CLASS STRATIFICATION IN THE *EDCOR* COMMUNITIES

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The idea of an Economic Development Corps which would combine land settlement with the effort to solve the Huk problem originated in the Philippine Army and became a reality while Magsaysay was Secretary of National Defense. The projects were financed out of savings from the army appropriations. In spite of criticisms that they are too expensive one complete EDCOR settlement can be built and operated during its first year on less than the gate receipts for one world series baseball game. By any fair standard of judgment the EDCOR settlements are a bargain.

The first community accommodating one hundred settler families was established early in 1951 in the thick jungle near Kapatagan, Lanao Province. One year later a second project twice the size of the first one was opened at Buldon, Cotabato. The third farm in Isabela Province celebrated its formal opening in February, 1954. When fully developed it can handle about three hundred families. The fourth project now in the early stages of survey and construction is located some forty kilometers north of Midsayap, Cotabato Province, and is planned for six hundred families.

The following report is based on an intensive study of the first two projects at Kapatagan and Buldon. This is part of a larger study of the Huk movement and the efforts of the government to solve the problem of communist rebellion. The EDCOR program is only one part of the total government attack which includes military action, land reforms, education for democracy, and barrio development. But EDCOR has been significant in establishing the good intentions of the government and in proving that the Huks were not just an agrarian movement interested in land distribution. The Huks have done everything they could to sabotage EDCOR, which has offered a real opportunity to ex-Huks to settle on land of their own.

The present paper is limited to the discussion of one issue, namely, class stratification in the rural Philippines and its consequences in the attempt to develop democratic communities at EDCOR. The report is based on extensive field study at Buldon and Kapatagan. The author lived at both of these places for several weeks, observing the community, talking with officers and soldiers, and interviewing settlers. Case studies were made of a random sampling of one-half of the ex-Huks at both projects, or a total of one hundred thirty one cases. These were supplemented with statistical data made available from the EDCOR Administration's own files. Only a small part of this information fits into the present discussion; the remainder must wait for a longer and more comprehensive report.

The Huk revolt is rooted in the problems of the people, in their struggles to earn a living, and in their frustrations. Here is a typical example from the plains of Central Luzon.

Pedro Mariano had always lived on a farm. His earliest memories were of games played along the narrow dikes which divided the rice paddies and of trips to the water hole to bring the carabao. How he loved this big gentle companion! By holding her tail he could climb up behind and take a ride on a broad friendly back. The carabao would flap her ears and plod along as if she had complete understanding of the needs of small boys.

When Pedro grew up he helped with the rice planting. As a child he had carried the young shoots from the seed to the field. Now he did a man's work: plowing through the soft deep mud before the planting, setting out the young seedlings, taking a turn at guard while the grain ripened, and working through the long days of harvest. He labored along side of his four brothers and two sisters and his parents. His father was a tenant farmer working on the customary fifty-fifty crop sharing arrangement. He had four hectares of land, which exceeded the average two to three hectares per tenant in his province. And yet this was not enough—not enough to keep the boys, now men, employed; and not enough to support the family.

At the beginning of each planting season the landlord furnished the tenant with two sacks of seed to be planted. Any grain which the tenant received in excess of this was a loan to be repaid at the end of the harvest. The family always had to borrow to piece out a meager existence. For every sack of palay loaned, the landlord collected double at harvest time. But in addition he figured in the change of price of palay during this interim. Invariably the price was twice as high when the tenant borrowed during the time of scarcity as when he paid it back at harvest. Thus, instead of collecting double, the landlord collected quadruple interest for the six months period. In terms of a year this meant an interest rate of 800 per cent. This is the problem of usury, the most pernicious and vexatious aspect of the agrarian trouble in Central Luzon.

As Pedro grew to maturity and the family went deeper and deeper into debt, he determined to leave home and find a job. First he tried the naval base at Olongapo, then he made the rounds in Manila. Discouraged, he returned home to the farm. Then he heard about a job in Iloilo and made the long and expensive boat trip there, only to meet further disappointment. Back in Manila, he met a friend who invited him to lunch at a bar in Tondo. As Pedro related his story of failures, the friend said, "You have no work; there is no sense in slaving as a tenant farmer for a starvation share; why not join the Huks?" Thus, Pedro, like many others from the rice lands of Central Luzon became a revolutionary. He determined to fight against a system that did not reward hard work and which provided no opportunities for youth.

Such agrarian unrest constitutes the background and motivation of 32 per cent of the ex-Huks at the EDCOR Farms. Yet the simple fact of economic exploitation is only the most obvious and dramatic expression of the system of social classes that has characterized Philippine society. As the above statistic of 32 per cent indicates, the sourse of unrest which feeds the Huk revolt is far more varied and complex than economic exploitation of the poor peasant. The fundamental problem is a stratified society where people are divided into classes with privileges and rewards

unequally distributed among them. Not only economic goods, but recognition, prestige, educational opportunities, voting power, and equality before the law are at stake. Interviews with ex-Huks at EDCOR made abundantly clear that they resented bitterly being low man on the social totem pole.

The social system in the rural Philippines, which comprises some 76 per cent of the total population of the nation,[1] includes two main classes, the landlords and the tenants. The money lenders and the overseers are a part of the landowning class. The Philippine Army and the Constabulary form a third group, theoretically a neutral force to protect the equal rights of citizens under the law; but in actual practise their power has been used largely to support the interests of the landlords. Whether justifiably or not, tenants from Central Luzon have a deep fear and distrust of the Constabulary which they pass along from parents to children. Confronted with a choice of "protection" by the Constabulary or life under the Huks, many chose the latter.

The landlords are a wealthy leisure class; they live in large beautiful houses and drive big automobiles. Much of their time is spent in Manila or on vacation abroad. They can afford many servants and expensive educations for their children. The tenants, on the other hand, never travel far from their homes. They possess little or no formal education, for even the minimum fees charged in Philippine public schools place a strain on their resources. They work hard and grow old at an early age. Malaria and dysentery and a poor diet take a heavy toll. The difference between the two classes is sharp; the social distance is like a wide abyss.

The present social system has a long history of development. The landlords of today are descendants of the *caciques,* the wealthy aristocrats of the Spanish period; while the tenant farmers occupy the same position as the *aparceros,* or peasants, of former times. Under Spanish rule the Civil Guard was the terror of the countryside and the barrios.[2] The Constabulary seems to have inherited some of the bitterness which had developed toward that former police force.

The roots of the class structure of the Spanish regime in turn are embedded in the pre-Spanish period. When the Spaniards arrived in the islands they found the Filipinos living in villages governed by a Datu, or chief. Beneath the Datu and his family were three classes: free men, serfs, and slaves. The free men held their land tax free and in return for this favor helped to work the lands of the Datu and fought by his side in war. The serfs were share-croppers who cultivated the soil and divided the harvest with the landlord on a fifty-fifty basis; much of their status is preserved in the present tenant system. The slaves were the absolute chattel of their masters.[3] During the Spanish period slavery diminished until it all but disappeared. The Datus were kept and used as a means of governing and maintaining control. Their families inter-

[1] Generoso F. Rivera and Robert T. McMillan, *The Rural Philippines,* Manila: Mutual Security Agency, 1952, pp. 14, 102.

[2] See the well known accounts by Jose Rizal, *The Social Cancer,* and *The Reign of Creed,* Manila, Philippine Education Co., first printing, 1912.

[3] Karl J. Pelzer, *Pioneer Settlement in the Asiatic Tropics,* New York: American Geographical Society, 1948, pp. 88-89.

married with the Spaniards and became the *caciques.* Unfortunately, the free men, who gave promise of developing a middle class, were squeezed out of the system. Few of them rose in status, while most slipped into the ranks of the peasants.

The EDCOR Farms have not been immune to the influence of this social system in Philippine rural society. Thus, in the EDCOR communities are found three distinct classes: the officers, whose status approximates that of the landlord; the settlers, whose status is similar to that of the tenant; and the enlisted men, who occupy the traditional position of the policemen. The class system at EDCOR is similar to and yet it is not identical with that on the outside. The Farm Administrator is not in truth a landlord; the settlers are not tenants; the enlisted men are more than mere policemen. But the social conditioning in the former society had developed attitudes in regard to each of the classes which have been carried over into the EDCOR experiments and have hampered the growth of a democratic community. The settlers feel that they are being treated like tenants, and the administration is set apart as if it were an elite class.

No evidence of class distinction is possible at EDCOR on the basis of type of housing, since all the dwellings are about alike. Each of the three groupings, however, lives in a separate area. For example, at Buldon the enlisted men occupy houses near the road at the entrance to the town site. They serve as a buffer between the Christian settlement and the Moros in the adjacent barrio. On the first main street and facing the Administration Building are the officer's homes. Behind these on other streets are the houses of the settlers. Some degree of physical segregation is an inevitable accompaniment of class divisions.

Relationships between the three classes are cordial even while the distinctions between them are being maintained. Some of the settlers' wives send special dishes of food or help to serve the table when the officers are entertaining guests at the farm. On special occasions the settlers elected to the Town Council are invited to meet visiting guests at the Officers' Dining Hall, but they either decline to eat or else wait until the second table is served.

It is appropriate for the enlisted men to entertain the officers, but not the other way around. An enlisted man's family at Buldon invited the officers to dinner in celebration of the butchering of a cow. At the first serving were the officers of highest rank. Other officers ate at the second sitting; enlisted men, third; and women, last. When officers and guests visit the settlers on their farms, the settlers graciously serve food, such as fruit or boiled eggs. These are pleasant social occasions for all, but there is no similar entertainment of the settlers by the officer class. With the exception of special celebrations of religious holidays, the anniversary of the founding of EDCOR, and the town fiesta, the recreation of the community follows class lines. Only the officers play tennis on courts that they themselves maintain. Dances are also largely confined to the officer families, although some of the enlisted men play musical instruments on such occasions.

There is, however, much mixing between the settlers and the enlisted men, and there have been some marriages between members of these two groups. Whereas the officers maintain their social distance and their

separateness as a class, the settlers and soldiers find much in common once the fear of the man in uniform has worn off. Many of the settlers have educations equal or superior to those of the enlisted men. As landowners and as possible office holders in the community the settlers have achieved a status which is the envy even of the officers. The settlers and soldiers are closely enough matched to be competitors. Some of the settlers recent the fact that the soldiers may carry arms, while they are forbidden their use. On the other hand, the soldiers tend to resent work on projects that benefit the ex-Huks, when they who have been loyal have not been given free land. These rivalries may increase as the farms become more productive and the income of the settlers begins to exceed that of the soldiers.

In the Philippines the personal relations between members of the upper and lower classes are often marked by a benevolent paternalism. When a man from the lower class asks a gift from one in the upper class, the individual in the superior class dares not deny the request. To refuse to offer the poor man a gift would be to cast doubt upon one's ability to bestow the favor, and would call the whole system of statuses into question. The poor as well as the rich expect to play the roles that are suitable to their social positions. They expect to be treated as inferior, to do the hard and dirty jobs, and to be cared for and protected. The system is maintained when the benefactor bestows some favor upon the poor, preferably in such a way that the superiority of the one and the inferiority of the other are emphasized.

Many of the settlers at EDCOR were accustomed to the role of inferiority and to treating superiors as benefactors. At the farm they came to the Administrator with their problems in the same way they had gone to the landlord back in their barrios. He was expected to act like a good and benevolent representative of the landed aristocracy. When the Farm Administrator did not fill these expectations, but followed "a policy of self-help," there was considerable confusion. A request for additional rations might be countered with instruction on planting mango beans as soon as the palay was harvested in order to increase production and keep down the growth of weeds. When settlers begged for help to clear the land, they were given tools and instruction, and were organized into work parties to clear the land for themselves. The lessons were hard ones, for they ran against a current that had flowed through Philippine society for generations.

Misunderstandings arose on both sides. The settlers accused the officers of being cruel and heartless. Protests were sent to the headquarters at Camp Murphy against the inhuman treatment. One officer was charged with driving the settlers to work and depriving them of their freedom. On the other side, the officers thought the settlers were lazy and not trying to carry out their part of the contract. As long as the attitudes that characterized the old social order still prevailed, settlers and officers alike found it difficult to develop a democratic community characterized by a maximum of individual responsibility and self-reliance.

The stratification of society into social classes sets up hurdles in the path of free communication and complete understanding. For example, one of the most trustworthy of the settlers at Buldon came to Major Valenova during the last rice harvest and complained that the wild

pigs had destroyed palay that would have yielded forty sacks of grain, about half of his harvest. This destruction had occurred in spite of the fact that the settler had lived on the farm day and night in an effort to protect the crop. The Major turned to an officer and gave an order to have soldiers go to the settler's clearing with shot guns that evening and kill the wild pigs. Some days later the settler was asked about the wild pigs.

"They are terrible," he replied. "We can no longer frighten them away. They come right up near the house and trample plants and uproot our garden. If we only had a shot gun, we could kill them easily."

"What about the soldiers?" asked the interviewer. "Did they not come with shot guns to hunt the pigs?"

"Oh yes, they came one evening about dark and stayed for a couple of hours. Then they left, saying the mosquitoes were too bad," was the disgusted reply. "I don't see why the administration won't let us have a shot gun to protect our crops. Don't they trust us? We are still treated like criminals. What is the sense of encouraging people to work hard and plant crops and then not permit them to have a gun to ward off the wild pigs? I'd be willing to buy my own gun, if they would let me."

This is a good illustration of how a program carefully planned by the administration to protect the settlers and extend aid to them had failed in its execution. The settler had an honest and legitimate need which the Farm Administrator was quick to recognize. His order to hunt and kill the pigs was sincere. But this concern was not communicated to the two enlisted men who were entrusted with the mission. The concern with the success of the project was shared by the officer class, but only to a small degree by the enlisted men to whom the ex-Huks appeared as rivals. To the settler the actions of the administration were ineffective and nonsensical. He was more determined than ever to distrust those outside his class. As long as the attitudes of each group reflected the separateness of its social class, the community progressed with difficulty.

One of the primary aims of EDCOR was to develop prosperous settlements. This meant that every settler not only must work hard but also must follow an intelligent plan for the development of his farm. Agricultural experts planned the best use of the land and the wisest choice of crops. Army officers experienced in modern farming took charge of the training and direction of the settlers. Sometimes these efforts to help meet stiff resistance. Especially difficult to communicate was the idea that land once cleared should never be left unplanted, for it would rapidly revert to grass and jungle growth. The fact that this instruction came from an officer and a member of another social class made it sound like foreign and unreliable advise. The Project Director at Kapatagan reported that after two years of effort he was just beginning to get across a few simple and basic ideas about farming to some of the settlers. When the Administrator gave an order backed by force it was of course, obeyed without question. When he attempted to instruct the settlers, however, they became suspicious and often chose to disregard the advice. The task of imparting information across class lines, in an atmosphere of confidence and understanding, can be incredibly

difficult. The class lines themselves tend to destroy confidence. The problem is not the difficulty of the ideas but the barriers created by social class. Information can be disseminated most easily by the leaders among the settlers themselves, for then no social barriers to acceptance exist.

Social stratification sets one class over against another and breeds distrust. When many of the plans and suggestions of the administration turned out well, the settlers thought nothing of it. When a man's abaca plants rotted in a marshy part of his Kapatagan farm, the administration received the full blame. One bit of poor advice often was enough to precipitate a flight from modern practice back to the customary farming based on superstition.

Class lines breed suspicion. At Buldon one of the settlers received monthly checks from the Department of National Defense. In a small community where the mail was delivered through many hands such unusual letters could never be kept a secret. The rumors began to spread. Perhaps the man was a spy for the Department. The settlers rumored that he was spying on them. The officers on their part were suspicious that he had been planted in the settlement to check up on their activities. These rumors subsided only when it was learned that the settler was being paid for past services rendered to the Department.

The impression should not be created that the EDCOR communities are places torn by class strife. Far from it. They are examples of a Filipino effort to replace an ancient and deeply imbedded social system that pitted landlord against tenant and army against the people. The lingering remains of this old society hinder the birth of a new order, but every group at EDCOR was firmly convinced that the new democratic community is in the making. The public schools are enormously influential. The children of all the families attend the same classes and join together in games on the playground. All parents belong to the PTA, and settlers as well as officers and enlisted men hold offices. The Town Council is a governing body democratically elected. The cooperative store organized at Buldon includes officers, enlisted men, and settlers. The medical service is free to all alike. There is one church for all the community. The Farm Administrator is not a remote figurehead, but a participating member of the community. Settlers consult him at any hour of the day or night. Fellow officers are impressed by the fact that "the Major has never been away from the farm overnight."

Whatever its failures may have been, the administration through hard work has convinced the settlers of their sincerity and good will. Many of the ex-Huks said, "For the first time we have experienced what a true democracy is like."

EDCOR has kindled the ambition of its settlers. They eagerly discuss future plans:

"I want to clear all my land and become prosperous."

"I want to rear my family and educate my children."

"I want to make a comfortable living and get married."

"I want to educate my children so they can defend their own rights."

"I want to clear all my land and plant it in permanent crops so that I may live well."

"I want to make this my permanent home."

"I want to develop my farm so that I will have something to pass on to my children."

"I want to succeed here and then buy more land."

"I want to improve my livelihood and help the government."

"I would like to educate my two sons to become a doctor and a lawyer."

"I want to be the richest settler here."

"I want to become a successful farmer."

"I want to live a peaceful and happy life."

These are not the sentiments of exploited peasants; they are the hopes and ambitions of democratic citizens in pursuit of tangible opportunities.