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Towards Social Justice for the Farm Laborer

CRISTOBAL P. HOFILEÑA

It is obvious that the average farm owner in the Philippines is beset by this serious *social problem*: how can he ameliorate the living conditions of his farm laborers in accordance with the demands of Social Justice? In return for the labor, how can the *hacendero* give to his laborer the wherewithal to obtain a sufficiency of food, clothing and shelter for himself, his wife and children and, in addition, medication, education, recreation and security befitting his human dignity?

Where the farm owner has failed to make substantial progress towards the solution of his social problem, the reason is often to be found in his own inner conviction that "it can't be done" or—at least—"I can't do it." This discouragement in the face of his social problem is due to what the owner would term his *business problem*. He claims that it would be impossible for him to operate his farm as a going business if he were to confer upon his workers and their families all the benefits demanded by Social Justice. He might add that his business problem—i.e., how to make a profit on the operation of his farm—is grave enough even without any attempt to raise the living standard of the workers above its age-old level! His preoccupation with his busi-

ness problem leads him to postpone indefinitely any serious attempt towards a solution of the social problem.

During the past twenty years or more, many attempts have been made to shake this conviction of the hacendero. There have been "Social Justice Crusades" of various kinds, government propaganda, sermons, exhortations. They have met with some success, no doubt. But for the farm owner who has built up in himself a kind of immunity to appeals of this nature, another argument is needed. In order to convince him that "*it can be done*," he must be shown, in terms of pesos and centavos, precisely *how* it can be done—or, better still, he must be shown that *it has been done*.

This paper is a modest attempt at showing how the hacendero, in view of his business problems, can make a real advance towards the solution of his social problem. The progress described in this paper has actually been achieved to a degree sufficient to justify the writer's own conviction that the average farm owner can do much to solve his social problem. All figures given in this study are taken from an existing situation. True, there is here described only one "experiment." But the situation is sufficiently typical to justify an attitude of optimism.

The Business Problem of the Hacendero

Let us take, for example, an average cane farmer by the name of Juan de la Cruz. He owns 100 hectares of fairly fertile soil valued at ₱100,000.00. He has invested ₱50,000.00 for improvements on the farm. His capital or net worth, therefore, is ₱150,000.00.

He has a quota of 5,000 piculs. To produce this, he cultivates 65 hectares of sugar cane at an average of 80 piculs per hectare. He cannot afford to mechanize, so he uses man and animal labor. He has a total of 65 laborers, or one laborer per hectare. He has 33 carabaos, or roughly one carabao per two hectares. He has a milling contract with the Central at 65-35. He gets from the Philippine National Bank an annual crop loan of ₱45,000.00.

Now, the problem is: What is the status of his business? We shall itemize here his cost of production and his income:

Cost of Production per Hectare

Land Tax	₱ 15.38
Interest & Depreciation of implements	14.53
Owner-Manager's salary (₱8,000.00 per year)	123.00
Interest on Crop Loan (₱45,000.00)	41.54
Points (at ₱15.00 per 10,000 at 82,000 per ha.)	42.00
Fertilizer (½ ton Mixture of 40% Urea & 60% 6-24-24)	138.30
Man labor (1107.6 hours at 23 centavos per hr.)	254.73
Animal labor (473.4 hrs. at ₱.125 per hr.)	59.18
Total Cost	₱688.66

Production per Hectare

80 piculs sugar x 65% planter's share = 52 piculs	
52 piculs x ₱13.40	₱696.80
Molasses at 5 gallons per ton with 45 tons per ha.	
prud. = 225 g. x 65% = 146.25 x 10¢	14.63
	₱711.43
Gross Income	₱711.43
Less Cost	688.66
Net Profit per hectare	₱ 22.77
Hacienda cost of production (₱688.66 x 65)	₱44,762.90
Hacienda income (₱711.43 x 65)	46,242.95
	₱ 1,480.05

From this we gather that on a conservative estimate, Planter de la Cruz has a net profit of ₱1,480.05. This is the situation of a small planter who adheres to the old system of production. His profit can be attained only if he personally supervises the work and does not live beyond his salary of ₱666.00 a month.

It follows that a bigger farm with a bigger quota and using mechanical implements can get a much bigger profit. It also follows that smaller farms with much smaller quotas have not much hope of breaking even.

The Social Problem of the Hacendero

The social problem of Planter de la Cruz is recognized by a consideration of the living conditions of his laborers. Let us, therefore, peer into the life of laborer Marcos Martinez.

Marcos Martinez is married and has 4 children, all minors. He lives in a nipa house provided by the hacienda. The house is made up of one living room, one bed room and one kitchen. His furniture consists of one wooden table, two wooden benches, and a hammock. The family's personal belongings are kept in one *baúl*. There are no beds, but the family sleep on mats placed over the bamboo floor. There are no mosquito nets. Blankets are old and tattered.

The annual income of Marcos is ₱254.73. (See the Table of Cost of Production per Hectare). Spread over 365 days, this adds up to approximately 70 centavos a day, or ₱4.90 per week. His minimum requirements for rice are 6 gantas for a family of six, but because his total weekly income is barely enough to buy 6 gantas of rice at ₱.80, he buys only 5 gantas for ₱4.00. For "viands" and fuel he has ₱.90 a week or ₱.13 a day.

Marcos cannot afford to buy clothes, medicine, other personal goods and services. He cannot afford to send his children to high school. He cannot afford to smoke or drink or gamble. He cannot afford to travel by public vehicles. If he places much importance on any of these, he must surrender part of his family's most vital need — food.

In this picture of Marcos Martinez we recognize the social problem of Planter de la Cruz. This human being, Marcos, is not getting a living wage; his living conditions are far below the standard demanded by Social Justice. And there are 65 Marcos Martinezes on the hacienda with a total dependent population of 390 souls. What can Planter de la Cruz do to solve his problem?

Towards a Solution of the Social Problem

Planter de la Cruz can do much towards the solution of his social problem. Some things he can do working indi-

vidually; he can accomplish other things by working collectively through his Planters' Association.

Let us recall that, of Planter de la Cruz's 100 hectares, only 65 are planted in cane and the taxes for the entire hacienda have been charged to the cost of production of the cane. Any utility, therefore, derived from the 35 hectares can be considered gain. Of the 35 hectares, 15 have to remain pasture for the carabaos. Planter de la Cruz can distribute $1/4$ hectare to every family for their planting in rice. From their rice production, the family could buy clothes. Planter de la Cruz could convert the remaining 3.75 hectares into a collective vegetable garden and orchard. Products of this would be proportionately divided among the families. This could minimize the food expenses of the family and they could afford a little for transportation or recreation or other personal goods. It is, of course, understood that the cost of the seeds for rice and vegetables should be borne by Planter de la Cruz. He can afford this by assigning ₱66.00 from his monthly salary of ₱666.00 to this purpose.

So far so good. Planter de la Cruz, without aggravating his "business problem," has made a considerable contribution towards the solution of the social problem on his farm, *his* social problem. The living conditions of his laborers have been ameliorated to some extent: they are better fed, better clothed, they can afford some little travel and relaxation. But the Planter still cannot afford to provide medication and education for the family of his laborers. What can he do? He can go to the meeting of his Planters' Association and fight for two projects: namely, a complete free clinic for farm laborers and a free vocational high school for their dependents.

Collective Action

An average Planters' Association has approximately an income of ₱120,000.00 a year. All this money usually goes to administrative, legal and representation activities of the association. Hardly any amount is spent on welfare.

A free vocational high school with a faculty of one principal teacher and ten teachers can be operated on ₱40,000.00 a year. A clinic with one doctor, two nurses and one clerk, which gives free medicine, can be operated on the same amount of ₱40,000.00. With judicious administration, a Planters' Association can function efficiently on ₱70,000.00 a year or less.

If, therefore, it could be arranged that the income of the association would reach ₱150,000.00, the school and clinic projects could be pushed through. This seems to be feasible—through a spirit of sacrifice on the part of the planters in the Association.

Old-age Security

A living wage should include some provision for security and old age. Planter de la Cruz can do something in this regard also. It will be recalled that his hacienda shows a net profit annually of ₱1,480.05. He could set aside 50% of this annual profit as a reserve. In 5 years, the hacienda can probably accumulate a sufficient reserve fund from the profits to buy a 5-hectare farm. This could be sub-divided into 5 one-hectare farms and donated with title to deserving laborers on retirement.

Conclusion

The distinction has been made between Planter de la Cruz's *business problem* and his *social problem*. The propriety of this terminology may be debated; the problems are not nearly so distinct as the terms suggest. But for purposes of analysis they have been usefully employed in this paper. And it has been shown how this Planter's social problem can be solved to a considerable extent *without harm to his business*. This Planter, here and now, in these concrete circumstances, can do much towards meeting the demands of Social Justice. Is the solution of Planter de la Cruz the complete solution? Is it the best possible of solutions? That is beside our present point. The example of this Planter has shown that something can be done—something which is by no means inconsiderable.

This solution means much sacrifice on the part of the planter. It means pegging down his family expenses to ₧600.00 a month. It means no new car, no gambling, no new house, no expensive trips or parties. It means staying on the farm and working hard on the planning and supervision of the work. But, in exchange for all these sacrifices, is a general condition of harmony and peace on the farm, plus the solid hope of an everlasting reward. All in all, the sacrifice is much too small for the return expected.

What is true of the case of Planter de la Cruz is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of planters in general.

The solution to their individual business problems may be found in increased production through better agricultural methods; in a higher participation with the Central, through legislation or mutual agreement; in a higher market price through judicious timing or through favorable world market conditions.

But the solution to the social problem on their farms depends basically on a single factor—the conscience of the planters. Let them accept the social problem as *their* problem. Then, with genuinely good intentions and a willingness to make sacrifices, they can, without aggravating their business problems, go far towards meeting the demands of Social Justice for their laborers. And Social Justice demands this sacrifice on the part of the owners.