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The Free Farmers Examined: The Philippine Federation of Free Farmers

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International Studies, University of California, Indian Press Digest Monograph Series Number 4, Dec., 1958, 150p. xixp.

This is an extraordinarily sympathetic study of the very difficult problems confronting India in the process of achieving the unity required for complete and stable nationhood. The author has made a very careful and thorough enquiry into the situation and its development, and has produced a carefully documented and very readable account of the diverse and conflicting tendencies that are shaping the future of that country. After having himself lived through the turmoil of the events described in the book, the reviewer can gratefully appreciate the delicately sensitive and sympathetic approach and outlook of the author who, though an American, can, despite the obviously selfish attitudes and interested motives of individual linguistic protagonists and political parties, express admiration for a sorely tried Government that has had the courage to face the problem and, when necessary, to bow to the will of the people. It is not always possible nor has it been the practice of foreign observers to look at India's internal struggles with such sympathetic eyes.

The only criticism that one can make about the book is that the author perhaps errs on the side of optimism when she describes the working of the Zonal Councils. A more detailed conspectus of the bitter criticism of the Government's vacillating behaviour would bring balance to the general framework of the book. In these matters, however, time is the best judge. India has suffered from the great battle for linguistic states and it will take many years before the wounds can be healed. One more point that the author should have more carefully verified is the behaviour of the Communist Kerala Government in the Southern Zonal Council. Despite the apparent attempt at co-operation, the Government's rice deal with the Andhra State was one of the reasons for its recent downfall.

But there is no doubt that the book is an excellent account of the difficult stage India is passing through. It is a pity that there is usually a dearth of such observant critics of India's economic and political development, critics who can present the nation's difficulties, her methods of achieving her aims, and her point of view in these matters with the accuracy and sympathetic understanding displayed by the author in the book under review.

A. FONSECA

THE FREE FARMERS EXAMINED

THE PHILIPPINE FEDERATION OF FREE FARMERS: A Case Study in Mass Agrarian Organization. By Sonya Diane Cater. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1959. vii, 147p. \$2.00.

This study fills a felt need. For agrarian movements in this country need not necessarily be radical or communist-inspired; nor must the peasantry always resort to force and violence for the redress of their grievances. The fact remains, however, that the dynamics and possibilities of organization in rural communities in the Philippines as a means to achieve desirable reforms in socio-economic and even political fields have, heretofore, received but scant and grudging attention. This study offers thorough and, in many instances, very intimate glimpses into the organization, *modus operandi* and orientation of The Federation of Free Farmers (FFF), a group effort national in scope and impelled by the highest of social motives.

The country's defective tenure patterns and tenancy practices, which have given rise to inequitable and exploitative arrangements; which have proved almost insuperable obstacles to the farm population's legitimate efforts to shake away from subsistence to attain higher levels of living; which, in a larger sense, have obstructed our transition from a purely agricultural to an agro-industrial economy; and which, only recently, bred a rebellion—have been, for decades, the subject of reform measures both constitutional and statutory.

But while policy lines aimed at transforming our agrarian structure have been clearly drawn, a critical appraisal of our past attempts at reform discloses that policy has been superior to performance. Numerous agencies have been created and energized to translate our reform programs into actuality, the most recent of these being the Agricultural Credit and Cooperative Financing Association (ACCFA), National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Administration (NARRA), Court of Agrarian Relations (CAR), Bureau of Agricultural Extension (BAE), Land Tenure Administration (LTA), Agricultural Tenancy Commission (ATC), etc. These agencies—given impetus at the advent of what the writer aptly calls the "Magsaysay era" in land reform—have succeeded to an appreciable degree in improving our tenure patterns and tenancy practices. However, one of the main roadblocks to agrarian reform, viz., the inability or indifference of our small farmers and the tenantry to take advantage of the benefits extended to them, has yet to be successfully solved.

The reasons for these—which the writer fully appreciates—are too well-known to need elaboration. Generally poor, ignorant, widely dispersed in scattered, remote barrios, our farm workers and the tenantry have been unable to organize and assert their rights. They continue to be the hapless prey of repressive and retrogressive practices and of national policy orientations polarized to serve the *status quo* and the prevailing (or what the writer calls the "vested") interests.

Happily, in answer to this lack in organization, groups of civic-spirited citizens have taken upon themselves the duty of organizing our farmers and the tenantry into assertive groups. Among the more

significant of these organizations are the units of the Philippine Federation of Free Farmers.

The study under review comprehensively and analytically discusses the Federation's framework, organizational set-up, membership, basic aims and principles, activities, difficulties encountered, accomplishments and suggested reforms. It is divided into six chapters and contains a bibliography and the Federation's manifesto and constitution and material on the role of the priests in the Federation, as appendices. The first chapter deals with the genesis of the Federation; the second with its framework and composition; the third with its role in the unionization of agrarian elements; the fourth with the activities of the Federation, from the encouragement of cooperative movement among farmers to the defense of its members and the promotion of agrarian peace; the fifth with the Federation's proposals for agrarian reform and the prospects for their adoption. The final chapter evaluates the accomplishments of the Federation in relation to its objectives, its short-comings and its merits—its points of strength and weakness.

Under the heading of accomplishments we may note in passing that recently the FFF successfully defended before the Court of Agrarian Relations (CAR) the change of sharing basis in *tumanal* (seasonal) cash crops, e.g., corn, mangos, peanuts, etc., from the customary 50-50 to a higher percentage of participation on the part of tenants—rectification of the sharing basis which would increase considerably the tenants' income. The appeal of the case by respondent=landholder to the Supreme Court of the Philippines is under consideration. (See Francisco Santos, *et al.* vs. Angeles Marquez, CAR Case No. 251-Bulacan, prom. Sept. 22, 1959.)

Also, the FFF inspired the inclusion in Republic Act. No. 2263, approved on June 19, 1959, of amendments to Republic Act. 1199 (The Agricultural Tenancy Act of the Philippines) viz: "The landholder shall not discourage, directly or indirectly, the formation, maintenance or growth of a union or organization of tenants in his landholding, but he shall not initiate, dominate, assist or interfere in the formation or administration of any such union or organization."

The writer's generally sound conclusions leave but little room for disagreement. The Federation is a long way from its goal of effectively exerting pressure on the administration to influence policy direction. FFF structure can be decentralized to enable it to permeate the "grass-roots" and effect true rapport with the farmers and the tenants. There is some validity to the observation that the FFF has fragmented its efforts into several undertakings well beyond the capacity of the FFF to formalize and execute—to achieve "complete and lasting results." This may, however, be due to the crying need for a many-pronged assault on rural problems, which are multifarious in facets and needs. The "Land-to-the-Tiller" program is impractical,

and, in our Philippine context, may be "a consummation devoutly to be wished" only, since constitutional impediments and fiscal limitations are insurmountable obstacles. The success achieved by the land reform programs in Japan, Taiwan, and, to some extent, Italy cannot be duplicated here. But the writer's observation that "it will be absolutely essential to push through real reform to sustain the enthusiasm and confidence of the peasants to enhance the vigor of the movement which at times has already begun to wane" is disconcertingly vague. The "alternatives" that she points out need not necessarily be the only recourse of the FFF. As the writer herself observed, the fields of activity open to the FFF, e.g., "tenancy counselling" and/or "assistance" in one form or another in projects calculated to ameliorate members' conditions, afford in themselves rich, rewarding opportunities for service. Ecclesiastical influence, distinguished from control, in the context of Philippine conditions, is not as undesirable as she would have us believe. The FFF should, of course, leave no room for doubt that it is independent in its actuations from undue control even by the Church. This last observation, especially, impels us to the thought that the writer should have made more extensive studies of other agrarian unions to round off her perspective and afford her opportunities for comparative evaluations.

The value of the study to students of the methodology of organized, cooperative efforts in the rural areas, however, does not lie solely in its able presentation of the varied activities, short-comings, and accomplishments of the FFF. Rather, its value lies in offering proof, through example, that successful mass organization in the Philippines is not impossible. Likewise, its detailed and scholarly dissection of the organization, objectives and activities of the FFF should afford students a clearer insight into the difficulties of farm organization, the means of solving these, and possibly point to more advantageous and effective utilization of tested successful methods of rural unionization for better, more effective results.

A parting thought which the perceptive writer expressed needs to be emphasized. Government efforts, however gigantic and pervasive, have—wherever the democratic principle and way of life have permeated into the people's consciousness—never proved to be the truly effective catalyst of social reform. In the ultimate analysis, the impetus to and sustained efforts at reform are the sole responsibility of the people. This responsibility the social group discharges only through organized, collective efforts.

The study—pioneering in some respects—offers itself as a springboard for more extensive ones on the organization of rural elements in the Philippines and other under-developed countries of Asia. The ILO, which has done so much for organized industrial labor, may find in

this the beginning of fruitful inquiries into the means to promote cooperative efforts among agrarian elements, whose need for help in this respect is equal to if not much more than that of their counterparts in industry.

GUILLERMO S. SANTOS

AN EXCELLENT CATALOG

CLASSIFIED LIST OF FILIPINIANA BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS IN THE MAIN LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES, AS OF DECEMBER 1958. Prepared by the Cataloguing Section under the editorial supervision of Pacifico M. Austria, Gloria S. Quiros and Consolacion B. Rebadavia. Quezon City; University of the Philippines, 1959, vi, 358p. mimeographed.

This is a competent piece of work and will serve as a useful tool for intra-library business and a basis for inter-library loans. Although not a complete listing of the Filipiniana holdings of the University of the Philippines (departmental library collections and serials are not included), the enterprise has gotten off the ground. An extensive index considerably increases the value of the listing.

The catalog was undertaken in compliance with a "Proposed Program of Action" for the development of bibliographical services in the Philippines drawn up by the Philippine Library Association in 1950. The long-term objective is to establish a national union catalog and a union list of serials. For this, the cooperation of other libraries and educational institutions was enlisted in a joint meeting of the Philippine Library Association and the Bibliographical Society of the Philippines in 1951.

In 1952 the Philippine Mission (now Province) of the Society of Jesus issued a mimeographed union list of the Filipiniana holdings of its various libraries consisting of 1,355 entries. The same year the University of Manila Library and the Santo Tomas University Library followed suit with mimeographed lists of 249 and 861 entries, respectively. Subsequently the Institute of Science and Technology, the Philippine Normal College, the Philippine Women's University and the Philippine College of Commerce compiled typewritten lists of their Filipiniana holdings. These institutional catalogs bring us appreciably closer to the much needed and ardently desired union catalog, but a great deal of work remains to be done. Now that the enterprise is air-borne, we hope that the forthcoming seminar of the Bibliographical Society of the Philippines, scheduled for this month, will give it another powerful boost towards its distant landing field.