

PLATFORMS OF PHILIPPINE PARTIES: THE POLITICS OF EXPEDIENCE, 1902-1913

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The termination of American military rule at the turn of the century brought hope to many Filipino leaders that the transition to a civilian form of government would be smooth and easy. What they did not know was that the United States had other ideas concerning the length of time it would take between total American rule and a measure of Filipino self-rule. Within a short time, however, new political parties mushroomed, equipped with various, seemingly divergent platforms, all claiming to promote the best interests of the Islands.

What was responsible for the birth of these political parties? Did they have the welfare of the people at heart? Or did their leaders see them as vehicles to instant fame and fortune at the expense of the honest hopes of their potential supporters? What was the general reaction of the American authorities? Were they enthusiastic about, or suspicious of these parties' goals? These and similar related questions will be the subject of this paper.

The re-election of President William McKinley brought about the formation of the *Partido Federal* (Federal Party) which advocated pacification and annexation of the Philippines by the United States. Its members, who were prominent Filipinos, were convinced that an American civilian government would soon be established in the Islands and some posts would be given to Filipinos to fill. They felt that their

chances of getting these positions were better if they acted as a group than if they were acting individually. After the capture of Emilio Aguinaldo in November, 1901, they petitioned the United States to annex the archipelago as a state.¹ They saw statehood as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. They were certain that annexation would result in the realization of the Revolution's goals, such as the spread of education, modernization, economic growth, and the elimination of social injustices characteristic of colonial relationships.

Although the Federal Party later changed its platform in favor of independence, its new nationalistic stand was still questionable because of its past record of pro-Americanism. The same could not be said of the *Nacionalista Party* which arose as the major political party in the Philippines. The Sedition Law was an obstacle to the strong advocates for autonomy because they had to conceal their aims until the right moment came to organize themselves. After July, 1902, which marked the end of Philippine-American hostilities, several nationalists forwarded a petition to Governor William H. Taft for permission to organize political parties based on the platform of independence. Taft, however, did not approve of their plan, stating that they could be misunderstood for this which might eventually embarrass them. Instead, he counselled them to use the next three years to build the economy of the country.² His successor, Luke E. Wright, was of the same opinion. This discouraging attitude of the authorities killed the launching of the *Partido Nacionalista* and *Partido Democrata*.³ The Nacionalistas could organize only a harmless civic league whose goal was the establishment of a permanent committee in the United States to look after Filipino interests.⁴ As for the latter, Taft described it as a "nucleus . . . for the gathering into one movement of all the lawless, restless, lazy and evil members of society,"⁵ and reprimanded its would-be members:

¹ For further delineation of its platform, see Dapen Liang, *The Development of Philippine Political Parties* (Hongkong: South China Morning Post, 1939), pp. 56-59, 61.

² *Fourth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission*, 1903, pt. 3 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 40-41.

³ The *Partido Nacionalista* was founded by Pascual H. Poblete in 1901 and reorganized in 1902 with Dr. Dominador Gomez as president. The *Partido Democrata* was founded by Albert Barreto, Justo Lukban, Leon Ma. Guerrero and Jose de la Vina. Gregorio F. Zaide, *Philippine Political and Cultural History*, 2 vols. (Manila: McCullough Printing Co., 1961), Vol. II, p. 239.

⁴ Liang, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-68.

⁵ Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, Letter, Taft to Elihu Root, April 3, 1901, *William H. Taft Papers*, Series 8.

The error of your attitude is that you . . . seem to regard it as entirely proper for you to continue an agitation which has devastated your country, and injured your people by dressing it up in a slightly different form.⁶

When the ban on the organization of radical parties was lifted in 1906, almost without delay the *Partido Independista Inmediatista*,⁷ the *Partido Urgentista*, and the *Comite de la Union Nacional* sprang up.⁸ These parties' goals could be classified into various categories. The aim of the *Independistas* was immediate independence by peaceful means, and they were disposed to cooperate with the American government. The *Unionistas* had the same aim, but were less disposed to cooperate with the authorities. They wanted the United States to be specific about its future political policy towards the Philipinés. The *Urgentistas* formed the radical column. Their aim was immediate independence by peaceful means if it were possible, but by violence if it were needed. The *Urgentistas* and *Unionistas* merged to become the *Union Nacionalista* which in turn fused with the *Partido Independista* to form a single party.⁹ This party was the mother of the present Nacionalista Party in contemporary Philippine politics. Among its leaders were Manuel L. Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, Alberto Barreto, Rafael del Pan, Galicano Apacible, Pablo Ocampo, Felipe Agoncillo, Rafael Palma, and Fernando and Leon M. Guerrero.¹⁰ They made clear that their aim was the immediate independence of the Islands under a democratic government.

In the interim, the Federal Party changed its name to *Partido Nacional Progresista* with a message of independence inserted in its platform but restrainedly proclaimed. As its party chief, Juan Sumulong announced:

We, the Federalists, want an independent and at the same time a democratic government, and if, in contending that the people may establish an independent but not a democratic government at least at present, we attract unpopularity, we will face the consequences. We announce as an error or a dangerous imposture the policy of those who believe or pretend to believe that the functions of political bodies or leading elements should be that of yielding to every kind of imposition by the masses.¹¹

⁶ Letter, Taft to Jose de la Vina et al., November 7, 1902, *Taft Papers*, Series 3, Box 74.

⁷ Louis LaRavoire Morrow and Norberto Romualdez, *A Short History of the Filipino People* (Manila: The Catholic Truth Society, 1936), p. 350.

⁸ Maximo M. Kalaw, *The Development of Philippine Politics, 1872-1925* (Manila: Oriental Commercial Co., Inc., 1926), pp. 77-79.

⁹ Liang, *op. cit.*, p. 72. They monopolized the name "Nacionalista" though their interests were far removed from those of the people. Their primary motive was to resuscitate interest in the Spanish system.

¹⁰ Kalaw, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

A positive proof of how election results could affect the chances of a candidate if he did not speak for immediate independence was the case of the same Juan Sumulong who later became a commissioner. In the election for the Assembly in 1907, he was told that if he espoused "immediate independence and some of the tenets of the Nacionalista Party," he would be elected. He refused, and was defeated.¹² Another example is that of Purita Villanueva of Molo, Iloilo who was often heard because she was "a very bright [woman], an actress by instinct, an authoress, newspaper correspondent and assistant editor, and oratress, having made many addresses and of the immediate independence order."¹³

Propaganda was sometimes used to build up hope in the masses for independence as when word was spread that the American troops were leaving the Islands and giving back the government to the natives. In fact, money was raised in various localities in order to send messengers throughout the provinces to disseminate this information.¹⁴ However, during a carnival held in Manila, General William P. Duvall saw to it that the people did not succumb to these false rumors by stationing many troops in different areas for them to see.

The *Democratas* merged with the *Nacionalistas* before the organization of the Philippine Assembly in 1907, retained the name *Nacionalista*, and openly advocated independence. It was now clear that the *Nacionalistas* were the new leaders of the people as shown by the votes cast for the opposing political parties at the election for delegates to the Assembly held on July 30, 1907:

<i>Party</i>	<i>Number of Votes</i> ¹⁵
Nacionalista	34,277
Progresista	24,234
Others — not a coalition (Independent, Catholic, Philippine Church, etc.)	38,385

Upon its organization, 58 delegates declared themselves Nacionalistas, 16 Progresistas, and 6 Independents. But the Americans would not admit that a real change in leadership had taken place. They regarded the

¹¹ *La Democracia*, July 9, 1906, as found in the *National Archives*, Bureau of Insular Affairs, File 6830-8.

¹² Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, *Journal of W. Cameron Forbes*, 1st Series, Vol. III, p. 123.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹⁵ *Eighth Annual Report of the Philippine Commission*, 1907 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 9108), p. 203.

results of the first election to the Assembly as an inconclusive index of the relative strength of the political parties.

A question could be raised as to what kind of men were those who proposed independence for the Philippines? Governor W. Cameron Forbes described those "patriots" who clamored for self-rule as wanting it under American protection so that the United States could continue to maintain peace and order, and keep the Germans and Japanese off the area while they robbed and exploited their own people without any outside interference. Money was their principal motive. As he wrote, referring to them:

If they can get office and salary they become forthright Americanistas, otherwise they intrigue for 'independencia.' Their intrigues, if they are left alone, culminate in getting a few guns and a small band of followers, and in levying contributions from defenceless people on threat of murder or torture and on promises of huge preferment in the Philippine Republic.¹⁶

To confirm this, he mentioned the case of Pedro Paterno, the president of Aguinaldo's Congress, who arranged the peace of Biacnabato in which the Spaniards bought off Aguinaldo. The price reportedly paid by Spain was \$1,200,000. Aguinaldo got \$200,000 and the balance disappeared among the officials. It was alleged that \$200,000 went into Paterno's pockets. Forbes deplored such detestable deportment in these words:

It is a pity that the word independence should be used almost wholly by men wishing to become rich without work and who want to wield a little authority.¹⁷

In a visit to Bacolod on November 16, 1904, Governor Forbes told a crowd that "it was time for them to stop talking independence and get to work, and that their business and ours was to say not only 'the Philippines for the Filipinos,' but to make the Philippines worth something to the Filipinos."¹⁸ The crowd's reaction to his speech was total silence, either because they felt autonomy was coming anyway sometime in the near future, or their discretion indicated that it was neither the place nor the time to clamor for it.

Forbes was not against the Filipino aspiration for independence. At one time, comparing the political parties that insisted upon it, he said:

¹⁶ *Forbes Journal*, 1st Series, Vol. I (1904-1906), p. 34.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁸ *Forbes Journal*, 1st Series, Vol. I, p. 101.

All parties have independence in their platform, and the difference between them is when — some want it right away, and some, sooner. The platform is about the same: they mean they want the spoils. The difference . . . is simply who will get the spoils . . . They have no particular grievances to remedy, no principle to avow, except that of the desire to manage their own affairs, and one not to be discouraged but fostered.¹⁹

Benito Legarda found the following observation hard to swallow. It was made by Gregorio Araneta who did not believe that Filipinos were capable of independence at the time. Even Quezon and Osmeña felt the sting of its message when they heard it.

There are two parties in the Philippine Islands. The progressistas who do not recognize the capacity of Filipinos to govern themselves and the Nacionalistas or Inmediatistas, who are demonstrating their incapacity.²⁰

Forbes' principal objection to independence at the time was the "lack of an intelligent and trained body of people with the power of the ballot who have had the benefits of good local government long enough to demand and insist on it. This [could] only be obtained by giving them good government and letting them have it long enough to appreciate it."²¹

In trying to contrast the politicians' cry for independence with the simple aspirations of the masses, Forbes wrote:

I want to call attention here to the nature of the requests that kept coming in, which I took as a direct tribute to the policy I had adopted and maintained throughout the islands. It is to be noted that the people asked for things which reflected directly on their material welfare. They wanted roads, bridges, ports, artesian wells, irrigation, municipal markets, school buildings . . . They didn't ask for independence or other kinds of moonshine.²²

However, as the people were getting more and more involved in public affairs, there was a growing criticism of and opposition to Governor Forbes' administration. Secretary of War Jacob M. Dickerson noticed this during his visit to the Islands in 1910.²³ Offering a help-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II (1906-1909), p. 39.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²¹ *Forbes Journal*, 1st Series, Vol. II, p. 264.

²² *Ibid.*, Vol. III (1908-1910), p. 447.

²³ *Special Report of J.M. Dickerson, Secretary of War, to the President on the Philippines*, November 23, 1910 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), p. 33.

ing hand, he spoke of the necessity of gaining experience in self-government. He said:

. . . I have . . . gone into this discussion for the purpose of inviting the calm and temperate judgement of those who are asking for immediate independence upon the real character of the problem, and for the purpose of urging that, however loud and insistent the cry for independence may be, no one who has the real welfare of the Philippines at heart will neglect . . . the real substance, which is the development to the highest degree possible under present conditions of everything that will tend to broaden the foundations for future Philippine independence.²⁴

The enmity increased during the remaining years of President Taft's administration. It did not go unnoticed when Professor Henry J. Ford, Woodrow Wilson's special investigator, submitted a report deploring the fact that the Filipino seemed unappreciative of American efforts to help them, and resentful of the latter's domination.²⁵ He ventured to state that an underlying cause of these strains in Philippine-American relations could be traced to the refusal of the Republican administration to grant self-government to Filipinos, coupled with the latter's belief that they would have achieved autonomy had it not been for American intervention.

A case in point was *La Vanguardia*, a Nacionalista paper, which expressed concern over American policy, contending that the longer the Americans stayed in the Philippines the harder it would be for them to get out. However, it found consolation in the thought that nothing was eternal in this world, and hoped that Philippine independence would become a reality with the victory of the Democrats at the polls in the United States.²⁶

At this time the Nacionalistas intensified their demand for independence. Their distinguished spokesman, Sergio Osmeña, Speaker of the Philippine Assembly, the majority of which were Nacionalistas, pointed out in a speech that the aspirations and tendencies of the Assembly were unequivocally clear in the party's declaration of independence of June 19, 1908. It confirmed the same declaration of the Filipino people at the outbreak of the Revolution. Made by the duly elected representatives of the people, it had the same value as the declaration

²⁴ J. M. Dickerson, *Address Delivered at the Popular Banquet Given by the Filipino Reception Committee at the Hotel de Francia, Manila, September 2, 1910* (Manila: n.p., 1910), p. 11.

²⁵ W. Cameron Forbes, *The Philippine Islands*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1928), Vol. II, p. 206.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

of a plebiscite, especially as it was supported by nearly all of the municipalities and other political bodies of the archipelago.²⁷

In order not to be labelled treacherous because of his statements, Osmeña stressed the fact that the term "immediate independence" was not a post-American Occupation invention. It was always the actual longing of the people, a national aspiration soaked with their blood. He indicated that there was no contradiction involved between allegiance to the United States and loyalty to one's national aspirations to be free.²⁸

Among the resolutions adopted on February 3, 1911 by the Philippine Assembly was one which dealt on the independence question. It was in the form of a petition for immediate independence as contained in the platform of the Nacionalista Party of September 1, 1910. Petitions to the United States President or Congress or both for immediate independence were also attached to the resolutions of the Philippine Assembly of October 16, 1913.²⁹ In the conclusion of Osmeña's speech of February 11, 1913 he informed his colleagues of the solemn promise of the Democratic Party made for the third straight election denouncing imperialism and the colonial exploitation of the Philippines. It publicly pledged the granting of independence, once a stable government had been established, and promised to obtain the warranty of its territorial sovereignty from the international powers.

Meanwhile Quezon made haste to lobby for the same goal in the United States Congress as a resident commissioner sent by the Philippine Assembly. In his opening statement to the American Congress, he read a letter of the Nacionalista Party which emphasized independence as one of its platforms:

This party aspires to the immediate independence of the country, because it believes the Filipino people endowed with those conditions necessary to establish and maintain a stable government of law and order as has been proven by the existence of what was the government of the Filipino Republic in the years 1898 and 1899. The period of experiment which has passed during the American sovereignty is ample to demonstrate that the Filipinos know how to make use of civil and political liberty, and to comply

²⁷ Hon. Sergio Osmeña, *Discurso del Speaker de la Asamblea Filipina en San Miguel de Mayumo, Bulacan, P.I.*, 7 de Mayo, 1910 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1911), p. 23.

²⁸ Asamblea Filipina, "La Independencia Como Aspiracion Nacional," *Documento No. 6753-A3* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1916), pp. 3-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-23. The same petitions were attached to the resolutions of January 14, 1914; February 5, 1915; October 16, 1915; and January 25, 1916.

with and to force compliance with the laws, to avoid disorders, to prevent abuses, and live in accordance with the practices of civilized communities.³⁰

Answering the objection that the Filipinos' literacy needed to be improved, he underscored the fact that literacy was in the Islands prior to American Occupation. Private schools, colleges, and the University of Santo Tomas had produced leaders, both secular and religious. As a matter of fact, when the Philippine Congress met at Barasoain, Bulacan on September 15, 1898, of the ninety members, there were forty lawyers, sixteen physicians, five pharmacists, two engineers, and one priest. Many were graduates of European universities.³¹

Arguing against the Filipino's lack of political experience due to the Spanish policy of limited government sharing with the local population, he cited the American example saying:

Experience in life and in business certainly comes in no other manner but in daily contact . . . with the interests which are managed. The United States has not gained experience to manage the affairs of the federation, except since the old Britannic colonies declared themselves independent and constituted such form of government. We are convinced that the Filipinos must likewise expect more complete experience to direct and administer their national affairs after they are independent.³²

The Philippine Assembly praised Quezon's work in the United States, especially his contribution to the final discussion of the Jones Bill in the House of Representatives. A message referring to these achievements was adopted by the Assembly which read as follows:

. . . we send him the warm message of our admiration, congratulation and esteem. He knew how to convey our sentiments and those of our people. He was efficient in his defense, insistent in his petition, understanding towards misconceptions and generous towards all.³³

Why, then, did the identical platforms of the various political parties, with their vote-attracting clamor for self-rule, meet with un-

³⁰ Manuel L. Quezon, "Philippine Independence," *Speech before the House of Representatives*, March 2, 1911 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 3. See also U.S., Congress, House, March 2, 1911, *Congressional Record*, XLVI, 3951.

³¹ Manuel L. Quezon, "The Jones Philippine Bill," *Speech before the House of Representatives*, no date (Washington: 1914), p. 23. See also Sol H. Gwekoh, *Manuel L. Quezon, His Life and Career* (Manila: University Publishing Co., Inc., 1948), pp. 65-79.

³² Quezon, "Philippine Independence," p. 19.

³³ *Asemblea Filipina*, "Felicitacion Al Comisionado Quezon," (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1913), p. 4. *Translation Mine*.

satisfactory response of the people? Two reasons predominate: partly because the masses had other priorities than independence, and partly because the politicians themselves did not come up with concrete goals that would follow the attainment of autonomy. Their failure to take a unified stand against the American policy of retention sprang from a jumble of conflicting views and competitive ambitions. Much as the untiring efforts of Quezon and Osmeña are to be commended, the purity of their motives in working for Philippine independence is questionable. On the other side of the ocean, the Republican Party's infatuation with colonialism was still popular with many Americans. Three decades later, just as expediency had characterized Philippine political parties, so now it was the motivating factor that caused the United States to turn over the reins of government to the Filipino people.