

PHILIPPINE SOCIAL ISSUES

from a  
CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Edited by  
RICHARD P. POETHIG

for the  
CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP EDUCATION  
PROGRAM

of the  
Department of Christian Education  
United Church of Christ in the Philippines  
1963

5. "A Christian steward is responsible not only for how he uses his money, but also for the methods he used to secure it in the first place." What meaning does this principle have for the Philippine economic situation and the typical ways of getting wealth in this country?

6. Would you favor the evangelical churches developing a program of education for parents on how to space their children and limit their families by employing effective techniques of controlling conception? Please discuss.

7. Discuss the differences between social welfare and social action.

#### B I B L I O G R A P H Y

*Commentary on Industrial Evangelism* — Issue VIII, Issue XV, Committee on Industrial Life and Vocations, United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Manila.

*Dilemmas and Opportunities, Christian Action in Rapid Social Change* (Part III), Department of Church and Society — Division of Studies, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1959.

Fagley, Richard M., *The Population Explosion and Christian Responsibility*, Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1960.

Huber, Allen and Santiago C. Manongdo, *Credit Union Handbook*, National Cooperatives and Small Business Corporation, Manila, 1948.

#### CHAPTER 6

### THE CHRISTIAN AND LABOR

By RICHARD P. POETHIG

#### I. LABOR IN CONTEMPORARY PHILIPPINE SOCIETY

The term "labor" has two general meanings. First, there is the verb which means to work with one's hands in pursuit of a livelihood. Secondly, there is the collective noun "labor" which refers to those in the ranks of labor as distinguished from those who are managers or professionals. Labor in this second sense is used also to designate those organized in labor unions.

Within the Philippines the term "labor" generally stirs up a negative emotional response. By playing on the more aggressive aspect of labor union activity, newspapers have encouraged an antagonism toward labor. The mental image created by the word "labor" is often that of a labor union striking against an employer. This negative response to labor is not new to the Philippine scene but goes deep into the Filipino past.

### *Spanish and U.S. Attitudes Toward Labor*

The inferior position of labor derives in part from the disrespect with which Spanish culture regarded those who worked with their hands. The line of division in Spanish society was drawn between those who worked upon the land and those who owned the land. The ambitious man sought to rise above the need to do manual labor for his livelihood. Bruno Lasker delineates the social system of the Hispanic Philippines:

... in the Philippines, anyone whom industry, thrift, or luck had placed in possession of money almost invariably invested it in land and thus changed his social status. To engage in any kind of physical labor would have held down his social position. The process of industrialization thus was greatly handicapped not only by the export of potential capital, but also by the absence of a class of manual workers who, when successful, would invest their savings in technical training for themselves or their children and thus build from the ground up enterprises of growing complexity. Instead, the successful man became an ilustrado whose son, if of a progressive frame of mind, might prepare himself for a career of industrial management or teaching, but always with a view to functioning in the office or the classroom, never in the shop.<sup>1</sup>

Social mobility, which is the moving from one class to another, was limited within stratified Spanish-Filipino society. Within this society a man

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Hunt, Chester in *Sociology in the Philippine Setting*, Hunt, Coller, et al., Alemar's Manila, 1954, p. 330 ff.

rose from his lower social rank by reason of good luck or fate. Hard work was not thought of as a means for improving one's social status. Rather, labor was the lot which fell to a man by reason of his lower station in society.

The American attitude toward manual work was a move in the opposite direction. The early American administrators of the Philippines saw work as a necessary and a valuable contribution to the well-being of society. The teachers who came in the first decade of the 1900's introduced industrial training to the classroom. Through industrial training it was expected that the children of the Philippines might learn to be industrious and at the same time earn extra money while attending school. A *Teacher's Magazine* in 1913 carried articles written by Filipino teachers on the people's attitude toward this program of industrial training. One teacher, Santiago Bautista, wrote:

#### *WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK OF OUR INDUSTRIAL WORK*

The people think that industrial training is one of the most beneficial things that the school can impart to the children. They say that during Spanish sovereignty in the Philippines, the students regarded work as dishonor, but now, through the industrial work the students are taught that to work is a great honor. They say that by means of it the children are trained to be good workers. Before, in the town, no one knew how to make hats out of buri leaves and fibers, but now the boys are using buri hats which they make them-

themselves. Antonio's father said that Antonio formerly spent his time at home in playing, but now he weaves hats and baskets and makes picture frames.

The parents are very much pleased to see that through the industrial work their children earn money. Concepcion's mother said that her daughter earned three pesos last year by selling the handkerchiefs in the school. Victoriana's oldest sister said that Victoriana makes good lace and that she has used her time in the school to learn something through which she can get money.

Some parents say that they would send their children to school if only to learn some kind of industrial work.<sup>2</sup>

But even with this avowed policy of industrial training, the U.S. occupation of the Philippines made little change in the overall attitudes of the people toward labor. The professions, even though they are over-crowded, are still more sought after than technical jobs. A young man would much prefer an office job than a factory job even though the factory job pays higher. This dislike of manual labor has made it difficult to find the laborers and skilled technicians necessary to insure the steady growth of industry. The industrial development of the country depends, in part, upon a changed attitude toward manual skills.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Pecson, Geronima T. and Racelis, Maria. *Tales of the American Teachers in the Philippines*, Carmelo & Baucermann, Manila, 1959, p. 209.

### *Problems in Economic Development*

The aim of the Philippine government is to raise the standard of living of the whole nation. In order to raise a nation's standard of living all of its resources must be usefully employed. Every nation has these resources: its people, its land and its capital. While not every person has land or capital, every person has his labor to add to the economic resources of the nation. A person's labor is as much a part of a nation's wealth as are its land and its capital. When a man can find no job or when he is not full employed, his labor capacity is wasted. Not only does he suffer but his country suffers as well. In the Philippines unemployment and underemployment are two of the nation's most persistent problems. In 1959 the figure for unemployed and underemployed was set at 1,793,000 out of a labor force of 9,709,000. This poor use of labor is one of the reasons for the prevailing poverty in underdeveloped lands.

In the farm areas the underemployment creates a vicious circle. Since rice-growing uses the equivalent of only 75 eight-hour days a year, the farmer's labor is only partly employed. Even with two rice crops a year he is employed less than half the year. This accounts for the low yearly income of the farmer. In 1959 the farming group, which makes up 56.9% of the total labor force, re-

ceived only 10% of the country's total income. When the farmer can not make ends meet, he cuts his food budget to two inadequate meals a day. Further he withdraws his children from school so they may help support the family. Thus the plight of the farmer is perpetuated through his children.

The situation of the farmer has repercussions within the total economy of the country. The Philippines depends upon its rice crop to feed the nation. Since 1915 Philippine rice production has been insufficient for the nation's needs. When the farmers of the Philippines are not able to provide rice for the nation, the government buys rice from overseas. When capital is spent outside the country to buy rice, the over-all standard of living of the people is retarded. The country needs all its available resources to achieve its program of economic development.

#### *The Farmer's Plight*

But let us see the farmer's plight from another angle — that is, the poor rewards for his labor. Even when a man works hard there is no assurance that he will receive just payment for his labor. In the rural areas the tenant farmer is the classic figure of one whose labor bears little fruit. A combination of factors work together to keep the tenant tied to the soil. The greatest single factor in his servitude is his continual indebtedness.

The plight of the tenant farmer is described by Karl Pelzer:

A characteristic feature of the kasama system is that the tenant has no funds and usually no rice for his family at the beginning of the contract. He therefore receives a bugnos, or advance, from his landlord. This sum varying from 25 to 125 pesos, usually bears no interest but is returnable in money or in kind at the termination of the contract. In addition, the tenant is given a weekly or monthly palay (unhusked rice) ration to keep him and his family going. The palay received up to the time of planting is usually paid back without interest; whereas the rations delivered after the crop is once planted are subject to high interest, and here the door is open to usurious practices, which will be discussed later. The Kasama is completely in the hands of the landowner, who has to support him until time of harvest and the division of the crop. Often the tenants run so deeply in debt that they remain in debt after the crop has been divided and they have turned over their share to the landlord in payment of their loans. Thus, instead of being able to draw upon their own rice during the off-season between February and July, they must ask the landlord for new loans in money or palay and fall even more deeply into debt.<sup>3</sup>

Over against the discouraging picture of the agricultural worker, is the more hopeful situation of the growing class of industrial workers. The worker in industry receives more than three times the income of his counterpart on the farm. This higher income is due in part to the greater rewards.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Pelzer, "Pioneer Settlement in the Asiatic Tropics", American Geographical Society Special Publication No. 29, 1945, New York, p. 94.