Ambition, Cooptation, and Betrayal in the Formative Years of the Philippine Labor Movement

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Abstract

This work re-examines the rise and fall of the Union Obrero Democratica (UOD)/Union Obrero Democratica Filipina (UODF), the country's first labor federation, and more critically how its *Ilustrado* leaders dissipated the movement's initial gains. At a period when the American colonial authorities were bent on pacifying the resistance and the labor movement was transitioning from the artisan guilds and gremios, it became the platform for the incursion of these leaders in the rising waters of colonial politics to the extent of collaborating with the Americans in capturing the leaders of the anti-colonial resistance, with tragic and bloody results.

Keywords: UOD, UODF, Isabelo de los Reyes, Dominador Gomez, pacification campaign, Macario Sakay

Filipino workers have a vaunted tradition of resistance against oppressors. They were the sinews of the revolution against Spain, the struggle against Japanese invaders, and in 1975—in the darkest hours

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of the Marcos dictatorship—the La Tondeña strike that forged a united front and cracked the authoritarian repression. However, a nascent labor movement, or at least its leaders, betrayed the resistance to and enabled American consolidation of its grip on the newly acquired colony.

Between two empires, between two wars

The American fleet streamed into Manila Bay in the opening salvo of the Spanish-American War. Hobbled by its ancient arms and ships, Spain lost its empire in the Battle of Manila Bay on May 1, 1898. Thus, as the US Senate narrowly ratified the Treaty of Paris on February 6, 1899, Spain ceased to be the empire "where the sun never set" as her prized colonies Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines were ceded to the new superpower for $20 million.

The Filipino-American alliance against Spain was short-lived as fighting, this time between Filipinos and American troops, broke out on February 4, 1899. Before that, tensions simmered as Americans barred Filipino troops from entering Manila. Spain and America had agreed behind the Filipinos' back on a face-saving agreement that the remnants of the Spanish Army holed out in Intramuros would only surrender to American officers. This, even as Filipino troops were in control of the rest of the country.

Eager to try on its new imperialist shoes, in March 1900, US President William McKinley convened the Second Philippine Commission with instructions to create a civil government for the Philippines after the American pacification of the islands had been completed.

On July 2, 1902, the US Secretary of War telegraphed, among others, that "the insurrection against the United States had ended…"

Thus, as part of this tutelage in democratic self-governance, the Philippine Organic Act—approved on July 1, 1902— provided that a legislature be established composed of a popularly elected lower house, the Philippine Assembly, and an upper house consisting of the Philippine Commission, thus institutionalizing the collaboration between the American colonizers and the first generation of Filipino national leaders.

America's duplicitous invasion ended the Filipinos' brief self-governance: the first Republic in Asia fled, the superior arms of the enemy in hot pursuit, until the capture of its President, Emilio Aguinaldo. However, by 1902, while many of the recognized generals of the Aguinaldo forces had surrendered—the last hold-out being Gen. Miguel Malvar—a fierce guerilla war raged in various parts of the country led by other former Katipunan generals.

Belying the claim that Filipinos had been pacified were laws and policies promulgated by the Philippine Commission intended to crush the resistance and the nationalist spirit among Filipinos, which gave rise to the so-called period of suppressed nationalism (Cullinane, 2009) hence:

The creation of the Philippine Constabulary (1901). Act 175 promulgated on August 18, 1901, organized the Philippine Constabulary to pursue and root out the continued resistance against the Americans. This allowed the colonizers to carry out a divide-and-rule policy, hence:

> The Constabulary was a unique and successful application of the principle of employing native infantry, officered by white men in the subjugation of their own tribesmen. Other nations had used the principle of native soldiers but the Constabulary developed a fundamental difference in the application of the force. These insular police unit fought the natives of a district with troops recruited in the same district. (Ochosa, 1995 p. 93)

The Sedition Law (1901). Act No. 292, promulgated on November 4, 1901: the draconian measure outlawed advocacy of independence against the United States as well as forming organizations for the purpose, or even seditious speech and writing with sanctions of heavy fines, long prison terms, and even death.

The Brigandage Act. (1902). Act No. 518 was issued on November 12, 1902. While the stated crime was forming groups to steal cattle, the intended effect was to banish the sympathy still harbored by the population for the resistance fighters by labelling them as *tulisanes* or common thieves.

The Reconcentration Act (1903). This was the policy of resettling inhabitants in compact hamlets or villages usually near military sight or surveillance to prevent the population from extending aid to those fighting the Americans. Anyone found outside such settlements were presumed as *insurrectos* and punished. One of the most often used form of torture to elicit information about the captured resistance fighter was the water torture, where water was poured and forced down the throat of the prisoner and later, American soldiers would jump on the victim's bloated stomach.

The Flag Law (1907). On August 23, 1907, members of the American community, in a meeting at the Manila Grand Opera House, passed a resolution urging the proscription of the Filipino flag. On September 6, 1907, the Philippine Commission passed Act No. 1696, commonly known as the Flag Law, entitled "An act to prohibit the display of flags, banners, emblems, or devices used in the Philippine islands for the purpose of rebellion or insurrection against the authorities of the United States and the display of Katipunan flags, banners, emblems, or devices and for other purposes." This enactment was unique to the Philippines among the new territories of the United States and while there was recognition of the unpopularity of this law, the Philippine Commission refused to act on five proposals to repeal it. It was not until 1919 that the law was repealed.

At the time the foregoing measures were issued by the Philippine Commission, three of its more senior members were Filipino *ilustrados:* Benito Legarda, Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, and Jose de Luzurriaga, all members of the *Partido Federalista*. It did not matter that Pardo was a former Secretary of Diplomacy in Aguinaldo's Cabinet; Pardo was hailed as the "best interpreter of American intentions towards the Philippines" and "right hand man of Governor Taft in the establishment of civil government." He declared that the Partido Federal was:

> continuing the insurrection, but by legal rather than by forcible means; that would simply change that they were contending for the same rights as those set out in the Malolos Congress—the liberty of the individual; that with independence the Filipinos would simply change the despotism of Spain for a domestic tyranny as bad or worse; that they could not follow the system with which they were familiar, and being untrained,

> their mistake would be greater; that the great American nation would save them from themselves; and prevent their furnishing to the world the spectacle of the Central and South American republics, which, though independent, labored under a slavery worse than that of their former masters; he said that that they had lost nothing; that the sun pictured upon the Filipino flag was replaced by the sun of liberty which now shone over the islands; that the colors of their banner found a counterpart in those of America; and they could look forward to the day when another star, the star of the Philippines, would be added to those many on that field which represented States 'free but not independent'. (Mojares, 2006, p. 147).

The exile returns

Isabelo de los Reyes was also an *ilustrado* though not of the Partido Federalista. An Ilocano businessman based in Tondo, he published a newspaper and owned a printing press as well as a farm and forest lands in Tarlac. He was born in Vigan, Ilocos Sur, on July 7, 1864 to Elias de los Reyes and the poetess, Leona Florentino. He is said to be related by affinity to Jose Rizal whose maternal grandfather, Lorenzo Alberto Alonzo, was, at one time, married to Paula Florentino, Leona's younger sister.

After receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Colegio de San Juan de Letran, he enrolled at the University of Santo Tomas, where he studied law and paleography. In 1886, he finished the course on notary public, but could not practice it because he was then only 22 years old – three years short of the minimum age required by law to qualify as notary public.

To supplement the limited monthly allowance he received from his mother, he became a journalist. Writing was in his blood, for he inherited his passion for literature from his mother. He wrote articles for *EI Diario de Manila, La Oceania Espanol, EI Comercio, La Revista Popular, La Opinion,* and other Manila newspapers.

In 1889 he founded the first vernacular newspaper in the Philippines, *El llocano*, with himself as editor as well as publisher. He made intensive researches on Philippine history and culture and wrote

various historical works, such as *Las Islas Visayas en la Epoca de la Conquista* (first edition in 1889, second edition in 1889)*; La Expedicion de Li-Mahong contra Filipinas en 1574* (1888)*; Triuntos del Rosario 0 Los Holandeses en Filipinas* (1888)*; Prehistoria de Filipinas* (1889)*; EI Folklore Filipino* (1889)*; and Historia de Ilocos* (1890, 2 vols.). These works made him the father of Philippine folklore.

In January 1897, shortly after the execution of the "Thirteen Martyrs of *Bagumbayan*," Don Belong, as he was popularly known, was arrested and jailed in the Bilibid Prison where his feet were chained to a pillar in the unpaved basement. His sick wife died but he was not allowed to attend her funeral and comfort his grieving family.

Inside Bilibid Prison, Don Belong was able to talk with fellow prisoners, among them *Katipuneros*, and learned the history of the Katipunan and the reasons why they rose up in arms against Spain. Thereafter, he wrote the *Sensacional Memoria sobre la Revolucion Filipina*, which became one of the valuable works on the history of the revolution.

The arrival of General Fernando Primo de Rivera in Manila on April 25, 1897, as successor of the ruthless Governor-General Camilo de Polavieja (who ordered the execution of many Filipino patriots, including Dr. Rizal), saved Don Belong from the firing squad. However, he was rearrested and deported to Spain. During the 30-day journey, his feet were bound to an iron bar and he was held incommunicado (Scott, 1992).

At first, he was held in a national prison in Barcelona and while there, was visited by Ignacio Boy Singla, a radical Catalan journalist who considered him a comrade-in-arms in the local anti-government campaign. He was then transferred to Montjuich Castle, infamous to Filipinos as the detention site of Dr. Jose P. Rizal. Isabelo's cellmate was Ramon Sempau, a poet-journalist who had assassinated Montjuich prison's torturer.

When the Pact of Biak-na-Bato was concluded on December 15, 1897, he was released and introduced to Sempau's network of radicals. It was during this time that de los Reyes read Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and other socialist thinkers as well as joined protest actions, carried a revolver and even got his nose bloodied in a street

demonstration. In one of these demonstrations, a bomb exploded and de los Reyes was among those arrested. After his release, he moved from Barcelona to Madrid (Mojares, 2006).

While he was busy with other projects, among them translating the Bible to Iloko for the British and Foreign Bible Society, he was hired as a publication consultant of the *Ministerio de Ultramar* (Ministry of Colonies) in Madrid, a position which he held from 1898 to 1901. At that time, the Spanish-American war was raging in the Philippines and in the West Indies and his engagement was thought to rally Filipino support for the Anti-American effort.

During the Filipino-American War (1899-1902), he used his pen to lambast the Yankee attack on the First Philippine Republic. He founded and edited two nationalist periodicals in Madrid, *EI Defensor de Filipinas* and *Filipinas Ante Europa*. He wrote two books, both published in Madrid, namely, *Independencia y Revolucion* (1900) which urged the Filipinos to carry on their war against American and *La Religion de Katipunan* which discussed the teachings and organization of the K.K.K.

On July 1, 1901, the Spanish Government permitted Don Belong to return to the Philippines. He brought many books with him, among which were those written by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Victor Hugo, Pierre Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and other socialists of Europe. These books inspired him to introduce socialism in his own country by giving copies of Marx and Errico Malatesta to Hermenegildo Cruz and Arturo Soriano, both with experience in organizing strikes (Scott, 1992).

From sari-sari store to a labor federation

Organized labor in Manila simultaneously followed two paths which sometimes intersected but often went separate ways. One was trying to establish a federation for all or many groups and unions. The second was the effort among workers in specific industries and factories to establish and develop their own distinct organizations, which were independent from the federation (Kirkvliett, 1989).

In the early history of organized labor in Manila, union dues, closed shop, check-offs and collective bargaining did not exist. For Manila workers, a union (*union*) was different from a mutual aid society (*abuluyan*). The union was primarily concerned with the working conditions at the laborers' workplace while a mutual aid society with financial and moral support during sickness and deaths. This was pointed to by William Henry Scott: "the typical Manila trade union of the Spanish period was a tame fraternity of craftsmen in a particular shop or neighborhood which served primarily as a means for mutual aid in times of sickness or death" (Scott, 1992).

Thus, in mid-1901, lithographers at Casa Carmelo intended to organize their own mutual aid society from the 25-centavo contribution of each member. They wanted to set up a cooperative sari-sari store for rice and other staple items. Rice was scarce due to the unstable political situation and the continuing fighting in the countryside.

De los Reyes' arrival in Manila had immediately caught the public eye, "editor and radical" newspapers reported. Others called him "agitator and anarchist." American officials forbade him from publishing the newspaper *El Defensor de Filipinas.* In the Spanish-language newspapers, he proposed that Emilio Aguinaldo be sent to Washington to present Filipino grievances, chided Felipe Buencamino for never having visited his former chief, demanded exclusion of Chinese immigrant labor, lower salaries for American teachers and the right to peaceful protest in the press and popular demonstrations (Scott, 1992).

"The Americans regard me as a suspect and terrible enemy," he wrote to his wife in Madrid (Kirkvliett,1989, p. 12).

While a man of means, Don Belong lived a frugal existence above his printing press in Padre Rada in Tondo. He was supposed to be a typical Ilocano, *kuripot* (stingy), and did not smoke, drink or gamble. Squat and corpulent, he was described as "educated but not elite." While he liked to wear an *alpaca* after his return to Manila, he later dressed like a laborer and but for a peculiar shambling gait and other odd mannerisms, one newsman noted that he would have blended unnoticed in the teeming city crowds (Richardson, 2011).

On Dec. 30, 1901, the Carmelo printers visited him to talk about their planned activity and invite him to be president of their future enterprise as they felt his participation would give prestige to the cooperative. It was also possible that they shared de los Reyes' nationalistic sentiments. It may be noted that as a former printing press owner, he was not exactly a stranger. They soon found out that he had ideas other than heading a sari-sari store (Kirkvliett,1989).

He convinced the workers to form a federation similar to what he had seen in Spain. It would represent all workers from many factories and establishments and seek economic reform. He offered to draft the constitution for the federation. The workers agreed to an initial meeting on February 2, 1902. The draft charter was shown to government officials as well as published in local newspapers to encourage more workers to join. Thus, on February 2, 1902, approximately 140 of 500 printers and lithographers in the publishing industry in Manila convened at the *Variedades* Theater in Sampaloc to form the *Union Obrera Democratica* (UOD).

With UOD, he rejected the two options then open to educated Filipinos: joining the guerillas in the hills or the *Federalistas*, or collaborating with the American colonizers.

A man of property leads the workers

Except for Cruz, all UOD officers elected on that founding meeting on February 2, 1902 were rich manufacturers and employers in Manila. All officers, except for de los Reyes, were chosen *in absentia* (Kirkvliett, 1989).

De los Reyes himself strongly supported the involvement of the rich in the federation, because he had observed in Spain that an alliance between labor and capital was possible and productive. Moreover, he concluded that such an alliance was essential "and certainly nothing is more erroneous and suicidal for both parties than to consider their interests antagonistic when actually their interests complement each other and are vital for the whole enterprise."

"Our aim," de los Reyes wrote, "is to achieve the longed-for alliance between capital and labor." He hoped that the UOD's funds, contributions and donations would come from beneficent employers and into the executive board: he would co-opt "the richest industrialists and owners" in Manila. This would differentiate UOD from the *Katipunan* which he felt had been "a terrible association because it was composed of common and ignorant folk, because the masses think little (Richardon, 2011).

Printers themselves may have decided to be cautious and agreed that with rich people as top officials, the American authorities would regard the federation as a "safe" organization. However, Ramon Ongpin, Teodoro Yangco, and Jose Ramirez, the industrial elites elected, refused involvement with the UOD (Scott, 1992). A new election was called and printers were elected officers of the organization (Kirkvliett, 1989). It may be noted that a similar effort, though on a tragic note, was employed by the *Katipunan* when prominent and wealthy *Manilenos* were purposely implicated as the Spanish authorities discovered the underground organization (Agoncillo, l956).

Among the printers active during the first meeting were Felipe Mendoza and Cruz, both of whom would later play important roles in the Philippine labor movement. Mendoza was also a Tagalog writer and orator who spoke passionately during the UOD meeting on the importance of a workers' organization. He was a leader in the printers' strike in 1899 and was known to maintain close ties with printers and lithographers. Cruz, much younger than Mendoza, was an orphan who had to support his brothers and sisters and taught himself how to read and write. Cruz was a well-known writer and speaker in both Spanish and Tagalog. In that UOD organizational meeting on February 2, 1902, he was elected Secretary.

UOD recruited from a diverse slew of occupations: barbers, tailors, mechanics, draftsmen, clerks, seamstresses, business agents, tobacco factory workers, and employees of the Manila Customs office and the Manila railroad. By June 1902, these groups had formed their own unions and affiliated with the UOD.

UOD's organizational structure was loose and informal. At its core was the Executive Board composed of the officers elected by the

representatives of the affiliated unions. Each affiliated union had its own executive board and by-laws. There was no definition how the federation was to relate with the affiliated unions. Members did not pay any fees and officials at both the federation and union levels were not paid for their services. A union member was someone who attended the meetings, joined strikes, or simply acknowledged membership. Affiliation was also easy: a few workers formed a union, usually declaring themselves as officers and notified the federation that they wished to affiliate (Kirkvliett, 1989).

The second man of property

While de los Reyes was in Hongkong in April 1902 to purchase a new printing press, a series of strikes erupted in Manila sparked by a strike of the Filipino cigar workers against the Commercial Tobacco factory in Malabon. Pointed to as the mastermind of the abortive general strike, Don Belong was arrested and jailed in Malabon. He was convicted by the court on the charge of public disturbance and sentenced to four months in prison though William H. Taft, then Governor-General of the Philippines, himself condoned the sentence as not being aligned with current American thinking and policies. Because of his imprisonment, the mantle of labor leadership was passed on to Dr. Dominador Gomez, UOD's physician, on September 14, 1902 (Scott, 1992).

If Don Delong was a man who could blend with the crowds, Gomez intended to stand out. He was often in an immaculate white suit, straw boater, and gold-rimmed glasses and rode through the streets of Manila in his own private carriage drawn by magnificently groomed horses. He was a Spanish *mestizo,* nephew of the martyred Father Mariano Gomez, and was baptized at the Manila Cathedral by another martyred priest, Father Jose Burgos. He was a medical doctor by profession and lived in a mansion in *Calle* San Miguel. Muscular and barrel-chested, he often boasted about and found opportunities to display his prodigious strength. He often arrived at meetings accompanied by "young women with whom he was said to be involved." His private life, Rafael Palma, a contemporary, noted, "left much to be desired" (Richardson, 2011).

At 20, he was sent to Spain to continue his medical studies and Antonio Luna was said to remember him as the first among the "glorious"

Filipino youths in Spain at that time promoting the progress of the Philippines. He was the first Secretary of the *Asociacion Filipino-Hispanica* and was the only Filipino who contributed to Jugo Vidal's *La Vanguardia Filipina*. While still a medical student, he collaborated with Marcelo H. del Pilar when *La Solidaridad* moved from Barcelona to Madrid. In 1890, he joined Rizal and del Pilar in filing a protest with the *Ministerio de Ultramar* against the Calamba evictions.

Like Rizal, he enlisted in the Spanish medical corps bound for Cuba but unlike Rizal who never reached Cuba, Gomez stayed for almost two years and came back in December 1898 with the rank of Commander, with decorations for bravery, first-hand knowledge of Cuban guerilla tactics and a readiness to challenge critics to a duel.

He maintained a small eye clinic where he was noticed for his experiments in improved embalming techniques. It was then that he met de los Reyes with whom he became fast friends and a comrade in the propaganda movement against the American occupation of the Philippines. Even as de los Reyes sailed back to Manila, Gomez favored forming an independent party in the Philippines within the framework of the American occupation.

Gomez arrived in Manila on February 6, 1902 after being away for 15 years and found his friend, de los Reyes, busy organizing lithographers, printers, and bookbinders. He began his medical practice and also explored the possibility of a nationalist party with men like Pascual Poblete, Aurelio Tolentino, and Macario Sakay. He also founded a school, *Instituto Filipino*, while making himself available to de los Reyes and UOD, becoming its official physician, attending its *veladas* where he would speak, and joining de los Reyes in arbitrating strikes.

In the second week of September 1902, de los Reyes and Gregorio Aglipay paid him a visit, sounding him out about being president of UOD should it come around, which Gomez readily accepted. Thus, when he was presented to UOD's membership on September 14, 1902, there was loud applause and wide approval (Scott, 1992).

On September 21, 1902, Gomez laid out his promised policies for the union. His speech was said to be "a masterpiece of flowery elocution" which exalted trails the union would blaze but revealed little program

beyond proposing the revival of Greek Olympics and changing the organization's name to *Union Obrera Democratica de Filipinas* (UODF) (Scott, 1992), a change in name that came barely seven months after it was formed.

> Influenced and persuaded by the powerful currents of modern Progress and cosmopolitanism, (the Union) is not unaware that any sort of unwillingness to compromise drains the robust sap needed for thriving vigorous growth on the part of popular associations as well as institutions of more distinguished lineage. We are therefore opening windows and doors to air out every corner of our homes, our factories, and our hearts with life-giving oxygen. We are determined to disinfect the acts of the *Union Obrera* against unhealthful tendencies in order to obtain the effective and indispensable support of proprietors and capitalists. We will establish regular and active relations with all the workers' centers and societies of the world and support our brothers in everything that is not disruptive or unjust, and together with them, we will either raise ourselves to the very heights of glory, or fall, confounded and headlong into the cold depths of the tomb. (Scott, 1992, p. 54)

Barely a month later, Gomez announced that the UODF "must widen its field of action more, by taking part in the electoral struggle and organizing a political party." In his view, the new party will take advantage of the opportunities offered by the "ample and democratic North American legislation." Among those present in the October 26, 1902 meeting were Pascual Poblete, Manuel Artigas, and Leon Guerrero. Two weeks later, the manifesto of the *Partido Nacionalista* was published.

On November 23, 1902, Gomez was proclaimed *Nacionalista* party President in the *Teatro Nacional*. Representatives of the new party then paid a call on Governor Taft. The *Manila Times* reported the event as follows: "The new party is better known to older residents of Manila as the Democratic Labor Union, which has been reorganized to support the government from start to finish."

The demise of UODF

The change in name was followed by a revision of the UOD charter where more powers were arrogated unto the President who can declare strikes or sympathy or support strikes and invite sympathizers; in general, conduct business without consulting the rest of the union. There was a clearer definition of the duties of members including payment of dues. In return, certain benefits were accorded members including, for additional charges, medical consultation at the clinic of Dr. Gomez or even for his house calls; legal services of a retained law office; and discounts for medicines purchased at an affiliated drug store.

The *veladas* or nightly entertainment where speeches and patriotic plays were staged, started during the time of de los Reyes to generate funds for the UOD's activities as well as to educate workers in the light of worker's clubs which he observed in Spain, continued. The theatrical productions sourced funds for assistance to striking workers. Aurelio Tolentino's plays stoked the nationalist sentiment and these were later deemed seditious and authorities swooped down to padlock venues where the plays were being mounted.

The formation of the *Nacionalista* Party and its overlap with the UODF required a more organized structure down to the districts and the political operatives that would take charge. In the meantime, Gomez appeared to shrewdly combine nationalism and conservatism such that his tirades were felt to be directed more at the Americans rather than the capitalists. While he was warned by Taft to refrain from political activities, Gomez continued to push the *Nacionalista* project where party activities and meetings were also held at the UODF's office which was the Gomez residence.

Pushing the envelope, Gomez demanded from Taft the declaration of May 1 as a holiday, Labor Day, mobilizing 100,000 UODF members during the May 1,1903 parade, and pardon for Gen. Faustino Guillermo, a revolutionary general. Taft rebuffed him on both counts—no urgent need to decide on the May 1 holiday, it being a year away— Guillermo was a brigand, Taft cabled back. On hindsight, flexing its muscle during the May 1 parade worked against UODF; instead of being appreciated as UODF's show of loyalty and support of to the Americans, their number raised alarm.

Things came to a head swiftly. On May 22, 1903, government seized the books of accounts of the *Nacionalista* Party. The inspector also audited the books of UODF and found the union to be deeply in debt, with no funds deposited in banks, its receipts falsified, its ledgers short of P1,200, and its business negotiations and stock sales not registered with any government agency. UODF was declared bankrupt on May 29, 1903. On the same day, Gomez was arrested on charges of sedition, brigandage, swindling, and embezzlement (Scott, 1992).

UOD/UODF, the first Filipino labor federation, closed shop 15 months after it was founded. If de los Reyes was UOD president for seven months, Gomez lasted just a month longer.

Betrayal

Carmen Guerrero Nakpil wrote of Macario Sakay:

> During his brief lifetime, Sakay became the scourge of all his country's oppressors—the Spaniards, the Americans, the misguided half-bloods and compatriots—trying in every way he knew to secure freedom for his people. He was more determined than Rizal, more fortunate than Bonifacio, purer than Aguinaldo, more lyrically mysterious than Mabini. If Filipinos had won the war against the Americans, he would probably have been our Simon Bolivar or our Ho Chi Minh (Nakpil, 2011, p. 65).

Sakay was born in 1870 in Tondo, Manila, the cradle of rebellion against Spain and later, of the mostly plebeian roots of the *Katipunan*. He was born out of wedlock and Sakay was his mother's family surname. Growing up, he took on odd jobs to make ends meet: as an apprentice in a calesa shop, a tailor, a barber, and as an actor in *comedias* and *moro-moros* that were popular entertainment fare for the masses (Abad, 1955).

He was among the first recruits of Katipunan in 1894, a contemporary of Emilio Jacinto. His Katipunan activities eluded detection by the Spanish authorities as he moved from district to district in Manila acting in the nightly staging of *comedias*.

The mother cell of the Katipunan was the *Katagalugan* Council of Tondo, which Andres Bonifacio fondly called *"Haring Bayan Katagalugan,"* from which all the other *sanggunians* (councils) of the Katipunan descended. *Katagalugan* spun off a council in Trozo, the *"Balangay Silanganan,"* which, in turn, gave birth to *"Dapitan"* of which Sakay was made president. In her autobiography, Gregoria de Jesus, Bonifacio's widow, recalled how Sakay helped the young Jacinto put out and circulate *Kalayaan*, the Katipunan newspaper. "Macario Sakay was a true patriot, I know he greatly helped the *Katipunan"* (Ochosa,1995, pp. 78-79).

In 1896, Sakay was with Bonifacio, Faustino Guillermo, Apolonio Samson, Francisco de los Santos, and Gen. Hermogenes Bautista in the attack against the town of San Mateo as well as the subsequent retreat to Balara (Agoncillo,1956). He was not, however, with the *Supremo* in the Revolution's tragic fiasco at Cavite. Thereafter, he drops out from accounts of Aguinaldo's Republic though Ochosa surmises that the two long-haired men in the photograph of the family around the dead Emilio Jacinto could be Sakay and Francisco Carreon (Ochosa,1995). His continued organizing work may be gleaned from a letter of Gen. Pio del Pilar in 1930 to a historian:

> Macario Sakay, as I knew him, was a true *makabayan.* In the days of the revolution (Aguinaldo's revolution) while we (in the Republic) were doing the fighting, he on his part was spreading the Cause of the *Katipunan* whose ultimate objective was to win the independence of the Philippines. He was among those who greatly helped by going from town to town in 1899, 1900, 1901 to organize the councils of the *Katipunan*. The passion for that cause was so great that even when the Americans caught him (in 1902?) he was still determined to consummate the unfinished *Katipunan* goal to make the Philippines free and independent by means of promoting a new revolution. (Ochosa,1995, pp. 80-81).

On August 21, 1901, Sakay was with a group of former *Katipuneros* – both of the *Magdiwang* and *Katagalugan* cells – who met in a printing house in *Calle Gunao* in Quiapo to form the *Partido Nacionalista.* Sakay was elected Secretary General. The key members of the group however – Francisco Carreon, Alejandro Santiago, Aguedo del Rosario,

Cenon Nicdao, Nicolas Rivera, Salustiano Cruz – all belonged to the *Katagalugan* faction. It may have been the intention to present a legal front but apparently, things did not go well that barely three months later, on November 2, 1901, the group calling themselves "the true members of the *Katipunan*" drafted the constitution for the "Government of the *Katagalugan*" (Ochosa,1995).

Reeling from the arrest of Sakay and Nicdao in January 1902, Santiago, acting as Presidente-*Supremo*, activated armed *Katipunan* bands in the hills of Rizal and Bulacan. However, members of the entire *Katagalugan* Supreme Council were themselves captured on July 7, 1902. Fortunately, Sakay and Nicdao were declared qualified for amnesty on July 4, 1902.

At this point, Gomez took over as President of the *Partido Nacionalista,* the other members of the original group having fled or were in jail.

After their release from prison, Sakay and Carreon, the last of the original *Katipunan,* now turned to the survivors of Aguinaldo Republic among the peasants in Cavite and Batangas. Sakay founded the Republic of *Katagalugan*: Republic as a nod to Aguinaldo's revolution and *Katagalugan* to Bonifacio's *Katipunan*.

On May 6, 1903, from his lair at Mount San Cristobal in Laguna, Sakay issued his manifesto announcing the creation of *"Kapulungang Katagalugan,"* reminding people not to aid and comfort the American-sponsored government and show their loyalty and allegiance to the "*Katagalugan* Government."

Evading capture in Laguna, Sakay crossed Laguna de Bay and established his camp in the mountains between Boso-boso and Tanay. In the meantime, his followers grew by leaps and bounds, alarming the Americans. One of Sakay's key aides, General Leon Villafuerte, a division general, had 4,000 men in his command. Sakay's forces raided and punished local officials who showed subservience to or who spied for the Americans. On the other hand, Nakpil also writes that Sakay was a dashing, romantic hero who was supposed to have kidnapped the comely wife of a provincial governor who vowed revenge (Nakpil, 2011).

Sakay's forces eluded hundreds of Constabulary soldiers and defied civilian authorities for more than four years and at times threatened towns and villages around Manila. By 1906, American officials and their Filipino partners as well as the landed elites were anxious to end this constant threat and increasingly offered support to the efforts to capture Sakay.

The last fiesta

With the promised National Assembly elections in limbo due to the continuing Resistance led by Sakay, the operation that led to his arrest began in early May 1906.

The Acting Director of the Constabulary, Col. Harry H. Bandholtz, approached Gomez. By this time, the latter's *Partido Nacionalista* had morphed into the *Partido Popular Independista* and who was also facing sedition charges from his previous UODF period. Bandholtz prevailed on Gomez to use his good offices to bring about Sakay's surrender (Cullinane,2009). Gomez travelled to Floridablanca, Pampanga to see Dr. Santiago Icasiano who accompanied him to Villafuerte who, in turn, could get him to meet Sakay.

In the presence of witnesses, Gomez showed Villafuerte a written authority supposed to be from the office of and signed by Governor General Henry C. Ide. The letter authorized Gomez to work out the most effective way of persuading Sakay and his rebels to lay down their arms and upon their surrender, they would be granted licenses to possess firearms and freedom to establish their residence wherever they may desire to settle.

While non-committal, Villafuerte undertook to relay the message to Sakay and with Gomez, took the train to Manila where he claimed to have briefly met Governor General Luke E. Wright. During the trial of Sakay, however, the letter of authority that Gomez showed to both Villafuerte and Sakay could not be found and presented to the court as Gomez claimed that the said document was snatched by a burly American soldier, depriving Sakay's defense a vital piece of evidence that could have spared him the death penalty (Abad,1955).

By mid-June, Gomez, Bandholtz, and Sakay and several of the latter's officers met in Tanay, Rizal and negotiated a surrender agreement. Succeeding negotiations shuttled between Manila and remote mountain villages to negotiate the surrender of Sakay's forces, particularly the feared Montalan and de Vega.

On July 14, 1906, Sakay and his men entered the city of Manila armed with a safe-conduct pass from American authorities. They were allowed to carry daggers and pistols. They wore clean rayadillo uniforms, their long hair neatly combed. Then Mayor of Manila, Felix Ma. Roxas, ordered the Chief of Police, Capt. George Seaver, that they should not be molested and that they could go anywhere they pleased. As they made their way on foot, hundreds of Manila folk walked with them and gladly gave them food and quarters. They were feted and at night, serenaded by singers and guitar players together with young women (Abad, 1955).

On July 17, 1906, an American officer told them that they were invited to the town fiesta of Cavite by Col. Van Schaick, then the acting Governor of Cavite. A ball was in progress by the time they arrived at the municipio but at a signal, the Americans pointed their guns at Sakay and his companions, the building was surrounded by Filipino Constabulary and American officers. One of Sakay's soldiers aimed for Gomez but Sakay intervened.

> "What is this, Doctor?" Villafuerte shouted.
>
> "No hay nada. Solo una mala inteligencia entre las autoridades civiles y militares" Gomez calmly replied. (It's nothing. Just some bad news from Civil authorities and the military.)
>
> As the tension between Sakay's group and the Americans mounted, Gomez stepped forward and said, "Sakay, there is no use fighting as you see that the soldiers have surrounded the place. If you start shooting these people inside, who will stop the whole battalion from killing you?" (Abad,1955)

Thus was captured the legendary Macario Sakay (Abad, 1955).

Sakay, Montalan, Villafuerte and de Vega were all found guilty of sedition. While initially pleading "Not guilty" as per advice of their counsels Felipe Buencamino and Ramon Diokno, they changed this to "Guilty" reportedly at the advice of Gomez though a telegram received in the middle of the trial and after witnesses for the prosecution had testified. Gomez himself was nowhere to be found during the trial. In the appeal to the Supreme Court decided on July 26, 1907, it was held:

> The attorneys for the appellants argue that, inasmuch as the defendants presented themselves to the authorities, this should be taken into consideration in reducing the sentence from death to that of imprisonment. It is true that the defendants did present themselves to the authorities. However, no promise of leniency was made to them by those in authority at that time. They were given, expressly to understand that no promise of leniency was made to them by anyone in authority; they presented themselves unconditionally, without any promise of leniency whatever, except that they would not be shot upon their surrender, but that they would be guaranteed an equitable and just trial. (U. S. v. Unselt, 4 Off. Gaz., 612; 6 Phil. Rep., 456.)
>
> The attorneys for the defendants argue in their brief that this court should take into consideration the fact that they surrendered themselves voluntarily, and reduce the penalty imposed by the lower court. We are of the opinion that we have no authority to do this. If any clemency should be exercised in favor of the defendants for this voluntary act on their part, it should be done by the executive branch of the Government. (US vs. Sakay, 1907)

Abad, who interviewed Villafuerte, notes that while Sakay and his group were in Bilibid, their visitors were issued passes by Gomez which were honored by prison guards, raising the question: what authority was possessed by Gomez, who was not a government official at that time, to issue those passes which would carry weight with the guards of Bilibid?

In the morning of September 13, 1907, Sakay, then only 37 years old, and de Vega were taken out of their cells and priests heard their confessions. Thereafter, they were led to the death platform and upon

reaching it, Sakay shouted at the top of his voice: "Death comes to all of us sooner or later, so I will face the Lord Almighty calmly. But I want to tell you that we are not bandits and robbers as the Americans accused us but members of the revolutionary force that defended our mother country, the Philippines! Long live the country, the Philippines and may our independence be born in the future! Long live the Philippines!"

The deception carried out by Gomez claimed not only the lives of Sakay and de Vega. Villafuerte, who was later pardoned by Gov. Gen. Francis Burton Harrison at the request of Manuel L. Quezon, revealed that while he was confined in Bilibid, about 300 prisoners, all members of the revolutionary forces, were hanged to death inside the Bilibid compound away from public eyes or knowledge (Abad, 1955). Another hundred prisoners, all of them Sakay's men, were alleged to have been injected with a poison serum causing their immediate death.

Was Ilustrado leadership beneficial to the labor movement?

All things considered, the charismatic leadership of de los Reyes and Gomez provided a starting point for the organization of the labor movement. However, their leadership had strategic flaws, primarily the direction they identified for the labor movement which favored their own personal interest.

Ideology, form, and structure

If for anything, de los Reyes gave form and structure to the workers organization in the printing press and beyond. Through the Socialist texts that he brought with him from Spain, he gave a conceptual and ideological framework to Cruz, Arturo Soriano, and through them, succeeding generations of unionists. Cruz had responded to those readings like a real Spanish *obrero consciente.* (Scott, 1992). While he retained affection for Don Belong during UOD's brief lifetime, it was Cruz who often had to keep the federation's administration functioning while Don Belong was off sponsoring *veladas* and getting arrested in raids in theaters, or organizing anti-friar demonstrations. Cruz had expected to become UOD president the first time Belong "resigned" but acquiesced and supported Don Belong's return.

The *Union del Trabajo de Filipinas* (UTF) took over where the UODF left off. The UTF was less fiery than UODF, given the influence of Edward Rosenberg, a commissioner from the American Federation of Labor (AFL), who advised that politics be removed from the union and much would be gained by organizing strictly along trade union lines. Lope K. Santos, a former journalist, teacher and printer, was elected President and together with Cruz, they gave evening classes for interested worker-unionists at what was called the "School of Socialism" in Quiapo where study focused on the radical texts of Marx, Zola, Reclus, Gorky and others (Richardson, 2011).

The working class will emancipate itself

Cruz and Santos also published the newspaper of the printworkers union, a short-lived fortnightly called *Balagtas.* On its masthead was the tenet of Marx and Engels: "*Ang katubusan ng manggagawa ay nasa manggagawa rin."* (The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class.). After a while, UTF's progress was hobbled by its own timidity and was challenged by a revived and more militant group in UODF (Richardson, 2011).

In the middle of this rivalry, Cruz and four of his former students in the School of Socialism, namely Arturo Soriano, Melanio de Jesus, Crisanto Evangelista and Felipe Mendoza, reorganized the *Gremios de Impresores, Litografos, y Encuadernadores*, the core group of the old UOD, into the *Union de Impresores de Filipinas* (UIF). The UIF announced a more defined and restrictive membership: outsiders were not welcome in the union. In its declaration of principles, it asserted: "Whoever of our employed brothers does not associate with those of his condition shall sooner or later be enslaved by capital." This departed from what had until then been the customary affirmation of universal brotherhood in UOD and OUDF. The UIF declared: "We laborers, should be united and love our co-workers in preference to those who are not…" (Richardson, 2011). Evangelista would go on to be the founder of the *Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas* in the 1930s.
Cruz would be elected President of the *Congreso Obrero de Filipinas* (COF) in 1913. The *Congreso* was an attempt to unite all labor groups to better leverage on their collective strength. He would leave this post to become the Librarian of the Philippine Assembly in 1918. He

was appointed Assistant Director of the Bureau of Labor becoming its Director in 1922. By this time, the lion's roar had been tamed so thoroughly he was admonishing workers that they should not be moved by their own interest alone and they should assist their employers wholeheartedly so that product or output is improved (Richardson, 2011).

Charismatic leadership in lieu of rules

While there were no rules that defined the relations or negotiations between workers and their unions to the employers as well as the government, the charismatic leadership of de los Reyes and Gomez attempted to fill the void but this did not work all the time given the undefined relationship between UOD/UODF and the affiliated unions. Thus, the UOD's uncertain level of influence at a time when the American authorities' main objective was to minimize disturbance in a colony they have yet to fully control. In a sense, the relationship and the rules of that relationship between the workers, employers, and the authorities were still very much a work in progress at this time. Rules on procedure, on scope or coverage of negotiable items, limit the scope of conflict and allow both parties to explore mutually acceptable options without burning bridges or creating irretrievable antagonism.

Contrary interest in grouping workers and capitalists together

If *Ilustrado* leadership or the inclusion of wealthy capitalists was intended to buffer unwanted attention and suspicion from the American colonial authorities, it was not achieved, given that de los Reyes had acquired notoriety even before his exile to Spain while Gomez's manners, his chosen activities for the federation such as the May 1, 1903 parade, and his political agenda, raised alarms.

Ilustrado leadership had other distractions

For Don Belong, it was his involvement in the local Filipino clergy and the properties of the Catholic Church after the Revolution.

Utilizing his labor leadership, Don Belong, in a meeting of about 42 members of his labor organization at the *Centro de Bellas Artes* in Quiapo on August 3, 1902, launched the Philippine Independent Church and proclaimed Father Gregorio Aglipay as the Supreme bishop, an action that he failed to consult with the UOD and led to his break with Cruz.

For Gomez, it was his cherished project of a political party working within American colonial parameters which he pursued, using the warm bodies of the UODF and inviting the raid and seizure of the books and records of both the *Partido Nacionalista* and the UODF, that would ultimately lead to the demise of UODF. Thereafter, both Don Belong and Gomez would be on the fringes of the labor movement led by Santos, Cruz, and other unionists who came after them.

Last gasps of the Manila Ilustrados

While his brief idyl as UODF leader continued to tag him as a so-called labor leader, Gomez plunged deeper into the colonial politics of the day. His *Partido Nacionalista* had several incarnations following his shifts in political alliances: *Partido Popular Independista, Urgentista, Partido de Union Nacionalista*, then back to *Partido Nacionalista*. This period, however, saw the rise of provincial governors like Quezon and Osmena who, with help from the Americans, were rewriting the rules of colonial politics. At the provincial level, Americans left the Filipinos much to themselves allowing local politicians to build and consolidate their own network. A conference of provincial governors was called by the American authorities during which the governors sat and discussed governmental issues with the Philippine Commission for a month coupled with the provincial networks reaching out to the national offices and colonial officials. This encounter revealed more brilliant fishes in the bigger pond and the Manila-based *Ilustrados* waned in influence.

Ambition and bloody hands. Gomez was haunted by the ghost of Sakay. Two weeks after Sakay's execution, the Supreme Court overturned Gomez's conviction for sedition due to insufficient evidence (US v Gomez,1907). Nakpil writes:

> Gomez then went on to become a representative for the first Philippine Assembly of 1907 where he was denounced and expelled by Sergio Osmena and Manuel Luis Quezon for having served as a surgeon in the Spanish Army in Cuba and received a medal from the Spanish queen during the Spanish-American War. But despite his previous disgraceful expulsion, he was backed by American authorities. The facts speak for themselves; Sakay was the plea bargain (Nakpil, 2011, p. 73).

Gomez would not achieve his dream of leading the Philippine Assembly: both Osmena and Quezon stood in his way. Like him, Osmena had also negotiated the surrender of *insurrectos*, the Tabal brothers, notorious *insurrectos* in Cebu, but the Tabal brothers survived largely through Osmena's protection (Cullinane, 2009). After his stint in the Philippine Assembly, Gomez would be elected as councilor of Manila and fade away until his death in 1929, a man whose ambitions were awash with the blood of Sakay and his *Katipuneros*.

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