

THE REGIME IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE REGIME!

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In the end, despite his reputation as a skillful politician, Ferdinand Marcos went the way of most modern-day dictators—fleeing his enraged people under the cover of darkness. The swift end of the Marcos regime was unexpected: before the defection of the reformist group within the Armed Forces of the Philippines to its side, the opposition was convinced that the struggle to oust Marcos will be protracted. The initial call for boycott of the “crony” firms was generally seen as the first step in active non-violent resistance that would graduate to civil disobedience. The opposition plan was for escalating pressures to be put on the Marcos regime that would lead to the latter’s demise. While the anti-Marcos forces were confident of victory, the immediate seizure of state power was certainly not in their plans. The military mutiny accelerated the opposition’s timetable in a way they only previously dreamt of. The sudden and dramatic end of the dictator and the opposition’s unpreparedness for it gave credence to the popular explanation that the whole event was a “miracle”.

The Regime Besieged

Most analyses of the fall of the regime consider the Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino assassination as the beginning of Marcos’s end. It is said that the bullet that killed Ninoy Aquino also felled the Marcos regime. This analysis, while not altogether wrong, overlooks the other causes of the regime’s downfall.

There is no doubt that the assassination of Ninoy Aquino radicalized a large segment of the Philippine social formation, the most significant development in Philippine politics in recent years. The sentiment of outrage against the assassination is largely responsible for bringing his widow, Corazon (popularly known as Cory), to the Presidency. It is also the case that the assassination was the catalyst that brought the brewing conflict within the alliance which thrust Marcos into power in 1972 out in the open. It is in the context of mass unrest

and open power bloc conflict that the downfall of the martial law regime must be seen. The proper context of the murder of Benigno Aquino is that it precipitated this particular conjunction of events.

In order to understand the fissures within the power bloc that the Aquino assassination revealed, the composition of this bloc and its basis of unity must be understood.

The Ferdinand Marcos coup of 1972 must be seen as an attempt to integrate the Philippine economy into the world economy along new lines. Marcos presented himself as the one who can provide the political structure that would realize the new hegemonic project of the IMF/WB and the internal and finance fractions of the Philippine bourgeoisie—export-oriented industrialization. This project ran counter to the erstwhile dominant hegemonic project of the landed bourgeoisie—agricultural export economy—and the national bourgeoisie’s counter project of import substitution industrialization. The adoption of the new hegemonic project and the consequent re-integration to the world economy was accomplished through the re-organization of the Philippine power bloc via the installation of the internal and finance fractions of the bourgeoisie as the new hegemonic fractions. By eliminating Congress, the seat of the landed and national bourgeoisie’s political power, and concentrating political power in the executive branch of the government the opposition to the export-oriented industrialization was effectively neutralized. Deprived of the traditional means to exercise power, the national and landed bourgeoisie could only watch while an assault on their livelihood was made.

But the imposition of martial law was as much an instrument of this (power bloc) reorganization and (world economy) reintegration as it was a vehicle to perpetuate one man in power. With a constitutional prohibition against his staying as president and popular dissatisfaction with his rule, Marcos needed extraordinary means to hold on to power. His refusal to accept defeat in the February 7, 1986 polls should have

erased any doubt on the people's mind about Marcos's intent to hold on to power despite legal impediments and popular sentiment. This coincidence of interest between Ferdinand Marcos and the proponents of a new hegemonic project was the crucial element that made martial law possible.

But the radical restructuring of the state apparatus required support, or at least neutralization, of the other classes. Unless the new government was willing to rule by force alone, allies must be sought and won. Among the other classes in the Philippine social formation the petty-bourgeoisie turned out to be the easiest to court. By promising to turn the tide against rising criminality and containing the rise of political warlordism, the petty bourgeoisie was easily won. This class felt that their collaboration was vindicated when the new regime was able to immediately deliver on its promise to restore peace and order. The regime posturing on land reform bought the goodwill of the peasants. When they gave the new government the benefit of the doubt on the issue of land reform, Marcos was able to stabilize and consolidate his forces.

The imposition of martial law not only broke the stalemate between the different fractions of the power bloc and satisfied one man's desire for power, but also crushed for the meantime the emergent nationalist and communist movements in the Philippines. Militant student, worker, and peasant organizations were declared illegal and their leaders hunted down and thrown in jail. The growing trend towards popular participation in national affairs was forcibly reversed.

Precisely because Marcos was not merely a lackey of the new hegemonic fraction of the power bloc, the competing demands of the members of the alliance that gave birth to Philippine martial law eventually came into conflict. The emergence of "crony firms" and the undue preference given them over other enterprises drew the ire of his allies in the bourgeoisie. The massive government bailout of bankrupt crony firms in the context of a failing economy and the regime's intransigence on the issue of agricultural monopolies controlled by those close to it demonstrated where Marcos's loyalties and priorities lay. The other fractions of the bourgeoisie, those who were not allied with Marcos, suffered immensely from the regime's economic policies: the import liberalization program and agricultural monopolies were obliterating the national and the landed bourgeoisie. When Ninoy Aquino was assassinated, the different bourgeois factions had little to be happy about with the Marcos regime.

The regime had also lost the petty-bourgeoisie. Outraged by the brutality of the assassination, hardpressed to maintain their standard of living, threatened by the rising crime rate, the erstwhile ally of the regime finally went to the streets en masse.

Towards the regime's end it seemed that it was only the military that remained loyal to it. But as the Filipinos soon learned, the military was already in a slow boil. The schism between the soldiers and the "body guards" was becoming more and more evident. The soldiers were convinced that the evil that they thought they had eliminated with martial law, undue "political" interference on purely "military" affairs, once again reared its ugly head. The soldiers felt that change was necessary and organized a reform movement within the military to effect this. It was the fear of persecution that finally prompted the reformists to mutiny in February 1986.

Despite the growing general dissatisfaction with the regime as a result of the Aquino assassination, the opposition

was unable to bring the Marcos regime down. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was committed to "people's war", to the Maoist principle of surrounding the city from the countryside, and was not interested in seizing state power. On the other hand, the bourgeois opposition was in disarray—its leaders were unable to forego personal ambition for the general good. Given these conditions it was not difficult for the Marcos regime to survive despite itself, that is, until Cory Aquino.

Towards Dual Power

When Ferdinand Marcos called for a "snap" presidential election while on US television, he never dreamed that he was signing the death warrant for his regime. He calculated that the opposition would remain fragmented, or in the small chance that they joined forces, their election campaign would be lackluster at best. There were good reasons for him to feel this way because the bourgeois opposition never rose to the occasion in the past. What he did not foresee was the Cory Aquino phenomenon.

Cory Aquino electrified the populace. It is said that even the famous campaign of Ramon Magsaysay paled in contrast to hers. In a country obsessed with stars, she became the newest superstar. Her simplicity, forthrightness and inner strength turned out to be her biggest assets. Cory is adored because she is the anti-thesis of the infamous family. People's experience with the Marcos regime had caused the redefinition of what the people believed their leaders should be; everything that resembled the Marcos family became suspect and was rejected. None of the old-style politicians could have generated the same response as Cory Aquino because they resembled the members of the old regime in style, if not in substance.

The tremendous popular support that rallied around the Cory Aquino campaign left Marcos no option but to cheat massively. But the people were prepared; they understood that supporting Cory Aquino meant more than just voting for her. The campaign made it clear that for Cory Aquino to win, the people's votes must be counted. Thus on election day, and the days after, the people kept vigil over the ballot boxes and the counting of the election returns. But Marcos never intended to lose; all the stops were pulled and victory was declared despite popular knowledge that he stole the elections.

The military mutiny provided the spark which turned into a conflagration. While the mutiny was the most dramatic of the anti-regime protests since the February 7 polls, it was by no means the whole of it. There were various activities being undertaken to repudiate the Marcos-claimed victory at the polls. Groups were preparing protest activities in response to the Cory Aquino call for non-violent actions against the regime. The mutiny was supported by the people because it was seen as the military's response to the emerging situation of dual power—where a proto-government, represented by Cory Aquino, competed actively with the Marcos regime for people's loyalty and active support. The *Tagumpay ng Bayan* rally at the Luneta on February 16, where the people declared Cory Aquino the real election winner and where she launched the active non-violent resistance movement against the Marcos regime marked the beginning of this dual-power situation.

It cannot be over-emphasized that the military mutiny was successful because of people's support. Had the people

not supported the mutiny it would have been just a failed attempt at reform within the military. Precisely because people's support came at the most crucial time, the character of the mutiny was transformed. The military mutiny with popular support created a situation of dual power and immediately resolved it in their favor.

Amando Doronila correctly points out that the military mutinied to help preserve the movement that was led by the middle class.¹ The characteristic features of the post-Aquino assassination protest—yellow ribbons, streamers, flags and confetti; motorcades; yellow shirts and bumper stickers declaring loyalty to Cory and Ninoy—as well as the composition of the vanguard groups of the movement was decidedly petty-bourgeois. This is not to say that members of the petty-bourgeoisie alone marched on the streets and staffed the barricades, for members of the working classes and the bourgeoisie were on the streets as well. Or that protest forms used were strictly petty-bourgeois; the barricade is closely identified with working class movements. The argument put forward is this: while the movement drew sustenance from all classes, these classes participated under the hegemony of the middle class or the petty-bourgeoisie.

That the petty-bourgeoisie turned over their victory to a section of the bourgeoisie that was opposed to Marcos is not at all surprising. The need to validate their gains by soliciting other classes' approval is a characteristic of the petty-bourgeoisie. As Quijano de Manila argues:

The Philippine middle class has . . . been under some sort of a curse — the curse of becoming more and more impotent as it becomes more and more sophisticated. It has all the resources, but it cannot lead.²

History validates this claim. Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Aguinaldo actively courted the ilustrados to the side of the revolution. Only when it became apparent that the ilustrados were not interested did they take matters in their hands. In turning this "revolution" over to the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie was only being true to itself.

From Red to Yellow

The fall of the Marcos regime also saw the marginalization of the majority of Left organizations from the political process. This is a sad development for the Left was in the forefront of the anti-Marcos struggle in the dark years of the martial law regime. In choosing to boycott the snap presidential election, and coming out with an "I-told-you-so" statement after it became evident that Marcos cheated in the polls, the majority of Left organizations drew the ire of the masses. In so doing they lost the political initiative and any hope of influencing the events that followed. This was an unfortunate development because the Left could have imbued the anti-Marcos forces with a more coherent ideology. By virtue of their absence, the ideological field was left wide open for the catechists. The electoral and the succeeding battles were promoted in Christian terms, as a battle between the "forces of light and the forces of darkness". That this penetrated deeply the consciousness of the people is evident in songs they were singing in the rallies, vigils and barricades.

Together with the nationalist *Bayan Ko* and *Pambansang Awit*, the Christian, or even Catholic, *Onward Christian Soldiers* and *Ama Namin* were sung in the Aquino rallies and in the barricades. Ms. Aquino herself lead the singing of the Lord's Prayer. The mass and praying the rosary replaced speeches and discussion groups among the yellow "revolutionaries". The people no longer chanted *Marcos, Hitler, Diktador, Tuta* but *Cory, Cory, Cory*.



Pete Reyes/The Manila Times

The battle between the "forces of light and the forces of darkness".



The low level of political consciousness among the participants of the movement that toppled the Marcos regime is responsible for the popular acceptance of the "Miracle at EDSA" explanation for the glorious days of February. The opportunity to raise the political understanding of the crowds that joined the barricades was lost because no group articulated coherent and dynamic interpretation of the events other than the Church. Instead of learning and denouncing imperialism, the crowds rediscovered *Mambo Magsaysay*, the campaign song of the late CIA-groomed and sponsored president. Instead of appreciating the crucial roles they were playing in the making of history, they abdicated and passed on this role to a Higher Being.

However, given that a big section of the Philippine Left is notorious for analysis prone to conspiracy theory and a commitment to "ideological purity", they could have merely alienated the masses instead of raising their consciousness. But, at the very least, their presence in the movement could have prompted a debate within the movement about its goals and methods. Since they were out of the movement, their criticisms were taken as sour grapes (some really were) and not as sympathetic criticisms that can further the cause of the movement.

What Have We Done?

The ouster of Marcos was greeted with jubilation. The newspaper headlines screamed what many thought they'd never see: MARCOS FLEES. But when the celebration died down and the reality of his departure hit many, post partum depression was the order of the day. Many asked—what is it really that we have accomplished with the ouster of Marcos and the installation of Aquino?

There is real cause for concern. After all, the Aquino campaign was largely an anti-Marcos one. Furthermore, there were incidents in the transition between the Aquino campaign and the Aquino government that raised the anxiety of her supporters. During the Aquino inauguration, only representatives of the political elites were invited; the representatives of cause-

oriented groups were not. More eyebrows were raised when a number of people who used to work for the Marcos regime made it to her cabinet. People wondered if what they had done was to restore the discredited politics of the pre-martial law days.

Indeed the success of the people must be put in its proper context in order to understand what was accomplished and what remains to be done. What the people overthrew is a regime, a state-form, not the state itself. The Philippine peripheral capitalist state remains intact, its repressive arm—the military—is preserved. It is still, as the National Democratic Front's statement charged, a bourgeois state. In this type of state the workers and the farmers do not play significant parts. They may be recipients of welfare legislation that may ameliorate their conditions but the cause of their poverty will remain untouched. For all the improvements in our lives that the new government might bring, this state remains, in the words of Lenin, a dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

Is this to make little of what the people have accomplished? Did they stop the tanks for nothing? Fortunately, the answer is no. Formal democracy is infinitely more desirable than dictatorship, as any of the recently released political prisoners of Marcos would avow. Improvement of the conditions of the workers and the farmers is better than continued poverty. The parasitical regime and its repressive apparatus is being dismantled, military power has been demystified and people discovered their power. The Filipinos have created the condition where a more meaningful politics is possible.

But the gains of the past months cannot be sustained if people remain unorganized. The people cannot rely on traditional politicians, who are mostly interested in restoring elite-politics, and their vote-getting machineries. Most of them are completely incapable of working for substantive, and not merely formal, democracy. The movement that overthrew the Marcos regime must be sustained and organized. It cannot remain a spontaneous mass movement, it must have a cohesive ideology that goes beyond the personal commitment to Cory Aquino. Otherwise it will not be able to defend its victory.

The overthrow of the Marcos regime is already accomplished; the Filipino revolution has just begun.

NOTES:

¹Amando Doronila. "Middle Class Revolution", *Manila Times*, 24 Feb 1986, p. 1.

²Quijano de Manila (Nick Joaquin), *Reportage on Politics*, (Metro Manila: National Bookstore, 1981) p. 77.