

# The Presidency of Jose P. Laurel: His Policies for Survival during the Japanese Occupation

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## ABSTRACT

Governments ensure the welfare of the people, and this was the concern of Jose P. Laurel when he was chosen by the Japanese to lead the Second Philippine Republic. As president, Laurel was able to protect a number of persons from captivity, execution, and military conscription. He ordered the planting of food crops in available lands and distributed food among the hungry masses. Though branded as a "collaborator," his actions were vindicated when the people's trust in him manifested through the 1949 senatorial elections, where he gained the highest number of votes. This paper delves into how Laurel steered the Second Philippine Republic to promote the interest of the Filipinos through his policies. An examination of primary and secondary documents, in light of the Stewardship Theory, was made to assess Laurel's actions in securing the welfare of the people. Thus, a provided analysis would present a meaningful narrative supplying the historical methodology that links the situation of the country, the measures employed by Laurel, and the consequences of these responses.

**Keywords:** *Jose P. Laurel, Second Philippine Republic, Japanese Occupation, Executive Stewardship Theory of Presidency*

## INTRODUCTION

enerally, governments safeguard the welfare of the state and assure its survival, particularly in times of crisis—one that was exemplified by President Jose P. Laurel. These situations test the capacity of a leader in directing the state towards prosperity and progress, especially in the case of Laurel, who was caught between the flames of war and the ferocity of enemy occupation. The Japanese Military Occupation of the Philippines from 1941 to 1945 is an example of a time of crisis for the Filipinos

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and was one of the most perilous times in their history. The citizens experienced firsthand what it was like to have their country transformed into a battlefield between two industrial and military powers—an experience starkly different from their previous colonizers. Thus, to be the president of the Philippines during this time meant facing an extraordinary predicament in order to ensure the nation's survival. A political scenario that Laurel faced head-on as the President of the Second Republic, a topic that shall be the main focus of this paper.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Japanese forces were at the doorsteps of the Philippines as their advance toward Manila was unstoppable, and its capture was inevitable. General Douglas MacArthur, Commander of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East or USAFFE, evacuated Manila and proclaimed it an open city to save it from destruction. He then fortified Bataan and Corregidor to make it his last line of defense against the Japanese invaders. Now, with the increasing risk of capture, General MacArthur instructed Manuel L. Quezon to leave for Corregidor. Reluctant at first, Quezon eventually heeded the General's advice and left for Corregidor along with some of his cabinet members. Before departing on December 24, 1941, Quezon instructed those who remained to minimize civilian casualties and trust the United States.<sup>2</sup> He initially asked Laurel to go with him, but later changed his mind and decided that Laurel should stay in Manila and deal with the Japanese.<sup>3</sup>

After the capture of Manila, the Japanese gathered all remaining officials to facilitate the restoration of peace and order in the country. After a series of meetings, the officials established the Executive Commission in response to the Japanese' demands, which the latter approved. However, the Commission had little to no leeway in actualizing its measures due to the constraints of the ridiculous number of Japanese "advisors" who were, in truth, spies during the Commission's meetings.<sup>4</sup>

As early as January 21, 1942, Japanese Premier Tojo Hideki started hinting on the grant of independence to the Filipinos as long as there are evident signs

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<sup>2</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Burden of Proof* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1984), 1, 10-13.

<sup>3</sup> Jose P. Laurel, *War Memoirs* (Manila: Jose P. Laurel Memorial Foundation, 1962), 54.

<sup>4</sup> Agoncillo, *The Burden of Proof*, 20-34.

of cooperation.<sup>5</sup> However, the grant of independence, regardless of the Filipinos' level of cooperation, would be bestowed. Thus, Laurel and other officials thought that they could better fulfill Quezon's orders by accepting Japan's offer of independence and establish a Republic.

## LAUREL'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Laurel expressed his political philosophy in several works such as the 1943 Constitution, his Inaugural Speeches, and the Forces that Make a Nation Great. Here, he espoused that the Executive branch should be given a broader range of powers to better work for the sake of the people, especially during times of war and emergency. However, granting more authority to this branch meant running a higher risk of exploitation and the abuse of power. Therefore, in order to avoid corruption, Laurel argued that the Executive should exemplify and practice the essential virtues of leadership.<sup>6</sup>

This political philosophy is similar to the Executive Stewardship theory of the Presidency. The theory posits that the government, particularly the executive, is the steward of the state. The term "steward" denotes that an official is a caretaker—serving and carrying out the instructions a master or senior officer, which is generally to look after the welfare of the general populace.<sup>7</sup>

The Executive, being the steward, is therefore responsible for directing the nation towards its goal of cultivating and securing public safety and welfare, ensuring equitable growth among the citizenry. However, in order to achieve this feat, a broad range of powers should be granted upon the authority for him to function in practices and activities that were formerly out of governmental affairs.<sup>8</sup> This setup is valid due to the nature of the steward's capacity in determining the best means of fulfilling given duties and instructions. With this, the steward is therefore held accountable to his master for whatever decisions he takes in following the latter's orders.

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<sup>5</sup> Agoncillo, *The Burden of Proof*, 42.

<sup>6</sup> Remigio E. Agpalo, *Jose P. Laurel: National Leader and Political Philosopher* (Manila: Jose P. Laurel Memorial Corporation, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Randall L. Robinson, *The Stewardship Theory Of The Presidency: Theodore Roosevelt's Political Theory Of Republican Progressive Statesmanship And The Foundation Of The Modern Presidency*. Doctoral Dissertation, The Claremont Graduate School, 1997, retrieved January 18, 2013, from <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA324102>, 38

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, *The Stewardship*, 6-7.

It was only in the formation of the Second Republic was the task of being the "steward" of the people was officially conferred on Laurel by the Japanese. Likewise, one must recall that President Manuel L. Quezon directed Laurel to take care of national concerns and deal with the Japanese. For Quezon, Laurel was a nationalist who could ensure the survival of the Republic. With the welfare of the population in mind, Laurel would now set the direction of the newly founded Republic and perform his duties as the Chief Executive of the country.

## THE 1943 CONSTITUTION

As the president of the Preparatory Commission for Philippine Independence, Laurel explained that the provisions of the Constitution were based on what was happening in the country. From humiliation acts such as being slapped, tied to posts, and beating to the inhumane acts of torture, beheading, and burning people alive without sensitivity to sex or age, the people were threatened by the Japanese forces.<sup>9</sup> Further, concerning food production, the Japanese controlled the farmlands that produced the staple food of the country. According to Claro M. Recto:

The production of rice, which constituted the very life-blood of the nation, was drastically curtailed to give way to the production of cotton. What rice-producing regions were spared were allotted in significant part to the exclusive use of the Japanese forces. Similarly, sugar plantations were converted into cotton fields, and what little sugar produce was allowed was manufactured into alcohol to supplement the dwindling fuel supply for Japanese cars, tanks, and planes.<sup>10</sup>

The Constitution was structured in such a way as to prioritize the welfare of the people above all other matters. Its guiding principle was derived from Andres Bonifacio's words, emphasizing the welfare of the people as the prime

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<sup>9</sup> Claro M. Recto, Letter to General Wachi in Mauro Garcia, *Documents on the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines*, (Manila: The Philippine Historical Association, 1965), 109-124.

<sup>10</sup> Claro M. Recto, *Three Years of Enemy Occupation: The issue of political collaboration in the Philippines*, (Manila: People's Publishers, 1946), 11.

purpose of all governments.<sup>11</sup> In order to actualize this principle, the Constitution provided for a government whose powers were concentrated on the Executive. Article III, Section 13 of the 1943 Constitution provided that the President may be authorized by the National Assembly to promulgate rules to accomplish a declared national policy in times of national emergencies.<sup>12</sup> The realization of this section happened on February 2, 1944, when the National Assembly approved the Act authorizing the President to promulgate rules and regulations to safeguard the safety, health, and tranquility of the inhabitants of the Philippines in this state of emergency or the Emergency Powers Bill. Laurel then approved the bill on the 23rd of the same month.<sup>13</sup> Section 14 also authorized the President to enact rules and ordinances that shall have the same effect as that of statutory laws on occasions of urgent necessity when the National Assembly was not in session.<sup>14</sup> With the enactment of these laws, the President could then officially make statutes to promote the welfare of the people without the tedious process of going through the National Assembly, as the steward of the people should be doing.

Further, Article II, Section 10 stated that the President has the authority to appoint the provincial governors, city and municipal mayors whose appointments were not provided by law and who were also members of the National Assembly by virtue of Article III, Section 2.<sup>15</sup> With this provision, not only could the President swiftly replace inefficient officials, but he could also virtually influence the law-making body of the government. Because of the nature of the situation, then, according to Laurel, a quasi-dictatorial Chief Executive was needed to swiftly and decisively address the national crisis engulfing the country.<sup>16</sup>

The Constitution had no provisions for universal suffrage because of the impossibility and impracticality of popular elections. Instead, the election of the President was to be conducted by the members of the National Assembly. Lastly, the Constitution had a transitory nature. It was only designed to cope

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<sup>11</sup> Jose P. Laurel, "Together We Shall Work," in *His Excellency Jose P. Laurel President of the Second Philippine Republic: Speeches, Messages & Statements October 14, 1943, to December 19, 1944*, (Manila: Lyceum of the Philippines, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Philippine Constitution of 1943, art. III, sec. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Rose L. Avancena, *Days of Courage: The Legacy of Dr. Jose P. Laurel*, (Philippines, 1980), 124.

<sup>14</sup> Philippine Constitution of 1943, art. III, sec. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Philippine Constitution of 1943, art. II, sec. 10 & art. III, sec. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Avancena, *Days of Courage*, 98.

with the demands of the situation ending with the normalization of conditions in the country.<sup>17</sup>

## THE GOALS OF THE REPUBLIC

Laurel's inaugural address revealed how he saw the situation of the Philippines. He identified in his speech the major problems that engulfed the country and the goals that he wanted to achieve for the Philippines. He first pointed out the need to maintain peace and order in the country. He believed that internal security needed to be established first in order for the people to be able to work for their daily needs and, ultimately, for the survival of the state. Laurel then emphasized the scarcity of food supply. He mentioned that whatever was the cause of the shortage, hard work would be needed in the solution—highlighting in the attainment of ample food supply. In line with self-sufficiency was the need for the improvement of the living conditions of the population, particularly the poor, and the narrowing of the gap among the various classes in society. Moreover, the aspirations of the Republic may be carried over by the next generation, and Laurel saw the need to arouse the moral consciousness of the people through the Constitution's emphasis on the duties of the citizen and the development of the national character through the school, the home, and the Church.<sup>18</sup>

Laurel's inaugural address contained his vision of a republic that was suited for the Filipinos, one that would transcend the Japanese occupation and would still be ideal for the Philippines today. Before it looked to the future, it had to deal with the immediate problems of its time, namely, the securing of peace and order in the country and the procuring of basic necessities for the people. These were the conditions that the Republic had to face, and working as a government official during that time was not a sought-after vocation, but someone had to do it.

## LAUREL'S POLICIES

One of the first policies of Laurel right after the inauguration of the Republic was to grant amnesty to Filipinos who had committed political crimes and offenses. Through Proclamation No. 2, guerillas and those guilty of sedition and

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<sup>17</sup> Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Fateful Years, Vol. 1* (Quezon City: R. P. Garcia Publishing Company, 1965), 380-383.

<sup>18</sup> Laurel, "Together."

illicit association could have freely received amnesty with nothing but an oath in return. This amnesty could be availed within sixty days from the date of its promulgation, from November 25, 1943, up to January 25, 1944. For those in the Visayas, Mindanao, and Sulu areas, the amnesty period was to start on the date when the respective authorities received copies of the proclamation. The proclamation also included Filipinos who have already been captured and detained, which granted their freedom back.<sup>19</sup> In line with this proclamation was Administrative Order No. 3, which created an Amnesty Board, the purpose of which was to talk with guerilla units and encouraged them to avail of the amnesty program of the government. The members of the Board included Gen. Juan Cailles, Gen. Mateo Capinpin, and Gen. Jose de los Reyes, who acted as the chairman.<sup>20</sup> As the end of the Amnesty period approached, Laurel appealed to the people—both public officials and private citizens—to consolidate their efforts in making the campaign successful. Through Proclamation no. 11, Laurel called on the people to exert energetic efforts from January 19 to 25 to foster peace and order through the campaign. The Amnesty Week, however, was not observed in the Visayas, Mindanao, and Sulu areas due to the incoherence between the reception of the Amnesty program in the mentioned areas with the promulgation date in Luzon.<sup>21</sup> Since the reception of official order will take considerable time in the areas as mentioned earlier, it was emphasized in the statute that the Amnesty Week will not apply to those places in order to avoid further confusion in regards to the dates involved during the campaign.

Some 30,000 guerillas made use of the Amnesty Proclamation. Most, however, only used this proclamation to gather supplies and information for the guerilla movement. Nevertheless, they used Laurel's amnesty proclamation to further their goals.<sup>22</sup>

As early as the first quarter of 1944, the Allied Forces commenced their campaigns in the Pacific arena of the war. Despite the much-anticipated fulfillment of MacArthur's promise of return, the Filipinos were still at risk by the devastation of possible air raids by the Allies. Hence, in order to protect the Filipinos and prepare them for the possibility of bombings, Laurel enacted

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<sup>19</sup> Proclamation no. 2, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, October 1943.

<sup>20</sup> Administrative Order no. 3, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, October 1943.

<sup>21</sup> Proclamation no. 11, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, January 1944.

<sup>22</sup> Avancena, *Days of Courage*, 186

Executive Order No. 36, which created a Civilian Protection Service that drew plans and procedures to ensure the readiness of the people on occasions of air raids and their possible consequences, and to coordinate all activities related to such incidents.<sup>23</sup>

Even before the inauguration of the Republic, Laurel was already instructed by the Japanese to declare war against the U.S. and Britain. In their trip to Tokyo in September of 1943, he was asked by Premier Tojo himself to make the declaration. Laurel, however, declined to this demand.<sup>24</sup> By September 21, 1944, the USAFFE started its air raids on Manila. Laurel knew that further postponement of a declaration of war against the Allied Forces, which the Japanese had wanted since the birth of the Republic, would be a mistake. Thus, on September 22, 1944, Laurel issued Proclamation No. 30, Proclaiming the Existence of a State of War in the Philippines. This proclamation of Laurel was non-aggressive in the sense that it did not connote the Filipinos' waging of war against the Allies, but merely confirmed the fact that hostile conditions were present in the Philippines. Further, the proclamation had no provision for the conscription of Filipinos into the Japanese Army. All Laurel asked from the people was their loyalty and support to the government that they may secure the survival of the Philippines.<sup>25</sup>

Laurel expressed his stand against the conscription of Filipinos even before his Proclamation of a State of War. On September 13, 1944, he announced that the Republic would not allow the conscription of Filipinos into the Japanese army.<sup>26</sup> In a letter to General Yuzuru Iimura, the Chief of Staff of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Philippines, Laurel once again declared his stand against the conscription of the Filipinos. He stated:

Our greatest regret is that, with the war fast approaching its final stages and recently brought forcibly into our very midst, we cannot do more than what we have been doing. The Republic, still in its infancy, physically weak and spiritually dejected and torn, faced at every turn with inherent difficulties, is fully aware that its tangible contributions to the

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<sup>23</sup> Executive Order no. 36, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, February 1944.

<sup>24</sup> Agoncillo, *The Burden of Proof*, 55.

<sup>25</sup> Avancena, *Days of Courage*, 141-142.

<sup>26</sup> Avancena, *Days of Courage*, 138.

actual prosecution of the war are much smaller than could be wished. In manpower, the Philippines is at present almost near the point of exhaustion.

The flower of Filipino manhood was, to our bitter disappointment, irretrievably and unmercifully sacrificed in Bataan and Corregidor; a great portion of what remained died of illness; the few that survived are now either in asylums or charitable institutions, maimed and helpless, or still suffering from the ailments contracted on the battlefields.

The Filipino youth that we have been able to salvage amidst the debris of war and destruction is now the only remaining asset of this government and these men, we are proud to report, are actually engaged in the two vital functions of the Republic, namely, the maintenance of domestic peace and order and the production of food and other prime necessities of life.

Under the circumstance, the Republic has but one course to pursue, and that is, to render every aid and assistance to the Imperial Japanese Government, short of conscription of Filipino manhood for active military service, to the end that the present war of liberation may end in glorious victory for Japan and the people of Greater East Asia.<sup>27</sup>

On September 26, 1944, Laurel again reemphasized his stand through a national broadcast. After explaining the nature of the State of War Proclamation, he stressed his continued resolve that no Filipino shall be enlisted to the Japanese Army. Laurel stated:

About a week ago, I announced that 'the Republic has but one course to pursue, and that is, to render every aid and assistance to the Imperial Japanese Government, short of conscription of Filipino manhood for active military service...' I stand and will stand by that statement... In other words, the

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<sup>27</sup> Jose P. Laurel, letter to General Yuzuru Iimura in *His Excellency*, 226-227.

Republic of the Philippines will extend every aid and collaboration to the Imperial Japanese Government, but will not, for the reasons I already stated on that occasion, authorize the conscription of Filipino manhood for active military service. That is to say, our Constabulary will be maintained in the service of the Republic for the maintenance of domestic peace and order. The Filipinos necessarily will be regimented together to the service of that Republic.<sup>28</sup>

In another speech, the President reiterated his desire to prevent the enlisting of the Filipinos and even remarked on how the behavior of the Japanese affected the cooperation of the people. Laurel said (Laurel, 1944f):

The Philippines has entered into a Pact of Alliance with Japan. Living up to that Pact of Alliance, the Republic has declared the existence of a state of war against America and Britain. The Philippines is doing everything to help Japan win this war, placing all her resources—mines, lumber, and all other materials—at the disposal of Japan.

What else does Japan want of the Philippines? The Philippines has given Japan everything, or least she has given Japan her all-out cooperation—except the conscription of her youth, for reasons which I have already enumerated on other occasions.

All that Japan has asked within reason, in short, the Philippines has given. It is now Japan's turn to help the Republic survive and live. And the Republic can help Japan only as long as it is a Republic and it is living. You can not expect cooperation from a dead man. The army and the Japanese civilians here in the Philippines should adopt a mental attitude of respect

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<sup>28</sup> Jose P. Laurel, "The Grim Spectres," (Radio Speech delivered by remote control from Malacañang over Station PIAM, Manila), in *His Excellency*.

to the Republic instead of coming here with the victors' complex of conquerors.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of food production and regulation, Laurel promulgated his first ordinance that regulates the supply and circulation of rice, corn, and their by-products. Under this ordinance, the President sought to have a more equitable distribution of the said commodities through the National Rice and Corn Corporation (NARIC), or the control organization, under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. The ordinance urged all producers of rice and corn to sell their produce to the control organization after setting aside their personal share. The control organization then took charge of the distribution of rice and corn to the general populace.<sup>30</sup> This ordinance, however, was later suspended by virtue of Executive Order No. 49, by the recommendation of the Economic Planning Board that the supply, procurement, movement, transfer, sale, and distribution of rice be embodied in separate rules and regulations.<sup>31</sup>

This was later reinforced by Ordinance No. 2 that provided for the cultivation of all available lands for the production of food crops. This ordinance redistributed idle lands, including private lands, to the citizens—preferably to those unemployed—especially when the landowner refused or is unable to cultivate the land suitable for farming. The resulting crops were to belong to those who cultivated the land after setting aside at most 10% for the government. State farms were also established in appropriate places to be maintained by the Bureau of Plant Industry and cultivated by the unemployed members of the population. This policy was conceptualized so that the people may use the land to grow short-term crops to address the problem of food shortages, while, at the same time, relieving the problem of unemployment.<sup>32</sup>

To supplement this ordinance, Laurel enacted Administrative Order No. 9. Through this order, public plazas, grounds, yards, and sidewalk parking would be utilized for the planting of vegetables and crops by government offices or

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<sup>29</sup> Jose P. Laurel, "Their Salvation Lies in Their Own Hands," (Remarks at a press conference in Malacañang, Manila), in *His Excellency*.

<sup>30</sup> Ordinance no. 1, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, November 1943.

<sup>31</sup> Executive Order no. 49, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, April 1944.

<sup>32</sup> Ordinance no. 2, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, November 1943.

entities that were in charge of them. Harvested crops from this endeavor were to be given to hospitals, prisons, or similar public institutions for the use of its internees. If they were sold instead, the proceeds were to be given to charity. If the office or entity was unable to cultivate the land, they may allow private persons to do so in their place, in which case the latter gains ownership of the crops that they may harvest.<sup>33</sup>

Now, with the policy set in place, the President appealed to the people to contribute to making the program a success. Through Proclamation No. 10, Laurel reached out to the various civic and religious organizations to set aside at least one day in their schedules for planting food crops. The President also appealed to the educational institutions to formulate and conduct agricultural activities—making sure that these would not compromise the students' academic activities—to encourage and expose students to farming and arouse their interests in the said activity.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, through Executive Order No. 37, the President ordered the recruitment of able-bodied Filipinos, aged 16-60 to render emergency service for food production. If called upon, they would have to render service for at most one day a week for 8 hours a day. Citizens who had a stable and productive occupation could choose not to render the said service by paying five pesos per day or by securing substitutes to work in their place. Those who were not engaged in gainful occupation may be required to render service for a longer period.<sup>35</sup> Whether through forced or voluntary cooperation, the people responded to Laurel's call for food production such that the scenery of Manila has changed.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to human labor, the security of animal labor was also provided by Laurel through Ordinance No. 5, which prohibited the killing of carabaos. A permit had to be secured if the carabao was to be slaughtered.<sup>37</sup> Fruit-bearing trees were also protected with the enactment of Ordinance No. 15 that

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<sup>33</sup> Administrative Order no. 9, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, December 1943.

<sup>34</sup> Proclamation no. 10, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, January 1944.

<sup>35</sup> Executive Order no. 37, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, February 1944.

<sup>36</sup> Juan Labrador, O.P., *A Diary of the Japanese Occupation December 7, 1941-May 7, 1945*, (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Ordinance no. 5, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, March 1944.

prohibited its logging in order to increase the food supply of the country.<sup>38</sup> The government deemed these factors as necessary for the food production campaign.

With the worsening conditions, however, the government resorted to the collection of excess rice held by the citizens in Manila and Central Luzon. Through Executive Order No. 55, Laurel ordered the confiscation of rice held by the people from these places—with the exemption of rice needed by the owners for their families' consumption. After duly compensating for the confiscation, the gathered rice would then be redistributed to the less fortunate sectors of the population.<sup>39</sup> Minister Pedro Sabido sent a memorandum to Laurel on October 21, 1944, containing a report on the progress of the confiscation and distribution of rice. A total of 2,020 sacks of rice had been collected. The distribution of the gathered sacks of rice was as follows:

- a. 964 sacks – for the indigents in Manila
- b. 2 sacks – laborers of the BIBA who worked as cargadores
- c. 29 sacks – Malacañang
- d. 81 sacks – Constabulary
- e. 335 sacks – Bureau of Investigation personnel
- f. 12 sacks – Malabon P.C.
- g. 399 sacks – Community Kitchens
- h. 25 sacks – Pasig P.C.
- i. 92 sacks – Bureau of Prisons<sup>40</sup>

Laurel designed his policies to cater to the needs of the people. He made use of the instrumentations of the government to secure the welfare of the citizens. Since he wanted to ensure that all Filipinos have sufficient means to procure their necessities, the circumstances limited his options of utilizing whatever was available. His policies were structured such that available resources were much considered. Laurel's directives needed to be realistic concerning the situation-at-hand, thus, limiting his orders to granting amnesties, cultivating available lands, and the redistribution of excess rice to the needy members of the society. Laurel approached the situation as best as he could—that, at the time, these were arguably the best measures that one could have executed.

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<sup>38</sup> Ordinance no. 15, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, April 1944.

<sup>39</sup> Executive Order no. 55, Official Gazette of the Philippines during the Japanese Occupation, May 1944.

<sup>40</sup> Pedro Sabido, "Report on the Progress of the Confiscation and Distribution of Rice," (Memorandum to Jose P. Laurel, October 21, 1944, Laurel War Documents from the Jose P. Laurel Memorial Foundation, Series 3, Box 7).

## THE PEOPLE'S REACTIONS

Laurel's return to the Philippines after having been detained in Sugamo Prison, Japan paints a clear picture of how the people perceived the Second Republic. Thousands of people flocked to Nielsen's airbase to welcome the returning officials. Cheers broke out upon the arrival of Laurel and his party, who were surprised, for they were not expecting the warm acceptance of their return. Circulars that contained words of gratitude and appreciation for him were spread. Further proof of the people's support was seen during his trial for collaboration. The courtroom where the trial was held was filled with people, some of whom settled in the adjacent rooms waiting for some news on the proceedings and some who settled to look through the windows to get a glimpse of the event. There were instances where the spectators would applaud in reverence to Laurel's statements, which prompted the presiding judge to demand order. People from the other parts of the Philippines sent their accounts to the press regarding their experiences during the Japanese Occupation in the hopes that it would help the case of the former President.<sup>41</sup>

The anti-collaborators and the pro-collaborators were engaged in an exchange of opinions. Through the newspapers owned by both groups, they published articles that would support their cause and hamper that of the other faction. The pros were clamoring for the grant of amnesty to Laurel and the other officials. Those who opposed the actions of the officials of the Republic, on the other hand, manifested their desire to have the "traitors" tried and convicted. Both groups staged rallies and continuously expressed their opinions. The senators during that time also had their fair share of arguments regarding the fate of the officials who served during the Japanese Occupation. Their main focus was on the grant of amnesty to the "collaborators." The pro-amnesty senators were not able to attain their goal immediately, however.<sup>42</sup>

As the trials pushed through, more and more people had come to realize the motives of the actions of Laurel as the President of the Second Republic. As the truths behind the actions of Laurel were exposed through the developments of the trials, the comprehension of the people became apparent. They realized that Laurel was not a traitor, as the anti-collaborators claimed. He was cushioning the impacts of the Japanese Occupation and was steering the nation towards

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<sup>41</sup> Teofilo del Castillo & Jose del Castillo, *The Saga of Jose P. Laurel*, (Manila: Associated Authors, 1949), 3-4, 6, 35.

<sup>42</sup> Augusto V. de Viana, *Kulaboretor!: the issue of political collaboration during World War II*, (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2003).

better times. As time passed, the people's concerns moved away from the trial to the more pressing issue of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Amnesty, therefore, has been a frequent mention in some of the newspapers from the sides of both the pro-collaborators and the anti-collaborators.<sup>43</sup>

With the passing of time, much light has been shed on the collaboration issue and the truth behind the actions of Laurel. Hamamoto Masakatsu, the Japanese interpreter between the top officials of the Republic and the Japanese officials, stated in his post-war interviews that there was no one among the high government officials who were pro-Japanese.<sup>44</sup> In terms of the aims of the Japanese, Hamamoto said that their choice of Laurel as president was a mistake, that they misinterpreted his qualities and thought that he would aid the Japanese, when in fact, he did not.<sup>45</sup>

After the collaboration issue, Laurel continued to play an active role in political affairs. In 1949, he ran for the highest executive post in the government against Elpidio Quirino. He, however, failed to win the position, garnering only 1,318,330 votes against Quirino's 1,803,808 votes of the total 3,700,778 votes. The results, though, were believed to be fraudulent in that certain flora and fauna were made to cast ballots. Nevertheless, Laurel ran for a senatorial seat in the 1951 senatorial elections. This time around, he was not only able to win but even gained the highest number of votes at 2,143,452.<sup>46</sup> Based on these results, the people themselves have placed their trust in Laurel, giving him their votes, and, at the same time, upheld that the people's perception of him was that of a nationalist. It was none other than the nation who judged that Laurel was not a traitor as evidenced their faith in him through social support and elections.

Laurel assumed the presidency of the Second Republic that he may become a shield to protect the people and soften the shock of the Japanese Occupation. He may not have fought directly against the Japanese like some of the guerillas, but he struggled against the Japanese on a different battlefield. His was a battle of trying to outwit the enemy's policies on political warfare. In the words of former senator Pedro Sabido:

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<sup>43</sup> De Viana, *Kulaboretor!*.

<sup>44</sup> Hamamoto Masakatsu, quoted in Satoshi Nakano, *Appeasement and Coercion*, in *The Philippines under Japan: occupation policy and reaction*, eds. Ikehata Setsuho and Ricardo T. Jose (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1999).

<sup>45</sup> Hamamoto Masakatsu, quoted in Agoncillo, *Burden of Proof*, 1984, 70.

<sup>46</sup> Remigio E. Agpalo, *Jose P. Laurel: National Leader and Political Philosopher*, (Manila: Jose P. Laurel Memorial Corporation, 1992), 246, 253.

He fought thousands of battles during the occupation and, I may say, suffered a thousand deaths. Every minute, every hour, every day during the occupation, when he was in Malacañang, was a minute, an hour or a day of agony... Every time he interceded for those who suffered imprisonment in the dungeons of Fort Santiago, even at that time when he intervened for our illustrious Senate President, every time he dared stop the sword of the Samurai, every time he tried to defend his helpless people, he was always gambling his life... But, never for a moment did he hesitate in going to the extreme sacrifice, that his people may survive.<sup>47</sup>

## SUMMARY

It fell upon Laurel as president of the Second Philippine Republic to steer the nation through turbulent waters towards its preservation. He did so by brilliantly maneuvering the reins of authority vested in him by the Japanese, who assumed that they could easily manipulate the leader.

Laurel structured the constitution and the government in such a way that it would be helpful in his endeavor to minimize casualties and uphold the welfare of the people. With the centralization of the administration headed by the executive, Laurel smoothed and hastened the manner of governmental functions that were needed during the period of turmoil. He knew the demands of the time and chose the type of government that could best respond to the situation-at-hand while enabling the attainment of their goals. He removed some aspects of the previous democratic set-up and installed a semi-dictatorial government, one that can quickly act and react to the circumstances of the time.

Laurel, by way of his policies, sought to unify and direct the actions of the nation for the sake of the people. He believed that during their period of crisis, the only way the Filipinos could endure the hardships of war is by being united in achieving the goal of national survival. Laurel called upon all people—young and old, those in the mountains, and all of those who are capable—to work together for the survival of the nation. Through his speeches and messages, he

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<sup>47</sup> Pedro Sabido, "Laurel, the friend, the patriot, the man," in *Memorial Series vol. 1 Dr. Jose P Laurel: tributes, recollections, appraisals of close friends, associates, admirers, and the press*, (Manila: Jose P. Laurel Memorial Foundation, 1962), 94-96.

reminded the people of the value and importance of cooperation between the people and the government. As the steward of the people, he knew his role as the caretaker of the people. As their leader, he performed to the utmost of his capabilities and tried to keep the people intact in actualizing the goals he has set in the interest of the nation.

Thus, Laurel's actions have brought security to the majority of the people. In response to the third question of the study, he managed to prevent the wide-scale massacre of the Filipino people by the Japanese. Through his direction, he guided the people toward the production of food crops and the redistribution of rice. Undeniably, there were Filipinos who were victims of the brutalities of the conquerors and the harshness of the circumstances. There were factors that were beyond the control of the Republic. Nevertheless, Laurel and his administration still managed to stave off the extinction of the bulk of the Filipino nation. Through his guidance, the Republic's goal of national survival has been attained.

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