

# Report On The Fight For Benefits

Two significant developments came up during the last two weeks in connection with the fight of former Filipinos civilian internees for benefits under the U.S. War Claims Act of 1948.

The first is a cablegram from Rep. Anthony Cavalcante (D-Pa.), author of the bill which would grant such benefits, to F. Ben Brillantes, Secretary-General of the Philippine Ex-Political Prisoners' Association expressing optimism about his measure and the other, a request by the War Commission to the Philippine Embassy in Washington for data on Philippine claims.

The wire of Rep. Cavalcante was in response to a query from Mr. Brillantes as to the status of his bill filed last year and which was referred to the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce where it is presently pending. The Congressman from Pennsylvania replied that while no time has yet been fixed by the committee for hearings on the measure he had high hopes it would be taken up during the present session. At the same time he promised his full cooperation in pushing through the bill.

The other significant development came in the form of a request from the Philippine Foreign Affairs Department to the PEPPA for data concerning claims arising from the War Claims Act. These data were requested by the Commission from the Philippine embassy in Washington which in turn asked the home office for help. The request was later transmitted to the PEPPA which keeps an up-to-date roster of former civilian internees who would be benefitted under the provisions of the Cavalcante bill.

It will be recalled that under Section 8 of the War Claims Act the Commission is directed to make a report to the U.S. President for submission to Congress not later than March 31 this year regarding "(1) the estimated number and amount of such claims, classified by types and categories; and (2) the extent to which such claims have been or may be satisfied under international agreements or domestic or foreign laws." The Commission is also empowered to make recommendations for the satisfaction of the same.

Very fortunately, the PEPPA which was organized for mutual help among former political prisoners during the Japanese occupation keeps a record of its members now numbering around 30,000 who stand to benefit under the provisions of the Cavalcante measure. The secretariat is now busy compiling its report for transmittal to Washington through the department of Foreign Affairs. Significantly, through this report hinges to a large



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extent the passage of the Cavalcante bill whose sponsor promised to use the data to bolster the case for Filipino internees.

Data being compiled by the PEPPA secretariat about its members include among other things, information regarding capture, imprisonment, interment or entry into hiding and other matters. They also include the approximate number of claimants and the amounts of their respective claims.

A suggestion was made by Mr. Brillantes to Rep. Cavalcante to the effect that part of the \$23,000,000 former assets of the Japanese in the Philippines and presently being held by the Philippine Alien Property Administration be earmarked to pay Filipino claims.

The fight for benefits however will center in the U.S. Congress this session. Encouraged by the result of his mission last year, Mr. Brillantes has been keeping in constant touch with Washington officials including Ambassador Joaquin M. Elizalde who promised everything possible at his command to help push through the Cavalcante measure. It will be remembered that without Mr. Elizalde's help, the Cavalcante bill would not have been introduced in Congress last year and therefore the Filipino envoy considers the legislation one of his pet projects.

The need of sending a follow-up mission to appear before the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee when it holds hearings on the bill is of course recognized by Rep. Cavalcante himself. For this reason, PEPPA officials are presently consulting with members to map out plans for the financing of this mission. This mission, in order

to be effective, must be in Washington sometime next month.

The campaign however is not totally confined in Congress. Other American leaders whose friendship to Filipinos has been demonstrated time and again have been asked to help in the cause. These include Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Gen. Jonathan M. Wainwright.

The help of these two particularly has been solicited following reports recently to the effect that both have co-sponsored a \$2,000,000 drive to aid Philippine civilian and military war casualties. Separate letters thanking them for their benevolence and asking them to help in the approval of the Cavalcante bill were written by Mr. Brillantes.

There are others in Washington who are unselfishly doing their bit for the cause. There is Atty. Vicente Villamin, still considered one of the most influential Filipinos in the United States who is making contacts with his American friends in Congress regarding the measure.

Ultimately adjudication of claims will have to be made by the War Claims Commission composed of Daniel Francis Cleary, chairman and Mrs. Georgia L. Lusk and David N. Lewis, members. The membership however has been reduced to two with the untimely death in an airplane crash recently of Mr. Lewis. No successor to his office has yet been announced in Washington.

Chairman Cleary is well-prepared for the job. As senior attorney in the Office of Legislation of the Veterans' Administration, it was his work to analyze and report on legislative proposals affecting veterans. One of these proposals became the War Claims Act of 1948. As Chairman of the Commission it will be up to him to determine who is and who is not eligible for the benefits under the act. The months he spent analyzing the law as it passed through the various stages of the legislative process will prove to be beneficial to him in carrying out his duties.

Claims by Americans and Filipinos who were former members of the USAFFE are now being processed by the Commission. It is the hope of the PEPPA that before long, the War Claims Act shall have been amended to as to include former Filipino civilian internees among its beneficiaries.

## The Philippines: . . .

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has shown to be the best. We have perpetuated that government in a sacred document, our Constitution. In no other time in the past and perhaps in no other time in our future as a nation and as a people, have we ever and will we ever feel the importance and the need of a Constitution as in these years of our political, social and economic adolescence. Our destination will be at the end of the path which we are now blazing. Our acts today will be precedents of the future. Even our sins and abuses now may be assimilated into the background and perpetuated

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## THE MANILA GUARDIAN

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into customs. The generations of tomorrow shall look back upon the march that we have begun and which we now lead and I fervently hope that they shall not find a tortuous, dusty and bloody trail that we may leave behind as our meagre, miserable contribution to a proud and glorious lineage. Today on this occasion, I thank Divine Providence that, having implored His aid, we have a great Constitution which embodies our ideals and guides us to secure to ourselves and our posterity the "blessings of independence under a regime of justice, liberty, and democracy". —Speech delivered before the Philippine Lawyers' Association on Constitution Day, Feb. 8, 1950.