

A. V. H. HARTENDORP

THE  
MAGSAYSAY  
ADMINISTRATION

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

HISTORY  
OF  
INDUSTRY AND TRADE  
OF THE PHILIPPINES

THE  
MAGSAYSAY  
ADMINISTRATION

By A. V. H. HARTENDORP

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## FOREWORD

THIS book is a sequel to, or, rather, a continuation of the author's book, "History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines—From Pre-Spanish Times to the End of the Quirino Administration", which came off the press in September, 1958.

The author started work on the present volume some months later at the insistent request of readers both in the Philippines and abroad who were somewhat disappointed that the 1958 book contained so little about the Magsaysay Administration. Indeed, it seemed that everyone he met wanted him to write about Magsaysay, and so, as during recent years he had rather gotten in the habit of writing on "contemporary history", he resumed the task. In a way, the author was glad to do so because he felt that there was much left to be said which he had not been able to get into the earlier book. This new volume, besides covering the Magsaysay Administration, goes back over the preceding administrations to include material, such as on the country's foreign trade and the industrialization, which was skimmed before. It also sometimes runs over into the Garcia Administration for the sake of the continuity.

One thing troubled the author from the start, and that was that he felt he could not honestly write the book without detracting from what has become an inspiring conception of the late President Magsaysay. However, he submitted his introductory chapter and other pertinent parts of the typescript to a number of the late President's friends and close associates; without exception these men expressed themselves, although some with reluctance, in terms which supported the author's judgment.

As was the preceding volume, so the present volume was written with the generous assistance of numerous

persons in government, diplomatic, and business circles who on request supplied the author with information and in some cases went over sections of the typescript for correction. There are so many to whom the author is thus beholden that their names alone would fill several pages, and as probably a number of them, holding high rank or occupying positions of great responsibility, would not wish to be mentioned, the author will content himself with making this blanket acknowledgement and will add only that neither this book nor the preceding one could have been written without this valuable help.

One justified complaint about the preceding book was that it contained no index, the reason for this being certain exigencies of publication which arose at the time. In an attempt to make up for this lack, the author has included an index to the 1958 book in the present volume.

The author dedicated his initial "Short History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines", published in 1953, to President Sergio Osmeña, and the second volume (the book, in part a reprint, published in 1958), to both President Osmeña and to the memory of the late President Elpidio Quirino. He dedicates the present volume to the memory of the late President Manuel L. Quezon.

A. V. H. HARTENDORP

Manila,  
January  
1961



PRESIDENT RAMON MAGSAYSAY

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY AND GENERAL

*"Let fiction cease with life, and let us be serious over the grave."*—JESSE FOOTE, *"Life of John Hunter,"* (London, 1794.)

IN a world beset by fear of the growing menace of the totalitarian imperialism, the success of Ramon Magsaysay as Secretary of National Defense in dealing with the dangerous situation created in this country by the Huks, brought him world attention. This, and his overthrow of the corrupt Liberal Party regime in a dramatic campaign for the Presidency, certain outstanding personal qualities, and a somewhat frenetic press effort, both here and in the United States,<sup>1</sup> tended to the shaping of a conception of the man which was in good part myth.

Although from the beginning there were those among the men who knew him, who recognized his shortcomings, he was still described after some years in office, not only as a "leader of international fame",—the fame was real enough, but as a "figure of extraordinary stature,"<sup>2</sup> which was a sad exaggeration.

The common people, for whom he had a warm affection, paid him an almost fanatic devotion. They believed in him, expected everything of him. But from first to last, ambitious as he was, he was never so sure of himself. Doubt and bewilderment, as the responsible head of a nation faced with the gravest problems, assailed him, especially after he had been for some time in office. But his sudden death

<sup>1</sup>Largely inspired by Col. Edward Lansdale, a former advertising man in the United States and public information officer, first at Clark Field and later of JUSMAG (Joint U. S. Military Advisory Group), detailed to advise the Philippine Army in psychological warfare. He accompanied Magsaysay to the United States in 1952.

<sup>2</sup>"The Magsaysay Story", Carlos P. Romulo and Marvin M. Gray, John Day Company, 1955. This book did much to enhance the Magsaysay myth in the United States.

in a shocking airplane accident, forestalled both in himself and millions of others, a full realization of the extent to which he had failed to achieve his aims.

His election<sup>3</sup> was truly a people's victory; he did succeed in at least reducing the outrageous corruption in government; considerable progress was made in certain fields during his Administration, as will be shown in succeeding chapters; even the unwise government policies can not entirely hold a country down, especially one so richly endowed as the Philippines. But time soon proved that the economic policy-changes, which had become so desperately necessary, would never be instituted by him. In this respect, his Administration marked not merely a three years' loss of time but a great worsening of the country's economic situation.

Outstanding leader as he was hailed to be, this demands explanation.

*The Election,—and the Planned Coup d'état.*—In the election of November 10, 1953, Magsaysay overwhelmingly defeated President Quirino who had so unwisely run for reelection. With his victory, the Nacionalista Party made an almost clean sweep throughout the country, strengthening its control in the Senate and gaining control of the House. His running-mate, Carlos P. Garcia, defeated Jose Yulo for the Vice-Presidency.

Nevertheless, it later appeared that the country may barely have escaped a blood-bath, for while the victory had for months seemed to be sure, Magsaysay himself naively "revealed to Malacañang reporters"<sup>4</sup> that reckless plans had been made for a *coup d'état* on election day, to be carried out "as soon as it was certain" that the election would not be an honest one. The secret headquarters were in Zambales and there was a cache of 50,000 fire-arms in the

<sup>3</sup>See the author's book, "History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines", American Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines, Inc., Manila, 1958, Chapter X.

<sup>4</sup>Carlos Quirino, "Magsaysay of the Philippines", Alemar's, Manila, 1958.

Bondoc Peninsula; Magsaysay also had armored vehicles and even tanks waiting at strategic places.

"Magsaysay planned, if need came, to go immediately to the Zambales headquarters, direct operations from there, and announce to the nation that he had set up a provisional government and intended to advance on Malacañang to depose and imprison Quirino."<sup>5</sup>

This sinister revelation made trouble in 1958 for Secretary of National Defense Jesus Vargas (who was Acting Vice-Chief of Staff during the time Magsaysay was Secretary of National Defense), in connection with rumors of a *coup* allegedly planned against President Garcia.

*Biography.*—Like President Roxas, Magsaysay did not live to complete his four-year term of office. Roxas died of a heart-attack on April 15, 1948, after one year, ten months, and 17 days in office; Magsaysay lost his life on March 17, 1957, after three years, two months, and 7 days as President.

Ramon Magsaysay was born in Iba, Zambales, on August 31, 1907, the second child of Exequiel Magsaysay and Perfecta del Fierro. Politically he was an entirely post-war personality and he differed in many respects from his predecessors in the presidency. He was, first of all, younger. Quezon and Osmeña were both born in the year 1878; Roxas was born in 1892 and Quirino in 1890. Magsaysay was therefore 15 years younger than the youngest of the men who preceded him. On assuming the presidency he was 46, while Quezon, when he became President of the Commonwealth was 57; Osmeña was 66 when he succeeded Quezon; Roxas was 54 when he became President, first during the latter days of the Commonwealth and then of the Republic; Quirino was 58 when he succeeded Roxas. Magsaysay therefore personified a turn of the electorate to younger leadership.

Magsaysay was also more of a "man of the people", although he was not of so poor and lowly an origin as he

<sup>5</sup>Romulo and Gray, *op. cit.* (page 226).

was made out to be by those who directed his election campaign. All of his predecessors may be said to have belonged, or in the case of former President Osmeña who is still alive, to belong, to what in the Philippines is known as the *principalia* or the *ilustrado* class. Quezon's father, a Tagalog, was a school teacher in Spanish times and had been a sergeant in the local Spanish infantry; he married a Spanish *mestiza*. Osmeña derives from a Cebu family of merchants and landowners and has Chinese blood in his veins. Roxas was definitely of aristocratic lineage, native and Spanish; his father was assassinated by Spanish soldiers and he was brought up by a well-to-do grandfather, a distiller in Iloilo. Quirino's grandfather was a *gobernadorcillo*, and his father, in Spanish times, was a provincial (Ilocos Sur) jailwarden. All of these former Filipino chief executives married wives of wealthy land-holding families.

Magsaysay also inherited Spanish blood,—from both sides of his family, but this was not so apparent as in some of the others, although it accounted for his more than average height and weight. His father was at one time a teacher of carpentry in a provincial (Zambales) trade school and became the owner of a prosperous wagon-works and furniture factory; the family also owned over a thousand hectares of land; they lived, not in a *nipa* hut, but in a roomy, well-built "strong-material" house. Nevertheless, among all of the Filipino heads of state, Magsaysay was probably the only one who ever worked with his hands. He started out as a mechanic in the transportation department of the old firm of Teodoro R. Yangco, but he rose to shop superintendent and branch manager, which latter position he held until the outbreak of the war. In 1933 he married Luz Banzon, a girl of good family, of Balanga, Bataan, by whom he had three children,—Teresita, Milagros, and Ramon, Jr.

Other past presidents of the Philippines saw military service besides Magsaysay. Quezon was a young officer

under General Aguinaldo during the days of the fighting between the Americans and the Filipinos, and Roxas rose to the rank of brigadier-general in the United States armed forces during the war with Japan. Magsaysay, however, as a guerrilla leader and for a short time an officer of the Philippine Army, probably saw more actual fighting. He started as a volunteer with the 31st Infantry Division Motor Pool before the fall of Bataan, and later joined the then Lieutenant Claude A. Thorpe and a small group of other American army officers at Mount Pinatubo, Zambales, where together they organized the Western Luzon Guerrilla Forces. What happened subsequently has already been recounted in the writer's book,<sup>6</sup>—also his election as Representative for Zambales in the first post-war election in 1946 and his reelection in 1949, his three missions to the United States (1948, 1950, and 1952), and his appointment by President Quirino as Secretary of National Defense in September, 1950, a position from which he resigned in February, 1953, to run against Quirino for the presidency.

Despite this later political and administrative experience, Magsaysay was, of all the occupants of the presidency, the least experienced in governmental affairs, which was partly due, of course, to his being so much younger. But he was also less well educated. All the others were lawyers by profession. It was not that he entirely lacked education; although far from ever having been a brilliant student, he studied for some years (1927-1931) in both the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Engineering of the University of the Philippines, and he also studied in the Jose Rizal College, in 1932 obtaining a degree as Bachelor of Science in Commerce there. During the election campaign, his political enemies dug up and published the grades he obtained in his college studies, and they were all low.

However, that he belonged to the active rather than the mental type of man was not so important under the

<sup>6</sup>Hartendorp, *op. cit.*, Chapter XIII.

circumstances as was the fact that, as his intimates knew, he had difficulty in keeping his mind on any matter for more than a brief time; mental concentration tired him and generally ended with an impatient dismissal of the subject. He was capable enough in practical matters, as in putting more heart into the Army in rounding up the Huks, and he was not without political shrewdness, but he simply did not have that breadth of understanding and judgment required in making high policy.

The writer is painfully aware of the burden of his theme. In his former writing,—of that part of his history of the industry and trade of the country covering the Quezon, Osmeña, Roxas, and Quirino administrations, the question of the ability and competence of the chief executive never arose; these were in each case outstanding. But in any adequate coverage of the Magsaysay Administration this question can not be avoided.

*His Personal Magnetism.*—Masking Magsaysay's lack of intellectual qualities, was a remarkable personal magnetism. This attraction appeared to derive not only from his manly and handsome form and facial features, but from a great vitality and warm-heartedness. During the election campaign, and after, people came for many miles not just to see or hear him, but to touch him and to be touched by him. This is a phenomenon not unknown in history,—as in ancient France and England people sought the touch of the King, believing this would cure them of the "King's evil", scrofula.

The attraction between Magsaysay and the people was mutual. Whenever, as President, he ran into difficulties with the politicians, as he soon did, particularly with some of those who had assisted in raising him to the presidency for reasons of their own, he would abruptly depart for the provinces, not only, it seemed, to find refuge in the affection of the barrio people, but for moral reassurance. He seemed to want this so much that he came to employ certain

deliberate tricks to appeal to them, such as refusing to take available shelter, or even to accept an umbrella, because the people who had assembled around him remained standing in the rain.

The love of the people which he so plainly commanded, gave, or could have given, him great political strength, but, physically courageous as he was, he seemed to be afraid to rely on this strength. He seemed ever fearful of losing the affection of the people, and he rarely, if ever, made a decision which he believed would be unpopular. Was this because he knew that as time passed something meretricious had crept into his relations with the masses? The politicians of the old guard, taking advantage of the fact that Magsaysay did not seem "to know his own strength", forced compromise after compromise upon him.

Magsaysay did not have the indomitable will and fighting spirit of his great predecessor, Quezon. Both men exercised a personal magnetism, which instantly impressed itself. Both were handsome men, genial and appealing in manner, though Magsaysay, large-boned, strong, was a man of imposing physique, and Quezon, victim of a life-long illness, was of slighter build. Both alike were possessed of great vitality,—Magsaysay's largely physical, Quezon's of the mind and spirit. But while Quezon, lordly in mien and surpassingly persuasive in speech, fired the imagination of his countrymen by his brilliance, impetuosity, and courage, filling them with admiration and pride, Magsaysay, for his simpler and more common qualities, which made them feel at one with him, more easily won their love. Both were men of impulsive action, but Quezon's was generally intuitively wise and far-sighted, Magsaysay's short-sighted and bumbling. There was confidence in the Quezon government even during the Commonwealth's threatened years; there was a continuously lessening confidence in the Magsaysay government.

*The First Compromises.*—As President Quirino's Secretary of National Defense, Magsaysay, though seem-

ingly restrained to an extent by self-distrust, soon came to entertain presidential ambitions and this was played upon by shrewd old-guard politicians who, realizing his popularity with the people, planned to ride to power on the tails of his *camisa tagalog*. There were others who sincerely looked upon Magsaysay as a champion and deliverer, and who stood ready, disinterestedly, to throw themselves heart and soul into a campaign for his election. He indeed had become the inevitable candidate and the certain victor. Yet he turned to intrigue.

As early as November 16, 1952, more than two months before he resigned as Secretary, he entered into a secret agreement with Senator Laurel, Nacionalista opposition leader, Senator Tañada, President of the Citizens' Party, and Senator Recto, also a Nacionalista, at a meeting in the latter's house, which provided that upon his "bolting the Liberal Party", the others would launch and support his candidacy for the presidency and exert their every effort to secure his nomination as the "official presidential candidate of the Nacionalista Party coalesced with the Citizens' Party and other opposition parties" and that upon such nomination he would "affiliate with the Nacionalista Party." He was to decline any nomination by the Liberal Party for the presidency or any other position; Laurel, Recto, and Tañada were also to decline such nomination by their respective parties. The agreement further provided that the choice of candidate for the vice-presidency was to be left to the Nacionalista Party and the candidates for membership in the Senate and House were to be chosen by the coalesced parties which were to "determine the proportionate share of each." The agreement finally provided that—

"God willing, upon the achievement of victory, the new President of the Philippines shall choose the members of his Cabinet upon the recommendation and with the consent of the Nacionalista Party and the Citizens' Party."



It may be said in Magsaysay's defense that he no doubt sincerely believed that it would be for the good of the country to put an end to the Quirino regime and that Quirino had not only refused to step aside for Magsaysay when this was proposed to him but had also refused to accept him as the vice-presidential candidate. Quirino had said: "How can I let this man run on my ticket? He is ignorant. He knows nothing about affairs of state or how to conduct them. He is good only for killing Huks. . ."<sup>7</sup> Magsaysay, prompted by his advisers, seized upon the latter remark as ground for submitting his resignation as Secretary. He wrote:

"Under your concept of my duties as Secretary of National Defense, my job is just to go on killing Huks. But you must realize that we can not solve the problem of dissidence simply by military measures. . . while the Administration continues to breed dissidence by neglecting the problem of our masses. . . The only reward I have sought in public life is the people's confidence. It now seems impossible for me to continue to merit such confidence by serving under your Administration."

Magsaysay knew well enough that the President had never believed that force alone would solve the Huk problem; long before Magsaysay was appointed Secretary, the President had initiated various socio-economic measures to win the less hardened Huks back to the ways of peace.

In August, 1953, some months before the election, when the directorates of the Nacionalista Party and the new Democratic Party announced a coalition under the terms of which Romulo and Lopez withdrew as the Democratic presidential and vice-presidential candidates, respectively, Magsaysay agreed to "letting them have three of the eight senatorial berths and two Cabinet posts in exchange for their support."<sup>8</sup>

And these were not the only commitments. The following statement by Chester Hunt, a Fulbright professor

<sup>7</sup>Romulo and Gray, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup>C. Quirino, *op. cit.*