

The Economic Outlook of the Filipino

By PERCY A. HILL

The most vital of all Philippine questions today is not by any means political. It is purely economic. Possessed of great resources in land, a fair climate, and equal opportunity the per capita production from these resources remains about what it was under the much-discussed Spanish regime. With the government in the hands of the Filipinos for the last twelve years, it is a lamentable fact that they have done so little (except on paper) towards developing the country. The question then arises: Is there any way in which Uncle Sam has neglected his opportunities along economic lines? The land, the only resource of the islands, is of course a closed preserve, practically, and made so by those whose sentiments were more highly developed than their brains. But what about those who should make these lands a productive asset instead of a political liability? Have we or they evolved any sane system regarding this particular, or have we sentimentally neglected this in an effort to be benevolent?

We may safely answer this in the affirmative, we have been guilty of neglect; for in spite of the mouthings about the dignity of labor, in spite of the voluminous annual reports, in spite of specious excuses, and passing the buck delightfully, we have saddled them with an academic system of education that has evolved into an air-tight bureaucracy that leads away from, instead of towards, the goal of every Filipino—his economic independence. In a confessedly agricultural country, the most vital question is not that of the question of sovereignty, or the iridescent bubble of political independence. The paramount issue with the native of the provinces, the twelve millions, is one of comparative prosperity. And the first duty of a real patriot is to provide a decent living for himself and his family, a duty perhaps which is the last thought of both the politician and the bureaucrat steeped in bovine complacency and provided with the 57 varieties of stock excuses.

True, some will say that the economic salvation of every country lies in its own hands, or rather in those to which they have delegated it. Before capital can be employed a spirit of willingness to engage in agricultural activities is of course necessary. Of the twelve million who live in the provinces and who form the Filipino peoples, the earning capacity is yet extremely low. The well-dressed people of Manila are a criterion of these millions, for even if the opinions of the capital are vociferous, there is no reason to believe that these are shared by the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. This is a fact much better seen through the provincial microscope than through the Manila telescope. Prosperity is of course relative although the desire for it is universal. It connotes the living of normal lives. Without prosperity amongst the millions it is of little real value to point out fortunes made—perhaps during the war-period, by borrowing money.

Take the sugar industry. Even with the preferential now enjoyed it is a hard matter even in spite of all that's sung. Labor may be to convince anyone that it is a going concern

inefficient; on the other hand, wages paid in Cuba and Hawaii are almost double. It is all, of course, a matter of cost of production in the last analysis, but the incubus of indebtedness under which the sugar industry is laboring is perhaps the greatest handicap of all. Anyhow, many of the owners on paper of the haciendas and centrals, are in a quandary as to who is the real owner. With the cost production relatively high and the hectare-yield so low, the need of adequate and efficient agricultural labor will be found to be the chief root of all the evils of this industry.

The tobacco industry is perhaps the poorest rewarded of all agricultural activities in the islands—that is, the actual producer. A trip through the tobacco regions and a glance at the flimsy broken-down houses and the poverty-stricken and dejected air of the producer is enough to impress even the casual visitor that these farmers have the lowest earning capacity of all those engaged in wresting a living from the soil. While the Spanish monopoly in its heyday made many millions and was the first endeavor to make the Philippines economically independent of Mexico, whence the annual silver subsidy was drawn, it did not put much into the pockets of the producers. Its stringent regulations accomplished, however, one thing. They produced excellent tobacco, and Manila cheroots were known all over the seven seas. That many

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of the regulations were reprehensible goes without saying, but they did produce a superior product. The present experimental stations do little for the actual producer except hand him the cheapest commodity in the world—free advice. It needs more than advice to rejuvenate an industry or relieve the utter stagnation into which it has fallen. The words of a Dutch expert from Sumatra, who visited the tobacco region a couple of years ago, are perhaps pertinent. "You have here the best soil in the world, fine seed, and excellent tobacco climate, but an utter lack of people with agricultural intelligence to grow tobacco. Any good crop production is a direct dispensation of Providence."

The rice industry, from which some five million Filipinos derive a living, is in a little better shape than tobacco, and this we might say is not due to any government agency, but rather has occurred in spite of it. Better prices for the daily bread of the twelve million has a good deal to do with it. The rice grower not being engaged in producing an export crop, was ignored by the government, which did not understand his problems. He was yelped at by politicians who desired him to produce under a fixed price during the war, and reared up as a credit risk by the Philippine National Bank.

A moribund bureau of agriculture, mainly composed of typists, could do nothing for him. The producer of our chief food, and also our best money crop, has but few boosters, but he has solved some of his problems in his own way. Cheaper transportation is a great factor, the protective tariff helps, and the Chinese dealers, millers and distributors have been a godsend to him, for they have partly solved his credit problem. But there is no further extension of this industry, no new lands being placed under cultivation except in the old rice regions.

The economic situation of the actual producer leaves much to be desired. Rice is mainly produced under the share system, the landlords providing the capital and the tenants the labor, the profit being equally divided. The annual earnings of the producing unit, were, in 1914, P113.30, which sum gradually rose until in 1919 it was P280, which amount

Families Receive practically equals that of this year. **280 Yearly From** This represents the earnings of an average family unit, not a very opulent one. In connection with this we might state that the only agricultural school for the rice region, requires deposits and expenses per year of some P47 per student—students who work the fields half the time!

It can be readily seen that few farmers' sons can emerge from the depths with the family earnings as low as quoted. This school, founded by men of vision and ability, is also joining the procession of innocuous institutions. In the past it was the only bright spot in the system, and that of which visiting educators took the most notice.

The average yield of palay in the islands is, perhaps, the lowest in the orient. What is the reason for this stagnation in national prosperity? The main reason is academic and not agricultural instruction. With the greater part of the revenues devoted to public instruction, the government keeps on making parasites out of potential producers; it drains the rural population into the urban districts, and unwisely allots the price of a postage stamp per capita to the vital problem of agricultural instruction.

Schools are not merely buildings full of students. Unless the driving force of the institution is a man of real ability and vision the school fails of its purpose. Reduced to a stereotyped curriculum, the present system merely vegetates. Good agricultural teachers cannot be obtained at present salaries and under a stagnant bureaucracy. If they come, they speedily leave, never to return. Twenty-five years of education has done little or nothing to enable the present generation to produce as much pro rata as did their forefathers under the Spanish regime. Why this antipathy towards the practical end of agriculture in an agricultural country exists, only God Almighty knows. Education, the cornerstone of American rule, has only resulted in a plethora of theorists in the white-collar positions—and an extensive waiting list. The greatest political fulcrum

is the thousands of teachers on the payroll: there is a great chance here, for certain powers.

In spite of the millions spent annually from the treasury, this amount is now augmented by private subscriptions, by schools to be founded for illiterates outside the educative function of government, and private schools are increasing yearly. With the idea of discouraging the high schools, instead of limiting these the government has merely raised the fees, thus making more money available; but in all the school activities the urge is still academic and not agricultural or practical. The following figures given by a Filipino superintendent of schools are pertinent. He quotes a list of 1092 pupils, most of whom were graduated. Only 8.3 per cent engaged in agriculture. The saddest part of the report shows that these 1092 pupils came from families 55 per cent of whom were engaged in agriculture.

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