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## **The Sakdal Movement, 1930-34**

MOTOE TERAMI-WADA

### INTRODUCTION

From the start of the United States occupation of the Philippines, the independence issue was a concern of the majority of the Filipino people. The only difference among them was the time of its realization. Various groups not only expressed their stand on the issue, but also worked for its implementation through legitimate political means or through radical, and at times violent, means. The most influential and visible group among them was that of the Filipino political leaders of the time, represented by Manuel L. Quezon, Sergio Osmeña, and Manuel Roxas. Other groups were opposed to their methods. One such group was the Sakdal Movement, which was active in Central and Southern Luzon.

The Sakdal Movement started in 1930 and lasted for at least fifteen years. Within this period, the Movement went through several phases: the Kilusang Sakdal phase from June 1930 to October 1933, the active Sakdalista Party phase from October 1933 to April 1935, the post-uprising phase from May 1935 to the end of 1938, the Partido Ganap phase from the end of 1938 to December 1941, and finally the Japanese Occupation from January 1942 to February 1945. Although the Sakdal Movement is considered to have died with the defeat of the Japanese Imperial Army in early 1945, it still exists today to some extent. However, the name of the organization, membership, tactics, and emphasis have changed.<sup>1</sup>

1. Through interviews with former Sakdalistas, I came to know of the existence of organizations like Mga Hasik ng Bayani and Iglesia Sagrada ng Lahi. For more on the latter, see Motoe Terami-Wada, "Iglesia Sagrada ng Lahi: A Social Movement in the Philippines," February 1987 (unpublished).

This article is part of a long-range inquiry into the Sakdal Movement, and will deal with the formative stage, from June 1930 up to the time that Benigno Ramos, founder of the movement, left for Japan in November 1934. The focus is on those who joined the movement and their reasons. A second article (*Philippine Studies* October 1988) will look at the charismatic Ramos in more detail for his philosophy and leadership attracted scores of members and shaped the nature of the movement.

#### FOUNDING OF THE SAKDAL MOVEMENT AND 1930 ACTIVITIES

Events which triggered the birth of the Sakdal Movement were two incidents of racial conflict between Caucasian Americans and Filipinos.<sup>2</sup> The first took place in Watsonville, California, where Filipino workers were beaten up by white workers. The second involved an American teacher in Manila who insulted high school students. Both occurred in January and February respectively, in the year 1930.

The Watsonville incident had resulted in the death of a young Filipino lettuce picker. In reaction to this incident, several protest activities were held in the Philippines, including a memorial service at the Luneta Park attended by fifteen thousand people. This gathering turned into a protest rally demanding the immediate independence of the country from the U.S.

About two weeks after the Watsonville incident, students of the Manila North High School staged a walk-out and rallies in order to seek the dismissal of Mabel Brummitt, the insulting American teacher. The protesting students invited their parents and others sympathetic to their cause to join their activities. Among the sympathizers was Benigno Ramos, who at that time was on the payroll of Quezon.

Benigno Ramos was deeply touched by the two incidents of racial discrimination. He allegedly was a prominent leader of the ensuing

2. Regarding the two incidents, see the *Tribune* issues for 24-31 January, and 4, 12, and 16 February 1930.

protest rallies and strikes.<sup>3</sup> Quezon, on whose payroll Ramos was, wanted to keep the Manila North High School issue as small as possible. He did not wish to alienate the U.S., with whom he was reportedly negotiating on the independence issue. Naturally, Ramos' being actively involved in the strike did not please Quezon. As expected, Ramos was requested to resign from his government job, and he did so on 18 June 1930.<sup>4</sup>

Around ten days after resigning, he established the Sakdal Movement, which advocated immediate independence, and had strong antiadministration, especially anti-Quezon, sentiments. The movement was formally launched on 28 June 1930, with the initial publication of its organ, *Sakdal*.<sup>5</sup>

Ramos seemed to have found the name "Sakdal" appropriate since he and his followers were bent on "accusing" the Quezon administration and the U.S., and denouncing the present situation wherein the Philippines was a U.S. colony.<sup>6</sup> However, the rank and file membership believed that the name was taken from the Bible, specifically from the Letter of James (1:4), which goes, "At dapat kayong magpakatatag hanggang wakas upang kayo'y maging *sakdal* at ganap at walang pagkukulang." (Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so you may be *perfect* and complete, lacking nothing.) [*Italics mine.*] Agapito Illustrisimo, founder of the Samahan ng Tatlong Persona Solo Dios (Organization for the Three Persons in One God),

3. "Huwag Tayong Padala sa Katsang ng mga Dambuhala," *Sakdal*, 30 August 1930. This was also mentioned during interviews with former Sakdalistas such as Jermias Adia (in his home in Cabuyao, Laguna, on 6 December 1986) and Arsenio Batitis (in his home in Santa Rosa, Laguna, 6 December 1986).

4. "Ang Buhay ni Gng. Liboria de Castro ni Ramos; Pangbihira sa Kasaysayang ng Babaing Pilipina," *Sakdal*, 5 June 1937.

5. The date is confirmed in two separate *Sakdal* editorials on the Movement's establishment. See "Sariling Diwa: Ang Ikalawang Taon Namin," 25 June 1932; and "Sariling Diwa: Sa Ikalawang Taon ng Paglilingkod," 26 June 1977.

6. Gregorio F. Zaide speculates that Ramos took the name "Sakdal" from the French Phrase "J'Accuse" (I Accuse), which must have referred to a work of Emile Zola. See Zaide, *The Pageant of Philippine History*, vol. 2: *From the British Invasion to the Present* (Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1979), 407. For more on Ramos' decision to adopt "Sakdal" as the Movement's name, see Yasotaro Mori, "Hito Daitoryo no Nihon Homon wa Nani o Imisunuka" (What Does the Philippine President's Visit to Japan Signify?), *Kokusai Pankureto*, 11 August 1938, p. 21. Information regarding the Bible was indicated by Ramos-Uyboco, and other former Sakdal members in interviews conducted during one of their reunions held in Alabang, Muntinlupa, Metro Manila, on 14 April 1983. Regarding Illustrisimo, see Vicente Marasigan, *A Banahaw Guru* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985), p. 72.

and alleged founder of the Sakdal Movement, defines the word "sakdal" within the context of "maging sakdal ang pananampalataya mo sa Dios" (let your faith in God be absolute).

The movement quickly spread all over Luzon, especially in Rizal, Cavite, Batangas, Tayabas (now called Quezon), Laguna, Bulacan, Pampanga, and Nueva Ecija. Initially, *Sakdal* had a circulation of 6,000, but less than a year later (April 1931), the circulation had grown to 18,494. Ramos' daughter Leticia used to help her father fold the newly printed newspapers. She recalled that newspaper boys would rush to get hold of the copies, which "sold like hotcakes." The copies were normally delivered to the news stands and subscribers. Sometimes, though, due to the lack of funds to pay helpers, the copies were sold on the streets by Ramos himself. On one occasion, Ramos reported that he started selling at six o'clock in the morning, and that no copies were left after only two hours.<sup>8</sup> The readers were urged to pass around the copies, and in the provinces, one copy was read by at least ten people. In case the people were illiterate, the paper was read aloud before a small crowd composed of ten to twenty listeners. Thus the numbers of actual readers must have reached between 200 thousand and 400 thousand.<sup>9</sup>

*Sakdal* did print a lot of articles against Quezon and other politicians. They were portrayed as "fat ones" who continued to spend too much on unfruitful Missions of Independence while the people went hungry. Detailed lists of the politicians', especially Quezon's, staff and salaries, properties and expenses continuously came out.

For the movement, as stated in the *Sakdal*, the people's real leaders come and should be chosen only from among those who have been with the people in times of suffering. In other words, they should be like Rizal, Del Pilar, Bonifacio, Gandhi, and Jesus Christ. These leaders did not deal with the higher-ups in their struggle to uplift the plight of the oppressed.

By November, copies of the newspaper had been sent to Revolutionary veteran General Artemio Ricarte in Japan by his followers.

7. Interview with Ramos-Uyboco.

8. Ramos, "Umagap Kayo sa Arming Despatso Tuwing Sabadong Umaga," *Sakdal*, 13 September 1930.

9. Adia, former Sakdal and Ganap member, claims that there was at least one copy of the *Sakdal* in every barrio in the province surrounding Manila. Interview with Adia. See also *Sakdal* issues for 4 April and 7 November 1931.

Ricarte sent a message to Ramos, encouraging the latter not to be afraid in his defense of the people's rights. Ricarte added that Ramos was truly fulfilling the wishes of their heroes.

As early as August, less than two months after the Sakdal Movement started, a boycott of foreign goods and the coming elections was urged through the organ.<sup>10</sup> More and more people asked Ramos to go to their towns and give speeches as the Sakdal Movement caught on.<sup>11</sup>

The end of the first six months of the Sakdal Movement, which was also the end of the year and the decade, culminated in a boycott of foreign-made articles such as automobiles, men's suits, and cigarettes. The boycott included not patronizing restaurants or noodle houses owned by foreigners. This was announced in the final *Sakdal* issue of the year, which allotted plenty of space to articles on Rizal, who was considered to be the greatest hero in the world, a true genius who used his talent for the cause of the country.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE SAKDAL MOVEMENT IN 1931

In the early hours of 11 January 1931, 450 people carrying rifles and pistols attacked the Constabulary headquarters, municipal buildings, and post office of Tayug, Pangasinan. They also burned several houses. For the whole day, the town was completely under the control of the rebels. At least ten civilians died, as well as two Constabulary officers and eleven soldiers.<sup>13</sup> The major dailies branded these rebels

10. For the above information, see the following issues of *Sakdal*: 6 September, 8 November and 18 October, all in 1930.

11. *Sakdal*, 18 October 1930. In October 1930, Ramos reported that he had received invitations from all over the country, including Navotas, Malabon, Baliwag, Meycauayan, Atimonan, Lucena, Batangas, Cebu and Iloilo (the hosts even sent money for transportation), Bicol, Pampanga, Tarlac, Pangasinan, and Ilocos.

12. *Sakdal*, 13 December 1930. The editorial in this issue declared that "We need men like Rizal Today, who offered his life and who did not seek wealth, comfort but endured hardship."

13. The following firsthand description and analysis of the Tayug uprising appeared in the *Tribune* January issues for 13-17 and 21-23 in 1931. See also Blas Villamor, *Tayug Colorums: Reseña Histórica de la Conspiración en Tayug en 1934, y de la Sedición en Tayug en 1931* (Bangued, Abra: n.p., March 1931).

As a result of the Tayug incident, fifty-seven so-called colorums were arrested and jailed. The leader was said to be Pedro Tolosa Alias Calosa, who was the supreme head of a number of "Fanatics involved in colorum troubles" in Nueva Ecija some years ago. The Constabulary investigation revealed that some participants in the Tayug uprising had been in the San Jose, Nueva Ecija uprising in 1925.

as "colorums" because they were suspected of being members of a religious group. The women participants possessed charms in the form of small prayer books, stones, and medals, while the men had amulets.

After the initial shock had subsided, the papers began to discuss the motives behind the uprising. Interviews of those captured made it apparent that the participants had no intention of overthrowing the government, but only wanted independence. In connection with this, they were asking for social justice in the form of equal partition of land and elimination of abuses of the local policemen and the Constabulary.

The leaders of the uprising, the papers said, had exploited the ignorance of the poor people in the area. *Sakdal* reacted strongly to the papers' portrayal of the rebels as ignorant. *Sakdal* pointed out that many of them were high school graduates or drop-outs. Some had even been to Hawaii and the U.S.A. The paper criticized the authorities for branding anyone against the government, including the *Sakdal* Movement's followers, as "colorums," which insinuated that they were either fools or fanatics. They were not fanatics; they merely wanted independence. They were not robbers, for they did not steal anything. *Sakdal* even went as far as saying that the colorums had noble intentions and clean consciences.

By such name-calling, the *Sakdal* declared that the authorities had failed to see the core of the problem. It was pointed out that the corrupt administration had plenty of *kasalanan* (sins); the Tayug uprising was the strong cry of an oppressed people. The incident was mere dew compared with the rain which would follow if conditions did not change for the better.<sup>14</sup>

The *Sakdal* issue of January containing the comments on the Tayug incident was the first for the year 1931. Previous to this, the editor was warned to stop publishing articles attacking the government, or else face imprisonment. For the first three weeks of January, *Sakdal* did not appear. However, Benigno Ramos did not heed the warning and the *Sakdal* continued in its avowed aim of disclosing government ills and anomalies. Consequently, the *Sakdal* gained popularity among its readers and notoriety among government officials. For the *Sakdal*

14. Renato Bantilan, "Di sukat Masabi," *Sakdal* 17 January 1931.

newspaper declared that only independence could make the Filipinos happy, and therefore the people should sacrifice in order to attain that independence. The paper vowed never to stop fighting any obstacle.<sup>15</sup>

The Sakdal headquarters was kept busy not only with publishing the newspaper but also answering increasing requests to send someone (Ramos was preferred) to give speeches. Such requests did not come only from Manila and its suburbs. Invitations from Ilocos Norte, Pampanga, Zambales, Bataan, Camarines Norte, Marinduque, Mindoro, Cebu, Bohol, Iloilo, and other places were also received.

In the middle of 1931, the Sakdal Movement started to collect donations for General Artemio Ricarte, who lived in exile in Japan and was ill. The names of the donors, as well as the amounts contributed, were published in the *Sakdal*. This was done, it was explained, so that the people who sent their money through someone else had proof that the money did reach the Sakdal office. Among the first donors were Tanggulan members and Bishop Gregorio Aglipay.<sup>16</sup>

At the time that the campaign for Ricarte ended, Sakdal undertook a new activity with the Union Civica Filipina, a newly formed organization of those who felt that the country's leaders such as Quezon, Osmeña, and Roxas were not doing their job of securing independence from the U.S. Like the Sakdal Movement, it aimed to obtain independence for the country. This organization was headed by prominent lawyers, businessmen, doctors, and active Sakdal supporters, including Ramos.

The Union Civica Filipina planned a big public meeting which it dubbed the "Miting ng Pagtutuus" (Meeting of Confrontation). As the name implied, the meeting was to be a gathering of citizens intent on exposing what was anomalous in the administration. The meeting was set for 22 November 1931, in the Olympic Stadium. People involved in the Sakdal Movement looked forward to it, and many took an active part in the preparations.<sup>17</sup>

During the meeting, the major resolution passed was addressed to the U.S. Congress calling for the immediate granting of indepen-

15. "Patakaran [in Editorial box]," *Sakdal*, 28 November 1931.

16. *Sakdal*, 1 August 1931.

17. Information on the Union Civica Filipina comes from *Sakdal*, 21 November 1931. The meeting was featured in the *Sakdal* issues for 5, 12 and 28 November, and 26 December 1931.



dence as the only solution to the Philippine problems. It was read by Ramos in Spanish and approved by the audience. The resolution emphasized that those who approved it came from all walks of life. It was signed by the top leaders of the Union Civica Filipina, as well as by Isauro Gabaldon (Resident Commissioner), Isabelo de los Reyes (labor leader and Senator), Gregorio Aglipay (Bishop and head of the Philippine Independent Church), and Teodoro Sandiko (Senator).<sup>18</sup>

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience, the Sakdal Movement launched "Mapayapang Pagsuway" (Civil Disobedience) at the end of 1931. But Ramos had been contemplating this as early as the middle of the year, as shown in his letter to Ricarte dated 22 July 1931. Ramos remarked that such a campaign would need outside help, especially Ricarte's. The latter replied, however, that he still firmly believed that liberty should be taken by force, not asked for. The civil disobedience campaign included the boycott of foreign goods, especially automobiles which came mostly from the U.S., nonpayment of taxes, refusing to allow children to study in proforeign schools, and not buying from stores which were owned by the enemies of Independence.<sup>19</sup>

The start of the year 1931 saw *Sakdal* defending the rebels in the Tayug. The end of the year found the movement being linked to a group which the authorities thought was planning an uprising. This group was the Tanggulan.<sup>20</sup>

18. "Walang Kaparis na Tagumpay ang sa Miting ng Pagtutuus," *Sakdal*, 28, November 1931.

19. See the *Sakdal* issues for 22 July and 5 December respectively, both in 1931, for the campaigns on civil disobedience and boycott.

20. Tanggulan was formed by Patricio Dionisio, a lawyer and frustrated journalist. Tired of the political bureaucracy, Dionisio decided to establish a secret society in 1927 called the Katipunan ng Bayan. This organization aspired for the patriotic goals of social, economic, and political changes. Its immediate purpose was to propagate the radical ideas of Andres Bonifacio among the laboring class. By the end of 1929, some 97,000 members had been inducted into the movement. As the movement grew, constabulary and police surveillance intensified. Dionisio decided to register the association as a mutual agency in order to avoid the authorities' suspicions. The group was then known as the Kapatirang Tanggulan ng Malayang Mamamayan (Confraternity for the Defense of Free Citizens). See the *Fact Finding Report*, quoted in David R. Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 209.

At the end of the year, a rumor that the Tanggulan were going to stage an uprising on Christmas Day of 1931 spread widely. Their 9 December assembly in the city seemed to confirm the authorities' fears. The latter decided to preempt the alleged offensive, and in the evening of 10 December, special detachments arrested 183 Tanggulan members in Manila.<sup>21</sup>

The authorities were aware of the affiliation of the Sakdal Movement with the Tanggulan, and of the close relationship between Ramos and Dionisio. Dionisio during the year had often accompanied Ramos in attending Sakdal meetings. Furthermore, the *Sakdal* newspaper was accused of agitating the rebellious feelings of the Tanggulan members, and Bureau of Posts Director Juan Ruiz charged that the newspaper was libelous and seditious.<sup>22</sup> It was with these accusations ringing in their ears that the leaders and members of the Sakdal Movement entered a new year.

#### THE SAKDAL MOVEMENT IN 1932-33

A *Sakdal* anniversary editorial described the past two years as full of sorrow, doubts, and lessons learned about the country's problems. The *Sakdal* had been on its *lakarin* (mission) for only two years, yet that period was considered equivalent to hundreds of years of experience. It had no shield but the best interests of the people; it had no capital but the legacy left by the heroes and ancestors. Another component of the legacy was the cry of the Filipinos to get rid of oppression and slavery, and to put up an affluent, honorable, and stable Republic of which their children could be proud.<sup>23</sup>

In the middle of 1932, the Sakdal leaders decided that it would be more practical to purchase their own printing press, and a new campaign to collect donations was launched in May. As with the "ambagan" for Artemio Ricarte, the names of donors and the amount they had given were meticulously printed in the newspaper. One of the first to donate was Ricarte himself.<sup>24</sup>

21. *Tribune*, 11 December 1931.

22. *Sakdal*, 30 January 1932.

23. "Sariling Diwa: Ang Ikalawang Taon Namin."

24. *Sakdal*, 21 May 1932.

However, the most important activity of the Sakdal Movement during this time was the "Kusang Abuluyan sa Kasulatan at Sugo ng Bayang Api" (Voluntary Contributions for the Documents and Messenger of the Oppressed People), launched at the end of the year. During this time, the Philippine political scene echoed with much debate regarding the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act. The Sakdal Movement was naturally very much against the bill. It was decided that Ramos would go to the U.S. to protest the bill in the U.S. Congress, and to rally the American people to the cause of Philippine independence. To help in these tasks, Ramos would bring a resolution as well as copies of the *Sakdal* newspaper with him. Money was needed for both the trip and the documents. It was to be, in effect, a Sakdal Mission of Independence. But the Movement stressed that this was very different from the mission of Quezon and company, who were forcing the people to donate through local political leaders. In addition, they did not publicly announce the donors' name and did not account for the funds. This indicated that the rich people did not have integrity, while the poor did.<sup>25</sup>

The Sakdal leaders declared that if the total amount donated did not reach ₱4,000, the money would be returned to the donors. Not reaching that amount would be an indication that the people did not want the Sakdal Movement's assistance in obtaining independence. The money would be returned because the movement would not dirty itself over such a small amount. Sakdal stated that it had to be honorable because it had no capital but honor.

As usual, donations kept arriving. One supporter sent money and a suit with the following letter:<sup>26</sup>

Ako po'y isang maralita. Upang makatulong sa ating kilusan ay ipinagbili ko ang aking singsing na brilyante na ang boong pinagbilhan na isang daang piso ay ipinagkakaloob ko upang ipuno sa gugulin ng Mision ng Bayang Api at sa mga kasulatang kinakailangan sa kampanya sa kasarinlan. Tuloy ipinamamanhik ko po na tanggapin lamang ang kalakip na isang ternong lanang ingles na ala-ala ko sa inyo upang magamit sa malamig na paglalakbay.

25. "Pilipinas ng Pilipino at Di Pilipinas ng Dayuhan ang Ibig Namin," *Sakdal*, 26 November 1932.

26. "Mga Balita sa Kilusan," *ibid.*

(I am a poor man. So that I can help our movement, I sold my diamond ring, and the whole payment of one hundred pesos I am giving to be used for the expenses of the Mission of the Oppressed People and for the writings needed for the campaign for Independence. I also ask you to accept the accompanying woolen suit as a sign of my regard for you, for use when traveling in cold weather.)

To further boost this campaign, a "Miting ng Bayang Api" (Meeting of the Oppressed People) was held on 11 December at the Olympic Stadium.<sup>27</sup> Some of the provinces represented were Rizal, Laguna, Batangas, Bulacan, Cebu, Iloilo, Zambales, Tayabas, Nueva Ecija, Cavite, and Tarlac. The meeting ended with plenty of "Sigaw ng Bayan" (Cry of the People), such as the following: "Sakdal, Walang Panginoon Kundi ang Bayan" (Sakdal Has No Master but the People); "Mabuhay ang Bayang Ayaw Paalipin" (Long Live the People Who Refuse to be Enslaved); "Mabuhay ang Bayang Pinagpala ng mga Bayani" (Long Live the People Blessed with Heroes); and "Lubos at Kagyat na Kasarinlan Lamang ang Aming Kailangan" (What We Only Need Is Absolute and Immediate Independence).

But just as important as these slogans, the followers of the Sakdal Movement were also asked to perform certain duties in order to prepare their inner selves for the struggle for independence. First, they were asked to pray, especially since only God could change the minds of their enemies. Prayer would bring about unity and strength. It would also prevent more bloody struggles. Secondly, Sakdal supporters were enjoined to avoid any debate, quarrel, or fight. All these were taboo to the principles of Sakdal. The movement was fighting the errors, and not the person. For if the person changed his point of view, the person could be loved again by the people.<sup>28</sup>

The collection for the sending of Sakdal representatives to Washington continued in 1933. In mid-February, representatives of Sakdal supporters had a general meeting, wherein they vowed to continue with their support for the Movement.<sup>29</sup>

27. This meeting is described in *Sakdal*, 17 December 1932.

28. "Sa Lahat ng Maka-Sakdal," *Sakdal*, 19 November 1932.

29. *Italics mine.* The meeting took place on 12 February at the Sakdal headquarters. No details as to how many who attended were given. See "Abuluyan sa Kasulatan at Sugo ng Bayang Api, *Sakdal*, 4 March 1933.

Na,ang ating mga pagtulong at *pagpapakasakit* sa dakila at pangbayang kilusang ito ay ipagpapatuloy hanggang hindi nawawakasan ang gawaing ito sa ikatutubos ng ating bayan at sa ikatutupad ng kapangakuan ng bayan at pamahalaang Amerikano.

(That, our help and *suffering* for this noble and nationalist movement will continue until our task is finished, for the salvation of our country and in the fulfillment of the promise of the people and the American government.)

In another general meeting two weeks later, it was decided that Celerino Tiongco of Santa Rosa, Laguna, would become the acting editor of *Sakdal* while Ramos was away. Tiongco had participated in the Revolution and was a former municipal president of his town. As of 30 March, Tiongco had taken over the editorship.<sup>30</sup>

Ramos and company finally left for the U.S. and by 10 April had arrived in Honolulu. There a concert and dance were held in his honor under the auspices of the Filipino Labor Union in that place.<sup>31</sup> Ramos reached California in May and stayed until the middle of June. While there, he published a four-page *Sakdal* issue in English (*Manila Sakdal's Supplement*) with the help of Tomas D. Española, an erstwhile *Sakdal* supporter residing in Stockton, California.<sup>32</sup> One English article spoke of the credo and principles of the *Sakdal* paper, saying that it was a nonadvertising medium and did not accept any paid ad or article. It was absolutely dedicated to a sacred cause—the Freedom of the Philippines. Therefore, it had no desire to dirty itself with the “mud of mercantile avarice.”<sup>33</sup>

In mid-June, Ramos met with other Filipinos residing in California, and went on a round of speaking engagements. Then he proceeded to Washington D.C., passing through Utah and Denver. The party arrived in the U.S. capital in the first week of July. But the U.S. Congress was in recess, and nothing much was accomplished with regard to the plans of lobbying against the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act.

Between July and mid-October, debate over the act continued. In the Philippines, the political scene was split into two factors, one for the bill,

30. Ibid.

31. *Sakdal*, 1 July 1933.

32. The English issue was reprinted starting 1 July in the *Sakdal* in the Philippines, at the rate of one page of the English issue in each Tagalog issue.

33. *Sakdal*, 1 July 1933.

and the other against it. On 17 October, the Philippine Legislature declined to accept it. The Legislature then appointed Quezon to head another mission to the U.S. in order to seek a better independence bill. The holding of general elections (to select government officials for both national and local positions) in June 1934 so that the Filipinos might express their wishes at the polls was also discussed.

Upon the Sakdal mission's return to the Philippines, the movement set about making itself a political party. In the middle of October 1933, the Sakdalista Party was established as a manifestation of the Sakdal Movement's desire to be heard on the national political scene.<sup>34</sup>

### THE SAKDALISTA PARTY

The Sakdalista Party called itself the "Lapian ng Bayang Api, Sangkapuluan Filipinas" (Party of the Oppressed People, Philippine Islands). Its emblem showed a heart on an open right palm with a flame burning on top of the heart. Above these was a shining star. The extended hand symbolized that the Sakdalistas were fighting for the freedom of their mother country. The heart expressed everlasting love and devotion. There was a light from heaven which, along with the sacred spirits of the heroes, would help the Sakdalista in their quest to obtain independence.

The party severely criticized the incumbent politicians who had made themselves wealthy at the expense of the people. They were accused of delaying the granting of independence so that they would continue to receive benefits in their positions. As a result, the people were burdened by high taxes, and children were hungry and sick due to the lack of nourishment. In general, poverty was prevalent. To top it all, the people often suffered injustices at the hands of the policemen, Constabulary, and Courts, for these were used by the politicians to promote and protect their selfish interests.

For the party, only independence could cure these social ills. And since the incumbent politicians were not working for this, the party offered itself for the task of providing candidates who, if they won in the elections, would push for independence and set out to make life better for the majority of the Filipinos.

34. See *Pamahayag at Patakaran ng Lapiang Sakdalista* (Declaration and Rules of the Sakdalista Party) (n.p., 29 October 1933). The emblem, analysis of society, principles, and vision of the Sakdalista Party all come from this pamphlet.

If the Sakdalista candidates were able to get into the government, they would eliminate almost all taxes, give land to the landless, look after the workers' welfare, nationalize industries, provide a truly Filipino education, set up a pro-people judiciary, and keep a close watch on the performance of politicians.

Once independence was obtained, the Sakdalistas envisioned a society where no one was poor, and therefore no one had to commit crimes. In essence, everyone would be rich, happy, and comfortable.

So that the Sakdalista Party would be able to achieve all these, there should be complete unity among all Filipinos. All those who wanted to join the party should be clean in spirit and should become models by doing good work and by fighting for the cause of the country through peaceful means ("kailangang magpakalinis sa diwa [,] at sa gawain maging uliran sa pagpapakita ng mabubuting gawain at sa paglalaban ng matuwid ng sambayanan sa loob ng kapayapaan").

Answering the call of the Sakdal Movement, party chapters were quickly established all over the Islands. By the end of 1933, these were well entrenched in most of the Tagalog provinces of Central and Southern Luzon, aside from Manila. By early 1934, there were chapters in the Ilocos, Bicol, and Visayan regions.<sup>35</sup>

Why did the people join the Sakdalista Party? Based on what members wrote to the *Sakdal* newspaper, there were four main reasons. First, the Sakdal Movement, and later the party, was admired for fearlessly exposing the wrongdoings of politicians. Secondly, it was perceived to be truly of and for the poor and oppressed people. Third, it was uncompromising in its stand on the independence issue. And lastly, it possessed integrity in terms of living up to its principles and in its record of not being after the people's money.<sup>36</sup>

As June 5 approached, the *Sakdal* constantly printed prayers to God. These prayers hoped that the movement would be guided by God, so that His kingdom would be realized here on earth. Victory in the elections was possible with the help of the power of God. One battlecry was "Napapanahon na" (The time has come).<sup>37</sup> For the Sakdalista, voting during the elections was a way of coming closer to the paradise-like society that they envisioned.

35. *Sakdal*, 19 November 1933 and 27 January 1934.

36. *Sakdal* issues for 6 January, 3 March and 26 May 1934.

37. E. F. Jorque, "Napapanahon Na," *Sakdal*, 26 May 1934.

The results of the elections showed that the Sakdalista Party made a more than credible showing, especially in the provinces of Tayabas and Laguna. Senate President Quezon even lost to a Sakdalista in Atimonan of his home province, Tayabas. In Laguna, the Sakdalista had a sweeping victory. Two Sakdalista representatives were elected. The Sakdalista candidates for municipal president won in five towns, including Nagcarlan.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of Nagcarlan, all ten members of the Municipal Council were Sakdalista Party members, including the president and vice-president. Two members had graduated from the elementary grades, and the rest had no formal schooling beyond the primary grades. President-elect Nemesio Esmilla, who had been the town executive for three consecutive terms, could speak neither English nor Spanish, but was considered to be the most energetic president the town ever had.<sup>39</sup>

These unexpected victories at the polls put the Sakdal Movement/Sakdalista Party in the limelight. Newspapers became preoccupied with trying to analyze what the party was and to what its victory could be attributed. Most of the analysts felt that the success of the Sakdalista in the coconut-producing areas was due to the government's neglect of the depressed coconut industry, while the Sakdalista Party promised relief in terms of lessening tax payments, improvement of the people's standards of living, and presentation of a program of reform.<sup>40</sup> Others thought that the Sakdalista Party's opponents had underestimated its strength. Furthermore, the government had failed to check Sakdalista propaganda. Or perhaps the Laguna voters had simply wanted to try something new as a matter of experiment.<sup>41</sup>

There were some who predicted that the Sakdalista triumphs would be shortlived. The Sakdalista were seen as having taken advantage of the people's sufferings. However, the people would soon see that the Sakdalista promises would remain unfulfilled, for these promises were impossible to live up to.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the success of the Sakdalista Party in the polls was deemed an indication that national policies had better start considering

38. The victory of the representatives was reported in the *Tribune*, 7 June 1934, while that of the municipal presidents in the *Tribune*, 17 June 1934.

39. *Tribune*, 19 June 1934.

40. *Tribune*, 7 June 1934; and *Sunday Tribune*, 10 June 1934.

41. *Tribune*, 15 June 1934.

42. See *Tribune*, issues for 14 and 21 June 1934.



the welfare of the small people more seriously.<sup>43</sup> One thing was certain, the Sakdal Movement/Sakdalista Party had proven itself to be a potent political force to be reckoned with.

### SAKDAL PRINCIPLES

What accounted for the rapid growth of the Sakdal Movement?

When the party showed impressive results in the 1934 elections, the motivations of those who joined the Sakdal Movement/Sakdalista Party were publicly discussed and analyzed. Newspaper writers and intellectuals all saw economic oppression as the primary reason why the people in Laguna voted for the Sakdalista candidates.

It should not be denied that the economic reason was a very important factor behind the people's support. The people felt that the Party shared their grievances and was trying to alleviate their hardships.<sup>44</sup> But can the growth and expansion of the Sakdal Movement be attributed to the economic factor alone? Let us look into how the Sakdalistas viewed the social conditions and what formula for a better future they believed in. This may reveal to us the nature of the movement and the reasons for its growth and expansion.

The people were of course attracted to what the movement stood for—the defense of the oppressed sectors of the society, and the demand for immediate and absolute independence—principles which were echoes of their dreams and aspirations. Politicians, especially Quezon and Osmeña, were perceived as having amassed wealth by prolonging the independence negotiations with the U.S. Furthermore, they collected high taxes and created laws which favored the rich and oppressed the poor.

All these could be changed, especially by the *Bayang Api* (Oppressed People), *maralita* (poor), and *dukha* (destitute), who were considered pure of heart. Once independence was a reality, the Sakdalistas envisioned a society wherein there was very little taxation. There would be

43. *Sunday Tribune*, 10 June 1934.

44. The economic factor has been discussed in studies such as the following: Joseph R. Hayden, "The Unrepresented Minority," *The Philippines: A Study in National Development* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941); Sturtevant, "Sakdalism," "The Uprising of 1935," and "The Aftermath," in *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines*; Milagros C. Guerrero, "Peasant Discontent and the Sakdal Uprising," *Praxis* (August-September 1968): 40-56; and Teresita Z. Hachoro-Pascual, "The Sakdalista Movement: A Historical Assessment," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Santo Tomas, 1984.

no unemployment and no crimes. The poor would acquire possessions, while those already rich would have more. Everyone would live in a harmony-filled paradise.

From the start of the movement and during the electoral campaign, the candidates were asked to be ready to sacrifice, to be willing to carry the cross. With the election victories, the Sakdalista Party was said to be on the "altar of sacrifice, ready to be consecrated." Everyone was enjoined to prepare their inner selves for the struggle for independence by perfecting themselves morally.

But the Sakdalistas felt that their goals could not be achieved by themselves alone. God would have to guide them. Therefore, the help of God was constantly invoked, and the members were always asked to pray. Guidance was also asked of the heroes, who they thought had extraordinary powers. Jose Rizal was the most exemplified, and the members were asked to follow his path.

#### BENIGNO RAMOS'S LEADERSHIP

The Sakdalistas' future vision and the means for its attainment were greatly influenced and shaped by the founder-leader Benigno Ramos. He had been active as a poet in the 1910s and 1920s. This was the height of the Americanization of the Philippines, and yet the majority of the people were against the U.S. occupation. "Immediate independence" was their urgent desire, with the time of its realization or the interpretation of "immediate" a burning issue. Ramos was in the company of so-called committed or nationalist poets: Lope K. Santos, Jose Corazon de Jesus, Pedro Gatmaitan, Patricio Mariano, Iñigo Ed. Regalado, Julian Cruz Balmaseda, among others. They were fond of writing satirical poetry in the manner of Del Pilar, and making nationalistic appeals through poems just as Bonifacio had done.<sup>45</sup>

Ramos's poems are a reflection of the times. They are filled with patriotic sentiments; they defend the poor and needy; they criticize the existing social and political conditions, the large gap between the poor and the rich, and the Catholic Church; they expose the plight of the exploited peasants and urban laborers; and they attack the politicians who were concerned only with their own welfare. But although Ramos's

45. Almario, *Balagtasismo Versus Modernismo*, p. 49.

poems were a reflection of the times, he was bolder than his contemporaries, compelling his critics to label him a revolutionary poet possessing a rebellious spirit ("diwang naghihimagsik"). Nevertheless, he was the most sought after poet and orator of the period.

His establishment of the Sakdal Movement seems to be, in view of the above, the natural consequence of his political and social ideology. It appears that the rift between Quezon and Ramos only hastened his involvement in oppositionist activities; it was not the starting point. However, it is also possible that had he not quarreled with Quezon, he may have stayed within the administration and still kept on writing nationalist poems, as Santos and Balmaseda did. We may never know.

But the fact remains that Ramos' deep commitment to social justice and independence during his Sakdal years from 1930 to 1934 is consistent with the convictions he had expressed prior to 1930. This is clearly evident in his pre-1930 prose, poetry, and oration.

His stand for the poor and the oppressed as well as his commitment to change the social order were not the only things that attracted the people, however. The charismatic quality of an individual is said to lie in what is thought to be his connection with some very central feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives. It is the supernatural, superhuman power which is not accessible to everybody.<sup>46</sup>

Ramos admired the fallen heroes of the Revolution, especially Rizal, whom he called the Jesus Christ of the Philippines. He also saw himself as a "bagong Rizal" (new Rizal). At one point when he was being harassed, he stated that Rizal also had a similar experience, and that history was repeating itself. This comparison with Rizal is probably where his popularity lies as a charismatic leader. In addition, he regarded himself as the "Gandhi of the Philippines."

He had managed to recruit the uncompromising Revolutionary hero Artemio Ricarte to his cause. This was accomplished through a campaign to send donations to Ricarte, and by mentioning the general in his numerous speaking engagements. Furthermore, this made the Sakdal Movement appear to be the "legitimate" successor to the unfinished Revolution.

46. S.N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 18-50.

## THE SAKDAL FOLLOWERS

When the maiden issue of the *Sakdal* came out on 28 June 1930, it appealed to the Manila residents, especially those who had been greatly agitated by the series of anti-American, proindependence incidents at the start of the year. The *Sakdal* articles were strongly anti-Quezon and anti-administration, therefore appealing to those who were not represented in the political parties existing at the time. These people supported the movement's principles with the establishment of the Sakdalista Party. The tone of the paper was that it was for the protection of the poor and the *maliliit* (small), which naturally attracted the urban poor.<sup>47</sup>

As was once mentioned in *Sakdal* many of the members of the movement were elderly people. Most of them had been participants in the Revolution. They found in the Sakdal Movement an opportunity to complete their unfinished task. The veterans' organizations were among those who donated to the various campaigns the *Sakdal* initiated, such as the ones for Gen. Artemio Ricarte and for the Sakdal Mission of Independence to the U.S.

There was a close association and mutual admiration between the Sakdal Movement and Gen. Ricarte. This fact must have drawn the remnants of the Ricartistas who had demonstrated their desire for independence on 26 December 1914 through a mass rally, which later came to be called the Christmas Eve Fiasco.<sup>48</sup> The frequent praise for Jose Rizal must have touched the hearts of those so-called colorums. In addition, the *Sakdal* paper had defended the Tayug uprising.

Also attracted to the Movement were the Aglipayans, who honored Rizal and believed in the hero's resurrection. The Aglipayan Church in fact canonized Rizal in 1907. For some, especially many Aglipayans, the Sakdal Movement and the Philippine Independent Church were synonymous with each other.<sup>49</sup>

47. For instance, Batitis, who was one of those who led the 1935 Sakdalista uprising, was a construction worker in Manila when he first read the *Sakdal*. He was deeply moved and decided to go back to the province to set up the movement. (Interview with Batitis.)

48. Adia related that his father, also a staunch Sakdalista, was a Ricartista. (Interview with Adia.)

49. Rizal's canonization is taken from Marcelino Foronda "The Canonization of Rizal," *Journal of the Philippine National Historical Society* (1960): 95-137. The close relationship between the Sakdal Movement and the Aglipayans is mentioned in Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines*, p. 208.

Tanggulan leader Patricio Dionisio who possessed a quality similar to Ramos (both were skillful and strongly nationalistic poets and orators) was Ramos's neighbor, *compadre*, and provincemate. Their close ties were further strengthened by their mutual aspiration for independence, which drew other Tanggulan members to the Movement.<sup>50</sup>

Many *Sakdal* editorials and articles discussed land problems and taxes, especially the *cedula* (residence tax). Such write-ups voiced the sentiments of the rural population. In the case of Bulacan, some members of the *Kapatirang Magsasaka*, which was organized in 1930 in Baliwag, joined the *Sakdal* Movement because they felt that their organization was not radical enough in its view on the nationalist issues. And Luis Taruc, *ex-supremo* (head) of the peasant-based Huk rebellion, was once involved with the *Sakdal* Movement. He used to attend its meetings in Bulacan, and would help distribute the newspapers.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This article is merely an overview of the early years of the *Sakdal* Movement. The points requiring further study are numerous; the scope of the subject matter is vast. The economic, social, and political conditions were different from place to place, and accordingly the development of the *Sakdal* Movement took on various forms. Only after all these are fully investigated can we make definitive statements on the nature of the *Sakdal* Movement.

50. Five *ex-Sakdal* members in Atimonan, Quezon, for example, revealed that they were Tanggulan members before they joined the *Sakdal* Movement. Interview with former *Sakdal* members in Atimonan, Quezon on 28 March 1986.

51. Regarding the *Kapatirang Magsasaka*, see Brian Fegan, "The Social History of a Central Luzon Barrio," in *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformation*, p. 110, ed. by Alfred Mc Coy and Edilberto C. de Jesus (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1962); and Jaime B. Veneracion, *Kasaysayan Ng Bulacan* (Cologne: "Bahay-Saliksikan ng Kasaysayan" [Historical Research Institute], 1986), p. 198.)

Regarding Luis Taruc, this author interviewed him in his Quezon City office on 22 August 1986. See also the author's autobiography, *Born of the People* (New York: International Publishers, 1953), p. 29. Peasant participation is further evidenced by the 1935 *Sakdal* uprisings in Laguna, Bulacan, and Nueva Ecija.