

Introduction

The years in which the Malolos Republic came into existence was a time filled with controversy for the Filipino People. It was a time of transition for the Philippines in terms of colonial masters – from Spanish rule to American rule. Much tension was happening within the country's own government with different leaders trying to assert their own positions, at whatever cost. Some were eager to adopt the American democracy while some were convinced that the Philippines needed time to ground itself before anything else.

Many debates were held with regard to beliefs regarding the country's readiness for a democratic government. Many wanted to cling to the United States due to the support they expected the Mother Country to give, believing that this would result in a lifestyle of peace. Meanwhile, others, like Apolinario Mabini, believed that the reason for the country's inability to achieve peace and order was the nation's apathy and unwillingness to work. He was one who looked far into the country's future making present historians come up with the conclusion that the era that Mabini lived in, unfortunately was not ready for his ideas.

This paper aims to examine Mabini's political for the Filipino Nation. Next, it will study the Malolos constitution and compare it with Mabini's standards and the American constitution. Finally, it will seek to enumerate parallelisms between the Malolos and the present republic. In the end, this paper aims to assess the political progress that the Philippines has undergone.

Apolinario Mabini

Mabini had such strong feelings against Americans. He openly detested the idea of the Americanization. This ire against Americans often spilled in the various articles he authored –

articles published in newspapers in America, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines and countless other countries. Especially interesting is this article lifted from the March 23rd edition of the *Independent* of New York. This article addressed one of the controversial issues faced by the country.

“Among the many questions asked about the Philippines and her inhabitants, the following is the most interesting: “Can the natives be Americanized? In other words, can people of the Malayan race, up to this time governed despotically by the Spaniards, be trained and elevated into citizenship in a short span of time, that they may fit into our form of government? Undoubtedly, the answer is: No.

“A good, just and honest government is needed for such a radical change. A certain number of local positions in the towns may be entrusted to the natives...However, the main government should be composed of Americans, not natives.” (Mabini, p5)

He added that this “shall be the appropriate system of government”. Thus, Mabini believed that if the country cannot govern honorably by putting into position highly knowledgeable personnel, officials who are chosen by merit and are therefore well compensated, then the Filipinos must give up the idea of running the Islands or even just a part of it (Mabini, p5).

Mabini was obviously against foreign sovereignty. It was true that the Philippines would be relieved of their pain if they accept autonomy under American sovereignty, however Mabini knew that it would not radically cure the ills of the country. Only Independence, he said, could “bring about peace and well-being in a society deeply affected by the Revolution (Mabini, p11).”

However, he did not spare his fellow Filipinos his spite. The more stinging utterances made were against his very own Filipinos, those who overtly cooperated with the Americans. He lashed at those who preferred American sovereignty, those who declared the Philippines incapable of self-governance. He described these people as lacking the ability and the will to

work. Not only that, they had no hesitations in implicating the rest in their own incapacity in order to assuage the remorse of their conscience and to conceal their apathy (Mabini, p10).

Mabini's admonitions came at a time when there were many Filipinos who were greatly affected by nationalistic ideals. As such, he pleaded Filipinos to watch what they were doing. They may not equal Rizal in worth, but if they united together they could attain the realization of the work Rizal has started (Mabini, p4). He always reminded the Filipinos to be steadfast, not to lose heart and continue the fight.

Mabini was not only vocal against the pro-Americans. In his attempt to persuade those in the upper echelons of the government to fight for independence, he wanted to create a Philippines that was ready and self-supporting. As such, he is seen as a person who wanted to contribute to the Philippine government. He gave countless unsolicited advices on the appropriate government administration. An instance of this was the change of the Dictatorial government to a revolutionary government. This move was done so that other nations would recognize the country's struggle for independence (Agoncillo, 1990). Along with the change of government came the establishment of the first Congress. This Congress was delegated with the task of drafting a constitution. With such a daunting task at hand, they wanted to prove to the whole world the country's capacity to govern itself, and as such they copied the constitution of the French Republic and that of other countries that also copied theirs from the American Constitution. Mabini again criticized this heavily. Below is an excerpt of his article written on 19 July 1899.

"No revolutionary people must adopt a perfect constitution, but they must stick to the declaration of principles in the light of which they intend to carry out their undertaking... A revolution does not construct, it prepares. It prepares the people for a more perfect constitution with the coming of peace; the science of governance does not consist of knowing how to choose the best and most perfect, but the most useful and appropriate. In same manner that there are not two exactly the same individuals, no identical revolutions could exist; thus the need for resourcefulness. A revolutionary who only knows how to imitate but not to invent, does not deserve to be called such. Routine is the antithesis of a revolution (Mabini, 24)."

Indeed, Mabini spoke with such firmness regarding in issues that mattered to him. However at times, he mellowed down and appealed to the American people to hear their cause. He countered the Americans' claim that the Filipinos provoked the hostilities that led to the Philippine-American War. This assertion, according to Mabini, was baseless. And if indeed it was true that the Filipinos wanted it, they "could have started trouble immediately after the surrender of Manila, since the Filipino forces were at that time occupying..." (Mabini, p29-31). He explained that the Filipinos never intended to match the powerful strength of America, adding that Aguinaldo would not have had the heart to endure so much humiliation from the American generals. Moreover, the Filipino people were accustomed to hardships and sufferings during the long period of Spanish domination, and were capable of taking things in stride, even in the midst of great emotional stress. That was why the Filipino sustained their unwavering friendship with the Americans. The Filipinos were confident that the American government would not stoop to the level of the Spanish theocratic government. All these were conveyed to the American people in Mabini's article on 21 July 1899.

He also conveyed the message that the Filipino people would continue to fight in defense of their freedom and independence with the same tenacity and perseverance they have shown in their sufferings and inspired by their unfaltering faith in the justness of their cause. Failure of the Americans to deliver justice meant that America would face the same fate as Spain (Mabini, p32). A similar message that appeared in a letter to American journalists dated 22 January 1900 (Mabini, p118) confessed that the Filipinos were fighting American forces to show them that far from being indifferent to the political situation, they made sacrifices for a government which will assure their individual freedoms and govern according to the people's desires and needs. Such utterances, although amicable in nature, were still infused with the strong desire for

independence, the feelings against American sovereignty, and the indomitable spirit that accompanied their continued fight for complete independence.

Indeed, Mabini was a force to reckon with. His weapons were his sword and his pen; the former showed the strength of his revolutionary cause, and his spirit in continuing the fight for his country; the latter, a less violent yet more pervasive tool in campaigning for the cause. Even during an exile to Guam for refusal to accept American sovereignty, he kept his revolutionary fervor intact. He also continued his fight using words. Through these two weapons, he proved his worth to the Filipinos as an indispensable figure in our history.

Mabini saw that it was important to go back and examine the country's past, in order to recapitulate the falls, errors and weaknesses. For him it was a crucial step, and a laudable effort to amend and correct oneself.

Apolinario Mabini did not fight like an unguided, sightless rebel, ready to pounce on an enemy on his way. Mabini's ways were calculated and well thought of. A shrewd man, whose knowledge on the technicalities of war and the revolution were acquired from books and his experiences, he gave such a huge impact in the development of the direction of the revolution. His concept was that the Revolution was just a revolution since its goal was to recover the sovereignty that belonged to the people under the natural law. Thus, the independence sought was a just and lawful independence.

Throughout his campaign for the revolutionary cause, Mabini was always guided by those principles. Moreover, he envisioned a noble and free society, "taking reason as the only standard for their acts, justice as the only end, and honest work as the only means" (Corpuz, 1989). Inasmuch as Mabini wanted an independent country run by competent Filipinos, justice

and hard work were the only ways and means with which the Filipinos could attain such patriotic goals.

Mabini had a surer eye and a clearer view than most the other Filipinos. He had looked much farther into the future. In his *métier*, Mabini had no equal. He was truly the intellectual of the Filipino Revolution (Corpuz, 1989).

Analysis of the Malolos Constitution

The Malolos Constitution, written by several members of the governing body during the First Philippine Republic, was said to have embodied the ideals of the Filipino people during this period of radical change. It must be understood that these laws were established by those in power for the best interests of the people. Noble as this task appears, it is quite appalling to discover that these laws embody the ideals of the Filipino elite rather than the ideals of the Filipino Nation, which was mostly made up of poor people. The original Malolos Constitution was drafted in the light of the constitution of the United States, France, and other established world powers. The different constitutions were integrated and modified to suit the needs of the Filipinos.

The Preamble of the Malolos Constitution runs as follows:

“We, the representatives of the Filipino people, lawfully convened in order to establish justice, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and to secure for ourselves the blessings of liberty, imploring the aid of the Supreme Legislator of the Universe to help us attain these objectives, have voted, decreed, and sanctioned the following.” (Malolos Constitution)

Though this was formatted after the United States Constitution, as can be inferred from the simple fact that objectives, which were “...to establish justice, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and to secure for ourselves the blessings of liberty...” (Malolos Constitution) were lifted word for word from the US Constitution, the differences in the two countries’ definition of democracy is also apparent. The preamble of the US begins with the line: “*We, the People of the United States*” (Dumbauld, 1964), as opposed to the Philippine

Constitution that begins with the line: “*We, the representatives of the Filipino People*”. This indicates the discrepancy in the two countries’ understanding of democracy. The Americans, as manifested through their constitution, view democracy as a collective effort of all Americans while the Filipinos view it as an effort of the *representatives* of the general public. Unfortunately, the Filipino masses in this era remained rather aloof regarding affairs of governance. The elite retained most, if not full control, of government affairs making it highly improbable for the real representatives to voice out the concerns of the people. Thus, democracy was really based on the power of the few, not the whole.

Another point to consider is the wording of the constitution. Many of the articles were vaguely phrased, allowing for numerous instances wherein the law could be turned around, and used to the advantage of its makers. The following articles illustrate this point:

- Article 36. *The Assembly shall meet every year. The President of the Republic has the right to convoke it, suspend and close its sessions, and dissolve the same, within periods prescribed by law enacted by the Assembly or by Permanent Commission.* This article is evidently vague because it does not specifically state the conditions under which the President of the Republic would be able to exercise his right to dissolve, suspend or close its sessions.
- Article 55 states that one of the functions of the Permanent Commission is to declare if there is sufficient cause to proceed against the President of the Republic, the Representatives, Department Secretaries, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and the Solicitor-General in the cases provided by the Constitution. When this article is taken into consideration, it shows that the Commission can afford to be rather subjective in passing judgment because of the lack of definition of the term *sufficient cause*.
- Article 58. *The President of the Republic shall be elected by absolute majority of the votes by the Assembly and by the special Representatives convinced in chamber assembled. His term of office shall be four years, and he may be re-elected.* Although this article explicitly states that the incumbent President may be re-elected, it puts no limit to the number of terms in which the president can serve. Thus, presidents with ulterior motives may take advantage of this provision (or rather, the lack thereof) and remain in position indefinitely.

The right to suffrage is very important to a country that values democracy. One source mentions that the qualifications for voting could only be met by the *illustrados* or the elite (Agoncillo, 1995). Curiously, these qualifications cannot be found in the Malolos Constitution, unlike in the 1987 Constitution and the US Constitution. Rather, the qualifications were laid down in the decree of June 18. Since it is not part of the Constitution, such a law may have been relatively easy to modify. Furthermore, it does not provide any provisions that deal with qualifications for government officials. Again, the US Constitution provided such requirements, something that Calderon et. al. should also have done if they were serious in making the government an “oligarchy of intellect” (Agoncillo, 1995). In this light, the Constitution makes it seem like anybody can run for office despite the reality that the power of governance is passed and retained within the elite group.

Having seen these flaws in our country’s first Constitution, it can be said that there was indeed much room for improvement. It is possible to imply that the people who drafted the Constitution were self-serving. They constructed the laws in a vague manner, allowing them much room to maneuver in ways that would be most beneficial to their purposes. Further more, they appeared to be power hungry as manifested by their constant emphasis on a Filipino “representative” body rather than the Filipinos as a whole. This representative body formulated the Constitution in a way that kept the powers of governance concentrated within their group. It can be seen that as early as the 1890’s the government officials were indeed prone to corruption.

But the lust for power is reflected beyond the Constitution. Some of the drafters of the Constitution abandoned the very government that they helped establish by supporting the Americans when they saw that the foreigners were winning the war. Later they would become the *federalistas*, the political party notorious to the Filipinos for being pro-American during the American regime in order to gain the support of the new colonizers. But this is also the very party that shifted from being “pro-American” to “pro-independence” when the US government allowed parties other than the *federalistas* to exist. They did this because they did not gain any support they needed from the people.

Such an attitude shows that these people did not have an ideal that they strongly believed in. They supported any policy that would best suit their interests, which was obviously holding on to power. Eventually, they lost grasp of it because the people may have realized that these *illustrados* were insincere in their service.

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