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Notes and Comment

Manila: The Primate City

MICHAEL MCPHELIN

I

It requires an exercise of the imagination to remind oneself that the big industrial city without which life would be quite unthinkable today is something new — not two hundred years old in the West and of far more recent emergence in the developing countries. Its evolution has induced a profound change in the whole pattern of human life, affecting literally every aspect of the existence of men, both those who are the city-dwellers and those in the hinterlands. The modern city, if one thinks of Paris or of Tokyo, has been a center of influence and power upon the whole country, the whole world and all of society.

Manila is a primate city: that is, there is no other urban center in this country which is a city in the same sense as Manila. It is The City: *Urbs*. The theme to be developed here is that Manila, as the primate city, is a force which tends at first both to strengthen and to weaken this developing country but that it represents a necessary phase which must be gone through in the process of socio-economic development. The city is the source and spring whence modernization flows little by little over the wider area. Manila is a rising city; it has only just begun to have the impact which, unless damped, will little by little transform and modernize the whole people. The change first takes place in the city but its influence is not confined to the city. The power of the single primate city to influence the country is destined at first to swell but eventually to level off as the other quasi-urban centers grow to be true cities.

In the early days of this society's history, until the Spaniards first arrived in the Philippines, nothing justified a distinction between urban

and rural. There existed no city. Once cities were started, the differences between urban and rural life appeared. As modernization spreads, one can expect that the differences will once again be blurred, as the style and temper of the city permeates the whole land. This process has already begun.

The country as a whole is still predominantly rural and provincial, with islands of urbanity here and there and one prominent island, the primate city, Manila. But by and large the country is less rustic than it ever was before and will never again be quite so rustic as it is today. In the thinking of some, a good thing is being decomposed and destroyed: the wholesome, natural, unspoiled way of life on the land and in the village; something artificial, contrived, abnormal is being substituted for it: city-life. Be that as it may, the process is irreversible.

Change is underway here and the significance of the primate city lies in its being a stage in development, a necessary first stage. At present it tends to drain away from the rest of the country the best of its talents and powers, swamping the provinces in its backwash. Given continuing growth and development, it is expected that it will gradually diffuse throughout the country the powers it first drained away.

Right now Manila is the capital of everything. The leading figures in all lines operate in and from the primate city—even the Chinese élite and the remaining Spaniards, American and other non-Filipinos. It is the center in which decisions are made of national influence and where forces operate with extensive effect upon the whole country. It is not only the political capital but the capital of business, finance and commerce, of industry, of education, of the press and communications, of transportation, of medicine, of the arts and architecture, of fashion, fads and recreation. Without question, it dominates the republic. Allowing for obvious differences, it is to the Philippines what Washington, New York, Boston, Chicago, Hartford, Hollywood and Reno are to the United States.

The leading families maintain houses here, even when they do not pull up their provincial roots. The grander landlords make the city their base, reside in it part of the time, and keep their children in school here. It is a compact center; these people know of each other and are acquainted with each other. Though the city is big, its influential class is small and anything but anonymous.

Manila, all by itself, has many Universities—twenty-three—as all of England or all of France. It is the Athens of the Philippines; in addition to the universities, Greater Manila contains 87 colleges. Though the Philippines has nothing to compare with the distinguished libraries of Europe, what book-collections are in the country are chiefly

concentrated here, as are the bookshops and the art galleries. The city has as many television channels as New York and double the number of daily newspapers. All the national journals originate here and the Manila Overseas Press Club is the rendezvous for the newsmen of the international wire-services. The city has far more telephones than all the rest of the country lumped together. Office space in the city exceeds that of the rest of the nation three to one; currently about 80% of the country's annual expenditures on private construction are for structures in the city. The new architecture of the office buildings, the hotels, the industrial plants and the exclusive residential quarters is the model of the aspirations of the rest of the country.

Every important business keeps its home-office in Manila and all the larger banks, both domestic and foreign. The country's only stock exchanges operate here. All roads and sea-and-air-lanes lead to Manila; it is the center of both inter-island and international transport. The level of professional services—medical and dental, legal, financial and educational—is incomparably higher than anywhere else in the land, granted several acknowledged exceptions in education, especially in agricultural schooling. The most eminent architects, medical doctors, educators, lawyers, journalists, and entertainers practice their professions in the city and it is rare that international figures get beyond it. It is admitted to be the only place to live and work, if one hopes to be in the stream of things. The new industrial complex has grown up chiefly in the city. It is the prime locus of organized labor. In brief, it is the capital of everything.

As the primate city, it is the symbol and matrix of nationality. It conveys to all a sense of national unity, it is the well-spring of the national language and is the one place in the country which, sooner or later, gets visited by all mobile Filipinos.

At the same time it is distinctively cosmopolitan. To put it another way, it is not wholly Asian. It employs an international tongue in its press, its education, its business and even in the conduct of its government. The westerner feels at home in the primate city, where familiar trade-marks and products are ubiquitous. The foreign embassies are concentrated in Manila. The diplomatic corps takes an active part in the social life of the city and contributes to its international tone. It is cosmopolitan in its style and dress, its music, its architecture, its medicine, its hotels and shops, even in its household appliances. This is not unexpected. Foreign trade first and later industrialization speeded the tempo and enlarged the scope of urbanization. Modern urban life is not oriental in origin but has spread by diffusion from the rest of the world. Therefore the big city is not substantially Asiatic in tone or aspect, whether one regards its skyline or traffic, its police or municipal organization. All

of its leading people have traveled abroad and very many have gone to school or continued their training in Europe and North America.

II

The heart of the matter is this. Economic development is in proportion to the success and extent of urbanization. Not that economic development occurs only in cities; it must take place on the land, too. But businesslike farms are run by city-people, not by rustics. The strength and weakness of the entire economy are bound up with the quality of the performance of the business and professional and political élite who function in the city. The city sets the pace. The fortunes of all go upward or downward dependent upon city-leadership. This happens to be true even in bigger and more advanced countries: the commanding influence of Tokyo, London and Paris. It is bound to be true when a country has all its vital functions governed, as it were, from one nerve-center.

One of the facts of economic life in the Philippines is that vigorous businessmen, capital for financing, new ideas and the daring to try them are not spread around evenly but are concentrated in the primate city. There are understandable reasons for this. Rarely can one business survive all by itself. An industrial plant, for example, needs power and a system of transport to and from the plant of both things and people. Ordinarily it is beyond the resources of the single enterprise to provide all these infrastructural features for itself. An industrial complex, on the other hand, justifies them and strengthens them. The enterprises fortify each other. Expenditure on social overhead—including schools, health-facilities and police as well as power and communications—does not increase in direct proportion with the number of users. Consequently, one finds a congregation of varied enterprises in the primate city, where power is dependable and relatively cheap and where basic transportation facilities have grown up to serve their market. What has taken place in the advanced countries — the diffusion of industry and with it of urbanization — this young country is not yet ripe for. There is not yet place for many clusters of factories and of people to serve them. Consequently, they are bunched in Manila and people are drawn in from all over to staff them.

The primate city, while a force for growth, also tends to devitalize the rest of the country by draining out of the provinces the most ambitious, creative and inventive young men and women along with the restless and reckless. Opportunities in the provinces are few for brains and energies which are above average. The best chances and the most numerous are offered in Manila, where the action is and where there are more openings for able people than there are people capable of filling them. Hence there comes about a continuing exodus

of the better talents from all over towards the center. The immediate effect of this movement is to lower the level of ability and character remaining at home. It is a familiar observation that the primate city leaves the rest of the country in its wake. Notice that what takes place is more than a brain-drain; it is a drain of the energetic, of those of stronger confidence and determination. The result is immediately bad for the province, good for the city.

Yet this is inevitable; thus occurs progress. In time and where development succeeds, the whole country is revitalized by the ferment which at first gets seething only in the center, where the eagles have gathered.

It is the primate city, then, which is the single most powerful hindrance to the early diffusion of industry and its stimulating effects throughout the land. It is well known that certain industries do indeed operate of necessity outside the big city: sugar milling, cement, mining, the canning of pineapple, the processing of coconut oil and of dessicated coconut. Also, where there is offered the combination of cheap, dependable power and adequate transportation — say, by water — there some plants will be located. One thinks of Iligan and of the sites of the petroleum refineries. But such locales remain backwaters; life is dull, schools and hospitals inferior, good men hard to keep.

Thus it is that one finds only in the big city a relatively versatile labor force trained by schooling and experience for office and factory work. Here also is found the most promising market, both business to business and to a public whose incomes are far above the poor country's dead level. With this goes that urbane style of living not matched elsewhere, which set the social tone for the whole. Gathered together within the limits of the one city are all those who can afford the good life at which scandal is sometimes taken: the mansions, the air-conditioned automobiles and the occasional conspicuous display of luxury, which are, truth to tell, the open or secret envy of all.

The city is the stage whereon the scene changes as it does not in the sleepy barrio. Its contrasts with small-town life are sharp. It embraces larger numbers of people, of marked diversity of occupations, including a literate, articulate group, living in close contact with each other. All the élites are urban—intellectual, artistic, religious and political. They have been shaped by the city and have shaped it, creating an urbane ambiance of give and take. The flocking together of people in the city has maximized communication and has eased the exchange of ideas and attitudes as well as of goods and services. The city has been the carrier of civilization and progress all through history. Its superiority over the hinterland is epitomized in the adjectives urbane and rustic, and in qualities like style, elegance,

and verve. One thinks of obvious things first: a paved street, piped running water, electricity for its myriad uses, a garden, anything worthy of the name Architecture, or Boulevard, or Theater, or Cafe. Country-life in backward lands is dull and stupefying, nasty and brutish, the plaza of its municipio a squalid, malodorous marketplace, shabby with mud or dust. By contrast the big city appears bright, quickening, alert, exciting. This is not an illusion. Manila has drawn together men and women of widely varying backgrounds—Europeans, Americans, Japanese, Chinese — who would not be here at all unless they were a cut more daring than the average stay-at-home; and it contains the cream of the Filipinos. The city has indeed a unique ambiance. It is in its way, if not a melting-pot, surely a pot that boils: for business, of course, but also for learning, for the arts, and for public administration. Incidentally, anent the civilizing power of the city, it is unthinkable that the Filipinos whom the Spaniards encountered could run the contemporary Republic of the Philippines or the city of Manila. Yet they learned, and the city was the school in which they were trained. The city which the Spaniards fostered in this colony became the focus of the anti-colonial and independence movement. The westernized class — del Pilar, Mabini, Rizal and the others educated after the European manner — did most to foment rebellion and to demand home-rule. The city had taught them and those who succeeded them — Quezon, Osmeña, Recto — not only to want independence but also the skills sufficient to achieve it. Urbanity is anything but a decadent, abnormal way of life.

A middle class first begins to grow visible in the big city. More than that, there are some little signs that it actually grows faster than population. This is a desirable evolution. For one thing, in rural areas there is little in the middle socially. A family is either of the gentry — even the lesser gentry — or it is not. Yet, move the same individuals into the larger arena of the city and they show up in the middle class. For another, with the succession of generations the legitimate descendants of quondam lordly landholders feed the middle class, as do their natural children, too, — many of whom are well-schooled as well as well-bred. These get jobs and work for a salary. They are no longer patricians. One can observe that the middle class is being fed from the top. It is also fed from the bottom, thanks chiefly to education. There is considerable social mobility in the Philippines and it is two-way.

III

Certain traits have to be added to the notion of City to specify the Industrial City. The big city as we know it is the acknowledged offspring of technical and managerial innovation: in the factory, the office, in power, in transportation and communication, in tools,

energy, know-how and organization. It takes for granted a substantial surplus in agriculture upon which it feeds and clothes its citizens in return for the myriad services they render and the goods they produce. It depends, too, upon cheap and efficient means for rapidly moving bulky items and people over long distances. And it requires a modern net of communications.

It is hard to imagine the change which has taken place in Manila in the course of this present century, while it was making the transition from being a pre-industrial city to what it is now. Hardly a man is now alive who remembers. There is the change in sheer numbers; in the scope of its enterprises, drawing upon the resources of a wider hinterland, serving a broader market, spreading its effects far beyond this country's frontiers, open to world influence. There is the change in the very appearance of its avenues and buildings, in its use of money and of financial services, in the dazzling variety of goods and books and musical discs displayed in its shops and bazaars. There are also the smog, the jammed traffic, the crowds, the shanty-towns and the crime.

The scale of the business firm has been enlarged beyond the sole proprietor or the single family's capital. The employment of women outside the home has been broadened. The little man was taught to read and write. A changing system of social values places greater stress upon personal achievement, sharpening the competitive spirit. The big city is a wide field opening up a breadth of choices and cutting the former *provinciano* somewhat free from traditional restraints.

Because the primate city is what it is, it attracts to itself a steady stream of hopefuls from all the provinces of the land. Some are drawn; others are driven. The pull is the prospect of a more stimulating and rewarding life; the push is the poor and unpromising way of life on the farm. Those attracted are mostly young adults, married and unmarried, and students, both boys and girls. Enrollments in schools in Manila are growing by ten percent a year, some three times the current rate of growth of population in the country generally. Many of these students, if they make the grade, stay in Manila. Those driven to the city out of despair contribute to the problems which at times threaten to disorganize the primate city: crowded slums, shanty-towns of squatters, extraordinary unemployment, delinquency and crime.

IV

The process of modernizing a new nation can be described as that of spreading something of the quality and culture of the country's urbane elite — the numerically slender top-class — over the mass. Distinctive of this leading class, to put it mistily, is its outlook on life;

specifically, its rationality, drive, ambition; its readiness to take the risks of trying something new; its openness to change and its capacity for extended, taxing work. The elite is at this moment concentrated predominantly in the primate city, although smaller samples are to be found in other lively towns. Progress comes through their increase and spread.

The city itself is the prime milieu for training its children in the lifeways of the modern world. First, with every year that passes it embraces a larger and larger fraction of them. It is guessed that Greater Manila is growing at a rate in advance of five percent a year; the 1970 census may well reveal a higher rate of growth. The metropolitan area — not so easy to delimit — already contains about ten percent of the country's population. The percentage is destined to grow bigger. Second, there is diffusion of feedback. There are many superficial manifestations of the modernizing influence of the big city on the *consumption* of common people throughout the archipelago, notably their dress, tastes, housing appliances and forms of recreation. It also shows up in the widespread desire for schooling as the key to a better life. The influences on the side of *production* are not nearly so apparent. The observer cannot fail to see the spread of the use of money and the appreciation of its purchasing power. Not so readily detected in rural areas is any increase in the effort to get more money by producing more, working harder and using up-to-date methods of production.

The fact is that modernization proceeds unevenly; the modernization of consumption leads decisively, the modernization of production lags. The first is easy to bring about nor is any mystery attached to the question how consumers' preferences are modernized. The big city, though a kind of island of urbanity, is by no means insulated from the rest of the country. Its children are to be found throughout the provinces: returned students, teachers, clergymen and nuns, medical personnel, lawyers, social workers, judges, and local officials. These carry their city-ways with them and give, as it were, a demonstration to their country-cousins. These latter, in turn, visit the big city and see for themselves the changing style of life. Altering consumption has been described as a simple "demonstration-effect."

To bring about change in the methods of production is a much less swift process, hard and puzzling. It is clearly not a demonstration-effect. Part of the importance of the city as a modernizer lies in this: the work force is organized in enterprises of larger scale under modern management. A pace is set in the factory or the office which the workers pick up and run with. They are carried along by the system. It is not theirs to choose whether to adopt the new, faster rhythm; it gathers them up and carries them along. They must be at work at a set hour; they must work the full day and the full month; they

themselves must be on hand — they may not send their cousins; and they must meet certain standards of efficiency. A change in the rhythm of work and the method of production is built into the organization.

Things are different in rural areas. Most workers are actually self-employed: in rural areas perhaps as many as seventy percent, on small farms whether as owners or tenants, in small shops, and in small-scale cottage-industry. They are little managers and pace-setters unto themselves, millions of them. One might think that the core of the problem is how to convert them to the new ways; it is certainly not enough just to show them, to give them a demonstration. But the problem is not how to convert them but rather how to eliminate them as managers. The task of modernization is hopeless as long as there remain so many undirected, resourceless, unventuresome, barely surviving managers of small producing-units throughout the country.

What is called for is a reduction in the proportion of the work-force engaged in the small-scale production of raw goods and a corresponding increase in the proportion of workers employed in larger-scale manufacturing and tertiary lines under efficient management. This is the classical pattern of the industrial revolution. It knows no exceptions. It is not happening here because of two fundamental faults of this society: a too rapid increase in the numbers of people looking for jobs and a too slow growth of job-creating investment.

Tendentiously, one might describe the Philippines as suffering from over-urbanization and under-industrialization. It is a trickier, somewhat misleading way of saying that many have flocked into the big city who have been unable to find factory or office work here. These have actually not been caught up in the process of modernization, which involves both urbanization and industrialization. They remain rustics-in-the-city. The city has been able neither to employ them nor absorb them. To put it the other way around, they overtax the city and its basic facilities and threaten to disorganize it: housing, schooling, transportation, water, health, sanitation and police. Rapid population growth within and migration from without greatly outrun the city's capacity to provide essential services — first of all jobs.

Bad as may be current conditions in metropolitan Manila, they promise to grow worse. The big city now contains but ten percent of all Filipinos; Mexico city holds 15% of the Mexicans; Buenos Aires 35% of Argentina's population; and Montevideo a full 50% of the Uruguayans.

Somewhat apologetic for not being able to offer fresh light and hope, the social scientist sets down the major premise that population growth must be controlled and job-creating investment must be multiplied in the city and throughout the land. One safe conclusion to draw from that premise is that our children's lot will not be happy.