

## **Spanish Presence in the Philippines**

Filipino opposition to Spain's control of the Philippines grew steadily from the eighteenth century onwards. Following the loss of its Latin American territories in the early 1800s, Spain's administrative presence became increasingly intrusive and onerous for Filipinos. Forms of opposition varied however, and whilst emerging groups of middle class Filipinos demanded legal and economic reforms, sporadic peasant protests also continued. Initially, leading opponents to Spanish rule rarely supported independence, but by the late nineteenth century it had become clear that Spain was no longer able to contain the recurrent violence and demands for change.

The vulnerability of Spanish control had been demonstrated in September 1762, when a hostile British naval squadron appeared in Manila Bay with over a thousand troops onboard. Defending troops from Spain (and the viceroyalty of New Spain) were unprepared and surrendered, having been unaware of Spain's involvement in the Seven Years War. The British withdrew in 1764, but sporadic Filipino resistance to Spanish rule continued in Ilocos, Pangasinan and Bohol. Filipino grievances in these areas ranged widely from the imposition of the tribute to resentment at friars and attempts at religious control.

The British occupation had revealed the need for better revenues to fund the Philippines' defence. Spain's economic interests had been largely focused on Manila, which served as an entrepôt for luxury Asian goods. In accordance with Spain's mercantilist policies, the goods were sent annually by galleon from Manila to Acapulco in New Spain. In return, the Viceroyalty of New Spain sent galleons laden with silver to Manila each year to sustain the Philippine treasury. Following the occupation, however, local exports were steadily increased to improve the isolated colony's capacity for defence. Tobacco was exported successfully, along with sugar, indigo and hemp. Accompanied by increasing numbers of Chinese merchants, this fuelled an expanding cash economy and emergent Filipino middle class.

Mexican independence in 1821 signalled a new period of economic and administrative change in the Philippines, as administrators sought to compensate for the loss of New Spain's support. From the 1840s, policies encouraged the construction of new roads, canals and harbours to improve the islands' commercial potential and economic viability. Concerned by the Mexican precedent, Spanish administrators attempted to exclude *criollos* from positions of authority. New regulations excluded them from military office, prompting Andres Novales' mutiny in 1823. The same year, Luis Rodríguez Varela and José Ortega were among a number of intellectuals exiled to Spain for pamphlets and novels that protested increased discrimination. Varela's pamphlets urged loyalty to the king, but demanded that *criollos* be given the same rights as Iberian Spaniards.

Demands for reforms to education and the law became increasingly widespread amongst both *criollos* and Filipinos. From 1863, a series of liberal reforms sought to emulate the wave of liberalism then current in Spain. The rise of Spanish liberalism encouraged a belief that similar changes were possible in the Philippines. New policies sought to improve standards in education and to correct the Church's progressive encroachment of state prerogatives. Despite rising expectations, it became clear that conservative administrators and clergymen would frustrate any sustained effort at liberal reform.

The privileged and influential position of Spanish friars had become increasingly contentious during the nineteenth century. Indigenous hostility to Spanish clergy was longstanding, as religious orders had appropriated indigenous lands. Filipinos increasingly lived in municipalities however, where friars' influence on daily life was wide-ranging, and extended from schools to public order.

Moreover, friars vigorously defended their autonomy from local bishops' supervision. Middle class Filipinos were particularly concerned by friars' reactionary sentiments and attempts to deny Filipinos the education necessary for empowerment and change. Apolinario de la Cruz had inspired the Confradia Revolt in 1841, protesting the effects of the Spaniards' religious control. Yet, colonial administrators generally supported the friars, fearful that an empowered indigenous priesthood

might lead further revolts. One attempt to allocate additional parishes to Spanish friars prompted Father Pedro Peláez to galvanize local clergy's resistance in 1861. Despite his failure, Filipino clergy continued to play a central role in maintaining opposition to Spaniards, and tempered the more anti-clerical elements of growing dissent.

The period of liberal reforms and public debate ended in 1872, with the repression that followed the Cavite Mutiny. Initially led by *criollo* officers at the Cavite naval base in January 1872, a wage dispute escalated as Filipino workers and soldiers hoped other garrisons would join their abortive mutiny. Fearful of further rebellions, Spanish authorities instigated a widespread repression and a number of exemplary executions. Instead of pacification, the Spanish response unified Filipino and *criollo* anger at racial prejudice and social injustice. Public opinion was enraged by the decision to execute three prominent liberal Filipino priests; José Burgos, Mariano Gómez and Jacinto Zamora. In an effort to avoid the repression and to access better education, increasing numbers of wealthy Filipinos sent their children to be educated in Europe. From Europe's major cities, men such as José Rizal instigated the literary movement known as the Propaganda Movement, and demanded further legal and administrative reform.

By the early 1890s it was increasingly obvious that Spain would not instigate the reforms many Filipinos demanded. In response, the Katipunan secret society was founded in 1892 in order to expel the Spanish. By 1895 the Katipunan was led by Andres Bonifacio, and was organized according to a network of secretive local chapters. As an organization it urged Filipinos to cooperate and support one another, emphasizing a single united nation. In 1896, and alarmed at its growth, the Spanish governor ordered troops to quash the Katipunan. In response, and after extensive debate, Katipunan members controversially resolved to begin the long-planned armed revolution. The so-called 'Cry of Balintawak' that followed has subsequently been taken to mark the beginning of the violent revolution to oust the Spanish from the Philippines.

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### Sidebar

The Propaganda Movement (1880-1895) exercised a formative influence on the emerging expression of Filipino nationalism. The Movement aimed to secure Filipinos and *criollos* the same rights that Spaniards possessed in the peninsular, such as representation in parliament. Yet, the Propagandists instead fuelled the rise of a self-conscious Philippine identity. From cities throughout Europe, they circumvented censorship and engaged in literary publications that ranged from books to pamphlets and newspaper articles.

The most famous Propagandist, José Rizal, occupies a seminal position in Philippine nationalism. Rizal demanded administrative and religious reforms, which would strengthen the Philippines' relationship with Spain. His novels, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, extolled the history and characteristics of the Philippine nation, and carefully distanced it from the corrupt habits of Spanish friars. He also liaised with European intellectuals, such as his close friend Ferdinand Blumentritt, and wrote numerous articles for the Propagandists' newspaper *La Solidaridad*.

Spanish authorities within the Philippines considered Rizal's works highly seditious, and he was obliged to live in Europe and Hong Kong for much of his life. Although literacy rates amongst the Philippine population were generally low, Rizal rapidly acquired a heroic status that was used by others in the Katipunan to justify overt military resistance to Spanish rule. Aware of his vulnerability

after his return to the Philippines in 1892, Rizal sought to serve in the Spanish army in Cuba. He was recalled however, and executed for fomenting insurrection in December 1896.