

LANDLESS GIVEN LANDS

By Conrado Uy

THE government's policy of providing land to the landless people was initiated a year ago when the first group of settlers recruited by the Social Welfare Administration under its land settlement program settled in Koronadal Valley, Cotabato.

Since then, other migrants followed suit. Recently, the fourth batch of settlers arrived in Mindanao to start life anew, away from the insecure conditions and agrarian trouble in Luzon.

There are at present 177 families consisting of 877 persons in Calauag. These pioneers are mostly tenant farmers, evacuees, refugees and landless people from Luzon. Calauag is fast becoming a model community in the Promised Land. Homes are already constructed in the settlement project, out of the building materials gathered by the settlers from the nearby forests and the material aid given to them by the social welfare administration. Their homes were built on the 1,500 square meter home lots allotted to each family.

The farmseekers are given 10-hectare lots for each family to cultivate and within which to plant paly and shortseason foodcrops. Since the allotted land for them has already been cleared by the Land Settlement Development Company (LASEDECO) (another entity in charge of land clearance and distribution) the settlers do not find much difficulty in cultivating them.

The plows, harrows and carabaos that they brought with modern machineries handled by the technical men of the LASEDECO. After a year when the farm lots of the settlers are producing crops, the government will give them the title to the land.

During the first months, the SWA provides the settlers with rice, canned goods, clothing and a little amount of money as a start. A hospital to

take care of the sick, a market to sell their products and buy their needs and a schoolhouse where the children can continue their education have been established by the government.

New roads will be opened in the community by the bureau of public works. Transportation facilities will be increased to meet the demands of the people.

The needs and desires of the settlers are taken care of by the social workers of the SWA branch office and the LASEDECO officials in Lamian.

Calauag is peaceful, and the people feel happy and contented. The settlers are optimistic of their future in this new community where they could find homes and land to call it their own.

The lands are so fertile and suited to the crops they are planted with and the favorable climate adds much to the success of the settlers' efforts. The womenfolk share with their men in the farm by doing the usual household chores and helping them in the planting and harvesting of foodcrops. During their leisure hours, they engage in worthwhile occupations like mat-weaving, basketweaving and sewing to increase their income. Even the children do their share by selling homemade cakes and helping their elders during the harvest season.

When Social Welfare Administrator Asuncion A. Perez visited them last April, she expressed satisfaction upon seeing the improved conditions of the settlement project.

Calauag is a symbol. It stands for the yearning of landless people to own land. It is a fast-producing community due to the initiative of the pioneer settlers. It is the solution to the agrarian trouble in some parts of the country, especially in Central Luzon.

CONSIDER THIS

Since liberation, the expenditure for social welfare had fluctuated between .33% to .42% of the entire expenditure. It mean that only 1/3 of a centavo out of every peso spent by the government goes to promote the social well-being of 20 million Filipinos.

Other departments like education is given 28% while health, 17%. Yet if adequate social welfare services were only rendered on time, there would be less need for money to

maintain hospitals, sanitariums, jails and institutions for the orphans and aged and there would be better standard of living and contentment among the masses.

In U. S., social welfare expenditure exceeds all other expenses except education. Ceylon spends almost two rupees for every citizen it has. On this proportion, the Philippines should spend no less than 40 million pesos for social welfare.

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