



The Making of Laws During the Philippine Commonwealth

ON Saturday, March 23, 1935, in Washington, D.C., the President of the United States approved the constitution of the Philippines. He signed it in the presence of Manuel L. Quezon, the president of the Philippine Senate, Claro M. Recto, the president of the constitutional convention, and Manuel Roxas, a delegate to the constitutional convention and formerly speaker of the Philippine House of Representatives. Bells were rung in Manila to celebrate that event.

The new government under the constitution is quite different from the present one. This new government will be established sometime this year.

The laws of the Philippine Islands will be made by the National Assembly. This will be the legislature of the Philippine Commonwealth.

The present Philippine Legislature has two houses. They are the Philippine senate and the house of representatives. But the National Assembly has only one house. It is the National Assembly itself.

Having only one house, instead of two houses, the legislative body of the Commonwealth will be less expensive to run than the present legislature. It will be able to work faster because it will not have to wait for another body to approve what it does.

Some countries have legislative bodies similar to the National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth. Spain, Turkey, Norway, Finland, Latvia, and a few others have legislatures with only one house. Do you know

where these countries are? In 1898 when the Filipinos declared their independence and made a constitution in Malolos, they also provided for a legislature having only one house.

In the United States, the national government has a legislature with two houses. It is called Congress, and its two houses are the senate and the house of representatives. But some states of the United States are now beginning to plan for a change. Nebraska is one of them. In the elections last November the state of Nebraska decided to change its legislature by having only one house instead of two houses. The people of other states are thinking of following the example of Nebraska. They believe that a simple government works better and is less costly than one which is complicated.

The National Assembly of the Philippine Commonwealth will have 98 members. These members will represent all the provinces of the Philippines. As the population of the Philippines increases, the number of members of the National Assembly will also increase. But it cannot go beyond 120 members.

In order to become a member of the National Assembly, a person must be at least 30 years of age. He must also be a citizen of the Philippines and a voter. He must reside at least one year before election in the province which he desires to represent in the National Assembly.

A person who is elected member of the National Assembly holds his office for 3 years. During that time he is not al-

lowed to do business with the government. Thus, if he is an engineer he cannot receive pay from the government for making a building or a bridge or any other thing for it.

Every year the National Assembly will hold a meeting. This meeting cannot last longer than 100 days. It may have special meetings. Each special meeting cannot continue for over 30 days.

During any of the meetings, any member of the National Assembly may present a bill. Do you know what a bill is? It is a writing which the person presenting it wants to be approved as a rule for the people.

If the Assembly approves it, the bill is sent to the President of the Philippine Commonwealth. This person is the chief officer of the Philippine Commonwealth. He will take the place of the Governor General, who is the chief officer now.

The President of the Commonwealth has the power to approve or to disapprove the bill. If he approves it, the bill becomes a law. Every person in the Philippines has to follow that law and all other laws.

If the President disapproves it, we say that the bill is vetoed by him. To veto means to disapprove. A bill which is disapproved is sent back by the President to the National Assembly. If two-thirds of all the members of the Assembly will vote in favor of that bill, then it will become a law even without the approval of the President.

So you see that a member of the National Assembly will have much power. For his work, he will be paid P5,000 a year. Every good citizen should, therefore, elect only the best men of his province to be members of the National Assembly. Having much power, a good and wise member of the Assembly will be able to make this country prosperous and our people happy.