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Great Britain and the Philippines

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Notes and Comment

Great Britain and the Philippines

The following is the full text of the British Ambassador's address to the Foreign Affairs Association of the Philippines on April 22, 1960.—THE EDITORS.

I am greatly honoured at the kindness of your distinguished Association in asking me to address you tonight. I am, however, somewhat intimidated by the breadth of the subject, which I must admit to having chosen myself. I am at once brought up against the sage observation of La Rochefoucauld who always has the right word for every situation: he pointed out that the commonest fault of those who wish to penetrate a subject is not to fail to reach the point but to pass it. I fear that, with so wide a field to cover, I may well pass the point.

I propose to tackle this subject under three headings: first of all, the historical encounters between the Philippines and Great Britain; secondly, similarities in our respective development, and thirdly, the geographical and strategic points we have in common and the reactions of my country to this situation. I am not going to stress what differences there may be in our national temperament and institutions. I think far too many people these days spend their time emphasising the exclusive nature of their national characteristics and trying to prove that these are not shared in any degree by others. While a pride in one's own character and institutions is clearly right and proper, I suggest that in international relations the search for points of similarity is much more likely to be conducive to good results. If you can find points of similarity, you can then afford the luxury of points of divergence.

Britain and the Philippines are almost as physically separate from each other as is possible on this globe and it is not surprising that on the whole our contacts in the past have been few and far between.

There is one meeting-point that might have been fruitful, which I feel merits your attention for a moment: Philip II of Spain was the husband of Mary Tudor, Queen of England. Had that marriage been more of a success, many unsuspected consequences might have flowed from it. One of these would have been that the destinies of England and the Philippines might have become intertwined from the 16th century onwards. As it was, the ultimate consequence of that marriage was the rift between England and Spain. One of the main factors in this rift, Sir Francis Drake, was, in fact, the first Englishman ever to reach the shores of the Philippines, which he did, as you all know, in 1577 during the course of his voyage round the world. The next contact, I am afraid, is the less agreeable one of the occupation of Manila by the British between 1762 and 1764. This, I am told, has left a visible imprint upon certain villages in your country, and I must say that I myself have seen stations of the Cross in one of your beautiful 17th-century churches in which the Roman soldiers wear British uniforms. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that certain well-known British firms, still with us, established what has become a tradition of orderly and fruitful business dealings.

If our contacts with one another in the past have been few, there are some interesting parallels in our historical development. I wonder how many people in the Philippines realise that England was a colony of Rome for 350 years. Rome brought to our island, then in a Celtic twilight, urban civilisation, the amenities of roads and aqueducts, respect for law and order, and also, latterly, Christianity. The Romans had to abandon Britain and the Romano-British civilisation was gradually hammered to its close by the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes. You may recall that England was a Danish colony for a time. Then we were brought back again into the main stream of European civilisation by the Norman conquest from France. We have therefore known three foreign masters, each with a different speech, and are thus one ahead of you. I am often asked by Filipino friends who our national hero is. The fact is that each of these waves of conquest produced a national figure. As school children we were all thrilled by the exploits of Queen Boadicea, who opposed the Roman in vain and whose statue on her chariot you will remember in London. You, of course, know the tales that grew up during the Middle Ages about King Arthur and his Knights. King Arthur was a legendary Christian Romano-British chieftain, fighting against the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain; he, too, has his place in our pantheon. Then again, there is the valiant figure of Hereward the Wake, who was a Saxon who stood out in the island of Ely, which those of you who have visited Cambridge University will almost certainly have seen, against the Norman invader, William the Conqueror from France. None of this is so far in the past as you might suppose and no one visiting England can have failed to sense the omnipresence of history in every village.

We, therefore, in England, like you, have a mixed heritage. From the Romans comes our respect for law and order; from the Anglo-Saxons a certain spirit of adventure and a love of the country-side, of nature and the open air; from the Norman French the attachment of our country to the literary and humanistic traditions of France and Italy. Our language itself is a sort of Chabacano — a blending of Anglo-Saxon and French, as students of Chaucer know only too well. Our Celtic languages survive in Wales and Scotland—not to mention the revival of the native language in Ireland. We are, in fact, of mixed blood and our civilisation is a hybrid one. I suggest for your consideration that nearly all great civilisations have been of hybrid origins and it is for this reason that I feel that you in the Philippines are so singularly fortunate in having roots going deep into the varied cultures of Asia, Spain and Latin Europe and the United States.

Your North American root, if I may call it such, links you directly with our British achievements and is indeed the greatest bond between us. As you know, of course, traditions stemming from Britain — not to mention the English language — are perhaps still pre-dominant in the United States. Our North American colonies rebelled against our king in the name of principles which they had derived from England. "No taxation without representation" has long been a slogan in England. We have not, alas, always practised what we preached, even where we ourselves are concerned! However, you will remember that the great Dr. Johnson, in the 18th century, once said words to this effect: "Sir, are you such a fool as to suppose that a man who enunciates the highest principles should live up to them in his private life?" I have had many occasions, since I have been in the Philippines, to hear Habeas Corpus, Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights mentioned with some approbation as being at the roots of many of the principles to which you subscribe. Therefore, perhaps I am not exaggerating when I say that your North American root stretches across the Atlantic and goes deep into the heart of the United Kingdom. The most tangible proof of this is, of course, the immense compliment you pay us in speaking that hybrid language which we evolved, and in studying its masters in your schools. This linguistic link, I suggest, is one of the highest use in the contemporary world, where language barriers can only be harmful to international relations.

There is the other point in common of our respective geographical situations. We were for so many centuries regarded as the furthestmost outposts of Europe, sticking out into the Atlantic Ocean, and you occupy a similar situation with regard to the Asian land mass. We each feel ourselves to be profoundly European and Asian, but, as island peoples, we cannot help feeling slightly removed from the turmoil of continental politics, whether in Europe or in Asia. This, no doubt, has given both of us a slight independence of thought and de-

meanour. Then our island situation has, until recently, been a great strategic blessing. This is very much a thing of the past, as far as my country is concerned, because you will realise that the Straits of Dover, separating Britain from France, are no wider than Manila Bay. We therefore know that we are in short range of any ballistic missiles which our ill-wishers may wish to direct against us. We know that we are in the front line of fire; we have already experienced its consequences. Therefore it is natural for us to take the line, "In for a penny, in for a pound." As a flourishing democratic state, we feel that we shall be hit anyhow, if a war starts, and that we had better take what steps we can to make ourselves as formidable to prospective foes as possible. We know that defence in present conditions cannot be undertaken by a single country on its own. We have therefore abandoned our centuries-old tradition of complete independence of action. We know that we need the help of the rest of the free world, and its leader, that new colossus—in whose birth we played a notable part—the United States. We realise that we are all interdependent and therefore that we must accept bases in our islands. Now we perhaps know more about bases on foreign soil than anybody else, because we maintain some of our own in other peoples' countries. We realise what it feels like to be the owner of a base in somebody else's sphere and to be the host to the bases of others.

It is not only, however, by making ourselves as strong as possible with the help of our friends that we seek to combat the menace of the Communist ideology and potential aggression. We also try to do this by putting our own house in order. We realise that Communism is, as it were, a European heresy. You will remember that Karl Marx spent a lot of time in the British Museum Reading Room, pursuing his studies there. His works are primarily a criticism of the shortcomings of European civilisation, as he then saw it. We have, therefore, understood that, in order to prevent the Communist heresy from gaining a foothold in our country, we must take steps to remedy such real defects as Communism has shown up. This is the meaning of the whole emphasis in England on the creation of a state of social justice. I should like to point out to you in what courageous circumstances this was built. After the end of the last war so many of the sources of British wealth had been either lost or cut off. Great Britain is a densely populated country, wealthy agriculturally, but we have few natural resources and we built up our strength by becoming the workshop of the world, because we gave birth first—for good or for ill—to the Industrial Revolution. The profits we got thereby were largely invested in foreign enterprises; that was our form of administering aid and I suggest to you that it was a very good one, in that it involved a partnership. To me it seems that co-operation is of the essence of the successful application of aid. It was in this

way that we preceded the United States as the financial centre of the world. Our foreign investments were sacrificed in the Second World War; our import and export trade was badly damaged and we had to face a decade of planned austerity in order to recuperate our forces. I suggest to you that it is perhaps the fact that, during the war and the subsequent period of austerity, we were able to plan the distribution of foodstuffs and essential commodities in so fair a way that largely destroyed the appeal which Communism might have made to the British people. It was during this difficult decade that both Socialist and Conservative governments planned and carried out the creation of the social justice state, which had been foreshadowed by Lord Beveridge in his now-famous report. I do not want to weary you with long details of this. Suffice it to say that it is inspired by the social conscience, which is so pronounced a characteristic of the British people, and by their belief in free enterprise. Its most impressive aspect is the scope and scale of the Health Service, which provides medicine, doctors, hospitals and treatment on the State for everyone and which costs the country some £600 million a year—or over a billion U.S. dollars. This socialised medicine alone has lifted one of the fundamental pre-occupations from the minds of all citizens of the British Isles. It is worked on an elastic system, which does not impose restraint upon the individual. Indeed, it is the boast of my country that we have been able to provide the essential services which Communism professes to offer, while retaining the liberty of the individual and eschewing all regimentation of thought and action. This was carried out at a moment which might have daunted many governments and has become accepted by all political parties as part of the institutions of the country. It has, I suggest to you, resulted in our having no Communist Member of Parliament and a Communist Party which boasts only some 30,000 members and which the average British subject treats as a joke. I do not, however, wish to suggest that the influence of Communism can be neglected in my country. Naturally, as you know, Communists are dedicated persons. They will work for their cause where others prefer to sit back and relax. They will attend Trade Union meetings and seek to gain control of those unions, where others prefer to play with their children or look at television. Extreme vigilance is still necessary, but I would suggest that we could in England, without undue boastfulness, say that by an audacious programme of social reform we have been able to achieve a large measure of social justice and to eliminate some of the basic fears that have always assailed mankind. Your resettlement schemes, social welfare arrangements and community development projects therefore command the most sympathetic attention of the Englishman.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, I hope that this disquisition has not bored you too much. Our points in common, as I see them, are that

we are both island peoples, placed in positions of great strategic value; that we both believe in the same traditions of democracy and the rule of law; that we support Christian principles and that we are both determined to preserve our own way of life intact, even if it entails great physical danger for ourselves. You pay us the vast compliment of knowing our language so well. We both have faith and courage and these are the most important attributes a nation which intends to survive can have. I personally see great hope in both our futures. You have certain advantages which we do not possess: your population in relation to your territory is relatively small; nature is exceedingly kind to you; you can be self-sufficient in food; you have the feeling that with a little effort everyone in the Philippines can better himself, and you have an admirable thirst for education. With your hybrid origins I predict a magnificent flowering of culture. We too share hybrid origins and we are proud of the achievements which they have enabled us to bring about. It is my great hope that both our countries may understand one another better. I feel that an Ambassador should build a bridge between the country he represents and the country in which he serves. If I can help to do this by encouraging both peoples to know one another better, I shall feel that I have at least achieved something worth while. I hope you will help me in this constructive task.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude for the friendship that has been so warmly extended to my family, to myself and to so many of my fellow-countrymen in your beautiful and hospitable islands. I say, to all members of your Association and to the people of the Philippines, "*un millón de gracias de todo corazón.*"

JOHN PILCHER

Missiles and National Survival

PRESIDENT Garcia made news last April when, in an exclusive interview with Stan Swinton, general news editor of the ASSOCIATED PRESS, he issued a strong invitation to the United States government to station atomic weapons, including missiles, in the Philippines. The President said that any decision to station these weapons here was up to Congress, but he added he was certain Congress would approve. The ASSOCIATED PRESS interview was the first time the President made public his desire to have atomic weapons available here, for instant use in the event of attack. As the AP observed, he chose his words carefully.