

THE BRAIN DRAIN

Stopping the exodus

How does one plug the "brain drain"?

For many years, planners have been searching for the right formula to keep trained professionals within the country's confines. Several steps had been taken in the past to stop the outflow, but every year, the Philippines continued to lose the services and skills of thousands of trained men who leave the country shortly after graduation.

Among those who go out to work abroad are: four out of every six doctors, one out of every two nurses, nine out of every 10 dentists, one out of every four architects, two out of every three dieticians and nutritionists, and one out of every five mechanical and civil engineers who graduate from college each year.

Records of the US embassy reveal a pattern of a steady increase in the erosion of the country's corps of professionals and technical and kindred workers since 1967. Topping the list of those who obtained US immigration visas are elementary and secondary school teachers who, from 342 in 1967, rose to 2,285 in 1970. They were followed by engineers, who started from a low of 346 to 1,165 in the same period; physicians and surgeons, from 612 to 968; nurses, from 445 to 954; other technology and related fields, from 194 to 1,709; other medical and related fields, from 240 to 640; other professional and

kindred workers from 95 to 411. Even the sciences have not been spared from the effects of the drain. While only 85 natural scientists left the country in 1967, the figure rose to 283 in 1970; and social scientists from 13 to 67 in 1970.

The figures do not include those who first obtained tourists visas and later converted them into blue (immigrant) cards in the United States. Also not included in the listing are those who had migrated to Europe, Canada, Australia and other countries.

The country filled up 29.72 percent (19,997) of the total of Asian immigrants (67,280) to the United States in 1970 from a previous low of 5.26 percent in 1967. On the average, the Philippines—a developing country which needs all the training and expertise of these technical men in its march toward development—had lost about 50 percent of its total highly skilled college graduates every year.

Thus far, there is no firm consensus among foreign and local labor experts on whether or not such a brain drain constitutes an irreparable loss to the country. West German economists, for instance, count the professionals as part of the country's capital investments. Another country, Russia, is levying a heavy tax on every Russian Jew who emigrates to Israel, and among other reasons perhaps, she wants a reimbursement of the investments by the state.

Mr. M. L. Gupta, a manpower assessment and planning expert of the International Labor Organization who is currently conducting a study of RP labor, says "one must be cautious about inferring conclusions about the merits and demerits of the losses and gains from brain drain."

"While poor countries lose trained

manpower to the rich countries, there are a number of ways in which they also gain," Mr. Gupta adds. "A number of migrants provide real benefits to the country in the form of income remittances, paid or unpaid direct consulting services and the production of knowledge some of which may be of specific relevance to the problems of developing countries and which they may be able to produce more efficiently abroad than at home."

Just the same, Philippine labor authorities are concerned about the problem. Secretary of Labor, Blas F. Ople said recently that "effective and immediate policies must be made to counteract the threat."

The Office of Manpower Services under the labor department has recommended to Secretary Ople a two-pronged plan to limit the medical brain drain and increase the employability of Filipino doctors and nurses.

The OMS says Filipino doctors and nurses must be made to undergo five years' training in local hospitals before they could become eligible for overseas work. Secretary Ople said that "while the ultimate objective is to limit their outflow, this plan may represent the first step in the long process designed to develop or increase their employability."

Since September too, when the program of reform and renewal began in earnest in the Philippines, the country saw a steady decline in emigration, particularly that of professionals. If this new trend continues, one of the immediate beneficiaries will be the medical field and one can perhaps expect more doctors and nurses to be working soon in the rural areas, where their services are badly needed.

Complementary measures, of course, are now being drawn up or put into effect to encourage professionals

to work in their own country.

In line with the administration's policy, Mr. Gupta suggested the adoption of bigger wage differentials in favor of desired skills, adjusting the educational system to include in the curricula such requirements as service in the rural areas by medical students, assistance to tenants in the implementation of land reforms by law students, making extensive use of trained persons in local technical assistance programs; research grants; encouragement for the establishment of private scientific and research foundations; review of Philippine participation in exchange visitors programs and initiation of bilateral agreements with foreign countries and international organizations engaged in development work for possible greater use of indigenous highly trained manpower.

The proposal of the Office of Manpower Services may be the prelude to the implementation of some of Mr. Gupta's suggestions.

Josefina R. Cortes, in a study made in the course of obtaining a doctorate degree in philosophy in international development education at Stanford University in 1970, traced the three major causes of the exodus to the United States. She said these were: (1) government inefficiency, red tape, favoritism and meddling in appointments and promotions; (2) poor pay and inadequate material rewards; and (3) poor professional climate.

With the removal of these conditions following the proclamation of martial law and the adoption of other positive measures, the Filipino professional and technical men may now find it more fruitful and more rewarding to apply their knowledge and skills for the good of their fellowmen and the economic development of their own country.

MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

Correcting an imbalance

utilization of the nation's manpower and out-of-school youth."

This government agency was born four years ago, toward the end of the first term of President Marcos. Its forerunner was the Manpower-Development Council, created by the President in 1966 and initially designed to conduct experimental training programs. Two years later, a manpower training program was launched on a nationwide scale. The initial results proved more than encouraging. After three quarters of its first year of operations, more than 37,000 individuals had acquired skills training in some 40 course offerings. In an effort to upgrade the training standard, the government sent 75 Filipino vocational administrators, supervisors and trainers to the United Nations Development Program Vocational Training Center in Turin, Italy. At the same time, the MDC conducted studies and analyses of training programs in various government agencies.

In his 1969 State of the Nation address, the President could already report that "manpower development is a breakthrough in the solution of the perennial unemployment problem." He said that "for the first time we have set up a national program



Trainees at the youth center: the core of educated manpower.

designed to give new skills to workers who otherwise would have no chance to get a formal training."

With the establishment of the NMYC, manpower development as an institution gained a permanent status.

The council is composed of eight ex-officio members coming from the government and six appointed members coming from the private sector, particularly industry, labor, family and youth welfare. It is a policy-making body and has a secretariat which serves as its implementing arm. The secretariat is headed by a director-general and has three component offices (Manpower Planning and Development, an Office of Out-of-School Youth Development, and a

National Manpower Skills Center) and several staff and service branches.

During the NMYC's first year of operation (fiscal year 1969-1970), 98,098 unemployed adults and out-of-school youth enrolled in 49 different courses in 174 training centers. Of these trainees, 77,420 or 79 percent graduated.

Although manpower training program was considered mainly the concern of the government, the program also called for coordination with the private sector. Thus, the NMYC entered into a closer liaison with the private sector. The result was an inroad in the fields of in-plant and instruction training geared to the up-

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"In a laissez-faire society, we thought that the best way to the top is to go there, and when we are already all there, we find that the only vacuum left to be filled is at the bottom," an educator once commented.

He may as well have been describing too the malaise obtaining in manpower development in the Philippines. The number of graduates in "prestige courses" like commerce, law, education, and liberal arts had been much greater than the demands and needs of the labor market. The result was a mass of educated manpower that was largely unemployed or underemployed. More professionals were being produced than the economy could absorb. On the other hand, "at the bottom," where the demand for vocational and technical skills was great, the available trained manpower was inadequate.

A number of measures are now being implemented to correct that imbalance. The educational system, for one, is being reoriented to relate it to the country's development needs. For another, manpower development is an important new activity now being vigorously pursued by the government.

On the forefront of this activity is the National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC), created "to take care of, train and develop human resources and to establish institutions and formulate integrated plans, programs and projects as will ensure efficient and proper allocation, accelerated development and optimum

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grading of skills. During the fiscal year 1969-1970, 3,874 industrial workers were trained.

This training helped in the promotion of these workers and in increasing their salaries. Moreover, as a consequence of the promotions, vacancies were created, giving job openings to the unemployed.

By definition of law, manpower from the out-of-school youth group falls between the ages of 12 and 17 years. As such, these young people are still practically unacceptable to industrial establishments. What was fashioned for them was a cooperative system of "bayanihan" integrated skills program aimed mainly at the development of agricultural skills and skills needed for cottage industries.

At present, the NMYC is conducting two "bayanihan" youth settlement programs. One is in Negros Occidental where 15 youth recently graduated from a one-year training in various agricultural skills like sugar technology, rice and corn culture, vegetable raising and animal hus-

bandry.

In several barrios in Pampanga, where a home industry project was launched in 1971 — also in line with the "bayanihan" integrated skills training program — the NMYC revealed that 86 percent of its training graduates were able to find means of self-employment and were able to earn an aggregate income of P12,600 from their various projects, including hog and poultry raising, rice farming and vegetable production.

Giving the NMYC program a big boost is the completion of the multi-million-peso National Manpower Skills Center in Taguig, Rizal. This complex construction represented the counterpart of the Philippine government under the RP-United Nations Development Program-International Labor Organization agreement. The UNDP and ILO provided \$200,000 worth of machinery and equipment.

It started full operations last January 15, with the first 80 trainees enrolling in machine fitting, automotive mechanics, electronics and electricity. The training will last from

six to eight months, after which they will undergo an on-the-job training in selected industries where they might later be employed.

The NMYC is also putting up 10 regional manpower training centers in key industrial regions of Northern Luzon, Central Luzon, Bicol, East Visayas, West Visayas, East Mindanao and West Mindanao.

Since the proclamation of martial law, the NMYC has undergone a self-evaluation of its programs with the view to giving them added momentum. Now, it is centering its program implementation on three principal areas, namely: manpower assessment and planning, projects operations, and establishment of additional institutions for effective development and utilization of manpower resources.

Among the long list of activities under these three principal areas, perhaps the most outstanding is the implementation of a restructured manpower training program. Findings showed that only 60 percent of the training graduates had been actually absorbed for gainful occupation. To

raise the level of efficiency, several measures have been adopted, including an increase in the number of training hours, the revamp of the instructional materials by employing a method used in Europe and the United States called "training modules," aptitude testing in the recruitment of trainees, the employment of trade test standards, and the exclusion in the curriculum of so-called soft trades like dressmaking, hairdressing, cosmetology and the like and concentration instead on higher technical skills needed by industry and agriculture.

Also part of these activities is the construction skills training project of the NMYC in conjunction with the Export Processing Zone Authority in Mariveles, Bataan. One hundred jobless adults have so far received training at the trade zone training center. Additional workers are at present undergoing training in construction skills while another group of trainees are engaged in shoe manufacturing.

LUIS P. VENERACION

TOWN FIESTAS

Tradition as a tool for growth

Early last month, the Department of Local Government and Community Development issued a circular to all local officials to transmute lavish fiestas into agro-industrial fairs and other meaningful activities. This was in line with a presidential edict issued shortly after the proclamation of martial law enjoining all citizens to avoid and prevent ostentatious display of wealth and extravagance, including the holding of fiestas and other festivities.

Fiestas are indeed costly affairs. On the average, a barrio (of which there are now 33,827 in the Philippines) spends around P500 for its annual fiesta. This is a conservative figure and does not include the expenses in city and town fiestas, which can be far more lavish. In any case, barrio expenses add up to quite a substantial sum: P16,913,500. Such amount, if spent for the construction of irrigation systems, fertilizer, and tractors, can mean untold benefits in terms of increased agricultural production.

In response to the government call, many cities, municipalities and barrios have been harnessing the "fiesta spirit" for progress in agriculture, industry, and even culture. Last month, according to the Philippines News Agency, at least three cities, four provinces, and 22 towns held agro-industrial fairs under mini expositions to replace the lavish fiestas of the past. In Caloocan City, at least 50 industrial firms participated in an exposition held at the athletic grounds of the city high school. An average of 2,000 persons visit the fair each day. In Marikina, the country's shoe capital, more than 30 industrial firms are participating in a cultural and industrial fair. Paranaque, a few minutes drive from Manila International Airport, is also holding its own fair to redirect the people's enthusiasm and energies towards the enhancement of



Farm products at the agro-industrial fair: a change from lavish fiestas.



local business.

Apart from the government call for austere celebrations, what has made the spirit of the agro-industrial fair catch on? One of the main reasons is the success of the "Green Revolution" in the cities, towns, and barrios. The agro-industrial fair has provided an outlet for the people to display what they have produced, such as the longest "upo," the biggest pig, the largest carp, the most beautiful handbag and other outstanding products.

This and other trends may not mean the abolition of the fiesta altogether but, rather, its being redirected towards social growth and economic development.

The idea is to harness a long-established institution in shaping a new society responsive to the needs of the masses. Thus, in some communities today, there are moves to pool the contributions they usually chip in for fiestas and to invest the amount in some communal project or enterprise.

Mayor Osmundo de Guzman of Marikina said that "aside from finding ready market for products of agriculture and industry, the agro-industrial fairs have encouraged our people to

improve the quality of their products."

Another example of a fiesta as an instrument of growth was the one held in Taytay, Rizal, last month. During the town fiesta, different barrios put up agricultural and industrial exhibits. Among the products exhibited were handicrafts, ornamental cases, embroidery items, kitchen utensils, bags, trinkets and trays. All sectors of the community were involved, and the proceeds were to be plowed back into the community through various projects.

"The success of the fair was not only in terms of the profit realized but more so in the realization of the people that they have so much to be proud of in terms of products and potentials," Taytay Mayor Benjamin B. Esguerra said.

Fiestas cum mini-fairs can also be directed towards the promotion of tourism. An example was Kalibo, Aklan which held a fair last January. The provincial and municipal governments joined hands in making the annual ati-atihan festival more useful for Aklan's tourism industry.

Other places which have held agro-

industrial fairs include Jaen, Nueva Ecija; Mandaue City and Talibon, Bohol, both in Eastern Visayas.

"For years," Kalibo Mayor Icamina said, "we had been celebrating the ati-atihan, and all we did was spend so much money without getting anything in return. But this year, we fully tapped our fiesta to derive some profits for our people and for our government coffers."

According to Mayor Icamina, Kalibo attracted more tourists this year with the sprucing up of several hotels and boarding houses to accommodate revelers from other parts of the country. He said there also was a brisk sale of locally made products.

Other towns, cities, and provinces can learn from such example.

There is much to gain from fiestas being geared toward socio-economic uplift. With more initiative, ingenuity and imagination on the part of the officials and with the full cooperation of the people, what used to be a purely religious tradition can be tapped fully for the country's development.

EUFRONIO V. AFUANG