

REVOLUTION WITHOUT TEARS:

Notes on People Power and the February 1986 Uprising in the Philippines

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When it finally came, Ferdinand Marcos's fall from power was swift, sudden and dramatic. For more than 20 long years he had ruled the country, and it was natural that Filipinos should expect that the elimination of such an entrenched dictatorship would require a protracted and ultimately bloody struggle. But the actual uprising that brought the Marcos regime down took only four days, from February 22 to 25, while the sporadic armed clashes which were more the exception than the rule claimed a total of exactly four lives, three of whom were soldiers all belonging to the Marcos troops, and one civilian. Yet, it should not be forgotten that the struggle against the dictatorship had been going on for many years - certainly long before the middle class, which was at the center of the February events, had even dared to join the growing mass actions in the streets. Moreover, it should ever be borne in mind that the Marcos regime claimed countless victims from all social classes throughout the dark period of its rule.

An Unexpectedly Easy Revolution

Nevertheless, the transfer of power had taken place so suddenly that it caught everyone unprepared. Mr. Marcos and his entourage of 88 military aides and civilian staff, who were airlifted by four US embassy-supplied helicopters and eventually flown out of the country from Clark Air Base, apparently fled in great haste. Journalists, who joined the throng of Filipinos who came to reclaim Malacañang Palace on the night of February 25, have reported seeing half-eaten meals strewn about in Mr. Marcos's bedroom. The dictator's most treasured war medals, the subject of so much controversy in the last election, together with a draft of Mr. Marcos's memoirs, were found abandoned in one corner of the spacious presidential quarters which had served as a bunker in the last four days. Two days after the events, Mrs. Marcos was reported as having

phoned a close friend in Manila to retrieve the medals and the memoirs.

The extraordinary pace of events was especially shocking to Cory Aquino herself. On February 22, the day the rebellious wing of the military decided to part ways with the Marcos regime, Cory was in Cebu City, south of Manila, exhorting people to join her in the non-violent civil disobedience campaign that she had launched less than a week before. There was an ongoing debate within her party centering on the issue of whether to file an election protest with the Presidential Electoral Tribunal controlled by Marcos, thus implicitly recognizing the validity of the legislature's hasty proclamation of Marcos as the winner, or to repudiate the entire Marcos-instigated constitutional process and proceed to destabilize the regime through a strategy of non-violent resistance and withdrawal of cooperation.

The idea of establishing a parallel provisional government in order to set the stage for a contest of loyalties was also floated a few days earlier, but it did not command enthusiastic support because nearly everyone thought such a move would at best be symbolic in the face of the awesome presence of the Marcos government. A number of advisers even thought this to be too drastic, and were quite content with the seven-step campaign of Cory, which entailed mainly the boycott of banks, companies and the controlled print and broadcast media. The more radical groups gave support to this campaign but also announced that they would initiate more drastic moves like a "welgang bayan" or people's strike aimed at paralyzing transportation and other basic services. Interestingly, not even the boldest of these initiatives was seen as capable of forcing the dictator out of the presidency. Filipinos had so universally conceded the tenacity of the Marcos grip on power that absolutely no one suspected the system had actually become so brittle.



Enrile and Ramos: the born-again democrats as heroes.

On the other hand, the CPP-NPA, which had grown by leaps and bounds under the Marcos dictatorship, seemed at that time as if it was preparing for a shift to a higher sub-stage of the struggle in an effort to harness the popular outrage that resulted from the fraudulent conduct of the election. It was widely thought that a re-declaration of martial law was just around the corner, and that this would inevitably compel many moderate elements to go underground. This scenario was seen as almost inexorable, barring a US-sponsored coup d'état that would eliminate Marcos and undercut the Left at the same time. Yet even a military coup was expected to generate great resentment among the civilian population because of the general unpopularity of the army. Moreover, the provisional military government that would result from a coup was expected to become oppressive because precisely its principal aim would be to crush the revolutionary movement. Therefore, it was expected that in the event of a coup, there would be a crackdown against left-wing dissenters. The organized Left was thus convinced that Marcos would have to adopt more repressive measures to prolong his stay. The resulting situation would favor recruitment into the underground movement. As fate would have it, Marcos was to be unseated not by an election but by an act of rebellion.

Anatomy of an Incongruous Rebellion: Preliminary Notes

It was to be a very strange rebellion. On the early evening of Saturday, February 22, 1986, Radio Veritas, the Catholic radio station, announced that Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Vice Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos had called for a press conference at which an important announcement was to be made. People who had read the newspapers that day suspected that Enrile would at last confirm the rumor that he was quitting the government. They also hoped that General Ramos would follow Enrile's example and likewise announce his resignation from government. From the point of view of the forces in the anti-dictatorship movement, such moves were welcome since they would make it extremely difficult for Marcos to declare martial law. The consensus was that the only thing that could effectively derail the civil disobedience cam-

paign of Cory Aquino was a declaration of martial law and the arrest of Opposition leaders and organizers.

There was a firm belief however that Marcos was in no position to re-declare martial law because of the split within the military. No one knew exactly how serious the split was, but everyone agreed it was serious enough to dissuade Marcos from launching a crackdown on the Opposition. There had also been talk about a Reformist *coup d'état* that could be supported by the US. But this was quickly dismissed as improbable because of the following factors: (a) the overt support that Marcos continued to get from the US, (b) the clear dangers of political instability that this could trigger off, (c) the superior strength enjoyed by the Marcos-Ver loyalists in the military, and (d) the lack of popular support for any faction within the military. It was thought that if anybody within the army had the boldness to stage a coup, it would be easily crushed because it would be isolated from any sizeable civilian support. As it turned out, however, all previous scenarios of the Philippine political situation failed to take into account the presence of a huge Metro-Manila based and largely middle class groundswell that was mobilizable at short notice against the dictatorship. This groundswell of middle class *vigilantism* first became noticeable on election day (Feb. 7) and the two weeks following that, e.g., in the citizens' vigils in front of municipal and city halls, in the Batasan (parliament), and in the mammoth crowds that followed Cory Aquino wherever she went. This later came to be known as people power - an amorphous, unorganized, predominantly middle class, Metro Manila-based unarmed force. No one could have predicted the birth of this political force. Even so, some sections of the Philippine Left are now nurturing the theory that the stage was carefully laid out by the US, beginning with the announcement of the presidential election, that a script was quietly prepared, and that everyone just innocently played his role. Given the manner in which the February rebellion has effectively intercepted the project of the Left, it is certain that this theory will persist for a long time.

In the light of the foregoing, it therefore came as a shock to see that when Enrile and Ramos finally came on the air, they did not sound as if they were just quitting the govern-

ment. Indeed they said that they were resigning from the government, but they also said that they were calling on all their colleagues in the army to do the same, that is, to withdraw their allegiance to the Marcos government. They told local and foreign journalists who had gathered at the Ministry of National Defense in Camp Aguinaldo that they had learned that day that they were going to be arrested by the forces of General Ver and that martial law was going to be declared by Marcos on Monday morning, February 24. They swore to remain where they were and to defend themselves until they were all killed. They made it clear that their lives as well as the lives of hundreds of others who were identified with the Reformist movement in the army were in danger. But they had resolved not to surrender.

From all indications therefore, it was, up to that point, a defensive rather than an offensive stance, a passive mutiny rather than a *coup d'etat*. They knew and they publicly acknowledged that Marcos and General Ver controlled the greater part of the army, but they were also confident that their cause was popular and would draw the support of other soldiers and ordinary Filipinos.

On both counts, they were not mistaken, but they were unprepared for the multitude of civilians who rallied to their call that same evening, bringing food and other provisions for a long siege. The supportive response of the people was made easy by the fact that Jaime Cardinal Sin, the Archbishop of Manila, decided to come out openly on the radio to endorse the cause of the rebellious soldiers and to urge all citizens to help Enrile, Ramos and the soldiers who had joined them. These seditious calls were followed by many others, and they were all aired live and throughout the entire country on Radio Veritas. By midnight of that first day, February 22, the number of people who stayed to hold vigil outside the two military camps held by the Reformists had reached 5,000.

Meanwhile, Marcos appeared stunned by the turn of events. He tried to telephone Enrile that same evening but the latter refused to talk to him. He sent a military emissary, the

notorious Col. Rolando Abadilla, to see him and to bring him to the palace, but Enrile would not budge, stating that he would be ready to talk the following day. He and Ramos instead spent the evening calling on their friends and classmates and relatives, or appealing on radio to other soldiers and officers to join them in their crusade to bring the country back to democracy. Enrile said that he was morally convinced that Mr. Marcos lost the last election, and that the rightful winner was Cory Aquino. On account of this, he urged Mr. Marcos to step down from office.

Marcos quickly responded to all this by appearing on government television to render his own version of what was happening. His story was that his security men had discovered a plot to kill him and his wife as part of a coup d'etat led by members of the RAM (Reform Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement) or Reformists. To buttress his story, he asked three colonels who had supposedly been arrested that day to confess their participation in the plot. That plot was supposed to have been carried out midnight of Saturday, February 22, but that it was aborted by General Ver, his son Irwin Ver (head of the Presidential Security Command), and Marcos's own son, Bongbong. Hardly anybody believed Marcos, of course, because of his low credibility; though, who knows, he may have been telling the truth.

At any rate, that evening General Ver and Minister Enrile agreed with one another that neither side would make any offensive move until negotiations could be resumed the following day, Sunday. It was obvious that the rebels needed time; the longer it took the more the crowds outside swelled. By the time Marcos loyalist troops were dispatched on both ends of the highway which separated the two rebel camps from one another, there were already 50,000 civilians insulating the two camps. Barricades had been put up, and human walls met the approaching soldiers sent by General Ver. It was too late to stop the swelling of the crowd. At the same time, retired generals had come to express their solidarity with the rebels. Gen. Ramos went on the air periodically to announce the defection of various commands from all over the country. There was no way of checking the veracity of the announced defections, of course, and it may well be that the announcements were part of a sophisticated psychological offensive. By Sunday evening, the throng of Cory supporters had grown to nearly a million. In other parts of the city, residents joined the fight by building barricades and obstacles to slow down the movement of tanks from the other camps still controlled by Marcos loyalists. Cars, jeeps, passenger buses and trucks were left in the middle of highways to block the entry of Marcos troops.

At daybreak of Monday, February 24, Marcos ordered the dispersal of civilians outside the camps and the bombing of the two camps from the air. Marines were brought in from Mindanao to surround the two camps with tanks, and two jetfighters and four helicopter gunships were dispatched on a bombing mission. The Marines were stopped by human barricades consisting of nuns and priests, seminarians and students who flung themselves in front of the tanks. And the 15th fighter wing sent to bomb the two camps circled the disputed area and decided to join the rebels. The sight of defenseless and innocent civilians was too much for anyone of them, as their Commander, Colonel Sotelo later admitted. Moreover, they could not bear the thought of slaughtering so many of their fellow officers, many of whom were their classmates at the Philippine Military Academy. The defection of the pilots was the turning

Courtesy of the UP Dept. of European Languages.



Sin: "The new Filipino soul is emerging. . ."

A CIA-scripted Show?

point. After that, it was the turn of the rebels to launch their own offensive—the capture of the government television station and the dropping of a few grenades on the palace ground.

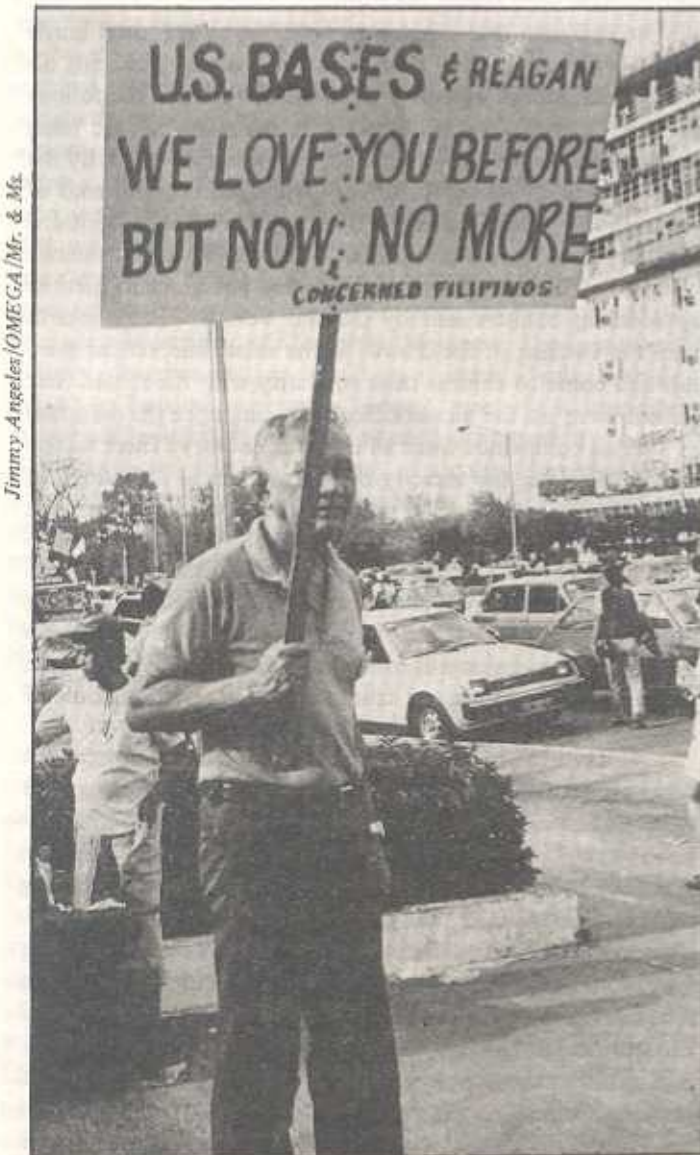
On the fourth day of the rebellion, it was clear that Marcos had permanently lost the initiative. The evening before, he hastily announced the imposition of a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. curfew. Yet the streets teemed with people on their way to the vigil site. That morning of Tuesday, Cory Aquino took her oath as President of the Republic in a clubhouse near the two rebel camps. On the other hand, Marcos decided to stage his own inauguration at 12 noon of the same day. A few close friends and relatives had been summoned to witness the oath-taking, and 3,000 ordinary citizens had been brought in to form the audience for this incongruous ritual. At the precise moment that Marcos raised his hand to take his oath of office, he was cut off from television. Only a few probably missed him since three million Filipinos were on EDSA highway that day, expressing their solidarity with all their fellowmen who had chosen to cut the chains that had restrained them since 1972. The climax came at 9:05 in the evening of Tuesday, February 25, when four helicopters from the US embassy came to airlift Marcos and his entourage first to Clark Air Base and then to Guam and Hawaii the following morning.

The first reactions from progressive elements had been to dismiss the whole affair as nothing more than a power play within the army. When the Reformists within the army decided to pledge their loyalty to Cory's government, this was viewed as a window-dressing for a military provisional government with a civilian figurehead. Yet Cory openly defied the military establishment on her first few days in office by demanding the immediate release of all political detainees.

Today, the fashionable analysis is that the entire thing was most likely scripted by the CIA from beginning to end. This perspective would make Cory Aquino a willing tool of the CIA. Underpinning this view, in a sense, is a persistent skepticism concerning the capacity of ordinary people, from all classes, to get rid of their oppressors without any assistance from foreigners. Ironically, this is also more or less the thesis that the US government has been trying to peddle—that the US pulled the rug from under Mr. Marcos at that crucial moment when there was a stalemate, that the US had warned Mr. Marcos against using violence against his own people, and that the US military provided fuel and tactical advice to the Reformists under Enrile and General Ramos, etc. The Reform movement itself has come out to challenge these spurious self-serving claims of American officials. In various newspaper interviews, both the military and civilian associates of Minister Enrile have narrated how appeals for assistance from the US embassy had been met by non-committal responses from embassy people. When they did actually move, they said, it was to provide the helicopters and the airplanes to airlift Mr. Marcos and his entourage and their cargo of stolen wealth out of the country.

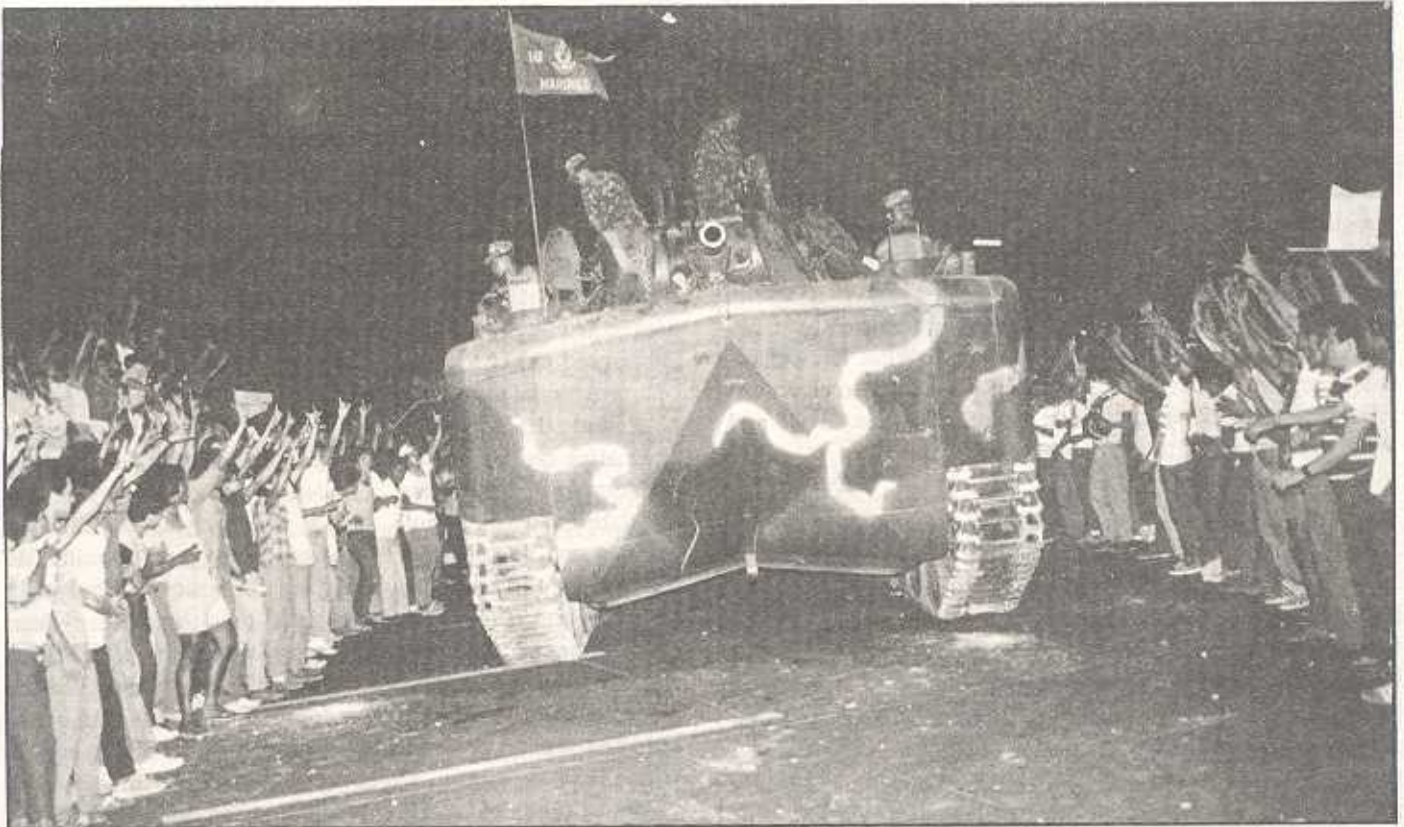
The Reagan government has not, however, stopped congratulating itself for its "handling" of the Philippine crisis. *Time* magazine, in its March 10 issue, even went to the extent of characterizing the US role in the Philippine uprising as a new model of American intervention. All of this is calculated to erase the enormous responsibility of the US government in propping up the oppressive and absolutist rule of Marcos. Once more, however, the US Establishment misreads Filipino perceptions. The latter are one in saying they owe nothing to America and that America decided to cast its lot for the new government only when it was very clear that the old regime had actually been defeated. But the Americans have woven their own self-serving myths. As *Time* magazine put it, "As the week ended, Reagan Administration policymakers breathed a great sigh of relief that their plans and strategies, so painstakingly worked out over the past two years, had gone so well." Here again is America presenting itself as the savior of democracy in other parts of the world as if people were incapable of assuming responsibility for their own destiny. What else is new?

Undeniably, the Philippines under Marcos had been a thorn on the side of America. The terrible human rights record of the dictatorship, its incomparable corruption, and its lack of any meaningful popular support had made it difficult to justify continuing support for the regime. Yet Marcos's unconditional pledge of loyalty to America and his repeated assurances concerning the military bases issue had made America blind to the popular clamor for change. The US dilemma was how to effect a transition from the Marcos era without unleashing a process of destabilization which could be captured by the



Tagumpay ng Bayan (People's Victory) Rally, Rizal Park, 16 February 1986.

Jimmy Angeles/OME-GA/Mr. & Ms.



Up in arms without arms.

underground communist movement. The February presidential election, which they had imposed on Marcos, was meant to be the most desirable mechanism for attaining a change in government. But the Americans were also aware that the Marcos electoral machine, endowed with unlimited resources, was practically unbeatable and therefore it was next to impossible to see a Marcos graciously accepting defeat in an electoral contest.

It would be extremely naive to think that America had not contemplated sponsoring or encouraging a military coup as a way of ousting Marcos. The Reformists within the army now openly admit to having seriously considered this option. In fact, it now appears that the military plot that Marcos claimed to have discovered was, after all, true. And it is possible that the Enrile-Ramos siege in Camps Aguinaldo and Crame which touched off the civilian non-violent uprising was a fallback plan, and not a simple defensive move taken in response to an impending danger. All this is academic now. What happened was that no one believed Marcos anymore when he accused the Reformist soldiers of having conspired to murder him and Mrs. Marcos supposedly on the morning of February 23rd.

A People's Project

But the people saw the Enrile-Ramos-Reformists mutiny as an integral part of Cory Aquino's civil disobedience campaign. If there were any apprehensions that the whole affair was just an internal struggle within the Army which had no clear linkage to Cory Aquino's crusade, these were soon dispelled by the appeal of Cardinal Sin to support the Reformists' rebellion.

No one, not even the Enrile-Ramos rebels nor Cardinal Sin himself, expected the kind of response that people from all walks of life gave to the rebellion in the military. For more

than a decade, the people had viewed the entire military apparatus as a collection of gangsters in uniform: without compunction, ideals or minds of their own. As it turned out, the people were awed by the Reformist soldiers' extraordinary display of courage and determination. And they reciprocated by marshalling the same zeal, idealism and bravado that they showed in the February election. This is what has come to be known as the "bantay ng bayan" (lit. vigilantes of the people) syndrome or "people power". In the final analysis, this is what won the revolution; this is what lent the entire uprising its enviable participatory character. It was everybody's revolution, not the exclusive project of an identifiable armed group in control of the whole situation. Its avowedly non-violent character assured it its participatory dimension, for, unlike in an armed confrontation, people knew that they did not have to bear arms to be a part of the struggle.

It was General Fidel Ramos who first used the term "people power" revolution to describe the events that were taking place. Perhaps, when it was first used, it was mainly motivated by the desire to submerge the persistent suspicion that this was nothing but a military *coup d'etat*. Many are still not sure that this was not what was originally intended. But the term "people power" became an overnight reality whose dimensions and impact could not have been anticipated by anyone. Like an amorphous mass with multiple organs, people power worked hand in hand with reformist military power, many times seizing the initiative and not waiting for any direction from anywhere. People who have not known one another before worked instinctively like dutiful members of an ant community, putting up human and all types of barricades in order to prevent the tanks and troopers of Marcos from converging around the two camps where the rebellious soldiers were holed up.

In other circumstances, it would be difficult to expect a

rebel military group to win power from an existing group, and then voluntarily hand this over to a civilian leadership. The classic model of military take-overs assumes precisely that soldiers who successfully seize power invariably find it impossible to return to the barracks and pave the way for a civilian government. They hang on to it indefinitely even as they keep on assuring everyone that their control of the government is just provisional and until a civilian leadership is elected into office. Such a model of military coups has been repeatedly confirmed in various Third World countries so that up till recently, many educated Filipinos could not believe that Cory Aquino is truly in control of government. What has persuaded most people that she is, has been her ability to effect the release of all political prisoners, against the best advice and repeated warnings of the military.

Would A Military Coup Have Been Acceptable?

A few hours before Mr. Marcos made up his mind to leave Malacañang, he talked to Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, urging him to form a provisional military government with him (Marcos) continuing as a ceremonial president until the end of his term in 1987. He was obviously thinking of the Indonesian scenario where Sukarno was stripped of all powers but allowed to remain in the country. Unfortunately for Marcos, this was not to be. Mr. Enrile told him that he had already pledged his allegiance to the new government of Cory Aquino. Still, what continues to intrigue many observers is the question: whether the reformist military had thought of seizing power but decided not to as a matter of principle, or whether it decided that there was no way it could have seized power for itself. In short, how did it happen that in the Philippines, the military could initiate a coup and then voluntarily offer the government to a civilian leadership? There is no single answer to this question, but the presence of a set of conditions could shed some light on this important issue. They include the following, from the least to the most important:

First, the presence of a clear ethos of professionalism in the Philippine military which recognized the supremacy of civilian authority, or alternatively, the absence of any experience in overt military rule. There has not been a military coup in Philippine political history. The Philippine military has always been known as a professional soldiery reared in the tradition of civilian rule. In fact, the Reformists who engineered the February uprising had previously made themselves known as a loose movement within the military dedicated to the restoration of professionalism in their ranks. They won a lot of sympathy because of this call. Even so, one could not entirely discount a first time. But if it entered their mind at all, the idea of a military provisional government would have been approached nevertheless with a great deal of wariness by these soldiers since they did not know how Filipinos in general would have reacted to a military government.

Second, the absence of any independent mass support for the military as a whole on account of its strong identification with the dictatorship. This is related to the first. One doubts very much if Minister Enrile and General Ramos could have attracted the same magnitude of civilian support for their mutiny if they had said that they were simply interested in removing Mr. Marcos and his bodyguard General Ver from power. Enrile and Ramos, now the toast of the majority of the

Filipino people, were not exactly well-liked while they served under Marcos. Mr. Enrile had always been viewed as a crafty politician with enormous presidential ambitions. And General Ramos was generally viewed as an indecisive weakling. In short, their images were completely tarnished by their involvement in the regime. It was necessary for them to announce that, in withdrawing their loyalty from Marcos, they were at the same time giving it to President Aquino. For, in so doing, they became part of the crusade that revolved around the personality of Cory Aquino. There is no doubt that the people would have abandoned them at any point had they announced either a compromise with Marcos or the formation of a provisional military government.

Third, the presence of a credible and extremely popular alternative civilian leadership whose center of gravity was the phenomenal Cory Aquino, a leadership which enjoyed a clear mandate from the people. This is extremely important. The uprising was not difficult to process in the public's mind. An election for the presidency and the vice-presidency took place on February 7. That election made two things very clear: one, the brazen, arrogant and immoral way with which Marcos was prepared to employ his dictatorial powers to get himself re-elected; and two, the tremendous, spontaneous, and unprecedented support given to Cory Aquino by the Filipino people. Where their votes were not counted, the people voted by their awesome presence in all the rallies called by Cory Aquino. There was no doubt whatsoever in the minds of Filipinos who they wanted to be president and who actually won the election. Unlike the period immediately following the assassination of Ninoy Aquino, there was no vacuum in the leadership. In Cory Aquino, the Filipino people found a clear unchallenged focal point of popular support. Such a situation left the military reformists no choice but to recognize her leadership. To have failed to do so would have been fatal for them.



Mr. & Ms.

Cory Aquino: winning hearts and minds.

Fourth, the massive participation of millions of militant civilians in the actual seizure of power. Responding to the Reformists' call for support, these civilians consciously shielded the rebellious wing of the military from attacks by the Marcos troops. Most dictatorships are usually terminated by a *coup d'état* or a popular revolution. The Philippine experience was a combination of both, although its dominant public image is unmistakably supplied by its popular character. The Enrile-Ramos group of military Reformists know that Mr. Marcos could not have been overthrown without people power; and the people know the whole thing could not have been possible if the *unity of the Army was not broken by that one single act of mutiny*. On the other hand, the spontaneous mobilization of millions of Filipinos was made possible by its expressly non-violent character. This element ensured the participation of nearly everyone who was concerned about the situation. One did not need guns to be a part of the revolution; one only needed to be there to manifest one's final defiance of the regime and to express one's solidarity with the ongoing struggle. By their nature, i.e. their predominantly clandestine character, most coups do not provide space for popular participation. On the other hand, most revolutions tend to be so bloody and so violent as to deter the spontaneous participation of unorganized millions. What happened in the Philippines surprised everyone because it defied logic and violated all the standard scenarios and presuppositions about revolutions.

People Power

Shortly before he decided to abandon his palace, Mr. Marcos had called on all his supporters to come to Malacañang with their arms so that he might show that people power was to be found on both sides of the equation. Nobody came. Three thousand civilian guests had been collected from various parts of the city to witness his oath-taking at mid-day of the 25th. It was to be Mr. Marcos's last public appearance. His inaugural guests hurriedly left the palace as soon as the ceremonies were over for fear of being stranded there. At around this time, more than 3 million people had gathered on the highway in front of the two rebel camps, endlessly chanting *Co-ry! Co-ry!* Several thousands were spread out as well around the vicinity of Channel 4 and Channel 7 and Radio Veritas, determined to defend all the gains that had been made in the past three days. This was people power at work. Ordinary folk had decided to drop whatever they were doing to respond to periodic radio and television calls for people power in various places. What was this people power all about?

First of all, it was largely unorganized. While there were organized forces like trade unions, student organizations, schools and religious orders that regularly guarded the barricades, the bulk of the people came as families, as small friendship groups, as neighborhood delegations or even as individuals. There were contingents from various communities and from far-away towns outside of Metro Manila. They came and they did not need to get their orders from any central directorate or committee. What held them together was the alternative radio and newspapers which kept them informed of the latest developments.

Second, people power was not held together by a common ideology nor even by a common political perspective. It was largely an anti-Marcos movement that was at the same



time bound by an almost universal attachment to Cory Aquino as the only remaining hope for a better future. For many, the issue was a choice between good and evil, period. This made the whole campaign from the very beginning an intensely moral crusade.

Third, people power was bolstered by an interesting form of religiosity. Almost everywhere was the image of the Virgin Mary, carried about like an invincible talisman. This folk religiosity which revolved around prayers and icons had apparently penetrated middle class culture. It is a return to the old moralistic religious culture and suggests nothing of the theology of liberation that has given strength to members of the clergy who opted to go underground. How it could be harnessed in support of what was clearly a political act remains one of the fundamental mysteries of the February revolution.

Fourth, people power was morally righteous, and this moral superiority allowed people to confront the immoral State with the courage and sense of self-sacrifice seen in all types of crusaders. Its exemplars are the martyred Evelio Javier and Ninoy Aquino, the heroic Comelec computer

technicians who walked out of their jobs to protest the dishonesty with which electoral returns were being handled, and the thousands of young men and women and church people who valiantly faced the armed goons of Marcos and his henchmen in polling precincts, and who stood vigil for many nights in front of city halls in order to protect ballot boxes from being stolen. This unorganized heroic vigilantism hit Metro Manila and major towns and cities all over the country like an epidemic. Since the February 7 election, the people have been, literally, up in arms without arms.

Fifth, people power meant the direct exercise of moral pressure, founded on a basic distrust of government processes. It is a diffused type of vigilance; an undifferentiated activism in search of moral causes. The entire institutional scaffolding of the Marcos dictatorship had been called into question, delegitimized a hundred times over. We had a people that was totally "psyched" for a convulsive civil disobedience. Since they were mostly unorganized, no major initiative could come from people power. Somebody credible had to make a call to summon its awesome presence. That somebody had to be either the Church or Cory Aquino or both.

Weaknesses of People Power

The same qualities that gave to people power its basic strength are also the sources of its basic instability. Being



essentially unorganized and spontaneous, the people power movement was free of all the bureaucratic vices which tend to cripple popular creativity and inventiveness. This is a strong point. But precisely because it is unorganized, it also lacks a certain degree of permanence and stability. The voluntarism and essential goodwill that many people now have must be harnessed for longer-term projects so that their new-found activism does not wane with the passage of time.

Furthermore, because people power was not brought together by any coherent political program but rather by a shared sense of moral outrage, it was able to draw the participation of millions of people from a bewildering variety of political tendencies. The absence of any dominant political-ideological perspective prevented any internal contradictions from breaking the basic unity of people power. There were many reasons and whatever ideological framework underpinned them were subsumed under the encompassing call to oust the dictatorship. This too is a plus point. But precisely because of the absence of a political and structural perspective, people power can degenerate to mob power. We have in fact already begun to see such a process at work in the contest for local government positions following liberation day. Politicians have started to mobilize their supporters to manifest their endorsement of their choices in the most public way possible. In the province of Pampanga, for instance, whose governor, a staunch supporter of Marcos, had quickly abandoned his post after the exit of Marcos, a new governor was appointed by the new government. The incumbent vice-governor has refused to honor the appointment. Instead, he installed himself as the successor by barricading himself and his relatives inside the governor's office. The same mob power, no longer resonating the selfless themes of the previous weeks, has now become the stage prop of office-seekers and stubborn hold-outs of the previous regime.

It took a long time for people to realize the power that has always been within their reach, and to employ this on behalf of the entire community rather than in the name of any particular individual. Things can go wrong in at least two ways unless something is done to organize and stabilize people power: (a) People can go back to individualism and indifference, and (b) Unscrupulous individuals can borrow the techniques of people power mobilization to pursue narrow selfish goals.

A return to apathy would pave the way for the resurgence of old-style politicians who are both inside and outside of the new President's circle. At the moment, while they find themselves on the defensive, they are also actively defending the rampart of elite party politics. On the other hand, the resort to mass actions for every conceivable cause, no matter how individualistic and selfish, devalues people power and creates an atmosphere of anarchy and instability. This situation is bound to strengthen the hand of the military in government.

The Thorny Road Ahead

As a country that followed the path of authoritarian developmentalism, the Philippines found itself being tossed from crisis to crisis, seemingly unable to find a way out of the intricate dilemmas that have been woven by 13 years of the Marcos dictatorship. Against all odds, it has succeeded in freeing itself from the authoritarian spell. It faces enormous

problems, not the least of which is the problem of reviving an economy that was badly battered by corruption, wastefulness, excessive foreign borrowing, and mispriorities. For the moment, the underground movement remains stunned, unable to believe that the dictatorship it has been battling for over a decade could be overthrown in less than four days by the power of unarmed millions who had only rosaries, flowers, and religious statues to protect them.

The tranquility is deceptive, however. As hundreds of young men and women are freed from Marcos prisons, as exiles from all over the world come home to a liberated country, and as thousands of NPA guerillas consider the new government's offer of a ceasefire, the reality of unemployment, of poverty and of starvation continues to besiege the existence of all concerned Filipinos.

We have inherited a foreign debt of nearly \$30 billion. We have to allocate more than one-half of the country's annual foreign exchange earnings just to pay the interest on this gigantic debt. The national treasury is empty, and each day brings only news of more properties and funds stashed away abroad by the rapacious regime of Mr. Marcos. It will take some time before this wealth can be brought back to the country. In the meanwhile, we have to face pragmatic foreign creditors all demanding to be paid now, and who cannot seem to appreciate why democratization should be a matter of concern to them. Most importantly, the new government confronts a people that is awaiting nothing short of a full deliverance from their present miseries. In short, while Mr. Marcos and his cronies have fled the country, it is still perhaps too early to call it a revolution in the real sense. Our most basic problems — unemployment, the foreign debt, poverty, social inequality, and foreign domination — are still upon us.

Cory's Dilemmas

Cory Aquino's government, thrust into power by a curious combination of a military rebellion and a popular civilian

unarmed uprising, and deriving unprecedented mandate by a direct manifestation of popular sovereignty, nevertheless faces two basic and urgent problems.

The first is the problem of *political consolidation* which presents her with an array of interesting political dilemmas.

Having captured the presidency not through an election but by an act of popular rebellion, Cory Aquino owes nothing to the political party under whose banner she ran in the February 7 election. This happy circumstance insulates her from any undue pressure from the political bases of the electoral Opposition. On the other hand, because of the significant role played by the military in the February rebellion, she has, somehow, to accommodate their interests in her government. However, this can only be done up to a certain point. To bring the military into the circuit of civilian affairs, is to court the same "dual function" syndrome which has kept the military in power in countries like Indonesia and Thailand. On the other hand, to isolate the military altogether at this point, in the interest of a fierce assertion of civilian supremacy, would be to furnish the military enough reason to overthrow her government. While Marcos loyalists in the military are still around, the Reformist soldiers who joined Cory Aquino have no choice but to support her. Should the Loyalists succeed in consolidating their positions, the first to be slaughtered by them would be the Reformists. Until the Reformists' position in the military is fully secured, they have no choice but to submit to Cory's civilian government. A Reformist-led coup, however, would not be far-fetched in the event of a weak civilian center. The communist issue would almost certainly be its rallying theme. For only by raising the spectre of communism can the military hope to attract civilian support for itself.

In this light, the recent release of political prisoners acquires a special meaning. If Cory had not released the political prisoners, she would definitely be accused of simply being a puppet of the military. Thus, her order to release *all* detainees may be seen as a strong assertion of a claim to civilian supremacy. On the other hand, she may have also paved the way for a situation in which she would be blamed later on for a

Joe Galvez/Mr. & Ms.



Newly Released political detainees: CNL's Edicio de la Torre, NDF's Horacio Morales and CPP's Jose Ma. Sison.

worsening insurgency situation. Still and all, Mrs. Aquino seems clearly to have won this particular round. Her stubborn insistence on the unconditional release of all political prisoners of the Marcos regime has won her a large amount of goodwill, and more importantly, has demonstrated her independence from the military and the US government.

The second aspect of the political consolidation problem has to do with dismantling the remaining ramparts of the Marcos bureaucracy. It is easy enough to replace the Marcos regime's minions in the various ministries. But Cory Aquino has been met by a shameless rear-guard action by the Marcos people in the Batasang Pambansa (parliament) and the local governments. These people are now arguing that the Aquino government is an illegal government since it came to power not under the auspices of the Marcosian Constitution of 1976. As a result of this, they have offered to *legitimize* (!) her government on condition that she does not abolish the present Batasan. The Marcos people who control the governorships and mayoralties have also insisted that they are protected by security of tenure until their successors are duly elected in a local election. Similar stubbornness had earlier been displayed by the members of the Supreme Court, though a recent people-power barricade has compelled most of them to resign.

In the face of this, Cory Aquino finds herself in a position where she has no choice but to order the replacement of the 1973 constitution and begin a drastic clean-up of government functionaries from top to bottom. Her first few weeks in office had shown that she would prefer to go slow on this issue, but unless the legal impasse is resolved soon, mounting legal disputes might weaken her government and consume so much of her time which is more needed in the area of economic reconstruction.

This leads us to Cory's second basic dilemma: the problem of *economic reconstruction*. The gigantic external debt accumulated under the Marcos regime has placed the country under the direct economic supervision of the IMF and the WB. The IMF adjustment program concluded with the Marcos government called for further tightening of credit, increase in indirect taxes, and moderation of wage increases in order to control inflation. These conditions will certainly exacerbate the already troublesome problems of unemployment, high prices, and low wages. It is doubtful that a change in the government it is dealing with would lead the IMF to alter these conditions in any fundamental way.

Yet it is obvious to any commonsense businessman that a program of austerity cannot easily be reconciled with the aspiration to economic recovery. The IMF is not interested in economic recovery. It is concerned with enforcing a program of repayment on behalf of international capital in the short term, and with effecting a program of adjustment to the requirements of global capitalism in the long term. These concerns are all contrary to the wishes of the Filipino nation to rebuild the economy along the line of greater self-reliance and to enlarge the scope for doing business and earning a decent living in the country.

On the other hand, the program of repayment worked out by the IMF would eat up such a large portion of the annual foreign exchange earnings of the country that the Aquino

government will eventually have no choice but to secure new loans to meet its obligations, even if all pending development projects were to be completely frozen. This is the reality of the debt trap. The new government therefore essentially faces the same problem which, in a large sense, contributed to the downfall of the Marcos regime. The options are limited: either Cory plays according to standard IMF rules and starves the nation, or, in the interest of genuine economic reconstruction and stabilization of the democratic experiment, she rejects the IMF prescriptions and risks punishment from the international financial community.

The global situation has not at all been conducive to the type of economic reconstruction awaited by most Filipinos. For one thing, protectionism in the capitalist countries continues and Third World countries like the Philippines are at their wits' end deciding what else they can sell to generate much-needed foreign exchange. The collapse in oil prices has been welcomed as a source of relief. But it also has its costs. Oil-exporting countries now find themselves having to reduce their demand for overseas contract workers, a steady source of foreign exchange for countries like the Philippines. Moreover, the drastic decline in oil prices has now compelled these same oil-exporting countries to borrow short-term capital from international banks. This will have the effect of raising interest rates in international money markets and tightening credit altogether.

In the final analysis, she really faces no choice at all. Her government was launched by the power of the people, not by the intervention of a foreign government. If she intends to maintain her government through the support of the people and not through the constant sponsorship of the US government, she has no choice but to respond to the needs of the vast majority. Concretely, this entails an approach to the external debt question that would minimally include the following: (1) the cancellation of those debts that can be shown to have been fraudulently contracted, (2) the drastic reduction of the debt service to ideally about 10% of the total export earnings of the country in a given year, (3) the lowering of interest rates on existing loans, and (4) the lengthening of the period of repayment of outstanding loans, with perhaps a longer grace period. These are really not extraordinary measures and certainly they are nowhere near the debt-repudiation schemes so greatly feared by international creditors. The latter must be persuaded that in the long term, these moves are really consistent with the interests of the banks themselves.

Many of those who campaigned for Cory in the last election and who sought to enforce the popular will in the successful rebellion of February 22-25 have been conditioned to believe that the root of all evils in the country is Marcos himself. There has been little understanding of the less visible structural factors that constrain development and create poverty in the Third World. Consequently, many expect that the ouster of a dictatorship would automatically pave the way for a genuine restructuring of society. Perhaps the more realistic view is to regard the overthrow of the dictator only as an opportunity for doing something heroic and different. That opportunity is clearly now in the hands of the Aquino government.