

# Understanding: philippines and national hero



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

It is in the national revolution that the people were most united, most involved and most active on the fight for freedom. Almost always the leader of the revolution becomes the principal hero of his people. The unity between the people and the leader enhances the effects of both. In our case, Rizal, our national hero was not the leader of our revolution. In fact, he refused to be associated with it. He said in his manifesto that he was only for the reforms and that reforms must willingly come from above, not by force.

His condemnation of the revolution has placed us in Filipinos in a situation in which we have to choose between two undesirable choices. In our case, we chose to ignore this contradiction because we still haven't realized the consequences of our refusal to resolve this contradiction. The Philippine revolution has always been overshadowed by the widespread reputation of Rizal. Because our national hero took no part in the revolution, it gave less significance to the event, to the man, and to us.

Such appraisal has dangerous effects because it can be used to exculpate those who actively betrayed the revolution and may lessen the passion of those who today may be called upon to support another revolution to complete the anti-colonial movement. We have magnified Rizal's role to such a point that we have lost our sense of delegation of our other great men. It cannot be denied that his pre-eminence among our heroes was a result of American sponsorship.

Governor William Howard Taft and other conservative Filipinos chose Rizal to be our national hero because Rizal never advocated independence, nor did he advocate armed resistance to the government. He wanted reforms by

means of public education. It is the public image that the Americans desired for us Filipinos to follow. They favoured a hero who would not run against American colonial policy and ignored heroes who advocated independence. In the first place, he was already dead by the time the Americans began their aggression.

The Americans emphasized the fact that Rizal was a reformist, not a separatist. It must also be remembered that the Filipino members of the Philippine commission were conservative ilustrados - the class that they were cultivating and building up for leadership. A proper understanding of our history is very important to us because it will serve to demonstrate how our present has been distorted by faulty knowledge of our past. What would have happened if Rizal had not been executed in December of 1896? Without Rizal there would have developed other talents.

The execution of Rizal on December 30 only added drama to the events of that period. Rizal may have given form and colour to the aspirations of the people but even without him, the national struggle would have ensued. Because Rizal had certain qualities, he was able to serve the social needs of the period. He was able to see the problems generated by historical forces. The truth of this statement is demonstrated by the fact that the revolution broke out despite his refusal to lead it and continued despite his condemnation of it.

Rizal's viewpoint was delimited by his particular status and upbringing. Rizal lived in a period of great economic changes. These were accompanied by cultural and political ferment. The country was undergoing grave and deep

alterations which resulted in a national awakening. This economic development and the English occupation of the country inevitably led to improvement in communications. Material progress set the stage for cultural and social changes in the country. Economic prosperity spawned discontent when the native saw a new world of affluence opening for themselves and their classes.

They attained new consciousness and a new goal - equality with the Peninsulares in practical, economic and political terms. Equality with Spaniards meant equality of opportunity, but they did not realize that real equality must be based on national freedom and independence. To a large extent, Rizal, the ilustrado, for in voicing the goals of his class, he had to include the aspirations of the entire people. Though he only wants reforms, he expressed his demands in terms of human liberty and human dignity.

As the exposé of oppression, his writings were part of the tradition of protest which eventually blossomed into a revolution. His original aim was to assimilate the country as a province of Spain, but what happened was opposite. It gave the root to separatism. The winning of the term Filipino was an anti-colonial victory for it signified the recognition of racial equality between Spaniards and Filipinos. This contribution was in the realm of Filipino nationhood, this was a victory in the realm of consciousness. However it is only a partial gain.

This victory was truly a limited victory, for the user of this terms were themselves limited Filipinos based on education and property. Americans projected Rizal as the model of an educated citizen. Rizal's preoccupation

with education serves to further impression that the majority of the Filipinos were unlettered and therefore needed tutelage before they could be ready for independence. The elite had a sub-conscious disrespect for the ability of the people to articulate their own demands and to move on their own.

They are no different from the modern day mendicants who try to prove that they are Americanized, meaning that they are Filipino-Americans. The contrast to the ilustrado approach was the katipunan of Bonifacio. Rizal was the embodiment of consciousness without a movement. It was Bonifacio and the katipunan that embodied the unity of revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary practice. Rizal was a necessary moment in our revolution but he was only a moment, and while his validity for this time amounted to heroism that is valid for all time.

We must view Rizal as an evolving personality within an evolving historical period. The revolution of today would be beyond the understanding of Rizal because his orientation is only limited to that time. We must discard the belief that we are incapable of producing the heroes of our epoch, that heroes are exceptional beings. In fact, the true hero is one with the masses and does not exist above from them. When goals of the people are finally achieved, Rizal, the first Filipino will be negated by the true Filipino by whom he will be remembered as a great catalyser in the metamorphosis of the decolonized indio.