

Some Long-term Effects of U.S. Control of the Philippines

To review some of the long term effects of American colonialism in the Philippines--the only Asian country that we ever directly subordinated to a formal colonial status--will enable us to gain a more vivid, personal appreciation of the record that we have made in another Southeast Asian country during this century.

In 1898 President McKinley ordered troops into the Philippines to establish American sovereignty over the islands. There ensued an incredibly bitter war of conquest in which, according to one American general, one-sixth of the inhabitants of the most populous Philippine island died (about 600,000 people).¹ But by 1907 the U.S. had succeeded in establishing a colonial rule that came to be acclaimed by many Filipino and American authorities for its moderate, even permissive, nature. American students of Philippine affairs usually call this colonial relationship "successful" and explain its success in terms of the ambivalent American motivation behind the initial seizure of the Philippines, the paucity of American commercial interests in the islands before 1898, and the relative insignificance of American investments there afterwards. But these facts do not of themselves explain what it was in the structure of American colonial rule that the Filipino leadership itself found so accommodating. Nor do they explain what factors existed in the Philippine situation that could enable American rule to become moderate so soon after having been so harsh. Least of all do they have a bearing on the reality behind the "success" of American colonialism in the Philippines.

A partial answer to these questions may be found by first examining the conservative-radical cleavage in late nineteenth-century Philippine nationalism. As early as 1893 a split along ideological and class lines appeared in the ranks of the Philippine nationalists. On the one hand, the propertied elite, including the liberal intelligentsia, sought to win the support

of the Spanish government to the cause of political reform from above, even hoping to make the Philippines a province of Spain. Opposing them were the members of the Katipunan, a lower class plebeian group whose founder and "spiritual leader" was a self-educated laborer, Andres Bonifacio. It was the radical Katipunan advocating overthrow of the status quo, agrarian reform, and economic democracy that initiated and led the revolt against Spain in 1896. Only later, when the revolution had "expanded into a national struggle for liberation, when the masses had already shown that they could dethrone the ruler and beat his army in the field...the middle class, caught between two fires, moved in and sided with the rebels...."² Thereafter the leadership of the Philippine Revolution passed to both a Katipunero, Aguinaldo, and to the propertied classes. On Aguinaldo's orders Bonifacio was executed and the original Katipunan was disbanded.

Thus, at the moment when the Revolution was taking on a more conservative coloration, the United States came upon the scene. Confronted with a new but essentially familiar situation, the Filipino landowning and money-lending classes had little difficulty in allowing their "nationalism" to be coopted into the structure of American colonial rule. As it turned out, the total defeat of the Philippine Revolution by the American intervention in the early years of this century ultimately determined the role and composition of the ruling class in Philippine national life for most of the remainder of the century.

Between 1900 and 1905, while American military forces pacified the "natives," the more conservative members of the patrician elite, organized in the Federal Party, worked to extend American colonial rule throughout the islands. The Nationalists, who came into being in 1907, then extended and perfected the pattern of accommodation with the colonizers which the Federalists had established.

"A colonial regime," writes a Filipino historian, "naturally looks for a base or anchor of support in the dependent society. Its first alternative is to win over the existing leadership....It was unnecessary for the Americans to go beyond the first alternative in the Philippines, where the ilustrados readily responded to the policy of accommodation. The colonial regime strengthened its own position and that of its supporters by passing the appropriate laws on suffrage and elections."³ The spread of Western-style democratic institutions thus enabled the Nationalists and the landowning classes which they represented to consolidate their hold on the country.

From the inauguration of the landlord-dominated Philippine Assembly in 1907 until 1919, when the suffrage provisions of the Jones Law went into effect, the voting electorate of the country was limited to 3 per cent of the total national population--the same 3 per cent who in the waning days of Spanish colonialism had comprised the native aristocracy.⁴ Thereafter, although the franchise was extended, high property and literacy qualifications continued to deny suffrage to the vast majority of the Philippine population so that even by the 1947 election only 17 per cent, or approximately 3 million, were registered to vote. Through the device of suffrage restriction, the Nationalist Party, spokesman for a manipulative nationalism and its class constituents, ended up being the most direct beneficiary of, and the chief active participant in, the vaunted American training in democracy.

Ever since their triumph, the characteristic mark of Philippine politics has been the absence of ideological difference between political parties and factions. Yet even the servile politics of the Nationalist Party and its 1946 offshoot, the Liberals, was not without its underlying metaphysic. All political leaders espoused the principles of free enterprise, nepotism, and paternalism. Given a colony in the firm grip of a ruling elite as ideologically united, as economically homogeneous, and as accommodating as the Filipino elite--a colony in which the vast majority of natives were disenfranchised by poverty and ignorance--what colonizer would conceive of effecting anything but a moderate or permissive spirit of rule.

As the "tacit alliance"⁵ with the American colonial regime strengthened the landlord class, the alliance in turn strengthened the customary ally of the landlord class, the Catholic Church. Although the United States did formally disestablish the Catholic Church, it never enforced a complete separation of church and state. While the United States did assist in purchasing some 400,000 acres of friar lands, the terms by which these lands were resold to the peasants made the reform ephemeral, "since the rate of interest for the acquired homesteads, generally 8 per cent per annum for twenty-five years, proved to be more than the new owners could pay without adequate credit facilities. The result was that land gradually became absorbed by large landowners and partly again by the Church."⁶ Consequently, once the most serious threat to its hegemony had been crushed by the American suppression of the Revolution, the Catholic Church--an institution profoundly hostile to Philippine nationalism--proceeded to recover the religious and economic ground it had lost since the separation from Spain.

The Revolution had unleashed intense anti-clerical feelings which were given organizational expression in 1902 when a Filipino priest broke with Rome and established the Aglipayan (Independent) Church. Because it enjoyed the support of the American Catholic hierarchy, the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines was easily able to roll back the nationalist Aglipayan challenge to its spiritual authority. By decision of a pro-Roman Catholic Supreme Court in 1906, the Aglipayans were forced to relinquish all Church properties confiscated during the Revolution.⁷ This was a blow to their prestige from which they never recovered. In its preoccupation with safeguarding Roman Catholic interests in the islands the American colonizers had irrevocably weakened the only institution in Filipino life that was totally dedicated to representing the interests of the laboring poor.

The economic foundations of Catholic power also continued to grow with the new opportunities opened up for it by the American presence. When Japanese researchers conducted an inquiry into the state of Philippine politics and administration in 1943 they learned that the Catholic Church had shifted the locus of its economic wealth from landholding to the industrial and

financial fields. It had become "an industrial and financial institution" with investments in such soul saving activities as "breweries, the movies, and amusement establishments."⁸

Likewise, the Catholic Church gained tremendous political influence. Even today, at election time Catholic archbishops take out "full page political announcements in the Manila newspapers." So powerful is the Catholic hierarchy, writes Gunnar Myrdal, that "Acceptance by (it) can be an important avenue to office and non-acceptance the death knell of political ambition. Even the small beginnings of trade unions and peasant organizations are very much under the control of wealthy landowners and churchmen."⁹

The alliance of big landowners (the so-

called "hacienda, comprador, and money lending families") and anti-nationalist churchmen was the chief legacy of over three centuries of Spanish colonialism. Under American colonial rule that legacy was enormously reinforced. The result was to foreclose the possibility of any meaningful economic transformation of Philippine society. In 1909 the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act imposed on the colony uninhibited free trade with the United States. Deprived of tariff autonomy and forced into a closed-door, inherently unequal trade relationship, the Philippines soon experienced the rapid destruction of its cottage industry, and the overdevelopment of a narrow primary product export sector, largely in American hands. In 1899 only 7 per cent of Philippine total imports came from the U.S.; by 1932, 74 per cent of all Philippine foreign trade was with the U.S.¹⁰ In this time the colony had moved from a food exporting to a food importing condition. When the era of formal American colonialism drew to a close, the majority of Filipinos were worse off than they had been at the start, while the colony as a whole was more dependent on its Mother country than any other Western colony in Asia. In this situation of extreme economic dependency and war devastated helplessness, the U.S. imposed, under threat of refusal to pay for Philippine war damages, a new trade act which was even more damaging to their economic welfare than the Payne-Aldrich Act.

Also important in defining the postwar informal colonial status of the Philippine Republic was the Military Bases Agreement of March 14, 1947, and the Quirino-Foster Agreement of November 14, 1950. The first, giving the U.S. 23 military bases in the islands for 99 years, was followed by an agreement establishing the presence of a U.S. Military Advisory Group to support the national constabulary in suppressing a serious decolonization movement. The Quirino-Foster Agreement, in a similar way, enabled the U.S. to plant American civilian advisers at every level of Philippine government under the principle of "supervised assistance." Thus, ironically, in the first few years of her independence, the groundwork was being laid for the most active American military and economic intervention in the islands since the 1899-1909 decade of American imperialism.

The slowness of the Filipinos in perceiving the economic and other disabilities from their American colonial relationship is related to their problem of national identity, another legacy of colonialism. The Americans who destroyed their revolution also systematically downgraded their nationalism. In schools decorated with portraits of American presidents, young Filipinos were taught American songs and required to memorize the Gettysburg Address. In the

American style colonial school system Filipino materials of instruction were conspicuously absent from the curriculum, the use of vernaculars was prohibited, and penalties were actually imposed on the pupils for speaking their native tongues.¹¹ Until 1935 no Filipino was allowed to head the Department of Public Instruction.¹² By that time a full generation of Americanized Filipinos had matriculated from the colonial system. Having absorbed Western political ideals through the neutralizing medium of an educational system that was originally conceived as an instrument of colonial pacification, the small electorate and the ruling nationalist elite in particular proved to be, with few exceptions, as eager as Magsaysay and Carlos P. Romulo to perpetuate U.S. colonialism.

A different side to the educational legacy of American colonialism was recently revealed by Salvador P. Lopez, Permanent U.N. Representative of the Philippines. Reflecting upon the American imposition of English on the Filipinos, he wrote: "By enormously complicating the learning process, this policy has doomed the majority of Filipino students to be hardly literate in the national language based on Tagalog, as well as in his own vernacular, if other than Tagalog, virtually illiterate in English, and almost totally illiterate in Spanish."¹³

Consequently, most Filipinos are today both deraccinated and sorely bewildered about their identity. For their outlook, values, and tastes have been shaped by affluent, industrialized America, but are totally at variance with their abject poverty. A Filipino writer recently asserted that his country has one million urban unemployed, a rural population of which one quarter is underemployed and an annual real per capita income of less than \$100. Philippine tenantry, which grew rapidly throughout the period of American rule, continues to impose extremely high

levels on nearly half the peasant population. Today tenant farmers pay as much as 50 to 70 per cent of their crops in rent to landlords.¹⁴ The ruling elite, of course, is not unaware of the peasants' plight. Twice, in 1955 and again in 1963, the landlord-dominated Philippine Congress enacted publicity-oriented land reform bills. The first, Magsaysay's land reform, was completely ineffectual. The second was characterized in 1966 by an Australian student of Philippine agricultural policy as "a mixture of publicity stunt and bureaucratic reform with rather long range social and distributive implications Its important immediate result was an administrative reorganization among the agencies concerned with agricultural productivity--a reorganization beginning at the top and very slowly spreading among the grass roots. Only a dozen municipalities had fully realized by late 1965 the local reorganization required.... the strictly reform part of the legislation was weak.... Expropriation is provided for large tenanted estates of grainland, but the lower limit of the size expropriable was raised by Congress from 59 to 184 acres, and no appropriations have yet been made to finance expropriations."¹⁵

A serious assault on the inequalities in the Philippine agrarian structure will probably have to await a fundamental shift in power in Philippine class relationships. In the meantime, whatever advantages or successes their long participation in the "free world" capitalist economy under American tutelage are thought to have brought for most Filipinos the enduring political, economic, military, and psychological legacy of American colonialism renders them meaningless.

The psychological legacy of American colonialism, often ambiguous and difficult to grasp, may well be the most long-lasting. One might point to the introduction of the color line in all-white military clubs, schools, and churches. "The Americans," in the words of one anthropologist, "did not mix freely with Filipinos, and imposed a strong taboo on intermarriage. This social code was an obvious reflection of the racial mores of the United States, and might be characterized as a kind of 'informal Jim-Crowism'."¹⁶ In the 1930's the upper class Filipino reaction to this ranged

from a deep identification with Japan, to the establishment of the "Club Filipino" in Manila for the purpose of practicing "counter-snobbery against Westerners."¹⁷ At the same time (and not so well known), by heightening the racial consciousness of the native elite, the Americans indirectly influenced their approach to the overseas Chinese, an economically powerful, but politically and socially vulnerable, group of colored foreigners in the colony. An American scholar, George H. Weightman, has recently written that, "Historically, the greatest antipathy and open conflict in Southeast Asia between the Chinese and a host group occurs in the Philippines." This Filipino anti-Sinicism, he continues, "is largely but not entirely the result of both Spanish and American colonial policies."¹⁸ One might add that in so far as the twenty-year long American crusade against Communism has fanned the flames of anti-Sinicism, it has seriously complicated the task of meliorating ethnic problems wherever they exist as legacies of a colonial past in Southeast Asia.

And yet, awareness of these specific American ways of relating to the peoples of Asia still does not help us evaluate the psychological legacy of colonial rule. In fact, we cannot understand the situation of the overwhelming majority of post-war Filipinos until we delve more deeply into

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the psychological implications of their centuries-long subordination to Spain and America. In the course of adjustment to the values of two different conquerors, the Filipino male has been made to reject a certain part of his personality and culture. That is to say, success in sustaining his underlying Malayan-Polynesian cultural heritage has always been paid for by a certain self-denial, perhaps, as one scholar has suggested, the denial of a rational exercise of anger. By rearing children not to rebel in the face of provocation, to suppress anger and be at all times gentle, obedient, and hospitable, the Filipino family system has made the proper adjustment to colonial rule. "There is also strong medical evidence to suggest a very high rate of schizophrenia and paranoia, though even

normal health services are so rudimentary in most provinces that this can be little more than conjecture."¹⁹ Finally, following Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, we must look again at the high rate of crime, mental disorder, and corruption, together with the prolonged over-identification with the U.S. that has characterized Philippine society ever since it was granted, on American Independence Day, a nominal political independence. These signs of social disintegration and cultural-psychological disorientation are related to the fact that an informal colonial situation continues to exist in the Philippines--a nation still ruled by a dominant traditional elite that is subservient to U.S. economic and strategic interests.