

“OUR LITTLE NEWSPAPER” THE *LA SOLIDARIDAD* AND PHILIPPINE JOURNALISM IN SPAIN (1889-1895)

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“*Nuestros periodiquito*” or “Our little newspaper” was how Marcelo del Pilar described the periodical that would serve as the organ of the Philippine reform movement in Spain. For the next seven years, the *La Solidaridad* became the respected Philippine newspaper in the peninsula that voiced out the reformists’ demands and showed their attempt to open the eyes of the Spaniards to what was happening to the colony in the Philippines.

But, despite its place in our history, the story of the *La Solidaridad* has not entirely been told. *Madalas pag-usapan pero hindi alam ang kasaysayan*. We do not know much of the *La Solidaridad*’s beginnings, its struggle to survive as a publication, and its sad ending. To add to the lacunae of information, there are some misconceptions as to its story.

To the knowledge of the researcher, there singular work which studied the *La Solidaridad* is John N. Schumacher, S.J.’s *The Propaganda Movement*, and this was first published in 1972 and again in 1997 (Schumacher, 2002) Here the newspaper is mentioned as part of the overall history of the reformist movement.

This paper will attempt to present new facts on the *La Solidaridad* and parts of its story which had been overlooked. It will also show the methods of how Philippine journalism was done in Spain during the 19th century at a time when freedom of the press was at its height in the peninsula.

Sources on the *La Solidaridad*

Primary sources on the story of the *La Solidaridad* were surprisingly rare in the Philippines until recently. But its history could be followed through the letters of its staff and contributors. In writing this paper, I consulted the letters of Jose Rizal in the five-volume *Epistolario Rizalino*; the two-volume *Epistolario del Marcelo H. del Pilar*; and some of the letters of

Historian, archivist, and writer Manuel Artigas y Cuerva had written works on Philippine journalism, especially during the celebration of the tercentenary of printing in 1911. A meticulous researcher, Artigas viewed and made notes on the pre-war newspaper collection in the government archives and the National Library. One of the bibliographical entries he wrote was that of the *La Solidaridad*, which he included in his work “El Centenario de la Imprenta”, a series of articles in the American period magazine *Renacimiento Filipino* which ran from 1911-1913. Here he cited a published autobiography by reformist turned revolutionary supporter, Timoteo Paez as his source. There is, however, no known copy of this autobiography in any library here in the Philippines today.

It is also unfortunate that there is no complete set of the *La Solidaridad* in the Philippines today. Specimens that were in the National Library of the Philippines during the American period were destroyed during World War II. A few issues were discovered in 2011 in the University of Santo Tomas Archives by its archivist, Prof. Regalado Trota Jose, after it was placed in storage following an exhibit in the late 1970s.

Two complete sets are known to exist – one in the University of Michigan and, the other in the Augustinian Archives in Valladolid. A translation project was begun in 1966 by historian Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon using photostats from the latter set. She translated Volumes I to V and had two volumes published before the project was discontinued by the University of the Philippines Press. The volumes remained in manuscript from until 1996 when Fundacion Santiago published the entire set of the English

translation with the Volumes VI and VII translated by Luis Mañeru and marketed under Bookmark Inc.

The Epistolario was reprinted in 1961 by the Jose Rizal National Centennial Commission (JRNCC) according to the letter writers.

“El Centenario de la Imprenta” in *Renacimiento Filipino* (1911-1913). The articles ran infrequently for two years until the magazine closed down in 1913.

In a message to the author on the social networking site, Facebook, Dick Malay, the son of writer, educator, and Filipiniana collector, Dean Armando Malay, said that his father donated a inaugural issue of the *La Solidaridad* to the University of Philippines in 1992. It now hangs in the College of Mass Communications Library. The said issue was a gift from National Library Director Luis Montilla after World War II.

La Solidaridad: Quicenario democratico. Volumes I-VII. Translated by Guadalupe Fores-Ganzon and Luis Mañeru (Manila: Fundacion Santiago, 1996).

The World of La Solidaridad

The opening of the Philippines to world trade in the 19th century brought new things and ideas from Europe. There were several factors that brought about this condition, one of which is the shorter and faster route from the continent via the Cape of Good Hope that made communications easier between the colony and their mother country.

The foreign commerce and the improvements in local production and trade also created a new stratum in Philippine society – the middle-class or the *ilustrados*. It was this class that gained much from the growing colonial economy by getting involved in the foreign trade. They reaped its profits and lived a good life, being wealthy enough to send their sons to Europe to study in higher education.

As Schumacher (2002) wrote:

“The growing prosperity of the country was important to the nationalistic movement in various ways: First, opportunities of trade in the Philippines brought about increased contacts with foreigners and peninsular

Spaniards. Second, the relatively small but significant number of families who prospered could send their sons in Europe for an education, further rupturing the isolation that cut off the Philippines from the rest of the world. Their sons absorbed the intellectual current of Europe, saw a completely different type of society and became disillusioned with Spain itself on seeing the more progressive state of other countries.”

One of the places to go to was Spain. The peninsula was going through a period of change. Liberalism, the philosophy brought about by the Age of Enlightenment, was permeating Spanish society. In the 19th century, the Spanish government was a constitutional monarchy with a *Cortes* (Parliament) that represented the Spanish provinces. Because of the distance from the continent, the Philippines was irregularly represented here. Slowly, the middle-class Filipino intellectuals began to question their roles in society and the governance of the Church and State in their country which, at that time, was still recognized as a “colony” rather than a province of Spain. Movements began that sought equal recognition between the Filipinos and the Spaniards.

The Propaganda Movement

The Philippine reform movement or what is to be known in our history as the Propaganda Movement was a result of the nationalism from a modernizing Spanish colony. The enlightened Filipinos became aware that the fight for nationalism and equality was not to be fought in their own country but in the land of their colonial masters. Dissatisfied with their roles as colonials, but unable to fight and foster their ideals in their homeland, the *ilustrados* opted to do their campaign abroad in the liberal atmosphere of Spain. It must be made clear to the authorities, however, that the changes they wanted to achieve had to be done by peaceful means. They wanted reform not revolution.

Though several middle-class sons were sent to Spain, only a few actually worked in the reformist movement. Among them were young men like Jose Rizal, Marcelo del Pilar, Jose Alejandrino, Pedro Paterno, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Eduardo de Lete, Jose Maria Panganiban, Mariano Ponce, and the brothers,

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Juan and Antonio Luna. These men worked hard in the creation of the movement and its eventual recognition in Spanish society.

For the next 15 years, beginning in 1880 until 1895, the Propaganda Movement formed a cause that battled the colonial government and the Catholic Church in the Philippines with the might of the pen.

Early Journalism Attempts

The proposal to publish a newspaper to spread their ideals came with the idea of forming a Filipino organization in Madrid in 1876. But the concept of uniting the Filipino community in Spain died an early death, yet the thought of coming out with a newspaper remained.

On March 7, 1877, the first issue of the newspaper, *España en Filipinas* made its appearance in the streets of Madrid. It was edited by Eduardo de Lete and came out at least four times a month. The paper was initially issued to combat the anti-Filipino attitudes of some Spanish writers who began writing diatribes against the ideas of assimilation. It was moderate in its outlook and, at first, “not openly opposing “existing institutions” (Schumacher, 2002) but “to sustain in the arena of the press all those solutions which tend to renew once more the open-minded policy of assimilation, traditional in overseas Spain.”

The newspaper was the first step to make known to the Spanish authorities the idea of assimilation by the Filipino reformists. It called for representation in the Spanish Cortes as well as equal rights for the Filipinos as a province of Spain. But it still took a moderate stance with regards to confronting the Spanish authorities and, in fact, dealt more with commenting about non-Philippine affairs. It was only in its third issue and he subsequent issues that it began to deal with Philippine events. (Schumacher, 2002)

España en Filipinas lived a short life, lasting only 16 issues with the last one put out in September of 1877. Internal strife was the cause of its demise. There were differences of ideals and purposes among its staff and writers. Rizal and Lopez Jaena were said to have radical tendencies in deplored anti-Filipino feelings by the Spaniards of which the newspaper’s Spanish writers want nothing to do with.

Schumacher also blamed “racial elements” with “lines largely drawn between the creoles and Spanish mestizos on one side and the Chinese mestizos and indios on the other.”. (Schumacher, 2002) Political differences also caused the withdrawal of funds by its supporters. Before the newspaper folded, Ponce tried to continue running it by gathering funds from friends and other supporters. But the enthusiasm to continue the publication already waned and nothing could stop its demise.

The La Solidaridad

In spite of the end of *España en Filipinas*, Ponce continued to solicit funds to put up “an organ of Filipino opinion in Spain.” (Schumacher, 2002) There were immediate positive results. Funds were contributed by interested parties along with proposals that Ponce and Rizal (who was beginning to show his leadership among the Filipinos in Spain) should be the editors of the planned newspaper. Both declined. Lete, on the other hand, assumed that he will be asked to be editor again considering his experience with the *Espana en Filipinas*. But it was because of the debacle of the newspaper that many of his countrymen opposed his taking up the responsibility again. In fact, Lete was also blamed for the growing schism between the Filipinos caused by his handling of the newspaper. The decision to appoint a director for the planned newspaper became deadlocked. Unable to solve the problem of removing the condition of choosing an editor that came with the contributions, Ponce, along with the other Filipinos, decided to put up a newspaper with their own money.

In his history of the Soli based Timoteo Paez’ account, here the facts about the newspaper:

“The *La Solidaridad* was founded on February 15, 1889 in Barcelona by Galicano Apacible, Jose Ma. Panganiban, Mariano Ponce, Pablo Rianzares Bautista, and Santiago Icasiano. The main proponent of the newspaper project, however, was Mariano Ponce, who became administrator and the business manager of the newspaper. The newspaper began with funds these men contributed. Paez mentioned that Ponce and Bautista gave 10 reales fuertes each while Panganiban gave three duros.” (Paez, 1980 as cited by Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

Lopez Jaena was made director though he only said that “he can give only a contribution of his works.” (Schumacher would belittle Lopez Jaena’s role in the movement, citing that the part Lopez Jaena played was “small and he contributed nothing of permanent value to the vision of a future Philippines.” (Schumacher, 2002) There was also evidence that it seemed it was Del Pilar and Ponce who did most of the work of the newspaper. (NHCP, 2011)

The Soli was not a broadsheet but a tabloid-sized newspaper measuring some 20.5 x 28 cms (the size of a sheet of short bond paper) – Del Pilar’s “periodiquito”. The text was printed in two columns. Illustrations were present yet seldomly found only on the front page. A regular edition of the newspaper was around 12 pages but there were issues that had 16 pages or more. The size and thickness were necessary for the target readers also included the ones in the Philippines. Knowing that the newspaper had will draw the ire of the friars and the colonial authorities, the Soli administrators prepared it to be secretly mailed or smuggled to escape the government censors in the islands.

The new periodical also had its birth pains. Del Pilar would write to Rizal about the dilemma of “too many articles” submitted as well as the “trick of compositors” who use large types for the articles which forced the editors to temporarily cancel the planned Literary Section. (NHCP, 2011)

The objectives of the La Solidaridad were printed on the front page of the first issue:

Our program, aside from being harmless is very simple, to fight all reactions, to hinder all steps backward, to applaud and to accept all liberal ideas, and to defend progress....

The aims, therefore, of La Solidaridad are defined: to gather, to collect liberal ideas which are daily exposed in the camp of politics, in the fields of science, arts, letters, commerce, agriculture, and industry....

We shall pay special attention to the Philippines because these islands need the most help having been deprived of representation in the Cortes. We shall fulfill one

patriotic duty in the defense of democracy in those islands. That nation of eight million souls should not and must not be the exclusive patrimony of theocracy and conservatism.

As Schumacher said:

The newspaper unabashedly took a partisan stance, associating itself with the generally anti-clerical republican parties of Spain, and to a lesser extent with the left wing of the liberals. It announced its program as “assimilation” – the full application to the Philippines of Spanish law and the rights conceded to it. (Schumacher, nd)

It was, as Epifanio de los Santos later said, “a summary of the aspirations of the Filipino people.” (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

The La Solidaridad was no different in content and style from the Spanish newspapers circulating in the peninsula. These turn-of-the-twentieth century newspapers were generally subjective, reflecting “be it political or otherwise, of the publishers.” (Bascara, 2002) They were called “periodicos personalistas” for they serve as “a media to convey and herald the opinions, views, sentiments, and positions of individuals and different sectors – politicians, business, Church, and labor groups.” Spanish newspapers were also described as “periodicos opinion” for many of them were opinion-centric and focused more on view and opinions rather than news. (Bascara, 2002)

Writers and Managers

The writers of the Solidaridad were among the best of the intellectuals in the Filipino community in Spain. The articles, at first, remained uncredited for obvious reasons but later the writers started using pseudonyms: Rizal was Dimas-Alang and Laong-Laan; Ponce - Kalipulako, Tikbalang, Naning; Del Pilar - Plaridel; Antonio Luna - Taga-Ilog; and Panganiyan - Jomapa. Later, Rizal would ask Del Pilar to use their names when publishing their articles (NHCP, 2011) – a suggestion that was seldom followed.

The set-up of the La Solidaridad included correspondents in the following countries with their corresponding addresses:

Madrid : Plaza de San Marcial, num
3, 2
Paris : 175 Boulevard Piére
London : 37 Chaliot Crescent,
Primrose Hill, N.W. (Rizal's Lon-
don address)
Hong Kong : J. Basa. Pottinger, St.

The growing communications technology like telegraph cables, faster ships, and land vehicles that transported news materials between countries made it easy for the newspaper to keep up with the news and notices in the continent and the Philippines.

In his letter to Rizal from Barcelona, two days after the Soli was put out, Del Pilar gives us a description how the newspaper was initially run:

It is democratic in its opinion, but very much more so in the organization of its staff. One should see how the director writes, corrects proofs, directs the printing, distributes the copies, and even takes the packages to the post office. Naning (Ponce), the administrator, gathers the data, writes, corrects proofs, addresses the wrappers, answers the correspondence, and also distributes the copies. I am the only idler, though the newspaper had me preoccupied during the period of its gestation and birth, for which reason I am behind in my correspondence with you.

Del Pilar later took over management when the newspaper and its editorial offices moved to Madrid and Lopez Jaena opted to stay in Barcelona – a move that proved to be fortunate for the reformists as Lopez Jaena was already being complained against by Ponce for the former's lackluster work on the newspaper. (NHCP, 2011)

Expenses and the dependability of available funds from contributors forced the staff to change offices and printing shops. The Soli was printed in different printing houses at different times. It was first run in the Rambla de Cataluña, num. 123, Barcelona while the editorial and administrative offices were on Plaza de Buensucessos 5, 1º. Ten months later, the staff moved to a new location on Atocha St. principal izquierda and the printing was done at the Tipografia de Jaramillo y Compañía on Cueva 5. The shop later moved to No. 45 on the same street on December 15, 1890.

When the Soli was moved to Madrid, the printing was done at the Progreso Tipografico on Miñas 13.

Following Rizal's complaint that the first Soli issues from the Madrid printing was of poor quality, Del Pilar changed printers on July of 1890, transferring the Soli to the Tipografia de Madrid. Before the end of the year, the printing needs were handled by the Imprenta Moderna while the editorial offices were moved to Calle del Rubio 13 Principal. The Imprenta de Diego Pacheco del Dos de Mayo 5 was the last printing press that handled the printing of the Soli in its last year of existence. (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

Financing

The La Solidaridad began as a bi-monthly then later became a monthly then would come out infrequently as funding became a problem. Money to sustain the newspaper came mainly from the Comite de Propaganda in Manila of which Del Pilar was a member. The first remittance he received from the Philippines was a letter of exchange for 150 pesos fuertes. But the printing costs for the first month of the newspaper's existence amounted to 18 pesos monthly which later increased to 120 pesos. This expense did not include the payment for the rent of a house for the editorial offices; the director's dormitory; the salaries of the staff and the printing and writing costs. (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913) The newspaper was also sustained by subscriptions and sales. By the second issue, the Soli was already selling advertising spaces.

However, the funding seems not to be enough. Rizal's letters from Paris between 1889 and 1892 to Ponce and Del Pilar would mention notices of paid subscriptions and complaints by his friends that their issues failed to arrive.

Among those who helped with the money problem were Paez, Juan Zulueta, Marcelino Santos, Timoteo Lanuza, Deodato Arellano, Domingo Franco, and Moises Salvador. These men gave Lopez Jaena an additional 40 pesos monthly to gather propaganda materials for the newspaper. Another Filipino propagandist, Fernando Canon Faustino, gave money from the sale of Rizal's novel, *Noli Me Tangere* (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

The staff also contributed two duros monthly deducted from their pay that was reduced to one duro when the funding from Manila failed to arrive.

The shortness of funds would sometimes be so serious that in one letter to Rizal in 1891, Antonio Luna, who was hired by the newspaper as a correspondent, complained that he had not been promoted or paid sufficiently by the newspaper, in spite of the fact that the newspaper management has been receiving funds:

"As a special favor that comes from you, they assigned me 8 *duros* a month. It is exactly one year that, despite my fulfillment of my duties and working more than is required; I have not yet received any promotion that will encourage me to continue. I write two, three, or more articles for each issue, as you will see, and nevertheless, despite stealing time from school duties, I find myself with the salary of a *carromata* driver (as I call him) without hope of rising further. If it is true that they are sending thousands of *duros*, on what are they spent, where are they invested? My book is dying of laughter, neither books nor pamphlets are being printed, the pay is wretched . . . what is this? On the other hand, there is a great waste of money, useless trips, complete abandon, no initiative, and what amounts to a dead campaign. This is complete suicide. This very day the fortnightly is in my hands and the two issues published while I am here have only one article by Naning. Here in its true light is all the work of the labors of the *Propaganda*. Today it has been truly scandalous. There was almost no material and I have had to write on one day four articles, because both del Pilar and Naning are doing absolutely nothing." (NHCP, 2011)

Smuggling the Soli

A problem of the reformists about the La Solidaridad was disseminating the newspaper, along with their other writings, in the Philippines. Reports of their anti-government activities had already reached the colonial authorities in Manila. One of their immediate reactions was to strictly monitor the cargoes from ships coming from Europe entering the customs house in the city. The prohibition was so effective that Del Pilar would only happily report to Rizal on February 28, 1890 that the Soli has finally been smuggled into the Philippines almost a year after it came out. (NHCP, 2011)

Copies of the Soli were smuggled to the islands

by sympathizers working in the mail and telegraph offices in Manila. Based on Paez' account, Artigas y Cuerva says that the subversive materials from Spain and Hong Kong were received by a first-class telegraph operator, Damoso Ibarra, who handled the incoming correspondences at the Office of the Inspector-General of Communications. These were then handed to a postman, Brigido Casteloy, who would then secretly distribute them to other messengers. They would then clandestinely distribute the materials in the city and the provinces. This system was effective for some time as it was happening under the very noses of the authorities. The two, however, were eventually caught and punished by their superiors. (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

The price for getting caught with copies of the La Solidaridad and other subversive propaganda materials was heavy. Many were arrested and deported. Among them were two relatives of Del Pilar who he was relying on for funding.

The End of the Soli

The end of the La Solidaridad came in the seventh year of its existence. By this time the reform movement waswaning. Rizal had returned to the Philippines in 1892 and founded the La Liga Filipina on July 3. He was, however, arrested that same evening and ordered deported to Dapitan four days later. With Rizal gone, it was the end of the La Liga. The remaining members tried to continue the organization along with its aims of reform and support for the La Solidaridad. But the Liga lasted for only a few months as the members saw the futility of continuing the call for reforms as it apparently fell on deaf ears in the Spanish colonial administration. The group broke into two factions: the Cuerpo de Compromisarios led by Numeriano Adriano and the Katipunan led by Andres Bonifacio.

The Compromisarios tried to continue support for the publication of the La Solidaridad but they had to face the fact that the gathering of funds was becoming difficult. Money still came in from time to time from supporters and sympathizers, but it wasn't enough. The funds dwindled. The printing of the Soli suffered.

Finally on August 19, 1895, Apolinario Mabini, secretary of the Compromisarios in Manila, wrote to Marcelo del Pilar in Madrid with the sad news that the group has finally decided to end the newspaper:

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I regret very much to be the person to inform you that the moment I have feared has come when the publication of the newspaper La Solidaridad has to stop.

The efforts of a few could not prevail against the belief of many that the newspaper is useless, since the authorities refused to listen to our clamors for help.

"This is the reason why we cannot send you any amount this month. They make use of any pretext for not giving money. It is not now possible to support the paper, unless someone comes along who was great influence and plenty of money, and even then, I consider it still difficult because of the entry of the newspaper here will meet with serious obstacles. At other times, we could have gone ahead. Nowadays, it is impossible because we are a highly impressionable people, and, on top of this, very little is given to reflection. This is why the few who were helping us, lured by recent events that you know only too well, have lost the hope they pinned on the paper over there and have transferred it wholly to another direction. I do not know whether they even realize the difficulties that the new procedure would bring with it and consider whether they have enough strength to meet and overcome difficulties. All I know is that they believe it is the only good way, and they refuse even to think whether the death for the newspaper could cause us some damage." (NHC, 1965)

Mabini also told Del Pilar that they are collecting money to provide funds for him and Mariano Ponce if they would like to leave Spain. He added that "everyone wants you to go to Japan, where some from here already are." (NHC, 1965)

The last issue of the La Solidaridad on November 15, 1895 was a mere ghost of its glory as the newspaper of the reformists. It was only eight pages with articles written by Del Pilar, Andres de Gachitoren, and Juan Serrano Gomez. Its farewell message to its readers is found in the last page. It was a brave front put up by Del Pilar as he did not lose hope that the newspaper will continue:

Facing the obstacles that the reactionary persecutions bring in opposition to the circulation of this newspaper in the Philippines, we have to suspend our publication for some time.

Nowadays, when there are ways to curb difficulties, we will not stop working to overcome them. We are certain that all sacrifice is little in order to conquer the rights and freedom of an oppressed nation living in bad times of slavery.

We work within the law and thus we will continue publishing this newspaper whether here and abroad, depending on the exigencies of the right wherein the Filipino reactionaries have come to impress upon all Filipinos that in its soul there beats some sentiment of dignity and shame.

Whether here or abroad, we will continue developing our program.

The end of the La Solidaridad signaled the end of the Propaganda Movement and Philippine journalism in Spain. It was the final curtain for, what Artigas y Cuerva called, a "glorious moment of the Philippine press." (Artigas y Cuerva, 1913)

An Examination

Though it may be a successful newspaper to many of its readers with regards to its objectives, the La Solidaridad went into a steady decline as the years passed. Several factors were cited:

First, as mentioned in Mabini's letter to Del Pilar, the irregularity of funds. Money was a continuous problem despite the financial support from fellow Filipinos and sympathizers in Spain. The reformists not only had to pay for the printing of the newspapers, they had to deal with expenses like rent for the offices as well as salaries for the staff and the correspondents and fees for the use of the telegraph and other means of communication as well as the sending of the newspaper.

Second, the effective vigilance of the Spanish authorities in the Philippines led to a low circulation of the Soli in the country. And without a good circulation, subscriptions from readers were very few,

leading to a shortage of funds. Schumacher mentioned that the Soli “had less effectiveness as an instrument of documentation within the Philippines.”

Third, a rift between Rizal and Del Pilar over the leadership of the reformists climaxed with the breakaway of Rizal from the movement and the Soli. This worsened the newspaper’s precarious circulation since Rizal had many supporters and readers. Del Pilar was left with Ponce to manage the newspaper. The contents soon became repetitious for Del Pilar had discussed issues over and over in earlier Soli articles. Interest among the Spanish politicians waned.

However, a question remains as to how successful was the La Solidaridad in its objectives? As an organ of the reformists, it was successful, but as a means to influence the Spaniards, it failed. Assimilation became an impossible dream for the reformists. Though there was some Philippine representation in the Spanish Cortes, these men were Spaniards and not Filipinos. Moreover, Schumacher pointed out that there was no concrete proof that the reforms that were later brought to the Philippines was a direct result of the Soli.

The positive result of the newspaper, however, was that it still contributed, in a small way, to the development of the identity of the Filipinos. The ideas the newspaper expounded, coupled with the call for reforms and assimilation introduced the Filipinos to their standing as members of Spanish society – not as colonials but as equals. It also contributed to their realization of the futility of having equal status with Spaniards. Independence would soon become the cry of the people.

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