

Mr. Bryan and the Promise of Philippine Independence

CONGRATULATORY TELEGRAMS

Washington, D. C., August 29, 1916.—Hon. William Jennings Bryan, Lincoln, Nebraska. My dear Mr. Bryan: I take pleasure in quoting herebelow a cablegram received from the Honorable Sergio Osmena, speaker of the Philippine assembly:

"Quezon, Washington. The following for Hon. William J. Bryan: Permit me to extend to you, in the name of the Filipino people, the sincerest appreciation and thanks for the help you have rendered in the passage of the Jones Philippine bill. You have more reason to rejoice than any other American over the step just taken towards the consummation of an act of justice which you have so long and so laboriously advocated. Pray, accept the tribute of gratitude from the Filipino people."

Very sincerely yours,
MANUEL L. QUEZON.

Washington, Aug. 17, 1916.—Hon. Wm. Jennings Bryan, The Commoner, Lincoln, Nebr.—The Philippine bill passed the senate yesterday and it will pass the house tomorrow; it will, of course, receive the signature of the President in due course.

Since your efforts in favor of Philippine independence have been largely instrumental in securing the enactment of this measure, allow me to express to you my heartfelt thanks on behalf of myself as well as of the Filipino people. We owe you eternal gratitude. I should like to get from you either by telegram or by mail a message for the Filipino people which I shall be very glad to transmit.

MANUEL L. QUEZON,
Commissioner from the Philippines.

MR. BRYAN'S REPLY

En route, Aug. 22, 1916.

Hon. Manuel L. Quezon,
House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Mr. Quezon:

Your telegram has been forwarded to me. While it reached me too late to send the telegram for which you asked I shall not be denied the pleasure of thanking and congratulating you, and through you the people whom you so faithfully represent, upon the splendid victory won after a struggle which has lasted nearly eighteen years. It was in December, 1898, that I resigned from the army to begin the fight for a resolution promising ultimate independence. The Bacon resolution, containing such a promise, almost passed the senate at that time. I helped to write the promise of such a resolution into four national platforms—the platforms of 1900, 1904, 1908 and 1912—you can imagine, therefore, the satisfaction I find in seeing the pledge kept and justice done this nation as well as the Filipinos—for our honor and our theory of government were involved no less than the political rights and welfare of the people of the Philippines. It is an epoch-making for the doctrine that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. Urge your people to show their appreciation of our nation's action by proving their wisdom, their self-restraint and their unselfish devotion to order, progress, and the prosperity of the masses.

With good wishes I am,

Very truly yours,

W. J. BRYAN.

BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE

On the 1st of October, 1898, the peace commissioners selected by the governments of the United States and Spain met at Paris to arrange the terms of the treaty which brought about the ending of the Spanish-American war. Meanwhile the whole force of the administration at Washington was turned to the policy of getting as much as possible out of the war, with a sentiment developing in favor of holding the Philippine Islands.

The peace commission concluded its labors in Paris the 18th day of December, 1898, when the result was finally reached in the form of a treaty to be submitted for approval to the treaty making powers of Spain and the United States.

President McKinley, near the close of the year 1898, finally laid the treaty before the United States senate.

The terms of the treaty as agreed upon recognized the independence of Cuba, but provided for the cession of the Philippine Islands, thus transferring to the sovereignty of the United States a new territory having a population of over 8,000,000, with the consequent necessity of establishing over the Filipinos some kind of a colonial government.

When the terms of the treaty became known, as first given in a cablegram from Paris, under date of December 10, 1898, Mr. Bryan forwarded his resignation as colonel of the Third Nebraska regiment to Washington, and at once took up the fight against a colonial policy. A copy of Mr. Bryan's letter of resignation follows:

"Camp Onward, Savannah, Ga., Dec. 10, 1898.—Adj. Gen. U. S. A., Washington, D. C. Sir: The dispatches from Paris announce that the terms of the treaty between the United States and Spain have been fully agreed upon, and that the commissioners will sign the same as soon as it can be engrossed.

"Believing that, under the present conditions, I can be more useful to my country as a civilian than as a soldier, I hereby tender my resignation, to take effect immediately upon its acceptance.

Respectfully, etc.,

W. J. BRYAN,

"Col. 3d Reg., Neb. Vol. Inf."

STATEMENT BY MR. BRYAN

Mr. Bryan, upon leaving his command of the Third Nebraska, gave out the following interview at Savannah, Ga., December 13, 1898:

"My reason for leaving the army was set forth in my letter to the adjutant general tendering my resignation. Now that the treaty of peace has been concluded, I believe that I can be more useful to my country as a civilian than a soldier.

"I may be in error, but in my judgment our nation is in greater danger just now than Cuba. Our people defended Cuba against foreign arms; now they must defend themselves and their country against a foreign idea—the colonial idea of European nations. Heretofore greed has perverted the government and used its instrumental interferences for private gain, but now the very foundation principles of our government are assaulted. Our nation must give up any intention of entering upon a colonial policy, such as is now pursued by European countries, or it must abandon the doctrine that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed.

"To borrow a Bible quotation, 'A house divided against itself can not stand.' Paraphrasing Lincoln's declaration, I may add that this nation can not endure half republic and half colony—half free and half vassal. Our form of government, our traditions, our present interests and our future welfare, all forbid our entering upon a career of conquest.

"Jefferson has been quoted in support of imperialism, but our opponents must distinguish between imperialism and expansion; they must also distinguish between expansion in the western hemisphere and an expansion that involves us in the quarrels of Europe and the Orient. They must still further distinguish between expansion which secures contiguous territory for future settlement and expansion, which secures us alien races for future subjugation.

"Jefferson favored the annexation of necessary contiguous territory on the North American continent, but he was opposed to wars of conquest and expressly condemned the acquiring of remote territory.

"Some think that the fight should be made against ratification of the treaty, but I would prefer another plan. If the treaty is rejected negotiations must be renewed and instead of settling the question according to our ideas we must settle it by diplomacy with the possibility of international complications. It will be easier, I think, to end the war at once by ratifying the treaty and then deal with the subject in our own way. The issue can be presented directly by a resolution of congress declaring the policy of the nation upon this subject. The President in

his message says that our only purpose in taking possession of Cuba is to establish a stable government and then turn that government over to the people of Cuba. Congress could reaffirm this purpose in regard to Cuba and assert the same purpose in regard to the Philippines and Porto Rico. Such a resolution would make a very clear cut issue between the doctrine of self-government and the doctrine of imperialism. We should reserve a harbor and coaling station in Porto Rico and the Philippines in return for service rendered, and I think we would be justified in asking the same concession from Cuba.

"In the case of Porto Rico, where the people have as yet expressed no desire for an independent government, we might with propriety declare our willingness to annex the island if the citizens desire annexation, but the Philippines are too far away and their people too different from ours to be annexed to the United States, even if they desired it."

Mr. Bryan left Savannah, December 13, for Washington, for the purpose of entering actively into the fight against a colonial policy, later expressing himself very emphatically to his democratic associates upon the duty of congress in regard to the Philippines.

THE BACON RESOLUTION

On the 6th of February, 1899, when the treaty with Spain in regard to the Philippines was under discussion in the United States senate, Senator Bacon of Georgia offered the following amendment:

"Resolved further, That the United States hereby disclaim any disposition or intention to exercise permanent sovereignty, jurisdiction or control over said islands and assert their determination when a stable and independent government shall have been erected therein entitled, in the judgment of the government of the United States, to recognition as such to transfer to said government upon terms which shall be reasonable and just all rights secured under the cession by Spain and to thereupon leave the government and control of the islands to their people."

The vote upon the motion was 29 to 29, a tie vote, and it was decided in the negative by a vote of the vice-president.

WHY THE TREATY WAS RATIFIED

The following is an extract from Mr. Bryan's speech on "Imperialism," delivered in Indianapolis, Ind., on August 8, 1900, in accepting the democratic nomination for the presidency:

"I was among the number of those who believed it better to ratify the treaty and end the war, release the volunteers, remove the cause for war expenditures and then give the Filipinos the independence which might be forced from Spain by a new treaty.

"In view of the criticism which my action aroused in some quarters, I take this occasion to restate the reasons given at that time. I thought it safer to trust the American people to give independence to the Filipinos than to trust the accomplishment of that purpose to diplomacy with an unfriendly nation.

"Lincoln embodied an argument in the question when he asked, 'Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws?' I believe that we are now in a better position to wage a successful contest against imperialism than we would have been had the treaty been rejected. With the treaty ratified a clean-cut issue is presented between a government by consent and a government by force, and imperialists must bear the responsibility for all that happens until the question is settled."

DEMOCRATS TAKE UP THE FIGHT

In the next national campaign following the ratification of the treaty, the democratic party in its platform strongly denounced the republican party for its policy of imperialism and took up the fight to bring about the recognition of the independence of the Philippine Islands. The platform of the democratic party in 1900 contained the following plank:

"We condemn and denounce the Philippine policy of the present administration. It has involved the republic in unnecessary war, sacrificed the lives of many of our noblest sons, and placed the United States, previously known and applauded throughout the world as the champion of freedom, in the false and un-American position of crushing with military force the efforts of our former allies to achieve liberty and self-government. The Filipinos can not be citizens without endangering our civilization; they can not be subjects without imperiling our form of government; and as we are not willing to