

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

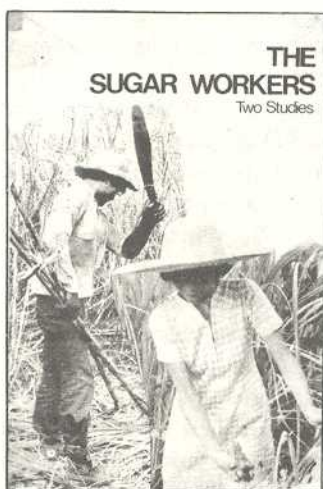
A critique of this document would be incomplete if the

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

However, the book, wittingly or unwittingly, has presented some detailed clues to the socio-economic condition of the workers. For instance, Table 6A presents the workers' relationship to the sugar planters (their "bosses"). Of the 301 workers interviewed, 97.6 percent were related to the planters as workers only. Some 0.7 percent were owner-workers on their own lands, while 1.0 percent of the respondents were members of the sugar planters' families. The remaining 0.7 percent of the workers were relatives of the sugar planters. These data confirm the highly unequal income and land distribution in the industry, which best explains the poverty of the majority, and the affluence of the minority who do not contribute to the actual production process.

Though labor exploitation should never be equated with wages as compared to the standard of living, nor with not being paid the legislated minimum wage, but rather should be seen as the surplus being appropriated from the worker (which is the difference between the actual value produced by his/her labor power and the wages that he/she receives), the table belows leaks out data which could be used for constructing a preliminary picture of labor exploitation.

Average Earnings and Workers Earning Below Daily Minimum Wage by Province and by Season, 1976						
Province	Daily (Pesos)		Monthly (Pesos)		Workers Earning Below Daily Min. Wage (Percent)	
	Off-Milling	Milling	Off-Milling	Milling		
Neg. Occidental	6.67	7.99	128	164	34.5	23.8
Neg. Oriental	6.64	7.90	108	146	51.0	25.0
Iloilo	6.25	7.40	133	168	26.0	10.3

Sources: Tables 30, 33, 44, 47, 35, 39 per column respectively

The second part of the study is entitled "The Sugar Workers of Negros Occidental and the New Labor Code". The study is based on a random interview of 935 respondents, 905 of whom were on-farm workers and 30 were off-farm individuals (government employee, student, etc.). The study identifies the paternalistic and feudal landlord-tenant relationship as the root cause of the friction of interests and impoverishment of the sugar workers. The operation of the *pakiao* system, for instance, where the planter pays the workers a certain amount for a given piece of work, is viewed by many workers as highly exploitative because the task is too heavy compared to the fixed payment that they receive. And it is in this system where other family members – the wife and the children – are dragged into plantation work, thereby setting the cycle of generations being tied to the exploitative structure of surplus appropriation.

With regards to the implementation of the labor code, three interrelated problems were identified: the ignorant workers who invite labor code violations; the greedy planters and landlords who commit the violations; and the inefficient and often corrupt labor implementing agency which permits the violations.

To correct these, the Department of Labor proposes, among others, crop diversification, alleviating workers' conditions through stricter implementation of the minimum wage

law, social amelioration funds, etc. Another measure being eyed is the reformation of the local (Bacolod) leadership of the DOL office.

Now, these ways of viewing labor exploitation and the "solutions" to them only obscure a truly critical perspective of regarding such exploitation in the process of surplus expropriation. To deny the existence of basic class division between the workers and the planters/landlords, or to gloss over it, is to fail to grapple with the present misery in the sugar industry, and even in other spheres of society, at its roots.

Following is an alternative perspective in defining labor exploitation. The thesis here assumed is that the worker is not paid the actual value of his labor output, but only a subsistence wage that keeps him alive for the further appropriation of the surplus of his labor's toil. The surplus is taken away by the planters/landlords and to some extent, by the government in the form of taxes, trading monopoly profits, etc.

The data for sugar prices were taken from the *International Sugar Organization (ISO) Yearbook* of 1977. The 5 and 10 per cent deductions in the price of sugar (denoted by an asterisk) are allowances for trading expenses in the international and domestic trading, respectively.

World Price = ₱ 20.44/lb.
 Domestic Wholesale Price = ₱ 9.30/lb. (Manila only)
 Exchange Rate (₱/\$) = 7.248

Converting world and domestic prices from cents per pound to pesos per picul:

$$\frac{(\text{₱}20.44)(\$ 1)}{\text{lb.}} \frac{(\text{₱}7.248)}{100\text{¢}} \frac{(2.2045\text{lbs.})}{1 \text{ kg.}} \frac{(63.25 \text{ kgs.})}{1 \text{ picul}} = \text{₱}206.58/\text{picul};$$

$$\text{less } 10\%* = \text{₱}185.92/\text{picul.}$$

$$\frac{(\text{₱}9.30)(\text{₱}7.248)}{\text{lb.}} \frac{(139.44 \text{ lbs.})}{1 \text{ picul}} = \text{₱}94.00/\text{picul};$$

$$\text{less } 5\%* = \text{₱}89.30/\text{picul.}$$

In 1975, sugar allocation was 70% for export and 30% for domestic consumption; thus:

$$(\text{₱}185.92/\text{pp.})(.70) + (\text{₱}89.30/\text{pp.})(.30) = \text{₱}156.93/\text{picul}$$

was the composite price of sugar.

Now, from an itemized cost of production on page 174, the following table is constructed (in ₱/pp.):

	1972	1975	% Increase
(1) Labor cost (planting, etc.)	30.25	35.28	16.64
(2) Fertilizer, repairs, etc.	34.66	40.44	"
(3) Total cost	64.91	74.71	"

Now, going over some classic Marxist estimation of indicators of exploitation, let:

$$P = v + c + s$$

Where:
 P = price of the product; in this case, the composite price of

sugar, etc. Another measure of variable capital or labor cost (wages, bonuses, etc.) is "constant capital" or other expenses as in item (2) of the surplus value or the value produced in excess of the paid labor and is appropriated by the landlord/capitalist and the government.

Substituting (all units in P/pp.):

Following is an alternative calculation of the rate of profit. The thesis here assumed is that the worker is not paid the actual value of his labor output, but rather a wage that keeps him alive for the further reproduction of the surplus of his labor. The surplus is taken by the landlord and to some extent by the government.

$$156.93 = 35.28 + 40.44 + s$$

$$s = P(v + c) = 156.93 - (35.28 + 40.44) = 81.21$$

Indicators of Exploitation or Surplus Appropriation:

(a) rate of surplus value or exploitation:

$$s' = \frac{s}{v} = \frac{81.21}{35.28} = 230\%$$

(b) rate of profit:

$$p' = \frac{s}{v + c} = \frac{81.21}{75.72} = 107\%$$

A rate of surplus value of 230 percent means that for every P 1.00 labor cost (wages, etc.), the landlord/capitalist

appropriated P 2.30. Considering other expenditures (fertilizer, etc.), a rate of profit of 107 percent means that for every P 1.00 production cost, the landlord/capitalist profited by P 1.07 for minimal work done in the production process.

I repeat, these computations are just approximations. I believe that these figures are still conservative estimates due to the following reasons:

- (1) Industrial estimates placed industrial labor cost to be around 5-10% only of total production cost; here, labor cost comprised 46.6% of the total production cost which is highly exaggerated;
- (2) The assumed 16.64% increase in wages when total production cost increased by such amount is high. Generally, wage increases trail behind commodity price increases.

This alternative definition of labor exploitation is only in the economic sphere. In the psychological sphere, there is the consequent alienation, or the estrangement of the worker from himself as a result of his estrangement from the tools and means of production (simple machineries, etc.), from land (as it is owned by the landlord), and from the product itself — sugar.

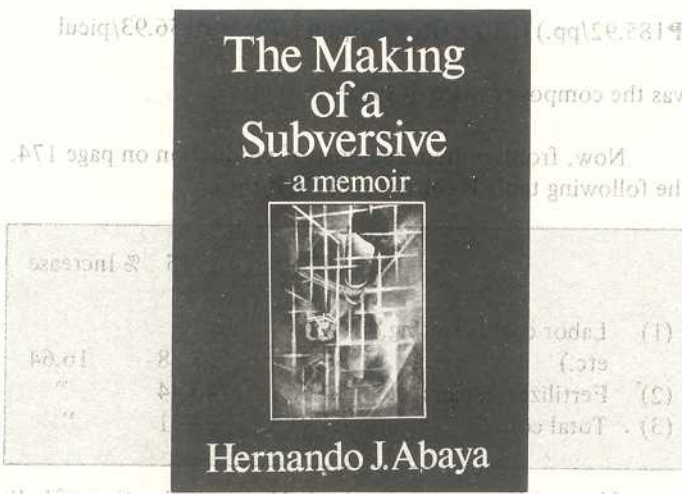
Thus, the book, in flooding the reader with more than a hundred tables of not-so-important, if not completely irrelevant, data; in naively presenting labor exploitation as simply a function of being given or not given the minimum wages, fails in truly grabbing the bull by the horns, in a manner of speaking.

BOOK REVIEW

Looking Back on a Life and History

Danilo F. Sibal

The Making of a Subversive
by Hernando J. Abaya. New Day Publishers. 1984.
235 pp.



Hernando J. Abaya's is a voice with a brave past. As author of *Betrayal in the Philippines*, an account of how the United States government (through Gen. Douglas MacArthur) maneuvered the rehabilitation of erstwhile collaborators with Japan in order to further its neo-colonialist aims, Abaya

reaped harassment and intimidation on a level rare even for the traditionally harried dissident intellectual.

For that book, he suffered everything from losing a prospective United Nations appointment in the late '40s, becoming the object of anti-communist calumny in the early '60s, to spending 114 days at Camp Crame at the onset of martial law.

However legitimately contemporary Filipino social critics may complain about censorship and restrictions, the fact is that they never had it easier compared to Claro M. Recto, Renato Constantino, I. P. Soliongco, and Abaya. For, unlike the new generation of progressive publicists, Recto *et. al.* confronted a hostile Establishment without benefit of a sympathetic public. In the post-Liberation euphoria of those years, to be critical of American policy was to risk being regarded in the popular colonial consciousness as a godless Bolshevik or, at best, a shameless ingrate. To go to war against smugness, complacency, and prejudice of society itself required a special kind of courage.

If we are tempted now to shrug off as trite and commonplace Abaya's inventory of nationalist convictions, we need only remember that when they were first espoused by his generation, these ideas were nothing less than iconoclastic and heretical. When we fulminate against colonial mentality, the military bases, and foreign control of the economy, we do so on the shoulders of Abaya and a few other lonely voices. The present work's importance lies in affording us a look into some of the most intimate aspects of our political history since the Second World War.

In those days, no Marxist subtleties were required to grasp the reality of the State as an imperialist instrument. The Americans quite straightforwardly rammed military bases, free trade, and parity down our throats, making or