

VOLUNTEERS

Money is not everything

Early last month, 12 Dutch and nine Japanese technicians started a two-year work stint in various government offices under a rare kind of contract; no mention is made of monetary remuneration. In place of the usual compensation clause, the agreement contains two strikingly simple "guarantees": 1) safety for their persons and personal effects; and 2) enough work to keep them busy for the duration of their stay.

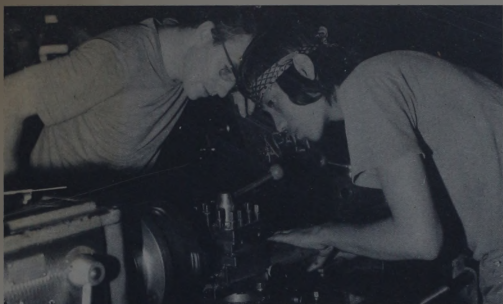
They were not the first ones to work here under such a contract, but in a country where technical talent is at a premium, the terms seem unheard of and, indeed, can cause no little amount of mystification. What, for instance, can they expect to subsist on while working here? They do have something to fall back on. Depending on his place of assignment, a technician gets from \$80 to \$150 (P540 to P2,000) as monthly allowance from his own government. Back home, a comparable job would command a monthly salary of at least \$350 (P2,370).

Not all things, however, can be reduced to that popular common denominator—money. At least not for these young men, for they are volun-

teers. In its essence, volunteer service retains some romantic undertones: a selfless giving without thought of what one would be receiving in return. As one appreciative Philippine official puts it, "Volunteer service is lay missionary work minus the promise of heaven." Admittedly, adventure provides an added motivation for some of them; for others, it is the prospect of knowing better another country and her people; but for most, it is living out the credo that "a man's greatest reward is his sense of accomplishment."

And accomplishments they already have in great variety. In barely six years since the arrival of their first team in the country, members of the Japan Overseas Corporation Volunteers (JOCV) can point to several successful projects where their services proved invaluable. Among them: the Guimaras (Iloilo) mango plantation which produces export-quality mangoes in commercial quantities and the fish sausage plant in Mercedes, Camarines Norte, the product of which is now the subject of a market feasibility study.

On the other hand, representatives of the Organization of Netherlands Volunteers (ONV), working under the auspices of Bishop Cornelius de Witt in the southern province of Antique, helped organize cooperatives for small-scale, self-help community projects like fishing and cattle raising. In another project that has drawn national attention, some Dutch volunteers collaborated with the Philippine Printing Technical Foundation in setting up a general printing course in offset press, plate-making, binding and related skills—perhaps, the only course of its kind in the country today.



Foreign volunteers: a chance to work with the people.

It would take a long list to enumerate all the projects initiated or assigned by these volunteers. Working in various parts of the country today are 106 volunteers from the JOCV, 41 from the ONV, 6 from Britain's Volunteer Service Overseas (VSO) and 5 from the Stanford University-based Volunteers in Asia (VIA). They cover a broad range of technical specializations: from irrigation to artificial insemination, from fish culture to sericulture (raising of silkworms for the production of raw milk), to ceramics, electronics, cooperatives and even landscaping.

Working on projects like these gratis et amore is, without doubt, praiseworthy. But it has often been a cause of understandable concern that foreign technical aid tends to create a dependent attitude on the part of the people of the recipient country. On this score, the agreements entered into by the Philippine government and foreign volunteer organizations (or their governments) usually contain a proviso that Filipino counterparts be assigned to the volunteers. The intent is clear: to enable Filipinos to learn the rudiments, if not the refinements, of their technical know-how so that no gaps are left when the volunteers leave.

The intensification of foreign volunteer programs here almost coincided with the phasing out of certain forms of foreign technical assistance and the first moves toward redirecting Philippine education along the lines of technical and vocational training. For these reasons, the role of volunteers in helping develop much-needed, middle-level manpower gains added significance. Their working here could not

have been more timely.

But their role could have been understated, as the dearth in publicity seems to indicate. To some extent, this low profile could have resulted from the self-effacing nature of most volunteers themselves as well as their organizations, thus their reluctance to play the celebrity game.

If these foreign volunteer organizations have shied away from the limelight, so has the agency that plays a key role in the whole scheme. But then matchmakers are quite well-known for remaining unknown. The Philippine National Volunteer Service (PNVSC) is no exception.

The PNVSC was created on December 17, 1964 as the national liaison with foreign volunteer organizations. It found itself hamstrung at the start by the absence of a permanent staff and lack of authority to implement its policies and programs. Executive Order No. 105 issued by President Marcos on December 11, 1967 sought to correct that inadequacy by establishing a secretariat, charged with the actual implementation of the committee's functions. The same order expanded the committee membership to include representatives from the better-known local volunteer organizations.

The committee at present is chaired by the secretary of the Department of Local Government and Community Development (DLGCD). Other than the DLGCD secretary and the PNVSC executive secretary, the committee is composed of one representative each from the following departments: Foreign Affairs, Labor, Health, Education and Culture, Agri-

culture and Natural Resources, Public Works, Transportation and Communications, and National Defense. Also represented are the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, Operation Brotherhood International, Medical Aid for Rural Indigent Areas, Work-A-Year, and the School Volunteer Program of the Philippines.

"Every day is a busy day for the PNVSC," says Executive Secretary Elizabeth Z. Barbero. The task revolves mainly around its clearing-house function. "We receive numerous requests for volunteers from both government and private agencies," she says as she explains the process of foreign volunteer recruitment. "We have to carefully evaluate the project proposals and then make the requisite representation with the foreign organization concerned."

In the course of negotiations, the foreign volunteer organization may seek an on-the-spot survey of the proposed project. The PNVSC makes the necessary arrangements, sometimes including accommodations for the survey party. Once the project is approved and volunteers are sent here, the PNVSC conducts an in-country program—a four-week crash course in English, Philippine history, political science, sociology and economics, plus other subjects designed to familiarize them with local conditions.

The PNVSC receives periodic progress reports from volunteers already in the field. Complaints of volunteers are also couched through it. Curiously, the most common complaint is that the volunteers do not have much to do. A likely solution in cases like this is immediate transfer to another place of assignment.

Giving ample support to the PNVSC are the country representatives of the two largest volunteer organizations operating here—Ichiro Toyoshima, for big JOCV, and Johannes J. Liethoff, for the ONV.

Obviously, even such a good thing as foreign volunteer service will come to an end. The PNVSC prepares for such an eventuality by helping develop domestic volunteer organizations. In the main, its contribution consists of technical support in the form of briefings, orientation courses and seminars for youth volunteers. Two organizations which have received such support are the Democratic Youth Movement and the Far Eastern University Students Volunteer Organization. In coordination with the defunct PACD (which has been absorbed by the Department of Local Government and Community Development), the PNVSC has organized and supervised the work of the Volunteers for the Improvement of the Philippines (VIP), made up of college students who had dropped out for financial reasons. As a form of encouragement, VIP members get some financial assistance to enable them to continue their studies.

Another incentive for local volunteers in PNVSC-assisted projects is the prospect of being chosen to serve in foreign countries under the United Nations Volunteer Program. To date, the PNVSC has arranged the trip of 10 Filipino youths to the Yemen, the United Arab Republic, Iran, Jamaica and Liberia.

The inducements are far from substantial, but it is perhaps a measure of the appeal of volunteer service itself that several volunteer programs are going on in the country today.