

Manila Chronicle - Sunday 14. March. 1971.

Women Form Liberation Front, Set Rally

Women from various sectors yesterday announced the organization of a women's liberation front committed to the struggle against oppression and exploitation in the country.

They scheduled, as their initial activity, a march-rally for tomorrow afternoon to protest the increase of prices.

The mass action by women will be spearheaded by the newly formed coordinating body, **Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan (KATIPUNAN)**.

Mila Aguilar, a young journalist and acting spokesman of the KATIPUNAN, said that the rally is tentatively set for Plaza Bustillos "as Mayor Antonio Villegas, although we cannot see any reason for him to be afraid of us, refuses to grant us a per-

mit to rally at Plaza Miranda."

The progressive women, among them housewives, laborers, professionals, and students, called for other Filipino women to join "the national democratic struggle" and to fight "against the oppression and exploitation of the Filipino masses" in general and specifically, discrimination against women.

They asserted that "it was time for women to involve themselves in national affairs" and break the myth that women must be kept at home.

Mrs. Paula Carolina Malay appealed to her fellow housewives to assert themselves in policy-making affecting national and local issues.

Her daughter, Carolina (Bobbie) Malay, a newspaperwoman, at the same

time, assailed the present set up wherein women "cannot have their own place without the consent of the men."

"Although discrimination against women in newspapering is not widely felt, some people do not fully accept the fact that women are equal of men," she said.

DISAPPOINTMENT

Soledad Valencia, a young laborer, also expressed disgust over the so-called "lie down or lay off" policy by certain government and private firms on women applying for jobs.

Other speakers included Edith Sangalang Atienza, a teacher from the Philippine College of Commerce, Ma. Lorena Barros of the Malayang Kilusan ng mga

Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA), Judy Taguiwalo of the Samahang Demokratiko ng mga Kabataan, (SDK) Lou Roque of the **Kabataang Makabayan (KM)** women's bureau, Mrs. Ceres Alabado, housewife and writer of children's books, and Mila Astorga Garcia of KATIPUNAN.

The progressive women noted that rising prices affect not only the men but also women who assume responsibility in stretching the budget. To ensure support, the KATIPUNAN has conducted teach-ins among women's groups in schools and other establishments, distributed pamphlets at markets and shopping places.

The MAKIBAKA, meanwhile, said that "Filipino women should break the fetters of feudal conserva-

tism and of the bourgeois regard for women as mere commodities and struggle together with the men to liberate the oppressed masses of Filipinos."

POLITICALIZATION

The KM, through its women's bureau, also described the projected women's march as sign of "the growing politicalization of the broad masses of Filipinos to the worsening economic crisis of the country under the rule of the chief oligarch Marcos."

It was the KATIPUNAN's view that "since the Filipino women constitute more than one-half of the country's working masses, they are a potent force in smashing the old oppressive society and in building a new just and prosperous society."

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The persistence of reports that Mrs. Imelda Marcos is being promoted for the presidential nomination in 1973—barring changes in the Constitution—is such that they can no longer be ignored. The possibilities open for President Marcos, as a has-been President, succeeded by his wife in the Palace are intriguing, to say the least. We imagine, for instance, how, after having exercised effective power for eight years, Mr. Marcos would comport himself as the Prince Consort of the female President (assuming the Filipino people cannot avoid such a political calamity), or to use a pedestrian term, her "sidekick."



HELE-HELE

The average farm family in the Philippines farms the land around its barrio under one of several conditions. The farmer may be a tenant, paying rent in crops or money; he may be a hired hand on an estate; or he may be an independent farmer-owner. Even if he is the last, his holding is usually less than five acres, his rice crop yield is low and he runs short of food from one harvest to the next.

The common Filipino *tao* lives and farms almost the same way his ancestors did one hundred years ago. Average annual rice production per acre in the Philippines compares unfavorably with most other countries in the world despite the naturally rich soils. The Filipino tenant farmer lacks both the knowledge and the incentive to grow the additional food which he and his country require.

Rice farming does not keep the people employed throughout the year; they carry on many supplemental economic activities such as the harvesting, processing and marketing of copra; and the growing of other small crops such as peanuts. However, most of these supplements are subsistence activities which yield only a small cash income. Small farms, scarcity of capital and backward methods of farming limit the productivity and income of these farm families. The general inaction of the government in protecting the rights of small-scale farmers; the relative lack of self-government; the shortage of communications, the attitudes of the people themselves, prevent any improvement in their well being.

The relative shortage of capital in barrios can be traced to similar situations throughout the country. One major factor is the large annual withdrawal of wealth and income by landlords, money-lenders and middlemen, in the forms of rent, interest and low prices paid for farm products. Small farms, low productivity and large households, too, perpetuate maldistribution of wealth and income. Little or no investment is ever made by the few absentee landlords, in farm building, irrigation systems, livestock, fertilizer or farm machinery.

There are a number of observations that are applicable to many Philippine barrios. The people within a particular barrio constitute a homogenous group, sharing the same religious beliefs, having predominantly endogamous marriage within the barrio, and with a very low mobility upward or outward. A majority of husbands and wives were born in the barrio or a neighboring one. Residents, however, are careful about marrying too close to known kinship lines as marriage among kinsmen is taboo. Proximity of residence, similarity of means of making a living, membership in allied kin groups and common religious beliefs are combined features of community life. These bonds bring the the people together into one group whenever birth, sickness, marriage, death or other important events in the family cycle occur. These relations facilitate and maintain the transmission of the cultural values of the community which result in group unity and identity.

The following is a commentary on barrio life by Robert Shaplen in the *New Yorker* magazine: "...in sharp contrast with the frenzy of opportunism that pervades Manila, there is a sense of isolation and apathy, broken only by occasional fiestas-explosive forms of release that invariably consume whatever meager savings the people have accumulated...Life in most barrios remains extremely primitive. The majority of the families live in

rickety houses that are set up on stilts, so they won't be flooded out during the rainy season, and that have no plumbing; many people still consult *herbolarios*, or medicine men, about everything from aches and pains to means of getting jobs or finding mates and two thirds of those over ten years of age are illiterate. The prevalent lack of energy and imagination can be traced back to the systematic stifling of initiative and ambition during nearly four centuries of Spanish rule, and although there were some examples of enlightened American leadership, few changes in the basic outlook or condition of the farmer took place in the half century of United States dominion over the islands. The Spaniards, while pursuing a deliberate policy of isolating the Philippines by restricting trade and other intercourse with other Asian nations created a massive, lumbering civil bureaucracy that made it virtually impossible for the Filipinos to do any business among themselves, and thus enabled the Spanish landowners to dominate the people completely. Spanish planters and churchmen acquired and administered the biggest and best tracts of land, turning the Filipinos into poor tenants or small private farmers trying to subsist on marginal acres in the wilderness. The most fertile plantations in the nation, some of them comprising several thousands of acres, were held by the friar corporations of the Church, and hundreds of thousands of acres of other good land were owned by the *caciques*, or absentee landlords, whose descendants still own much of the land in the rich plains of central Luzon."

A self-perpetuating force within the society is the colonial mentality that permeates all aspects of the culture. William J. Pomeroy, an American Huk guerrilla leader of the 1950's, writes of the effects of this:

"Who that is free can know the meaning of a colonial mentality? Every white man who walks in the streets, even though he be a beachcomber, is deserving of special consideration. The landlord is a lord indeed; when you pass before him, bow low, with your hand to the ground like a plow. When you enter a 'tienda' and see on the shelf the foreign and the Filipino product, buy the foreign, of course it must be superior. And don't ever forget to raise the hand of the parent to the brow, to kiss the hand of the priest, to watch the hand of command raised by the 'kapitas' (rulers).

"When this occurs for 400 years under the arrogant Spaniard, and for 50 more years under the brashly superior American, there is something that happens to the temperament of a people. A theory exists that misery breeds revolt, but that is true most often when misery follows from a loss of what one has had. But when one has known nothing but misery for 450 years, it crushes, subdues, becomes a pattern of life...Only the most powerful of reasons can stir such a people to revolt."

The Americans and the Philippine Educational System

During the Spanish period, only a small percentage of the population received any education. Schooling above the primary level was expensive and largely restricted to the *Ilustrado* (illustrious or elite) class. Education never was looked upon and did not operate to provide a mobility ladder for the able and ambitious in a closed colonial system.

barrio life · reflection

Americans introduced free, popular, secular education attempting to reach the common person through a system patterned on the American public school. The Filipino's identification with the West is partially attributed to the impact of the public school system which was initially staffed by Americans. The schools served as a tool for communicating the idea of change and intensifying the Western identification of Filipinos who had been bypassed by the Spanish cultural impact. The public school system served to erode the foundation of traditional authority and value patterns by forcing an awareness of individual dignity, security and welfare which were dependent upon the efforts of the individual to realize his capacities.

THE PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER

With its ethic of hard work and self-improvement, focus on material goals and the motivation and skills required to gain such goals, American administrators did succeed considerably in improving the percentage of literacy at the barrio level. However, only a minority are educated to the point where they may be said to have a minimum ability to act as citizens of a literate society. Most pupils left school at the end of the third grade.

Philippine conduct of the educational system has resulted in a broadening of the base along with a weakening of standards. And, although the Philippine school system now is operative as a channel of social mobility, the school seldom has been an effective channel for mobility for the lowest half of the population consisting of tenant farmers and farm laborers. Undoubtedly status accrues to that barrio student able to achieve a high school diploma. But more often than not, that student is the son or daughter of a teacher, landowner, teniente or local entrepreneur living in the barrio and not the off-spring of a farmer or fisherman.

No matter how bright or clever a student is, he is unlikely to continue beyond the sixth grade unless his parents (or wealthier kin) have achieved a higher status than farm or fish folk. There is no law against such offspring going on to high school except the law of economics. Thirty to fifty dollars a year, the average cost of a public school or private secondary school education, is way beyond the means of the average family. Even in the situation where the honors student can receive a full or partial scholarship to the first year of high school, his parents are loathe to lose his services and also fear that they will be unable to afford the more than incidental "incidental expenses" that a student is forced to pay while attending the local high school.

The Filipino child also faces a heavy linguistic handicap in a school system which features crowded classrooms, limited supplies, a short educational day and a span of years two shorter than the American system. The first grader studies in his own dialect. He also is required to begin the study of Tagalog, the national language, as well as English in the latter of which he will receive all formal instruction from the third grade. Unless the teacher repeats the lesson in the dialect, the primary year students miss much of what the lesson is all about. So that from the third to the sixth grades, he is half-learning, from basically American

textbooks, what American children learn in six years in their native language!

In order for the school to play effectively its pre-eminent role in the social development of the child, it is necessary for the school to have knowledge of and operate within the context of the pattern of relationships between people or the local social customs. This is in part assured inasmuch as most teachers grow up within the culture in which they teach. But what happens when most of the educational content is from the United States? Instead of stories revolving around Tomas, Inday and their carabao, Dick and Jane and their pet dog Ruff are served up in English reading class. Science books are from the United States; many other materials are American produced.

The school child doesn't read about his family, with all of its involved and extended relationships. He reads about the Smith family--a father, a mother, a brother and a sister, residing in a big, white frame house on a pretty, tree-lined residential street of some big city...or, if the family happens to live on a farm, he reads about extensive acres with modern milking machinery, a number of cows grazing in the fields, chicken coops housing a considerable population, all dutifully producing eggs. Do these scenes spur the Filipino child to imitation? Not in this case, even though imitation of things American (on the most superficial level) is carried on a grand scale throughout the islands. No, this is the way only Americans can live and these are the things that only Americans can have because they are rich. America is another world, beyond the attainment of the poor Filipino tao. So that despite the pretty picture books, what preparation can the school child gain through reading American school books in which the stories reflect American folkways? The material of American books does not capture the spirit of the Filipino way of life. The school does not fulfill its function of training children for interpersonal relationships in the Philippines.

As teachers in the Filipino elementary school system, the Peace Corps volunteers have been faced continually with the apparent conflict between expectations stated in American textbooks and values inherent in Filipino life. There is the authoritarian trend in the Filipino family in which parents exercise much more influence over their children to a much later age than is true in the United States. This is expressed in the notion that children's wills must sometimes be broken. Children respond by doing as they are expected. The American teacher, however, places a relatively higher premium on students self-expression. She encourages individuality. But how can the Volunteer teacher reconcile the culture's demands for conformity with the textbook emphasis on originality?

The classroom inevitably is a miniature version of the whole society; it reflects the values of the society it serves. It makes little sense to foster an American educational system with its built-in patterns for aggressive, competitive children seeking achievement on children who are taught outside the school not to assert themselves, but rather to cooperate and respect authority.

of colonial mentality