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The Philippine Press System: 1811-1989

DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ

The Philippine press system evolved through a history of Spanish colonization, revolution, American colonization, the Commonwealth, independence, postwar economy and politics, Martial Law and the Marcos dictatorship, and finally the Aquino government. Predictably, such a checkered history produced a system of tensions and developments that is not easy to define. An American scholar has said:

When one speaks of the Philippine press, he speaks of an institution which began in the seventeenth century but really did not take root until the nineteenth century; which overthrew the shackles of three governments but became enslaved by its own members; which won a high degree of freedom of the press but for years neglected to accept the responsibilities inherent in such freedom. . . . It is a press which has bred nearly all of the country's heroes (for example, Rizal, Mabini, del Pilar, Osmeña, Quezon, Romulo), while also breeding many corrupt and unscrupulous newspapermen.¹

This is a press centralized in Manila, the primate city, where the nationally-circulated newspapers are based, although there are 252 community or provincial newspapers.² This is a press that is predominantly in English, and only secondarily in Filipino, the national language, and in some of the vernaculars (e.g. Cebuano, Ilocano), in Spanish and in Chinese. Of the twenty-seven papers currently being published in Manila, thirteen are in English, all broadsheets, and ten are in Filipino, all tabloids. It is to the English newspapers that readers principally refer for the hard news, the investigative reporting, the news analyses and editorials, and the major columnists.

This article was originally written for the Consultation on "Press Systems in ASEAN," Jakarta, Indonesia, 23-26 August 1988, and revised in 1989.

1. John A. Lent, "The Philippines," *The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution* (Ames, Iowa: The Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. 191.

2. Alice Colet Villadolid, "A Feast of Reading at the Breakfast Table," *PPI Press Forum*, Vol. III, No. 2, 1988, p. 10.

THE SPANISH COLONIAL ERA

In the history of the Philippine press may be seen the roots of the present system. What might be called the first newspaper in the Philippines would be *Sucesos Felices* (Fortunate Events), printed by Tomas Pinpin (called the father of Philippine printing) in 1637. It was a fourteen-page newsletter devoted to "the depredation committed by Muslim pirates," and written "in an interesting anecdotal style reminiscent of modern journalistic trends." A second issue appeared two years later. Besides these, *hojas volantes* (literally "flying sheets," or flyers) have been found dating to 1799, titled "Al Publico," and carrying occasional news.³

Aviso al Publico (Notice to the Public), eleven pages with a blank back page, was a more formal publication, first issued on 2 June 1809 by Governor General Mariano Fernandez de Folgueras in order to inform the public of the Franco-Hispanic troubles in Europe. To counter the lies of the French papers ("the perfidious insinuations of the enemy of our country"),⁴ he translated news of 1808 events from gazettes taken from a French ship captured in Batangas. A second *Aviso* was issued 11 September 1809. Both carried imprint and license, but had no editorial information, publisher's or printer's address, or indication of regularity of publication.

Listed as the second paper issued is *Poema en verso heroico* (Poem in heroic verse) by Francisco Abaurre, a government official of the auditor's office at the Exchequer, printed at the University of Sto. Tomas in 1809. It is a compilation of news taken from English gazettes, also meant to counter false bulletins from France ("in view of the melancholy these caused"), by narrating in four cantos and in verse (*octavas reales*) the Spanish victories at arms.⁵

Del Superior Gobierno, which probably assumes the word *Gaceta* (thus Gazette of the High Government), a weekly first published on 8 August 1811, is generally accredited as the first formal Philippine newspaper because it had serial numbers, an editor, a (limited) variety of news content, and a sense of the urgency of news. Fernandez de Folgueras, governor general and editor, introduced the purpose in the first issue:

... the Superior Government desiring that the inhabitants of the Philippines who have constantly proved their fidelity, love and patriotism, should

3. Lent "Philippines," p. 192.

4. J.T. Medina, "El Primer Periodico de Filipinas," appendix to Wenceslao E. Retana, *El Periodismo Filipino: Noticias para su Historia (1811-894)* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de M. Minuesa de los Rios, 1985), p. 542. All translations from Medina/Retana are by the writer.

5. Medina, "Periodico," p. 545.

participate in the pleasing news from the [foreign] gazettes . . . I have endeavored to translate them with the greatest punctuality, and have hastened them to press in order to extend and transmit to all points of the Islands the enthusiasm and unalterable resistance of the Spaniards in the metropolis, the inexhaustible fidelity of the British allies, the victories over French arms, and most especially the opening of the Cortes . . .⁶

In his note to the fourth issue (28 August 1811), Fernandez de Folgueras promises that: "Whenever there is anything worth knowing and propagating, the editor himself will fly to the press so that in a supplement or special number, it can be punctually published." "Anything worth knowing," however seemed limited to news relating to Spain, because it is noted that: "In spite of what one might believe, under the rubric 'Filipinas,' one finds no news at all of local interest."⁷

Del Superior Gobierno ended after fifteen issues (the last was 7 February 1812), because its news sources dried up. Aside from foreign gazettes, Fernandez de Folgueras had been depending on news from the Spanish Cortes, which on 16 December 1810 passed "an absolute prohibition" for the reprinting of such gazettes without express permission from the Cortes. He noted hopefully, however, that "if new and interesting material becomes available, the weekly publication will continue; otherwise it is suspended until news parcels and correspondence are received."⁸

After these early publications came some 135 others, the last ones started in 1894, the eve of the revolution against Spain. Although the first papers, as we see, were limited to translations of European gazettes, eventually there came to be dailies (e.g. *Diario de Manila*, 1848, edited by Jose Felipe del Pan, and called "the best then produced by Philippine journalism"), a government organ (*Boletín Oficial de Filipinas*, 1852), religious newspapers (e.g. *El Católico Filipino*, 1862), papers dedicated to commerce (e.g. *El Comercio*, 1858) and the earlier-forbidden politics (*La Opinión*, 1887, later edited by Quiroga), and the still later magazine-type periodicals (e.g. *Ilustración Filipina*, 1859), and publications dedicated to science, literature, and the arts.⁹

The majority of these newspapers of the Spanish colonial period carried news relating to Mother Spain, and therefore had a colonial outlook. They were rigidly censored, by virtue of Spanish censorship laws dated as early as 20 May 1750, and by such subsequent regu-

6. Ibid., p. 549.

7. Ibid., p. 553.

8. Retana, *Periodismo*, Tabla IV (Appendix), pp. 629-37.

9. Jesus Z. Valenzuela, *History of Journalism in the Philippine Islands* (Manila: published by the author, 1933), pp. 30-80, passim.

lations as those of 30 April 1910 prohibiting the printing of "any discouraging news," and of 16 December 1910. Implementation was eventually delegated to a board of censors, made permanent in 1856. This was composed of eight persons, four appointed by the governor, and four by the archbishop. Because of this, and because Spanish governance of her Philippine colony was always conducted from both political and religious viewpoints, press censorship was rigid, and related to politics, government, morals and religion. Thus one could not speak of any form of freedom of the press.

THE REVOLUTION AGAINST SPAIN

The native or vernacular press may be said to have begun in 1862, with a paper called *El Pasig*, published fortnightly in Spanish and Tagalog. *Diariong Tagalog*, published in 1882, and the first daily in Tagalog (edited by Marcelo H. del Pilar and Francisco Calvo), survived only three months.¹⁰ *El Ilocano* (1889-96), founded by writer and nationalist Isabelo de los Reyes, has been called "the first newspaper that was genuinely native" because of its personnel and ideas:

We have no other object in *El Ilocano* than to serve our beloved people the Ilocanos by contributing to the enlightenment of the Filipinos as a whole, defending their interests, but never entering into a commercial venture. That is why we do our mission without expecting monetary reward.

...

All our aspirations are directed toward the aggrandizement of the intellectual, moral and material life of the Philippines in general, and the Ilocanos in particular; and all our efforts are exerted to this end.¹¹

It was the revolution against Spain that focused and inflamed the native press, and gave it a significant role on the national scene. The various factors that triggered this are well known: the education in Europe of such Filipinos as Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Graciano Lopez-Jaena, Juan and Antonio Luna, and their imbibing of the liberal ideas then current. The reform movement, in which Filipinos sought representation in the Spanish Cortes, equality with Spaniards, the secularization of parishes and the expulsion of friars, and greater freedom, including freedom of speech and the press. The need to ventilate and propagate all this resulted in what is called the Propaganda Movement.

10. Ibid., pp. 80-86.

11. Ibid., p. 86.

Publications of this era are led by *La Solidaridad* (1889-95), a fortnightly established by Graciano Lopez-Jaena in Barcelona, and secretly mailed to subscribers in the Philippines, who passed them on to others. Most of the writers were Filipinos now enshrined as heroes (Rizal, del Pilar, the Luna brothers, Isabelo de los Reyes, Dominador Gomez), who often wrote under pseudonyms. Its aims, the editors wrote, were:

Modest, very modest indeed . . . Our program aside from being harmless is very simple; to fight all reaction, to hinder all steps backward, to applaud and to accept all liberal ideas, and to defend progress; in brief, to be a propagandist above all of ideals of democracy so that these might reign over all nations here and beyond the seas.

The aims therefore of *La Solidaridad* are defined: to gather, to collect liberal ideas which are daily exposed in the camp of politics, in the fields of science, arts, letters, commerce, agriculture, and industry.

We shall also discuss all problems which deal with the general interest of the nation [Spain], seeking solutions that are purely national and democratic . . .

We shall pay special attention to the Philippines because those islands need the most help having been deprived of representation in the Cortes. We shall thus fulfill our patriotic duty in the defense of democracy in those islands.¹²

When the Filipinos back home came to realize that it was the Philippines that was the Motherland and nation of their concerns, the Katipunan was formed, and a paper called *Kalayaan* was established (1 January 1896). It was ostensibly published in Yokohama (actually in Binondo), to escape Spanish persecution, among other reasons. The betrayal of the Katipunan caused the destruction of the second issue, yet it is said that the ranks of the Katipunan grew by 30,000 after the sole issue of *Kalayaan*.

The 1896 revolution came to a temporary halt with the signing of the Pact of Biaknabato (4 August 1897), which provided for freedom of the press, among such other reforms as the equal treatment of Filipinos and Spaniards. The Spaniards, however, did not live up to these provisions, and instead exiled leaders of the revolution, among them General Emilio Aguinaldo.

The fighting continued, and on 24 May 1898, Aguinaldo proclaimed a Philippine Republic with himself as head. On 12 June, Philippine independence was declared, and a Revolutionary Congress held at Barasoain Church in Malolos on 14 September. General Aguinaldo,

12. *La Solidaridad*, Volume I, 1889, translated by Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1967), p. 3.

needing the press as an ally, decreed that "as long as abnormal conditions exist, no publication of any kind shall be permitted without a government license." He set up a revolutionary organ of his own, *El Heraldo de la Revolucion* (28 September 1898), later called *Heraldo Filipino*, *Indice Oficial*, and lastly *Gaceta de Filipinas*.

Five satirical publications were started by Spaniards in 1898: *Kon Leche*, *El Cometa*, *El Bejuco*, *El Chiflado*, and *La Restauracion*, and we read that "in demonstrating their idea of the freedom of the press under the American government some contracted libel suits, others were suppressed by the military authorities for indecent illustrations, and none long survived." The Spanish prisoners of war, many of whom remained till the signing of the treaty of peace, also established a paper called *El Soldado Español*, which was discontinued when they were sent home.¹³

The Filipinos, of course, established papers, all printed outside the American lines, but circulated in Manila. Most important was *La Independencia*, which has been called "the first paper to advocate independence from Spain" and in fact, except for *El Ilocano* and other publications by Isabelo de los Reyes, "the first newspaper published by native Filipinos in the islands," and also the first "really Philippine newspaper," having been founded when the former Spanish colony had proclaimed itself an independent nation.¹⁴

The first issue was published on 3 September 1898, twenty-six days after the first number of *El Heraldo de la Revolucion*, and its founder and editor was Antonio Luna, at that time commander-in-chief of the army of the new Philippine Republic. In its first editorial is announced its program:

We advocate the independence of the Philippine Islands because it is the inspiration of this country which now has come of age. When a country stands up, like a man, to protest with arms against injustice and oppression, that country shows vitality to live freely by itself. The organs of justice and government have already been functioning for three months after an arduous battle. We are treating our prisoners of war as any other civilized nation should treat prisoners of war.

A nation that does these things can govern itself alone.¹⁵

La Republica Filipina was published on 15 September 1898, and directed by Pedro Paterno and later by Leon Ma. Guerrero. Its aims are expressed thus: "The basis of society is respect for law. This respect

13. Carson Taylor, *History of the Philippine Press* (Manila: Bulletin Publishing Co., 1927), p. 33.

14. Quoted in *ibid.*

15. Valenzuela, *History*, p. 101.

must be practiced by all everywhere. Our ideal is reduced thus: With liberty and responsibility, we shall protect a free public and a stern government."¹⁶

El Católico Filipino (December 1898) was "for religious unity." *La Democracia* (1899–1908) was edited by Trinidad H. Pardo de Tavera. It became the organ of the Federal Party, and was "the first Filipino newspaper to recognize the sovereignty of the United States in the Philippine Islands . . . [it] urged the people to heal up the wounds of war by surrendering themselves to the Americans."¹⁷ *El Grito del Pueblo* and its Tagalog edition *Ang Kapatid ng Bayan* (1899) were both edited by Pascual Poblete. *El Filipino Libre* (1899) was published by Dr. Manuel Xeres Burgos, nephew of Fr. Jose Burgos.

Along with many other publications in Manila and the provinces on the side of the Philippine revolution, including a Spanish daily, was one still defending Spanish administration of the Philippines. This was *El Noticiero de Manila*, 1899, which announced it was Catholic in religion and Spanish in politics.

When the Americans preempted the Filipino army's conquest of Manila, the Filipino-American war began, and so did a new chapter in the press. Between 13 August, occupation day, and 31 December 1898, some seventeen papers were started.

The Americans, of course, founded their own newspapers. The first of them was the *Official Gazette*, published 23 August 1898, ten days after the occupation of Manila, to inform the 8,000 American soldiers of such military orders as the designation of the first provost marshal, commander of the guardia civil, collector of internal revenue, etc. Aboard Admiral Dewey's flagship, the *Olympia*, the ship organ called *The Bounding Billow* was printed as well, with a full description of the battle, telling how "Dewey did the Dons." *The American Soldier* was published by enlisted men of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteers. *The Manila Times*, the first American daily (11 October 1898) was published by Thomas Cowan, an Englishman. *The American*, the second American daily (15 October 1898), was established by Franklyn Brooks, a newspaper correspondent from New York, and financed by subscriptions from army and navy officers, who put up money to cover the cost of cable service from the Associated Press. In 1897 came other papers like *The Manila Freedom*, *The Tribune*, *The Insular Daily Press*, *The Sentinel* and the *Monthly Summary of the Commerce of the Philippine Islands*, all established by Americans.¹⁸

16. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

18. Taylor, *History*, pp. 30–36.

Strict military censorship was enforced from 1899–1900:

... [It was] intended to keep the Filipino belligerents in the Philippines from communicating with their agents in Hongkong and elsewhere and from knowing what was transpiring in the outside world, particularly between the Washington authorities and the Americans in the Islands. It required the advance reading of articles, and also eliminated materials the publication of which would subject the publishers to punishment.¹⁹

The censor was a military officer. Major General Frank McIntyre, Cebu censor, said that "the object of the censorship was to eliminate propaganda against occupying forces" and was pursued throughout the Philippines. The censors did not keep fixed office hours, and thus delayed the transmission of news since "the censor could not be found except after search or patient waiting for long hours." News of Gen. MacArthur's unsuccessful efforts at political dealings with the Filipinos, for example, were kept from the papers. Isabelo de los Reyes's *Filipinas ante Europa* (1899–1901), published in Madrid, being revolutionary and nationalistic, was not allowed to come into the country.

Military censorship seems to have lasted till about 1901, but was soon replaced by Act 292, the Sedition Act, passed 4 November 1901. Section 10, the basis for the arrest of the authors, casts, and sometimes audiences of the so-called "seditious plays," ruled out the topic most pressing for the Filipino press, namely independence:

Sec. 10. Until it has been officially proclaimed that a state of war or insurrection against the authority or sovereignty of the United States no longer exists in the Philippine Islands, it shall be unlawful for any person to advance orally or by writing or printing or like methods, the independence of the Philippine islands or their separation from the United States whether by peaceable or forcible means, or to print, publish or circulate any handbill, newspaper or publication, advocating such independence or separation.²⁰

The libel law (1901) was still another form of censorship. The famous case of *El Renacimiento* illustrates this well. In a campaign by the paper against certain Americans in government said to be mediating for big business, an editorial, "Aves de Rapiña" (Birds of Prey), was printed. Dean C. Worcester, Secretary of the Interior, brought suit for libel, and

19. Valenzuela, *History*, pp. 117–18.

20. *Public Laws Annotated*, cited in Tomas C. Hernandez, *The Emergence of Modern Drama in the Philippines 1898–1912*, Philippine Studies Working Paper No.2, Asian Studies Program, University of Hawaii, June 1976, p. 82.

was awarded \$30,000 in damages, while the editor and publisher (Teodoro M. Kalaw and Martin Ocampo) were given jail sentences. The Philippine Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court both affirmed the decision. The best legal minds in the country were involved, and the case attracted considerable attention in the foreign press (including Puerto Rican papers). Locally, the Filipino-owned and some Spanish-owned papers were on the side of *El Renacimiento*, while all the American papers were against it, showing the alignment of perceptions.

Because of this, *El Ideal* (26 January 1911) urged the Philippine legislature to pass a law abrogating the law of libel which is "so rigorous that it is not compatible with liberal and democratic practices of which the Americans are vainglorious . . . If saying the truth, placing the finger on sore spots, discovering unhealthy growths, and exposing shams is to be libelous, then there is no freedom for the press, and let us say: 'Down with Democracy!'"²¹

THE MODERN ERA

The period after the calling of the National Assembly (1907), through the Commonwealth government (inaugurated 1935), to the forties, has been called "modern" because of the establishment of American-style journalism. Journalism in the Spanish colonial period, even when focused on news, was literary in style (sometimes expressed in verse and metaphors), given to opinions and what today would be called editorializing, slow-paced and with little urgency. Journalism of the propaganda, revolutionary, and American colonial eras, being caught up in reform, revolution and the Fil-American war (which the Americans called an "insurgency"), was shaped by the issues and by the revolutionary or war conditions, including censorship.

At this time, newspaper publishing became less a government concern, or even the private concern of writers (propagandists, leaders, *aficionados* or enthusiasts), and more a business. *The Manila Daily Bulletin*, for example, which was started by Carson Taylor on 1 February 1900, aimed to supply shipping and commercial information, and nothing else, and was supported principally by shipping interests. It was at first distributed free, then put on a subscription basis in 1904. It became a general daily newspaper in 1912, and in 1957 passed to Philippine ownership (a group of businessmen represented by Hans Menzi).

21. Valenzuela, *History*, pp. 129-30.

The Manila Times first appeared on 11 October 1898, with an English publisher, but was later bought by various Americans. In 1917 it was sold to a group of Filipinos headed by Manuel Quezon, but it later passed back to Americans. It discontinued publication on 15 March 1930 (because of the "uncertain political status of the Philippines, portentous to American business").²² Among its editors have been names closely associated with the Philippine press, like R. McCulloch Dick and A.V.H. Hartendorp. The *Times* was purchased in 1927 by Alejandro Roces, Sr., by then the owner of a chain of newspapers (*Taliba*, *La Vanguardia*, and *Tribune* — familiarly called TVT), and flourished till it was ordered closed in 1972, upon the imposition of Martial Law.

The Philippines Herald was first published on 8 August 1920, on the initiative of Senate President Manuel Quezon. Feeling that *The Manila Times* (then an American paper) was misrepresenting the Filipinos in the minds of the visiting members of the U.S. Congress, he gathered wealthy Filipinos (Juan B. Alegre, Manuel Earnshaw, Tomas Earnshaw, Ramon Fernandez, Carmen Ayala de Roxas, Antonio R. Roxas, Vicente Madrigal, Mauro Prieto, Teodoro Yangco) and asked them to support a paper for the Filipino voice. When the paper was unable to secure a paper supply, it bought the *Cablenews-American* (which was about to close) to secure its paper contract. Eventually the *Herald* became part of a chain (DMHM) with *El Debate*, the *Monday Post* and *Mabuhay*. The *Herald* was bought by Andres Soriano in 1960 "after they (the Sorianos) tangled with and were second best to the Lopez combine, owner of the *Manila Chronicle* and some sugar centrals."²³

This was a period of keen competition and rivalry among the newspapers, and it has been said that: "Up to this time (1930) the Filipino papers have been calling each other . . . [names], each fighting for supremacy in a limited sphere of influence."²⁴

Significantly, both chains had papers in all the principal languages in the history of Philippine journalism: Spanish, English, and Tagalog. One might also note at this point that the newspapers in the vernacular have always been secondary to the newspapers in the colonial languages—Spanish and English. This proceeds from the colonial experience, in which the language of the colonizer is dominant, as the language of government, of contact with foreign countries, and of prestige. Another reason advanced for this is that "the heterogeneity

22. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

23. Jose B. Syjuco, quoted in Rosalinda Pineda-Ofreneo, *The Manipulated Press: A History of Philippine Journalism since 1945* (Mandaluyong, Metro Manila: Cacho Hermanos, Inc., 1984), p. 71.

24. Valenzuela, *History*, p. 191.

of native dialects prevents the vernacular newspapers from having a national aspect which the newspapers in the Philippines must have in order to progress."²⁵

Vernacular newspapers have been published in many of the major languages (e.g. *Ing Emangabiran*, 1908, Pampanga; *Magindanaw* in Davao; *Makinaugalingon*, 1913, Iloilo; *Palaris*, 1914, Pangasinan; *Ti Bagnos*, 1919, Laoag). Among the most successful have been *Liwayway* (1924), and its sister publications in Ilocano (*Bannawag*), Cebuano (*Bisaya*) and Ilongo (*Hiligaynon*), which published short stories and features.

There is also a significant Chinese press. The first Chinese newspaper in the Philippines was *Kong Li Po* (1912), and this was followed by a number of others, among them the *Chinese Commercial News* and *Hua Kiao Kong Po* (both 1922) and the *Fookien Times* (1926).

The woman's magazine began to grow as a segment of the press at this time, when the new American lifestyle focused attention on nutrition, home-making, education, fashion and society. The first of the genre, however was *El Bello Sexo*, which came out in January 1891. As early as 1893 (January 11) there was a magazine written entirely by women: *El Hogar*, edited by Amparo Gomez de la Serna, a Spaniard. Women, especially the new university graduates, entered journalism at this time too, not only in women's magazines, but in the literary sections of the regular magazines.

The newspapers of this period are completely American in influence: the physical formats, the style of newswriting, the attitude towards the gathering and reporting of news. This is the result not only of modelling on American newspapers, but also of the training of Filipino journalists in the United States. Even for the readers of the English-educated generation, the first consciousness is of American journalism, learned from the local American papers and from the U.S. teachers and schools.

THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Japanese rule imposed a systematic censorship on the press, even harsher than that which it had known under the Spanish and American regimes. Most newspapers were closed, and those allowed to function (the *Manila Tribune*, *Taliba* and *La Vanguardia*) were under censorship by the Propaganda Corps of the Army. Anyone wishing to publish a paper had first to secure a permit from the military, had to submit

25. *Ibid.*, p. 159.

to military censorship, was severely punished for any violations of the above, and was under complete control:

On 12 October 1942, control of TVT and *Liwayway* . . . was taken over by the Japanese Military Administration, and the publication of these periodicals was placed in the hands of the Osaka Mainichi Publishing Company, a group which established the Manila Sinbunsha Corporation . . . [which] was to control TVT, *Liwayway*, *Manila Sinbun*, *Shin-Seiki*, *Bicol Herald*, and *Davao Nichi-Nichi*, the legalized periodicals in the Philippines. Theoretically self-censorship was then in effect although official censors of the Department of Information still checked all copy nightly. Another censoring organization was created in January 1944, when puppet president Jose P. Laurel launched his Board of Information "to control, direct, supervise, and coordinate all information and publicity of the government."²⁶

This was countered by the guerrilla press, which aimed "to boost morale, to warn against Japanese collaboration, and to fight the Japanese in any way possible," in typewritten or mimeographed sheets edited by journalist-guerrillas. "To be caught with a copy of any of these sheets usually meant death."²⁷

The liberation of Manila on 3 February 1945 meant the liberation of the press as well, not only from Japanese censorship, but from the prewar "hoary tradition that newspapers must be million peso corporations."²⁸ Former editor Vicente Albano Pacis remembers that some 250 papers were published right after the Japanese occupation, many of them little more than flyers, being two-page single-sheet dailies. Jose Luna Castro has said: "Japanese control of the various media had created such a popular hunger for news about the Philippines and the outside world that even fly-by-night operators found it profitable to put out sidewalk papers."²⁹ By December 1945, however, the dailies were down to twenty-two, and eventually prewar newspapers were revived, the last one being *The Philippines Herald*, reopened 10 July 1949.

THE POSTWAR PERIOD

Teodoro Locsin, editor of the *Philippines Free Press*, describes the postwar press thus:

Never had the press been so free, never had it wielded such power and influence. The government was but recently established and uncertain of

26. Lent, "Philippines," p. 203.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 203-04.

28. Armando J. Malay, quoted in Lent, "Philippines," p. 204.

29. Quoted in Pineda-Offreneo, *Manipulated Press*, p. 18.

its strength. It was extremely sensitive to public opinion and the press took advantage of this healthy state, pouncing on the government's least mistakes and making national issues of them . . . The power of the press was utterly out of proportion to the circulations of the various papers. None could claim a sale of more than a few thousand copies . . . There was censorship by the U.S. Army. . . . But military censorship was soon erased and finally lifted, then it was open season and good hunting for politicians.³⁰

The first postliberation newspaper was published by the U.S. Office of War Information—the *Manila Free Philippines* (February–September 1945). It was at first distributed for free, and to get it long news-hungry lines formed every morning. Eventually it sold for five centavos. The Office of War Information had a major role in reviving the postwar Philippine press, as Mario Chanco acknowledges:

. . . the Office of War Information (now the US Information Service) lent a willing hand. Together with regular agencies, the OWI furnished pictures, published the *Free Philippines*, which was distributed free, and opened a radio station to help augment the limited facilities then available.

Last March, taking cognizance of the difficulty of provincial residents in obtaining news, the OWI organized a mobile crew to take the news to the provinces. Bad roads and continuing military operations hampered the mobile unit's work but the start had been made, and within a few days after V-J day, four mobile units were serving Manila and outlying provinces.

In addition to regular news broadcasts, the mobile crews put on short moving pictures featuring the latest developments in the world. A generator-driven phonograph plays the latest recordings, and transcriptions of important broadcasts both in Manila and the US are aired shortly after they are heard by their city listeners. Several thousand copies of the provincial edition of the *Free Philippines* and other informative publications are distributed.³¹

Raul Manglapus (current Secretary of Foreign Affairs), however, presented another side to the story:

On 16 February 1945, MacArthur turned over the government to Osmeña and the Commonwealth. Days before, the United States Office of War Information had established an office in North Manila, even as the guns roared south of the Pasig, and started to publish the *Free Philippines* to tell the Filipinos the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The Public Relations Office of GHQ, SWPA, had set itself up in the heart of the city and

30. Quoted in Lent, "Philippines," p. 204.

31. Quoted in Pineda-Ofreneo, *Manipulated Press*, pp. 18–19.

mushrooming newspapers, including the *Free Philippines*, were placed under strict, detailed, direct censorship. Foreign correspondents could not tell folks back home and local papers could not tell Filipinos that Manila was still left dirty, that Osmeña was slow, that MacArthur should not have liberated one minister and captured the rest, that cabinet members were making asses of themselves, that American MPs in some cases equalled if not surpassed the Kempetai in arrogance and rashness. Short-wave and local broadcast scripts were looked into to the letter to assure close uniformity with printed news. A Public Relations Officer called a Department Secretary and informed him that printed attacks against him and other government officials would be completely suppressed if they so desired. (Happily, the Secretary who had been a guerilla leader, replied he would not like to deny the press a right for which he himself had fought in the hills). Filipino newspapermen were shouted at in the PRO for daring to question censorship of specific articles. Reason for all this — military security.³²

Soon after the war, the big publishers reentered the newspaper scene, and in the free-enterprise economy, the small "militant, frequently dissenting newspapers" perished. These included the *Philippine Liberty News* owned by Manuel F. Manahan and edited by I.P. Soliongco; the *Manila Post* edited by Abelardo Subido and his wife, Trinidad Tarrosa-Subido; and the *Manila Tribune*, "the Cojuangco paper which dedicated itself to the promotion of Fil-American understanding,"³³ which was edited by Vicente Albano Pacis; and the *Morning Sun*, whose editor, Mauro Mendez, wrote:

They who have not the letter of credit to buy the linotypes, the rotaries, the newsprint, and the ink, shall not inherit the kingdom of the Press. For them, the pursuit of truth must be along harmless paths only. Theirs is not to question the good-will that draws the merchants, or, in a country so small as theirs, to incur for the hands that feed them the distempers of the gods.³⁴

The field was left mainly to the giants: *The Manila Bulletin*, which underwent modernization in 1947; *The Manila Times*, revived by the Roces family in 1945; the *Evening News*, Manila's first afternoon newspaper, put out by Ramon Roces in 1945 (he also resumed his vernacular magazines in the *Liwayway* chain); and the *Manila Chronicle*, which had started as "The People's Newspaper" in April 1945, with capital put up by staff members of the *Manila Post* and the *Tri-*

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

33. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 30.

34. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 40.

emergency in the Philippines, no foreign correspondence may be filed in this country which criticizes the Government and its duly constituted authorities.

Order No. 2 prohibited printers "from producing any form of publication for mass dissemination without permission from the DPI."

On 28 October, Presidential Decree (PD) No. 33 was issued, penalizing "the printing, possession, distribution and circulation of printed materials which are immoral or indecent, or which defy the Government or its officers, or which tend to undermine the integrity of the Government or the stability of the State." The penalty for violation was "*prison correccional* in its minimum period."

PD No. 90, promulgated on 6 January 1973, covered "rumor-mongering," penalizing:

Any person who shall offer, publish, distribute, circulate and spread rumors, false news, information and gossip or cause the publication, distribution, circulation or spreading of the same, which cause or tend to cause panic, divisive effects upon the people, discredit of or distrust for the duly constituted authorities, undermine the stability of government and the objectives of the New Society, endanger the public order, or cause damage to the interest or credit of the State.

PD Nos. 1834 and 1835, escalating the penalties for rebellion, sedition and other crimes relating to national security, also referred to journalism. Originally dated 16 January 1981, the day before the supposed lifting of martial law, these were kept secret for about a year and a half, and were finally rendered operational in July 1983, with their publication in the *Official Gazette*. PD No. 1737, called the Public Order Act, empowered the president to detain "persons and entities with a view to preventing them from acting in a manner prejudicial to the national security or maintenance of a public order," and to close "subversive publications and other media of mass communication." This was strengthened by the National Security Code, which had provisions against those

uttering, publishing, distributing, circulating and spreading rumors, false news and information and gossip, or causing the publication, distribution, circulation or reading of the same which cause or tend to cause panic, divisive effects among the people, discredit of or distrust for the duly constituted authorities, undermine the stability of the government and the objectives of the New Society, endanger the public order, or cause damage to the interest or discredit of the state.

In July 1983 PD Nos. 1875 and 1876 repealed the Public Order Act and the National Security Code. However, there remained PD Nos. 1834 and 1835 (above), and on 5 August 1983, there came PD No. 1877 abolishing the Presidential Commitment Order (PCO) and authorizing the PDA (Preventive Detention Action), which authorized "the incarceration for a period not exceeding one year of persons accused of national security crimes, i.e. rebellion, sedition, subversion, and/or the conspiracy or proposal to commit such crimes."

The above decrees and orders established the framework of control of the press during the martial law era, certainly the most systematic, fully articulated, thorough, and powerful of all the systems of control the Philippine press has known in its history. The decrees and orders, which automatically became part of the law of the land, spelled out in official, legal terms the fact that the authoritarian regime would brook no criticism, accept no suggestions, and would punish any threat to its image and stability. The image of a "smiling dictatorship" was to be established and enforced by smothering all dissent under a blanket of decrees.

To bolster these laws, media-regulating agencies were established. The Mass Media Council (MMC) was created through PD No. 36 on 2 November 1972, and given the task of passing upon applications of mass media for permission to operate. Thus, no newspaper, magazine, periodical or publication of any kind, and no radio, TV or telecommunications "facility, station or network" could begin operations without an MMC certificate of authority. The reason given for this was that mass media in the "Old Society" had taken part in the conspiracy against the Government by "indirectly giving aid and comfort to the forces of insurgency and subversion seeking to overthrow the Government by organized violence." General Order 12-c (9 November 1972) added that military tribunals would handle cases of persons operating communications media without the certificate of authority "signed by the Philippine President."

The MMC was abolished on 11 May 1973, and replaced by the Media Advisory Council (MAC), empowered to issue certificates of authority to operate mass media subject to presidential approval. It supervised privately-owned media, while the Bureau of Standards for Mass Media supervised government-owned media. The guidelines mentioned freedom of the press "guided by a sense of responsibility and discipline, without any control, supervision or censorship from any government body," but with "recognition of limitations to press freedom, including the laws on libel, invasion of privacy, obscenity and good taste, and on national security." Emphasis was placed on the last "during a period of national emergency, as occasioned by the

existence of an insurrection, rebellion, public disorder, or a state of war itself being waged by organized groups acting on orders from foreign elements."

The MAC was abolished on 9 November 1974, along with the Bureau of Standards for Mass Media, ostensibly because of: "(1) the improved capability of mass media to . . . discipline their ranks; and (2) the favorable peace and order situation of the country." PD 576 then divided the mass media into the print and broadcast media, and created the PCPM (Philippine Council for Print Media), with basically the same duties as the MAC and MMC, and the power to impose sanctions including cancellation of registration certificates, suspension, and written admonitions.

A significant point is that, in the guidelines issued by the PCPM for print media practitioners, responsibility for policing publications was laid squarely on the shoulders of the publishers:

The publisher must assume final and full responsibility for everything printed in his publication. He must be guided by the knowledge that press freedom is a public trust and should not be used to serve personal, anti-social and divisive interests.

Thus, to the threat of official punishment from the state with which the writer had to contend was added sanction from the publisher who, fearing closure of his publication, promulgated internal standards of censorship and exercised close supervision over his writers. It was also through the publisher that official displeasure was conveyed, directly or indirectly, and was then his to interpret and act upon. Examples are many of the actions taken: dismissing a writer outright, pulling out the article already printed; recalling the issues if already distributed; withholding the article in question and replacing it with another; "freezing" the writer by not allowing him to write even while retaining him on the payroll; demoting the writer; and, mildest of all, cutting out the offending portions of the article so that it may be acceptable to officialdom.

The official sanctions for transgression of these written laws and their unspoken codicils were: censure, banning, closure of publications, arrest, and for foreigners deportation, or denial of entry. Between official, publishers' and unofficial sanctions, a "culture of crisis" was created in which journalists had to work. Yet all the while the Marcos government claimed "freedom of the press." In February 1973, Secretary of Information Francisco Tatad explained the need for "certain restraints on the freedom of the media" in exchange for a "unified policy and single-minded course toward development," saying

What is sad . . . is that [the Western press has made] the media policies appear brutalized, illiberal and negative . . . What is clear to me, at least to the Philippine experience, is that when media in a modernizing society accept a role relative to development, they embrace a set of postulates about their work that are, in fact, progressive, reformist, and in the long run, liberal.³⁹

Again and again it was announced and pointed out how "free" the press was, and how there was no censorship at all.

The newspapers that were allowed to reopen belonged to Marcos friends and relatives, among them *The Bulletin Today*, a resurrected *Manila Daily Bulletin*, belonging to presidential aide-de-camp General Hans Menzi; *The Times Journal*, belonging to Benjamin Romualdez, brother of Mrs. Marcos; *The Daily Express*, belonging to friend Roberto S. Benedicto, who also controlled three television channels. The Lopez-owned ABS-CBN was taken over, and one channel became GTV-4, the official government station. However, Marcos could and did preempt space on the other channels (often on all of them) when he wished. Eduardo Cojuangco, Jr., a close friend, owned a nationwide radio network.

The result of this structure of presidential orders and decrees, supervised by publishers and media-regulating agencies, and backed by official and military police powers, was a "crony press" that showed just how they were controlled, by publishing stories with identical wording on all their front pages. Obviously the press releases were written by government spokesmen and released by official sources. It was a press that wrote the New Society line, observing the unspoken boundaries: no unfavorable mention of the regime, and no questioning, or even the mildest criticism of the Marcoses, high officialdom, and the military.

For the members of the press who succumbed, it often meant corruption:

. . . the prostitution of the profession, [yielding to such blandishments as] . . . free passes, wining and dining, pocket money given during press conferences, regular "envelopes," monthly retainers, stocks and bonds, dollars, airplane tickets, expensive gifts (including cars), money-making projects . . . jobs for relatives, unlimited access to airports, seaports and Customs (thus facilitating the lucrative entry of highly dutiable items), etc. . . . outright extortion . . . blackmail . . . direct sale of published material . . .⁴⁰

39. *The Bulletin Today*, 4 February and 8 March 1973.

40. *The White Paper*, 6 October 1977, quoted in Pineda-Ofreneo, *Manipulated Press*, p. 143.

For those members of the press who did not succumb, the result was a lifestyle of brinksmanship: writing as one must, and while keeping the limits in mind, testing them to see how far they could be stretched. The "girls" of the *Bulletin Today*, for example, who wrote 750-word columns on various subjects, occasionally slipped in pieces about military abuses, corruption in high places, political prisoners, newsmen's arrests. Feature writers wrote pieces on oppression that brought in storms of letters (in praise of their courage, but also in denial and accusation). In 1983 the columns were removed completely, and eight writers and editors, all of them women, were "invited" by the military for interrogation by Special Committee No. 2 of the National Intelligence Board. They were questioned about their personal lives, religious beliefs, income from writing, understanding of "national security," and whether they belonged to the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Although many of them were eventually repressed, these writers had extended the limits of what could be written about, and paved the way for the alternative, or non-crony, press. Individual writers could be suppressed by crony publishers; whole newspapers were not as easy to silence. *We Forum* was the first protest newspaper, and it was allowed to exist as an example of freedom of the press, also because its low circulation did not make it seem dangerous enough to stop. On 7 December 1982, however, editor Jose Burgos and his columnists and staff members were arrested (after a story on the false Marcos medals), the paper's printing equipment, office and assets locked and placed guard; its typewriters, telephones and files taken by the military.

The *We Forum* case and others rallied and united the press, laying part of the foundation for the emergence of other members of the alternative press after the Aquino assassination. Their numbers (*Malaya*, *Mr. & Ms.*, *Veritas*, *Philippine Signs*, *Kabayan*, *Business Day*, etc. constituted quite a body of writers and readers) made suppression difficult. A boycott of the government-controlled press ("Ban the *Bulletin*! Suppress the *Express*! Junk the *Journal*!") worked extremely well, even though spread only by word of mouth. People came out in support of the "mosquito press" by cooperating with the boycott, buying the alternates, and writing in.

As protest mounted, so did sanctions. Added to the government arsenal of PD's and LOI's, threats and questioning, arrest and detention, closure of publications and firing of journalists, came the libel suits. Some were announced but not filed, being obviously threats. Some were filed but not pursued, and left to hang over the journalist's head. Some were for ridiculously astronomical amounts that no

Philippine journalist could expect to earn in his lifetime, being meant to carry the clout of power and the threat of position, and terrify the journalists and publishers into submission.

The ultimate threat to the journalist was death, and there was no lack of examples: Kenneth Lee, *Depthnews* correspondent, killed in Jolo; Demy Dingcong, *Bulletin Today* correspondent, shot dead in his house in Iligan City; Porfirio Doctor, publisher-editor of the *National Guardian* and radio commentator, shot in Zamboanga City; Geoffrey Siao of the *Philippine Post* in Iligan; Jacobo Amatong, publisher-editor of the *Mindanao Observer*; Noe Alejandrino, reporter of the *Economic Monitor*, reported killed in a gunbattle with the Philippine Constabulary in Bulacan; Alex Orcullo, editor-publisher of *Mindaweek* news-magazine and *Mindanao Currents*, shot by ten men in Davao City.

The contra-martial law press efforts featured as well a vigorous underground press. This included banned articles from the foreign press, photocopied and passed around, the so-called "xerox journalism," such publications by religious as *Signos*, published by the Association of Major Religious Superiors, and *The Communicator*, edited by Fr. James B. Reuter, S.J.; and the Left's *Ang Bayan* (official organ of the Communist Party of the Philippines), *Liberation* (National Democratic Front), *Ulos* (a literary magazine), and various provincial papers, mostly typewritten and mimeographed and circulated hand-to-hand.

The repressive Marcos control of the press thus caused the rise of the protest journalism that eventually assisted in its downfall.

THE AQUINO GOVERNMENT

With the return of democracy, the press has, so to speak, started again from a position in law. Although the Marcos-promulgated 1973 Constitution had proclaimed that "No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech or of the press" it was blockaded by an array of decrees and devices (including secret memorandum agreements) ensuring its suppression.

The 1986 Constitution has the following provisions relating to the press:

Article III

BILL OF RIGHTS

Section 1. No person shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor shall any person be denied the equal protection of the laws.

Sec. 4. No law shall be passed abridging the freedom of speech, of expression, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances.

Sec. 7. The right of the people to information on matters of public concern shall be recognized. Access to official records, and to documents, and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law.

THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS

Sec. 4. The Commission may, during the election period, supervise or regulate the enjoyment or utilization of all franchises or permits for the operation of transportation and other public utilities, media of communication or information, all grants, special privileges or concessions granted by the Government or any subdivision, agency, or instrumentality thereof, including any government-owned or controlled corporation or its subsidiary. Such supervision or regulation shall aim to ensure equal opportunity, time, and space, and the right to reply, including reasonable, equal rates therefor, for public information campaigns and forums among candidates in connection with the objective of holding free, orderly, honest, peaceful, and credible elections.

Sec. 9. Unless otherwise fixed by the Commission in special cases, the election period shall commence ninety days before the day of election and shall end thirty days thereafter.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Sec. 11. (1) The ownership and management of mass media shall be limited to citizens of the Philippines, or to corporations, cooperatives or associations, wholly-owned and managed by such citizens.

The Congress shall regulate or prohibit monopolies in commercial mass media when the public interest so requires. No combinations in restraint of trade or unfair competition therein shall be allowed.

(2) The advertising industry is impressed with public interest, and shall be regulated by law for the protection of consumers and the promotion of the general welfare.

Only Filipino citizens or corporations or associations at least seventy *per centum* of the capital of which is owned by such citizens shall be allowed to engage in the advertising industry.

The participation of foreign investors in the governing body of entities in such industry shall be limited to their proportionate share in the capital thereof, and all the executive and managing officers of such entities must be citizens of the Philippines.

In its commitment to democracy, and in reaction to the extreme repression of the previous regime, the Aquino government has been strict about adherence to freedom of the press, and has not implemented orders (still in force) about any kind of censorship. It has also avoided coddling the press as Marcos did (with money, facilities, privileges) so that it cannot be accused of swaying it to any interpretation of the truth. No longer do the government offices engage in "press release journalism." Instead the reporters are back to working their beats. This could be difficult, as in the case of Malacañang, the prime beat, where the President did not use to give regular press conferences, and "ambush journalism" was the unhappy solution (since rectified). There is no official government paper, and even the TV Channel 4, the station which airs government programs, is given no subsidy, and operates like a commercial channel in order to survive.

The newspapers after the February 1986 revolution bore the hangover of protest, and the most popular were the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *Mr. & Ms.*, and *Malaya*, all of the alternative press. The *Bulletin* was seen as a crony paper, and dropped in circulation, especially when Marcos ownership of 74 percent of the shares was revealed. It eventually recovered its prime position in circulation, however, because of its strong advertising component (the classified ads, the obituaries). The heady air of freedom also caused papers to proliferate, just as they had after the Japanese occupation. Some papers (e.g. *The Independent*, *The Observer*) soon closed, yet today there are 27 newspapers in Metro Manila, and 252 community papers in the provinces.

Since 1986, however, the ownership of some papers has changed. Ownership has slowly reverted to some of the old families and their vested interests. *The Manila Chronicle* has been reopened by the Lopez family, who also own TV Channel 2, and have tried to get back Channel 4. *The Manila Times* was reopened by the Roceses and then sold to John Gokwongwei. One member of the family, Alejandro Roces, is president of the *Bulletin*, which has undergone changes in ownership structure, being now owned by Emilio Yap, a banker, and by whoever owns the Marcos shares (a question as yet unanswered). *The Standard* was acquired by the Elizaldes, then sold to the Sorianos; *The Philippine Star*, *Business Star* and *Evening Star* are published by Betty Go-Belmonte, whose father, Go Puan Seng, was editor of *The Fookien Times*. *The Daily Globe* is owned by Alfredo and Benjamin Ramos of National Bookstore, with Teodoro Locsin, Jr., presidential speechwriter, as publisher. It has linked up with the revived *Philippines Free Press*, edited by Teodoro Locsin, Sr. *Business World* is published by Raul Locsin, who formerly published *Business Day*, and whose father was the publisher

of a provincial newspaper. *Malaya*, formerly published by Jose Burgos, changed ownership twice and lost its "protest" character. *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* aims at broad-based ownership, and is owned by media professionals, among them publisher Eugenia D. Apostol and Mariano B. Quimson, Jr. media manager.

The Philippine Press Institute, established in 1964 and suspended from 1972 to 1986 (along with the Press Council), has been holding seminars for the training of journalists, and for the raising of ethical standards for the press. It recently promulgated a Code of Ethics (cf. Appendix), which newspaper publishers and their staffs are adopting officially. Its publication, the PPI Press *Torum*, is distributed to newspapers, press associations and related agencies, and contains materials on the role, responsibility, ethics, and practice of journalism. The Press Council, which it formed in 1966 for the purpose of regulating the press and preventing corruption, commercialization, sensationalism and dishonesty, is in the process of reorganization and revival.

Professional associations of communicators, like the People in Communication (PIC) and the Philippine Communication Society (PCS), are also involved in the upgrading of the press through seminars, dialogues, and publications. Both organizations have actively lobbied in Congress for legislation on communications, including controls on media ownership, to prevent the media monopolies of old.

CONCLUSION

The Philippine press has indeed had a checkered history of power relations, of freedom and control, which evolved into and is reflected in its present system.

In the Spanish colonial period, there was strict press control in the interests of the Spanish government, and small-enterprise press ownership. The revolution against Spain brought about a nationalistic press, mostly in the vernacular, banned, and circulating clandestinely. The American insular government instituted strict press control by the military, which ended when the libel and sedition laws effectively banned all advocacy of independence, the main subject of passion and urgency of the time.

The "modern" period between the Commonwealth and the Marcos era was marked by free-enterprise, American-style journalism, and thus the growth of newspapers as big business. Although there were no apparent controls, power relations (business and advertising interests, political interests, and American interests) influenced and in effect controlled the press. This was the time of what has been called the freest press in the East, and also the most licentious. Such problems

as newspapers supporting the vested interests of their owners, reporters drawing salaries from their newspapers and from government officials and politicians, yellow journalism, media monopolies, publishers putting the ledger over the interests of truth and information, etc. were products of the system and the freedom.

The Marcos government imposed the sternest and most systematic controls in history, while trumpeting its belief in press freedom. A system of decrees, agencies of control, and secret orders, was buttressed by unspoken but real threats of arrest, closure, banning, firing, and even death. The culture of fear was effective control, but the culture of crisis engendered was what developed heroic journalism, and eventually the alternative press, both instrumental in the downfall of the regime.

The Aquino government has returned the press to structures of democracy, with a new constitution that is indeed the law of the land, and strictly upheld. The press is free again, but movements in the press, especially changes and adjustments in ownership, are setting up once more some of the structures and vested interests of the fifties.

The Philippine press system, therefore, is the product of both control and freedom. Control by the Spanish colonial government, the American insular government, the Japanese occupation forces, and finally and most strictly by the Marcos government, makes for a total of some 120 years since 1811, date of the first formal newspaper. The intermittent periods of freedom include the thirty-four years from the postcolonial period of self-government to the Japanese occupation; the forty-three from liberation to Martial Law; and then the years since President Aquino.

When there was control, there were urgent and imaginative solutions such as the underground presses and "xerox" journalism; there were protests, and struggles to be free. When there was freedom there was a free exchange of ideas and a venturesome pursuit of the truth—but also the abuses of irresponsible freedom.

The philosophy behind this hard-won freedom is that of liberal democracy, in which the press stands as witness, sworn to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is the medium through which the people receive the information they must have in order to make the decisions that run the democracy. As witness, it stands as watchdog of the government on the people's behalf—not necessarily an adversary (unless the government is abusive), but an ally and partner in the cause of democracy.

Further to this role as critic, check and conscience of government, is its allied role of educator—through information on current issues,

history, development; through the dissemination of culture and cultural values; through its interpretation and analysis of all the above.

Who serves then as critic, check and conscience of the press in its vital roles? The press itself, which in a democracy is responsible for itself. It is responsible to the reader; it is responsible to itself. With its freedom came this responsibility; with the responsibility came the duty to formulate its own codes and to enforce them.

The legal foundation for this freedom is built into the 1986 Philippine Constitution. Although the words are noticeably derived from those of the American Constitution, the conviction behind and the commitment to them come from the years of actual experience of repression, and hard-won freedom. The Marcos years, the most recent and most thorough experience of nonfreedom, gave Filipino nuances to such words as "the right of the people to information," and "the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for redress of grievances." The press today can illustrate these with actual incidents. Even the provisions against "torture, force, violence, threat, intimidation, or any other means," bring back real experiences in the conduct of press work.

As a result, the Aquino government is committed to a free press, even when the freedom means criticism that stings. And the Philippine press, having won its freedom again and again, treasures it and feels with the People's Movement for Press Freedom:

Press freedom curtailment without our unified resistance? NEVER AGAIN. Never again shall Philippine media, or the citizenry for that matter, allow without resistance, much less accept as legitimate, the imposition of restrictions on, or exceptions to, the Constitutionally-guaranteed indivisibility of the Freedom of the Press.

It is a matter of concern that the government, committed as it is to democracy, continue to keep the press free; and that the press, forged by both repression and freedom, focus on truth, and live up to the responsibilities of being free.

APPENDIX

A JOURNALIST'S CODE OF ETHICS

(Subscribed to by the Philippine Press Institute and the National Press Club)

- I. I shall scrupulously report and interpret the news, taking care not to suppress essential facts nor to distort the truth by omission or improper emphasis. I recognize the duty to air the other side and the duty to correct substantive errors promptly.
- II. I shall not violate confidential information or material given me in the exercise of my calling.
- III. I shall resort only to fair and honest methods in my effort to obtain news, photographs and/or documents, and shall properly identify myself as a representative of the press when obtaining any personal interview intended for publication.
- IV. I shall refrain from writing reports which will adversely affect a private reputation unless the public interest justifies it. At the same time, I shall fight vigorously for public access to information.
- V. I shall not let personal motives or interests influence me in the performance of my duties; nor shall I accept or offer any present, gift or other consideration of a nature which may cast doubt on my professional integrity.
- VI. I shall not commit any act of plagiarism.
- VII. I shall not in any manner ridicule, cast aspersions on, or degrade any person by reason of sex, creed, religious belief, political conviction, cultural and ethnic origin.
- VIII. I shall presume persons accused of crime of being innocent until proven otherwise. I shall exercise caution in publishing names of minors and women involved in criminal cases so that they may not unjustly lose their standing in society.
- IX. I shall not take unfair advantage of a fellow journalist.
- X. I shall accept only such tasks as are compatible with the integrity and dignity of my profession, invoking the "Conscience Clause" when duties imposed on me conflict with the voice of my conscience.
- XI. I shall comport myself in public or while performing my duties as journalist in such manner as to maintain the dignity of my profession. When in doubt, decency should be my watch word.