

THE FILIPINO-AMERICAN PROBLEM

It may be pertinent to consider the discussions on Vietnam and the Philippine role at the recent Philippine-American Assembly held in Davao. Bearing in mind that this assembly made an effort at high level and serious deliberations, and that there were prominent delegates from both sides (further given importance by the presence of speakers like William Bundy, the US Far Eastern affairs Secretary, and our own secretary of foreign affairs) their viewpoints on Vietnam should be of interest. It was of course impossible to disregard the question of Vietnam in the talks on Philippine-American relations, particularly since the bill providing military aid to Vietnam had just created debates in the Senate then.

Let us first turn to the final, official report as published. On Philippine-American relations since after 1946, the report states this

backgrounder that traces some major causes of discord in Philippine-American relations: "In view of certain limitations on Philippine independence it was particularly difficult to establish the reality of this independence and its credibility in the eyes of other nations, more particularly, in Asia. From the Philippine viewpoint, such credibility was further compromised by pressures exerted from time to time on Philippine policies and decisions in the international field."

On "special-relations" as a whole: "The relationship has become so burdened with slogans and cliches that mutual understanding is frequently inhibited. It should be accepted that the two nations approach situations from different premises. Filipino traditions and perspective of shared problems and interests differ from those of Americans — and vice versa." And on Philippine foreign

policy: "The Philippines should continue to seek and utilize, in terms of its interests, the opportunities for greater cultural, educational, economic, and political cooperation within Southeast Asia. The United States recognizes the inherent and legitimate responsibility of the Philippines for its foreign relations. We urge the United States to accept the validity of Philippine regional aspirations and, wherever possible, to support Philippine initiatives along those lines."

On Vietnam specifically: "The Philippine recognizes that it too has an important stake in the outcome of the struggle in Vietnam. It is already making its own contribution, together with many other countries, and should decide, in terms of its own assessment of its interests, the timing, form, and extent of further participation." These are the pertinent points regarding our policy in Vietnam that may serve as a guide for the present dis-

cussions. It should be noted that the above is the final consensus arrived at by the Filipino and American participants, and not the opinions of the rightist or radical members, because in truth, there was a Filipino in our particular group who was for fighting in Vietnam, while there was an American who questioned the entire policy in Vietnam and leaned to the minority "pullout of Vietnam movement" in the US.

The Philippine-American Assembly consensus on Vietnam comes from participants who can hardly be considered communist-dupes or irresponsible agitators; and yet the final report, despite watering down and diffusion by cushioning phrases, clearly distinguishes the Philippine from the American role in Vietnam; the least discernment will reveal where Philippine policy direction regarding Vietnam, stands. — *Alfredo R. Roces in Manila Times, March 22, 1966.*