

THE ORIGIN OF THE PHILIPPINE POLITICAL ELITE

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THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT had no knowledge at all about conditions in the Philippines awarded to it by the Treaty of Paris (10 December 1898) at the end of the Hispano-American conflict. President McKinley had instructed his delegates to the peace conference in Paris to ask for the entire Philippine archipelago, but he had no clear policy what to do with it. At the suggestion of Commodore Dewey, idling in Manila after coolly destroyed the decrepit Spanish fleet of Cavite on 1 May 1898, the President formed a commission to investigate conditions in the new colony, and named Jacob G. Schurman, president of Cornell University, to head it. From their reports the President hoped to formulate a program for the new colony. In due time, the Commission submitted its report after a few months in the Philippines, and the following year, 1900, William H. Taft was named head of a second Commission to implement the suggestions of the first.

Because Schurman and his colleagues arrived in Manila shortly after hostilities between the Americans and the Filipinos had broken out, they had to look into the causes of the conflict and see how to bring about peace. The Commission invited people to provide information, assuring them of the benefits of a “wise and generous protection of life and property” the American government would give the Filipinos.¹

In due time, the Commission reported to Washington that Manila was reeling under a “reign of terror.” Fires were a daily occurrence, the city was half-deserted, streets were empty, rifle shots were frequent, and “some of the best in the city” who befriended the Americans either mysteriously disappeared or received threats. But, the Commission reported, except where emissaries of the rebel leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, had done, the people were peaceful and not hostile. It was not surprising that the Commission should conclude that the anti-American feeling was merely a “Tagalog rebellion” brought about by the “ambition of a few and the misunderstanding of many.” The report continued: “[Aguinaldo’s government] served only for plunderizing the people under the pretext of levying ‘war contributions,’ while many of the insurgent officials were rapidly accumulating wealth.”²

¹ Schurman report in *Reports of the Philippine Commission*, I, p.185.

² *Ibid.*, I, p.97-123, 176. See also, for the various testimonies, the second volume of the *Report*.

This was a serious charge, but what had happened? Out of fear of retaliation, only a few people bravely volunteered information. Some of the informants were foreign businessmen residing in Manila, others were the educated elite, or the Filipino *ilustrados* who soon concluded that peace with the Americans was the better alternative to a bloody fight. And so, perhaps without intending to, they served as spokesmen for the rest of the country.³

At the time, the Filipinos could be classified into three groups: (1) the *ilustrado* elite and property owners who wanted peace, considering the futility of armed resistance, which, in 13 months of fighting since the revolution against Spain had killed 34,714 Filipinos, besides 572 recently killed Americans; (2) the middle class - teachers, clerks, writers, and government employees who urged continued resistance because they believed they were capable of self-rule and did not want a second colonial master; and (3) the majority of poor, property-less, landless, apathetic to public issues unless they affected them personally.

The question, however, is whether or not a few months' investigation of Philippine conditions sufficed for a comprehensive view. Did the Schurman report, partly based on the *ilustrado* perspective, faithfully mirror the reality of the country? On the strength of this report, however, McKinley appointed William H. Taft to head a second Commission to implement the program Schurman had suggested.⁴

The Taft Commission arrived in June 1900 and assumed legislative powers the following September, ending the military government installed immediately on the arrival of the American occupation forces for the duration of the Philippine-American conflict.⁵ As with the Schurman Commission, only the *ilustrados* cooperated and provided needed information. The rest Taft described in a report as people, despite their defects and weakness, capable of development and growth, better than other people in a similar condition.⁶ How fairly Taft had assessed the Philippine situation may be questioned, but he governed the Philippines through the eyes of the elite who had his ear.

In places where peace had returned, the Americans established a civil government, following a plan Col. William A. Kolbe had drawn up, which the Taft Commission later superseded with the Municipal Code passed in January 1907.⁷ In 1903, the first local elections were held for town presidents, vice-presidents, and members of the town councils. However, suffrage was limited to prospective voters who had the necessary qualifications: (1) literacy in either English or Spanish; (2) previous experience in government service; and (3) a minimum amount of assets. Intended or not, this limited voting privileges to only 2.44% of the population, namely, the

³ Ibid., I, "Exhibit VI," p.216-28.

⁴ Actually, this program was based on suggestions from the elite, people like Trinidad Hermenegildo Pardo de Tavera, who later founded the first Philippine political party aimed at union with the United States.

⁵ Bonifacio S. SALAMANCA, *The Filipino Reaction...*, p.25-8.

⁶ *Census of the Philippine Islands*, I, p.529-31.

⁷ Glenn A. MAY, *Social Engineering in the Philippines...*, Chapter 3, but especially p.44-9.

educated and wealthy elite, and, therefore, local administration, was effectively controlled by the privileged sectors of local society. At the same time, of course, government action in the towns would have been impossible without these small groups of individuals who had experience in governance.

In due time, the town oligarchy monopolized local political power. For example, from 1904 to 1912, a period of nine successive years, the town presidents in Taal, Batangas, were the same individuals who had been members of the past *principalía*. From 1904 to 1919 in Pampanga, 13 out of 20 town presidents were former local *capitanes* or *gobernadorcillos*, or their relatives. Political dynasties were clearly forming under the new American democracy in the Philippines.

The effects were neither surprising nor unexpected. Abuse of authority was not rare, town presidents became petty dictators, fees were charged for government services supposedly free. Apparently, more than three centuries under Spanish rule had not weaned the people from the pre-Hispanic tradition of subservience to *datus*. Add to this the traditional *utang na loob* (literally, “debt of affection”), which demands an expression of gratitude – and one can understand what has persisted as today’s *lagay* system.⁸ Not surprisingly, higher budgetary allocations were approved for the salaries of the municipal officials, while neglecting the plight of the school teachers, or basic infrastructure, etc. Local treasury officials were appointed, not by the local town council, but by the provincial governor who was usually an American. Budgetary allocations or amendments needed the signature of the provincial treasurer, also an American.

That these things occurred should not be surprising. More than 300 years of Spanish colonial rule, when government offices were sold, had not prepared the Filipinos for an active role in public administration, in which government service was not for personal gain. The new system was a novelty.

In 1903, 50% of the town elections were reported to be fraudulent and dishonest, while 33% were annulled. The election in Tiwi, Albay serves as an example. Ramón Morales won the town presidential elections over Pantaleón Azcuna, 95 votes to 64. But the Provincial Board annulled these results, because there was clear proof that qualified voters had been barred from casting their votes, while unqualified voters had been allowed to vote.

Two months later, elections were again held, and Morales received 128 votes and Azcuna 119. These results were also nullified for the second time for the same reasons as earlier. After two months, a third election was held, with the same results in Morales’ favor. For the third time, the election results were annulled again for the same reasons.

Incidents like these confirmed the perception of the American decision makers that the Filipinos, by and large, lacked basic moral integrity and were still incapable of self-rule. In reaction, the more articulate Filipinos launched a fervid anti-Amer-

⁸ A financial “gift” from an official staff member for services, like speeding up the renewal of a driver’s license.

ican campaign in the Manila newspapers. Glossing over the real issues, they concentrated instead on the ever popular issue of national independence.

It was about this time that the idea of forming a political party surfaced and, with Taft's approval, a few of the *ilustrados* organized themselves into the *Partido Federalista*, the first political party in the Philippines. Its founders -Trinidad Hermenegildo Pardo de Tavera, Benito Legarda, José de Luzurriaga- believed that peaceful union with the United States was the best program for the Philippines. After a period of economic development of the Archipelago, then they would consider the idea of independence.⁹

This won an immediate reaction from a younger group, who immediately formed their own political party, the *Partido Nacionalista*, with the platform of immediate and absolute independence. Differences among them split the members into smaller factions, but they all aimed at immediate and total independence.

Unfortunately, the dream of political independence overshadowed the more important need for basic economic development, the more sensible way of preparing the nation for independence. The *Nacionalistas*, led by Sergio Osmeña and Manuel L. Quezon, soon became the majority party and won all the national elections until the Japanese invasion. They faced no appreciable opposition, since for the majority of the Filipinos, the clear choice was for self-government, and only secondarily economic and social growth.¹⁰

Today, more than a century after the establishment of the first political parties, thinkers admit the Filipinos had been taken. Political parties are useful only to improve public administration. But what the first political leaders of the Philippines offered the people was not good government, but a change in government. Membership in political parties became the key to personal advancement and personal political power. Public service was neglected.

II

William H. Taft took office as the first Civil Governor of the Philippines on 4 July 1901. Three days earlier, the Cooper Act had provided that two years after peace returned, a national census should be taken, after which national elections for the National Assembly should take place. The National Assembly would act as the lower legislative chamber, the Philippine Commission the upper, while two Resident Commissioners would represent the Philippines before the Washington government.

The Census was taken in 1903, and in the subsequent national elections of 1907, 81 representatives were voted into the Assembly. The non-Christian provinces (the Mountain Province, the Moro Province, Nueva Vizcaya, and Agusan) which had their own special governments, appointed delegates represented them in the Na-

⁹ G. A. MAY, *Social Engineering...*, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ D. LIANG, *Philippine Political Parties and Politics*.

tional Assembly. The Assembly was solemnly inaugurated on 16 November 1907. Osmeña was the Speaker.

Almost all the new Assemblymen came from aristocratic families. They were young, well educated, and idealists. The majority (47) were between 31 and 40 years of age, 9 were 30 years old or younger, and only 10 were older than 50 years of age. 21 (16%) had been officials in the Spanish government, 58 (78%) had served in the Malolos government under Aguinaldo, and 73 (91%) had briefly held offices under the new American system.¹¹

The first Philippine legislature was clearly composed of the country's elite. There were 40 lawyers, 16 physicians, 5 pharmacists, 2 engineers, and 1 priest. Almost to a man, they were the same individuals who had already exercised political leadership one way or another.

There is an explanation for this. Only 1.58% (104,966) of the total Philippine population (7.6 million) were registered voters, and of these only 9.4% (98,251) actually voted. This meant that only 14 out of 1,000 Filipinos participated in the first democratic act of government for his country.

Second, power and prestige in almost all the provinces were based on kinship groups bound by *utang na loob*. Then wealthy were, as a matter of course, expected to dispense favors to the poor, who, in turn, were expected to loyally serve in gratitude the interests of their benefactors. Hence, the qualifications of a candidate were not the prime consideration in the vote; rather, it was nature of the link that held people together which mattered most during the elections.

The National Assembly was, in a sense, Taft's project, to "teach" the Filipinos basic democratic processes. He had expected the new body would act efficiently and honestly. He was badly disillusioned. Two thirds of the assemblymen had been delegates to the earlier Malolos Congress, several of whom were Aguinaldo's appointees, steeped in Spanish legal traditions. It was unrealistic to expect them to change overnight. As a matter of fact, the Americans, who had always held them suspect, kept security profiles of all of them.

After 88 days of the first 90-day session, only 72 bills had been submitted to the upper chamber. To make up for lost time, 64 bills were rushed in the last two days before the session adjourned. Interestingly, one of the first bills introduced for debate was to increase their per diem allowance. They also wanted a bill to exempt their untitled lands from taxation.¹²

Clearly, the new lawmakers had not discarded old attitudes and could not yet see that public service was not for personal gain. Previous to their election as assemblymen, several of them had been asked to resign from government service because of proven malfeasance of public finances.¹³ One of the most notorious was the

¹¹ G. A. MAY, *Social Engineering*..., Appendix A. See also Joseph R. HAYDEN, *The Philippines*..., p.165.

¹² The pre-war elected officials were "driven, as politicians are always driven, to utilize 'government jobs' as political currency." J. R. HAYDEN, *The Philippines*..., p.91.

¹³ G. A. MAY, *Social Engineering*..., Appendix B, Appendix C.

leader of the campaign for immediate political independence of the Philippines.

This naturally convinced the Americans that the Filipinos were not yet ready for self-rule. One of the members of the upper chamber wrote, "I am firmly convinced that in thus giving the Filipinos the benefit of the doubt, we erred, with the result that the Philippine Assembly came at least 10 years too soon. Its creation in 1907 has resulted in imposing a heavy financial burden on the country, for which there has never been no adequate compensation."¹⁴

A modern political scientist observed that the first Philippine legislature served more to bring to the surface the latent hostility between the upper house composed of the American members of the Philippine Commission and the lower house, or the National Assembly.¹⁵

The Commission had hoped to build a new nation according to American democratic principles, but the first elected assemblymen remained Filipinos in temperament, attitudes, and habits of work. The Americans who wanted "efficiency" were forced to tone down several house bills that were redundant, badly worded, repetitious, or in bad legal language. Five bills on education were redrafted into only one, for example. Until 1913, when under Harrison's term the administration was "Filipinized,"¹⁶ such shortcomings were frequent.

As a result, the assemblymen finally relegated to the upper house the difficult task of drawing up a law and choosing the precise terminology to express the law's intent and scope. While the first drafts came from the pens of various department secretaries, the Commission generously gave advice and time and the benefit of their experience. But this generated a feeling "irresponsibility" for the actual process of legislation, which led to a *laissez-faire* national assembly.

For their part, the electorate, themselves tyros in representative government, hardly ever questioned or demanded an accounting from their elected representatives. Hence, no public opinion developed. This partly explains why, up to this day, Filipinos seem to believe that democratic government ends with elections. After the votes have been counted, the electorate lapses into inactivity, expecting their representatives to act "well" on their behalf and carry out their campaign promises.

More importantly, until the inauguration of the Philippine Commonwealth in the fall of 1935, political life and legislative activity centered exclusively in the bewitching issue of immediate and absolute political independence. Measures to develop the economy were conveniently overlooked or hardly emphasized, for the Philippines was lulled into a false security by the easy money generated through the free trade arrangement with the United States, which brought on a deceptive eco-

¹⁴ *Reports of the Philippine Commission (1901)*, I, p.25.

¹⁵ Three Filipinos were co-opted to the Commission, but without voting rights: Trinidad Hermenegildo Pardo de Tavera, Benito Legarda, and José de Luzurriaga.

¹⁶ In 1916, in preparation for Philippine independence, all the government administrative departments were entrusted to Filipino secretaries, except that of the Bureau of Education, who was until the Japanese invasion, an American appointee by the President in Washington, D. C.

nomic progress. For this reason, political platforms were not about how best to govern the country, but about how to *change* the government.

But two Damocles swords were poised over the National Assembly. First, all bills had to receive approval of the Governor General, an American, representing the President of the United States. This put a damper on the freedom to legislate. Second, the Governor and the Americans in the upper chamber were not behold to the Filipino voters, and were indifferent to any negative reaction of the Filipino electorate if a law was objectively good in itself, but was felt to be prejudicial to the latter's interests.

To survive the national elections, the two Nacionalista factions reunited and defeated the rival *Partido Demócrata* (formerly, *Federalista*). The latter gamely tried to continue as the opposition party, but it no longer enjoyed any political influence.

In 1926, the majority party invited the Demócratas to join a "National Supreme Council." The purpose was to strengthen and unify opposition to the American "imperialists," that is, Governor General Leonard Wood and some congressmen who were moving to separate the islands of Mindanao and Sulu from the rest of the Philippines.

This posed a dilemma for the Demócratas. If they refused, they could be called "anti-Filipino"; but if they accepted the invitation, they would no longer be an opposition party. Unfortunately, the Demócratas succumbed, and from then on, there was no real political opposition that could have fiscalized the majority party. No real opposition candidate ever won in an election or threatened the monopoly of the majority *Partido Nacionalista* Quezon clearly led.

Unopposed in their political fortunes, the majority party degenerated into a bunch of politicians inanely squabbling among themselves. No substantial issues were raised before the electorate, and the party became petty, selfish, personalistic. Later, after the war, this self-interest exploded before the public, when a Manila daily, *The Chronicle*, reported in two issues (16, 18 July 1949), the blatant tolerance for corruption in the government, through the Senate President's notorious remark during a party caucus, "What are we in power for?"¹⁷ Had the Pacific War not broken out, one legitimately wonders what the Philippines could have become as a sovereign nation.

In other words, while a few privileged individuals put on political sophistication, Philippine politics never became an instrument for good democratic government. Blinded by the magic word "independence," politicians hardly did anything to promote the country's economic growth, which is the necessary basis for a strong inde-

¹⁷ See *Senate Report No. 528* (Manila, 1949). The story is almost unbelievable, but the senator tried to defend his position by adding, "Why did you have to order an investigation, Honorable Mr. President? If you cannot prevent abuses, you should at least tolerate them. What are we in power for? We are not hypocrites. We are not angels. And besides, when we die we all go to hell. Anyway, it is preferable to go to hell where there is no investigation, no Secretary of Justice, no Secretary of Interior, to go after us. When Jesus died on the cross, He made a distinction between a good crook and the bad crook. We can prepare to be good crooks." The court dismissed the senator from the government.

pendence nation. One could never win an election unless he publicly sponsored his nation's independence.

III

Against his friends' advice not to return to the Philippines with General Douglas MacArthur during the liberation of the Philippines from the Japanese, Sergio Osmeña, who had become President of the Philippine Commonwealth on Quezon's death in 1944, answered that the Filipinos would want to see their President. Unknowingly, the second President of the Philippine Commonwealth was maneuvering himself into an untenable position and, as he soon found out, he would fail to rehabilitate the Philippines ravaged by the recent war.

On 20 October 1944, he waded ashore near Tacloban City with MacArthur, who three days later, installed him President of the war-torn Philippines. Then on 27 February 1945, after the liberation of Manila, MacArthur handed to him Malacañan Palace, the Philippine president's official residence.

Though President, Osmeña had literally nothing with which to govern a nation. He had no office, no desks, no stationery, no secretary, no Cabinet, no funds. At that moment, he had to depend completely on the largesse of the United States Army. But MacArthur, satisfied that he had redeemed his promise to return and liberate the Philippines from the Japanese invaders, left to finish his work in Japan.

To normalize things, MacArthur insisted on convening the pre-war Congress, bending the law to include those members whose terms had ended in 1941. But out of 128 Filipinos legislators, only 83 could come for the sessions. Two Senators and 11 Representatives had died, 7 Senators were out of Manila, and the rest were Osmeña's political enemies. Although there was a quorum, all of the legislators were suspected enemy collaborators during the war. Of these, Manuel A. Roxas was the most important.

In other words, to start the government machinery running, Osmeña had been forced to reinstate known collaborators in the lower offices temporarily. But the rehabilitation of the ruined nation depended on the settlement of the collaboration issue. The American Secretary of State had cabled the Philippine President asking for the effective prosecution of the "timid, craven, opportunistic helots who basely collaborated with the cruel enemy who sought to enslave" the latter's people, or no assistance would be forthcoming.¹⁸ To these officials, their appointment amounted to a total exoneration. The illusion was confirmed when MacArthur announced that "... among those freed is Brig. Gen. Manuel Roxas, former speaker of the National Assembly. Four members (José Yulo, Antonio de las Alas, Quintin Paredes, and Teófilo Sison) of the Philippine Collaborationist Cabinet have been captured. They will be confined for the duration of the war as a matter of military security and turned over to the government of the Philippines for trial and judgment." The United States government had insisted that those who had "collaborated with the

¹⁸ Theodore FRIED, *Between Two Empires...*, p.254.

enemy must be removed from influence and authority.” But who “collaborated” with an enemy?¹⁹

When MacArthur turned over the suspects to the Philippine government for trial, the United States government issued no guiding principles to decide the tricky issue of collaboration. In his speech on “government by law,” Osmeña announced that collaborators were of three kinds: (1) those promoted by a true desire to protect the people; (2) those driven by fear; and (3) the scoundrels and true traitors to their country.²⁰ Hence, collaboration would not be judged by the mere occupation of a government position under the Japanese, but why and how one assumed public office under the enemy. Each case had to be judged individually.²¹

Roxas had been MacArthur’s aide before the war, and was part of the wartime puppet Philippine government, but served as a member of the counter-intelligence net-work in contact with the Allied forces. In 1943, he had refused Quezon’s invitation to go with him to the United States, and he accepted a government post under the Japanese. President Laurel of the puppet Philippine Republic had prevailed on him to accept the position of “Food Czar,” to make sure food supplies continued to be available to the people, instead of being confiscated by the Japanese military units. He was caught trying to escape, and were it not for the intervention of a Japanese soldier who had befriended him, he would have been executed. Was Roxas a collaborator? MacArthur apparently did not think so. Other Filipinos suspected of collaboration could have brought up similar records, but they did not enjoy MacArthur’s close friendship and support.

Interviewed by the American Presidential Survey Commission to check the Philippine post-war situation, MacArthur was supposed to have said he wanted a highly “efficient” civil government to normalize the Philippines. Quezon had died, he added, but he found it impossible to work with Osmeña. Roxas, however, was to him a capable man. To legitimize him as the country’s new leader, there had to be presidential elections.

At a time when every effort should have been directed at rebuilding the ruined nation, raising food, building houses and roads, creating jobs, etc., MacArthur, who held the reins of power in the newly freed Philippines, wanted the Filipinos to engage in the political game of electing a president. Osmeña’s term still had a few years to go, but MacArthur wanted a new president. The same week, Roxas announced his candidacy against Osmeña.

All the odds were piled against the latter. He had to leave the country to appeal for help in the United States to rehabilitate his country, while Roxas remained in

¹⁹ The country urgently needed rehabilitation funds, but U.S. Secretary of State Harold Ickes warned Osmeña that, unless the collaborators were brought to justice, no funds were forthcoming. See note 18 above.

²⁰ Hernando J. ABAYA, *Betrayal in the Philippines*, p.93.

²¹ Osmeña hoped to set up a court composed of former judges of the courts of first instance, whose reputation clearly could never be sullied by even a hint of having been a collaborator, with non-collaborationists prosecutors. As expected, the Philippine Congress, many of whom were suspects, opposed the plan. See H. J. ABAYA, *Betrayal...*, p.111.

the Philippines to work for his election, with MacArthur allowing him the use of military transportation and means of communication for his electoral campaign. And because in order to counter the clear advantages Roxas enjoyed. Osmeña was forced to win the support of the leftists and the Communist sympathizers, the press was merciless against him. On 28 May 1946, Roxas was elected the third President of the Philippine Commonwealth.

Less than two months later, on 4 July 1946, the Philippines received political independence from the United States, and Roxas became the first president of an independent Philippines. When he died of a heart attack on 15 April 1948, he left behind a still devastated nation, with an unresolved problem of collaboration and a real danger of a Communist take-over. In the meantime, running the government were many suspected collaborators.²²

By 1946, two years after the end of the war, only 91 out of 5,600 collaboration cases had been tried, and the guilty appealed their sentences. Prosecution was never easy. The courts were bogged down on procedural debates. The American tradition of “two-witnesses-to-an-overt-act” was followed by the American Counter-Intelligence Corps, but it was unsuited for the Philippines, where no two witnesses could be found easily.

It took time before the court decided that documents seized by the U.S. Army were valid as evidence, and finally in war-shattered Philippines, it was clearly impossible for 15 judges in 5 salas to try 5,600 cases in six months.²³

Teófilo Sison’s case can be a good example. He was convicted of treason and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a fine of Ph P1,500. The sentence emphasized that there was nothing to mitigate his guilt, despite his defense that he was merely following Quezon’s directives. The prosecution demolished his argument, when it stated that either such instructions had not been given, or they could not have been intended by Quezon as the defendant interpreted them. For, according to the court, “loyalty is not merely verbal ... to be true and believed [it] must be active and demonstrative, not passive and indifferent.”²⁴

Among the most prominent of the accused was José B. Laurel, the puppet President under the Japanese. But prosecuting him and others like him was clearly impossible.

²² On 7 November 1945, jurisdiction over the collaboration issue was transferred from the Counter-Intelligence Corps of the Armed Forces in the Western Pacific (AFWESPAC) to the Philippine government, on the pretext of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the Philippine Commonwealth.

²³ Six months were clearly not enough time. Money, too, was inadequate and paid for only 25 prisoners’ cases. Each prosecution had six months to prepare approximately 255 cases, with each prosecutor working six days a week, and could cover only nine cases within this time. Besides, since transportation and communication were paralyzed and records had been lost or destroyed, it was clearly an impossible task the lawyers had to finish. Actual trials would necessarily drag on for decades if there were only five courts with three judges sitting on each case. See David J. STEINBERG, *Philippine Collaboration...*, p.127.

²⁴ Sison was charged with 26 counts of treason, José B. Laurel, former puppet President of the Japanese-sponsored Philippine Republic, with 111 counts, and Jorge B. Vargas, former Commonwealth Secretary, with 116.

Before Roxas' installation as President, no bail was allowed the suspects. Once he was in office, however, he changed his mind and granted bail to everyone under arrest. And watering down the norms of judgment, the courts declared that enemy "duress" under the circumstances of war could be altered to mean "modifying circumstances," and considered a mitigating factor of guilt, and "treason" became "faintheartedness."

President Truman of the United States refused to have the collaboration cases tried by a U.S. court, thereby abandoning the Roosevelt war-time policy. Though perhaps influenced by the increasing tension of the Cold War, this weakened the case against collaborators, despite Sison's conviction.

As a result, known collaborators escaped conviction. When the Philippines became an independent republic in 1946, only 9 cases were on the docket, and convictions were all appealed. Mathematically, only 0.6% of the political leaders of the puppet republic under Japan were convicted (156 out of 5,600).

In January 1948, a few months before he died, President Roxas issued his universal "Amnesty Proclamation." Alleged acts of collaboration, it declared, had been either involuntary or sincerely seen as a patriotic duty. Besides, the issue of collaboration tended to divide the nation at a time when unity and full cooperation from everybody was needed. Roxas believed that the people wanted the problem settled once and for all through a presidential amnesty.²⁵ In other words, it was declared that there had been no collaborators after all! More importantly, the suspects were back in power and in control of the government.

But several questions begged for an answer. What about moral integrity? Sincerity? Was there such a thing as loyalty to one's word? Do words pronounced in a public oath on assumption of public office have any meaning at all?

Those who had been loudest in proclaiming their allegiance to the Philippine flag were the same ones who had fallen under suspicion of having collaborated with the enemy. Allegedly they had broken their oaths, but on the surface, the nation was none the worse for it. In fact, with universal amnesty, the nation had again the personnel, regardless of moral qualifications, to turn its administrative wheels.

Was the Philippines a nation of law and order, or not? Was collaboration with an enemy bent on destroying the nation a serious crime or not? What were the values held dear by the Filipino leaders?

An historian observed that corruption is an abstraction isolated from social or political reality, part of the fabric of each society. Societies determine for themselves what constitutes a transgression of their own norms.

These truths, unfortunately, seemed not to have left any impression on the leaders of the Philippines immediately after the war. The question, actually, is whether

²⁵ The important part of the proclamation reads: "Whereas, these trials have been held for more than 2 years but no final judgments convicting anyone of the accused have been rendered; Whereas, the Supreme Court has declared that the mere holding of a position in government established by the enemy does not per se constitute the crime of treason under the laws of the Philippines." See *Official Gazette*, XLIV (February 1948), p.408-11.

or not the leaders of the Philippines at the time merited, or were capable of discharging their responsibilities. And, would public opinion in a supposedly democratic republic like the Philippines have changed or helped solve the problem of political elitism?

The contemporary story of the Philippines, which has been tarnished by the career of a man like Ferdinand E. Marcos, who kept himself in power for two decades by altering the fundamental law of the land, calls for serious examination of the country's reality.

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