

## CHAPTER XV

### "PEACEFUL REVOLUTION" IN THE PHILIPPINES

On February 22, 1926, the newly formed Supreme National Council, dedicated to the cause of Philippine independence, gave the first public demonstration of its power. The day was deliberately chosen because of its association with George Washington and his record as the leader of a people striving against alien domination. On that "National Prayer Day" Filipinos throughout the length and breadth of the archipelago were asked by their own leaders to gather round the clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, and pray to "Almighty God, the Father of all Nations," for complete political separation from the United States. In hundreds of thousands, on all the sizable islands from Luzon to Mindanao, they did so.

A paragraph of the prayer, recited with equal fervor by American-educated professional men and barefooted rural children, is worthy of remembrance by all who would visualize the first really serious colonial problem which imperialistic America has been called upon to face. It ran:

We entreat Thee, O most Gracious Father, stay Thou the hand that would smite our liberties. Send forth Thy Spirit unto our rulers across the sea and so touch their hearts and quicken their sense of justice that they may in honor keep their plighted word to us. Let not the covetous designs of a few interests prevail in the councils of the sovereign nation nor sway its noble purposes toward our country.

There was contained in that prayer all the dignity, the piety, and the aspiration of a people who, whatever their shortcomings, are gentle, kindly, and lovable beyond most in this world. The wave of irritation which swept the Filipinos of Manila when an American paper there ridiculed their method of political protest was something unpleasant to witness. It made one realize the significance of statements made by old residents in the islands: that a definitely hostile attitude is replacing the friendliness and admiration in which Americans were once quite widely held.

On the same day, February 22, there was focussed on the Luneta, in Manila, where the Day of Prayer ceremonies centered spiritually if not numerically, a formidable American military parade in honor of Major-General James H. McRae, then about to end his term of service as Commanding General of the Philippine Department. By eleventh-hour negotiation the gathering of the thousands who sought spiritual fortification for the independence campaign, and the gathering of those prepared to resist rebellion with machine guns were held at different times on the same holiday. But just as Governor-General Wood thought that it was "damned impertinence" for the Filipinos to choose Washington's birthday for their demonstration, so Senate President Quezon thought it "the tactics of a bully" to overawe the quiet native demonstration with military might. And there again is represented the racial hostility which grows apace in the islands under the present tension.

Two days later, on February 24, I boarded the little coasting steamer *Cebu* for a week's trip through the Philippine Archipelago with the more prominent members of the Supreme National Council. It was the first propaganda trip of this body since, in January of 1926, it was created by a coalition of the two political parties in the islands with the express purpose of bringing the

independence issue to a showdown. And on this journey it was impossible not to realize the real tragedy of the Philippine problem, which is the way in which the native leaders are being forced to campaign for an end (independence), which many of them do not really want, because of the accumulating evidence that the United States seeks to deprive them of the degree of autonomy so far obtained. It is a natural bargaining process to ask for more than you expect in order to secure the golden mean. The danger in this case is that the Filipino people are being very successfully stirred up in behalf of complete independence at just the time when the President of the United States is publicly favoring measures designed to curtail native self-government.

As a means of solidifying and crystallizing Filipino public opinion in behalf of complete self-government, the scheme on which the Supreme National Council is working has pronounced theoretical impressiveness. It involves three objectives, each of them noteworthy in itself: *first*, the attraction of Filipinos of prominence in all walks of life to the independence campaign, involving the seeming subordination of the *politico* element which has heretofore been overprominent; *second*, the decentralization of the campaign, so that the provinces, where American influence is little felt, may take a controlling part heretofore reserved for Manila; and *third*, an attempt at gradual and peaceful usurpation of the executive power legally vested in the American Governor-General. In short the program is distinctly, though quietly, revolutionary.

At the center of the new independence drive is the Supreme National Council itself, composed of ten members of whom at least eight must be elected members of the Legislature. These eight, half from the Nacionalista and half from the Demócrata party, are virtually *ex officio* appointees, so that the general direction of

the campaign is vested in the hands of those who have been most prominent in the political development of Philippine autonomy. The eight men in question are the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House (Quezon and Roxas); the majority leaders in both houses (Osmeña and Aquino); the minority leaders in both houses (Tirona and Recto); and another outstanding minority member from each of the two branches of the Legislature (Sumulong and Avelino). The two remaining members are designated respectively by the national committees of the two parties.

Directly under the Supreme Council is the National Solidarity Central Committee, composed of all the elected Senators and Representatives and all the elected provincial Governors. Thus the legislators from the non-Christian provinces, appointed by Governor-General Wood, are automatically excluded. This is not the only instance in which a sort of stigma is made to attach to those Filipinos who show wholehearted cooperation with Americans in the government of the islands. The Central Committee is a sort of general policies body, designed to give coherent direction to the progress of the independence campaign in the provinces. As the Nacionalistas have twice the representation of the minority party in both House and Senate, and also count a healthy majority among the elected Governors, this body is comfortably controlled by those who are most radical on the independence issue.

Under the Central Committee have been established, in all provinces except the few where Governors are appointed by the American Governor-General, organizations known as National Solidarity Provincial Committees. It is their function to work up independence sentiment, and to further economic measures looking to that end, throughout the length and breadth of the Philippine Islands. Here the effort to attract substantial

Filipinos not previously active in the independence campaign is stressed. Each Provincial Committee is composed of (1) the Governor and members of his Provincial Board, or *junta*; (2) the Municipal Presidents (mayors) of incorporated towns in the province; and (3) a quota of prominent citizens equal in number to (2), half of them selected by the provincial organization of each political party. Under each Provincial Committee in turn come the National Solidarity Municipal Committees, planned on a similar division of political and business leadership. Their initiation, in towns touched en route, was part of the program of the Supreme Council's trip which I accompanied as an interested observer. And behind the Municipal Committees are to be established, in theory at least, *Barrio* or township committees designed to give the smallest hamlets opportunity to participate in the campaign for political freedom.

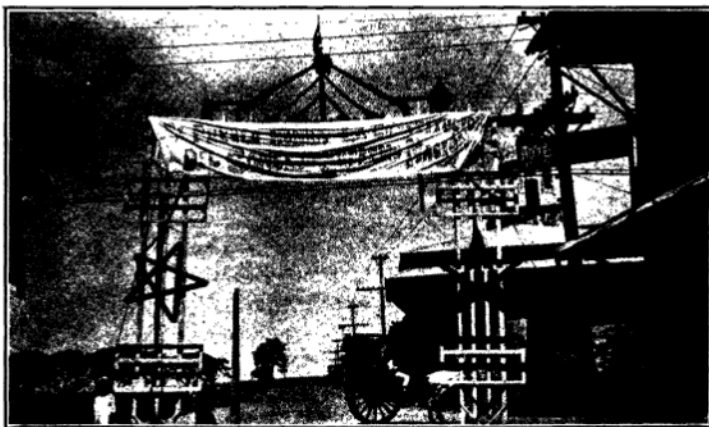
In addition to this comprehensive organization for stimulating public opinion on the independence issue the Supreme Council possesses a formidable executive arm in its National Advisory Committee. This board of twenty-five members, all of whom are business or professional men of a type not heretofore actively identified with politics, is now well organized in Manila. And it is beginning to engage in schemes of national development altogether without legal sanction under the powers of government granted to the Filipinos by the United States Congress. Here is another example of what Speaker Manuel Roxas calls the "peaceful revolution" now started in the Philippines.

The root issue in the Philippine problem is not independence. As has been stated, the intensification of native propaganda for that nominal objective is due primarily to the intensification of American propaganda aiming at a closer incorporation of the islands under our dominion. What the Filipino leaders are really



#### A PRAYER FOR INDEPENDENCE

The population of Talisay, as in hundreds of other Filipino towns and villages, turns out on Washington's birthday to ask fulfillment of America's pledges.



#### LOYALTY TO THEIR OWN

In Bacolod, on Negros Island, "the people honor the Constitution of the Supreme National Council," which seeks to force the issue on Philippine independence.





seeking and what, by fair means or foul one might almost say, they are determined to get, is control of the executive power so far as purely domestic policy is concerned.

As long as the American Governor-General can veto not merely complete legislative measures, but even specific items in the annual appropriation bills, and as long as he can treat the department heads as minor bureaucrats responsible to him rather than to the Legislature, the power which the latter body appears to possess is unreal. The entire trend of Filipino political thinking in recent years has been in the direction of supplanting the American executive with one amenable to the control of the Legislature. The effort, at the risk of repetition, is towards substitution of the British system of an executive deriving all his powers from the support of Parliament, and away from the American system of divided executive and legislative authority. We may point to Filipino shortcomings. We may argue that they are unfitted for self-government. But we cannot deny that the division-of-powers idea works none too well under the most favorable conditions in the United States; and can scarcely be expected to function smoothly where the executive is appointed by the dominant race and the legislature elected by the subjects. So far as efficiency in government goes an outright alien dictatorship would admittedly be preferable in theory.

The underlying function of the National Advisory Committee of the Supreme Council, it may now be said, is quietly to arrogate executive power into Filipino hands in a way which will be exceedingly difficult to counter without seeming to put the American Governor-General in an openly tyrannical position. How this is likely to come about can easily be appreciated by dwelling for a moment on the nature of this Advisory Committee.

None of its members, nor members of the subsidiary



commissions organized to carry out the executive powers which it is attempting to assume, can be members of either chamber of the Legislature. And while they are all men and women of standing, the primary purpose is not to give the Supreme Council the nominal support of an array of prominent personages. It is, rather, to work out the long-range plans of government which is the duty of the executive arm, and then to submit these plans to the Legislature after they have been approved by the Supreme Council. As party government ceased to exist in the Philippines with the formation of the Supreme Council—elections are no longer contested—and as the Legislature may be expected to indorse without opposition anything approved by the Council, the importance of this entirely extra-legal advisory committee is clear. It aims to take over, by quiet encroachment if possible, at least a part of the executive power of the American Governor-General.

The point is further clarified by examination of the fifteen commissions which the National Advisory Commission has already established in Manila. They fall naturally into two groups—those which are in reality embryonic ministries or government departments, and those of lesser importance which are in reality integrating rather than initiating commissions. Obviously in the first class are the following: Commissions on National Defense; Public Works and Communications; Finance; Agricultural Development; Public Instruction and National Language; Health and Public Welfare; Justice and Law Revision; Immigration and Industrial Relations. The remaining seven commissions, more or less supplementary to those just named, are: Independence Campaign; Development of National Resources; Government and Civil Service; Economic Strategy; Protection of Native Industries; Labor Organizations; Women's Organizations.

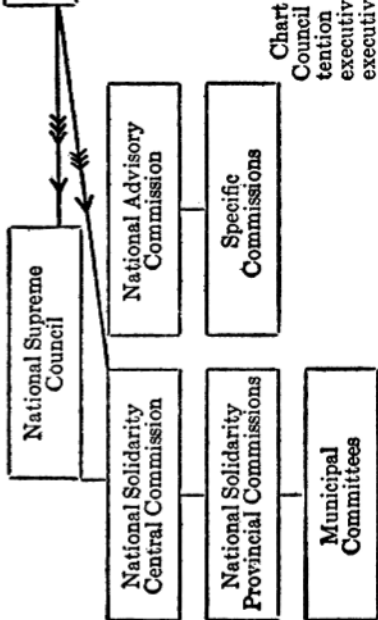
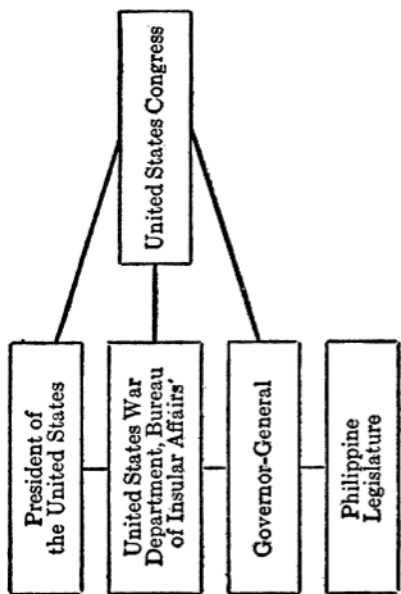


Chart to illustrate the projected rôle of the Supreme National Council and subsidiaries in Philippine Government. The intention is to draw the Philippine Legislature under a native executive (as the arrows indicate) and away from the American executive power as now exercised (see text).

It is not surprising that this very comprehensive and ambitious scheme has as yet received so little publicity. The Filipino leaders, perhaps contrary to national custom, prefer working towards its fruition rather than talking about it. And then again its complicated nature, though well worth understanding, does not lend itself to newspaper treatment. What is surprising is the rather offhand way in which the Supreme Council and its subsidiaries seem to be regarded at Malacañang, the seat of American authority in the Islands. This may be due to policy, or to the deep-rooted belief that the Filipinos as a people are clever in drawing grandiose schemes and incapable in carrying them out.

At the same time it is very difficult for an impartial observer to believe that this plan, which has been months in the building and which follows the logical trend of Filipino political philosophy under our rule, is doomed to collapse by reason of the incapacity of its sponsors. The men who are behind it, particularly those on the National Advisory Committee, are too substantial. The treasurer of the Supreme Council, to cite only a single individual, is Alejandro Roces, one of the wealthiest men in Manila, owner of three newspapers printed respectively in English, Spanish, and Tagalog, and, incidentally, a close personal friend of Governor-General Wood. But, as in our own Civil War, the issues involved in the struggle of the Filipinos for complete self-government cut deeper than personal relationships.

One more illustration—a plan drafted for financing the work of the Supreme National Council—should be cited to indicate the thought-provoking manner of this campaign. A comprehensive taxation scheme, losing none of its significance from the fact that payments would nominally be “voluntary contributions,” has been given serious consideration as the best means for meeting all expenses, including the dispatch of special mis-

sions to Japan and other foreign countries to study technical aspects of Philippine self-development.

The proposed taxation plan consists of five different assessments, at least one of which would touch virtually every Filipino, while many of them would be expected to contribute under two or three of these extra-legal imposts. There is planned: *first*, an annual per capita assessment of 50 centavos (25 cents) on every adult who is not a public charge; *second*, an assessment of 12 pesos (\$6) per annum on all professional workers; *third*, a property assessment of one-tenth of 1 per cent of the tax valuation of all privately owned real estate, payable annually; *fourth*, a sliding-scale assessment, varying from 1 to 5 per cent, on the annual salary of every public employee; *fifth*, a profits assessment on all Filipino corporations of one-half of 1 per cent of annual net income. It is hoped by such levies to do away with all the "drives" whereby the independence campaign has been financed hitherto. The mere fact that so comprehensive a scheme, lacking even any pretense of legal authority, can be drawn up for consideration is an excellent index of the welcome which the Filipino public is in general extending to the Supreme Council.

That welcome, in the course of my trip through the archipelago with leading members of the Council, there was ample opportunity to observe. In all the towns visited, whether on the big islands of Negros and Panay or on little Romblon, the receptions staged were a striking refutation of the assertion that outside of Manila there is no interest in the campaign for independence. It was not so much the size of the crowds that turned out everywhere, the decorated arches of welcome, or the patience with which audiences would stand three hours or more in the tropical sun listening to relays of speakers attack Governor-General Wood's "interference" with legislation of purely Filipino concern, and applaud refer-

ences to American pledges on withdrawal from the islands, that was impressive. It was, rather, the seeming enthusiasm shown by local leaders of prominence in turning their attention to the difficult and unspectacular work of furthering the Supreme Council's far-reaching plans.

The working out of this campaign will, as their leaders admit, show whether or not the Filipinos possess the staying qualities in which we have always claimed they are deficient. It may show, also, whether we have delayed too long in combining common sense and idealism to solve the Philippine problem in a way according with our interests, our traditions, and the spirit of our plighted word.