

## THE PHILIPPINE REVOLUTION: IT'S SPIN-OFF IN DAVAO

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The revolutionary spirit which had long animated reform leaders in the national capital region failed to arouse the people of Davao nor did it succeed in building up a common manifestation of anti-Spanish sentiments. However, many Davao leaders for sure knew of the grievances presented to the Spanish authorities especially those involving violations of human rights, injustices, taxation, graft and corruption, favoritism and various forms of misgovernance.

News of goings on in and around Manila, though much delayed, were also being received in Davao through letters or word of mouth brought by crew members of vessels that engaged in commerce or delivered supplies to the military outposts in this region. Members of the Freemasonry Society were especially active in transmitting such news of grievances against the authorities, if not exhortations to fellow Masons in Davao or Surigao to carry out some reforms in the local administration of government affairs.

Dr. Jose Rizal, a classmate at the Ateneo de Manila of Davao's own Don Teodoro Palma Gil, had carried out constant

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correspondence with the Davaweño even while he was in Dapitan. Rizal's advocacy of reforms and the method of attaining Philippine Independence at some future time must have won the Davaweño's support.

Thus, while the Davao **ilustrados** were aware of the reformist activities and the subsequent outbreak of armed hostilities in Manila, including Bulacan and Cavite, no overt action or movement to follow the revolutionary efforts in Manila was known to exist in Davao.

The discovery of the Katipunan, the incarceration of numerous leaders and suspects, the trial and the subsequent shooting of Dr. Jose Rizal at the Bagumbayan (Luneta), the soldiers' mutiny at Cavite, the active warfare carried out by Filipino **revolucionarios** in the battlefronts of Bulacan, Laguna and Cavite, the proclamation of Philippine Independence on June 12, 1898, and the existence of the Philippine in Revolutionary Government, with its manifesto urging local officials in towns and provinces "to unite and establish for themselves an independent local government and preserve the maintenance of peace and order", seemed to have had no immediate response from Davaweños.

An observer may readily form in his mind that Davaweños were not interested in joining the Philippine independence movement. For one thing, Rizal's ideas or admonition for a peaceful revolution, that is that our people first improve their educational attainment and economic well-being, must have gained significant followings especially in Davao because of the same advocacy that the Davao **ilustrados** espoused, particularly Don Teodoro Palma Gil who was highly

regarded by the missionaries, the Spaniards, the Christians and the different tribes of Davao, including the Moslems.

Another factor that Davaweños did not consider rising up in arms against the Spanish presence in Davao was the fact that Davao leaders were also in the forefront in working hand in hand with the missionaries and the Spanish civil officials in the campaign for the conversion of the various ethnic tribes in the territory.

Don Teodoro Palma Gil and most of his relatives were teachers promoting not only Christian religious teachings among the pagan tribes but also the basic education in the schools for the "Niños" and the "Niñas". Both Don Teodoro Palma Gil and Don Francisco Bangoy, including Don Ciriaco Lizada, were not only government interpreters for the "Lumads" but also served as the major liaison persons of the missionaries with the Davao inhabitants, both Christians and tribals.

For instance, when Fr. Saturnino Urios, who labored in Davao since 1892 for the conversion of the intransigent Islam believers, finally succeeded in converting a large following of Kalagans of Hijo (Mandaum Moslems) settlement in 1896, he assigned Don Francisco Bangoy to resettle them at Tigatto while Don Teodoro Palma Gil took care of another large group which he resettled at Ma-a. These Moslem communities remain to this day.

The thrust of greater concern in Davao while the revolution was taking place in Manila and its adjacent provinces was the conversion of pagans. Hence it is no surprise to note that Davaweños did not respond to the revolutionary activities

going on in the North. This is not to say that Davao was an unusual exception; many provinces in Luzon did not join either, nor did Cebu, the central route of transportation and communication of that period.

One development perhaps that may be associated with the revolutionary warfare taking place in Manila was the exhortation of Governor General Blanco and later Gov. Gen. Polavieja for the local Alcalde Mayores or Governors to intensify their collection campaign for taxes, including the payment in advance of those taxes, because funds were badly needed by the national government. Filipinos conscripted to serve as soldiers in the Spanish army had not been paid their salaries for several months and it was noted that many had deserted, especially when the revolutionary army of Gen. Aguinaldo was winning in many battles. The unusual or irregular mandate to collect taxes in advance had posed problems also to local officials because their very own relatives were in the forefront of the complaints against such collections.

Such was the case in Dumangas, Iloilo, when Don Tomas Demonteverde had to abandon his office as **gobnadorcillo**, and in disguise as an itinerant merchant, he sailed on a **batel** to Davao to escape the pressure from the Spanish authorities in Iloilo on the collection of taxes. Don Tomas had no heart to force his relatives and therefore he decided to transfer residence to Davao where he changed his name from Demonteverde to plain Monteverde.

A parallel story concerning the pressure on tax collection ordered by Davao Governor Don Bartolome Garcia created a more dramatic and vigorous objection on the part of Don

Prudencio Garcia, the Chief of Police of Baganga, then one of the three major towns of the Davao East Coast .

Chief Prudencio Garcia did not like the Davao Governor's order. As a response towards the pressure for the collection of taxes in advance, Don Prudencio declared his town's rebellion and claimed the independence of his territory. He assumed the mayorship of Baganga and assured the people of his protection.

Don Prudencio had long been trusted and respected by missionaries and the people of Baganga and adjacent towns for the purification and Christianization campaigns he had made among the Mandaya of Contra Costa or Eastern Davao, and for his fair dealings with them. Some **bagani**, however, had seen the gradual loss of their followings, and thus also their influence and power as more and more Mandayas embraced Christianity and lived in the town settlements. These aggrieved **bagani** engaged in the kidnaping, if not the killing, of fellow Mandayas as a form of vengeance.

Police chief Garcia vigorously campaigned to bring these recalcitrants or "impeders" of Christian propagation to justice. His campaign even brought him beyond the mountain divide to Compostela and thus gained the cooperation of the Mandayas. The Mandayas themselves reported to Don Prudencio any wrong-doings of the anti-Christian agitators. Mandayas even reported in advance rumors which they heard about the plots or attacks that the recalcitrants intended to perpetrate.

Don Prudencio had maintained peace successfully. He assumed the mayorship of Baganga and declared his town, and

those who would follow him, as independent territory, free from the control of the provincial or national officials. He confiscated firearms he could lay his hands on in order to augment those of his municipal police force. He was able to get a few in the town of Caraga.

Don Bartolome Garcia, the provincial governor in Davao's capital town (now Davao City), heard of his namesake's revolt. He instructed another Garcia, Teniente Manuel Garcia y Neilla, head of the **commandancia** of Mati, to demand the surrender of Mayor Prudencio Garcia and to confiscate the firearms in Baganga.

The parish priest of Baganga, Father Mateo Gisbert, a veteran and highly respected missionary in Davao Gulf area for several years, prior to his assignment as the first parish priest of Baganga, was a friend to both Garcias and knew the danger that would befall his parish should the Mati Commander and the Baganga Mayor confront each other. He used his good offices to find a solution to the predicament of avoiding open warfare. Mayor Garcia had his two cannons behind the newly erected Baganga Church and was scared that their use would lead to the possible destruction of the parish church.

He was finally able to convince the two to make a semblance of the surrender of the guns in Baganga as token of their compliance of the Governor's Order, Lt. Garcia y Neilla in Mati would accept the surrendered guns. In turn, Father Gisbert would write the Governor for the pardon of Don Prudencio, in as much as he was not actually anti-Spanish Government but only someone who was seeking reforms. This finally done, peace was established in the Baganga/Caraga area and Mayor Garcia received his pardon papers.

It was during this time that bad news concerning the presence of the Gonzales brothers, Simon and Wenceslao, who had returned to Surigao as representatives of the Revolutionary Government of General Aguinaldo, was received in Baganga. Missionaries from Bislig, together with residents from Hinatuan and further up of the coast, sought Don Prudencio's assistance in checking the persecution and vengeance activities being carried out by the two officials of the Revolutionary Government.

Back in Davao's capital town, meantime, Father Saturnino Urios, head of the parish, probably cognizant of the repercussion which Don Prudencio's rebellion in Baganga might bring to his friends in the parish, called upon Don Teodoro Palma Gil and gave him advice to get rid of whatever letters or documents he might have in his possession from Dr. Jose Rizal which might possibly incriminate him with the revolution. The good Father was fearful that the Manila government might send some investigators to find out who in Davao belonged to the revolutionary movement.

Father Urios, it was learned later, had advised Don Teodoro to leave Davao with his relatives and friends who, because of their dealings with Rizal, might be arrested. Thus, we are told that Don Teodoro, with Don Francisco Bangoy and Don Ciriaco Lizada, left and stayed in Parang until several months later. There they learned of the happenings in Davao where the residents tried to form a "junta" to maintain peace and order following news that the Spanish civil officials had no right anymore to govern them.

It should also be further noted that news of Admiral Dewey's blockade of Manila Bay and rumors of America's take-over of Manila did not reach Davao until late October in Baganga and early November of 1898 in Davao **poblacion**.

In Baganga, Don Prudencio Garcia was informed about events taking place in Manila by word of mouth from the crew of a trading vessel which occasionally called at Baganga from Surigao. Don Prudencio, like the Gonzales brothers, belonged to the same confraternity of Freemasonry, a society supportive of and active in disseminating news about the reformist movement.

In the Davao **poblacion**, news concerning the American fleet's presence was brought to the knowledge of the Davaweños on November 2, 1898, via a traveler from the military station at Glan who had heard of the news from persons who arrived there in a small Chinese trading vessel which came from Labuan, Northern Borneo. The news finally agitated some minor Davao leaders who then called for the resignation of the incumbent Davao officials, thus leading to the formation of the **junta** and its further abolition, as described by Palabyab earlier.

It was not until eleven months later, when the American forces came to administer the government of occupation, that a new era opened for Davao under the democratic ideals proclaimed by the new colonizers. Baganga was the first town to receive American occupation troops on Dec. 22, 1899. Davao **Poblacion** itself welcomed the American contingent upon the return of the vessel from Baganga to the Davao capital town on December 24, 1899. A group of Davao **illustrados**, who welcomed Gen. Hunter Ligit, was asked by the American official

to elect among themselves their local officials and, by secret ballot, using a **huri hat** as ballot box, elected Don Teodoro Palma Gil as Davao's **Presidente**.