

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

A vigorous comeback for co-ops

A movement that was practically given up as a lost cause several years ago has sprung back to life and now accounts for much of the frenetic activity going on in thousands of Philippine villages.

Rural folk in at least 40 of the country's 69 provinces have begun banding themselves into organizations that promise to revolutionize life in the countryside and make the barrio a truly dynamic and viable unit of Philippine society. The activity centers on the revival of the cooperative movement.

All signs point to a vigorous comeback for cooperatives. Never before had the movement, which started as early as 1927 and enjoyed a heyday of sorts in the 1950's, been injected with as much vigor as now.

President Marcos, who has given the movement a key role in the land reform program, views the cooperative as "a mechanism that can tap the latent creative energies of our people, especially in the rural areas, a mechanism that can unite, integrate and direct their scattered human, social, moral and material resources." Cooperatives have been described too as "democracy in action" or as "a proclamation of independence from middlemen and usurers."

Essentially, a cooperative is the pooling of resources of members so that they can have access to credit and other services which they would otherwise be unable to get through

their limited individual resources. It may be made up of people working in the same institution or living in the same community.

On a higher plane, cooperatives are regarded as effective instruments in bringing about social equity, promoting desirable economic and social values among people, and, finally, strengthening the country's potentials for economic stability and growth.

The President, speaking before the First Asian Conference on Agricultural Credit and Cooperatives hosted by the Philippines in December 1970, said of cooperatives: "They are peculiarly suited to the economically small and weak for whom indeed they have been conceived. Propelled by the power of self-help and self-reliance, cooperatives can be effective means of rationalizing the problem of credit both with respect to generation of funds and to their efficient management. As institutions of people, they can replace or at least balance the institutions of private property that today constitute the citadels of the status quo. They can thus bring about the revolutionary change that the temper of the times demand."

The President was not, by any means, paying lip-service to the cooperative movement. For today, not quite three years after that address before Asia's co-op experts, the program is enjoying unprecedented support from the government, particularly in terms of activity priorities.

The cooperatives now existing or being organized in the country fall into two broad categories: agricultural and non-agricultural. Each category embraces several types of cooperatives. Thus, a cooperative may be wholly an association of consumers, or of workers, farmers, craftsmen, artisans and fishermen.

Whatever type of cooperative they form, however, the members share one common objective: to uplift their life through a pooling of their limited financial and other resources.

In a credit union, probably the

most basic type of cooperative, the common fund is utilized as a source of credit for productive and provident purposes at reasonable rates of interest. In a consumers' cooperative, the money is used to buy goods direct from the source and the goods are sold to members at a small margin of profit. A farmers' or fishermen's cooperative can be a source of fund for the purchase of farming or fishing equipment and supplies. A cooperative may also be a multi-purpose one. In any case, by making available either credit, production or marketing facilities, a coop frees its members from the clutches of usurers and middlemen.

Given the task of steering the current campaign to convert the country into a network of cooperatives is the Bureau of Cooperatives of the Department of Local Government and Community Development, under Secretary Jose A. Rono.

The bureau so far has fielded some 1,900 "frontline" fieldmen to help the people organize the Samahang Nasyon (barrio organizations) in 40 pilot provinces. These grass-roots organizations serve as the nucleus of the cooperative program, Phase I of which is now being implemented. A total of 96,387 volunteers also have been trained to help in the organizational phase.

Formation of the Samahang Nasyon started with the implementation of the land reform program, which aims not only to give tenant-farmers the lands they till but also to provide them with facilities to increase their production and assure them better margins of profit from their produce.

A presidential decree issued in mid-April provided an additional shot in the arm for the movement.

Cooperatives or the Samahang Nasyon were initially formed in six pilot provinces, namely, Isabela, Nueva Ecija, Laguna, Albay, Camarines Sur and Iloilo. Thirty-four more provinces have since been added to the list. These are Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Cagayan, Pangasinan, Tarlac,

Pampanga, Nueva Vizcaya, Zambales, Bataan, Bulacan, Cavite, Rizal, Batangas, Oriental Mindoro, Camarines Norte and Sorsogon in Luzon; Leyte, Samar, Cebu, Negros Oriental and Occidental, Bohol, Antique, Capiz in the Visayas; and Bukidnon, Zamboanga del Norte and Sur, Lanao del Norte, Agusan del Norte, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur and Norte and Surigao del Sur in Mindanao.

To avoid the pitfalls that almost killed the movement in the past, the DLGCD has drafted rules to prevent undue interference in the internal affairs of the cooperatives by any government official not connected with the department. Cooperatives will also be given greater freedom in the management and operation of their respective co-ops.

Under the decree, the cooperatives will not only be provided with funds and expertise — the lack of which, among other factors, caused the failure of similar organizations in the past — but also all the rights and privileges granted to business organizations. In addition, cooperatives are granted preferential rights in supplying prime commodities to government agencies involved in price stabilization programs.

Although capitalization is drawn mainly from members' resources, co-ops can obtain additional finances from the Cooperative Development Loan Fund, expected to be set up soon.

When people fully realize that co-ops provide them not only with economic benefits but also educational and cultural values; when they learn not only to be thrifty but also to keep alive the spirit of bayanihan (self-help) and to help one another; when they look up to the co-op not just as a source of loans but as an organization whose success depends on their collective effort, the cooperative movement may be here to stay — permanent. The signs of such realization are becoming abundantly clear in the country's 35,000 or so barrios today.

QUEZON CITY

A look into the country's capital

To many people outside the Philippines, the words "Quezon City" would probably not ring a bell. They might even be more familiar with Makati, the fast-growing suburban town that has become the hub of some of the country's leading financial, industrial and commercial establishments.

While Manila is still the center of most of the nation's political, social and cultural activities, it is not a well-known fact that "QC," as Quezon City is sometimes called, is the capital city of the Philippines. It has been so for the past 25 years.

Its 153.60 square kilometers (88.1 square miles) make it one of the biggest cities of the world. It is over 400 times bigger than the Vatican territory, 20 times bigger than the principality of Monaco and five times wider than the old capital of Manila.

Thirty-nine years ago, Quezon City was mostly grassland or gently hilly terrain. Today, it is a bustling city of 800,000, its downtown area studded with commercial and industrial buildings and its sprawling residential districts cradling eight government housing projects plus countless privately developed subdivisions. It still has wide open spaces and, like other suburban communities, continues to absorb some of the outflow from crowded Manila.

Cubao, one of the 21 districts of the city, is the most developed. It is

also the city's entertainment center, with several first-class moviehouses and a wide variety of recreational facilities. It also boasts of the "world's largest domed coliseum," with a sitting capacity of 35,000 and which has been the venue of many a crowd-drawer — from a world boxing title fight to a musical extravaganza.

And it has many other things a modern city can offer: banks, supermarkets, first-class restaurants, hotels, plus several outlets for high-quality but reasonably priced shoes crafted in Marikina, the country's "shoe capital" just 15 minutes by car from the downtown area.

To the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC), goes much of the credit for the city's speedy development. It developed various housing projects — Projects 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and the GSIS Vil-

lage, all vast residential areas.

Some of the country's leading institutions of higher learning are in Quezon City, among them the University of the Philippines and the Ateneo de Manila University.

Many national government offices too have already moved to the site being developed into the Government Center.

Geographically, Quezon City is hemmed in by the cities of Caloocan and Manila and the province of Rizal. Founded on October 12, 1939, under Commonwealth Act No. 502, it was originally composed of five districts. It now has 21 and is still growing.

According to the city plan, 62 percent of the total area is utilized for residential, commercial and industrial purposes; 14 percent for roads, 14 percent for government uses; 7 percent for parks and open spaces and 3 percent for agricultural uses.

Quezon City, named after the late President Manuel L. Quezon, grew from an area originally conceived as a community for laborers (Barrio Obrero). The community grew so fast that soon plans were being drawn to convert it into a city.

The idea became a reality when the National Assembly enacted the Quezon City Charter, under Commonwealth Act No. 52. The city was officially created on October 12, 1939

and was inaugurated 10 days later. It became the official capital of the Philippines when the late President Elpidio Quirino signed Republic Act No. 333 on July 17, 1948.

Cubao, San Francisco del Monte, Diliman and the compound of the University of the Philippines with a total area of 7,335 hectares were the original areas embraced by the city.

Through the years, the city engulfed nearby areas until it grew to the 15,159 hectares it has today.

It was President Quezon who first assumed the duties of the city mayor. He later designated Tomas B. Morato to replace him as city executive. Morato was succeeded by Ponciano Bernardo, then by Nicanor Roxas, Ignacio Santos Diaz and, finally, Norberto Amoranto, the incumbent mayor.

At present, Mayor Amoranto is also chairman of the Metropolitan Mayors Coordinating Council, a body which aims to integrate or synchronize the services of local governments in Greater Manila.

With the current reformation program in the entire country, Quezon City is trying to relate its development plans not just to those of the other communities in Greater Manila but also to the overall effort for national growth, consistent with its role as the capital city of the Philippines.