

# **Wow! These Americans:<sup>1</sup> Philippine Bourgeois Theater in English, 1946-1964**

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## **The Emergence of a Neocolonial Philippine Economy (General Mode of Production)**

When General Arthur MacArthur “liberated” Manila on February 4, 1945, most Filipinos welcomed the American forces with open arms. Such euphoria was due to the illusions Filipinos had that on hand was the beginning of the true Philippine Republic. At the time, many Filipinos truly believed that they would be able to govern all aspects of social life with the exit of the Japanese. They did not realize that no drastic change would occur to alleviate the economic and political stranglehold of American capital on the Philippines.

Philippine postwar economy went from bad to worse. An economy that relied disproportionately on export earnings from copra, indigo, sugar, cotton and later from dried coconut meat, coconut oil, pineapple, and gold experienced its first balance of payment crisis during the early liberation period. Even President Elpidio Quirino’s attempt in 1949 to establish an import substitution strategy was manipulated early on by American capitalists to their favor. This policy caused the rise of the manufacturing industry—i.e., the manufacturing of tailored outfits, shoes, hats, mats, and the like. However, the manufacturing industry did not produce the much needed surplus because it

also depended on traditional export earnings to survive and flourish.<sup>2</sup> What further disrupted government attempts at accumulating surplus was the influx of American luxury consumer goods for the Philippine ruling bloc.

In terms of social relations obtaining in the Philippine postwar society, the period saw no significant changes in class composition. The traditional exporting fraction of the ruling bloc and the prewar *politicos* were resuscitated by General MacArthur who wanted to maintain the prewar status quo. Among his closest friends and advisers, in fact, were Andres Soriano, Joseph McMickling, Charles Parson, and Courtney Whitney.

Parson was one of the richest Americans in the Philippines. Whitney was one of Manila's most affluent corporation lawyers with contacts among the city's wealthiest businessmen and influential politicians of prewar Philippines. McMickling was a wealthy businessman. Soriano was one of the richest Filipino-Spanish entrepreneurs owning various corporations.<sup>3</sup>

A manufacturing sector, belonging either to the internal or national fractions of the bourgeoisie, emerged with the institution of an import substitution policy by President Elpidio Quirino. However, its emergence did not pose a serious challenge to the stability of the dominant bloc. Many of the members of the manufacturing sector were also engaged, like the old elite, in the export of traditional crops. Moreover, the former located themselves in urban areas where they were able to translate their economic power into political power.<sup>4</sup>

Social relations and structures that appeared in Central Luzon during the Japanese Occupation were immediately crushed by the combined forces of the Philippine Constabulary, the CIA and the American liberation forces. During the war, the HUKBALAHAP, declaring itself the army of the people, reorganized villages and barrios into people's councils and thus, gave the masses greater participation in decision making. HUK justice was also enforced in the HUK strongholds. Furthermore, political education was undertaken by the HUKs. Finally, and more

importantly, tenants were encouraged to till their own farms and to reap the fruits of their labor in lands owned by landlords who had fled to Manila or those who were judged as guilty of collaborating with the Japanese. Because of all these, the HUKs were popular in Central Luzon during the war. After the war, when they asked for American recognition of their war efforts, MacArthur branded them as bandits and ordered them to surrender their arms. With overt repressive tactics of the USAFFE, PC, and the CIA, the HUKs were ultimately crushed in 1955.<sup>5</sup>

Through the dominant bloc, who owed the preservation of its privileged status to the Americans, the latter were able to formalize their control over Philippine economy and politics. The Bell Trade Act and the Laurel-Langley Agreement were passed in spite of protests from nationalist leaders like Claro M. Recto. And to ensure economic control over the Philippines, Americans also intervened in the political sphere. MacArthur, and later CIA and JUSMAG, manipulated Philippine politics in the late forties and fifties by installing President Manuel Roxas over Sergio Osmeña and by catapulting the “Guy”, Ramon Magsaysay, to the presidency.<sup>6</sup> Even attempts by President Carlos Garcia to protect the patrimony of the Filipinos through his “Filipino First” policy were not successful.<sup>7</sup> President Macapagal, another CIA project, removed all constraints and invited American investors to pillage the Philippines anew.<sup>8</sup> Nationalist historian, Renato Constantino, considers the Macapagal administration as the formal start of neocolonialism in the Philippines.<sup>9</sup>

According to Jack Woddis:

To guarantee its domination, imperialism tries to destroy the national, cultural and spiritual values of each country, and forms an apparatus of forces docile to their policy—the establishment of military bases, the creation of organs of repression, with technical advisers from imperialist countries, the signing of secret military pacts, the formation of regional and international war mongering alliances. It encourages and carries out coup d’etat and political