Manila. At nightfall of the following day the fetid soldiery entered and occupied a city which could not, in its shock, understand that it had fallen.” Aquino had been proved right in saying that even the so-called advantage of American protection was “illusory.”

On January 5, eve of the Epiphany, he joined Yulo, Paredes, Vargas, Laurel and Sison at No. 353 Peñafrancia to discuss the situation. That year the Three Kings brought not goodies but a rod, and a people that had wished for more colonialism got its wish.

To the East

NO. 353 PEÑAFRANCIA in Manila’s Paco district was the Yulo residence; and within its high-walled compound the political oligarchy met daily from January 5 to 12, 1942, usually in the afternoon, the number of conferees increasing from the original six to three dozen, representing all branches of government. In the Peñafrancia conferences was a preview of how the oligarchs would weather the war, from the initial “emphatic, reiterated and vehement protestations of loyalty and adherence to the President of the Commonwealth” (then a refugee on Corregidor) to the later quietness of some, ambiguity of others, and outright switch of the rest. None of the positions arrived at was an instant reaction; each was a process: Yulo, for instance, began with a show of initiative but in time became diffident; and what meter can calibrate the graduation of Vargas from neutral courier to involved protagonist? But perhaps the development of most interest was Benigno Aquino’s, because it implied our past and presaged the future.

Basing the statement on an interview with Colonel Ota Kaneshiro in 1958, or 13 years after the war, Theodore Friend has it that, as early as January 6 or 7, 1942, Aquino had met with the Japanese and proposed himself for president, presumably of a Japanese-sponsored republic.¹ This is highly doubtful. Aquino had no reputation as pro-Japanese before the war, but rather the contrary, and would therefore not have dared to offer himself as instant puppet. Moreover, at the Peñafrancia conferences he showed no awareness that the Japanese were planning to sponsor Philippine independence; he it was who fought to get the word independence into the reply of the Peñafrancia group to the Japanese command. “Almost immediately, Maeda and his advisers insisted that the reply should not contain the words freedom and independence. The Japanese

¹Between Two Empires, p. 215.
said they could not decide anything in this respect. This was a matter that only Tokyo could decide.” Aquino did later seem to have entertained presidential ambitions; but to say that he went over to the Japanese as soon as they entered Manila is to make him unique among the figures of government, and unique in the entire country. The fall of Manila embittered many into declaring themselves “disillusioned with America” but not even the most anti-American did then and there become pro-Japanese.

What the Penafrancia conferences reveal is an Aquino at first as wary as his peers of the Japanese overtures but gradually veering to the hope that here might be the chance to realize the dream of independence, frustrated so often before and gone onward, it seemed, under the Commonwealth, because the class in power preferred a permanent colony. The possibility of this hope, this chance, was first projected during the January 7 conference at Penafrancia, when Senator Parede made a startling proposal.

At the conference Aquino had related that he and Recto had just been picked up and taken to Colonel Masami Maeda (assigned by Commander-in-Chief Homma to contact local leaders) and that Maeda had stressed his desire that prominent Filipinos organize a committee with which the Japanese military authorities could work in reestablishing order throughout the country. Since such a committee would be practically a government, the conference at Penafrancia naturally saw it as merely their duty to man the committee, and when Secretary Bocobo proposed suggesting to the Japanese the creation of local committees in each part of the occupied regions, his idea was opposed. What the Japanese wanted, said the conference, was a national committee with jurisdiction over all the occupied regions. The oligarchy were not going to risk, even for the interim, the disposal of power from their hands to numerous isolated groups. Parede then came up with his shocker.

“Senator Parede proposed that the commander-in-chief be asked to establish a Philippine Republic, even under the Japanese military administration; and that he would be willing to go out to the field and persuade Filipinos to lay down their arms, if only to have a government of our own.” The idea was turned down as too dangerous: such a republic could be used as a tool by the Japanese; and the majority backed the Yulo proposal that the Japanese be asked to consider the Commonwealth government as still existing, to be staffed by provisional officials. But one man present had been impressed by what Parede had suggested: Aquino — and only he seconded the Parede proposal.

As was merely to be expected, the Japanese rejected the idea of continuing the Commonwealth. That government had been “imposed” on Filipinos and must be regarded as “dissolved.” Maeda observed that though the army could coerce all native officials into a government, it wanted the initiative to come from Filipinos. What was finally agreed on was the creation of a provisional Council of State that would undertake to form a government. The council would be headed by Vargas as “spokesman” and its membership would represent (this was Aquino’s idea) all the political parties. Homma sent a message expressing his thanks that “men of importance in the Philippines” had shown “loyalty and truthfulness to us” and were cooperating with each other during the crisis: “I earnestly urge that you would cut off your links with the United States of America hereafter, rescue your people from the unbearable crisis at this very moment, and try your utmost cooperating with a single mind for the welfare and happiness of the Filipinos, under our military administration.” The Penafrancia group then met for three days (January 9, 10 and 12) to draft a reply to Homma that would advance the Philippine position as much as possible — “sacar la mejor partida posible,” as Yulo put it.

The hope implanted by the Parede proposal had evidently seized Aquino, and in these meetings he was clearly maneuvering, through the reply to Homma, to get the Japanese committed to a promise of independence. At the same time he was defining the alternative. During the drafting of the reply Aquino asked Yulo, Vargas and Alunan: “Should the top military command order you to go to your province and pacify the Filipino troops fighting in Negros Occidental, how would you answer?” The three replied: “We will not go, even if they shoot us.” Aquino then asked the rest of the group: “And if we here present are forced to do the same in our provinces, what attitude will we adopt?” The company replied in chorus: “We will not go, even if they kill us!” At the next meeting, during the argument over the use of the word independence in the reply to Homma, Aquino asked the company if they were still disposed to maintain our attitude,” the attitude they had agreed to adopt. “And some said yes.” This reveals a continuing willingness in Aquino to stand up to the Japanese. His position then may be stated thus: Let the Japanese promise us independence; otherwise, no cooperation will be forthcoming, “even if they kill us.”

He made what he called his “standing” clear during the January 9, 10 and 12 conferences.

On January 9 and 10 he read to the table those parts of Homma’s January 1 proclamation that announced the end of American sovereignty.

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2Armando Malay, Occupied Philippines, p. 63.
3Mauro Garcia, Documents of the Japanese Occupation; minutes of the Jan. 7 conference.
and defined the "purpose of the Japanese expedition" as "nothing but emancipating you from the oppressive domination of the U.S.A., letting you establish the 'Philippines for the Filipinos' as a member of the Co-Prosperity Sphere of Greater East Asia and making you enjoy your own prosperity and culture." Aquino's point was that a reply to Homma should refer to this avowed "purpose" of the Japanese advent.

In the January 10 conference he further explained that such a reference was necessary because he had noticed that in the appeal the Japanese addressed to Quezon, they mentioned only "the Philippines for the Filipinos." However, the appeal did say: "The fate of seventeen million Filipinos is in your hands. Now is the time to act, to cooperate with the Imperial Forces, and to push forward the realization of your great ideals." So here again was the "transcendental commitment," for the "great ideals," it seemed to Aquino, could only mean freedom and independence. "I don't know," said he, "if we can resolve the future of our country."

Laurel had observed that the moment the provisional Council of State was accepted by the Japanese high command, it would mean the disappearance of the American government and the Commonwealth government, which would be replaced, at least in the occupied territory, by a de facto government — "and it will be as if we had declared President Quezon dismissed as head of state."

Aquino rose to remind the gathering that "our brothers are still fighting on the field of battle." Though the conferences were obliged to state in the reply to Homma that they accepted the fact of the military occupation, "we cannot give an earnest of our trust and loyalty." He pointed out that no value could be given to the talks with the military high command, unless they were written down on paper. "Granted that our promises are accomplished facts, we will still have to seek justification before history, before America and before our absent authorities. But before all this, our loyalty to our people."

In other words, the conferences, though obliged to act against their will by the force of circumstances, must still, to be justified later, remain true to the ideals, American of America, of the fled leaders, and of the Filipino try to advance those ideals despite the evil situation. "I'da posible," to repeat Yulo's words. How could this be?

We should not honor the Japanese government with obtaining a specific statement on our ideals of independence; a "specific statement" was prompted by the growning the Filipinos that he had noted in the past. He bade the conferences compare the Homma statement from with a recent "notification" from the high command: the current pronouncements of the Japanese were "very much vaguer" than their proclamations when they first arrived. Shades of Dewey! But Aquino was the deputy of the burnt-child generations, once bitten and twice shy, and he wanted it all down in black and white. There must be "distinct negotiations," said he, with the Japanese.

"My personal standing on the pressure to lend them faith is this: if they recognize our independence, we embrace them — that is, become Japanophiles; but if not, we maintain our ideals and our loyalty to America." Aquino’s thinking seems to be that collaboration could be justified only if it achieved what Philippine politics was, after all, committed to achieving: national independence; and for this reason he had proposed that the reply to Homma specify that the Filipino officials had decided to cooperate in the maintenance of peace and order only because they had "in mind the independence and freedom of our country." Because of Maeda’s objections, the word independence was dropped. Aquino insisted, in the January 12 conference, that it be restored. Substitute phrases like "the realization of our great ideals" were, said Aquino, too vague and did not express the true sentiments of the country. Justice Avancena asked if the phrase meant that "we have the idea of putting in the hands of the Japanese the realization of our ideals." Said Aquino: "Senator Recto and I have explained that with the use of the words independence and liberty, we mean to say that, whatever the situations that make may afford us, we must give expression to our ideals — that is, the ideal of independence."

What stands out here is that Aquino was insisting on the use of a word that had greatly vexed the Japanese, which he would hardly have done were he already on their side, or had any fear of displeasing them, or any reason for wanting to gain their favor. However, the consensus was that the word should stay suppressed (especially after Vargas let drop the news that Governor Cujuangco had been ordered back to Tarlac — "and escorted," said Aquino grimly, "by Japanese soldiers") and the approved text of the reply to Homma read: "Having in mind the great ideals, the freedom and happiness of our country, we are ready to obey to the best of our ability and within the means at our disposal the orders issued by the Imperial Japanese Forces for the maintenance of peace and order and the promotion of the well-being of our people under the Japanese military administration."

Though Aquino had lost the fight over a word, he was to win what he had fought for: a "specific statement" on Philippine independence. The

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*All the foregoing from the minutes of the January 10 conference.*
obliged to cooperate with them — and we cannot permit that others be allowed to rule in the interests of Japan or any person." 8

The oligarchs knew that they, though so hotly wooed, were not all that vital to the Japanese, whose army could rule by itself, with iron fist (as Maeda had warned), or through puppets — and the puppets most dangled were bogeys like Ricarte and Benigno Ramos, outsiders hostile to the American-era elite and whose treasons had enlisted the puppet classes of society. Such were the "others" who could not be allowed to rule, because they would surely rule in the interest of the enemy, which might mean more than Japan. Imagine Benigno Ramos as president and the Sakdal peasants in power! How could the oligarchs permit this to happen? Their sincerity cannot be doubted when they assumed that, whichever the pressures, they themselves could be trusted to try to rule in the interests of the country rather than of the invader. However, to refuse to rule would be to abdicate power — and to allow the "others" to take over, as a ruling class that might become difficult to dislodge. Nor was the fear groundless; the nightmare did become actual during the resistance, in Central Luzón, where, the barons having fled, the peasants established an armed dominion — and another war had to be fought to dislodge them and reinstate their feudal lords.

The irony is that, even before the Huk wars, certain members of the elite had decided to champion Japanese policy as an effort to stop the return of the feudal lord. To men like Benigno Aquino, who believed that the break with America was, or should be, final, the situation had become a whole new ball game in which the ploys to save American face could not be allowed to keep the country in anguish — as he argued during the debate on whether the de facto government should send an appeal to Washington to halt the fighting in Bataan. America had failed, said Aquino, to prepare the country to defend itself properly, and had failed to prevent the fall of the Philippines into Japanese hands; and since he presumed that American sovereignty would never return, "I believe it is useless to continue an unequal war without the means of defense." 9

It was mid-February then, 1942, and rumor may have reached him of a famous incident of the war. His eldest son Antonio, a captain in the USAFFE, had early that month swum the strait between Bataan and Corregidor, to bring Quezon news of what was happening in Bataan: "antagonisms at the front between Filipinos and Americans, and the fact that the former were receiving far less rations." 10 The report so disturbed Quezon that he began asking, like Aquino, if it was not useless to continue the struggle when the country had been abandoned.

8 García; minutes of the January 12 meeting.
9 García; minutes of the February 18 session of the Council of State.
10 Friend, p. 218.

6 D. J. Steinberg, Philippine Collaboration in World War II, p. 36.
7 Mangalus, Frontline Man.,

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Five months later, Aquino was still (Bataan having already fallen) asking angrily: “Why did all this happen? Why did not the Battle of Bataan stop sooner?” He went to Camp Stotsenberg late in July to visit the USAFFE survivors there and asked them why, even when abandoned by MacArthur, they were “made to wait in long agony” in Bataan, “on limited rations and as targets of incessant firing . . . condemned to humiliating defeat and ignominious death.” Why was this horror prolonged? Why was the folly not halted?

“I will tell you why,” said Aquino. “It was because American, British and Australian propaganda needed your heart rending sacrifice as a symbol of resistance. International political propaganda required your sufferings, your starvation, your tribulations in order to heighten the morale of the allied countries at war, and thus enable them to claim, with inhuman deceit, that not everything in the Pacific was defeat for the Allies and that you were the vanguard and guaranty for reconquest.”

Filipino boys had been used to warn Indonesians and Burmese and other colonials to bear in mind the I shall return of their imperial masters.

“At the cost of your blood, of your sufferings, of your afflictions, they wanted, though only for the purposes of false propaganda, to stage a heroic stand, to your sorrowful plight, in Bataan.”

Such speeches, usually circulated afterwards as pamphlets, were to earn the commissioner the name of “Judas Aquino” among the guerrillas; yet he was saying nothing that Quezon had not said, and said more savagely, while Bataan was on the rack. Quezon had demanded to know why Filipinos should continue to perish in Bataan when “for the final outcome of the war the shedding of their blood may be wholly unnecessary.” Quezon had raged to see his people “burn and die for a flag that could not protect them.” Quezon had called President Roosevelt a sinverganza.

Quezon had actually proposed that the Philippines be neutralized — so it could abandon the American side of the war. Quezon had appealed to Washington to stop the carnage in Bataan. Quezon had thought that the “patriotic thing to do” was “to give up.” Quezon had said that it was “my duty as well as my right to cease fighting.” Quezon had said: “To hell with America!” Quezon had manifested an “almost violent resentment against the United States” and a belief that his country had “been betrayed in favor of others.”

Why was a reaction excused as natural in Quezon vilified as unnatural in others?

But Aquino has been vindicated, for historians now support his interpretation of Bataan, which was blasphemy at the time.

“For the sake of American morale,” says Theodore Friend, “Henry Stimson wanted an inspiring fight to complete destruction — the Alamo massacre reenacted, but with seventy thousand men instead of seventy. He was a little disappointed when a white flag on Bataan, April 9, took the decision out of Washington’s control . . . But the point Stimson wished to make had been established: valiant American resistance in the face of great odds would inspire the whole war effort.”

And Teodoro Agoncillo is even harsher with the myth:

“Bataan was unnecessary in so far as the throwing away of precious lives was concerned, for it served no strategic purpose. All it served was the Allied propaganda mill, which magnified Bataan to prop up the morale of those fighting on the side of the democracies. The propaganda mill . . . went one step further and claimed in all seriousness that Bataan successfully delayed the Japanese timetable . . . As symbol of American military unpreparedness, Bataan is legitimate; but it is not what the underground said it accomplished.”

Such historians now agree with Aquino that blood was spilled in Bataan just to provide paint for American war posters; the difference is that they are saying decades after the event, when the truth has burst the myth, what he was saying during the event — and got called Judas for saying.

This period of campaigning to get the people to work for the promised independence was perhaps the time when he most believed in the cause, and also when the Japanese most believed in him. By October of 1942, they were ranking him third among the “men of importance,” after Vargas and Yulo, and ahead of Laurel and Recto. In December he was yanked out of the Department of the Interior to run the Kalibapi (Kapisanan sa Paglilingkod sa Bagong Pilipinas), the Association for Service to the New Philippines that was supposed to unite the entire adult population in a single nationalist super-party. “Because the Japanese placed considerable faith in the future of the Kalibapi, Aquino wielded great power as director-general. In this post, perhaps because of ambition, he became an increasingly bold propagandist.”

Aquino embarked on the third political odyssey of his career, stamping all over the country to fulfill his promise that he would “spare no effort to convince and persuade the Filipinos that the only possible salvation of our land and people rests upon the unsparing and unhesitating support of the Co-Prosperity Sphere.” He was again on an independence mission and his words echoed his prewar fulminations against saxonismo and against
those who wanted the country to be a permanent American colony: "A Philippines perpetually dependent on the whims and fancies of the West cannot stand. A Philippines, Oriental in geography, culture and ancestry, tied to the apron strings, nevertheless, of America, is artificial, unnatural, illogical and untenable."\textsuperscript{17} None who had heard the prewar Aquino could accuse him of mouthing somebody else's words. Says Agoncillo: "Aquino, more than any other Filipino, was responsible for the success of what was then called the 'Kalibapi movement.' A fiery orator and a seasoned politician, he swayéd, or seemingly swayed, the masses to the Kalibapi way. That huge masses of people attended Aquino's meetings and affiliated with the Association was, however, no indication that the people believed in him or in the Kalibapi's avowed aims. Actually, the people were merely curious what the Association was all about. Aquino himself must have divined the people's thoughts, but the play must continue and he as director must make it appear to the Japanese that the Filipinos were behind him and applauding his stage act. The Japanese authorities, on the other hand, were so thoroughly convinced of Aquino's role that they could not bring themselves to believe that he was merely acting."\textsuperscript{18} The position would be: Use the Japanese to gain independence; with the objective won, time enough for other things.

The "success" of the Kalibapi obviously impressed Tokyo, for on January 28, 1943, or within two months of the Aquino campaign, Premier Tojo was telling the Diet that enough progress had been made in the "degree of cooperation rendered to the Japanese empire by the people of the Philippines as well as in the restoration of internal peace and security" to warrant the grant of independence "in the shortest possible time. In May 1943, Tojo came to Manila to see for himself. Recto would brand as "completely imaginary" the reports afterwards in Tokyo that the premier had had a "frank exchange of viewpoints" with the Filipino leaders.

"All I remember," said Recto, "was that Tojo asked Aquino about the Kalibapi, if it had many affiliations, and Benigno said thousands and thousands. Tojo asked if it was not true that even with government employees 'you have used coercion.' Benigno replied: 'On the contrary.' Then Tojo asked again: 'Are you sure that no coercion has been used to make people affiliate with the Kalibapi?' And Aquino protested and said no. I remember that Tojo also said to Laurel: 'You can have independence even tomorrow, if there is peace and order.'\textsuperscript{19}

On his return to Tokyo the premier announced that the Philippines would be granted independence "in the course of the current year."

It is likely that Aquino wished to be president of the coming republic but the Japanese had had a change of mind about the three top-ranked officials: Vargas, Yulo and Aquino. "The Japanese were still desperately searching for some leader capable of winning Filipino loyalty away from the Quezon government in Washington... They turned to the prewar oligarchy and initially to former Chief Justice Avanceña and to Manuel Roxas as their best candidates. Vargas and Aquino had been rejected because, while they seemed interested in the job, they had not given the Executive Commission the necessary charismatic leadership.\textsuperscript{20} Since Avanceña was too old, Roxas became the choice for president, but he begged off, claiming poor health. Aquino came back into the running when the Japanese toyed with a plan to make Roxas "the first President in name — whether he wants it or not — provision being made for Aquino to perform the functions of the office.\textsuperscript{21} Then, on June 5, 1943, came the guerrilla attempt to assassinate Laurel, upon whom, as a result, Japanese attention became focused. In a sense, it was the guerrillas who made José P. Laurel president. "The two leading candidates left were Laurel and Aquino. Utsunomiya asked Roxas' advice; Roxas said Laurel was a great scholar and lawyer, but Aquino was the better politician... Aquino was a formidable rival... he was convinced he could beat Laurel in an election. But the last thing the [Japanese] wanted was an election. Utsunomiya, in a two-hour conversation with Aquino, convinced him that he could be the next president; meanwhile, Oriental custom suggested that the place belonged to Laurel, who was the elder of the two. Aquino acquiesced; Laurel accepted. Vargas was indignant at being pushed aside.\textsuperscript{22}

A commission headed by Laurel and Aquino was organized to draft a constitution, but the new charter was mostly written by Roxas, then revised by Laurel, and ratified by the Kalibapi. The Kalibapi also formed the National Assembly which, on September 25, 1943, elected Aquino as its Speaker and Laurel as president of the new state. Then Laurel, Vargas and Aquino were flown to Tokyo to be decorated by the emperor.\textsuperscript{23} "This trip, which received enormous publicity throughout the Japanese-controlled areas of Asia, was demanded by Tokyo to permit Tojo to instruct Laurel on what he wanted."\textsuperscript{24} And what Tojo wanted was a declaration of war by the new Philippine government against the United States. Laurel said no and got away with it. This was at a dinner on October 1 given by Tojo. "When Laurel and his companions were about to leave, Tojo called General Wachi and Murata to another room and told them that he wanted to give Laurel P500,000, Vargas P300,000, and Aquino

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} The Fateful Years, pp. 367-8.
\textsuperscript{19} García, minutes of the Laurel cabinet meeting on December 27, 1944.
\textsuperscript{20} Steinberg, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{21} Steinberg, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{22} Friend, pp. 234-5.
\textsuperscript{23} Laurel and Vargas received the First Order of Merit, the Grand Cordon of the Rising Sun, while Aquino was given the Second Order of Merit, the Sacred Order of the Treasure

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P200,000—modest sums that Tojo felt were ‘necessary for the achievement of independence.’ Laurel, acting as the spokesman of his companions, promptly turned down the offer, and Tojo, embarrassed at the unexpected refusal, said: ‘I am prepared to assist you in any way I can. So please contact me any time for anything.’ Laurel requested an airplane to take them to Manila.” 23 The Filipinos had made clear they were not puppets and had no price. Two weeks later, on October 14, 1943, the Second Republic was inaugurated.

The tragedy of the Second Republic is not that it was puppet; the tragedy is that, though we think it aberrant, it was not an abnormal but rather the normal happening in our history. It was caught in the same plight as the First Republic—and the Third Republic would be caught in the same plight. Of Laurel is said (which could also be said of Aquino) that he “thought he could achieve certain goals despite the occupation, and perhaps even because of it, and he gambled on that assumption.” 24 But that, too, was the gamble of Aguinaldo in ‘98, thinking to achieve freedom despite the Yankee presence, or even because of it, and learning too late that it’s always the stronger that makes use of the weaker, and not vice-versa. As if the hurt had not been twice groaned, the Third Republic would risk it again, with parity rights and defense pacts and “special” relations; and every Philippine administration since ‘46 has had to assume it can be independent—despite the continuing alien presence, the continuing economic occupation that, in the ‘70s, would have the young crying out that a puppet state had yet to be freed from the triple evil. Laurel was condemned for finally yielding to Japanese pressure and declaring war against the United States; but into how many wars was the Third Republic forced by its “ally”?

Knowing the odds were against them, men like Laurel and Aquino did still try to “achieve certain goals,” the goals set by nationalist tradition; whereas those who fought the Japanese were not necessarily fighting for freedom. The resistance was largely an effort to ensure the return to colonial status, and not a fight to “liberate.” As can be seen in its hostility to the Huks, the peasant army that didn’t want the Japs around but didn’t want the Americans back either. In this, the Huks were closer to the Laurel government they fought than to their supposed co-fighters in the resistance. His son Antonio quotes Aquino as saying: “I don’t care who gives us independence as long as we start independence by ourselves.” But this was an attitude not acceptable to the pro-Americans, for at the root of their resistance was snobbery. To be a colony of America meant prestige; but of Japan, embarrassment. How shameful to be “liberated” by cheap Asians like the Japs; but to be “granted” independence by America was high-class history—and would, moreover, not mean a breaking off but a continuing of relations, because of the bonds of gratitude. A common snort in Manila at the outbreak of war was: “Ah, now, no more talk of independence!” And what Filipinos yearned for during the occupation was not “freedom” but the coming back of the Americans, Piedmont cigarettes, Babe Ruth candies, and the status quo the war had disturbed.

Alas, that status quo had been disturbed for good; and the Second Republic, though so scorned, was a big leap into the future, though we are only now realizing how big. When Vargas went to Tokyo in 1943 as ambassador to Japan, he carried the first Philippine passport, and it was printed in Tagalog. Not till three decades later would the Third Republic follow suit. During the Second Republic the head of the Church in the Philippines was, in effect, Bishop Cesar Maria Guerrero, the first Filipino to administer the See of Manila. For the rest of his life that brilliant nationalist would be under a shadow, punished to his death for his “collaboration”—but this move to Filipinize the Church would have, however delayed, a quite irresistible effect. Quicker was the impact of the frank anti-Americanism of the Second Republic, although that was the quality that doomed it, the country in general being supposed not to share the animosity. Yet barely a decade later, in the ‘50s, neo-propagandists were resuming the dialectics of the Second Republic and, by the ‘60s, repeating them to applause. His children say of Benigno Aquino that he would be hailed for arguing today what he was reviled for arguing in the ‘40s.

One “feature” of the Second Republic, the guerrilla movement, has had a surprise result; the effect usually traced to it, is postwar violence; more important is its role in developing a revolutionary spirit in the middle class. Before the war, subversion was associated with crackpots and badmen; revolution was deliberately identified with the “most ignorant members” of the “vicious classes.” The educated just didn’t join movements like the Sakdal or run to the hills with Asedillo. But the guerrilla era insured us to an underground where the anti-government forces were led by Establishment figures: landlords, priests, professionals, army officers, intellectuals, and elite-school boys. The underground they took over for the defense of colonialism has, ironically enough, become today what it was in prewar years: a revolutionary movement—but now attracting the educated young, for whom, because of the glorification of the guerrilla, it’s no longer outré to join a reb group, defy the government and take to the hills, just like their fathers did in the ‘40s. And their messages—from the Go Home for the Yanqui to the Come Home to

23 The Fateful Years, pp. 391-2.
24 Steinberg, p. 75.
Asia for the Filipino — bespeak the continuing effects of the Second Republic.23

But in 1943 the Second Republic seemed destined to be ephemeral, a bugbear that would dissolve as soon as the Jap sun had set and the Stars & Stripes returned to Philippine skies. "Aqui no duran laureles," quipped the wags, punning on the names of the President, the Speaker and the sinister Pío Durán. And it did look from the start as if the Laurel government had been set up just to be wiped out. Its first efforts at nation-building were mocked by a storm that wrought widespread ruin; and October of '43, when it was inaugurated, was the last month of a comparative normality. The first three months of '42, while Bataan was holding out, had been a pause in time, anomalous and unreal. In Manila, stores and offices stayed closed; only the streetcars continued; and the '20s seemed to have come back as in street and park and vacant lot, from morning to evening, man and boy played softball, the game the '20s knew as "indoor" and that had been so popular until, in the '30s, the NBA made basketball the national obsession. But during that lull of '42 it was softball for the men, mahjong for the women, that whiled away the hours and days and weeks of waiting for those "mile-long convoys" that were to rescue the land. Then Bataan fell and, like a stopped watch, knocked back into action, time stirred again. Those who had evacuated grimly came home; stores and offices reopened; the men abandoned softball and reported back to work.

The wait had proved a deception; now to reality. Prices were higher but, otherwise, life returned to normal — or what would seem normal then: corn with the rice, molasses instead of sugar, instant local cigarettes, streets full of bicycles and horse-drawn vehicles of every kind from rig to coach, the standing in line for rations, the buy-and-sell boom, the revival of vaudeville as "stage show" and the resurrection of old-timers like Toyoy and Katy de la Cruz, the vanishing of coat-and-tie (which wouldn't return till two decades later), the jam session or everybody's party where the young did the boogie to the Andrews Sisters, or the conga to Carmen Miranda, or softer swayings to Adios, Mariposa Linda and You Old Indian Summer and I'll Never Smile Again and the sweetheart song from Maytime. But the song of the time was an anonymous street ballad in the vernacular on the war, which had, for its listeners then, the two most poignant lines in all poetry: "Habang sila'y sumulog/Tagyo nama'y umuunwong..."

Such was the normality of the period from the fall of Bataan to October of '43, when the Second Republic began. The very next month, a typhoon of singular fury devastated Manila and the heartland, which could not recover from the blow: There was no returning to normal. Prices began their panic spiral, money turned into waste paper. Pushcarts replaced buggy and bike as people went afield looking for food. Hunger became visible as bloated bodies collapsed on sidewalks. The secondhand clothes on sale were rumored to have been despoiled from the newly buried. A ship laden with rice sank and men dived for the cargo and ate the sisig rice and died. Hoarders locked themselves in for fear of looters. And agony became desperation as the Jap grew crueler.

This was the situation in which the Second Republic found itself, and which made the task set for it doubly difficult. In a secret letter Recto described that task as a "constant endeavor of the Filipino leaders to promote and maintain [the prestige of the Republic] in the eyes of its own people, and to have it exercise as much as possible the powers and prerogatives to which the government of a sovereign state is entitled, saving only the limitations arising from the exigencies of the war situation as defined in the Pact of Alliance between the Philippines and Japan...to convince them that the independence of our country is real."24 The elite had gambled on the chance that, once attained, independence could be asserted even in the teeth of Japanese might; and they succeeded well enough to make the Japanese feel it was they who had been duped, by being led to believe that the grant of independence would give them easier puppets. They were presently calling the officials of the Republic "double-crossers" and accusing them of not cooperating with the imperial army, declaring that Tokyo was extremely disgusted with them.25

Japanese dissatisfaction became so furious that in April, 1944, to appease Tokyo, the Republic sent over a "gratitude mission" headed by Speaker Aquino and including Yulo, Osfas, Rafael Alunan and Antonio de las Alas. Their job was to convince Tokyo that the Republic was cooperating in the war effort. Aquino was specially effective in soothing Japanese feelings and, for his pains, was conferred a second decoration by the emperor. "Whether he was sincere or merely accommodating to the Japanese," observes Aguonillo, "was difficult to determine. His bold statements, however...chilled the spines of his colleagues."26 But Agoncillo adds that the mission was part of "a modus operandi of appeasement as a protection against Japanese brutality," and that the Japanese military continued to be suspicious of "the Filipinos and their officials."

The suspiciousness became, after the American landings in Leyte in October 1944, outright distrust, as the Japanese showed by organizing a counter-elite in the Philippines, the Makapili (Makabayan Kilipinang ng Filipino—bespeak the continuing effects of the Second Republic.23

24Garcia; confidential letter of Recto to Lieutenant-General T. Wasti.
25Garcia; minutes of the Laurel cabinet meeting on December 27, 1944.
26The Fateful Years, pp. 416-7.
"Daddy said he had to be accused by the guerrillas because 'if nobody accused me the Japanese would never believe I was working for them.' So he made it appear he was hated by the guerrillas, so the Japanese would open up to him. And he saved a lot of guerrillas in Fort Santiago. In fact, Primicias partly owes his life to my father, and so did Roxas. He was instrumental in getting information from the Japanese high command to us. We were in the USAFFE; we had organized our allied intelligence here in Manila, which was one of the areas of command. We had our headquarters on top of a building near Malacañang and we had access to Malacañang because of the Laurels, Pepito especially, and my father. So we had all this information when we started printing our clandestine newspaper. Daddy supplied us with information — movements of Japanese troops, etc. At that time he was seemingly collaborating with the Japanese, since you'd never get the Japanese to give you a certain degree of faith unless they knew you were their man. But even then he was very strict in his belief that the best thing for the Philippines was to be independent. Whether it came from the Japanese or the Americans, he said, there was nothing better than independence. Oh, they have accused him of everything. They have never accused him of nationalism."

But endorsement by the guerrillas would hardly clarify the "story behind the whole thing," because, as Renato Constantino points out, the resistance of the guerrillas was based on the certainty that the Americans would win the war: "For them, freedom meant that which they had known under the Americans; so they fought for American victory instead of seizing the opportunity to fight for their own freedom as their forbears had done at the turn of the century."32

And Benigno Aquino's "tragedy" was that he seized the opportunity.

32 The Making of a Filipino. p. 117.