

- Filipino-American relations as viewed by an independent American journalist on the basis of current problems.

FILIPINO NATIONALISM AND THE AMERICANS

A few days ago, I urged that Congress take a vote without delay on the controversial Vietnam Aid Bill so as to enable us to move on to the discussion of more pressing domestic problems. But now that the political situation in South Vietnam has taken a turn for the worse, it may be wiser to shelve the Vietnam Bill until conditions clear up in that dissension-torn country.

The main argument being fielded by the administration, after all, in favor of sending 2,000 Filipino engineers to Saigon is that the South Vietnamese government made a specific request for this type of assistance. It is only logical that we should determine whether this government will remain in powers before taking a vote on committing our engineers.

This does not mean that we are any less concerned

about the future of South Vietnam. But our foreign policy, far from being rigid and inflexible, should be dictated by common sense.

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The lead article in the March 12 edition of "The New Republic," a prestigious magazine published in Washington DC, is entitled: "The Philippines — Sugar, Rice and a Great Deal of Vice." It was written by Alex Campbell, an old Asia hand, who is now the periodical's managing editor.

In his story, datelined "Manila," Campbell asserts that "the White House is said to have used every possible pressure, including sending Hubert Humphrey to the Philippines twice in a matter of weeks, to get a reluctant (President) Marcos to 'show the Philippine flag' in South Vietnam, by dispatching a military engineering unit there and so becoming

ing the first Asian member of the Southeast Asian Organization to respond to the Saigon government's appeal to SEATO for military help.

Notice how candid they are, even in Washington DC, about the fact that what is wanted in Saigon is Filipino MILITARY involvement. Over here, we're still talking euphemistically about "construction engineers" and inserting clauses into the bill about prohibiting the proposed engineers from getting into a fight with the Viet Cong. Let's get rid of the sugar-coating once and for all. It takes two to tango, but only one side to start a battle — and the Viet Cong have already announced that they intended to start one.

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Campbell further comments that "Filipinos have reasons to be sensitive about their special relationship with the United States."

"Some Americans," he declares, "still behave as if the Philippines is nothing more than a company town, and they, the Americans are the company. They find the labor docile on the whole, and

cherish the illusion, dear to all tycoons, that the workers revere their bosses and are loyal to the company. It follows, of course, that any unrest that makes itself felt must be caused by agitators, probably Communists. Filipinos don't love Americans, or hate them either; they do resent them. After having been ruled first by Spaniards, then by Americans and also brutally overrun by Japanese, the only way many Filipinos seem able to express the nationalist fervor they genuinely feel is to resent the United States."

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The "New Republic's" editor notes that "Americans here mutter darkly about 'Communists' when what actually happens is that Filipino nationalist sentiment is coolly inflamed by forces that are concerned with profits. A rising class of Filipino businessmen wants to elbow out foreign capital, especially American, in order to have the exclusive rights to exploit an abundant and intelligent labor force whose members are lucky if they earn as much as \$50 a month. Filipino

capitalists own the newspapers and magazines that feature loud 'left-wing' criticisms of the US."

Campbell concludes: "In spite of their depressing economic situation and appalling politics, Filipinos are cheerful, warmhearted, impulsively generous and essentially optimistic people who tend to believe that they will always manage to muddle through somehow. They are neither pro-Communist nor pro-Chinese. Chances are they will tolerate the American bases for as long as they are supposed to — the agreed date is now 1985 — and may tolerate American business beyond 1974. But in terms of international relations, neither date is really far off, and before either is reached, more Filipinos will be thinking seriously about their place in Asia and their relations with China. US policy ought to be receptive to that. If it isn't, the next demonstrations at the US Embassy in Manila may

be neither small nor decorous."

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Not all of Campbell's remarks may make us happy, but they were made by a veteran observer who covered Asia for several years and lived in Japan for four years, at the end of which he wrote the bestseller, "The Heart of Japan." Perhaps one reason he can write about both Filipinos and Americans with such detachment is that he is a Scotsman, born in Edinburgh in 1912, and a former correspondent of the London "Economists."

His views are intriguing, for they give us an insight into how foreigners see us. They should be equally interesting to Americans here for they were not written by those whom they seek to dismiss as "Little Bungs" or fire-eating nationalists. I don't agree with everything Campbell observed in his article, but one thing can be said — he lets the chips fall where they may. — *Maximo V. Soliven, Manila Times.*