

The Philippine Problem: A Proposition for a Solution

By Sixto Lopez

[Mr. Sixto Lopez is an authoritative though not an official representative of the Filipino people in the United States. He is, like a very large body of his fellow-countrymen, a man not only of native intelligence but of education, cultivation, and agreeable personality. One has only to read his article to see that he possesses a clear mind and a reasoning faculty of unusual logical power. At our request Mr. Lopez has undertaken to state the basis on which he believes his countrymen would cheerfully acquiesce in American control of the Philippine Islands. We think his article deserves wide reading and careful consideration. We comment more fully on it in another column.—THE EDITORS.]

WHAT form of government, exercised by the United States, would the Filipinos acquiesce in, so as to put an end to the war and pave the way for a peaceful and an intelligent conference on the question of final independence?"

This question, which has been put to me by the editors of *The Outlook*, is one that comes from many other sources. It is a question which can be answered in one sentence: The Filipinos would accept the same or any similar form of government or control as that exercised over Cuba during the interregnum between cession by Spain and final independence. Nay, more, the Filipinos would accept any form of government, any form of despotism, government by caprice or by the will of any one with or without benevolent intentions, provided that they be given a similar promise to that given to the Cubans. Any form of government, or government without any form, would be preferable to the present indescribable horror under which honest men are not allowed to express their opinions; by which the best of our people are driven through swamp and jungle and shot down in the proportion, according to official reports, of five killed to one wounded; and during which the honor of our women, in outlying districts, is at the mercy of common soldiers' passion. There never has been any dispute or objection, as far as the Filipinos are concerned, as to what form of government they are prepared to temporarily accept. They have already accepted the arbitrament of war, and war is the worst condition conceivable, especially when waged by an Anglo-Saxon race which despises its opponent as an alien or inferior people,

Yet the Filipinos accepted it with a full knowledge of its horror and of the sacrifices in life and property which they knew they would be called upon to make.

It is therefore unnecessary to inquire if the Filipinos would be prepared to accept a less horrible condition of affairs, coupled with the understanding that there was to be "a peaceful and an intelligent conference on the question of final independence." The whole trouble lies in the fact that the Filipinos have never been promised or offered a conference upon the question of final independence. If they had been offered such a conference, the war would have ceased at once. But when Aguinaldo's emissaries came to confer with the Sclurman Commission, they were told that the question of American sovereignty (which was the negation of Philippine independence) had been settled and could not, therefore, be discussed. The Bacon resolution and other similar resolutions have been rejected by Congress, and the only official statement of America's intention with regard to the Philippines is the proclamation of the President annexing the whole of the archipelago and demanding unconditional and apparently perpetual submission to American sovereignty.

Every fair-minded man will see, and many will admit, that the Filipinos have never been treated as though they were human beings possessing rights and aspirations of their own. They have been required to submit to American authority without a promise or a guarantee that the question of final independence would ever be discussed in an intelligent or any other kind of conference. On the contrary, they have been told that the question was one which could not be discussed at all. The

question of independence has never been referred to in any official utterance. The only assurances that the Filipinos have received—and these not from Congress but from the President, whose decision Congress may or may not sustain—are that they shall have such personal liberty and such a share in the government of their own country “as is consistent with American interests and the discharge of American obligations.” But, worse than this, America is to be the sole judge of the Filipinos’ fitness for taking any part in the government of their own country. They are to be given only such things as America may choose to give them, not as a matter of right, but in the form of benevolence. Their rights are thus to become privileges, and everything that they are permitted to enjoy will be due to the benevolence of a foreign master who, whilst giving, has yet the power to withhold. It ought to be plain to the meanest intellect that this is a wholly one-sided arrangement, which would never have been offered except under the consciousness of overwhelming power to enforce it. It is a thousand times less liberal than the conditions imposed by England upon the Transvaal, and yet, presumably, American sympathies generally are with the latter. One can imagine with what scorn Washington and Jefferson and Patrick Henry would have refused such terms had they been offered by George III. And every one knows with what derision the English potentate’s proclamation was met when he declared that he was “desirous of restoring to them [the American colonists] the blessings of law, which they have fatally and desperately exchanged for the calamities of war and the arbitrary *tyranny of their chiefs.*”

Now, the above truthfully and fairly represents the actual condition of affairs—a condition to which the Filipinos will never submit, and which is causing a prolongation of the war with all its attendant horrors; and yet I confess that it does not truthfully represent the desires and intentions of the American people generally. I am aware that there are those in America, as in every country in the world, who desire to lay hands upon everything within reach, irrespective of the laws relating to *meum and tuum*. But they constitute only a minority. I am convinced

that a large majority of the American people desire to treat the Filipinos fairly, as human beings possessing certain rights; and that they do not intend to deny ultimate independence to a people who once fought side by side with American soldiers and rendered all the assistance in their power against “a common enemy.” And here we reach the essence of the whole difficulty. This same majority of American people have placed in power those who do not, or who will not, in their official utterances, declare to the Filipinos the real intention of this majority. Yet the Filipinos, if they submit at all, must do so, not to the conditions required by this majority, which presuppose and include final independence, but to the conditions which I have explained above, and in which no mention is made of final independence.

It is, therefore, clear that the solution of the Philippine problem lies in the bringing of official assurances into line with the desire and intention of the majority of the American people. If this can be achieved, the Filipinos will not continue, or *desire* to continue, the strife for one day longer.

It may be premised that the Filipinos are not unreasonable in their desires. Indeed, under present conditions they would naturally be disposed to accept terms which might be regarded as somewhat unreasonable. On the other hand, America ought to admit that the Filipinos do possess certain rights, and that flat-footed power is neither a just nor a practicable means of settling the difficulty.

There are also certain propositions which, if not admitted as self-evident, ought to receive at least some attention. A people capable of civilized government is capable of self-government. Fitness lies not so much in the ability of the few men deputed to make and administer the laws as in the nature of the people themselves, in their deference to properly constituted authority, and in their social, domestic, and personal virtues. The best administrators will never succeed in governing a bad people, but indifferent administrators may succeed in governing a good people. Colonial government, unless it be what is termed responsible government, has never proved a conspicuous success. Representative government is

the only sure means of securing purity in administration.

These propositions show that if the Filipinos are capable of being governed by America, they are capable of governing themselves, and that American rule would be neither as good nor as suitable for the Filipinos as their own rule. It is necessary to approach the subject with at least an open mind upon this question of fitness, or, at any rate, it should not be concluded, *a priori*, that the Filipinos are unfit.

With these tentative premises, and leaving out of the question for the moment all acts and utterances which have aroused resentment on both sides, let both parties approach the problem with a determination to be fair.

The Filipinos are, and always have been, prepared to yield, under an understanding as to final independence, all that America can possibly gain by force of arms. In details, the Filipinos are willing to yield to America: (a) The right and the means to fulfill all obligations to other nations. (b) The right and the means to protect life and property—foreign and native—and to conserve any and every interest possessed in the Philippines. (c) The right of American citizens to embark in missionary or educational enterprise if they so desire. (d) Bases of trade and military operations for the Far East. (e) Coaling stations. (f) Repayment of the \$20,000,000 paid to Spain, if demanded; and (g) trade concessions, or any other reasonable demand not included in the foregoing list.

The yielding of these rights and concessions implies that America would have the right to retain troops in the islands, to demand suitable guarantees from the Filipinos, and to appoint a Customs Commissioner in order to secure the fulfillment of such guarantees. But these implied rights need not be, and ought not to be, made perpetual.

These rights, express and implied, do not necessitate American sovereignty in

the Philippines, and they are not incompatible with present partial, and complete final, independence.

As, therefore, the American people do not intend to deny final independence to the Filipinos, and as the Filipinos are ready to yield all that America is demanding or can obtain by force of arms, what is it that is causing a continuance of the war? Is it not abundantly clear that it is due to the fact that the intention of the American people has never been officially expressed? From the time of the cession under the Treaty of Paris, up to the present moment, the Filipinos have never been officially informed, and therefore do not know, what their fate is to be—whether they are to become citizens, subjects, or ciphers. They are required to give up the one inalienable right that God gave to man, and to trust entirely to the will and the benevolence of the President. If this is not imperialism, make the *least* of it!

It is true that the American people do not make this demand, but they have placed in power those who do not make it clear that such is *not* their demand.

Thus, the solution of the problem lies in the official expression of the intentions of the American people with regard to the final independence of the Philippines.

I sincerely hope that the President and Congress will see the wisdom of giving such an expression of policy. One sentence, "It is not the intention of America to exercise permanent jurisdiction, sovereignty, or control over the Philippines," would restore peace, put an end to all this misery and untold sorrow, and save the lives of thousands of Americans and tens of thousands of Filipinos. All details as to the how and when could be arranged by friendly negotiation. The difficulty is not in the arranging, but in the agreeing to arrange. And if the Filipinos finally desired to remain under American rule, as many Americans hope and believe, though personally I do not, they would be at liberty to do so if America also desired it.