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Notes on the Revolution in Surigao

LEO A. CULLUM

IN a recent article on Francisco de Paula Sánchez the present writer had occasion to dip briefly into the history of the Revolution in Surigao.¹ In that article I spoke of the brothers González, Simón and Wenceslao, and said that Simón had assumed military command of Mindanao without presenting any document to certify his right to do so. This statement was based on the source used: *Cartas Edificantes*, 1898-1902. The letter in question is of Father Alberto Masoliver of the Society of Jesus, who was Superior of the Jesuits in the area, and parish priest of Surigao at the time. He says: "...no one dared to demand of them [Simón and Wenceslao González] any credentials or documents which would attest the validity of such sudden and high promotions..."

Mr. Francisco González, principal of St. Augustine Institute, Gigaquit, Surigao, a grandson of Simón González, has taken courteous exception to this through a mutual friend, and has furnished me with a copy of the appointment of Simón González.² It runs as follows:

¹ PHILIPPINE STUDIES 8 (1960), 334 ff.

² The Spanish text reads as follows: "PRESIDENCIA DEL GOBIERNO REVOLUCIONARIO DE FILIPINAS.—En uso de las facultades de que estoy investido como Presidente del Gobierno Revolucionario de Filipinas y General en Jefe de su Ejército, he tenido á bien, en esta fecha, nombrar al Sr. Simón González Jefe Militar provisional en la Isla de

In exercise of the powers with which I am invested as President of the Revolutionary government of the Philippines and Commander-in-Chief of its army, I have deemed it right on this date to name Señor Simón González provisional military commander in the Island of Mindanao with powers to recruit and organize troops on the said island, which I communicate to you for your information.

God protect you.

At Malolos January 1, 1899
E. Aguinaldo

Sr. Simón González.

This leaves no doubt that Simón González had an appointment. The original statement of the *Cartas* may however still be correct: that he did not present his appointment to the officials of the town. But it is more likely that he did.

It might be of some value for future historians of the Revolution if we review briefly the career of these colorful brothers.

The González family was a well-known family of Surigao. The head of the family was Don Juan or Jantoy,³ who is described in 1899, at the age of 74, as a fine figure of a man, tall, strong and vigorous. He was a Spanish mestizo "de segunda generación" which seems to imply that one of his grandparents was a Spaniard. He had married a Chinese *mestiza*, but she was dead at the time of the Revolution.

In 1892 the Spanish governor of Surigao exiled the brothers González, Simón and Wenceslao,⁴ for political activities.

Mindanao, con facultades de reclutar y organizar tropas en dicha Isla.—Lo que comunico a V. para su conocimiento.—Dios guarde á V. muchos años. Malolos 1° de Enero de 1899. [Sgd.] E. Aguinaldo.—Sr. Simón González." The appointment carries a seal: "Gov. Revol. de Filipinas, Presidencia." This document was received through the kindness of Mgr. Daniel Ortega, parish priest of Bacuag, and Father F. van der Borgh, M.S.C., parish priest of Gigaguit.

³ Pastells calls him Don Alejandro, which seems closer to Jantoy than Juan, which is the name he has in the *Cartas* and other sources. Cf. *Misión de la Compañía de Jesús en Filipinas* III, 356.

⁴ R. Romero, *Historia de nuestra prisión en Surigao* (Barcelona 1903) says that Jantoy and Simón were exiled. In the article on

Jantoy fought this action in the courts but was unsuccessful in blocking it. Father Pablo Pastells, Superior of the Jesuits in the Philippines, intervened with the authorities to have the exile changed from the Marianas to Jolo. Father Pastells had been parish priest of Surigao and was a friend of the González family.

Simón is mentioned as living in Tago in 1895 where he prospered for a while but when his house burned down he moved to Gigaquit, probably in 1896 or 1897.

In Gigaquit Simón again incurred the displeasure of the Spanish authorities, this time apparently through involvement in a case against a Chinese merchant. This merchant had some influence, and Simón was summoned to Surigao. About the same time Wenceslao returned from Manila, where he had been an employee of the Customs. This was in March 1898.

The governor shipped them both to Manila in April. The reason for this is not clear but was almost certainly connected with the political ferment which was at that time stirring the whole Philippines. In this same month of April, probably on the 7th, another brother, Florencio, was killed in the uprising against Spain in Cebu.

Simón and Wenceslao never got to Manila. While they were travelling north, war broke out between Spain and the United States. Dewey's fleet was in Manila Bay by May 1. The González brothers were therefore detained at Iloilo under a form of surveillance, with the duty to report daily to the Spanish authorities.

In September they obtained permission to go to Hong-kong, and from there they returned to Manila, which had fallen to the Filipino and American forces on August 13, 1898. In Manila the brothers established contact with the revolutionary leaders, and Simón received the appointment described above. Wenceslao seems also to have received an appointment, as we shall see later.

Father Sánchez I confused the two exiles, treating them as one. The first exile, to Jolo, took place in 1892; the second in 1898 to Iloilo.

The newspaper, *República Filipina*, about this time carried a notice that Juan Ruiz, Simón González, Wenceslao González and others had been named to the Committee for Mindanao in order to extend the Revolution and gather means for its prosecution.

Simón and Wenceslao sailed for Mindanao on the ship *Cebu*. They made a stop at the city of Cebu where Simón paid a courtesy call on Bishop Alcocer, and told him of his mission.

During the hostilities between the Filipinos and Spain, Surigao had not been involved save for certain manifestations of satisfaction over revolutionary successes on Luzon, and for the activities of some Tagalog exiles and a few local residents. Among the latter was the González family.

On December 24, 1898, the Spanish officials handed over their authority to the Filipino *gobernadorcillo*, Manuel Ballori, who however resigned after a few days. Elections were then held and Jantoy González was elected governor. His only opponent was a Tagalog, Hermenegildo Narciso.

On January 12, 1899 at 2 p.m. a ship, the *Melliza*, arrived at the port of Bilan-Bilan and the two González brothers disembarked. Simón made a speech declaring his desire to bury old dissensions, and to work in harmony for the welfare of the country. He informed his audience that he had been named military governor of Mindanao, and that his brother Wenceslao had been named civil governor.

Nothing is said of the presentation of any document. It seems that since the father was the highest authority in Surigao (though he had not had much success in bringing the other towns under his rule) he had no desire to challenge his sons' claims. It is altogether likely that Simón showed him the appointment.

The brothers immediately began concentrating the Spanish missionaries, Jesuits and Benedictines, from the surrounding country, and confiscating ecclesiastical funds and other properties. Wenceslao was at times arbitrary and harsh, but

Simón was uniformly courteous, and expressed regrets that he was forced to inflict such inconvenience on the Fathers to whom he owed so much and whom he held in such high esteem. One fact that does not sit well with his protestations was the closeness of the confinement which he imposed at Surigao and later at Gigaquit and Placer. To all remonstrances Simón's one answer was that he was acting under verbal orders which he was not at liberty either to divulge or change. The implication is that Aguinaldo had upon appointing him, instructed him to concentrate all the Spanish missionaries and to seize church funds and possessions.

Before the arrival of the González brothers in Surigao another revolutionary leader had emerged in Mindanao. This was Prudencio García, who four months before in Baganga had risen against the Spanish authorities and established himself in power in the south. Since not a few in Surigao were unhappy over the manner in which the González brothers were conducting their government, Prudencio García received appeals to intervene. He left Baganga with a party of twenty-five soldiers and arrived in Surigao on Friday, March 24, 1899 at 8 a.m. He and his party were received with honor and García himself rode in a carriage to the house of Simón. After a brief exchange of courtesies, García went to the town hall which he and his men henceforth made their headquarters.

The next few days were spent in maneuvers for control. But since a number of the González adherents were already in the García ranks (notably that Narciso whom Jantoy had defeated in the elections) and since García was able to disarm and immobilize the rest, he soon had control of the town.

At this juncture Simón was summoned to appear at the town hall. When he refused to come, he was arrested. The first thing asked of him was his official appointment. He produced the document printed here. At the same time it was revealed that Wenceslao had been appointed merely to preside over elections in Surigao.

The García group then countered with their documentary authorization in the form of a general communication of Agui-

naldo naming brigadier-general and *ex officio* chief of a territory the first man to take up arms against Spain. García had been the first, and this, he claimed, made him the supreme authority of the area.

Obviously Simón was in no position to contest this claim. He was then accused of having assumed the rank of *teniente general* without due authorization. Wenceslao was accused of having assumed the office of governor beyond the tenor of his appointment. Subsequently many local residents who had grievances against the brothers brought their charges before García.

When asked why he had imprisoned the missionaries and confiscated church property, Simón answered: "He obrado en virtud de órdenes secretas que no puedo revelar." Asked further why he had made the confinement so close, he replied: "Por consejo de mi padre." He was then obliged to sign a resignation:⁵

Since on the one hand the people of Surigao do not want me for their military chief, and since on the other the troops have deserted me, I hereby resign the office with which the Government of Malolos was so kind as to honor me.

On March 27, 1899 a commission of García, headed by one Bernardino, a former González partisan, arrived in Gigaquit and placed Wenceslao under arrest. Bernardino arrived back in Surigao with Wenceslao González on Saturday April 1, 1899, Easter Saturday. The prisoner was lodged in jail with Simón and with Jantoy, who meanwhile had also been arrested.

At twelve that night the three were taken from prison. Simón is reported to have asked for a priest: "If you intend to kill us, tell us, because then we shall go to confession. After all, we are Christians." No priest was called for them.

The three prisoners were put into a boat and taken down the east coast. On the beach at Cortés they were shot. There

⁵ "No queriéndome el pueblo de Surigao por jefe militar de una parte; y de otra habiéndoseme quitado las tropas, vengo en renunciar el cargo con que el Gobierno de Malolos tuvo á bien honrarme."

is considerable obscurity about their death. García told the wife of Simón and apparently the missionaries in Surigao that the three González were being sent into exile at Baganga. However a missionary in Cantilan received a report from Surigao that the sentence of execution had been read to the three men in the boat before they left Surigao. Consequently it is not clear whether the killing was a sudden decision of the escort or the execution of a sentence of the court.