

Youth in Action

THE BOGO - MEDELLIN EPISODE

by Rolando Arañas
AB 2

MISSION:

To verify the alleged reports of oppression against Sugar-plantation laborers and violation of the laws of the Philippines in the towns of Bogo and Medellin.

NUSP FACT-FINDING TEAM:

Zosimo Santiago, Romeo Maata, Teodulo Tumangday, Quirino Aparte, Rolando Arañas, 2 CIT students and one UV student.

DATE: March 26, 1970

It was nearing five o'clock when the members of the NUSP FACT-FINDING TEAM, started for the trip to Bogo and Medellin, the sugarlandia of Cebu. We brought with us two bundles of questionnaires and some clothes since we were planning to stay in Medellin for three days.

The trip to Northern Cebu, though long and dry, was a thrilling experience. It was ten o'clock in the morning when we arrived at Barrio Binabog, ten kilometers away from the town proper of Bogo. There we interviewed ten families who were all laborers of a sugar-plantation owned by a high official. The results of the interviews were revealing.

All the laborers were underpaid. Their wages ranged from P1.50 to P1.75 - a blatant violation of the minimum wage law. The trusted man of the haciendero collected P2.00 from each laborer as a fee for his membership to a labor organization named FREWAS. The laborers were not informed what FREWAS really was and what benefits the laborers could derive from it. They were simply told they were members of this said organization. The laborers told us that this labor organization was in itself formed by men of the hacienderos if not the hacienderos themselves! During working hours, armed men (members of the Insular Police Agency) were around the vicinity of the plantation.

The whole team went to the ALU chapter in Medellin to interview the

officials about the condition of the place. The ALU officials reported harassment by the Insular Police and the hacienderos against their fellow members. Coercion was used by the men of the hacienderos to let the laborers join the haciendero-formed labor organization called the FREWAS. The whole team was then split into two groups. The first group, led by Zosimo Santiago, was to interview the laborers. The second group, composed of two students (Teodulo Tumangday and I), was to verify the alleged harassment of the Insular Police against the ALU members.

Let us follow the second group. We rode with two ALU members in an ALU Scout car. As we stopped at a gasoline station for fuel, one ALU member calmly raised his eyebrows pointed out a light green cargo truck bearing the name Insular Police Agency. It was filled with men (fifteen or more) clad in blue, wearing hats commonly worn by Philcag men, holding long barreled guns and wore no nameplates. They were all looking at the Scout car.

As our Scout car moved out from the gasoline station the cargo truck began to trail us. At one instance when our Scout car stopped, the cargo truck, passing from behind, stopped three meters ahead. Some of the men alighted from the truck and pretended to inspect the tires. As the Scout moved ahead, the Insular Police trailed it again. The Insular Police Agency truck persisted in its tail-gaiting. The driver of the Scout would step hard on the accelerator shooting it through narrow street bordering the hacienda. Then it would suddenly slow down. Then it would run again in a very high speed. The slow moving cargo truck had a hard time following us. The tense trip continued for more than an hour and thirty minutes.

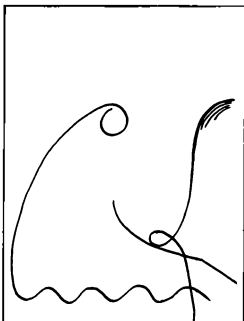
The second group in the Scout car proceeded to a place called Curba, the

rendevouz point of the whole fact-finding team. The Insular Police Agency truck was presumably lost during the chase. One lad, sporting USC P.E. T-shirt (obviously a Carolinian), told us that the first group had already been there earlier but moved out immediately. We learned later that they had also been chased by the Insular Police.

The first group, led by "Toots" Santiago, was nowhere to be found in Medellin. This time we took with us a P.C. soldier for protection. In any eventuality the numerous Insular Police would at least respect the uniform of the P.C. We proceeded immediately to Bogo to look for the "lost" group. But, then, the other group could not be found in Bogo. There was a growing concern for them. We went to the P.C. barracks in Bogo since the PC soldier who accompanied us wanted to report to their commanding officer.

As we were within the premises of the barracks, we suddenly saw the jeep of the first group heading toward the town proper of Bogo. It was trailed by two vehicles - one police jeep and a blue cargo truck. We immediately trailed the three cars. We overtook the three cars about one to two kilometers away from the town proper of Bogo when we united with the four groups.

The UV student had become very nervous. "Toots" Santiago was very silent. One student from my team asked what had happened to them. Nobody dared yet to answer. The Insular Police in the blue cargo truck stopped behind us some meters away. The policemen from Medellin went back because the place did not belong to their jurisdiction. The PC soldier promised only to guard us within the territory of Bogo. The Insular Police followed us from Medellin to the town of Sogod. On the way, the members of the first group of the fact-finding team told its own story.



*i wonder how i shall live
longing for your love*

*hot sand on my wet
palm drying the flesh
cold and soft,
a warmth long
denied
makes my wet
palm wet no more
; makes my cold
flesh cold no more.*

*hot sand growing
hotter, the sun
high above the sea,
burns the tender flesh
beneath,
crush the warmth with
fingers so desirous, so
unsatisfied, warm
sand trickles
down
and gone
among no-
sand sand on
my longing
flesh.
- slm*

At one point, as Mr. "Toots" Santiago and his companions continued their series of interviews of the sugar-plantation laborers, one car of Insular Police agents surrounded them, and one person, obviously the head of the Police group, told the students: . . . "You, people, better behave . . ." One student in the group said that the guns of these agents were already cocked. Then the Insular Police shoved the laborers away from the students and shouted at them in the vernacular . . . "Hoy, nag-unsang man mo diri, hala balik sa trabaho!" Then a moment later one owner of the hacienda came to intervene. He told the students that if ever they would have questions regarding the hacienda and the laborers they should come to them (haciennderos). But what the hacienndero neglected was that the students were interested in the actual and direct testimonies of the laborers themselves.

So, as the students continued their interviews, the Insular Police agents trailed them. The laborers who knew already who were these Insular Police agents were reluctant to subject themselves to interview. The students had no other recourse except to return to the city.

Writer's Note: Very probably, it needs a true hero to die with a true and just cause. But the NUSP fact-finding team was not prepared and did not intend to do heroism since we were not and did not want to appear as heroes. We just wanted to give a little help to our brother Filipinos oppressed by their landlords and acted upon the order of the NUSP. As a result some haciennderos right now are facing charges which are now under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Labor.

REPORT ON . . .

(continued from page 9)

with or without permission from the hierarchy.

FORMAL MEETING

In the morning of the third day, just as the business sessions were about to begin, the Latin American bloc staged a mass walk-out, much to the anguish of the rest of the assembly. The Executive Council, took over, organized the Nominating Committee headed by Helmut Reiner (the vice president of the world federation) and the Committee on Amend-

ments headed by Edythe Westenhewer (the Executive Secretary of the Secretariat in Rome).

On August 14, at 9:00 in the morning, election of officers took place. A motion was put on the floor that other more eligible candidates may be nominated aside from the ones already presented to the Holy See months ahead. With the permission of Msgr. Audet, Papal representative, the motion was granted.

Roland Calcat (France), President; Fred Leone, Vice President; Hildegard Ehartmann (Germany), Secretary; John Parsons (England), Treasurer; Jose Luis Velasco (Spain), Consultant; Aurelio Serrano (Brazil), Consultant.

Fr. Benjamin Sim, S.J. (Philippines) and Coral D'Souza (India) was Appointed Consultants by the New Executive Council.

After the elections, deliberations on proposed amendments were made as quickly as possible because time was running out. Only two amendments belonging to Group A and B were carried: changing the term "Ecclesiastical Assistant" to "Assistant of the group" (Part II Art. 14 Paragraph 2) and that "Special bond with the Hierarchy" be changed to "1) appointment of the Assistant of the group 2) organization of the World Federation 3) approval of the GP be subject to the approval of a group or federation . . ." (Art. 17 Part II)

Lastly, it was generally agreed that the CLC draw from the Eucharist and the Ignatian Exercises the spirituality it needs, as a religio-apostolic lay organization. The members came to conclude that with the distributing signs of the times, each must not remain passive but be fully involved in the situation that he is in. The trouble within the church had been directly and too deeply felt by the assembly in the schism of the Latin American group. In a sense, they have regarded the incident as prompted by the Holy Spirit so that discussions will be too theoretical but would be given an element of lived experience by making the members feel the anguish of a divided church.

