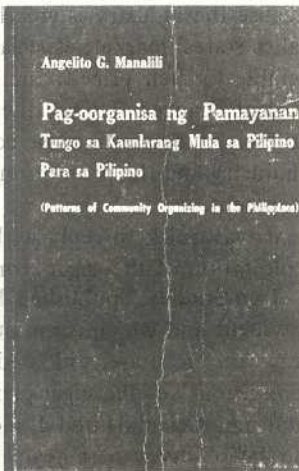


BOOK REVIEW

Patterns of Community Organizing in the Philippines: A Critique

Caridad Nasol

Pag-organisa ng Pamayanan: Tungo sa Kaunlarang Mula sa Pilipino Para sa Pilipino
by Angelito G. Manalili: Kapatiran-Kaunlaran Foundation, Inc. 1984. 239 pp.



This book could not have been more timely given the fact that government and non-government entities are both engaged in the process of initiating changes in the system—whether reformist, radical or revolutionary—through community organizing (CO). In the country today, community organizing is inescapably a potent tool for developing people's (disadvantaged groups) capabilities to determine and move towards their desired future in a sustained manner. This being the case, CO has generated its own share of issues and controversies. And this document brings to the fore concepts, issues, and strategies in CO vis-a-vis national development

Sustaining CO

The chapter that dwells on CO in a historical perspective showed that the Filipino people's common objective of fighting for freedom, of resisting different colonizers' systems of governance perceived to be unjust, fueled and sustained CO activities. A critical question raised from these experiences is: Does CO merely come about because of and is sustained by issues arising from unjust societal structures? If so, will CO then be unnecessary should a more just system evolve or shall it then be a necessary adjunct to such a system in order to sustain it? To clarify this issue, it is suggested that the author include a discussion of the events, situations and CO activities in other areas of the country after 1946, other than those of the Hukbalahap movement.

Issue on Leadership

Corollary to the question of sustainability is the issue of leadership. The author highlights the attempts and strategies of the governing power (colonizers) to frustrate the efforts of the people in their struggle for freedom. Foremost among these strategies is the granting of government positions, con-

cessions and privileges to leaders of freedom movements which consequently resulted in leadership crisis among various resistance units. Considering the immense powers and resources at the disposal of a government (especially a reactionary one), how can CO discourage or minimize the probability of leaders collaborating with the very system being fought? The author has prescribed a number of strategies: developing a mass-based leadership, a continuing process of reflecting on current conditions, and a clear definition of the goals and objectives of CO. These are indeed vital starting points in evolving more effective CO strategies based largely on local experiences so that errors in the past may not be repeated and potential hindrances can now be anticipated.

BOOK REVIEW

Role of Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)

A nagging issue for the author keeps on surfacing in the course of the discussion of the experiences of the people of Dalig, Tabun and Bulihan. It is the direction of the organizing activities undertaken by the people themselves which revolve primarily around their livelihood problems. Although this was not explicitly answered, the preceding and the succeeding discussions lead one to hold that these activities should lead to more substantial changes in societal structures by transcending highly localized problems and relating them to larger areas of concern.

It should be noted that the author presents a list of Do's and Don'ts in CO in relation to project development and management, particularly involving government workers. At this juncture, one may venture to ask: Can the government effectively pursue CO beyond income-generating related projects to meaningful structural changes which may mean radical changes within, if not a complete change of, the whole government system? If it can, this is going to be some kind of a self-destroying mechanism and, therefore, may prove to be untenable to the existing system.

Who are then in the best position to undertake CO? The NGOs? As discussed in the book, they are generally perceived to be effective in undertaking CO activities but are limited by financial resources such that they are able to cover only very few communities. Given sufficient resources to cover more areas simultaneously, can they be equally effective? A related subject matter which has not been discussed thoroughly concerns the minimum requirements for an individual to be an effective community organizer. However, these are implicit in the discussions on the various strategies employed at each step of the organizing process.

Merits of CO Activities

These issues become doubly significant should one wish to interpret the current surge of CO efforts as an indication of the need to evolve more responsive structures which will assure the disadvantaged groups in society equal opportunities for a better life.

Arguments against CO have been put forward by both the government and the revolutionary oppositors to the government. Some quarters in the former view CO as a destabilizing agent in Philippine communities; the latter regards it as a possible tool for co-optation when initial successes are won by disadvantaged groups from government and, hence, slackens the revolutionary pace. It seems now that CO is hemmed in between opposing forces.

The merits of CO, to my mind, lie in its being instrumental in generating a community consciousness among the people, in people finding strength in themselves and in the organization, and in opening channels for the discussion of options for development. And this is the reason why the effort that went into the production of this document is most laudable considering the dearth of instructional materials on community organizing, particularly in book form.

On the Author's Writing Style

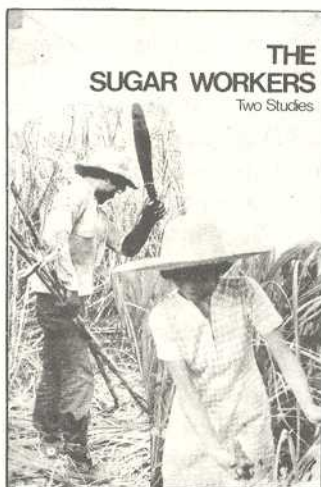
A critique of this document would be incomplete if the

BOOK REVIEW

Obscuring Labor Exploitation with Abstracted Data and Liberal Apologism

Bienvenido S. Oplas

The Sugar Workers: Two Studies
by Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies, Ministry of
Labor and Employment. No date. 233 pp.



The collapse of the Philippine sugar industry has been the subject of recent attention and alarm here and abroad. The worsened state of impoverishment and misery of the sugar workers, especially in Negros, to the point of hunger and starvation has evoked various responses: pity and sympathy on the one hand; worry and fear of unrest on the other. In the wake of all these, the National Sugar Trading Corp. (NASUTRA), the government's sugar trading monopoly, was dismantled, returning sugar trading to free enterprise. It is as if, with this simple act of NASUTRA's abolition, the root cause of the sugar industry's misfortune has finally been eliminated.

Many sectors, however, who have worked closely with the sugar workers and have made independent studies on the sugar industry have tried, in varying degrees, to correct the impression created by the abolition of the NASUTRA and revealed it for what it was the liberal apologism of a government eager for an excuse.

In an analysis characterized by a broader and more critical and analytical perspective, these groups trace the problem of the sugar industry to its roots — the existing domestic feudalism and US imperialism. Feudalism, because of the existing onerous landlord-tenant relations and the backward agricultural and technological situation of the industry;

author's writing style is not noted. The easy narrative manner and the informal language used is most unorthodox considering that many authors follow a more or less structured format and use formal language. I believe this augurs well for a popular understanding and appreciation of the book. This is consistent with the author's aim of reaching a wider audience including laymen. Its effectiveness in terms of reaching a heterogeneous audience, however, may still have to pass the test of time. Should it prove to be so, it may revolutionize writing styles, specifically as far as CO materials and related subject matters are concerned.

and imperialism, because the industry is greatly dependent on the advanced capitalist states' market, especially the US, and thus, is highly vulnerable to their price-fixing, product substitution and technological changes. To say the least, the solutions proposed by these groups are likewise comprehensive — land reform in the industry and the promotion of a nationalist agro-industrial development.

The government was quick to reply with its own study of the extent of exploitation of the sugar workers. The book *The Sugar Workers: Two Studies*, published by the Ministry of Labor and Employment and which came out only recently is an attempt to draw an "accurate, unbiased picture of the living and working conditions" of the sugar plantation workers in Negros (Occidental and Oriental) and Iloilo. The findings are based on a June 1976 survey of a team made up of six representatives from four offices of the Department of Labor (DOL), interviewing a total of 301 sugar plantation workers. The first study is on the living and working conditions of sugar plantation workers in Negros and Iloilo, while the second centers on the sugar workers and the New Labor Code in Negros Occidental.

The first study is a presentation of 100 tables on such items as the types of lighting facility (*kingke, lampara*), water facility (spring, rain, etc.), and others — not so relevant, considering that the concern is to study the exploitation of sugar workers. This I call "abstracted data" because they function to divert the reader's attention, with a mass of not-easily-related details and descriptions, from the real extent and nature of exploitation in the sugar industry, which can only be understood with analytical data and discerned with the use of the concept of not being paid the mandated minimum wage of the government by the sugar planters. To illustrate this point clearly, a rundown of the content of the government survey is presented below:

TOPIC/DESCRIPTION	NO. OF TABLES
Household description (age, children, educ., etc.)	7
Worker type, relation to planter, recruiter, employment length	8
Parents' activities; animal raising	8
Workdays (during milling and off-milling seasons)	5
Facilities: type and provider (dwelling, water, etc.)	13
Earnings: daily, monthly, below minimum	13
Earnings: difference-of-means and proportions	8
Indebtedness (reasons, etc.)	4
Barangay involvement	3
Benefits and payments: SSS, MEDICARE, etc.	13
Job payments compared to statutory rates	14
Perception of political and economic situation	4
TOTAL	100