

# Spirit of 'Bayanihan'

By SECRETARY JESUS VARGAS

THE most challenging problems of our times are economic. Until we have sufficiently relieved our people with the economic insecurities which have been weighing oppressively on their lives all these years, we may perhaps continue to remain unstable as a nation. Such a problem, I believe, cannot be solved simply by formulas and mathematical computations.

We may, therefore, have to rely heavily on the strength and character of our people. In other words, we may have to draw from the mainspring of Filipino nationalism the necessary strength and vigor to meet our national problems.

It is my sincere conviction that the greatest national resource of this country is its people. But in this task of utilizing our vast manpower resource, we have to go down to the basic character of our people.

In this respect, I disagree vehemently with those who contend that our people are lazy and deeply immersed in siesta habits. If a man takes to siesta habits, I believe that it is mainly because he has nothing much to do. I feel that it is principally a case of the Filipino unable to locate the opportunity to work and thereby contribute a share in the national productive endeavor. Also, it may be that he has been made an object of handouts, that form of charity and paternalism which has the tendency to make him a dependent rather than an active participant in what clearly is a joint undertaking.

Out there in the rural areas lies untapped a vast manpower resource which when fully harnessed would be a veritable powerhouse that can provide the productive energy with

which we could more vigorously push our economic development efforts toward their objectives.

You are all familiar, perhaps, with barrio life. In the barrios one immediately becomes aware of the beautiful tradition of the people of helping one another. Each time one of them is in need, all the neighbors pitch in to help, without expecting any monetary or material compensation. We are all familiar with this practice and we know it as *Bayanihan*.

*Bayanihan* is about the only original Filipino spirit that has withstood the pressures of domination through centuries of Philippine history. As it is understood today, it is simply a concept of mutual help and cooperation. But sometime in the past, *Bayanihan* carried a patriotic connotation. Our heroes of the revolution used the word *bayani*. In the sense that it was used by our revolutionary heroes, *Bayanihan* was meant to reflect patriotism during a time of grave national urgency. And even from the strictly etymological point of view, their usage was correct because *bayani* and *Bayanihan* stem from a common root word—*bayán* (country). May I therefore suggest for your reflection the broader connotation of *Bayanihan*, and that is, serving the country without thought of benefits other than the satisfaction that comes from knowing that one has served with and for one's own countrymen.

*Bayanihan* must then be the true mainspring of Filipino nationalism. Our villages of old were built up through *Bayanihan*.

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## SPIRIT OF . . .

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Even today, barrios spring up through the force of *Bayanihan*. Houses are transferred from one place to another, houses are constructed, crops are harvested, and many other activities that make up barrio life are undertaken through *Bayanihan*.

This incident happened way back in my days in uniform in the active service of the armed forces, in Central Luzon. My men and I were tired as a result of continuous patrol operations, and we were looking forward longingly to a good afternoon and night rest at the end of a patrol mission. But at the end of the trail was no physical rest, but a spectacle which I cannot forget, and whose picture I cannot remove from my memory. We found a group of men and women—all rural inhabitants—doing a serious work of harvesting in a ricefield. Curiosity got the better of me when I recognized in the group some of the more prominent and landholding citizens of the community. When I inquired, I was informed that the effort was a *Bayanihan*, and that the beneficiary of that heartwarming display of cooperative spirit was a lowly farmer who was too sick to harvest his ripened crop.

Oblivious of the demands of our tired bodies, we waded through the field and my men, rifles strung across their shoulders, contributed their bit to the over-all community effort. The spectacle was as beautiful as it was reflective of the true Filipino spirit found in *Bayanihan*.

Spectacles like this have prompted a Filipino writer to ask this question: "When barrio people help a neighbor build a house or harvest a crop, what compulsive power makes them donate their labor for free?" Then, answering his own question, he said: "The answer to this spontaneous and massive symbol of help towards a fellow countryman lies in the innate character of the Filipino to help for the common welfare. If this could be achieved to build a house, harvest a crop, or move a house in its entirety to another place, why can't this be done to build a nation's economy, the benefits of which are not oblivious even to the barrio man. Indeed, like the meandering river that flows over the hills and dales, filled with potential hydraulic power but nevertheless pursues its course harmlessly—even wastefully—*Bayanihan*, as a potential powerhouse for economic production, must be retrieved

## SOLUTION

White-faced, a patient rushed into his doctor's office.

"Oh, doctor," he cried, "the ghosts of my departed relatives come and perch on the tops of fence-posts all around my garden at dead of night. They just sit there... staring, staring... What can I do?"

Said the doctor calmly: "Sharpen the posts." (Liguorlan)

## THOUGHTS OF . . .

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interpreted by Society as some form of indecency or discourtesy.

On top of the preceding, the Ex-Convict also finds himself as a total stranger even in the very midst of his blood kin, and his former intimate associates now know him more (and IDENTIFY him MORE) with his "poisonous" diploma which he now carries, and which seems to be the only potent force that would mold his immediate future. (Incidentally, the writer-ex-convict has in his possession, put down in black and white, a long litany of actual illustrations to support this seemingly strange observation.) "Prevention is better than cure", so that popular adage runs, hence the Ex-Convict leaves the folds of these intimates, so as to cut short his bitterness (else this bitterness may flame again into another blunder) . . . and, he starts knocking at the doors of civic-spirited organizations which he occasionally reads about in the newspapers.

During all this time of course, the more pressing and more realistic problems of meals and shelter concomitantly assert themselves . . . and he has to stretch his palm for a measure of charity every now and then (because Society concludes it cannot take the risk of trusting the Ex-Con with another break or job in their midst), so much so

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from its obscure course and made the principal rallying point of the nation's economic development."

(Excerpts from a speech before Manila Council 1000, Knights of Columbus, on March 15, 1959)