

The Third Wave

1965-Present



The year 1965 was to mark the beginning of a new phase, a new character for the Filipino community in America. In 1965, a new immigration law was enacted. Prior to 1965 the law was highly discriminatory toward "non-white" immigrants. It favored white Europeans over other peoples of "colored" races and national origin. The new law of 1965 removed racial and national barriers for the first time, giving peoples outside of the Americas and Europe an equal footing to compete for the 170,000 immigration slots with a maximum of 20,000 immigrants per country. The basic reason for this "liberalized" policy was to attract professional people from under-developed countries to meet the labor needs of the U.S. economy during a boom period.

Many people have given much weight to the 1965 immigration law for "pulling" Filipinos to immigrate to this country. However, there are factors internal to the Philippines which are still the principal reason for the ever increasing Filipino exodus to America.

The Present-Day Continuing Economic Crisis

Like the previous waves before them, this third wave comes to America at a time when conditions in the Philippines are worsening. The U.S. granted independence to the Philippines in 1946. It was an act heralded by many countries in the world as a positive example of an imperialist power forsaking its former colonial entanglements. While the U.S. "granted" the Philippines its formal independence, it maintained the unequal and exploitative economic ties through the series of treaties signed between the two nations.

These treaties spell out the so-called "special relations" between America and the Philippines which give American citizens equal rights as Philippine citizens to land and establishing business industries in the Philippines, giving huge tracts of land to the U.S. military for bases, etc. These provisions have undermined Philippine sovereignty and tied the destiny of the Philippine nation and people to serving the needs of the U.S. multi-national corporations.

For the masses of Filipino peasants, continued U.S. domination has meant continued bondage to the landlords. Under 50 years of direct American colonial rule the tenancy rate, i.e. the percentage of peasants not owning their land but "share-cropping" with landlords rose from 18 percent in 1903 to 37.4 percent by 1948. After independence (1946) this trend continued until it was 50 percent by 1960. These figures indicate the extreme poverty of the great majority of the Filipino peasantry.

Meanwhile, U.S. big businesses have been allowed a commanding role over key sectors of the Philippine economy — petroleum, rubber, drugs, fertilizers, chemicals, mining, heavy equipment, marketing transportation facilities, finance, and others. The U.S. multi-nationals work through the local ruling elite, thus exacerbating the gap between rich and poor. Sen. Benigno Aquino, commenting on the Philippine economy in 1972, said, "75 percent of the people are poor, 23.5 percent middle class, and only 1.5 percent are privileged rich." In 1972 only 10 percent of the people controlled 85 percent of the wealth.

A 1966 government report showed that the average yearly per capita income in the Philippines was P627 (\$250), one of the lowest in the world. A survey taken the same year reported that 72.2 percent of 5.3 million Philippine households have an annual income below P2,000; 17.1 percent earned from P2,000 to P4,999; while only 4.7 percent earned more than P5,000. With this present distribution of the national income, only 4 percent of Filipino families can provide college education for their children.

Against this backdrop of deteriorating Philippine social and economic conditions,

the professional and skilled sectors sought to escape by immigrating to the U.S. With the 1965 lifting of restrictions, the avenue for their immigration was opened up. This begins the third wave of Filipino immigration to the U.S.

Unlike the first wave, who came from rural and peasant backgrounds, the third wave are urban-based and come largely from middle class, professional backgrounds. To immigrate to America now is a very costly venture, which prevents the masses of workers and peasants from taking advantage of this "escape route." Not only are professionals coming, but their families and relatives are also entering in increasing numbers. In fact, the majority of immigrants entering the U.S. today are the immediate family and relatives.

Unlike the first wave Filipinos who settled largely in the rural areas of California, Hawaii and Washington, these third wave Filipinos are settling in the urban areas. The trend is that most still settle in California and Hawaii. Between 1971-76, nearly 50 percent of the total immigrants for that period went to California and Hawaii. Within this number 38 percent went to California.

At the same time, Filipino communities are growing steadily in the urban centers of the Mid-West and East Coast. These immigrants focus around the major cities and surrounding suburbs for jobs and homes. Cities like Chicago, New York City, Newark, Jersey City, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Norfolk have developed sizable Filipino communities since 1965.

"The Life of a Nation is in its People"

What does this increasing exodus of Filipino professionals and their families mean for the Philippines? The life of a nation is in its people and their skills and labor. There is a great need for people of such knowledge and education in the Philippines to play vital roles in the development and transformation of Philippine society. But because of the subservience to U.S. needs instead of its own people, there is clear distortion of national priorities set by the government. The government does not strive to create the opportunities for these professionals to practice their skills in the Philippines for the benefit of the people, but instead acquiesces to the "brain drain." This results in the loss of the most skilled people to the U.S. at a time when their skills are desperately needed in the Philippines.

The major groups of Filipino professionals immigrating to the U.S. are in the medical sector (nurses, physicians, dentists, med/dental technicians, dieticians); accountants; engineers (electrical, mechanical, civil) and teachers (primary, secondary, college).

The medical sector makes up the largest percentage of the total number of Filipinos who have come to the U.S. since 1965. This grouping has accounted for 36 percent of total immigrants coming between 1965-76. Nurses and doctors are the majority of the medical sector.

Medical professionals of any country are key in maintaining the mental and physical well-being of that nation. There is certainly a dire need for them especially in the Philippine countryside. Diseases like T.B., Cholera, Malaria, Polio and others still cripple and kill many Filipinos. Why is it that these professionals are leaving for the U.S. to practice? The answer is not a simple one, but at the heart of the issue is the distortion of priorities of the national government. In this period, Marcos has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on projects to attract tourists and to get multi-national corporations to invest in the Philippines. Projects like the high-rise hotels and international convention centers are given precedence over basic things like clinics or hospitals in the countryside. As a result many Filipino

professionals are denied the opportunity to practice their skill in the Philippines. As a result they seek immigration to the U.S.

These third wave professionals are drawn like the first wave pioneers to fill the labor needs of the U.S. economy. The U.S. welcomed this influx of foreign labor because it provided highly-skilled and trained workers for U.S. industry. These Filipino professionals are used to fill jobs in the lower strata of white collar workers. Many are employed at beginning-level jobs which are vital in the business process. For example, accountants — there is a high demand for people with accounting skills. Not necessarily as Certified Public Accountants, but as workers who can perform basic and advanced accounting for financial institutions like banks, insurance companies, government administrations, etc. These firms will hire Filipino CPA's or accounting graduates and utilize their skills without having to pay them as CPA's. They can do this because of discriminatory licensure procedures in the U.S. which do not recognize experience or education from the Philippines.

During the sixties and early seventies, the U.S. economy experienced a boom. With the expansion of the big multi-national corporations, there was a growing need to facilitate internal and external communications and transactions. All of this meant writing, recording, typing, filing, duplicating, etc.

In San Francisco, thousands of Filipinos go to work daily in the "Financial District" in big businesses like Bank of America, etc. Here all the paper-work that goes into accounting for the investments of these huge multi-nationals in the entire Pacific Rim area gets done by the cheap labor of Filipino professionals and others.

There has always been a shortage of skilled medical professionals in the U.S. This is because of lack of planning and the profit motivation in the U.S. health care system. As of the sixties and early seventies, the manpower shortage was reaching a critical point. To rescue the situation, foreign-trained nurses, doctors, dentists and med/techs were encouraged to immigrate to the U.S. In particular, Filipinos were sought because of their Western-style education. Today, there are concentrations of Filipino medical professionals in New York and New Jersey on the East Coast, and Illinois and Michigan on the West Coast.

Before 1970, when the nursing shortage was filled, foreign nurses were granted reciprocity in the U.S. with the RN status gained in their home country. This meant they did not have to take any special exams to participate in the U.S. However, once the labor shortage became less critical, reciprocity was eliminated. Foreign nurses now have to take difficult exams in the U.S. in order to obtain licensure as an RN, regardless of their experience and education level from their home country.

Once reciprocity was eliminated, the Filipino nurses were faced with the difficult task of taking the U.S. nursing examination. For the Filipino nurses who have to take the test, an insidious pattern has developed in which a large majority (about 80 percent) of them fail each year. How do we explain this? In fact, the nurses themselves are quite competent in handling their jobs. However, the real reason for the high failure rate is the highly discriminatory and biased nature of the examinations themselves. The tests take unfair advantage of people for whom English is not the "first language" by using American idioms and double negatives etc.

Once the foreign-trained nurses fail these tests, they are forced to take lower-paying positions with responsibilities almost exactly similar to those of licensed RN's. In this way, the U.S. medical industry gains extra-profits from the exploitation of Filipino nurses.

H-1 nurses face an even more unstable situation. These are "contract workers" who are recruited to the U.S. for a specific period designated by the contract. Unlike their permanent resident counterparts, they are easily subject to deportation