

A barrio high
school in
Urdaneta, Pangasinan

The barrio high school



ONE MAN'S

By MARIO PATRICIO

IN THE light of present-day reformist movements, he seems hardly the type who would lead one. One's first impression of him is of a shy, retiring family man, alien to the fervor that animates organized action or sparks demonstrations. And he is plainly too old to be a revolutionary (as we understand the term today), being well over fifty.

But Mr. Pedro Orata has, in his own way, become a harbinger of change among us. Today, he is at the forefront of a revolution that is quietly transforming and enhancing the life of the barrio folk. The transformation is happening in makeshift high school classrooms, where thousands of barrio residents, young and old alike, are trying to complete the secondary education course.

These makeshift schools have since been called "barrio high schools," but they are makeshift only in the sense of being without regular buildings and regular faculty members of their own. The classes are mostly held in elementary school classrooms, when they are not being used (mainly in the evenings); and the instructors are mostly elementary teachers who happen to be also qualified to teach secondary courses. Otherwise, these schools are every bit real high schools, complete with prescribed courses for study, grading system and even administrative personnel.

As founder of the barrio high school movement, Pedro Orata



PEDRO ORATA, founder of the barrio high school movement.

DREAM

has, indeed, reason to be proud today. At present, there are over 1,200 barrio high schools all over the country, with an estimated enrollment this schoolyear of over a hundred thousand students. This record of growth is phenomenal considering that the movement began, under Orata's leadership, with only four barrio high schools in Pangasinan and a total enrollment of 352 students only.

"It all began really as an experiment," Mr. Orata now recalls. "I thought that the barrios had been long neglected in our educational programs, and that they would continue to be exiled from the mainstream of national life unless the barrio folk themselves take the initiative. So I convinced some barrio residents in Urdaneta, Pangasinan to form their own high schools, using the existing facilities of barrio elementary schools. We got the support of the Department of Education in this. When we opened classes, I was amazed at the tremendous show of interest of the barrio people."

To the credit of the Administration it does not only recognize but actually encourages such vital educational programs as Mr. Orata's. In his recent State of the Nation address, President Marcos urged Congress to pass a law that will "support the barrio high school and remove any doubts as to its legality as an institution." The President also revealed that under his administration's policy of encouragement there are now "1,200 barrio high schools all over

the country, employing some 6,000 teachers and providing instruction to 120,000 students."

Orata's pilot schools in Urdaneta, Pangasinan today offer complete secondary courses, and over a hundred students have since graduated from these schools since their opening during the school-year 1964-1965.

The curricular offerings of the barrio high school, according to Orata, are the same as the courses in the regular public high schools with only such modifications as to make them immediately relevant to the economic needs of the barrio. Thus, some barrio high schools, cognizant of the problems and needs of their particular barrios, would offer courses related to rice or vegetable farming. Others would offer courses in hog-raising or in the industrial arts.

Despite the encouraging success of the barrio high school movement, it is threatened today by powerful opponents. This opposition largely comes from those who own and operate private high schools. They fear that the proliferation of barrio schools throughout the country will cut deeply into their business.

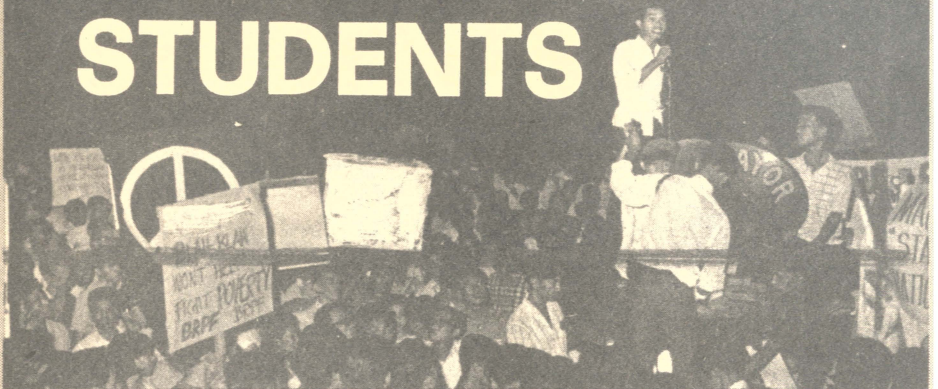
"Our immediate concern at present," says Orata, "is to ensure that what we have taken so long to build will not be destroyed. We want to see the passage of a Barrio School Charter through the Congress. Such charter would give definite legal status to the barrio high school. Senator Eva Estrada Kalaw has filed such a bill and I hope our legislators will approve it."

To gather support for the bill, Orata has embarked on an article-writing and speechmaking campaign. Several of these articles have already been printed by the *Manila Times*.

At a luncheon-press conference on the Barrio High School Charter, this writer had occasion to meet and hear Mr. Orata. In conversation, he was soft-spoken and reserved, very much like his handshake and his smile which neither ingratiate nor alienate.

When he stood up to speak finally, the persuasiveness of the man came through. He felt as much at home in English as in his native Pangasinan. He spoke at length on the story of the barrio high school. We listened, silent and convinced. FM

MAGNA CARTA FOR STUDENTS



"The students constitute a new force in our society."
—President Ferdinand E. Marcos

ONE of the positive effects of the recent student uprisings in campuses across the nation was the acceleration of the move to have a Magna Carta for Students passed in Congress.

President Marcos lost no time in certifying to Congress the bills pending in the Senate and the House that would guarantee the rights and responsibilities of university youth.

The rights of students provided in the bills include:

1. The right to admission to any school provided students meet academic requirements and are not hampered by regulations on the basis of sex and religion.

2. The right to be informed beforehand on the rules, policies, fees, discipline, and other regulations and while in school of any amendments of any of these strictures.

3. The right of due process, including information on any charges preferred against them.

4. The right to a student government.

5. The right to free research and publication, discussion and exchange of ideas in this regard.

6. The right to competent instruction and adequate welfare services and academic facilities.

7. The right to participate through the student government in setting up activity fees and other student funds.

8. The right of participation

through his student government in any curriculum, teaching personnel and policy change.

9. The right to organize on campus for legitimate purposes and to seek recognition for such a student group from school authorities, which recognition may be revoked when the groups' own purposes are violated by the members.

10. The right to use campus facilities as an authorized student group, subject to existing regulations, provided that facilities are properly used.

11. The right to use the name of his school as a member of an authorized group; to hear speakers of his choice invited by student organizations; and the right to publish student-directed publications within the bounds of the law and decency, provided the paper is financed by students.

12. The right to exercise his rights as a citizen off-campus without impairing his school standing, provided that he acts privately.

Matched with an equal number of responsibilities, these rights were described as "vital in any society that puts a premium on the search for truth and the total development of the individual human personality."

Fully endorsed by the Marcos administration, the Magna Carta for Students stands a good chance of passage this session. FM