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Promoting *Un Bien Gobierno* in Sorsogon, 1902–1907

Stephen Henry S. Totanes

On 6 February 1901, over two years after the outbreak of the Philippine-American War of 1899, the Philippine Commission passed the Provincial Government Act (Act No. 83). The Act organized the provinces which had already been pacified under American rule and provided for their governance through a provincial board to be composed of a governor, a supervisor and a treasurer. The provincial governor was the only official to be elected—he was to be chosen by the councilors of the organized municipalities in each province gathered in a convention. The supervisor and the treasurer were to be appointed by the Philippine Commission and eventually, by the governor-general (Laurel 1926, 93–94).

Since the members of the Commission—William Howard Taft, Luke Wright, Henry Ide, Dean Worcester, and Bernard Moses—had been confined mostly to Manila since their arrival in June 1900, they had little knowledge of the prevailing conditions in the various provinces now being placed under civilian control after having been administered by the military over the past year. Thus, soon after the passage of Act. No. 83, the Commission embarked on a tour of the islands, visiting the capital towns of the different provinces and meeting in a convention the municipal officers and other members of the *principalia* in each province. Taft, being the President of the Commission, would explain the purpose of the visit and the provisions of the provincial government act. The specific provisions to be inserted for that particular province relating to the capital and provincial boundaries, the salaries

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of officials and other local matters, would also be determined. Often, they were accompanied by members of the Partido Federal, like Dr. Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, who would exhort the *principalia* to support the efforts of the Americans in organizing provincial governments (Williams 1913).

For students of local history, these actions of the Commission at the onset of the twentieth century were actually very significant in laying the foundations of local government under the “new order” of the American occupation. The provisions of Act. No. 83 would have an effect on local governments similar to that of the Local Government Code of 1991 for the decade of the nineties.

The Act allowed the Filipinos in the different regions to choose the men who would administer their own provinces to promote what was then known as *un bien gobierno* or “good government”—active, efficient and honest. There would still be some support and supervision from appointed American officials, but it was a major change from the Spanish period, where the post of provincial governor or *alcalde-mayor/gobernador civil* was still exclusively for Spaniards. As we bring the nineties to a close, it would be beneficial to review that experience.

This article views this change in local government by focusing on the province of Sorsogon in southeastern Luzon, particularly the term of Dr. Bernardino Monreal from 1902 to 1907. Monreal was the first Filipino elected to serve as the governor of Sorsogon and he was cited by William Cameron Forbes in his two-volume work as a fine example of a provincial governor who “sacrificed personal convenience and interests and showed great energy in carrying out the work of their provinces” (Forbes 1928). What did Monreal accomplish during his term that merited a special mention in Forbes’ work? This paper explores that experience with the aim of providing other students of local history with samples of Filipino leaders who were capable of carrying out the ideals of self-government which had been espoused by the revolution at the close of the nineteenth century.

Sorsogon under American Occupation, 1900–1901

Sorsogon province lies on the extreme southeast end of the island of Luzon, over six hundred kilometers away from Manila via the Pan-Philippine highway. It has sixteen municipalities, all of which are coastal towns, except for Irosin, which lies at the center of the province

close to the active volcano of Bulusan. During much of the Spanish regime, it was under the jurisdiction of the province of Albay until 1894, when it became a separate province. In January 1900, American expeditionary forces landed in the capital town, also known as Sorsogon, to begin the occupation of the province and reopen the important hemp ports in the area. From Sorsogon, American forces then continued to occupy the other major provinces in the Bikol region—Albay and Ambos Camarines (Dery 1987; Jose 1971; Owen 1979).

There was little resistance to the American landing, but over the next few months, organized revolutionary forces led by Lieutenant Colonel Emeterio Funes of Bulusan, Father Felipe Orense of Donsol and Captain Mariano Dreu of Bacon, challenged the American detachments in the occupied towns and encouraged the inhabitants to support their cause. By February 1901, the resistance had weakened considerably, largely due to the efforts of the members of the Partido Federal and the local native clergy, who began to see the wisdom of collaborating with the Americans. By March 1901, the main bulk of the revolutionary forces had surrendered and the stage was set for the organization of civil government (Totanes 1990).

On 30 April 1901, the Philippine Commission finally visited the capital town of Sorsogon after having held meetings in Legazpi, Albay and Nueva Caceres in Ambos Camarines. Daniel R. Williams, who served as a secretary to one of the Commissioners observed that “the temper of the people (were) very different from that encountered in Nueva Caceres . . . the province is completely pacified . . . an American can pass unmolested through any part of it” (Williams 1913, 242–43). The meeting was well attended, with all of the towns, except for Pilar, represented by their *principalia*. Among the topics discussed were the salaries of the incoming provincial officials. Leon Paras, presidente of the town of Sorsogon, suggested that similar salaries be paid to those in Sorsogon province as that of Albay, but upon being presented with data that Albay had nearly twice the population of Sorsogon, he was willing to settle for the rates being paid in the province of Tayabas. Paras appears to have had vested interests in the topic, for after the deliberations, he was appointed as the provincial secretary with an annual salary of \$1200, roughly 2,400 or two hundred pesos a month (RPC 1901, II: 185–86).

Another controversial proposal was a suggestion from a Juan Maron from Bulan, that the provincial capitol be transferred to the town of Casiguran, roughly twenty kilometers away from the present capitol.

He reasoned that Casiguran had an equally good port although its population was only around 9,000 compared to the 12,000 or so inhabitants of Sorsogon. Besides, it was one of the older towns of Sorsogon province, its name having been derived from the local term for old—*gurang*. The matter was put to a vote which resulted in a tie. The Commission eventually decided to maintain the status quo and not recommend any changes. But the bid was made in an apparent attempt by the principalia from the southern towns of Casiguran, Juban, Irosin and Bulan to wrest control of the province from the principalia of Sorsogon town and with it, bring greater prosperity and more opportunities for their towns (RPC 1901, II: 186–87).

With regard to the appointment of provincial officials, the Commission explained that although they would normally appoint a native for governor, they had received numerous petitions from the persons they had interviewed that an American be selected until after the provincial elections to be held in February 1902. The following provincial officials were then appointed: Captain J. G. Livingston, of the 47th Infantry, as the governor; Leon Paras, secretary; Capt. E. W. Terry, treasurer; Patricio Bailon, fiscal; and Lt. George Purington, supervisor. For the next few months, Sorsogon would be administered by a board composed mainly of American soldiers and local principales. The special bill organizing Sorsogon into a province, Act No. 124, was then unanimously approved.¹ Interestingly, the subject of this article, Dr. Monreal was unable to attend that meeting because he was still languishing in jail, on suspicion that he was supporting the revolutionaries.

The Path to the Governorship

The man who would eventually be elected as the first Filipino governor of Sorsogon province was actually not a native of Sorsogon. Bernardino Monreal was born on 20 May 1856 in Daraga, Albay, the son of Francisco Monreal and Maria Josefa de Guzman. He was educated in the private schools in the region and attended the Seminario Conciliar de Nueva Caceres in Camarines Sur from 1866–75, at a time when the only school in the Bikol region for aspirants to the priesthood was opened to *externos*—male students who wanted quality education but did not intend to become priests. Under the tutelage of the Vincentian fathers, the sons of Bikolano principales formed “school ties” as students, a bond which would serve them well during the

revolution, as most of the revolutionary officers and secular clergy were alumni of the Seminario Colegio (Rosenstock's 1913, 81; Rojas 1994).

After leaving the Bikol region in his late twenties, Monreal enrolled at the Colegio de San Juan de Letran in Manila in 1885, then eventually finished a medical course at the University of Santo Tomas from 1886 to 1893. He was first appointed as titular physician of Bataan province in 1893 and then became a member of the Board of Health of Manila from 1894 to 1896. At the outbreak of the revolution in 1896, he was the municipal physician of Malabon. In 1898, he was appointed regimental physician of the Spanish Army. With the occupation of Malabon by revolutionary forces in the middle of 1898, he was made professor of Natural History at the College of Malolos, while serving as physician of the surgical clinic at the Malabon hospital (Rosenstock's 1913).

With the arrival of the Americans in Sorsogon province in 1900, Monreal appears to have moved to the province. In his work on the revolution in the Bikol region, Elias Ataviado identified Monreal as one of those who conferred with Colonel Emeterio Funes in Bulusan to organize the revolutionary forces against the Americans. Monreal was also appointed *in absentia* as the *comandante de sanidad militar* in one of the meetings of Funes's officers (Ataviado 1941). His exact role in the resistance against the Americans is unclear in the available records, but on 20 January 1901, he was arrested and imprisoned for allegedly being a member of an "insurgent committee" tasked with collecting contributions for the revolutionary cause. Among those arrested with him were some principales from Sorsogon—Justino Bautista, Pedro Duran and Hugo Nicolas, a former presidente of the town.²

Over a month after Monreal's arrest, Colonel Funes and the rest of the revolutionary forces surrendered, but he continued to languish in jail. Despite petitions for his release, Colonel Walter Howe, commander of the 47th Infantry, recommended his continued detention to await trial for the charge of "relieving the enemy in violation of the laws of war." Colonel Howe considered Monreal to be one of the "worst men in this province during the insurrection and strongly recommend against his release."³

In May 1901, the 47th Infantry was relieved of its duties in Sorsogon province and replaced by the 15th Infantry under Major Geo Cornish. The new commander did not share the sentiments of Colonel

Howe—he believed that either Monreal be brought to trial or be released from detention if charges against him were not proven. Cornish recommended his release as it was desired by the principal citizens in the province and Monreal had expressed his willingness to take the oath of allegiance. Cornish noted that Monreal was indeed “an influential man in this community and if friendly, capable of using it to our advantage.”⁴

Governor J. G. Livingston, in a letter to the Adjutant General for South Luzon recommended that Monreal be released from confinement on the grounds that:

Monreal is an influential man in the community and is respected by all. He at one time was an insurgent sympathizer, but so far as is known, did not commit any specific acts against the American government.⁵

Considering that the insurrection in the province had ended as early as February 1901, the Adjutant General eventually ordered the release of Dr. Bernardino Monreal from detention on 26 June 1901. Apparently, the prolonged imprisonment served him in good stead in the eyes of his peers, for in the provincial elections held on 3 March 1902, the municipal councilors from the various towns elected Monreal to the position of governor of Sorsogon.⁶

Restoring Peace and Order

The first problem that Monreal had to address as a newly-elected governor was the restoration of peace and order in the province. Although organized resistance against the Americans in Sorsogon province ended in February 1901, the provincial government had to contend with prolonged armed resistance from roving bands, some of which were led by former “insurgent” officers but of minor rank. This phenomena also arose in many other provinces, such the resistance waged by Macario Sakay in the Tagalog region and Simeon Ola in Albay. The Americans downplayed this resistance by citing the absence of enlightened leadership and labeled the members of these groups as bandits or thieves, or *ladrones* (Owen 1979; Iletto 1979).

In Sorsogon, these bands of *ladrones* became active in the southern portions of the province by around September 1901. The American constabulary officer referred to them as *anting-anting*, because its mem-

bers carried charmed amulets and displayed varied forms of fanaticism. Around four hundred or so adherents had gathered around the slopes of Mount Bulusan behind a leader named Francisco de la Cruz, who was eventually captured in November 1901. The Constabulary Inspector described de la Cruz as a "man of very low intellect, little above that of an animal and cannot write his name" (RPC 1902, I: 206).

De la Cruz's followers continued the resistance despite the capture of their leader. A new leader emerged in the person of Antonio Colache, a former second lieutenant in Colonel Funes' revolutionary army. At the time that Monreal assumed office, members of the *anting-anting* attacked the police force of Bulusan, killing a sergeant. The Constabulary Inspector, Harvey Nevill was alarmed—over two hundred of these members of the *anting-anting* were now disturbing the towns of Bulusan, Barcelona, Gubat, Casiguran and Sta. Magdalena. Inspector Nevill sought the help of Governor Monreal in waging a systematic campaign against the *anting-anting* (Totanes 1990).

Monreal responded by forming a committee on public order led by Rufino Gerona, a former presidente of the town of Bulan and president of the Partido Federal in Sorsogon, who was instrumental in securing the surrender of Colonel Funes. The committee decided to deploy a cordon of native volunteers around the affected areas, suspend work within the cordon and reconcentrate the people in the nearby towns. A contingent of around 450 men from the towns of Sorsogon, Gubat and Bacon was raised to man the cordon (RPC 1902, I: 207–8).

By 15 April 1902, a cordon was formed across Sorsogon town from barrio Abuyog in the west to Buenavista in the east while another extended from Bulusan to Irosin and from Irosin to Casiguran. Over the next few weeks, the Constabulary soldiers pursued Colache's men within the cordon. It was a short but taxing campaign—even Gerona took to the field, together with Esteban Fulay, a former revolutionary major in Funes's army who was now a *juez de paz* in the town of Barcelona. On 25 May 1901, Antonio Colache was finally captured with the last of his followers. The campaign against him lasted for fifty-six days and netted 250 prisoners. Inspector Nevill was all praises for Governor Monreal whom he hailed as "efficient, unbiased and conscientious . . . who took the field himself in the cause of law and order and left nothing undone . . . in putting down the petty insurrection" (RPC 1902, I: 209–10).

The new governor had passed his first test of loyalty to the American-sponsored provincial government. Although accused of having

financially supported the revolutionaries just over a year ago, Monreal took to the field, together with some former revolutionary officers, to quell "continued resistance" by men who were former comrades-in-arms, but who did not belong to the *principalia*—the class of "influential and educated" individuals whom the Americans were now actively collaborating with to pursue their pacification campaign.

Weeding Out the Undesirables

After restoring peace and order, Monreal began laying the foundations of *un bien gobierno*—good government manifested in the ideals of active involvement, efficient service and honest deeds. His first months were consumed by the pacification campaign against the *aning-aning*, an external threat to the provincial government. Now, Monreal had to deal with the "internal enemy" within his bureaucracy, the "undesirables" who occupied official positions but did not fit in with the ideals that his provincial government was trying to uphold.

The first to receive the "ax" was Leon Paras, the former presidente of Sorsogon town and provincial secretary since 1901. If we recall, during the meeting with the Taft Commission in April 1901, Paras had enthusiastically endorsed increasing the salaries of the provincial officials and he ended up being its first beneficiary after he was appointed provincial secretary. When Monreal visited Manila to attend to some matters, Paras served as the acting governor; upon his return, Monreal chided Paras for having "caused serious trouble by rendering decisions in favor of his friends, thereby injuring many other persons . . . his conduct gave rise to antipathy against his person and caused the loss of his moral prestige." The records do not mention the exact nature of Paras' misdeeds, but after being discouraged by Monreal's loss of confidence, Paras tendered his resignation late in 1902 (RPC 1903, I: 916).

This initial clash foreshadowed the tenor of Monreal's term as governor. He was not afraid to confront the entrenched elite of Sorsogon province because he himself was an "outsider" much like the American officials. On 1 August 1902, he married Perpetua Ilagan in Santa Cruz, Manila and had a listed address in the 1913 Rosenstock's Directory at 1038 Calle Soler, Santa Cruz, Manila (Rosenstock's 1913).

It was perhaps during his absence that Paras used the governorship to favor his townmates and provincemates, an act which Monreal would not tolerate and would not do, since his relatives and close

associates were not based in Sorsogon at all. But this would not be the end of Paras's career—in 1918, he would once again be appointed to the provincial board of Sorsogon, long after Monreal had left the province to settle permanently in Manila.⁷

In the course of the Colache campaign, Monreal also found it necessary to dismiss the entire municipal council of Bulusan because its presidente was an opium smoker and the councilors were accomplices of Colache who "did not inform the authorities in regard to the large number of inhabitants in their districts who took to the field." In 1904, Monreal dismissed the presidentes of Casiguran and Pilar, for allowing gambling in their towns and that of Irosin, for serious misconduct in office. He also dismissed the justices of the peace of Bulan, Bulusan, Castilla, Barcelona, Sta. Magdalena and Casiguran, while the auxiliary justices of Sorsogon, Barcelona, Magallanes and Bulan tendered their resignations (RPC 1903, I: 916; RPC 1905, I: 410).

These dismissals did not endear Monreal to the municipal elites in Sorsogon, as Vicente de Vera, who acted as governor in Monreal's absence in 1904, observed:

This province, thanks to the active campaign for morality started by Governor Monreal . . . a campaign which has brought upon him the name of autocrat from his political enemies, is undergoing a process of regeneration and ridding itself of the caciquism and favoritism that held the law in contempt and turned the current of the administration of justice from the impartiality and equity which would have followed. (RPC 1904, I: 620)

Monreal justified his dismissals of municipal officials in this manner:

One of the principal aims of the undersigned governor is to reform the public administration and eradicate all the prejudicial and even illegal usages still in vogue. Unfortunately, the existing laws do not give him sufficient coercive power, because the criminal laws, although they provide for such power, do not answer the needs of the moment and conditions. There are infractions of the laws or irregularities which doubtless do not deserve a reprimand that need to be made provided by the procedure established by law. (RPC 1903, I: 920)

He suggested that the governor be empowered to impose fines not exceeding \$500 Mexican in cases of infractions of laws committed by municipal officials, without further proceedings. He also suggested that the office of a provincial justice based in the capital, with limited jurisdiction but exceeding that of the municipal justices, be created. He

explained that many of these infractions were committed not out of malice, but out of ignorance of the law. The situation was not solely the problem of Sorsogon, since as Michael Cullinane has shown in his article on the "new order" of local government, there were high incidences of irregularities and infractions among local officials, who were adjusting to the more stringent application of laws under the Taft regime (Cullinane 1971; RPC 1903, I: 920).

Thus, we see in Monreal a governor who was willing to use the powers vested in him to oversee and supervise the men who were serving in his provincial bureaucracy. A more serious infraction was uncovered in the treasury department by Manila-based authorities shortly before Monreal departed for the United States. At the end of fiscal year 1903–1904, an anomaly was discovered during the examination of books. An amount worth 28,530.44 pesos was not entered into the books as the province's debt to the insular purchasing agent. The chief deputy to the treasurer and his aide, both Americans, were convicted of misapplication of public funds and falsification of public documents. The bookkeeper and four Filipino deputy treasurers were charged with estafa and given sentences ranging from six months to twenty-two years. Monreal would not tolerate dishonesty especially within the provincial capitol (RPC 1904, I: 618).

An Ambassador of Goodwill

After having "cleaned" his government of misfits, Governor Monreal was noticed and amply rewarded by the American colonial officials. He was chosen in 1904 to be a member of an honorary board of commissioners to be made up of fifty Filipinos of prominence and education who would visit the Louisiana Purchase Exposition at St. Louis, Missouri at government expense. This was in accordance with Act No. 1030 which the Philippine Commission passed on 23 December 1903, which provided for the selection of the commissioners who were supposed to be men currently holding office in the Philippine Islands, to enable them to visit the Exposition and other American cities within a five month period, all in the interest of public service (RPC 1904, I: 359–60).

The choice of the commissioners showed the American colonial government's intent to reward the Filipino elite who had cooperated with them so as to persuade them to continue carrying out the work

of the colonial government after having been given the opportunity to observe life in the United States and its private and public institutions. That trip is very much like the foreign visitors' exchange programs being run by the United States Information Service (USIS) at present. Most of the commissioners were members of the Partido Federal, like Dr. Trinidad Pardo de Tavera and Benito Legarda, who were already appointed to the Philippine Commission. Monreal was appointed to the executive committee of the honorary board together with the likes of Victorino Mapa, an associate judge of the Supreme Court and Juan de Leon, mayor of Iloilo. The other Bikolanos appointed to the board were Juan Pimentel, governor of Ambos Camarines, Marcial Calleja, provincial fiscal of Albay and Mariano Moreno Ramirez, head of a hemp-exporting house in Daet (RPC 1904, I: 356-59).

The Philippine exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition was put up to display Filipino products, manufactures, art, ethnology and the habits of the people. Around forty acres of land were set aside in St. Louis, Missouri for the construction of replicas of Philippine villages, such as the Igorot, Visayan, Bagobo, Moro and Negrito. According to William Howard Taft, who was now the Secretary of War, leading the Department overseeing America's colonial possessions, the delegation of fifty commissioners was expected to "represent with dignity the intellectual development of the islands and to speak with authority upon the needs of their people" (RPC 1903, I: 60-62; I: 406-24).

In effect, Monreal was assuming the post of ambassador of goodwill for the province of Sorsogon—he would not only observe American institutions during his stay in the United States but also champion the cause of his constituents, particularly those towns which had sent some products and manufactures to be exhibited at St. Louis. It must have been during this time that Monreal established greater rapport and a working relationship with Taft, as evidenced by a healthy correspondence between the two men after 1904, composed of over thirty items, preserved among the Taft Papers in the Library of Congress.⁸

In one of those letters, dated 3 January 1905, Monreal informed Taft that a gift of a cane and a box of perfumes were being offered to him courtesy of Cirilo Jimenez, presidente of the town of Bacon and Eugenio Tabuena, a Filipino perfumer whom Monreal had recommended for a medal of honor for his products exhibited at the Exposition. He appealed to Taft in another letter that since grand prizes had been awarded to the towns of Irosin, Juan and Casiguran for their collective and personal exhibits, the other towns of Gubat, Bulusan,

Prieto-Diaz and even Sorsogon, which displayed three pieces of the best class of hemp, were not even mentioned and should at least have been recognized. Together with the appeal, Monreal gifted Taft with a silk pillow embroidered with a gold cord.⁹ Interestingly, in the same letter, Monreal makes a petition to Taft to recognize the efforts of Father Jorge Barlin, who had served as the vicar-general for the province of Sorsogon and was now being considered for the post of Bishop of Nueva Caceres (Abella 1954).

In reviewing their correspondence, one can sense that because of his involvement in the St. Louis Exposition Board, Monreal was one of the favored individuals whom Taft was proud of and pleased to deal with. The Secretary of War would return the favor of the gifts from this solicitous Ambassador of Sorsogon by honoring the province with a personal visit in August of 1905.

Laying the Foundations

On 26 August 1905, the province of Sorsogon was honored by the visit of a distinguished delegation of American officials, led by the Secretary of War William Howard Taft, Governor Luke Wright and Alice Roosevelt, the daughter of the American President Theodore Roosevelt. They were guests of honor at the cornerstone laying at the construction site of a secondary school building and the inauguration of a bridge between Calle Comercio and Calle Taft. Upon the petition of the presidente of Sorsogon town, Bernabe Palma-Flores, the bridge was named after Miss Alice Roosevelt. The minutes of this cornerstone-laying was sent to Taft by Monreal as "proof of the sincere affection which the province bears you" and have been preserved among Taft's papers. It includes the signatures of the principalia of Sorsogon province who were in attendance on that occasion.¹⁰

The event was showcasing the foundations of projects that Monreal had set for the province, among them, the construction of a building to house a high school and a school for arts and trades. The previous year, Monreal had launched a campaign to raise funds for the building and 12,000 pesos had already been raised. In the minutes, Monreal made special mention of Lino Alindogan of Juban, for his hefty contribution of five hundred pesos. On 16 December 1904, about two months after Monreal returned from the United States, Governor Wright and Commissioner William Cameron Forbes also visited the

province for the manufacture of the artificial stone to be used for the cornerstone laying (RPC 1904, I: 621; 1905, I:405–8).

These occasions reflected Monreal's desire to lay the foundations of a public school system and provide opportunities for higher education in the province. During the first few years of the decade, most of the towns could only open schoolhouses for children of primary school age. Upon reaching the intermediate level, there would be less opportunities; more so for the high school level—there would only be one such high school and it would be built in the capital. If a child needed to go beyond secondary school, he would have to leave Sorsogon and enroll in the Seminario-Colegio in Nueva Caceres or study in Manila (Gerona 1988, 163–67).

The provincial high school building was opened for the intermediate grades in 1906, but high school classes began there only in 1907. Monreal complained that some of the subjects were being taught insufficiently since there were only three teachers assigned to attend to the needs of both intermediate and high school students. Nonetheless, he noted the change in attitude of the people towards education:

If the province has a treasure which attracts the attention of natives and strangers . . . this treasure is doubtless that of the opportunities for education, for which the youth of the province is striving for with such great enthusiasm and perseverance. . . . The man who possesses knowledge and wisdom has at all times and places merited affection and consideration from everybody; but there was a time, which has already been relegated to history, when the intelligent among the Filipinos were regarded with . . . suspicion and dislike by many of the persons then ruling in this country, who from the moment that they perceived an intelligent Filipino having opinions different from theirs, had all his actions watched. (RPC 1907, I: 462)

The enrollment was encouraging for the primary schools—of the forty-five primary schools all over the province, there were 6,076 students; but the intermediate grades had only 108 students. By the time high school classes opened in 1907, there were probably less than twenty students. The youth not only welcomed the schools but also imbibed aspects of American culture which was new to them—for instance, athletic competitions. Baseball was introduced in April 1905 under the sponsorship of Judge Grant T. Trent and Monreal's government. Teams from Albay, Sorsogon and Masbate competed against each other annually over the next two years. So great was the popu-

larity of baseball that Monreal thought "it can well be called the national game among the younger generation of Sorsogon" and "cockpit gambling (little by little) . . . will be replaced by baseball" (RPC 1907, I: 463; 1906, I: 449-51). Apparently, they had not yet heard of the recently invented sport of basketball.

Despite Monreal's enthusiasm for improving the educational opportunities in Sorsogon, the provincial high school building would not be completed during his term. But he had laid the foundations for its construction, an edifice which would serve future generations of Sorsogon's youth, among them, my mother and her sisters in the 1930s (Jamoralin 1994).

Coping with Crises

Monreal's term was not without its difficulties. Aside from the hostile forces of ladrones and inefficient government personnel, Monreal also had to contend with the forces of nature and the spread of disease. Being a physician by profession, Monreal had a special concern for public health conditions in the province. In his first year, late in 1902, Monreal reported the appearance of several suspicious cases of diarrhea which were later declared to be Asiatic cholera. From October 1902 to September 1903, 540 cases of cholera were reported, 253 of which resulted in deaths. The epidemic actually affected the entire country, with the largest number of cases coming from the Visayas (RPC 1903, II: 123-24).

The principal point of infection was spotted in the town of Donsol on the northwestern coast of the province. The chief health inspector visited the province together with a 60-bed travelling hospital complete with medical supplies. By May 1903, the epidemic had been contained. Monreal praised Dr. Julio Ruiz, the president of the board of health, for leading the battle against the disease. Municipal boards of health were established in the different towns, but Monreal deplored the fact that many were headed by persons "who are ignorant of medical science." There simply were not enough doctors at that time, not even one doctor for each town (RPC 1903, I: 918, 921; II: 142; RPC 1904, I: 617).

In 1904, owing to the excessive heat that lasted for six months, smallpox became virulent, numbering 1,925 cases and 585 deaths in the province. Vaccine points had to be sent from Manila to contain the

spread of the disease. With the onset of the rainy season, malarial fever also began to prevail in almost epidemic form, while rinderpest continued to attack the animals. In December 1905, smallpox was declared epidemic in the town of Gubat, from whence it spread to the nearby towns of Prieto-Diaz and Barcelona. The local boards of health distributed large quantities of quinine to these towns with accompanying sanitary measures to prevent the further spread of the disease. It was only in 1907 that Monreal could report that no disease of epidemic proportions had visited the province (RPC 1905, I: 408; RPC 1906, I: 448; RPC 1907, I: 465).

Through the last months of 1904 until most of 1905, the province experienced an extraordinary drought, that burned up many of the crops in the various fields. To make matters worse, a destructive typhoon hit the province on 25–26 September 1905, just a month after Taft and the other American officials had visited the province. This typhoon caused widespread damage of ricefields, municipal buildings, schoolhouses, convents and churches, hemp warehouses and private dwellings. It must be remembered that at this time, most of the structures and dwellings in the municipalities were made of light materials; often, it would only be the church which would be made of stone and cement (RPC 1906, I: 444).

Thus, whenever strong winds hit the province, most of the structures would be easily blown away and the inhabitants would spend the next few weeks rebuilding their homes and schoolhouses. Due to that typhoon, Monreal filed a report on the losses of the province: 50 persons injured, 13,174 houses destroyed with total losses amounting to 7,297,055.35 pesos. The figure may appear bloated, but I believe that the setbacks were real. One of the hardest hit was my hometown, Gubat, with 5,050 houses destroyed. It is a rustic coastal town, but vulnerably exposed to the ravages of typhoons coming from the Pacific Ocean. The following year, Monreal petitioned the insular government for a loan of 150,000 pesos to be payable over six years, to assist the province in its rebuilding and rehabilitation efforts (RPC 1906, I: 444–45).

These destructive typhoons were not isolated cases. The entire Bikol region would be susceptible to such and almost every year, Sorsogon like the rest of the Bikol provinces would have to bear the brunt of these natural disasters (Wernstedt and Spencer, 1967: 409–27).

It is not surprising then that as Monreal's third term was about to end, he "dreamed" of many more projects for his province, but the perennial lack of funds and the constant damage wrought by the typhoons

hampered his efforts. Most of these projects would be completed only after he had already served as governor. For one, he foresaw the need for a new road, linking the interior towns of Casiguran, Juban, Irosin with Bulusan and all the way to Bulan. The existing road passing through the towns of Gubat, Barcelona and then to Bulusan was a coastal road, which was exposed to the elements and left out the interior towns. This "planned" road eventually became the foundation for what is now a section of the Pan-Philippine Highway, traversed by buses headed for the Visayas travelling through Matnog and by ferry to Allen, Samar. Secondly, being a doctor, he envisioned a provincial hospital to be run by the government. It would materialize only after the second world war (RPC 1905, I: 412–13; Jamoralin 1994).

Finally, Monreal also insisted on the installation of telephone systems in the entire province of Sorsogon; it was a dream way ahead of his time. For a brief period in the 1970's, telephones could be used in Sorsogon, but it was only in the 1990s that Digitel connected three major towns—Sorsogon, Gubat and Bulan—with the rest of the Philippines through a telephone system. Until the present, the other thirteen towns can hardly be reached by phone. Monreal's dreams for telephones all over the province would have to wait for their fulfillment in the next millenium (RPC 1907 I: 466).

Conclusion: A Governor's Reward

In October 1906, some changes were introduced in the selection of provincial officials. The governor and a Filipino third member (*tercer vocal*) were both to be elected by a direct vote of the people. On 5 November 1907, the first provincial elections for governor and third member under this format were held. Monreal passed up his chance to run for a fourth term as governor and instead supported Cirilo Jimenez of Bacon. Unfortunately, his candidate was defeated by Atty. Mario Guariña of Juban, from the Nacionalista party. By this time, young Nacionalistas in their late twenties like Sergio Osmeña and Manuel Quezon, former governors of Cebu and Tayabas respectively, began to emerge as new leaders in the Philippine Assembly of 1907. They had outshone the former members of the Partido Federal, which had changed its name to the Partido Progresista (RPC 1908, I:85–87; 435F; II: 394–95; Paredes 1989).

Monreal, if he had been ambitious, could have run for the Philippine Assembly—instead he chose to stay on as governor and sup-

ported Vicente de Vera, who had acted as governor during his absence. By this time, Monreal was already fifty years old, perhaps ready to retire from politics and public service. Upon learning of the victory of Taft in the U.S. presidential elections in November 1908, Monreal sent his congratulations and revealed that he had been staying in Manila, attending to his wife who was ill, whom he had “abandoned” for so many years because of his work in Sorsogon.¹¹

But the governor’s reward had yet to come. In December 1909, Monreal was chosen by the new governor-general, William Cameron Forbes, to serve as Auxiliary Director of the Bureau of Labor. From a provincial post, he had now risen to become a national official, serving in the executive bureau. The years he had spent as governor of Sorsogon served him in good stead, so did his close collaboration with Forbes and Taft. In another letter extending Christmas greetings to President Taft, Monreal revealed his new appointment and expressed his “unconditional adhesion” to Taft and wished him success in his endeavors.¹²

After his appointment to the Bureau of Labor, we lose track of Monreal in the historical record. But the people of Sorsogon carve out his name in their memory by naming a few streets in the different towns in his honor. One such street is just across my residence in Gubat, Sorsogon. A town has been named after him in the island of Ticao, in the province of Masbate, which had been a sub-province of Sorsogon during his term. But more importantly, by reviewing his record as governor and his efforts at promoting un bien gobierno in the province of Sorsogon, we are provided with a fine example of the kind of Filipino local leaders who emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century. They were men who were equally driven to strive hard and live up to the ideals of freedom and self-government, which an earlier generation of Filipinos had sacrificed their lives for during the revolution.

Notes

1. The text of Act No. 124: An Act extending the provisions of the Provincial Government Act to the province of Sorsogon is found in *Public Laws and Resolutions: United States Philippine Commission*, vol. 1, pp. 266–67; Act No. 83: The Provincial Government Act is found on pp. 168–77.

2. “Report of Operations: Sorsogon,” in United States National Archives (hereafter cited as *USNA*), Record Group (hereafter cited as RG) 395: Records of U.S. Army

Overseas Operations and Commands, Entry 5318; "List of Native Prisoners held in Sorsogon Post," *USNA RG 395*, Entry 5322.

3. Colonel Walter Howe to Adjutant-General, Department of Southern Luzon, 20 April 1901, *USNA RG 395*, Entry 5311: Letters Sent, Sorsogon, 1: 26 LS #63.

4. Major Geo A. Cornish to Adjutant-General, 22 May 1901, *USNA RG 395*, Entry 5311: Letters Sent, Sorsogon, 1: 36 LS #97.

5. Captain J.G. Livingston to Adjutant-General, 18 June 1901, *USNA RG 395*, Entry 5314: Document File, Sorsogon 1901, Box 1, LR #192.

6. *Ibid.*, Acting Assistant Adjutant-General to Commanding Officer, Post Sorsogon, 26 June 1901.

7. In the *Official Gazette* (November 1918), there is an item announcing the appointment of Leon Paras on 2 October 1918 as a member of the provincial board of Sorsogon.

8. In the William Howard Taft Papers at the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, U.S.A., there are thirty-one (31) items addressed to or received from Bernardino Monreal. See *Presidential Papers: Microfilm Index—William Howard Taft Papers*. Vol. 4, Letters I-M: 1425.

9. Bernardino Monreal to Taft, 3 January 1905, *Taft Papers* (microfilm) Reel 47, Series 3; Monreal To Taft, 19 January 1905, Reel 48, Series 3. The same appeals appear in *RPC 1906*, I: 447.

10. Monreal To Taft, 4 September 1905, *Taft Papers*, Reel 52, Series 3. The document is entitled "Copia literal del Acta levantada en la Capital de Sorsogon, I.F., con motivo de la colocacion de la primera piedra angular del Colegio Provincial por el Honorable Secretario de Guerra Wm. H. Taft firmada por este, por Miss Alice Lee Roosevelt, por la Juanta Provincial, por los Honorables Congresistas, por los Honorables Miembros de la Comision Civil en Filipinas, y varios Representantes Municipales de la Provincia de Sorsogon, I.F."—"Este acto tuvo lugar en la tarde del dia 26 de Agosto del ano del Senor, 1905."

11. Monreal to Taft, 6 November 1908, *Taft Papers*, Reel 105, Series 3.

12. Monreal to Taft, 15 December 1909, *Taft Papers*, Reel 342, Series 5.

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- United States National Archives. Washington, D.C. at College Park, Maryland, U.S.A. The following Record Groups (RG) were useful:
- (1) RG 350: Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs; including the "Manuscript Reports of the Governors-General of the Philippines, 1909-1917."
 - (2) RG 395: Records of U.S. Army Overseas Operations and Commands.
 - (3) RG 94: Adjutant General's Office Records.

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