

THE COLORUM UPRISINGS: 1924—1931

MILAGROS C. GUERRERO

OF CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE AMERICAN REGIME THAT have suffered from the distortions of hysteria and indifference, perhaps none has been treated worse than those years when the Colorums staged their abortive uprisings. While the newspapers which covered the uprisings painted the Colorums as gullible ignoramuses, others have regarded them as "reds" and subversives. Failure to look into the causes of the movement and the uprisings has further bemuddled the history of the Colorums. Yet it is quite wrong to dismiss the Colorums as ignorant individuals easily given to violence, or to consider the Colorum uprisings as nothing but a "hash of religion, politics and fanaticism."

The origin of the term *colorum* and the Colorum movement is traced to the Spanish regime when, in 1843, Apolinario de la Cruz, founded the *Cofradia de San Jose* in the province of Tayabas (now Quezon).¹ De la Cruz was a former donné of the Dominican-operated San Juan de Dios Hospital in Manila. His association with the friars must have inspired him to enter the priesthood, to become a Dominican friar. Characteristic prejudice toward Filipinos, however, closed the doors of the Dominican convent to him. Unable to join a legitimate religious order, de la Cruz decided to organize one of his own. He found a following among Filipinos who wanted to go back to the old religion as well as among those discontented with the Spanish rule. The confraternity copied the liturgy of the Catholic Church, meeting frequently in the caves on Mount Banahaw, Laguna. Atavism found its fulfillment in the inclusion of one native folk-belief in the society's tenets: all members of the *cofradia* were immune from danger if they wore *anting-antings* or talismans and should they face persecution, they would be aided by direct intervention of heaven. Eventually the movement came to be known as *colorum*, derived from their mispronunciation of *saecula saeculorum*, an ejaculation with which many Latin prayers end.² De la Cruz attempted to legalize the existence of the organization but was refused by the Spanish authorities. The latter, believing that the *cofradia* was in reality a political organization, using religion merely as a blind, inaugurated a policy of per-

¹ Report of Juan Manuel de la Matta, February 24, 1843, in Emma Blair and James A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands* (Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur Clark and Co. 1903-1908), Vol. 52, p. 92.

² From the Latin *per omnia saecula saeculorum* (World without end). At present, the term *colorum* is used to signify any unlicensed property, particularly firearms.

secution, thus driving the members of the society to the mountains. Spanish contempt and fear of the organization drove the members to insurrection, which was, however, easily quelled.³

The Colorums seemed to have weathered Spanish repression for during the early years of American rule, they were found to be holding out in Mt. San Cristobal. Pilgrims continued to visit the place and paid large fees to persuade "Amang Dios" to talk to them.⁴

More Colorum organizations were established during the American regime: in Nueva Ecija, Rizal, Tarlac, La Union, Batangas and Surigao. There is no evidence that these Colorum societies were related to one another, either in ideology, leadership or organizational structure. Beliefs and practices in fact varied and depended upon the imagination of the leaders. They, however, share one common characteristic: membership was almost always confined to the peasantry and the urban proletariat.

In Tarlac, the Colorums believed in a resurrected Jose Rizal and Felipe Salvador, the latter being notorious for his brigandage during the early part of American rule.⁵ They believed that their bodies could not be hurt by bullets. The Colorums of Manila, on the other hand, made a pilgrimage each year from Pagsanjan, Laguna and Lipa, Batangas to Mount San Cristobal in Laguna. The pilgrims then listened to the sermons of a "living Christ" or "Amang Dios" in a cave in the mountain.⁶

The same fanatic fervor dominated the Colorums of Surigao who organized themselves as devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Jose Rizal, who was believed to have been resurrected, was venerated as a god who would later on rule the Philippines. Under his rule, the property of those who refused to join the society would be confiscated and distributed among the Colorums. The members were assured that in case of an uprising, the guns of their enemy would not fire toward them; or that in case the enemy's guns did fire, the Colorums would not be wounded. If by accident, any of them were hit or died, he would revive or resurrect within five days.⁷

Assured thus, the Colorums increased in number in Surigao, and spread to Agusan, Cotabato, Samar and Leyte.⁸ During the years 1923 and 1924 the Colorums of Surigao rose up in arms. The enemy, like the later Tayug uprising, was the Philippine Constabulary. On December 27, 1923, five constabulary soldiers on patrol in Bucas Island, off Surigao were murdered by the Colorums. A little more than a week later (January 8) they sur-

³ Report of Juan Manuel de la Matta, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴ Dean C. Worcester, *The Philippines, Past and Present* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1914), Vol. II, p. 944.

⁵ Serafin E. Macaraig, *Social Problems* (Manila, 1929), p. 410.

⁶ *Manila Times*, January 13, 1924.

⁷ Macaraig, *op. cit.*

⁸ *Manila Times*, January 20, 1924.

prised a constabulary detachment which attempted to land in a barrio of Surigao, and killed the provincial commander and 12 enlisted men.⁹

These daring attacks on the Constabulary provoked drastic government measures to suppress "the religious fanatics and recalcitrant taxpayers."¹⁰ An expeditionary force was sent to Mindanao to suppress Colorum activities and to check its growth. Attempts to do so literally stirred up a hornet's nest in the south. At first, the Colorums rose in Surigao but soon the rebel territory included "Colorum towns" in Samar, Leyte and Agusan.¹¹ Colonel H. Bowers, head of the expeditionary force, ordered the burning of Socorro town, the center of the rebellion. Farmers who were not involved in the uprising escaped to safer towns. A later attempt on the part of Senator Jose Clarin to investigate the incident did not materialize when Bowers sent word that the burning of the town was essential for the future safety of his forces.¹² The Constabulary allowed the corpses of the Colorums to rot on the spot where they fell; the better to prove to all and sundry that the Colorums did not have supernatural powers to resuscitate themselves.¹³ The purpose of the Constabulary was now clear: to avenge themselves in a relentless campaign against the rebels.

Governor Leonard Wood's office sought to discourage the illegal movement by ordering all pictures of Filipino heroes removed from all public schools in Mindanao. Wood's executive staff, when confronted by protestations of Camilo Osias, then president of the National University, reasoned out that the measure was aimed at allaying the "strong racial feeling existing between the Moros and the Filipinos." "National heroes of the Filipinos, while worthy and patriotic men cannot be held in the same esteem by the Moros."¹⁴ One other reason for this order was to discourage recalcitrant elements from taking a more active stand against the Constabulary, considering that the Colorums were not Muslims and one of their gods was Rizal. But Father Xavier A. Byrne, S. J., rector of the Ateneo de Manila, who perhaps feared that the uprising might have an untoward effect on the peaceful Catholic population, hastened to say in a press release that the Colorums were not Catholics.¹⁵ The American-owned *Manila Times* regarded the Colorum uprising, while purely endemic and "will be quelled by a necessary but proper display of force, . . . [as] symptomatic of what might happen everywhere in the Islands should independence come." The newspaper editorialized:

⁹ Philippine Islands, Office of the Governor-General, *Annual Report, 1924* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 51.

¹⁰ Philippine Islands, Office of the Governor-General, *Annual Report, 1923* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1925), p. 82.

¹¹ *Manila Times*, January 20, 1924; February 8, 1924.

¹² *Ibid.*, January 27, 1924.

¹³ *Ibid.*, February 3, 1924.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, January 22, 1924.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, February 19, 1924.

Throughout the Philippines there are large groups of uneducated and easily influenced people who would without question become the instruments through which contending political factions would try to achieve their ends. Judging from ease with which the colorum fanatics apparently aroused them into hostile action, there would be plenty of trouble and plenty of fighting were the restraining influence of America removed.¹⁶

Civil war once independence is granted! The editorial was a reflection of Governor Wood's attitude toward the capacity of the Filipinos for self-government and an indication that the Republican administration was not willing to give due concessions to Filipino agitation for independence.

It was not until October that the situation was brought under control. In the different engagements that took place between January and October, 1924, about 100 Colorums were put to the sword, 500 surrendered and the rest were dispersed. The leaders of the movement were brought before the courts and sentenced to long prison terms for sedition.¹⁷

After the Colorum uprising of 1924, the society and its activities were to receive only curt mention from the newspapers. The government authorities did not particularly feel obliged to look into the root cause of the uprising, content with dismissing it as a "mere fanatical movement of a religious nature." The Philippine Constabulary, on the other hand, viewed the uprising as one that could always be "quelled by a necessary but proper display of force." When another Colorum uprising took place, the Constabulary was again taken by surprise.

In 1931, the Colorums were again active. This time the hotbed of unrest was Pangasinan.

The acknowledged founder of the Colorum movement in Pangasinan was Pedro Calosa, then a 34-year old farmer from the barrio of Magallanes, Tayug, Pangasinan. Calosa was typical of the Ilocanos of his time. He was born in Bawang, La Union, but at 17, he migrated with his parents to Tayug. He worked for sometime as a magician in an itinerant circus troupe but later went to Hawaii, where he stayed for 11 years. Calosa was involved in a labor dispute there and was imprisoned for nine months. Upon his return, he founded a Colorum society in Tayug. The Philippine Constabulary which got wind of the existence of the secret society as early as the date of its founding failed, however, to pinpoint his actual responsibility for founding the society.¹⁸ Calosa maintained that he was only titular head, not founder, appointed by "Lagondindino Rizal, Abelardo Bonifacio, Artemio Ricarte Bi-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, January 27, 1924.

¹⁷ Philippine Islands, Office of the Governor-General, *Annual Report, 1924* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 51.

¹⁸ Biographical information on Pedro Calosa can be gleaned from an affidavit presented in Criminal Case No. 11885, Pangasinan Court of First Instance, cited in Cynthia B. Urgena, *The Colorum Uprising of Pangasinan* (University of the Philippines, 1960), M. A. thesis, pp. 14-20.

bora, Mateo Careon, Agaton Punzalan and Mrs. Aurora A. Quezon.”¹⁹ He took upon himself the leadership of the organization not so much for personal motives but for the “sake of the poor.” Twenty-seven years later, when Calosa had become a charcoal dealer living in the foothills of Tayug, he would still harp on the same idea, that the Colorum organization was founded to secure social justice. “We tenants till the soil for rich people but they give us very little for our subsistence.”²⁰

At various times the Colorum society in Pangasinan operated under two different names. In April, 1930, when the society was organized, it was called *Sociedad ti Mannalon* (Society of Land Tenants), an association for mutual help, particularly for raising stocks and herds.²¹ It was also known as *Sinarauay*, a mutual cooperation society for the improvement of barrio conditions.²² Pedro Calosa and his lieutenants found ready adherents among the ignorant, oppressed peasants of Tayug, Sta. Maria, San Nicolas, and San Quintin.

The secrecy with which the society was organized lent mystery to it, rendering it more attractive to the simple barrio folk. Membership was graded—from corporal to general. Calosa himself was *Primero General*. It had a flag of its own—a Filipino flag with suns taking the place of the stars. The flag bore the words: *Bato a poon ti laoag. Bato a poro. Panagoayaoaya ti Eglesia Filipina Endipendiente* (Stone is the foundation of light. Pure stone. For the liberty of the Philippine Independent Church).²³ Benigno Ramos, founder of Sakdalism and editor of its paper *Sakdal* pointed out that the flag symbolized the aspirations of the simple folk: complete independence from the United States.²⁴ The Colorums talked incessantly about *libertad* and Philippine independence. The more avid and devoted Colorums wore their uniforms even in public, rakish and gaudy white shirts and trousers with red sashes across the front which bore the inscription “We want the Filipino flag to flay [*sic*] along.” To complete their paraphernalia, they wore embroidered *anting-antings*, talismans which they believe gave them extraordinary strength and unusual courage to fight their enemies.²⁵

In January, 1931, they seemed ready to launch a program that would achieve these goals. Rumors were rife that the Colorums, in collusion with some municipal officials of Tayug, would take over the town. This was ex-

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Appendix A.

²⁰ Conrado B. Mendoza, “Ex-Colorum Becomes Charcoal Dealer,” *Philippines Free Press* (September 20, 1958), p. 46.

²¹ Urgena, *op. cit.*, p. 26. [*Mannalon* < Iioko: *Talon*, “farm.” *Mannalon* would mean “he who works in the farm,” hence “farmer.” Ed.]

²² *The Tribune*, January 20, 1931.

²³ A. V. H. Hartendorp, “The Tayug ‘Colorum,’” *Philippine Magazine*, Vol. 27, No. 9 (February, 1931), p. 565.

²⁴ *Sakdal*, January 17, 1931, p. 1.

²⁵ A. V. H. Hartendorp, *op. cit.*, p. 563.

pected to be the spark that would kindle a peasant revolution all over Central Luzon.

Late in the evening of Sunday, January 11, 1931, a band of around 70 Colorums assembled by the roadside in San Nicolas, Pangasinan. All of them carried knives and bolos although some were armed with guns. Five kilometers away, the prosperous town of Tayug slept on. The group, taking advantage of the darkness, covered the distance between San Nicolas and Tayug by walking part of the way and later, by commandeering a truck of the Pangasinan Transportation Company (Pantranco).²⁶ Arriving at Bitong Creek which bounds the town on the north, the truck stopped, the men got off, leaving the 14 women behind.²⁷

Shortly after two o'clock, the Colorums broke into the tiny barracks of the Philippine Constabulary in the heart of the town. The soldiers were not at all prepared to offer any defense of the barracks.²⁸ Lt. Sulpicio Bachinni, one of the officers-in-command in the barracks gave a pistol to his wife and sent her and their three children out of the house. In the meantime, one of the soldiers warned Lt. Martin San Pedro at the latter's quarters. But the Colorums had already swept through the barracks, killing three who crossed their path, including Bachinni and San Pedro, each of them receiving more than 35 wounds from the bolos of the attackers. The Constabulary was routed completely.

Flushed by their victory in the first skirmish, the Colorums set the barracks on fire. They continued marching, now rejoined by the women, to the center of the town. The municipal building was empty and they entered without opposition. They battered down the municipal treasury, brought out to the plaza bundles of documents, and lit them into a huge bonfire.²⁹ Almost simultaneously they burned the post office, a score of residences and a warehouse. The municipal president, the chief of police and the entire police force did not rally for a common defense of the town. They disappeared with the first alarm. They showed up a day later.

At dawn, a Constabulary detachment arrived in a Pantranco bus. The Colorums were still in the municipal building, ransacking the records of the Treasury office for "records of their taxes, slavery and oppression." The two parties exchanged fire which kept until 9 o'clock in the morning when the Colorums abandoned the Presidencia and rushed across the plaza to the convent. Inside they ordered Father Eusebio Bermudez to celebrate Mass and later demanded that they be served coffee.³⁰

²⁶ *The Independent*, January 1, 1931.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Tribune*, January 28, 1931.

²⁹ *Sakdal*, January 17, 1931, p. 1.

³⁰ Speaker Manuel Roxas, passing the town in his campaign tour of Luzon, was reportedly an "interested spectator" at this stage of the skirmish. *The Sunday Tribune*, January 18, 1931.

Reinforcements came from Constabulary units in San Quintin and Tarlac. The troops converged at Tayug at 4 o'clock and at a signal, the advance on the convent began. It was at this juncture that the fortune of battle turned against the Colorums. Their one disadvantage was their lack of familiarity with rifles. They fired desultorily and when the magazines were empty, they threw away their guns. As the two groups exchanged fire, the shots were accompanied by a pandemonium of whistles which the Colorums had apparently brought with them.³¹ The attack on the convent lasted nearly three hours. Three constabulary men were wounded in the rush across the plaza. In the afternoon the soldiers rammed open the convent door. Minutes later, a white flag appeared on the convent wall.

At 6 o'clock, the Colorums that remained, 13 women and 31 men, surrendered. Their standard bearer, daughter of their "colonel" Arcadio Vidal, was killed. The father himself died of his wounds several days later. Five others were killed. Two girls, both high school students, were wounded. The rest of the group escaped through the convent rear.³² Pedro Calosa, succeeded in escaping the clutches of the Constabulary and was captured days later in his home in San Patricio.

The uprising, if it deserves such a name, lasted for less than a day. Investigations made after the event revealed that 38 houses were burned by the Colorums during the hours on Sunday morning when they had full control of the town, with losses amounting to ₱47,180.00. This would exclude the damage sustained by the municipal building, the post office and the Constabulary barracks.³³ Most of the burned houses were owned by the municipal officials and prominent residents of the town. So great must have been the fear of the Tayug residents that nearly 90 per cent of them went on a mass exodus to neighboring towns at the crack of the first shot. It had so reduced the wretched municipal mayor to such a state of terror that he fled from the town, Paul Revere style, incompletely attired. The Chinese merchants, after barricading their shops, also fled from the town when the firing began.³⁴

Governor Bernabe Aquino, on the other hand, thinking that the Constabulary soldiers were too few to handle the situation, requested the Philippine division of the United States Army then engaged in maneuvers in the province, to intervene in the Tayug trouble,³⁵ for which action he was severely criticized in the editorials of the metropolitan papers. Easily frightened barrio officials in the surrounding towns began to see blood thirsty Colorums in every peasant and field hand they met, keeping the Constabulary in the province on their toes for days after the uprising. A week after the incident,

³¹ *The Independent*, January 17, 1931.

³² *The Sunday Tribune*, January 18, 1931.

³³ *The Tribune*, January 15, 1931.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1931.

soldiers from Bayambang Constabulary headquarters rushed to the town after a rush call had been received that peasants and students from Bayambang High School were preparing to attack the town. It turned out that the people were preparing for a garden festival in the plaza.³⁶

The uprising dominated the national scene for days. Labor strikes which had reached serious proportions in the sugar centrals of Occidental Negros, Oriental Negros and Binalbagan, Iloilo, which the authorities believed were caused by "Red agitators," were momentarily forgotten.³⁷ More soldiers were stationed in barrios of Pangasinan, Tarlac and Nueva Ecija suspected to be infested by Colorums. General C. E. Nathorst prescribed the immediate investigation of all officials of the barrios of San Nicolas, San Rafael, Santa Maria and Natividad. Because of the latter's failure to detect the existence of a dangerous Colorum organization in Pangasinan, the Constabulary chief concluded that municipal officials were protecting the Colorums.³⁸

The Constabulary was also quick to link the uprising to Communism, albeit a new idea in the Philippines at the time. A certain Agaton Abian, suspected as a "Red agent on the payroll of the Soviet Government" was pinpointed as the "brains" of the Colorum incident. A few days before the uprising, Abian was reportedly seen in the towns of Pangasinan where he was said to have delivered fiery and incendiary speeches. Abian and his driver were arrested, put under heavy guard and held incommunicado for two days. Further inquiry showed that the Constabulary were on the track of a witch hunt, which they probably were not aware of at the time, for Abian was a mere agent for an American packing company who had returned from the United States after thirteen years to look for his wife whom he married in Tayug 18 years earlier.³⁹

The Constabulary believed that there were more than 100 Colorums who participated in the affair, but official reports placed the total at 70.⁴⁰ Of the 70, however, only 20 were arrested against whom complaints of murder and sedition were filed by Fiscal Pio Fajardo in the Court of First Instance of Pangasinan.⁴¹ The Colorums impressed Secretary of Interior Honorio Ventura as "timid, harmless-looking people, with the semblance of ignorance in their appearance," with the exception of one "who, supposed to be one of their recognized leaders, looks like a bandit."⁴²

The prisoners testified during the preliminary hearings that the uprising was purely endemic, uninfluenced by extraneous elements, the attack

³⁶ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1931.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1931; January 28, 1931.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, January 16, 1931.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, January 17, 1931.

⁴⁰ Report of the Secretary of Interior, March 21, 1931 in *Philippine Islands; Office of the Governor General, Annual Report, 1931* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 89.

⁴¹ Urgena, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴² *The Tribune*, January 17, 1931.

having been made with the purpose of overthrowing the municipal government of Tayug. They gave as reasons the abuses committed by the town officials, particularly the municipal president, the treasurer, the justice of the peace and the Constabulary soldiers. They also maintained that they fought the Constabulary soldiers to secure liberty for the country, bring about equal division of lands and the recognition of the Philippine Independent Church as the supreme religious church in the country.⁴³ Calosa, the rebel leader was, however, silent on the reasons for founding the society and launching the uprising during the trial. But in an interview with Cynthia Urgena on April 25, 1958, he shed light on factors that led to his active participation in the uprising. He said:

If trouble arises through misunderstanding between [the landlords and tenants] the tenant is betrayed and brought to court. Yet the government authorities need one or two persons to defend him when there are officials of the government whose duty is to look into the welfare of those who are harmed. Instead they employ ruses by which the victim will spend much to settle the case. I consider myself an example because at present I am a victim of land trouble. The Court of First Instance has issued a complete document recognizing my ownership to a piece of land. Why was not my land measured? And what is the authority of the two lawyers to have the land title cancelled at the office of the Provincial Assessor? I brought the case to the Provincial Fiscal, yet I was not seen nor heard, because I was a nobody. This is the problem between the tenants and the landlords.⁴⁴

In the trial that followed, all defendants with the exception of three Colorums (two of them being minors) were found guilty. They were sentenced to imprisonment, ranging from 14 to 40 years and required to indemnify the heirs of the deceased soldiers. Pedro Calosa and Cesareo Abe, the leaders of the group, were sentenced to imprisonment for a maximum period of 40 years (*cadena perpetua*). While the authorities had made much talk about the seditious character of the uprising, the court could only prosecute them for murder as it could not establish beyond reasonable doubt that the Colorums were indeed guilty of sedition and treachery.⁴⁵ Their ignorance and poverty were held as mitigating circumstances without which they would have received stiffer penalties.

Official reaction toward the Colorum uprising saw very little (or none at all) political significance in the actions of the rebels. Sympathy and commiseration for their plight was not even conceded. Undersecretary of Agriculture and Natural Resources Jorge Vargas, who went to Tayug to look into the agrarian aspect of the affair, reported that it "was not inspired by vengeance growing out of agrarian disputes between tenants and landlords but was a result of blind obedience on the part of ignorant individuals to two

⁴³ *Ibid.*, January 14, 1931.

⁴⁴ Urgena, *op. cit.*, Appendix A.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

colorum leaders of a secret society professing patriotic purposes.”⁴⁶ Ignorance and poverty were regarded as crimes. In the official report of Secretary of Interior Honorio Ventura, he pointed out that the action of the Colorums “can be attributed to the ignorance that prevails among them. These ignorant people exploited by unscrupulous people like Calosa can be led to the wildest excesses. The spirit behind their movement is a hash of religion, politics, fanaticism and a little of everything else that can serve to inflame them.”⁴⁷ Acting Senate President Sergio Osmeña believed that the Colorum uprising was motivated by reasons other than religious fanaticism but declined to elaborate.⁴⁸ Manuel Roxas, Speaker of the Philippine Assembly and president of the *Bagong Katipunan*, opined that the movement was purely fanatical⁴⁹ even as prominent Americans in the country, particularly Jacob Rosenthal, criticized his *Bagong Katipunan* as a piece of patriotic fanaticism whose aims, if realized, would also result in consequences as disastrous as the Colorum uprising in Tayug.⁵⁰

Press opinion seemed to be cast in the same mould. There was agreement with Secretary Ventura’s report that the Tayug uprising was purely a local affair, as all other Colorum uprisings that preceded it, the Colorum organization being “a fanatical sect which has branches all over the archipelago.” The Tayug affair was blamed on the inability of the municipal police and the Philippine Constabulary, “a bunch of nearly useless peace officers,” to quash the Colorums before the latter could launch the uprising.⁵¹ The Colorums were compared to the *peons*, “a shiftless and inflammable class responsible for confusion and disorder” in Latin-America.⁵²

Mauro Mendez, editor of *The Tribune*, echoed the age-old *cacique* rationale for agrarian uprising. The Colorums’ pernicious desire for “equal distribution of land” was “an indication that the tenant farmers have an erroneous idea about property rights. It would appear, to the farmer, that because they do the physical work in the whole process of planting and harvesting the crop, they are entitled to claim an equal share of the acreage they have been tilling for years.” “It is a sad commentary on the character of our farming class” who lacked “the decision to go elsewhere to be free from landlordism.”⁵³

A number of enlightened journalists and government officials took exception from this popular opinion. Federico Mangahas, one of the eminent writers of the 1930’s wrote in baffled petulance:

⁴⁶ *The Tribune*, January 22, 1931.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; January 15, 1931.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Jacob Rosenthal to Manuel L. Quezon, January 19, 1931, in *Quezon Papers*, Bureau of Public Libraries.

⁵¹ *The Tribune*, January 16, 1931.

⁵² *The Philippines Herald*, January 17, 1931.

⁵³ *The Tribune*, January 15, 1931.

Those simple folk of Tayug who took it upon themselves to establish the millenium by erasing two [*sic*] Constabulary officers for a start must naturally be wrong, and the reason pure and simple is that they are poor.

In the first expression of public revulsion, at their sanguinary adventure . . . the unanimous cry was for their blood in instant payment. This was articulated through outraged, comfortable writers. It has not developed as an afterthought detail to suggest that perhaps there ought to be some investigation of a sort.⁵⁴

General Emilio Aguinaldo noted that the abuses and cruelty of the Philippine Constabulary, which were in fact "comparable to the excesses of the *Guardia Civil*," contributed in no small measure to the Colorum uprising.⁵⁵ His statement may have been inspired by the testimony of a woman Colorum who, upon her arrest, wailed: "We don't want policemen or the Constabulary. We cannot endure what they are doing to us any longer. They took my boy away from the barrio and locked him up for no cause at all. Then they beat him. We cannot forget that."⁵⁶ Apparently alone among government officials, Tomas Confesor, Director of the Bureau of Commerce and Industry, stated explicitly that "the immense majority of [the Colorums] are in reality nothing but discontented tenants who have been mercilessly exploited and who seek revenge through acts of violence."⁵⁷

The *Philippines Free Press*, even then already noted for its crusading spirit for, and interest in the welfare of, the oppressed masses, exposed the fact that most of the Colorums had been ejected from haciendas or deprived of what they believed to be their lawful lands by the courts and the Constabulary.⁵⁸ The Bureau of Lands was criticized for its inability to settle land disputes as they should be settled. As a result, many farmers were dispossessed of everything through "fabricated testimony and combinations between official investigators of the Bureau of Lands and the land-grabbers." It is interesting to note that as of the census year, 1918, there were 3,372 farms of which 635 farms have torrens titles.⁵⁹ Of the total population of Pangasinan, 36,021 were tenants⁶⁰ receiving an average daily wage of ₱0.75. An objective inquiry into the incident, which the authorities did not make, would in fact tend to confirm the conclusion that there was no way of accommodating to the *caciques* short of slavery. The administrators of the *haciendas* in Pangasinan observed practices whose origins can be traced back to the obnoxious *encomienda* system. If a tenant were to pay 17 cavans as rent to

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *The Tribune*, January 17, 1931.

⁵⁶ *The Tribune*, January 16, 1931.

⁵⁷ *The Philippines Free Press*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (January 24, 1931), p. 30.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Philippine Islands, Bureau of Census, *Census of the Philippines, 1918*, Vol 3 (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1919), p. 220.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

the *hacendero*, the rent was upped to 21 cavans.⁶¹ The landlords were also at liberty to get foodstuffs from the tenant and exact personal services from them.

The *Philippines Free Press* did not believe that meting out stiff penalties to the Colorums was enough to solve the problem in Tayug. It called for legislation to improve the conditions among the peasantry. It pointed out that there is no class distinction in the eyes of justice.

But what about the avaricious landowner, the brutal *cacique*, the oppressive usurer, in short the proponents of the *kasama* system? Who are in reality to blame for the outbreak? Their rapacious greed for huge profits, their utter disregard of the tenants, led to the Tayug uprising. What will happen to them?⁶²

In a vein reminiscent of Sinibaldo de Mas' recommendations to the King of Spain after he had made a brief inquiry into the conditions obtaining in colonial Philippines, the magazine editorial warned that he who makes evolution impossible makes revolution inevitable:

Three courses seem open: (1) Those enforcing the *kasama* system may voluntarily relax their stranglehold enough to allow the tenants to live, rather than merely exist. (2) The government may awaken from its lethargy long enough to secure justice for the down-trodden, abused tenant, who after all forms the backbone of the country. (3) The first two courses failing, the peasant may finally rise in all his might and seize by force those necessities which had been denied [him].⁶³

But Manuel L. Quezon, president of the Senate and highest Filipino official, whose opinion and reaction to Philippine affairs were much sought after, was not available for comment. He was at the time of the uprising confined at the Monrovia Sanatorium, California for tuberculosis. In the first press conference which he held with foreign correspondents upon his return home, however, he discussed the Colorum uprising, the upsurge of proletarian organizations as well as the question of independence. He said:

There is no cause for, nor intention on the part of, the people of the Philippines to rebel against the United States. The Philippine government with the Constabulary and the local police can adequately cope with the situation and maintain public order. There is a feeling of discontent due to the economic depression which is taken advantage of by some demagogues and communists who spread subversive doctrines against the peace and order to gain popularity or money, or both.⁶⁴

⁶¹ F. Sionil Jose, "Agrarian Unrest in Luzon," *Sunday Times Magazine*, Vol. 13, No. 14 (November 17, 1957), p. 26.

⁶² *Philippines Free Press*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (January 24, 1931), p. 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Manuel Luis Quezon, Press Conference, December 13, 1931, in *Quezon Papers*, Bureau of Public Libraries.

Quezon's view of the uprising was criticized by Crisanto Evangelista, president of the *Congreso Obrero Proletario* and a host of labor organizations.⁶⁵ In a letter dated December 14, 1931, he said:

If you continue in your way of reactionary reasoning and demagoguery, we are sure you are the one who will precipitate the social upheaval and consequently, you are digging the grave of your capitalist-imperialist regime, for it will force sudden change in the social relationship.

The fault, therefore, is not ours, whom you are calling "ignorant mass or class" and whom you said are misled by "agitators who are living by becoming agitators." We remind you that we are living in the twentieth century. We cannot go back to the middle ages. . . . We can no longer endure the use of inquisition nor can we compel the peasants to become mere serfs of their feudal landlords, and the workers to live as mere beasts or robots. These are simply out of the question!⁶⁶

He further pointed out that it did not seem reasonable that the Tayug peasants could become agitated to such a point without valid cause. Indeed, it is easy for the undiscerning and uncritical observer, even 40 years or so after the Surigao uprisings and the Tayug incident to blame them on fanaticism, ignorance or Red agitation. This is not the intention here: the simplicity of the peasants' orientation certainly do not bear sole responsibility for the Colorum uprisings. Although we must acknowledge the role played by these factors, they would have remained inoperative but for more valid reason that would induce the peasants to violence. A decent familiarity with Philippine history will show that peasant uprisings, whether small or large-scale, were staged in response to intolerable conditions of land tenure, excessive taxation, usurious money lending and general misery in the rural areas. Thus in the 1930's peasant rebellions were endemic as they were during the Spanish regime when conditions were equally intolerable. The Colorum uprisings were but the beginning.

It was in realization of the conditions obtaining among the masses that Quezon redeemed an earlier *faux pas* by issuing a statement recognizing the plight of the peasants and the urban workers (*obreros de la ciudad*). For the first time, he enunciated the idea of social justice: *La base duradera del orden es la justicia social, no la fuerza del Gobierno*.⁶⁷ When he ran for the presidency in 1934, his program of social justice no doubt earned many votes from the masses. It was a program he never had the chance to implement. The Sakdals rose even before an efficient machinery to implement social justice was discovered.

⁶⁵ Labor Organizations and Mutual Benefit Societies in Manila, 1931, in *Quezon Papers*, Bureau of Public Libraries.

⁶⁶ Crisanto Evangelista to Manuel L. Quezon, December 14, 1931, in *Quezon Papers*, Bureau of Public Libraries.

⁶⁷ Manuel L. Quezon, "El Gobierno es fuerte y el pueblo Filipino pacifico," December 1931, in *Quezon Papers*, Bureau of Public Libraries.

In conclusion, the Colorum uprisings, particularly the Tayug affair, suggest a few significant generalizations. The Colorum movement, being politically unsophisticated, failed to sensitize the people to a new spectrum of possible identities and purposes. Moreover, as borne out by the general apathy of the government and the condemnation it received from the public officials, the uprisings did not have any significant political effects, especially in the form of much-expected socio-economic reform. That there is a direct relationship between the Colorum movement and the later Sakdal, Tangulan and other peasant movements must be acknowledged. The emergence of a politically sophisticated Sakdal Party may well owe its establishment to a recognition of the simplicity, defects and relevance of the Colorum movement.