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Notes and Comments

Quezon and Independence: A Reexamination

MICHAEL PAUL ONORATO

In January and February 1987 I spent some time reading Manuel L. Quezon's private financial papers, press releases, statements, lesser known speeches, and very personal family correspondence at the National Library in Manila. In two previous research trips to the Philippines, my attention had been centered on Quezon's political career between 1907 and 1929 and the *moro-moro* nature of the Quezon-Wood controversy arising from the Philippine cabinet crisis of July 1923. For some reason, I did not examine those files in 1963-64 and in March 1972. Perhaps, it was the press of time and the mistaken belief that they would not be productive. But, as I went through those earlier neglected file boxes in 1987 I found that Quezon emerges as softer and less strident with respect to the independence question.

THE PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Most students of the Philippines are aware of the broad outlines of the Philippine independence movement. We know that the Nacionalista party under Sergio Osmeña and Quezon's leadership made "immediate, complete, and absolute independence" its rallying cry from the Philippine Assembly election of 1907 down to the United States congressional approval of the Tydings-McDuffie Act which provided for independence on 4 July 1946. We are aware from the researches of Nita Reyes Churchill, Theodore Friend, Peter Stanley, Michael Cullinane, and my own, that there was much American and Philippine rhetoric and bombast concerning independence, and that there were many missed opportunities by Filipinos to achieve their

goals before 1934. There have been many discussions among those alive then and scholars today as to what Osmeña and Quezon, especially Quezon, really wanted. Cullinane in his recent view of Churchill's monograph on the Philippine independence missions between 1919 and 1934 raises that very question.¹

In late 1922, after nearly a decade and more of demanding a solution to the Philippine question and spending several hundred thousands of dollars to promote independence, the Filipino leaders, especially Quezon, decided not to pursue a plan calling for a Philippine dominion despite the fact that a well-drawn plan had been agreed upon by prominent Manila Americans and key Filipinos. But in 1922-23, Quezon and Osmeña had no choice. The emergence of the Democrata party as a political force after the June 1922 elections forced the Nacionalistas (whether of Osmeña's unipersonalist or Quezon's collectivist wing) to appear more radical than the Democrata on the matter of "immediate, complete, and absolute independence."

In simple terms what was meant by dominion status for the Philippine Islands was that the Philippines would be governed by Filipinos, having their own elected chief executive, retaining their existing economic relationship with the United States, while yielding control of their foreign relations to Washington, and keeping American sovereignty through the presence of the United States flag, naval stations and military reservations, and a high commissioner. This plan satisfied both sides in Manila. Domestic Philippine politics, however, prevented further discussion and implementation.²

The so-called Quezon-Wood constitutional crisis was a time when an inordinate amount of Filipino political energy was consumed over essentially a contrived issue to the detriment of the independence movement. The failure of Quezon and Osmeña to pursue the Coolidge administration's grudging support of the Fairfield Bill in 1924-25, which bore a striking resemblance to the 1922 effort and bears a remarkable similarity to the Hare-Hawes Cutting Act of 1933 and the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, was another missed opportunity for a solution. However, the accusation by Claro M. Recto, a Democrata leader, that both men had accepted something less than "immediate, complete,

1. Michael Cullinane, "A Review Article on the Philippine Independence Missions to the United States: 1919-1934," *Pilipinas* (Spring, 1987): 64.

2. See "An Act to Enable the People of the Philippine Islands to form a Constitution and Government" in Bureau of Insular Affairs 364/458, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; see also my *Leonard Wood as Governor General* (Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc. 1968), pp. 15-16, 50-51, 92, footnotes 89-90, p. 93, footnote 103, pp. 105-06, footnotes 227, 237.

and absolute independence" forced Quezon and Osmeña to abandon any consideration whatsoever of the Fairfield Bill.³

We know that Osmeña alone in 1925-26, and later between 1930 and 1933 in association with Manuel Roxas, tried to steal Quezon's thunder by returning home with United States congressional legislation settling the Philippine question. Quezon scotched the Osmeña-Roxas efforts when he got the Philippine legislature to reject the Hare-Hawes Cutting Act of 1933. He then went to Washington and returned home with the same Hare-Hawes Cutting Act renamed the Tydings-McDuffie Act with changes concerning naval stations and military reservations. Independence was delayed so that Quezon could claim the victory.

QUEZON AND INDEPENDENCE

The pledge of independence on 4 July 1946 was given to the Philippines in spite of Quezon's best efforts to prevent it. Sovereign independence was not what he was after between 1907 and 1934. It must have been a terrible blow for him that his rhetoric and public posturing at home and America had led to a situation which he did not really want. He would have been much happier retaining some formal connection with the American people. If he could not retain American protection, then he would look to the British Empire. His efforts in late 1935 and throughout 1936-37 to build definite, behind-the-scene ties to Great Britain are well documented by Nicholas Tarling in his article on Quezon and the British Foreign Office which was published in 1978. I had discovered a hint of this while editing the Francis Burton Harrison diary on the early days of the Philippine Commonwealth.

In Quezon's thinking, the Philippines could not be cut adrift in the confusing maelstrom of Asian politics of the 1930s.⁴ His efforts to support a reexamination movement, which was started in 1939 by Philippine sugar interests among others in the Philippines, failed when

3. See "The Philippine Independence Mission of 1922" and "Independence Rejected: The Philippines, 1924" in my *A Brief Review of American Interest in Philippine Development and Other Essays*, rev. ed. (Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc., 1972), pp. 60-63, 90-97 respectively.

4. Nicholas Tarling, "Quezon and the British Commonwealth," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 13 (August 1977): 182-206; see also R. John Pritchard, "President Quezon and incorporation of the Philippines into the British Empire, 1935-1937," *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* 12 (January-March 1984): 42-63; see also my "The British Foreign Office and the Philippines, 1907-1927," *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* 11 (January-March 1983): 59-73.

Filipinos and Americans refused to reconsider the independence question.⁵ Whether he could have been able to avert total independence on 4 July 1946 by his using his immense and very persuasive powers will never have been known.

The 1920s are the best time to listen to Quezon about America and the independence question. He had beaten Osmeña in 1922-23 and become the acknowledged leader of the Filipino people. He was on a political roll until he was into the time-consuming and nearly self-destructive moro-moro episode with Leonard Wood. He was becoming wealthy and comfortable in his dealings with the rich and the powerful in the United States and the Philippines. He was also more introspective. He had suffered a personal tragedy in the loss of a daughter. He was at death's door twice in that decade. In the period between late 1923 and 1933, there are some interesting speeches and statements by Quezon that are worth noting. My attention was drawn particularly to the speeches given between 22 November and 4 December 1927 while Quezon was in the United States trying to find a governor-general after the unanticipated death of Wood.⁶

Quezon was comfortable among American people, whether they were businessmen, military, politicians, or just plain folk. Cullinane has shown the almost brotherly relationship that Quezon developed with Harry Bandholtz and James G. Harbord, both of whom were constabulary officers.⁷ I have maintained that throughout Quezon's alleged confrontation with Wood both men worked together behind the scenes.⁸ It was while serving as Philippine resident commissioner

5. See Gerald E. Wheeler, "The Movement to Reverse Philippine Independence," *Pacific Historical Review* 23 (1963): 167-82; see also "The Re-Examination issue: A View from the Inside. The Aide-Memoires of Salvador Araneta," *Pilipinas* 7 (Fall, 1986): 11-28.

6. The file boxes are crammed full of press releases, statements, speeches before the Senate and its committees, and speeches before Filipino and American organizations large and small. Some of the press releases and statements were never published. Some bear no date or title. Virtually all are written in English. Some in Quezon's own hand. Most bear some sign of editing indicating that he read what he dictated. Only his speeches before the Philippine Senate and its committees are in Spanish. The number of press releases or speeches in Tagalog are less than ten between 1921 and 1933. Similarly the number of statements or speeches in Spanish other than to the Senate are less than ten for the same period. It would appear that Quezon had become sufficiently comfortable in English by the 1920s. I saw no sign that he drafted any statement or speech in any language other than English except for his Senate speeches.

7. Michael Cullinane, "Quezon and Harry Bandholtz," *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* 9 (January-March 1981): 79-90, 99-101.

8. Michael P. Onorato, "Quezon and the Governors General," *Bulletin of the American Historical Collection* 9 (January-March 1981): 90-98; see also "Leonard Wood and His

to Washington that Quezon came to appreciate the openness of American society. He discovered that Americans were genuinely interested in what he had to say about his countrymen and their desire for freedom. He saw that Americans harbored no evil intentions toward his countrymen, but were confused about Filipinos and their capacity to maintain a sovereign nation. During the seven years he represented the Philippines in the House of Representatives, he made life-long friendships with many senators and congressmen from both sides of the aisle. He even found time for very serious romance and would have married Nina Thomas, a Washington attorney, if he could have survived politically in the Philippines.

While it is true that both he and many American businessmen, military, and political leaders used each other to further their own agendas, it should never be said that Quezon's affection for the United States and the American people was a sham. There is enough evidence to suggest that he believed that he in a very personal way and his countrymen likewise owed much to the generosity of the United States and those Americans who served in the Philippines. If there were any Americans whom he disliked, it was those who pretended to be holier-than-thou and put down the Filipino as lacking completely the capacity for managing their own affairs.

Let us turn now to those representative statements. In late 1923, Quezon said:

The United States is not benefitted by the possession of the Philippines. . . . The Philippines, in the opinion of many, are a source of military weakness. This may be or may not be true. But one thing is certain. That the Philippines can only be a military asset if the Filipino people are friendly to the United States and are ready to fight for them. . . . To have the Philippines as a military and commercial asset to the United States, it has to be self-governing because it is the only way the good will of the Filipinos can be won. Under an independent and self-governing Philippines, the United States may have here, if it so desires, naval, military, and commercial stations—a rich country which American capital can develop under good auspices. And certainly, a grateful people that would buy, sell and fight for the country which has given us our freedom.⁹

Shortly thereafter, he would say that "the national interests of America are not incompatible with the national aspirations of the

Khaki Cabinet in the Philippines: 1921-1927," in *A Brief Review of American Interest*, pp. 98-108.

9. Manuel L. Quezon, "Untitled Statement (1923)," Quezon Papers, National Library, Manila.

Filipino people."¹⁰ The above themes will be repeated time and again in Manila and in the United States over the next two decades.

In 1924, while in Washington trying to patch-up his relations with the Coolidge administration because of the cabinet crisis fall-out, Quezon wrote "In this day and generation it should be plain to all men who have studied the course of human experience that no alien government, however well meant, however thoughtfully laid out, will fit into the psychology of the governed." He went on to discuss the economic and external defense issues used by some Americans to deny independence or extended autonomy to the Filipinos. He concluded by saying that "these and similar problems are properly for the Filipinos themselves to solve, if they are worthy of the freedom they seek."¹¹ Quezon would come back to this theme in his inaugural address as Commonwealth President on 15 November 1935 and several days later in his speech to the National Assembly concerning National Defense.¹²

On 27 November 1927, while addressing the American Association of Social Sciences in Philadelphia, Quezon said, "Give us our freedom. Let us swim. You perhaps will say, 'Well, you may drown.' We will see to it that we do not drown. We are not desirous of committing suicide. We are ready to assume that responsibility because we feel we will be equal to it." ¹³ Two days later at the Hamilton Club of Chicago, he repeated the same sentiments and concluded by saying, "the maximum of what we want is immediate and absolute independence and the minimum we will take is a government of the Philippines by Filipinos, with such trade arrangements or strategic advantages for you as you may need."¹⁴

On 24 September 1924, on the eve of his departure for Manila, Quezon made a radio speech in Washington to the American people and said: "The Filipino people are mindful of the benefits they have received from their association with the United States. They will forever be tied by bonds of gratitude to this country. But . . . they want your

10. M.L. Quezon, "The Trend of Philippine Affairs (1923)," Quezon Papers.

11. M.L. Quezon, "A Moral Issue (1924)," Quezon Papers.

12. "Inaugural Address" in *Quezon in His Speeches* (Manila: State Publishing Company, 1937), pp. 85-88; and "On National Defense" in *Quezon in His Speeches*, pp. 93, 108.

13. M.L. Quezon, "Speech Before the American Association of Social Sciences, 27 November 1927," Quezon Papers.

14. M.L. Quezon, "Speech Before the Hamilton Club of Chicago, 29 November 1927," Quezon Papers.

friendship—not your mastery.”¹⁵ Three years later, while speaking to the Economic Club of New York on 22 November 1927, he said:

You may leave the Philippine Islands tomorrow . . . but as long as the world stands, the work that you have done in the Philippines will remain. You have left in the Philippine Islands your institutions. You have made that country a country in the midst of Asiatic people with ideals and aspirations of the Occident . . . I want to tell you that what flag floats in the Philippines . . . a thousand years from now, the Filipinos will not live who will not think and feel as they have been made to think and feel through American education in the Philippine Islands during the past thirty years . . . We would take your side, standing by you on all questions.¹⁶

As an exile from the wartorn Philippines, Quezon would write in *The Good Fight*, “Fifty years of association with American ideals, as inspired and practiced by the United States in the Philippines with altruism and generosity, have finally rounded out our apprenticeship and fixed our Western characteristics.”¹⁷ Speaking before the Filipino Association of Chicago on 29 November 1927, Quezon said that while Filipinos want independence, a compromise could be struck. In so doing, the United States could make Filipinos their friends forever tied by a “sense of real gratitude and affection” which “would mean that America will find a strong and loyal ally always.”¹⁸ In his preface to *The Good Fight*, Quezon wrote that he wanted “to throw into bold relief the fruit of America’s policy in the Philippines, namely, the voluntary sacrifice made by the Filipino people of their lives and their fortunes, fighting side by side with the United States against a common foe.”¹⁹ On Corregidor, in early 1942, when he was contemplating the drastic step of placing himself at the disposal of the Japanese in an effort to stop further bloodshed, he received a message from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the effect that America would fight the Japanese even if the Philippine government found it necessary to cease hostilities. Quezon would write in his book *The Good Fight*, “When I realized that FDR was big enough to assume and place the burden of the defense of my country upon the sacrifice and heroism of his own people alone, I swore to myself and to the God of my ancestors

15. The talk was broadcast at 9 P.M..

16. M.L. Quezon, “Speech Before the Economic Club of New York, 22 November 1927,” Quezon Papers.

17. M.L. Quezon, *The Good Fight* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1946), pp. 295-96.

18. M.L. Quezon, “Speech Before the Filipino Association of Chicago, 29 November 1927,” Quezon Papers.

19. *The Good Fight*, pp. xiii-xiv.

that as long as I lived I would stand by America regardless of the consequences to my people and to myself."²⁰

In August 1937, upon his return from his triumphal tour of the United States Quezon said, "We are bound to America by the most sincere and the deepest sense of gratitude. America has not only been just and fair, she has been very liberal and highminded in her dealings with the Filipino people and no words would be sufficiently strong to condemn us if we were insensible to such treatment." He went on to say, "The Philippines craves the sympathy and goodwill of the American people, now and forever." He ended by characterizing the Filipinos and Americans as junior and senior partners in the effort to build a viable Philippines.²¹

On 28 July 1927 in a speech to the Philippine Columbian Association, Quezon rejected the argument of radical Filipinos that their country should seek Chinese nationalist support in the Philippine struggle for independence, and concluded by repeating a theme that is found throughout many of his statements on independence, "We must renew our faith in the spirit of the fair play of America."²² Speaking at the University of Michigan four months later, Quezon said, "Just picture to yourselves . . . a fair Daughter Republic of the greatest Republic upon which the sun has ever shone, and tell me whether such a picture does not make you thrill with the pride of motherhood."²³ In Baltimore, on 4 December 1927, he made his last speech before the collapse which brought him to death's door.²⁴ He had made at least seven major addresses in fourteen days. He had crisscrossed the northeast United States to bring his message of friendship and reconciliation after the bitterness caused by his sparring with the late Leonard Wood. He ended his Baltimore speech by asking his audience to contemplate the respect that Asians would accord Americans for freeing the Filipinos. It would stand in stark contrast to the imperialism then existing throughout the world.

What is presented here is but the tip of the large iceberg of press statements and speeches in which the Filipino leader speaks of his admiration for the United States and the American people while at

20. *The Good Fight*, p. 75.

21. "Securing Economic Safety" in *Quezon in His Speeches*, pp. 143, 145-46.

22. M.L. Quezon, "Speech to the Philippine Columbian Association, 28 July 1927," Quezon Papers.

23. M.L. Quezon, "Speech to the Students of the University of Michigan, 28 November 1927," Quezon Papers.

24. M.L. Quezon, "Speech at the Hippodrome Theater, Baltimore, 4 December 1927," Quezon Papers.

the same time demanding independence because the Filipino people deserve to make their own mistakes but yet being willing to accept something short of full independence from the United States. What is presented comes from files not usually read and speeches that are not usually cited. Quezon did not have at his disposal his previous speeches when he was in the United States in 1924 or 1927. Many of his talks in 1927 were extemporaneous and are extant because someone provided a stenographic copy for Quezon. What is important in my judgment is the fact that the themes and language are consistent throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s and down to his death in August 1944. They did not change. They did not change because they were held deeply by Quezon. On 29 April 1933, in a letter from New York City to an old American friend who watched over his stock portfolio for over a decade, he said about another American:

He believes I am a hopeless demagogue and anti-American. What a fool! I told him and Senator Robinson of Arkansas, I am the best friend of America and the Americans in the Philippines, and you know I mean that; but I would be a damn fool if I ever place myself in a position wherein I am on record as approving of something which on its face is inferior. . . . I want my record for the future clear. No one will ever say of me that I am a fool or a coward.²⁵

While it may be argued that Quezon was capable of telling an audience what he believed it wanted to hear, it must be pointed out that he shared the above sentiments with Filipinos as well as Americans.

CONCLUSION

We have then the question of Michael Cullinane: Did Quezon really want independence? I think the record is clear. The answer is: No. Now is the time for historiography to catch up with the mounting evidence that is available in the National Library in Manila and elsewhere. Quezon wanted to become the chief executive of a government run by Filipinos and protected by a benevolent American people in exchange for which certain rights and privileges would be granted to the United States and Americans. In the world of the 1920s and 1930s, reality argued that weaker states need the protection of a great power. To continue to believe that Quezon wanted sovereign independence at any time, his fiery and flamboyant rhetoric between 1907 and 1941 notwithstanding, is an exercise that leads nowhere in

25. M.L. Quezon to Al Ehrman, 19 April 1933, Quezon Papers.

understanding Philippine-American relations then and now. Quezon could have been the instrument to break the bonds that linked both countries. He had ample opportunities over his long career. However, he could not do so for pragmatic and emotional reasons. Pragmatically, the severance of Philippine-American ties would have meant that the Filipino people would have been set adrift on a sea of economic, political, and diplomatic uncertainties and his capacity to govern would have been compromised. Such conditions would have been unacceptable to Quezon. Emotionally, he owed too much to his American and Filipino friends who did not want independence. Besides, he genuinely liked the American people and respected their altruism toward his country and people. It would have been totally out of character for him, despite all of his fiery denunciations of real and alleged American interference with Filipino domestic politics, to be the instrument of Filipino ingratitude to the United States in light of what was done for him and his people. In saying all this, I do not mean to infer that Quezon would have allowed his country or himself at any time to become a doormat upon which the American business community or military wiped their feet. We will never know if his charismatic leadership could have forestalled complete and total independence. World War II and his death changed everything in Philippine-American relations.

In his inaugural address of 15 November 1935, he said:

Good-will towards all nations shall be the golden rule of my administration. The peoples of the earth are interdependent and their prosperity and happiness are inseparably linked with each other. International brotherhood and cooperation are therefore necessary. Amity and friendship, fairness and square deal in our relations with other nations and their citizens, protection in their legitimate investments and pursuits, in return for their temporary allegiance to our institutions and laws, are the assurances I make on behalf of the new Government to Americans and foreigners who may desire to live, trade, and otherwise associate with us in the Philippines.²⁶

A year and a half earlier, in his acceptance of the Tydings-McDuffie Independence Act (1 May 1934 or thirty-six years from the date that Commodore Dewey sank the Spanish fleet off Cavite), Quezon said of Americans who lived in the Philippines: "They have adopted the

26. "Inaugural Address," p. 89.

Philippines as their home. . . . To all those whose interests are identical with those of the Filipino nation, I express the thanks of my people for their contributions, great or small, to the upbuilding of a new nation. I bespeak the wise counsel and cooperation of those of them who are adopted sons of this country, in our future deliberations."²⁷

It is my belief that we have known for a very long time who the real Mr. Quezon was. It is understandably difficult for Filipino scholars, who must weigh their love of country against historical objectivity, to state that Manuel Luis Quezon loved two countries: the Philippines and the United States of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. It must be harder still to acknowledge that he preferred an American connection rather than sovereign freedom. It takes courage as an historian to contribute toward setting the record straight. In doing so, maybe the Filipino and American peoples can move forward to a relationship based on sincere friendship and mutual respect.

27. "One More Step Forward" in *Quezon in His Speeches*, p. 41.