

MASONRY AND THE REVOLUTION

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MASONRY played a significant role in the Revolution. It was through Masonry that the propaganda activities against the injustices, immorality and brutality of the authorities were directed. Realizing the need for concerted action in the parliamentary struggle, the fiery Graciano Lopez Jaena founded lodge *Revolucion* in Barcelona, on April 1, 1889. It was exclusively for and by Filipinos. But it was, however, short-lived. The following year, lodge *La Solidaridad* was founded and the affiliates of the defunct *Revolu-*

cion transferred to the new lodge. The Filipino Masons, among them Jose Rizal, Marcelo H. del Pilar, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Antonio Luna, Pedro Serrano Laktaw and others were responsible for introducing to the Cortes pieces of legislation that would benefit the Philippines. Up to 1890, the Masonic activities that were tied up with the Philippine problem were restricted within the Peninsula.

A year later, however, Antonio Luna and Serrano Laktaw returned to the Philippines to establish masonic

lodges. Conferring with Moises A. Salvador and Jose Ramos, Serrano Laktau decided that it was propitious to introduce lodges as the arm for political action. Lodge *Nilad* was consequently founded on January 6, 1891. The *Gran Oriente Español* officially recognized it on March 10, 1892.

Like all the intellectuals of the period, the Masons clamored for reforms in the administration of the government. There was not even a hint of revolt in their actions or speeches. Everybody wanted the Philippines to be a province of Spain under which the Filipinos, as Spanish citizens, would enjoy the rights and privileges of Spaniards. What may be termed "revolutionary", in the eyes of the Spanish authorities, was the unexpected call for reforms. Thus, the Masons prepared their platform on the issue of peaceful reforms:

It is the eight million people who have been, for the duration of three centuries, under tyrannical oppression. The social life they lead is destitute of freedom; the natives have no right of association; they have no tribune where they could express their needs...

And with respect to their individual life, the Filipinos have not, as in other countries, the security against the abuses of the authorities, and for this reason, the... secret deportation of reputable persons has been repeatedly perpetrated upon the notorious instigation of the friars. x x x

We want a regime of democracy, a genuine and effective autonomy of the individual as against the enslaving pretensions of an ambition that nourishes its life by absorbing the rights of the people and waters its happiness with the tears of the needy.

We want a good government and a good administration.

We want our country to have the right to be represented in the Cortes: not a single Representative or Senator is defending its interests in the Spanish Parliament. Its government is dependent upon the Overseas Minister who, by and for himself, legislates and governs the Philippines through Royal Orders, while in Manila the Governor-General executes

and annuls the order of the Ministers.

We want our country declared a province of Spain, with all the rights and obligations. In a word, we want reforms, reforms, reforms.

Considering the time and temper of the period, the Masonic platform was bold. But precisely because of its boldness, the secret movement reached the masses and, eventually, the Spanish authorities. Thinking men and women, isolated by the intolerance of the authorities and the friars, found consolation in Masonry. Up to May 1893, the Masonic lodges numbered thirty-five, nine of which were in Manila.

But Masonry in the Philippines was not intended to be a political arm. It was primarily a propaganda machine designed to work for reforms and to denounce abuses, corruption, brutalities, and injustices committed by the Spanish authorities on the hapless people. This function of Masonry was clearly expressed by Marcelo H. del Pilar in his letter to Juan Zulueta:

The Peninsular Masonry is a means of propaganda for us. If the Masons there [in the Philip-

pires] intend to make Masonry an organ of action for our ideals, they make a serious mistake. What is needed is a special organization devoted especially to the Filipino cause; and although its members, or some of them, may be Masons, they must not depend upon Masonry.

It was the timidity of the intellectuals, most of whom were Masons, that led Andres Bonifacio, also a Mason belonging to lodge *Taliba*, to found the revolutionary *Katipunan*. Some Masons joined Bonifacio in his new undertaking, among them Jose Dizon, Jose Turiano Santiago, and Emilio Aguinaldo. It must be emphasized that the *Katipunan* was not a Masonic society, although some of its members were Masons. This is important in view of the fact that the Spanish authorities accused Masonry of having been the "brains" of the *Katipunan* and the initiator of the Revolution and, therefore, of the separatist movement. Thus, the Overseas Minister, writing to the Governor-General of the Philippines on April 4, 1895, said that "an alarm exists here about the separatist work in that Archipelago

through Masonic propaganda that excludes all Spaniards and is directed exclusively by natives. I request Your Excellency to inform me hourly of this, and, if true, to redouble the vigilance and to issue necessary orders to the [provincial] governors."

It cannot be doubted, however, that Masonry left its imprint on the Katipunan. For the initiation rites of this secret society were based on those of Masonry. Its structure, however, was based on that of *La Liga Filipina*, most of whose members were Masons, namely, Jose Rizal, Timoteo Paez, Jose Ramos, Moises Salvador, Apolinario Mabini, Bonifacio Arevalo, Numeriano Adriano, and others. It is perhaps for this reason — namely, that many Masons were affiliated with the *Liga* and the *Katipunan* — that the Spanish authorities thought of linking Masonry with the separatist movement. Masonry was in fact condemned as "infernal" and the "workshop where hatred for Spain and the Spaniards was cast." The charge was, of course, as silly and preposterous as the contemporary charges of "communistic" or "communist-inspired" directed by paid stooges at those who

disagree with them or those whose opinions do not square with their wild speculations and parochial views. For Masonry in the Philippines, as I have pointed out earlier, stood for reforms and never for independence.

BUT why did Masonry flourish, ramify and make converts throughout the Philippines during the last decade of the Spanish regime? The answer lies in the condition of the time and place. There was no freedom to speak of. Its meaning had been negative during the three centuries of Spanish rule: freedom to be exploited ruthlessly, freedom to remain ignorant and superstitious, freedom to be confused, and freedom to be brutalized. Wherever and whenever courageous men are found, there they seek release from this negative freedom — if there is such a thing — and join hands to forge a potent weapon in their struggle for self-expression. The early Christians suffered heroically all the indignities and injustices of the Roman emperors and their underlings. But, searching for freedom, they went underground, joined forces with other victims of oppression, and fought

their battles with results that are today common knowledge.

And so with the Filipinos of the last decade of the nineteenth century. Led by Masons, they closed ranks, went underground, and fought, first, a war of propaganda, and then, a war of emancipation. With the "Cry" that reverberated through the hills of Pugadlawin and Pasong Tamo, the dawn of a new era streaked in the Philippine sky and showered light where there was darkness.

With a bit of pardonable exaggeration, one may safely say that Philippine Masonry and the Revolution were related to each other. For the men who shouldered the responsibilities of the Republic at Malolos, both in the administration and in the field, were Masons — from President Emilio Aguinaldo down to his Cabinet Ministers and field commanders: Apolina-

rio Mabini, Gracio Gonzaga, Baldomero Aguinaldo, Ambrosio Flores, Vicente Lukban, Mariano Llanera, Bonifacio Arevalo, and Timoteo Paez.

Viewing the revolution from this perspective, it may be said to have been the child of Philippine Masonry — an unwanted child perhaps, but a legitimate child nonetheless. The men who carried on the burden of the propaganda—which was intended to bring about reforms but which, contrary to their expectations, resulted in a national blood bath — were Masons, men who were steeped in the lore of democratic ways, men who were sensitive to the pulse of changing mores. And Andres Bonifacio, the founder and the guiding spirit of the *Katipunan*, carried over the symbols of Masonry to the Society and breathed into it Masonry's climate of freedom.

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