




BACOLOD, THE PHILIPPINES — The crowded malnutrition ward at Monteliban Hospital is where the lucky victims of government corruption, private greed and general apathy come to live or die.

"One of the great tragedies here is that people have become so accustomed to hunger that they don't understand when a child is really sick," says Dr. Lourdes

 Espina, head of the hospital's pediatrics wing.


 At Monteliban Hospital, 641 children died in the first six months of this year.

 Only 93 of those deaths were attributed directly to "malnutrition."

 Medical records supervisor Melecio C. Plaza says most of the other deaths were
 caused by complications from simple childhood diseases in malnourished patients.

Health officials and relief workers emphasize that the Monteliban death toll only hints at the extent of the problem in Negros. Nearly a dozen other hospitals and private clinics are treating starving children across the island. And there probably are thousands of children whose deaths never are reported.

The children of Negros are starving because the government refused to do anything about a problem that became obvious more than a decade ago.


 Negros is the Philippines' sugar cane capital. Nearly 60 percent of the country's cane comes from this fish-shaped island and more cultivated land is turned over to producing sugar cane than all other crops combined.



That reliance on one crop served Negros well for decades, particularly in the 1960s and early '70s when the U.S. was importing almost every bag of excess sugar the Philippines could produce.

But in the mid-1970s, the countries of Western Europe suddenly became self-sufficient in sugar, thanks to high government subsidies to their sugar beet

former colonial ruler, the U.S. The pact assured the Philippines an annual quota of sugar exports to the U.S., and Filipino producers were reimbursed at prices well above the world market.


Bryant George, of the U.S. Agency for International Development, says the system encouraged Negros sugar growers to plant cane "all the way to their back windowsills."

 When Laurel-Langley expired in 1974, the bottom fell out of the Philippine sugar market. U.S. imports dropped from a high of 1.2 million tons per year to 330,000 tons in 1975.

   The quota system was reinstituted in 1982, but the new quotas were based on countries' average sugar exports to the U.S. between 1975 and 1981, down years for the Philippines.

For 1984-85, the Philippine sugar quota was only 312,000 tons out of a predicted harvest of 1.6 million tons. The sugar surplus is so great and the money shortage so severe that ripe cane stands unharvested in the hot sun when cutters should be working from dawn to dusk and mills should be grinding around the clock.

The Philippine government says it wants to ease the problem next year by limiting production to 1.3 million tons. But the crisis is almost certain to continue because the U.S. quota will be lowered to 215,000 tons.

 "There is a strong anti-U.S. sentiment here," says Dr. Violeta Lopez-Gonzaga, author of a just-published study entitled "Crisis and Poverty in Sugarlandia."

"It's really an anti-Marcos sentiment, but the grass roots associate

people," says Father Gordoncillo. "I have the feeling that ever since we began planting sugar for export, we were on the road to doom."

The priest supports a theory espoused by Ramon Nolan, former Philippine Sugar Institute chairman, who says American officials encouraged the Philippines to revamp its sugar industry in 1959, when Cuba stopped exporting 3.2 million tons of sugar per year to the U.S.



In a much-publicized speech on Oct. 27, Nolan, a former ambassador, said that the U.S. should restore the old Laurel-Langley sugar quota of 980,000 tons per year from the Philippines. "America is obligated to restore that quota," he said. "There is no justifiable reason why the country should be deprived of it."

Not everyone agrees.

Salvador Laguda, president of the Philippine National Development Bank in Bacolod, points out that the U.S. government is paying 18 to 21 cents per pound for Philippine sugar when demand for artificial sweeteners and a flood of European sugar beets has pushed the world price of sugar down to about 3 cents per pound.

"They are the only ones buying our sugar at prices that help us stay alive," he said.

Laguda calls the Philippine sugar crisis a "totally homemade mess"

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Marcos` s son and grandson, was made lord of the coconut empire.

Benedicto ruled Nasutra and its parent regulatory body, the Philippine Sugar Commission (Philsucom), from 1977 until both groups were revamped recently under International Monetary Fund pressure.

A confidential government audit in February is said to have concluded that Nasutra underreported profits by \$430 million from 1978-83, the six years



Benedicto controlled it.



Last year, when the sugar crisis began to take hold, the Marcos government urged Negros farmers to switch to corn. The government, however, continued to import large amounts of high-protein corn and did not deliver promised heat driers to help farmers prepare their crops for market.

The result was low corn prices.

Cojuangco, considered a possible running mate if Marcos goes ahead with special elections early next year, stepped in to buy the harvest at profitably low prices. He owns San Miguel Corp., which produces beer and runs a chicken operation that buys more hybrid corn than any other firm in the Philippines.

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international Development programs. But unlike the church, the U.S. government gets little credit for its help.

To cut government bureaucracy and speed relief to the people of Negros, AID has funneled most of its \$2 million in emergency contributions in the last nine months through private organizations such as CARE and Philippine Businessmen for Social Progress.



"Many people are skeptical of USAID down here," says Dr. Lopez-Gonzaga, who said she avoided American help and went to the Canadian government for money to conduct her study on Negros. "The USAID people make good promises, but they are very slow in coming."

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