

**Social Problems (Philippine Setting), Revised Edition, by Filomeno "Fil"
O. Apolinario Jr., Rafael B. Perez and Tito S. Segarra. Manila: Rex
Book Store, 1980, 335 pp.**

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Sociologists will find two quick reasons why they cannot use this book for introductory courses in social problems. They will read from the preface that the book is an attempt "to integrate into one compact, readable, and handy volume all the topics prescribed by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the study of these problems as a Humanities II subject (p. v)." That's one difficulty: social problems, in short, are not what C. Wright Mills calls "public issues," but what a government entity defines as social problems. Sociologists will also read from the same preface that the book intends to present "the fundamentals, nature, significance and rationale of each of the Social Problems within the context of the Humanities — that branch of learning concerned with human thought and relations (p. vi)." That's another difficulty: since the book does not describe this "context," sociologists will have a tough time trying to figure out what orientation the authors take to understand Philippine social problems.

These difficulties yield some odd results. Three of the book's four parts, for example, do not reflect what sociologists usually consider as social problems. Instead, these parts showcase government-sponsored programs: agrarian reform, taxation, and population education. Even if one concedes that the part on agrarian reform tackles the problem of class inequalities and that the part on population education confronts the problem of rapid population growth, sociologists will remain perplexed in sorting

out what social problem deserves seven chapters on taxation (the longest section of the book). But Part IV of the book, entitled "Other Social Problems," contains chapters on the standard problems: drug addiction, malnutrition, and environmental pollution. Unfortunately, these chapters (especially the one on pollution) are sociological wastelands which wallow in technical information, legal provisions, moral exhortations, and minimal social science theory.

A more odd result, but one expected from reading the preface, is the book's devout admiration of government solutions to social problems. The authors state, for example, that the objective of agrarian reform cannot be limited to the mere redistribution of land or the mere increase of the farmer's income. They add that agrarian reform:

. . . has to involve (the farmer's) education, his social upliftment, and a reformation of the power structure in our society so that the present many poor (*sic*) will have the socio-civic recognition and influence that are due them; it means that the farmer should have a reasonable opportunity to own the land he works, to produce or earn enough to support himself and his family in decent comfort, to have available market, school, recreation and church facilities, to develop a sense of independence and dignity and become an active and responsible member of the community (p. 6).

The authors follow this noble statement with a discussion on the need to modernize Philippine agriculture and with a succinct

history of the country's agrarian situation — both of which climax with hallelujahs for the agrarian reform program promulgated under martial rule. Criticisms of the program are not given full treatment, and the few cited are easily dismissed. Moreover, the content of presidential decrees and letters of instructions are assumed to exist in reality. In the end, the reader asks: how does the program *empirically* fare out with respect to the noble aims of the program? What policy changes are required to improve the program? The book is silent on the issues.

Similar questions will trouble sociologists after reading the other chapters. On drug addiction and pollution: what has been the impact of the anti-drug and anti-pollution laws in curtailing drug addition and environmental damage? And why do we sense that the authors treat the drug problem as simply the result of broken homes and poverty? On population and malnutrition: what has been the actual performance of the Philippine population and nutrition programs in reducing population growth and

the incidence of malnutrition? Is there evidence to show that these programs have aided the country in improving people's welfare? Are the authors aware of program implementation problems in the field? And what, in heaven's name, has taxation got to do in easing all these problems? Undoubtedly, the system of taxation helps to finance government programs. But how adequate is this system in financing state affairs? What percentage of program support comes from people's taxes, and what percentage comes from foreign donors?

Social problems (Philippine Setting) is too fancy a title for this work. If the authors want a book to inform students about selected government programs, government agencies, or about legal provisions, they can call the book "Government Issues" or "Social Concerns: The Government's View," or something similar. As it stands, the book only irks professional sociologists. It also misleads students who think that they are getting a healthy dose of sociological thinking by using this book for courses in contemporary social problems.