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## Uplift the welfare of the workingman

**T**HE very institution of martial law government in our country is premised on the belief that our social, political and economic structures must be radically overhauled to promote the welfare of the Filipino workingman. Initial sacrifices had to be made, however. To ensure continued expansion of production the government, at first, had to place a temporary ban on labor strikes as well as lockouts by management. The government believes that reasonable wages and assured industrial peace will promote greater national production, attract local and foreign investments, and enable us to be competitive with the rest of the world in the export market. This economic growth is expected to be directly translated into a higher standard of living for all Filipinos.

But the worldwide inflation of the recent years and the energy crisis have eroded the capability of the workers to sustain themselves and their families. Two choices confronted the government: will we allow wages to go up with the danger that local inflation will further accelerate or will we continue to impose the burden of economic sacrifice to our laborers? In some high-growth countries, the choice would undoubtedly have been the first one—harness "sweet labor" and build a strong export market.

In the New Society, however, the program of human dignity takes precedence over the program of economic growth. Despite the strong pressures from some sectors, the President decided on Labor Day, last May 1, that the minimum wages must be raised to enable the workers to cope with the rising

prices of goods. Before this statutory enactment, the government has in effect raised the minimum wages by decreasing a 13th-month bonus and the payment of emergency allowances for lower-salaried workers.

But more than raising minimum wages, the New Society government has restored the dignity and strength of the workers. Ideally, the government should not be very much involved in labor-management discussions when both parties are strong and socially responsible. Because we are a developing country, however, with the ills of heavy unemployment and heavier unemployment problems to contend with, the workers' groups do not possess strong leverage. Only about ten percent of the industrial labor force belong to labor unions.

To remove the inequities in the labor market, President Ferdinand E. Marcos enacted the comprehensive Labor Code last year. The Code set up the mechanics of achieving the aims set forth by the Constitution (Section 9, Article III): To "afford protection to labor, promote full employment, ensure work opportunities regardless of sex, race, creed and regulate relations between workers and employers."

Thus, the Department of Labor, as the chief implementer of government policies on labor, graduated from one of the minor arms of the government to a fully-expanded agency. From a position of relative functional insignificance, the Department has risen to play an strategic role in attaining economic

growth tempered with social justice.

The Department of Labor has expanded from a basically regulatory role to the field of manpower development. Eleven regional offices of the National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC) had been established; a nationwide network of 41 public employment exchanges had been set up.

To strengthen our international reserves position, the Department of Labor has also encouraged Filipino workers to take advantage of opportunities abroad. The Overseas Employment Development Board and the National Seaman Board became fully operational in 1975, actively pinpointing work potentials abroad as well as protecting the rights of Filipino expatriates.

The government has not been remiss in protecting workers' rights. The National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC) which has replaced the ineffective Court of Industrial Relations has extended the coverage of its arbiters throughout the archipelago. NLRG is emphasizing the importance of collective bargaining to promote job security and benefits.

In formulating and implementing its labor policies, the government has seized on the methodology of tripartism—the involvement of government, management and labor—in arriving at a program that is not only enforceable but also popular. Labor and management now settle differences over the bargaining table, ensuring industrial peace and continued production, with the government always ready to lend a hand. □



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