

THE barrio is the soul of Philippine society. In its structure lies the frailty or strength of our national life. Our efforts at development must necessarily include, if not begin with, the development of this basic social and government unit.

We love to profess that the strength of democracy lies in the grassroots. The barrio is precisely the grassroots. Here are born the first intimations of nationhood, citizenship and government. Attitudes towards government and the other facets of the national enterprise are shaped and given tentative substance here.

The neglected community spawns a breed of indifferent and calloused people. This is true with barrios as it is true with decaying slum areas. The attitude developed in such abandoned communities is one of apathy instead of commitment.

There is a crucial note to the need for urgent development of our barrios. The greater majority of our barrios are isolated communities, separated from the national mainstream by distance and time, brought about by lack of communications and adequate transportation. Basic services are wanting; the essential comforts of life are missed. Years of neglect have tended many barrios to drift from the center of society instead of integrating themselves into the national community.

There are extremes to this reaction. One is of self-decay, the other is more forceful and violent. The second consequence should compel our leaders to reexamine their attitude towards the barrio.

For years, national leaders of varying colors have declared their concern for the barrio. They plan grandiose designs and execute masterful blueprints for the development of the nation. Aside from a few feeder roads and artesian wells, there were little evidence of these passionate declarations. Many barrios remained stagnant and sterile as before.

There have been historic development of late. One was the passage of the Decentralization Act of 1966 which provided greater autonomy for local governments. The other is the enactment of the Barrio Development Fund under which each barrio is entitled to a financial assistance of ₱2,000.

The Barrio Development Fund is not a hand-out, not a form of patronage from the government. It is a contribution to the barrio for a much-needed project. The concept behind the development program is precisely to instill and encourage the concept of self-help among the barrio folk. Under the program, the government provides the sum plus general supervision. The choice

The Barrio Captains Men on the Move



By FRED D. MANALO

of the project, its completion, must come from the efforts and resources of the barrio people.

It is a fact that under the barrio charter, barrios receive not funds from the national government. In taxes, the barrio collects only 10 per cent of the real estate collected within the barrio, which is less than ₱100 in most places. Lucky is the barrio which is the recipient of pork barrel allocations from an expansive congressman, which may go to the construction of a feeder road or schoolhouse. Beyond this, nothing.

The Barrio Development Program came on the initiative of the new breed of barrio captains who have recognized their plight and, having no means to initiate vital projects in their communities, have sought the help of President Marcos. This dialogue has been going on for quite a time now and which was the basis for the inclusion in the appropriations act of the barrio development fund.

Under the program, it is the captain del barrio, together with the barrio council, who chooses the project where the ₱2,000. will be invested. The con-

trol and supervision will also come from them. With this assistance, they are now in a better position to expand their leadership in community-building.

This leadership is most crucial and vital. The citizen's first encounter with the process of government lies in the realm of the barrio council. The quality of the barrio council, as steered by the *capitan del barrio*, shapes the citizen's image of his government and society.

The quality of community life is also the responsibility of the *capitanes del barrio* and the barrio councilmen. It is their leadership and influence that greatly dictate the social—if not the economic—climate in their environment.

This means that the barrio leaders are obliged to be the exemplars in upholding values, to exercise the ethic and disciplines of the useful life. Through osmosis, such leadership tends to spread like a ripple, touching and influencing the lives of others, goading them to match the purposiveness and dedication of their leaders.

This purposiveness is most evident in the rising generation of *capitanes del barrio*. Responding to the President's call for New Filipinos, they are breaking new grounds for pioneering programs and are leading their barrio folk in the movement to break away from the self-defeating attitudes and habits of the past. Their vision is aimed at enriching the process of rebirth and self-renewal which celebrates the individual's capacity to overcome his environment and the accident of his birth, to shape his own destiny through his labors.

The cynics who perceive nothing but darkness in our future should see this growing, glowing spark in our barrio communities. The new concern of the government for the plight of our countrymen in the far-flung regions finds a heartening duplication in the revitalized leadership in the local governments. Its message is one of hope, its meaning is one of tremendous significance in the over-all development of the nation.

Says President Marcos:

"It is quite important to notice, because without our knowing it there is a revolution going on in our midst, not only in the national government but all the way down to the roots of our political society, to the base of our political pyramid. Barrio leaders and barrio presidents from all over the country have become conscious of their duties to their people. If in the past you saw them complacent, inactive, today they are not so. They are on the move, they are aware they constitute the first line of leadership in our country." **PM**



SECOND FILIPINO CARDINAL

The Philippines got its second cardinal last May 1 when Julio Cardinal Rosales of Cebu received from Pope Paul VI his symbolic red skullcap and beretta, along with 32 other new appointees. The elevation to the cardinalate of Rosales came as a timely gesture, considering that the local Catholic laity is racked by a number of grave problems. The new Cardinal vowed more social action.



The First Lady, Mrs. Imelda R. Marcos, was the "ninang" at the investiture of Cardinal Rosales. Mrs. Marcos and daughters Imee and Irene were received in audience by the Pope.