

The Philippine Fishing Industry

In a brawl between local police and villagers on one side, apparently nearly 200 Japanese fishermen on the other, on November 19 at the town of Coron, Palawan, the chief of police shot and killed one of the Japanese and thus precipitated a situation demanding the central government's attention. President Quezon at once sent a commission of inquiry to Palawan, on the coast-guarder *Arayat*, which of course had difficulty in getting there and could not find the Japanese once it had arrived. There will be a report, of course, but it is doubtful that the real facts will all come out. The main worth of the incident is that it brings the condition of the Philippine fishing industry to public attention and gives editors and reporters a chance to examine it.

It gives the Commonwealth the same chance, with more means of ascertaining the truth, and it would be worth while knowing just why this brawl started and why it reached the killing point. It is given out that the Coron police were tracing whether all the Japanese boats fishing there were licensed; you hear that some of the boats were reluctant to show their papers, if indeed they had them. The police insisted, the fishermen stood adamant, villagers grew irate and partisan, and the fight was on.

Just the same, could there have been a sudden accession of Japanese boats at Coron? What could have been going on in fishing there that had not been going on and known all along? Coron is on the southern shore of Busuanga, the northern island of Palawan province, of which Palawan itself is the mainland, and opposite Coron at a short distance lie Uson and Coron islands. Coron shows on the map as the largest community on Busuanga, a municipality. Well protected and near rich fishing grounds, it should be a rendezvous for fishing fleets. But a regularly patronized rendezvous, you would say, and not an occasional haven. Inquiry gathers that this is just what Coron is.

If this is true, it should not take a brawl and a killing to discover whether all fishing boats using Coron are licensed and operating legally. Certainly the boats have names, all licensed boats do—we have a copy of the entire list, courteously furnished us by the Fish & Game Administration at the Bureau of Science. Surely the Coron police could catalogue names of all fishing boats there, at any time, and check the names with the official records that must be near, at

Puerto Princessa, and at most are not farther away than Manila. On the other hand, if there had been some dealing on the side to defraud the Commonwealth and enrich some private purses, if unlicensed boats had been around there and been winked at, here could be the fertile source of quarrel.

Later than 1932, Japanese may not register new boats. This privilege is limited to Filipinos and Americans or companies chiefly owned by them. But Japanese fishing grows here, and a situation such as we suggest is certainly not out of the question.

As soon as you study anything in the Philippines, respecting government, you come on the shortcomings of the town administrations. Commercial fishing is no exception to the rule. The most monstrous practices are tolerated, in fishing, where even dynamiting schools of fish at sea or in inland waters is let by. There is not a town that can not apprehend its fish-dynamiters, and do so easily, yet you never hear of one that does. There is not a town or city where an unlicensed fishing boat can harbor unknown to the police, yet there must be towns as well as cities where they do. Coron's seems to have been a sudden and inexplicable excess of zeal; you suspect it tells of bad administration, rather than good.

At the same time, of course, your mind is open for correction of false surmise. The point is that the incident runs true to the pattern of inefficiency, and worse, that most town administrations purvey.

In the interest of social justice, the plan by which Philippine towns and cities are administered needs scrapping; the towns have liberty, they have usually converted it to license. They deserve no popular councils; every one of them, including Manila, simply needs a public administrator who may be styled a mayor, hired in the general civil service and gaining promotion on merit. Their police ought to be detachments of constabulary under this responsible officer. With a little inspection, such a system would give the people low-cost clean government.

What they have now, generally, is a system of rackets. These extend to traffic in the people's food supply, for instance to traffic in the sources of fish.

Though fish are basic as the poor's meat, this will not stop many a council from shortening the supply or

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Philippine Fishing Boats Licensed by Fish & Game Administration						
a. Boats Owned by Filipinos						
Number	Net Tons	Av. Tons	Total Value	Av. Value	Av. Nets & Lines	
128	1,280.32	10	P 811,262	P6,338	P 978	
b. Boats Owned by Japanese						
21	198.87	8.29	P 164,450	P6,832	P1,269	
c. Boats Owned by Americans						
3	16.55	15.5	P 28,790	P7,577	P1,233	
d. Boats Owned by Companies & Corporations						
36	498.55	13.84	P 244,145	P6,782	P 789	
e. All Licensed Fishing Boats						
191	2,024.80	10.6	P1,248,648	P6,237	P 983	
Authority: Fish & Game Administration.						

Notes.—Boats owned by companies or corporations are probably to be counted as practically all Japanese. Since foreigners can not register fishing boats later than 1932, no doubt some boats of nominal Filipino ownership are more accurately properties of Japanese; but Filipinos thus associated with Japanese fishermen should be deriving some revenue from the arrangement, just as men taking up public lands in Mindanao benefit from Japanese tenants who turn the land into productive plantations. It would be hard to prove that a boat nominally owned by a Filipino was not actually so owned; on the other hand, to own such a boat and have Japanese handling it would probably be profitable, there must be legitimate investments of this sort.

Nominally, Filipinos own at least 128 out of the total of 191 boats licensed for commercial fishing. This is nearly 67%. These boats average a value P300 less than the Japanese boats, their nets & lines average a value of P360 less than the nets & lines of Japanese boats. Nets & lines on the 3 American boats almost par those on Japanese boats, in value per boat. Nets & lines on all the 191 average the value of P983 per boat, almost P300 below the Japanese boats. Obviously the Japanese boats are the best equipped, as a fleet, with the possible exception of the 3 American boats.

The Filipino boats average a horsepower of 48, Japanese 46.6, American 60, company 61.5, and all the boats together 50.7.

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monopolizing the take. With such problems the central government will get nowhere until the chief officer of every community is a central-government official with an esprit de corps to honor.

Let us make fish the sole source of our illustrations. Tabular matter about the fishing boats is boxed in the first page of this paper. At all the islands, fewer than 200 licensed commercial fishing boats. A license costs P5, a charge of P1 per ton of fish marketed is collected; the owner pays this to the town treasurer where he brings in his cargo, but the license comes from the Fish & Game administration and is an insular charge.

Now for a few outrages:

Taytay, Palawan is a town nearby Malampaya sound, perhaps the richest landlocked fishing grounds in the archipelago. Some years ago the Taytay council declared Malampaya sound to be a fishpond—because the towns still have the administration of ponds, the marketing of bangos fry, and fish traps. A monopoly was then granted one man, he only could have traps in the sound, he alone could take fish commercially there; and if anyone else did so, they had to arrange with him and pay him something for the privilege—the poorest family could not fish without paying this racketeer tribute. This lasted years, until the supreme court knocked it out on grounds that a fishpond implied an impounding place for fish that was at least in part artificially prepared—whereas Malampaya sound is a mere natural arm of the sea and not a fishpond at all. In all those years, Taytay got its cut and some chap there got a fat income out of the people's staple meat, fish.

Now go to a Tagalog community, and a very proud one at that, Batangas.

Taal volcano and Taal crater lake are in Batangas, the lake drained to the sea by the Pansipit river. The town of Taal is on one bank of this river, Lemery on the opposite bank. Formerly the lake teemed with two species of mackerel, cheap, palatable, and wholesome. They spawned in the sea, but the fry went to the lake where they grew to maturity, and went back to the sea to repeat the story of their ancestors. This habit demanded an open river, and if not that, then a by-pass to serve the upstream and downstream migrations. But no; consulting only their convenience, the towns of Lemery and Taal let out a monopoly to a man who dammed the river in order to waylay and catch the mackerel as they went back to the sea. This man gave each town P18,000 a year, an indication of what a quantity of the people's food was involved.

The supply of mackerel is now running low, which is natural because the fish should be caught only in the lake, such as can make their way to the sea should be let do so in order to maintain supply. So now,

without abandoning the monopoly, Lemery and Taal have reduced the annual charge to conform to the depletion of the catch—they collect only P9,000 each a year. You see, corals or traps are still under the towns; these two towns give an extended meaning to the law, authorize a fatal fish dam, and make the people's meat supply precious and costly.

Wherever this is done, it is an invitation for the Japanese to come and do some fishing. Let present processes continue during a few more years, and fishing in the Philippines will have been made a large and remunerative vocation for many Japanese; and the fault will not be theirs, but that of town officers either shortsighted or indifferent about what should be done. Yet you hear that the new legislature may change the national fish & game law radically, and give even more discretion to the towns, such as rights off the foreshore.

Now go into Laguna de Bay.

Here used to abound a toothsome catfish the male of which incubates the eggs in his mouth. This transpires in the main during April to June, and at that time the fish



ought not to be molested. Frightened, they drop the eggs and it is not uncommon to see heaps of them so deposited, all of course quite dead. But local officials take no account of this, the catfish are sought at all seasons of the year, dynamite may even be used, and so the fish are already scarce. Carp are taking their place, carp being voracious vegetarians and harder to disturb in their plans to reproduce themselves. Local wiseacres round the lake have it that the carp are killing the catfish, but carp are not carnivorous and in fact it is these very men who are killing the supply of the superior fish.

Carp, the inferior fish, are naturally coming on in greater numbers, and gradually the people are coming to use them. This deterioration in a notable fish supply comes of nothing else but negligent local administration that takes no thought for the morrow.

How monstrous this is may be imagined by thinking about Japan, how readily she maintains a population of 70 millions (with Hokkaido, her northern island, little populated) because she lives so largely from the sea. Just how much she relies on the sea is ascertainable, but the seas round her lit-

tle archipelago are practically a part of her domain—and by far the most important single part. Men lose sight of this, saying how crowded Japan is: such men fail to calculate the resources of her seas. It is the same here, and if we were but to deal logically with our natural fish supply from the sea not less than 100 million people could domicile themselves comfortably in this archipelago, whose lands fit for crops exceed Japan's with forests and minerals yet to be considered.

Such resources, we maintain, can not be left to petty local officials elected for short terms who are not conscious of how destructive some of their negligences and oversights and condemnations may be.

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Now refer to the three things affecting fish that town authorities still control: the traps, the bangos fry, the pond. There are instances where councils turn all these over to monopolies, for an agreed payment a year; whoever puts in a pond, whoever sets up a corral, whoever impounds females and raises bangos fry—for salting, for example, and selling as *bagons*—must make his arrangements with the monopolists and pay them tribute. This is a fantastic way of administering such responsibilities, unquestionably the law means that opportunity will be equal to all, especially to all the poor, and not limited to the few who can pay comparatively high fees for the monopolies.

He who sets a trap, let him pay a tax; he who breeds fry, let him too pay a tax; and he who grows pond fish, let him pay a tax; and all this money will go to your town treasury and not for private tribute. It is also often vital that experts of the Fish & Game administration be consulted, to see that whatever is done will not deplete the fish.

As to Japanese fishing here, they are the only foreigners who do, and they fish chiefly at sea beyond the three-mile coastal limit. Early next year the first boats of the army's offshore patrol fleet are arriving at Manila from the builders in England—but we hear America builds better ones, which should be looked into—and after that no such incidents as that at Coron in November should occur. After that it ought to be possible to overhaul very readily any craft in Philippine waters, since the new boats attain 45 knots an hour, and, without killing anyone, ascertain that it is licensed and using the banks legally.

And here is a reported practice that might be stopped by the new boats: It is reported that Filipino crews take some boats to sea,

or beyond the breakwater, turn them over to Japanese crews who do the fishing in them, and then take charge once more when the boats are brought up the bay with the catch, the Japanese dropping off somewhere along the river or a launch taking them off in the bay. We do not know how reprehensible this is, but we assume it covers something from the law that ought to be exposed and discontinued. The slow coastguards are not up to that.

This country can't have its cake and eat it too, not even its fishcake.

President Quezon plans better administration of the country's fish resources in the future, and hopes to instruct Filipinos in new methods of fishing. Some Japanese instructors, for this, may be employed—the President thinks they are among the best fishermen in the world and have lessons to impart to this country. Practically, he demands that Filipinos take hold of their own problems and solve them. Certainly competent fishing, competent fish administration, that supplies will be conserved, is among these problems and not the least of them.

Japanese ice boats at Manila, make for Palawan and Malampaya sound, and trawl for Spanish mackerel. They do beam trawling; to a beam athwart the stern of the boat they attach a net in such a manner as to scoop up the mackerel as the boat moves along. They do this type of fishing at sea, too. They fish a great deal in Palawan waters, where fish are found at the reefs abounding there. At a reef they set a net in form of a triangle, the ends forward, the belly back, something in the form of a movable corral or trap. Now comes a skillful business. A light cable is paid out, far up current from the net, and man after man goes overboard to help move it forward. Palm leaves dangle from it, objects

that help the men's swishing legs frighten the fish along, and finally everyone closes in at the net and the haul is made.

This method gets quantities of *dalagang bukid*, an acceptable fish now plentiful on the Manila market, of which a large specimen 5 inches broad and 14 inches long costs about 50 centavos—the weight about 1 kilo. Filipinos do not use this method of fishing, called *mura-ami* or moving-coral by the Japanese. Sometimes Filipinos say they fear sharks and swordfish at the reefs, which can not be true; what is more probably true is that they shun the exertion involved for the prospective gains. Filipinos do not have to work so hard for a living, but Japanese do. All this poses the question whether Japanese compete with Filipino fishermen or merely supplement their efforts. One reporter at President Quezon's latest news conference suggested that law require at least mixed crews on all licensed fishing boats, the majority of the men to be Filipinos—this for learning the skill of the Japanese and keeping sea fishing national.

If such a suggestion caught on, it probably could not apply to boats licensed prior to 1932 and the date of the national fish & game act, No. 4003.

Dr. Landman's Nine-Point . . .

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ployment, including farmers and farm labor, since the bulk of all they buy derives almost directly from farms. The bulk of what they sell, too, sells as low prices, to labor. But suppose America turned to other sources for copra, Manila hemp, etc., where she could sell in turn only 30 million dollars' worth of goods, instead of twice that, as here, labor being about half the whole charge. This would at once cut American payrolls by \$15,000,000 a year, unless new sales made up for what was lost in the Philippines.

Of course, if America actually buys here what she does not need, she throws money away foolishly; but this is not the fact. She does buy, just now, short of a million tons of sugar that she might get from Cuba with a duty drawback, but she can readily settle this difficulty at any moment without disturbing the whole fabric of Philippine-American commerce, of which after all sugar is but a part.

This year, or during 1938, the trade balance has been running more favorably for the United States. But Dr. Landman understated it if the average balance during the decade ending with 1937 is taken, the direct average balance of visible items during that period having been more than \$36,000,000 a year.

8. *Entravées in America from 17 American firms here whose whole capital is \$100,000,000 fall at home on deaf ears.* If the aptitude of these appeals improves, this may not remain true. It is our view that

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