

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Howard T. Fry

Philippine Studies vol. 26, no. 3 (1978) 257–273

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**The Bacon Bill of 1926: New Light on an
Exercise in Divide-and-Rule**
HOWARD T. FRY

When Representative Robert Bacon of New York left the United States in August 1925 on a fact-finding tour of the Philippine Islands, the North American continent was suffering from a sudden sharp rise in the price of rubber. Opinions differed as to the cause. Americans attributed the crisis to an artificial restriction upon production by the British, whose plantations enjoyed almost a monopoly of the world's supply. This was denied by the British, who stated that they had done no more than protect their plantations from imminent bankruptcy, and that the real cause of the rise in prices was a very rapid growth in demand.¹ But there was no argument over the fact that the United States was already consuming three-quarters of the world's total supply of rubber,² and Representative Bacon, as a member of the House Committee on Insular Affairs, was therefore fully alive to the fact that his countrymen were certain to feel the rise in prices more severely than any other people.

In these circumstances the possession of a tropical colony in the Philippines began to take on a new meaning for many. Thus Representative Underhill of Massachusetts, who had visited the Islands in May 1925 convinced "that we ought to get rid of the islands at any price," was rapidly converted to the view that "it would be unpatriotic, uncivilized and unchristian to give the islands their independence."³ Herbert Hoover, as secretary of commerce,

1. See statements by Sir Wm. Letts, president of the British Society of Motor Manufacturers, *Philippines Herald*, 19 January 1926, pp. 1-2; and by British Consul-General Thomas Harrington in an address to a Rotary Club luncheon at the Manila Hotel on 4 March 1926, *ibid.*, 14 March 1926, pp. 10-11.

2. Estimate of the United States Department of Commerce, *ibid.*, 12 September 1925.

3. Report of interview with President Coolidge recorded by the *Chicago Tribune* on 2 August 1925, and reproduced in the *Philippines Herald* on 1 September 1925, pp. 1, 6.

added the warning that what had happened to rubber could as easily happen to coffee. Robert Bacon himself went further and stressed that he was interested in the Philippines not only as a source of rubber, but also of "hemp, sugar, tobacco, coconut oil, maguey, lumber and a host of other products."⁴ As Nicholas Roosevelt of the *New York Times* observed, for the first time Americans were awakening to the realization that the Philippines might be of economic value to the United States.⁵

With this new interest in the Philippine Islands as a source of tropical products, it was inevitable that Mindanao should become the focus of attention, since it offered not only some of the most fertile land in the whole archipelago, but also the greatest areas of unoccupied and undeveloped land. In addition, Mindanao had the great advantage of being outside the destructive typhoon belt. Yet the large American corporations which now began to show an interest in exploiting these new opportunities quickly discovered that before they undertook to invest their money in any development, they must first find a means of circumventing the land laws of the Philippines. These laws had been designed to encourage a diffused pattern of land-ownership in the Islands, and were not conducive to large-scale agricultural operations. The Filipinos would certainly like to share in the benefits that promised to flow from the new demand for rubber and other tropical products, but they were not prepared to sacrifice their hopes of achieving independence by amending their land laws and allowing the large-scale introduction of American capital before they had gained political mastery in their own country. As far as the Filipino leaders were concerned, therefore, Mindanao could only become a large-scale producer of rubber if this could be achieved by persuading a large number of small-scale Filipino farmers to grow rubber for themselves, with the backing of the government, and perhaps with some support from other outside interests.⁶

This put the American rubber interests in a quandary. Considering this Filipino alternative neither attractive nor even viable,

Underhill went on to detail the economic benefits that the U.S. could derive from the Islands.

4. *Philippines Herald*, 15 August 1925, where Bacon was described as a politician who was being groomed as a Republican Party candidate for the governorship of New York against the incumbent Governor Al Smith.

5. *Ibid.*, 25 July 1926, pp. 19-20.

6. See, for instance, *ibid.*, 15 November 1925, p. 1.

they saw three choices of policy open to them. One possibility was to find means of persuading or of frightening the members of the Philippine legislature into altering the existing land laws; or they could seek to remove Mindanao from the authority of the Philippine legislature; or they could search for other parts of the world in which to plant their rubber. Of these three alternatives, the last was the least attractive, since only in Mindanao could large-scale production be carried on under American suzerainty, and therefore free from the imposition of foreign restrictions and monopolies.

When this problem first arose, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover initiated a study on the outlook for rubber production in the Philippines and other countries, and in January 1926 a congressional committee, set up to investigate the extent of the rubber monopoly, began its hearings. These moves inspired one American writer to foresee the start of a new era of American imperialism. He wrote:

The United States is outgrowing itself, America requires alien fields to produce what is lacking at home Efforts of great American rubber interests to create an empire abroad mark the beginning of a new approach in the economic history of the United States.⁷

At this juncture, events in the southern Philippines played into the hands of Bacon and the business interests that he represented. There was an upsurge of Moro discontent. As the Sultan of Sulu agreed, relations between Moros and Christians had been satisfactory during the years when Harrison was governor-general, and when the policy of assimilation under Filipino leadership was inaugurated. The position had only begun to deteriorate after Wood had become governor-general. According to the sultan, this had occurred both because the Moros had begun to feel forgotten and neglected when senior ministers no longer came down from Manila to visit them, and also because some unfortunate appointments had been made, which had brought to Moroland persons whose ill-judged actions had seemed to threaten Moro traditions.⁸ The Filipino authorities in Manila were therefore partly to blame for the predicament in which they now found themselves, but they also had grounds for their complaint that Governor-General Wood, instead of using his influence to mediate between the two parties,

7. *Ibid.*, 15 January 1926, p. 1.

8. Exchange between Osmeña and Hadji Butu in the Senate on 19 August, reported in the *Philippines Herald*, 21 August 1925, p. 8.

had gone out of his way to exacerbate the cleavage by underlining, in his annual reports, the historic animosities that divided Moro from Christian. The political dangers that were implicit in this new situation were immediately apparent to the Filipino leaders. Fernandez, the chairman of the house committee on Mindanao and the special governments, suggested that "the apparent tendency of Governor Wood is towards the dismemberment of Mindanao,"⁹ while Antonio de las Alas, the chairman of the appropriations committee, perceptively warned of "the imminent danger of the Philippines losing that part of the archipelago in the event of independence."¹⁰

Thus quite fortuitously a community of interests had been created between those Moros who were opposed to being ruled from Manila, and those American business interests which similarly wished to see an end to the authority of the Philippine legislature in Mindanao. Furthermore, both had a vested interest in portraying all of Mindanao as being a part of Moroland. Some Moros really believed this. Thus when Forbes, the former governor-general, met Princess Kiram during a private visit to Jolo in January 1927, he found it necessary to remind her that some 400,000 Christians were living in Surigao and Misamis, but she simply replied that they could 'move off,' since all Mindanao was part of Moroland.¹¹

In view of these suspicions regarding Wood's attitude toward the future of Mindanao, it was not encouraging for the Filipinos to note that Bacon made his tour of the southern Philippines in the company of the governor-general.¹² There was no reason to expect him to be won over to Wood's vision of the Philippines,

9. *Ibid.*, 18 August 1925, p. 1. Patricio Fernandez was from Palawan.

10. *Ibid.*, 1 August 1925, p. 1. A Filipino authority at the time ascribed Moro discontent to four basic causes:

1. Fear of interference with Islamic religion and customs.
2. The suspicion that the public schools would encroach upon Islam.
3. The policy of social levelling.
4. Opposition to increased taxation.

See the report by Feliciano Ocampo in Quezon Papers, National Library, Manila, Box 163, 1925 file.

11. Forbes also had an interview with Sultan Hadji Butu. When he twitted the Sultan with having voted for Philippine independence and then having expressed a strong desire for the retention of American suzerainty in Moroland, the sultan replied that he favored the Filipinos being given their independence on condition that American suzerainty was retained in the south. See W. Cameron Forbes, *Journal*, microfilm copy in the Library of Congress, second series, vol. 2, pp. 422-24.

12. Wood had known Bacon since his childhood. See Wood Mss., Library of Congress, Wood to McIntyre, 7 July and 19 September 1925.

after a long process of assimilating American concepts and values, eventually becoming an agent in the crusade to "Christianize the world," and in partnership with the United States, to "rid it of injustice, of human degradation, of social cleavage and conflict, and of international slaughter."¹³ But after he had been guided around Moroland by Wood, and had been briefed at length as to how the governor-general viewed its problems, it was no surprise that he returned to the United States convinced that the Moro problem provided American business interests with a tactical advantage which, as their representative, he now planned to exploit to the full.

Back in Washington, Bacon found a well-informed and influential ally in David P. Barrows, the former director of education in the Islands, and at this time a strongly-backed candidate to succeed Wood as governor-general. Barrows had arrived in Washington at the beginning of January 1926, and as he informed Wood some weeks later, "during this time I have seen a good deal of friends of yours interested in Philippine legislation . . . I refer particularly to Congressman Bacon. Also to Congressman Lineberger . . . , who has been to the Philippines . . . and is a warm supporter of yours." As a result of meetings with various Congressmen, especially members of the Philippine Committee, Barrows had then helped to draft an 'independence bill' and, at the request of Bacon, an accompanying memorandum recommending the creation of a separate Moro territory, which it was intended to lay before President Coolidge.

Barrows explained to Wood his motivation in drafting this 'independence bill.' He shared the concern of "a considerable body of informed men in the House of Representatives" who considered that the course being pursued by the Filipino leaders posed a threat "to the good repute and the material interests of the United States." Ideally he would have liked to see Congress "declare in the most explicit manner that independence is not contemplated." This approach, however, had been forestalled by "the repeated assurances of our Government and the preamble of the Jones Bill." In these circumstances he felt that "the only hope of escape [was] to let the Filipino decide that independence is advantageous neither to his people nor to ours." No Republican

13. See *Remarks of Hon. Robert L. Bacon*, Bureau of Insular Affairs Library, Congressional Hearings and Reports 1924-25, Record Group No. 350, p. 9.

wished to be associated in the public mind with any measure that even hinted at independence, but he was hopeful that one of the "pro-independence leading Democrats" might be persuaded that it was tactically wise to introduce his measure. This was designed to demonstrate

to the Filipinos that the kind of independence they want — namely one in which they would hold all the power and the United States all the responsibility — is something which they can't obtain even from their Democratic advocates in Congress.

Barrows added that,

I do not believe that the plans of the Filipinos to secure greater autonomy have any prospect of success at present and I anticipate seeing legislation that will correct the undue concessions that have been made in this direction.¹⁴

Apart from these maneuvers behind the scenes in Congress, Barrows also published an article in a west-coast journal outlining his views. After suggesting that the preamble of the Jones bill was of questionable validity, since one Congress could not dictate the actions of another, he went on to dispute the argument that Cuba provided a precedent.

The case of Cuba is quite different . . . Cuba is the most important country in the Caribbean area, which our own interests compel us to protect and support under what amounts to a modern interpretation of the Doctrine of Monroe. Cuba lies at our very shores. The question of her independence or political stability, or her freedom from epidemic disease, are vital to our own safety and we can well afford, in our own protection, to carry the responsibilities laid before us by . . . the 'Platt amendment on Cuba'; but no such considerations control our action in the Philippines.

If independence was accorded, it would not be a military advantage to the United States to retain an army post or a naval base within the . . . Islands. The existence of such stations or bases would be a weakness in the event of a foreign war . . . From the military standpoint . . . the United States has no need to retain the Philippine Islands.

Nevertheless, he concluded, the Islands were of great value to the United States. Their administration had

never been a financial burden of any consequence to the American treasury; [on the other hand], the Islands are in the Pacific Ocean, and in the Far East the United States has a definite policy and is diplomatically

14. Wood Mss, Carton 180, Library of Congress, D. P. Barrows to Governor-General Wood, (dated) New York City, 7 February 1926. The belief that a supposedly pro-independence Democrat might sponsor his type of bill is an interesting comment on the true attitudes of some of those concerned.

active. To relinquish the Philippines would be to diminish greatly the influence of the United States in the Pacific Ocean and in the Far East.¹⁵

The Barrows bill itself advocated that in the event of their achieving their independence, the Filipinos would first have to deposit with the United States treasury the full cost for the conversion of the Philippine public debt, which was presently guaranteed by the United States, and would also have to deposit, as a condition precedent to the recognition of their independence, the agreed cost, in full, of the United States forts, naval bases, arsenals, military posts and other properties of the American government in the Islands. At the same time, they would be faced with the loss of their present advantages in the economic field, and in the matter of immigration.

When details of these proposals reached the Philippines, there was an immediate and very indignant reaction. The suggestion regarding the public debt, it was pointed out, was untenable; bondholders had known that future independence was a possibility when they invested their money, and there was no nation in existence without a public debt. But the Filipinos fully appreciated, of course, that the real intention of Barrows, ever the opponent of Philippine independence, was to attempt to persuade them that if it were offered now, they would be unable to meet its obligations.¹⁶

Although Barrows had been preparing, in private, a memorandum on the origins of the Moro Province in 1903 for Bacon's information, there was no mention of the Moro problem in his own bill.¹⁷ But in view of Bacon's tour of the south in the company of the governor-general, the Filipino leaders knew what to expect, and after a personal tour by Quezon they had formed a new committee on Mindanao and Sulu under the chairmanship of ex-Senator Teopisto Guingona.

Barrows and Bacon differed in the focus of their interest in the Islands. Barrows was a strong supporter of the concept of an

15. D. P. Barrows, "What of the Philippines? Keep it," *San Francisco Business*, 9 December 1925, reproduced in the *Philippines Herald*, 31 January 1926.

16. *Philippines Herald*, 26 January 1926, p. 6.

17. In Carton 180 of the Wood MSS., there is an account by Barrows of his own personal role in the formation of the Moro Province, and his memorandum favored recreating 'the Moro country' with the limits assigned to it by the military governor in 1899, i.e., Southern Mindanao and Palawan. This memorandum accompanied the draft of a bill which is clearly the original from which the Bacon bill was derived.

American 'mission' in Asia, which is why Wood, as a fellow believer, told him that

your wide experience in the Philippines had no doubt brought home to you, as to few others, the opportunity presented to us in the Philippines as a base in spreading western ideas of civilization, law and government, promoting the growth of Christianity, as well as the more material but important interests of commerce.¹⁸

But for Bacon this economic interest was all that mattered. Nevertheless, this difference in emphasis did not alter the fact that their different points of reference still led to the same conclusion: the independence of the Philippines must be thwarted. It was this which led them to work in such close partnership, and their respective measures must be seen as combined flanking movements in a common and carefully co-ordinated attack upon the Philippine Independence movement

As Bacon prepared his bill, increasing pressure was being brought to bear upon the administration of President Coolidge to force the Filipinos to be more amenable to the inflow of American capital, especially in the interests of rubber production. Harvey Firestone, Jr., in an address at Los Baños, had insisted that a change in the Philippine land laws was an absolute prerequisite to the development of large-scale American rubber plantations in Mindanao, and had suggested that in place of the existing maximum holding of 1,024 hectares allowed under the law, a corporation should be authorized to acquire 200,000 hectares on a 75-year lease.¹⁹ The American Rubber Association was also pressing for the development of American plantations in the Philippines and elsewhere.²⁰ Meanwhile, Harvey S. Firestone, Sr. had told the house committee on commerce that the answer to the rubber crisis lay in the establishment of American rubber plantations, that he felt assured of the sympathetic support of the United States government in this, and that Congress should "remove those [land] laws in the Philippine Islands that are barriers to investments." He emphasized that Philippine independence was unacceptable to United States business interests, since it would put them "at the mercy of the native government," and he confirmed that his company's experts had reported that Mindanao was excellently adapted to rubber produc-

18. *Ibid.* Wood to Barrows, (dated) Manila, 15 November 1922.

19. *Philippines Herald*, 6 April 1926, pp. 1, 4.

20. *Ibid.*, 14 January 1926.

tion.²¹ It was also reported to be the consensus of opinion among . . . leading members of the Senate Territorial Committee and the House of Insular Affairs Committee . . . that Congress will take some action this session which will open Mindanao to exploitation by American rubber interests The action eventually agreed upon . . . must be in the nature of a compromise between the extreme views of groups favoring absolute annexation and absolute independence.²²

On 2 April 1926 President Coolidge responded to these mounting pressures by appointing Carmi Thompson as a special commissioner to make a survey of the economic and internal political conditions of the Philippine Islands. This choice of commissioner was astute, for Carmi Thompson appealed to the various United States interests that were most closely involved. As a veteran of the Spanish-American War, a former colonel and now the national commander of the United States war veterans, he was likely to be more acceptable than most to Governor-General Wood and his "Khaki cabinet," whose military government in the Islands was certain to come under close and critical scrutiny. As a veteran of Ohio politics, and a former treasurer of the United States under President Taft, he was assured of the general support of the Republican Party. Furthermore, as not only a trained lawyer but also a highly successful businessman, with a stake in banking, coal, newspapers, and the iron-ore industry, he could be relied upon to look after United States commercial, industrial, and financial interests with an expert eye. It was, of course, inevitable that he would be correctly judged by the Filipinos to be a spokesman of American 'big business,' but his natural affability and his trained political sensitivity were important assets. At least some influential Filipinos were hoping that he would find a way out of the prevailing political impasse, though those with nationalistic ambitions must have read with dismay a report that he had described his main hobby as being 'Americanism.'

Thompson's tour lasted three months and everywhere he went, the emphasis was upon economic development. He was generally careful to avoid alluding to Filipino political ambitions, and as Nicholas Roosevelt of the *New York Times* pointed out, he was there, first and foremost, to discover the extent of the Islands'

21. Associated Press report, *ibid.*, 17 January 1926.

22. United Press report, *ibid.*

undeveloped resources, where

only about 15% of the total area of the Philippines is under cultivation. Of the lands suitable for farming as opposed to forestry and grazing, only about one-third are now tilled . . . and the opportunities for development are almost unlimited.

Since it had been discovered that the Islands could grow "practically every product now imported into the United States from the tropics," the American problem was how to get around the 'apathy' of the Filipino leaders.²³

Carmi Thompson did not confine himself to investigating the agricultural potential of the Islands, but was enthusiastic over their mineral prospects as well, and on his return journey to the United States this enthusiasm was to lead him into dangerous waters. He had called in to visit Japan *en route*, and had been asked to speak at a dinner at which W. Cameron Forbes happened to be a fellow guest. When called upon to speak, Thompson had been injudicious enough to describe the vast undeveloped iron deposits in the Islands as superior to the reserves of the United States Steel Corporation. As Forbes afterwards reflected in his *Journal*, Japan already had enough reason to be interested in the Philippines without having her attention drawn to the fact that the Islands possessed the one thing that she still lacked and yet needed for any "national offensive operations."²⁴

Meanwhile, the American Chamber of Commerce of Mindanao-Sulu was reported to have taken advantage of the recent disturbances in parts of Moroland by sending the following cable to President Coolidge:

Representative American population supported by more substantial foreign commercial houses Mindanao and Sulu ask your urgent consideration of proposal for separating from Philippine government Mindanao and Sulu and Palawan and reorganization on basis unorganized territory under American flag and administration as best solution present Philippine question thereby saving American investments and preventing continuous strife between Filipinos and Moro elements. Mohammedan natives desire perpetuation American government.²⁵

23. *Ibid.*, 25 July 1926, pp. 19-20.

24. Forbes, *Journal*, p. 367.

25. Quezon Papers, National Library, Manila, Box 163, 1925 file, memorandum forwarded through the secretary of interior to the president of the Philippine Senate by Feliciano Ocampo, acting director of Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes, 'First Endorsement October 29, 1925.'

Before Carmi Thompson had reached the Philippines, Bacon had introduced his bill in the United States Congress precisely along these lines. This bill provided for the separation from the rest of the Philippines of "the entire Island of Mindanao (excluding only the Province of Misamis as now constituted), the Island of Basilan, the Sulu Archipelago . . . , [and] the Island of Palawan." This territory was to be renamed "the Moro Province" with the city of Zamboanga as its capital, and its executive government was to be provided by a governor and five other officials, who were to be appointed by the President, with the consent of the United States Senate, and who were all to be citizens of the United States. There was also to be a legislative council, which would include the above officials as well as three other members "who may be citizens of the Philippines," and who were also to be appointed by the President with the consent of the United States Senate.²⁶

The community of interests that had developed for the moment between separatist Moro elements and United States business interests was now made manifest by the declaration of support for the Bacon bill by Senator Hadji Butu of Sulu, a lead to be followed later in the year by ex-Representative Ugalingan Piang of Cotabato, son of Datu Piang.²⁷ It is reasonable to speculate that those Moros who favored separation were not only motivated by cultural considerations, but also by the thought that the large-scale introduction of American capital would bring to the area a prosperity which it had never known before. Whether such leaders had accurately assessed the likely political consequences of their stand is, however, very doubtful. For Sultan Hadji Butu had made it clear that he expected an American administration to give him the same powers as the British had given the Sultans of Perak and Johore, and this was a concession that Forbes privately thought it most unlikely that any American government would agree to.²⁸

The fact that Bacon's present expressed concern with the fate of the Moros was entirely opportunistic was made very apparent when reference was made back to his press release on 15 August 1925, on the eve of his departure for the Islands. There the Moros had not even merited a mention, the statement having been wholly

26. H. R. 12772, 69th Congress, introduced by Mr. Bacon on 11 June 1926.

27. It is noteworthy that Cotabato was a region in which American rubber companies were showing a keen interest.

28. W. Cameron Forbes, *Journal*, pp. 422-24.

devoted to a consideration of American economic involvement in the Islands. Yet there was no denying, however cynical its conception, that his bill was nevertheless a formidable new obstacle in the way of Philippine independence, since he was exploiting what everyone recognized to be the weakest link in the argument of the Filipinos. True, his bill and his introductory speech would not stand up to close and rigorous scrutiny. It was exceptionally misleading, for instance, to claim that a "peaceful era under American governors had been succeeded by an era of constant friction"; for there had been exceptionally bloody encounters under Wood and Pershing, just as there had been peaceful times during the early years of Filipinization. Forbes himself denied Wood's repeated suggestion that the Moros had been tricked into disarming.²⁹ Above all, it was cynical in the extreme for Bacon to base American claims to suzerainty in Moroland upon the Bates' 'agreement' with the Sultan of Sulu, which Wood himself had unilaterally abrogated at a moment when it had seemed propitious to do so.³⁰

It was, of course, quite impossible to justify the interpretation of what constituted Moroland as was proposed in the Bacon bill,³¹ which only underlined the fact that in reality Bacon had no genuine interest in the fate of the Moros whatsoever. What interested him and his business backers was the economic potential of Mindanao. In his new guise as champion of the Moros, however, it was fitting that this consideration should be alluded to only near the end of his speech, and even then he approached the matter obliquely, not in the context of its value to American interests, but simply as reassuring evidence that the region would be self-

29. *Ibid.*, p. 380n.

30. For Bacon's speech, see *U.S. Congressional Record* Vol. 67 Part 8, 69th Congress, First Session, 6 May 1926, pp. 8830-8836.

31. The document already cited in the Quezon papers gave this breakdown of the population in the various provinces in this region:

<i>Province</i>	<i>Christians</i>	<i>Mohammedans</i>	<i>Pagans</i>	<i>Total</i>
Agusan	38,597 (86%)	32	6,112 (14%)	44,740
Bukidnon	10,110 (21%)	668 (1%)	37,766 (78%)	48,544
Cotabato	7,583 (4%)	110,865 (65%)	53,530 (31%)	171,978
Davao	53,130 (49%)	9,079 (8%)	46,013 (43%)	108,222
Lanao	7,680 (8%)	83,286 (91%)	493 (1%)	91,459
Misamis	195,066 (98%)	224	3,653 (2%)	198,943
Surigao	119,416 (98%)	159	2,589 (2%)	122,164
Zamboanga	65,837 (45%)	44,845 (30%)	36,651 (25%)	147,333
Sulu	3,721 (2%)	168,610 (98%)	445	172,776
Palawan	45,656 (66%)	5,531 (8%)	17,866 (26%)	69,053

supporting and would therefore not constitute an extra burden upon the American taxpayer. But reading between the lines made his real meaning crystal clear. "The great bulk of the lands, nearly 85%, in the Moro Province are still a part of the public domain of the United States," he remarked.

In fact, over 60% of the entire public domain in the Philippine Islands lies in the Moro Province. The agricultural, forest, and mineral wealth in this uninhabited and undeveloped region is exceptional. The finest coal bodies in the Philippine Islands are in Mindanao. One of the greatest undeveloped bodies of iron ore in the world is situated in Mindanao . . . With the Moro Province once opened for the development of iron ore and for the growing of copra, sugar, rubber, hemp and other tropical products and the investment of capital . . . encouraged rather than discouraged, as at present, . . . in a very short time the revenue of the Moro Province . . . would far exceed, per capita of the population, that of the entire remaining portion of the Philippine Archipelago.³²

One of the most revealing aspects of the Bacon bill was a fundamental change of argument that developed over the question of assimilation between the stage at which Barrows began his original draft and the time when Bacon presented the final version. The Filipinos themselves, laying stress upon the basic racial homogeneity of their peoples, explained the policy of assimilation in these terms. "What the Government should now do, in so far as it is possible, is to supplant their [the non-Christians'] form of government with our own government and their codes of law with our own codes of law. This is being done gradually." There was, however, "the difficulty, nay impossibility, of finding men qualified to exercise the powers granted by the municipal code of the Philippines," with the result that "we find that while the government of these municipal districts are complete on paper they do not function." This weakened not only the local government, but the central government as well. It was felt that the answer was to encourage "the movement of people from the densely populated sections of the Philippines to the non-Christian territory, which is sparsely populated . . . [The intermingling of] Christian Filipinos . . . with the native Mohammedans points to the way of solving the problem. There is nothing like association to bring people of different ideas to the common points of view." The result would

32. *Congressional Record*, p. 8833.

be "one civilization prevailing throughout the length and breadth of the Philippine Archipelago."³³

This policy of assimilation was only an extension, in principle, of the policy of 'benevolent assimilation' which had been proclaimed by President McKinley and had been followed by the American authorities ever since. Recognizing this, Barrows had felt obliged to affirm that

no-one will question the excellence of this aim. American policy in the Philippines from the very beginning has sought to merge the numerous and diverse peoples into one nation. The task will not be complete until the Moro people is embraced in the political, social and commercial order of the archipelago. The one question is, have the methods employed been wise, just, and financially sound? The examination of this point is the object of this memo.³⁴

Whereas the Filipino author of the report in the Quezon papers had stressed the essential homogeneity of his people, Barrows had emphasized the present separateness of the Christian Filipinos who "happily face toward the western world [and] the Moro people [who] face toward the ancient east." Professing to believe in assimilation, he adopted the traditional view of the Republican Party that this would be a very long-drawn-out process, a belief that was held to justify indefinite American retention of the Islands, and which could be expected to end in the eventual destruction of all specifically Filipino values, whether in a Christian or Moro guise.

For Bacon and his supporters, however, it was essential to condemn the policy of assimilation as such, as it would otherwise be impossible to justify his stand on separation. We therefore find that in his bill the above passage from Barrows describing the present separateness of Christian and Moro was quoted almost verbatim, but the whole of the passage commending the principle of assimilation as being universally accepted was omitted. Instead, assimilation was condemned as "an abortive undertaking from its inception."

Carmi Thompson's report came out some six months after Bacon had introduced his bill. As we have seen, Thompson had come out to the Islands to investigate both the economic and political

33. See footnote 25.

34. Wood Mss., Carton 180, B file, Since nobody had yet seriously questioned or tried to analyze the American policy of assimilation in the Islands as a whole, it is not surprising that the Filipino policy of trying to assimilate the Moros was so simplistic in approach, and optimistic in its conclusions, at that time.

conditions. His major interest was in the economic prospects of this region, but he had quickly realized that the political problem was fundamental, since the political impasse between the governor-general and the Philippine legislature had brought economic activity to a standstill. Like W. Cameron Forbes before him, Carmi Thompson argued that it was pointless to talk about independence until the Islands' economic development had proceeded to a point where the country's internal revenue would make such independence possible; like many other critics of the Filipinos he did not ponder whether independence after a prolonged period of Americanization would have any meaning or value, nor did he consider how the economic foundations for it could be laid while the economy was so tightly tied to that of the United States.

Proceeding upon the assumption that independence would be an impossibility for many years to come, Thompson suggested that the key to a solution of the political problem lay in putting an end to the military nature of the administration, and in assuring the Filipinos that there would be no reduction of the degree of autonomy that they already enjoyed, but rather, a gradual extension of it.

Implicit in his outlook was the belief that Americans and Filipinos had a mutual interest in promoting the economic development of the Islands, and that if the steps that he advised were taken, the foundations would have been laid for future cooperation between executive and legislature in the Philippines. And as further concessions in pursuit of this cooperation, he advised the abandonment of the Kiess bills³⁵ in their present form, and similarly the rejection of the Bacon bill, as these had all aroused very strong Filipino opposition.

Carmi Thompson painted an optimistic picture regarding the economic prospects of the Islands. Once the political deadlock

35. Thompson's report read:

I question the wisdom of giving greater power to the insular auditor, an American, as provided for in Kiess bill No. 1. However, his authority may need to be clarified. Kiess bill No. 2 provides that the revenue derived from the tax on Philippine tobaccos sold in the United States shall be transferred to the general funds of the Philippine government and expended for certain general purposes at the discretion of the Governor General. It seems to be unquestionable that this money . . . should be appropriated by Congress in the same way that other public moneys are appropriated instead of being [converted] into the general treasury of the Philippine government. It is not advisable, however, to place this sum in the hands of the Governor General to be expended at his discretion. Congress . . . should appropriate the money in such a way as to provide for its expenditure, under the direction of the Governor General, for specific purposes in the same manner as other appropriations are made.

had been overcome, he anticipated that American capital would readily flow in. Agricultural development must be the first priority, and soon the Islands could be expected to produce nearly all the tropical products that the United States needed to import. Products like coffee, camphor, and pineapples had the great advantage that they required little capital and no expensive machinery, and so were ideally suited to Philippine conditions, while in the cases of coffee and camphor there would be the added bonus that their growth in the Philippines would help the United States to free herself from dependence upon foreign monopolies.

Carmi Thompson also foresaw great opportunities in mining, and thought that the country could eventually establish sufficient industries to supply many of the people's needs, though that would only happen in "the far distant future."³⁶

By the time this report came out, it had become apparent that progress with enacting the Bacon bill was at a standstill, since it had aroused the most violent and persistent opposition and hostility in the Philippines. It was at that stage that Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon Johnston, a former member of Wood's staff in the Philippines, had suggested a way in which the Bacon bill might be used to break the deadlock between Governor-General Wood and the Filipino leaders. "A flank attack might upset the situation," he had said to the secretary of war.

Their [i.e., the Christian Filipinos'] weak flank was the Moro provinces which would give us good talking points (instead of platitudes) and . . . if it were made effective there would come up a party who would turn on the politicians and agree to co-operate.

This idea had appealed to the secretary of war, who had told Johnston to go and see Bacon.³⁷

Gordon Johnston's suggestion was taken up by Carmi Thompson who, in his report, after affirming that in his opinion independence would not be a possibility for a long time to come, went on to warn that

granting [it] at the present time would necessitate the separation of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago from the rest of the islands unless the United States were to break faith with the Moros.³⁸

36. 69th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Document 180, Col. Carmi A. Thompson, *Conditions in the Philippine Islands*, Washington D. C., 1926.

37. Frank McCoy MSS. Library of Congress, Container 20, Gordon Johnston to McCoy, 3 October 1926.

38. Thompson, *Conditions*, p. 7.

This slight evidence of influence encouraged Bacon to claim that his primary objective had been "to eliminate independence as a possibility," and to assert that by showing that "the Filipinos are not homogeneous" he had, in fact, "killed Independence."³⁹

It had certainly been one aim of Bacon, like Barrows, to bring the drive for Philippine independence to a halt through fear of the consequences. With the departure of Wood from the Islands, however, followed by his death in the United States in August 1927, there was a radical change in the situation. Stimson, the new governor-general, followed the advice of Carmi Thompson by concentrating upon economic development, and cooperation with the Philippine legislature was restored. Yet the widespread demand that had been made at the height of the crisis for a clear definition of United States policy for the Islands' future status and role remained unsatisfied.

Events had overtaken the initiatives of both Barrows and Bacon, and with the wisdom of hindsight we can now see a cruel irony in the situation. For the opposition of both men to Philippine independence, and Bacon's alternative solution of separating the islands of the southern Philippines, were both very largely motivated by an assessment of the economic interests of the United States. Yet within a very few years the onset of the world economic depression was to persuade the United States congress that the independence of the Philippine Islands, not their development by American capital, was in the best economic interests of the United States.

After 1927, Barrow's proposals were soon forgotten, but the unhappy legacy of Bacon's bill lingered on. For this exercise in "divide-and-rule" had helped to reawaken and reinforce historic divisions which it was the duty of statesmanship to seek to heal. His bill had never been capable of bearing anything other than the most bitter fruit.

39. United Press report, *Philippines Herald*, 21 January 1927, p. 1.