

HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING⁽¹⁾

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The machinery that Governor Tomas Confesor organized for the administration of the government and its various entities was more or less uniform through all of Panay and Romblon. There were at least seven departments which carried out the functions of supervision and control pertaining each of them. There were:

- The Department of Municipal and Provincial Government
- The Emergency Provincial Guards
- The Health Service
- The Food Administration Office and Relief
- The Board of Information
- The Finance Office
- The Administration of Justice
- The Special Services (Intelligence and Security)

MUNICIPAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The administration of municipal and provincial governments had to be done by remote control, it being physically impossible to undertake direct supervision of government activities because of lack of travel facilities and because also of the fact that the enemy, having occupied most of the important centers of population in the province, made it extremely dangerous for anyone to be seen around these places. This government by remote control consisted in the division of the provinces in Panay and Romblon into administrative districts with a deputy governor as chief executive for each district. Iloilo had ten such district, Capiz and Antique three each, and Romblon

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HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY
AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING

CONFESOR

one. The municipalities in a district retained their respective officials if they had not surrendered; otherwise, new ones were appointed. Wherever it was necessary to do so, Special Deputy Governors and Special Deputy Mayors were appointed or designated. In several cases, the number of municipal officials and employees was increased in consonance with the exigencies of the situation. For the purpose of keeping close supervision of government activities in the far flung administrative districts throughout Panay and Romblon, Supervising Deputy Governors were appointed for each province. Quick contact between the central office in Bocare and subordinate units in the field was made possible by a messenger centers scattered all over strategic points throughout Panay.

All municipal governments kept on functioning, in spite of tremendous difficulties occasioned by war conditions. Except for the City of Iloilo, which did not have a free government in the early days of the war, even municipalities garrisoned by the enemy kept its governmental machinery intact and functioning. As early as 1944, however, the free government of Panay and Romblon succeeded in organizing an underground civil government within the City of Iloilo, with Tomas Confesor administering it as Acting City Mayor, by remote control through a number of Deputy Mayors who resided in the City proper or in its suburbs.

THE EMERGENCY PROVINCIAL GUARDS

The Emergency Provincial Guards a semi-military organization, was the strong arm of the Free Government of Panay and Romblon. Generally, each administrative district was limited to only one company (130-136 strong) of Emergency Provincial Guards under the Deputy Governor holding the rank of Captain; but in some special cases, several companies were organized in a district under different commanding officers with the Deputy Governor retaining over-all supervision and control in matters of administration. At first, these companies were loosely organ-

ized and each one considered itself more or less autonomous and independent, a state of things which could not be helped at the time because of difficulties arising from lack of adequate transportation and communication facilities. Later, the organization was centralized with Governor Tomas Confesor exercising more or less direct supervision through an Inspector General appointed by, and personally responsible to, him.

HEALTH AND SANITATION

With but a few changes, the health service in Panay and Romblon was organized along pre-war lines. There was a District Health Officer for every province, a President of the Sanitary Division for groups of municipalities, and a sanitary inspector for each municipality. Due to abnormal conditions, the need for the intensification of the campaign for sanitation and health was met by the appointment of additional health personnel, such as the First Aiders, in every municipality where it was advisable to do so. Hospitals, hastily improvised and mobile in character, were established in a number of places throughout Panay. Medicine and medical equipments were smuggled in from Iloilo City and Manila by special agents. Civilian Emergency Refuge centers were established under doctors and nurses.

FOOD PRODUCTION AND RELIEF

“Direct civilians to plant food crops.” Thus President Manuel L. Quezon ordered Governor Tomas Confesor, in a radiogram the former sent from Washington D.C., on February 24, 1944. But a stronger order that—the threat of food shortage and famine that issue from war—led the government of Panay and Romblon to step-up its campaign for food production, which was begun even before the enemy landed in Iloilo on April 16, 1942. Teachers and other national employees and officials, who reported for duty in response to Governor Tomas Confesor’s order, were used in the campaign. Barrio tenientes gave unstinted help in this respect. No effort was spared to made whatever land there was that was safe enough from enemy

HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY
AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING

CONFESOR

penetration to cultivate, to yield food for the loyal inhabitants of the provinces of Panay and Romblon. The planting of short season crops as well as the raising of poultry and swine was encourage. The indiscriminate slaughter of large cattle was prohibited, so as to conserve work animals for farm use. At the beginning, the campaign for food production was not centralized, every mayor or deputy governor having been allowed a free hand in adapting procedures he felt best suited to existing conditions. But in 1944, a central office was created by executive order, from which rules and regulations were issued to synchronize food production policy or policies laid down by Governor Tomas Confesor as Food Administrator.

In this connection, Governor Tomas Confesor launched in 1943 an ambitious program of food production in which he put into execution his plan to place 150,000 hectares of land in Panay under cultivation (100,000 hectares for rice and 50,000 for corn). For this purpose, he set aside an appropriation of ₱1,000,000.00 to be distributed as crop loan to farmers at the rate of ₱10.00 per cavan and also to pay for the operation of merchandizing centers organized in the hope of stabilizing prices. This program was undertaken in view of "the necessity (to quote President Quezon) for maintaining agricultural production at any rate to insure adequate food for the people and sustenance for the military forces."

INFORMATION AND PROPAGANDA

The Board of Information Office was created by Executive Order sometime during the early part of 1944 for the purpose of gathering information of all sorts, such as enemy movements, progress of the war on all fronts, health conditions, food production, civilian morale, etc. Before this, however, instructions had been issued for carrying out propaganda work in every municipality where ten teachers were picked to make (20) copies, in handwriting, or by any means, of all propaganda materials received by them, and to distribute them along key elements in the locality. These teachers were to conduct oral propa-

ganda work—whispering campaigns, in other words,—aimed at driving the following points in the minds of the people.

- (1) The civil government did not surrender and would not capitulate to the Japs, the head thereof having transferred to Washington, the capital of the United States. "No Surrender" was our unrelenting battle-cry.
- (2) The authority of the civil government remains intact and will continue to serve the public interests.
- (3) The Japanese way, being totalitarian, is not suited to the temperament of our people. It is destructive of our time-honored institutions and national self-respect.
- (4) The armed forces have been fully reorganized to cope with the situation.
- (5) It is the sacred duty of every Filipino to side with America in this fight for the democratic way of life whose blessings he has enjoyed during the last forty years.
- (6) Our victory is as sure as day that follows night.
- (7) Each and everyone of us must gladly share the sufferings cause by war.
- (8) The present sufferings and sacrifices of the people will be amply repaid in the end in terms of human happiness. It is treason for anyone to think, believe and act or do otherwise.
- (9) It is the right of the civil government and the armed forces to demand loyalty and patriotism from everyone.
- (10) The civil government and the armed forces must be morally and materially supported.
- (11) The people must valiantly meet the test of the hour, with hearts purified with faith, with the will to win and to survive.
- (12) Our Allies, the Americans, are certain to come back.

Radio receivers installed in the mountains and in places in the lowlands safe from enemy observation fur-

HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY
AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING

CONFESOR

nished news from foreign fields while underground news-sheet were printed and distributed everywhere. The most famous of the resistance newsheets that were put into circulation were the "Ang Tigbatas", "The Liberator" and "The Mt. Baloy Watchman".

FINANCE

Perhaps one of the most difficult problems that confronted the Civil Government was that of financing itself and its varied activities. The first necessary step was to reorganize the fiscal branch of the government, which also suffered disintegration due to enemy invasion. A finance and treasury division was created to take care of the immediate financial needs of the Central Government in Bocare. Later, the office of the provincial treasurer for each province was organized and, finally, the office of the chief budget officer was established for all of Panay and Romblon.

While one of the objectives of Governor Tomas Confesor in his administration was "to continue the collection of taxes", the situation was so difficult that it was almost impossible to raise funds in that manner for the purpose or maintaining the Government. What little could be collected in the form of slaughter fees, market fees in certain places, and registration fees, was not enough even for the purchase of office stationery. In municipalities where there were no Japanese garrisons, it was likewise difficult to collect taxes because of the general evacuation of the people from such municipalities to unknown hide-outs. It was impossible to collect taxes in the occupied areas, for to do so would have endangered the existence of the municipal governments. In certain barrios where the civil government was in regular operation, taxes were collected with a meager measure of success. But what was collected was a mere drop in the bucket in comparison with what was collected in these municipalities during peace time.

But appropriations were needed to pay for the immediate needs of administration. Something had to be done

for the officials who have never been paid since the Japanese landed in Panay on April 16, 1942.

The printing of Emergency Circulating Notes was resorted to as a desperate measure to meet the fiscal needs of the organization. But a misunderstanding with Colonel Peralta soon arose over this matter resulting in a deterioration of the relations between him and Governor Tomas Confesor, a state of things which had to be regretted because it did not in any salutatory manner advance the interests of either party, or that of the people for that matter, in so far as this specific problem was concerned. It should be stated here in passing, that of the estimated amount of ₱43,511,033.00 that had being printed in emergency circulating notes after Colonel Peralta had usurped fiscal powers from Governor Confesor, only ₱1,792,500.00 was disposed of in favor of the Free Government of Panay and Romblon.

The Administration of Justice

One of the immediate results of the Japanese invasion of Panay was the complete breakdown of the administration of justice. The situation was aggravated by the application of martial law which Colonel Peralta proclaimed soon after the surrender of the USAFFE Forces on Panay on May 7, 1942. When conditions had eased down a little bit, justices of the peace were appointed in municipalities free from enemy control. The appointment of a justice of the peace in every municipality in the Province of Iloilo was authorized by Governor Tomas Confesor in an Executive Order dated November 2, 1942. Pre-war Justices of the Peace who did not surrender were, as a matter of policy retained.

Completely new judges were appointed for the Court of First Instance towards May of 1943, all the pre-war incumbents having either surrendered to the enemy or refuse to come from their hiding places and served as such. The new appointees to the Court of First Instance were Judges Florencio Vega, Juan C. Teruel, Miguel Salvani and Ceferino de los Santos and they had jurisdiction as Acting

HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY
AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING

CONFESOR

Judges for the Court of First Instance of the 7th Judicial District. All these appointments were recommended by Governor Tomas Confesor and approved by President Quezon. Attorney Pedro R. Davila was appointed Judge of the Court of First Instance when Judge Teruel surrendered to the Japanese sometime in the latter part of 1943.

A new office, that of the District Attorney, was created so that the work of the Provincial Fiscals throughout all of Panay and Romblon may be coordinated and synchronized for the purpose of securing the speedy trials of those who have the misfortune of being brought before the bar of justice.

SPECIAL SERVICES

The most exciting job in the administration of civil affairs in Panay and Romblon, fell to Special Service Unit. This is a department of administration which had charged of intelligence and security. This unit operated directly and exclusively under Governor Tomas Confesor and his brother Patricio, and its operators are marked "Top Secret." Many members of this Unit were sent on specific missions inside enemy territory in Panay. Five were sent to Manila and Baguio. Members of the unit operated in Albay, Mindanao, Leyte and elsewhere in the Philippines. Collecting dynamites, smuggling medicine, blowing up bridges, sniping spies, kidnapping puppets, helping prisoners to escape, conducting espionage work, providing security for headquarters of public officials, etc.—these were the work of the Special Services Unit.

So much for the mechanics of administration and the functions of government that had to do with the successful operation of the Free Government of Panay and Romblon. What follows next is an account of the activities and accomplishments of the said government for the furtherance of the Resistance Movement under the leadership of Governor Tomas Confesor. Four of some of the outstanding achievements of the Free Government of Panay and Romblon are herein submitted for purposes of record.

1. The eradication of banditry and other forms of lawlessness.
2. War against puppets and fifth columnists.
3. Food Production to the extent that stave off the threat of famine and starvation attendant upon the occurrence of war.
4. The maintenance of civilian morale and as a consequent thereto, the preservation of the people's loyalty to the cause of democracy so that their faith remained unshaken in the ultimate victory of the Allied Nation and the eventual liberation of this country from Japanese bondage.

THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE AND ORDER

In June, 1942—immediately after the surrender of the USAFFE banditry rose to such an alarming pass the civilians were more afraid of them than of the Japanese themselves. Some Filipinos had taken advantage of the times and started plundering in places where there were not Japanese garrisons and in evacuation areas where there was no police force. They organized themselves into groups and harrassed the civilians who were living in the hills and barrios. In one administrative district alone eighteen (18) cases of robbery were reported by the Deputy Governor, ranging from petty larceny to robbery with murder. Work animals were stolen in broad daylight. Rice, corn, clothes, tobacco, money, jewelry, fountain pens—anything the notorious bandits could lay their hands on—were seized from civilian evacuees who were harmed bodily if they protested or bayoneted to death if they refused to yield their property. By June and July of 1942 banditry and other forms of lawless reached their peaks and the cold-blooded murder of Judge Vicente Mapa of Iloilo City and Mr. & Mrs. Sabas Gustilo, well known proprietor of Zaraga, by the bandits.

Acting upon orders of Governor Tomas Confesor, the Emergency Provincial Guards took the field against the bandits, and in two months of ceaseless operation carried on their task with great success. The band under one Jacinto Ceballos, cracked up on July 16, 1942, when this most

notorious of all bandits fell into the net laid for him by the Emergency Provincial Guards under Deputy Governor Aportadero and was killed.

Another band of bandits operating in the hills, composed of more than twenty armed men was broken up at about the same time. Other groups of lawless elements scattered all around the island of Panay were rounded up and captured. By September of 1942, the campaign against banditry and lawlessness was relaxed to a more mapping up operations against isolated cases of petty thefts and hold-ups.

WAR AGAINST PUPPETS

Upon the arrival of the Japanese in Panay, one of their first measures of "pacification" so called, was the establishment of a puppet government. Mention has already been made of the fact that almost immediately after the occupation of Manila, the Japanese created the Executive Commission, which has ostensibly intended to help them re-establish peace and order. It is not hard to explain why the Japanese had to do this, if one takes into account the acts of Japan in Korea, Formosa and Manchuria. With the help of "recognized leaders" and "Constituted authorities", it would be much easier for the Japanese to foster their designs than without such puppets. Anyone can see that the former technique apparently would give the acts of the enemy legal sanction, especially in cases where he wanted to have something done, which would otherwise be illegal without the collaboration of some Filipinos who had at least some amount of influence with the people. Under the guise of cooperation with the "constituted" representatives of the people, the enemy would conceal his designs. Of course, it is an accepted fact that in war that a military occupant can take almost anything or do almost anything in the occupied areas and justify himself on the ground of "military necessity"; but such unwarranted procedure on the part of the Japanese would inevitably have resulted in the effectuation of a boomerang that would have

proved disastrous to them in the end. The Japanese realized this, and so did others invading hosts in history. And so it was that the enemy in Panay tried his best to establish a puppet government.

In Capiz, the Japanese appointed Gabriel T. Hernandez as puppet governor for the province; in Antique, they put up Tobias Fornier as puppet governor; and for Iloilo City they selected Vicente Ybiernas as their puppet mayor.

It is interesting to note now how puppet municipal government were generally established in the different towns during the early days of the Japanese occupation. In Barotac Nuevo, for instance, the puppet municipal government was established as early as the first week of June, 1942. A certain Japanese resident in the municipality, whose name was Miyosi Karaoka, in his capacity as civil commissioner charged with the mission of establishing puppet municipal governments, approached and urged Jose Bretaña, an old but influential man in the town to become puppet mayor. In Pototan, Tomas Ferraris was chosen by the Japanese as puppet mayor, both because of his ability to speak Niponggo and because of his influence in that town. He was installed in office after a rather pompous ceremony, in the plaza, on June 28, 1942. Cornelio Quidato, pre-war municipal mayor of Santa Barbara, was caught very early one morning in his hide-out near the barrio Omambong, Sta. Barbara and was later persuaded to become puppet mayor of that municipality. Carlos Mondejar was appointed puppet mayor of Ma-asin on July 4, 1942. Sometime in July of the same year Domingo Trompeta was appointed mayor of San Miguel. At about the same time, Jose Capalla, a political enemy of the incumbent mayor of Leon, was picked as puppet mayor of that municipality. In September of 1942, Buenaventura Aguilar was installed as puppet mayor of Passi.

At first, Governor Confesor and the deputy governors, did not launch a relentless campaign against the puppet officials, who were, for a time, just allowed to perform their duties as such inside the municipalities, as long as they did no harm.

HOW THE FREE GOVERNMENT OF PANAY
CONFESOR AND ROMBLON CAME INTO BEING

But many of the puppets did not behave properly, and this the Governor could not tolerate. In the first place, they held public meetings in the town plazas or markets, and with all the oratorical eloquence at their command, attacked Governor Confesor and the Civil Government, including all those who were not in collaboration with the Japanese.

Not only did the puppet mayors or their minions act as mouthpiece of the Japanese in the latter's program of propaganda, but many of them also guided the enemy to the hideouts of the civil officials or outposts of the army. In one instance, a certain puppet official guided the Japanese to the hideout of a deputy governor but finding out that this official and his family had previously moved out, thanks to the due warning given him by his operatives, the Japanese failed in their mission.

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Letter of Tomas Confesor to his son:

"June 23, 1943

"To my son, Roberto:

"Today, you leave to join the army. Please bear in mind the following:

"Be loyal and respectful to your commanding officers.

"Be good, honest, and true.

"Be brave and courageous.

"Be active and alert.

"Don't be afraid to tackle hard and difficult jobs.

"Don't commit any immoral act.

"Always seek *divine* guidance in whatever you do.

"May God bless you always.

Signed TM"

This was written in Confesor's own handwriting on a memo pad, "From the desk of Tomas Confesor." The word *divine* was underlined.

— Editor