

# Quezon and the Philippines

*An interview with the president of the island government foreshadows possible future events*

By James S. Allen

**M**ANUEL L. QUEZON is the most astute statesman serving the interests of the United States in the dependencies. Trained for over two decades in the exacting school of Philippine politics, under the tutelage of American governors-general, he has fought his way to become the unchallenged political boss of his domain. Now virtually a dictator within the restrictions imposed by American sovereignty, he aspires to become the undisputed overlord of his native land as president of the Philippine Republic.

For three months I studied and followed closely the activities of the president of the Philippine commonwealth as he rapidly built the structure of dictatorship. These were crucial months during which the few remaining civil liberties were one by one being destroyed. The National Assembly, whipped into utter helplessness by Quezon's demagogic appeals to national unity and "social justice," rubber-stamped one anti-democratic bill after another submitted by Quezon, and permitted his great *tour de force*, the postponement of the general elections and the passage of a sedition bill which reads almost word for word like the measure imposed by the American military authorities during the days of the Philippine insurrection. I saw Quezon, together with Field Marshal Douglas MacArthur (our former chief-of-staff who helped suppress the Philippine revolution and whose greatest victory was won against the bonus marchers in the Battle of Anacostia Flats, Washington, D. C.), perfect preparations for a Philippine conscript army, which is to serve the United States as a colonial force in the Far East and which is to function as the military arm of the Quezon dictatorship.

On a spacious veranda at Malacañang, the presidential palace, Quezon explained his policies to me in an interview lasting for over three hours. At the end of the interview, I did not find it necessary to alter any of my conclusions about the man and his aims. I did come away, however, with a more intimate understanding of the technique of this dictator who has mastered the art of demagoguery and knows how to adorn his real program with popular catchwords. In view of the act which Quezon is now performing on the American stage, which is practically a replica of the act he performed that afternoon in the palace, I wish to record this interview.

At the recent luncheon tendered him by the Foreign Policy Association in New York, Quezon prided himself on his readiness to face all critics. It was somewhat in this spirit that he arranged the interview with me in Manila.



Manuel L. Quezon

Aline Fruhauf

Just a few days before, he had spent four hours explaining his "motives" to a group of recalcitrant Filipino journalists and writers, including leading columnists on the Manila newspapers, who have banded together in an informal discussion group called the Beer Club. These writers regarded Quezon with great distrust, and had criticized as sharply as the "coördinated" press permitted the numerous suppressive bills of the administration. It was typical of Quezon's methods that he should keep his ears open for every murmur of discontent among the middle classes and seek to stifle it by literally purchasing the most articulate and able. The political atmosphere is such that the gatherings of the young Manila intellectuals in the rather harmless Beer Club invite comparison with the Filipino students of the nineteenth century in one of José Rizal's novels who, gathered in quite an innocent celebration at a Chinese restaurant, were arrested by the Spanish authorities for conspiracy.

The first point I asked the president to explain was the National Defense Plan, which had already roused severe criticism among liberals both in the Philippines and in the United States. He entered upon his usual apology, which he has repeated since in his speeches in the United States. The only defense against a fate similar to that of Ethiopia and Manchuria, he said, was military preparation. He repeated the argument originated by

Field Marshal MacArthur, that while the Philippines cannot provide the essential machinery for modern warfare, they can put up so effective a defense of the country as to make it very costly for Japan to attempt its subjugation. Neutrality pacts, as events have shown, have proven to be mere scraps of paper, Quezon said, and he is ready to place military defense above all else as a means of safeguarding the country. He is prepared to defend the Philippines (and this is Quezon's own adornment of the field marshal's argument) with a "power inspired by lusty ideals, lofty vision, and national strength."

In the present situation, national defense must be conceded as a legitimate need of the Philippines, providing, however, that the military instrument thus created is linked to an independent foreign policy and is really a democratic defense army. I therefore informed Quezon that the chief objections to the National Defense Plan were not of a pacifist nature but, rather, that the new army was being created as an extension of American military forces in the Far East, was in effect an American colonial army, situated in the most likely theatre of war, and that it was also being used as a police force in the Philippines. I emphasized that the American people would not approve a colonial army on the style of the English or the French, and that the Philippine military program of the American General Staff had been pretty well adorned with the pseudo-liberal commonwealth plan.

Quezon jumped to his feet, eyebrows quivering nervously, and looked at me quizzically.

"If anyone thinks I am merely a puppet," he exclaimed, "he is mistaken. The thought of the National Defense Plan was mine and exclusively mine. I chose the man to manage it. I am the boss."

I knew that there had been opposition to the military plan from the U. S. high commissioner and the U. S. Army authorities in the islands, who feared lest the Filipino army might prove a boomerang to the United States. But authorities in Washington had evidently thought otherwise, seeing the advantages of an army whose financial burden would be borne by the Filipinos and which was ostensibly the creation of the Philippine government. It was a neat diplomatic maneuver, permitting suspicion, but not open protest, from Japan. It was evidently useless to discuss this point further with the president, who continually uses the constabulary, Anacostia fashion, against the people.

The conversation then naturally shifted to

the problem of independence. I recalled that a number of influential Filipinos close to Quezon were agitating for some form of continued commonwealth or protectorate status even after the so-called ten-year transition period. At a recent press conference, the president had expressed his agreement with Professor Kirk's recent book, *Philippine Independence*, which also proposed some form of continued dependence upon the United States, but generally Quezon was very wary about committing himself too definitely on this point. Desire for independence among the Filipino people is as strong as ever, and opposition to the president centers chiefly around his acceptance of the ten-year commonwealth plan.

"I am an ambitious man," Quezon confided. "At first I did not want to be president of the commonwealth. I hesitated long before accepting that nomination. Now I want to be president of the republic. My present term expires in 1941. Under the Tydings-McDuffie Act, we will get independence by 1936, which would mean another man as president. I want to be the man who will gain independence for the Philippines."

It is difficult to tell when Quezon speaks for effect, excellent actor that he is, or when he means what he says. It was my turn to eye him quizzically. "Write this down," he responded, "for your own benefit: November 15, 1940. By that day we will have independence." I wanted to know what made him so certain of that. There were two reasons: first, he, Quezon, wanted it; second, the same group in the United States which helped obtain the Tydings-McDuffie Act now wants an earlier independence date.

The group Quezon refers to is dominated by the National City Bank of New York. It consists principally of the American-Cuban sugar interests and the National Dairy Union. These monopoly groups favored the Tydings-McDuffie Act and are now ardent for *independencia* because they wish to hamper the import of Philippine sugar and copra products which compete on the American market with Cuban sugar and local fat products. Their theory is that full tariffs would be levied against Philippine products, now duty-free or preferred, once the islands are independent. On the other hand, the sugar-dairy lobby is being fought by West Coast capitalists, American-Hawaiian interests, and a few scattered groups which have virtual control of the Philippine export industries and the import-export trade. At the forthcoming trade conference to be held in the United States, Quezon hopes to hit off a bargain between these competing groups in the form of reciprocal trade agreements which will levy a preferential tariff against Philippine products, but at the same time guarantee American exporters continued monopoly of the Philippine market. These competitive rivalries can be adequately settled within either the present framework or some plan of formal independence.

Both Quezon's dictatorship and American economic-strategic interests in the Philippines, opposite sides of the same coin, have most to

gain from an extension of the present commonwealth policy to formal independence. Quezon may shift his position, as he has done a number of times in the past, depending upon the demands of the powers that be. But he realizes full well the force of the independence sentiment in the Philippines, and if he can obtain the advance of the independence date, he feels that his dictatorial measures would be justified. This is what he means when he insists on the purity of his motives.

As far as American Far Eastern policy is concerned, its principal aims with regard to the Philippines would be achieved as long as Quezon manages to retain his grip. I asked Quezon what he proposed to do with the American naval bases on the islands and the related project for a neutrality pact. He waved both subjects aside. Since our interview, he has intimated on a number of occasions that he favors retention of the naval bases and scrapping of the neutrality pact entirely. His scheme seems to be: advance the independence date, which he hopes will take the wind out of the sails of the Filipino opposition; at the same time retain close economic ties with the United States, keep the naval bases, and supplement the independence pact by a military and political understanding with the United States. The net result would be formal independence, but a status similar in all essential respects to that of Cuba. The United States would be assured of full economic and political control of the Philippines. And it is not at all unlikely that this plan may appeal to the New Dealers in Washington.

Integral to the whole program is the establishment of a strong dictatorship.

AS WE WENT ON to discuss some of the pressing internal problems of his country, Quezon showed that he was aware of how each stratum of the population reacted to them. "Power," he said, "rests in the masses." His realization of this political truth explains the skill with which he plays his hand for dictatorship, without so far taking any premature actions. He is bound to overplay his hand, for if he is permitted to continue on his present course, he can end only as a Gomez or a Machado.

In reply to my criticisms of the anti-democratic measures of his administration, Quezon held that it was not really a question of democracy. The Philippines have never been and are not now democratic, he said. Only a few people, according to the president, know what democracy is, and these comprise only a few disgruntled individuals, like the young writers of Manila and the leaders of the Philippines popular front. And he for one is not going to encourage democracy. He launched into an inspired enunciation of the principles of what might be termed the benevolent despotism of the feudal *cacique*. The provincial and town officials, he explained, are not responsible to the electorate, but only to himself. He can fire them, by God, any time he chooses if they don't suit him. And he has. He defended the compulsory arbitration bill on the ground that labor was too weak to

help itself and that with the aid of the arbitration court he would be in a better position to look after its welfare.

The masses have shown on numerous occasions that they are well able to take care of themselves. I had seen enough of the masses in town and *barrio*, and some of their independent leaders, to know that they would prove the stumbling block to the president's plan. Quezon is fully aware of the danger. The central object of his policies, and the principal function of his dictatorship, is to suppress the peasant movement, to keep the masses within bounds, by the direct methods of intimidation and suppression, whenever demagoguery fails. "The laborers are underfed because they are underpaid," he says, but he does not hesitate to use the constabulary against them when they demand rice.

I remarked that the basic problem of the country was agrarian, that nothing fundamental could be done to improve the conditions of the country unless some basic agrarian reforms were undertaken. Quezon popped up from his chair, where he had been following me with characteristic workings of his agile eyebrows: "Now you have hit the nail on the head," he exclaimed. "That is the point! Within the next year or two we will settle that question."

I could think of no other way of settling that question so quickly short of an agrarian revolution, and again it was my turn to eye Quezon quizzically. "We will have a situation like that in Spain if we are not careful," he continued. I knew his sympathy for the fascists in Spain (his closest friends were the organizers of the Spanish Phalanx in Manila), and understood that he was talking from the standpoint of one concerned with stemming democratic currents. How would he settle the agrarian question? First, through the Rice and Corn Corporation, a government agency which is now controlled by the large rice dealers. Next, he intended to suppress usury by forcing a test case against one usurer which would strike terror into the hearts of all usurers. As for the rest, the President was actively engaged in solving the agrarian question:

"Whenever I meet a group of rich landowners I tell them, 'If you know what's good for you, better improve the conditions of your tenants. You do not have enough sons for our army. We must conscript our soldiers from the poor. We put guns into their hands and teach them how to use them, and if you are not careful they will use those guns against you and me. They will not defend their country unless they have something of their own to fight for. If you want to save what you have, give them 10 percent of it so at least you will be assured of 90 percent, or they will take all.' I put the fear of the masses into their hearts."

Quezon had already made himself sufficiently clear.

On the Pasig River, which flows by the palace, barges were carrying produce from the haciendas in Laguna and Nueva Ecija. Out



there was extreme poverty and starvation. Only a few days before, the peasants had marched on the provincial capitals demanding rice. Just a few miles from the palace, the tenants on large estates owned by the Catholic archbishop had stopped evictions by massing, 5000 strong, across the highway. At San Pedro Tunisan, at Lian, at Buenavista—large haciendas owned by the monastic orders—the tenants demanded the land which had been robbed from their ancestors, and formed societies called *Orasna*, "Now Is the Time."

On a large private hacienda, peasants had returned to harvest the lands from which they had been evicted, and clashed with the constabulary.

Labor also was stirring. A number of unions were merging, a new independent single federation of labor was crystallizing. The middle classes balked at high taxes and the restrictions placed upon them by American economic monopoly. The students and the young writers and intellectuals were recalling the revolutionary tradition of their country.

A People's Alliance was emerging, gathering all the anti-imperialist and democratic forces of the islands. Democracy and anti-imperialism are very much alive in the Philippines, not in Malacañang, but in the people.

I thanked the president for giving me so much of his time. "You are the first newspaper man to who I have given so much time," he said. And then, with just the hint of a question in his voice. "It is not often that one finds a newspaperman sympathetic to our problems."



#### MODERN POLITICAL CONTRETEMPS

*A fishing smack ventures off the coasts of England in spite of Franco's warning, thereby endangering Britain's freedom of the seas.*

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## Again for Catholics

THREE weeks ago we published on this page a statement by leading Spanish Catholics, including Ambassador Gallardo, Spanish envoy to Belgium; the Canon of Segovia; the Canon of Granada; the leading priest of the Madrid cathedral, and various Catholic writers and professors. These men said that as Christians of various social positions, and despite differences of political opinion, they protested against the "injustice and cruelty" of the fascist invasion of Spain. They were convinced that "all human beings who are decent and sincere" are on their side.

The side they were referring to was that of the republican government of Spain. And one of the most important implications of their statement was that *Catholics had united with Communists, Socialists, Anarchists, and Republicans* in defense of Spain against the reactionary assault of Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini.

This is highly significant. Men and women who are divided along religious lines find it not only possible but *absolutely necessary* to unite upon the far more pressing issue of defending democracy against fascism.

This particular Catholic position found its counterpart in the statement of the Mexican Communist Party which we also published three weeks ago. That statement denied that Communists attack "sincere Catholics." It made clear that "we attack no believer who bases his faith on the fraternity of mankind; we condemn only those men who bless the arms of the fascists, the conquerors of Ethiopia and the assassins of Spain."

In view of these statements from both sides by men who are united in a great cause affecting the future happiness of mankind, there is something both ridiculous and criminal in the Hippodrome ballyhoo of ex-governor Smith and George U. Harvey. Fortunately, that meeting was not a striking success. In a city inhabited by millions of Catholics, the Red-baiters failed to fill the hall. Nevertheless, the press gave considerable space to this attempt to divide men along religious lines at a time when justice, reason, and the fundamental laws of self-preservation demand that they unite to defend their common interests.

It would be folly to argue with the Smiths and the Harveys. Men unscrupulous enough to fan religious hatred for political purposes are beyond any appeal to reason. But we call the attention of sincere Catholics to the famous letter which Frank Ryan addressed to His Eminence Cardinal McRory, Catholic Primate of Ireland.

An executive of the Gaelic League, formerly editor of

*An Phoblacht*, member of the Irish Republican Army, Frank Ryan took some five hundred and fifty fighting Irishmen to Spain last December. These came not only from Ireland, but from Belfast, Liverpool, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Today Ryan heads the Irish Battalion of the International Brigade.

Irish reactionaries attacked Ryan's activities as part of a campaign to "destroy all belief in God and Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church, as well as every Catholic state in the world." Replying, Ryan wrote to Cardinal McRory:

Because Your Eminence supports those forces in rebellion in Spain, it does not follow that you applaud the massacre of 2000 Catholics at Badajoz; that you believe the Mohammedan Moors are fighting for Christianity; that you approve of the godless scum of the Foreign Legion, nor the outrages committed by irresponsibles against the Catholic churches . . . Your Eminence, when the Catholic clergy identify themselves with the Spanish rebellion, they turn their churches into barracks. . . . As in the Irish civil war of 1922-23, I see no legitimate reason why the Spanish monarchy or the fascists should be supported by the Spanish bishops. So today I voice my strongest objection to the attempts they have made to represent the Almighty as 'God become fascist.' . . . *I maintain that the real enemies of Christianity are those who use its name for political purposes. I maintain that the real enemies of Christianity are those fascist generals who openly proclaim that they will set up a military dictatorship, suppress trade unions, and prohibit the workers' right to strike. . . . I am a Catholic who cherishes the name of Father Garcia Morales and the Basque priests who are opposing the Spanish fascists.*

Ryan's words deserve far more serious attention from sincere Catholics than the muddle-headed fulminations of ex-governor Smith. The splendid republican captain who boasts that he takes his religion from Rome also boasts that he will not take his politics from Maynooth. He knows enough to look upon the Communists beside him in the International Brigade not as enemies, but as comrades-in-arms defending all that is best in contemporary life.

## A Million Students

TWENTY years ago, when the United States entered the world war, only a handful of Americans had the insight and the courage to call for peace. Since then, many more have realized what war means. Nearly a million students are expected to participate this week in strikes and peace actions throughout the country. The sponsorship of this year's movement is broader than ever before. Perhaps the most noteworthy single action so far has been the proclamation of Governor Benson of Minnesota setting April 22 as Peace Day and recommending that the day be celebrated throughout the state with proper exercises and programs. As a result of this proclamation, almost every high school and college student in Minnesota will participate in peace day demonstrations.

"The people as a whole," the governor said, "should join in this enlightened movement of our young people, and direct their thoughts and energies to an analysis of the causes of warfare, its futility, and the means of its prevention."

Governor Benson's wise proclamation is likely to have a profound effect even outside of Minnesota. To many, it will be a dramatic indication of what a national farmer-labor party could mean for the success of a peace movement in America.