another member a brother Christian. We never quarrel about these things. The Christians there may be Christians but their orientation is already Muslim. They understand the Muslim character; others even speak Tausug. So there is no fear of disintegration. The establishment of an autonomous government will not destroy but will strengthen us instead because we will become more dependable and more loyal to the central government. The taxes that we impose are not so high but just enough because tax is not a way of raising money to over burden the people. Tax is a way of reducing the wealth of the rich. Tax is always imposed on the rich people not on the poor because the rich will have to contribute part of their income to the national government.

### *On eligibility*

Before the declaration of martial law, we were not so developed; we were lagging behind. Take the example of the province of Tawi-Tawi. Just like in a family with four children — some are talented, others are not. You pay more attention to the one who is less talented. That is always so. If this were a lake, this is the end of the lake. We start from there. In the case of the province or region to the north down to the south, you are already here. We in Southern Philippines just started here. Now, at the same level of speed, we can never reach you. But if this one will be given more speed perhaps, the President will give us a Cadillac or Mercedes Benz. Time will come when we will reach you — in education, and civil service eligibility.

You are far ahead with the western education. As I said in my speech, our parents don't like us to go to school because we might be christianized and eventually forget our homeland. Our education is in the Islamic way, the Holy Koran. Most of us are not eligible. According to the law, we should have gained a certain experience in the government for at least 4 to 5 years, a college graduate — not any ordinary Muslim. But the trouble with this law is, even our brother Christians are taking advantage of it. They claim they are Muslims. But we never complained. On scholarship such as

CR-9, this is only for the minority. Most of our Christian brothers took advantage of it but the Muslims have never complained, have never questioned because it is in the temperament of the Muslims. If somebody wants to take advantage of that privilege, we do not question anymore. We should be happy that he wants to participate just like us. So, I hope it is better understood.

Here, there is no question of justice. I was trying to illustrate in the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity. As I said I was giving an example of children — some are given P5 while others are given P10 not because you do not love the other one but because perhaps he can look for money somewhere else. Perhaps our brothers in the north will not begrudge us.

### *On the issue on the Commission on Audit*

Incidentally the law says that any director to be assigned there should have at least the knowledge and our consent. Up to this time, we have never objected to the assignment of any director. We haven't interposed any objection. I agree with my good friend that it is a constitutional body. But let us be realistic. Show me if it is really independent. What we want to ask from the Commission on Audit is to understand the situation. For instance, like in Samar, you are fighting the NPAs if you are the auditor because you are with the government or the mayor. When the NPAs are already advancing, getting more people to their side, we will lose because of technicalities. If you want to obstruct you can do so. What we want to appeal to the auditors that are assigned to our region is to interpret the law according to the present situation. Besides, PD 1618 states, "In so far as this regionwide offices are concerned, the Ministry of the Budget, the Commission on Audit and the Civil Service Commission should change their policy to meet the demands in the spirit of autonomy." Now, if you interpret it, the policy adopted in autonomous Region IX should not be adopted in other non-autonomous regions. For example, somebody lost in an election. Under the law he cannot work for one year so I employed him as a consultant on part time basis. The official has to send it to Chairman Tantuico to decide whether this is a case of unemployment or violation of the provision of the Constitution. But consultancy is not employment. It is a case-to-case basis. But I cannot blame him because he is afraid he might be charged.



So as I said, we in the government should be risk-takers. If you are afraid that someday you will be charged, then do not join the government. That is the hazard of being a public servant just like the maids. In the same manner, we are the maids of the people. That is why we have to condition our minds. I would like to assure you that there is nothing we must fear on the establishment of the autonomous government and we would like to leave this matter to your sound discretion and better analysis on how we run the government. We assure you that it is not the perfect way of running the government but we would like to be judged not by the present generation but by the next generation.