

STATEMENT TO THE COLLEGIAN

(regarding the letter of May 26th, protesting against
the holding of the UP College of Law Recognition Day
ceremonies at the Meralco Theatre

My letter of May 26th, addressed to the UP Law Class of '83, protesting against the holding of the Recognition Day ceremonies at the Meralco Theatre, was not aimed at the prohibition imposed against the celebration this year of the traditional college graduation exercises. As a matter of fact, when I wrote my letter, I was not even aware of this prohibition. Rather, what I was protesting against was a rumor, which was widely circulating at that time, to the effect that this year's University commencement exercises, which will also serve as President Angara's investiture ceremonies, would be held not on campus but at the PICC.

The reason why I thought this rumored change of venue for both activities was particularly objectionable was because it was being justified on the ground that such a change is required by the security needs of the First Family. As you know, among this year's candidates for the LLB degree is Mrs. Imee Marcos Manotoc, and it is expected that the First Family will be in full attendance at the commencement exercises.

At the outset, let me state that I too recognize that the safety and security of the First Family -- especially the safety and security of the President -- is a legitimate and a reasonable concern of everyone. Nevertheless,

many people think -- and I am one of them -- that the holding of the both activities not on campus but at the PICC was distasteful for it would create the impression (or if you will, the misimpression) that the commencement exercises and the investiture ceremonies are being transformed into a rite of obsequiousness by the University to the New Society.

Lest I be misunderstood, let me say at once that I do not advocate a policy of hostility or confrontation between the University and the Government. For a tax-supported institution like the UP, such a stance is plainly absurd and indefensible. In fact, even if the UP were not a state-supported university, it would still be bound, I believe, by a duty to be serviceable to the State. But, at the same time, even as a state-supported university, I submit that the UP is equally bound by an obligation to avoid being servile to the State, the Government or the community at large. Moreover, like Caesar's wife, the UP must also avoid even the mere suspicion of servility.

The reason for this is as follows: during these difficult and troubled times, as the nation makes its slow, uncertain and perilous passage towards normalcy, the country needs a credible spokesman for purposes which transcend merely partisan, factional, sectoral or special interests. Among the few institutions which can serve as such a spokesman is precisely a free and independent university, in other words, a university that answers, and is perceived to answer, only to the "dictates of a conscien-

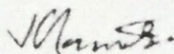
tious intellect." Indeed, among the causes which could seriously compromise and rapidly erode the university's credibility is precisely the urge to serve the State or the Government.

In this connection, it is worth remarking -- as President Brewster of Yale once noted -- that "(i)n some countries all universities are instruments of political power. But it is touching that even for (such universities) the compulsion of self-respect urges obeisance to the international republic of science and of letters." It may be, Brewster adds, that such gestures of obeisance are actually "more form than fact." But, he stresses, even mere "pride in the observance of form is not without its educative power."

Accordingly, if the UP is to preserve its credibility as the spokesman of human purposes which transcend partisan, factional, special -- or even national -- interests, it must assert and proclaim its independence constantly, firmly and with zest, and at times, also with courage.

The University must be serviceable, but it must never be servile.

Diliman, Quezon City, 15 June 1983


JOSE C. LAURETA
Professorial Lecturer
College of Law, UP