

## THE ANATOMY OF POLITICAL COLLAPSE

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How was it that the Marcos dictatorship cracked and crumbled so quickly?

In four sleepless nights and three heroic days, a dictatorial regime that took twenty years to assemble so readily and so humiliatingly disassembled before the world's unbelieving eyes, confounding both the tyrant and the rebellious masses.

Before anyone could take full stock of what was happening, the wild synergy of a military revolt and a popular uprising had sent the dictator scampering away like a terrified rabbit. The myth of arms that had cowed a whole nation was quickly demystified as the streets overflowed with the unarmed, half-prayerful, half-celebratory masses in their millions. Brigades deserted the once awesome apparatus of wholesale repression into the arms of a people discovering in all concreteness their collective power. The brittle shell of autocracy held together by the unreliable bond of opportunism could not hold back the outrage of a violated populace. The unsteady facade of martial authority unsupported by popular consent could not further deceive a people determined to vote out the conjugal torment, first by the ballot, now with their feet.

### Focus of Struggle

The swiftness and decisiveness of the uprising derives from its sharpness of focus, allowing the broadest array of forces to bear down on a singular objective. The target was unmistakably defined: Marcos and his closest personal allies.

The February rebellion was a narrowly political exercise that successfully excised from our collective lives the power clique that was at the heart of a massive and complex authoritarian system. This rebellion was not, in itself, a social revolution. Whether it shall eventually turn out to be the prologue to one is a matter for political praxis to determine. For in the wake of the February storm, the structures that bred social, and not merely political, discontent stand intact and operational.

That the rebellion occurred as a logical continuation of the electoral struggle defines its essential characteristics. The electoral contest provided the framework and organizing principle for the uprising. Aquino's campaign for the presidency, given existing conditions, developed on the motif of a democratic struggle against dictatorship. It catalyzed the broad

array of anti-dictatorship forces on a single line of march and set a uniform cadence for their advance.

The intensity with which the electoral campaign was fought threw the whole society into a political pressure cooker. It allowed the anti-dictatorship forces to consolidate rapidly and widely. It forced the timid and the apolitical to stake clear positions for or against the dictatorship. It brought millions of heretofore passive citizens in direct confrontation with the dictatorship's brutality and moral bankruptcy as they struggled to defend the integrity of the electoral process. It opened as wide a latitude as possible for the direct involvement of all social sectors in the democratic struggle aimed at the core of the autocratic establishment, giving this struggle a populist character and a popular form.

The strong democratic challenge forced the dictatorship to discredit and delegitimize itself completely. Facing the spectre of popular rejection, the Marcos clique siphoned public funds for the campaign, coerced and bought off voters, murdered opposition supporters, tampered with the returns, and with scandalous haste, forced the legislative to rubber-stamp the dictator's pyrrhic win. The dictatorship's frantic effort at self-endorsement proved self-defeating. The entire operation turned out to be its last transparent mockery of republican forms.

Major sections of the Filipino Left missed the cue from the start. They marched out of cadence and chorused out of tune. By their abstention, they weakened the left flank of the anti-dictatorship coalition, thereby unduly increasing the significance of the right. By insisting on a vanguardist role, they tailed in the events. Trapped in dogmatic visions of what the revolution should be like, the hour of rising found them wandering about in the sidestreets. They who fought hardest and contributed the most martyrs to the cause of freedom now stopped to contemplate the passing of history.

The electoral campaign produced an unchallenged focal point of leadership for the broad anti-dictatorship forces. Evident popular support during the campaign vested legitimacy on the Aquino leadership. Evident fraud, in the same manner, rendered the Marcos dictatorship totally void of legitimacy. The stage was set for Aquino to assume central direction over the post-electoral struggle.

At the onset of the campaign, Cory Aquino told the people that Malacañang was theirs and that they should come after the elections as rightful owners. On the night of the 25th, they did.

### Widest Access

With a central direction for the anti-dictatorship forces firmly established by the electoral phase, it was now possible to effectively sustain the massive democratic crusade into its post-electoral phases. The forces have been rolled into place, the trajectories have been set and the natural course of events could be anticipated.

An insurrectionary situation was evident from the night of February 7. The fraudulent electoral process and its tense aftermath forced the Marcos clique to the defensive, frantically attempting to reconsolidate and contain the damage. By Marcos's own admission, the decision to call for early elections proved to be a tragic miscalculation. Now hemmed in by hostile world opinion and a volatile domestic situation, the dictator's option narrowed by the day. In a condition of severe political weakness, he was prone to commit more blunders and deepen fissions within his own camp.

In order to keep the dictatorship off-balance and on the defensive, the democratic movement launched a massive, carefully calibrated civil disobedience campaign. With the availability of central direction, such as strategy could now be feasibly pursued.

Developing along the combined themes of people's power and massive non-violent struggle, the civil disobedience campaign opened the widest access for the involvement of every social sector. It was amenable to multifold forms of struggle encompassing all social classes and every political tendency within the anti-dictatorship coalition. It allowed the smooth transposition of the momentum of the electoral struggle into the post-electoral arena.

The nature of the civil disobedience campaign allowed the democratic coalition to maintain its populist character and popular appeal. With a definite command post — the Aquino headquarters — it was now possible to select targets for concentrated assault and precisely adjust to pace and forms of struggle for maximum political impact.

The first stage of the civil disobedience campaign centered on disabling the crony capitalist basis of the dictatorship. A projected general strike set the perspective for more advanced forms of struggle. The military revolt, as we now know, telescoped the whole process. The dictatorship proved easier to disestablish than was earlier anticipated.

The Catholic bishops' post-election statement concretized the ideological counter-hegemony that had been building up in the course of the democratic struggle.

The Marcos dictatorship had shielded itself with a sophisticated ideological hegemony that, while it held sway, restrained the middle classes particularly from decisively breaking away and crystallizing into a revolutionary force. This right-wing ideological hegemony put emphasis on political authority and political obligation, on the "political will" of the State to achieve development on the primacy of order and

and obsession with legalism.

The burgeoning democratic current, on the other hand, emphasized truth, justice and freedom. It underscored honesty, integrity and the primacy of the individual's conscientious choice. The bishops' statement irreversibly tipped the ideological balance against the dictatorship and gave the final moral blessing to the act of revolt against illegitimate political power.

Thrown into a panic by the civil disobedience campaign and the spectre of non-recognition by the international community, the Marcos clique scurried about in a desperate attempt to crawl out of the hole, retake the political initiative and mount a final offensive to break the momentum of popular resistance. While throwing up a smokescreen of empty concessions, Marcos sought to even more tightly control the military. In the confusion, he tripped off a military revolt that delivered, in dramatic fashion, the *coup de grace*.

### Eroding Bases

Taking the longer view, the February uprising could not have occurred before it eventually did.

When the dictatorship was inaugurated in 1972, it enjoyed the active support of the business community, the middle class and the Church hierarchy.

The business community welcomed the prospect of order and policies favorable to capital expansion. They did not complain when peasants were dislocated to make way for agribusiness and when workers' wages were artificially depressed. They cheered when workers' rights were suppressed in the name of "industrial peace". They looked the other way when resisting peasants were massacred, when militant trade unionists were abducted and murdered.

As the economy expanded through the Seventies, a prosperous white-collar class became a solid basis of support for the Marcos regime. In sanitized suburban communities, they traded gossip on the latest Palace scandal while trimming their lawns. In the Manila area, the suburbs swept up San Pedro to the south, Novaliches to the east and Valenzuela to the north. The complacency of these communities was disturbed only by occasional news of someone else's student activist son going up to the hills and dying.

Within the Church, tension simmered between the conservative hierarchy and rank-and-file religious workers giving life to the "preferential option for the poor". Sections of the religious community, to the bishops' dismay, identified with the rebellious intelligentsia. To the bishops' consternation, a few priests had joined up with the armed revolutionary movement.

With the tacit support of the business community, the white collar middle classes and the Church hierarchy, the Marcos regime felt its urban bases secure. Systematic repression kept trade unionists and student activities at bay. Strict censorship cut off the dissident intelligentsia from the masses.

With a secure rear, the Marcos clique consolidated its dictatorial power structure around a command bureaucracy legitimized by the technocratic ethos. It coopted traditional politicians, who were very often local warlords in the country-

side, by entrusting to them the local government apparatus. It secured its own economic base by cultivating crony capitalism. It expanded the military and secret police, appropriating them as private armies of the autocratic cabal. It justified over-centralization through the developmentalism peddled by technocrats.

The regime rewarded political loyalty with a blank check for corruption. Government transformed into an apparatus for systematic plunder.

The dictatorship's unmitigated thievery compounded and magnified the contraction of the economy from the onset of the Eighties. It became clear to most that the regime abetted rather than alleviated a comprehensive national crisis that was quickly developing.

By the Eighties, the regimes' urban bases of support began to evaporate. Businessmen were disillusioned by erratic policies favoring crony capitalism and by corruption of such scale that it disrupted the economy. The middle classes saw a tapering off of prosperity and began to be shocked by widespread injustices. The Church hierarchy was scandalized by the scale of human rights violations.

As incomes fell and unemployment rose, the working classes became more restive. A countryside revolution had blossomed as rural poverty worsened and local warlords sought to maintain control by the barrel of a gun.

By 1983, the Philippines had become an economic basket-case. The national debt ballooned beyond all proportions. The developmentalist Utopia that had enthralled the nation was by this time a shattered vision. The pack of vultures that monopolized political power did not, however, pause from their plunder.

The assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr. provided both an impulse and an occasion for the urban middle and business classes to finally break from the dictatorship. The eternal hierarchy of the church could not but be swept with the rising tide of discontent.

The main tendencies of the revolutionary movements assigned no role for the urban middle and upper classes to

play. These main tendencies thus failed to direct rising disenchantment in the cities along a clear agenda of upheaval. What the revolutionaries failed to accomplish in terms of catalyzing urban discontent and directing it along a clear line of advance, the Marcos regime accomplished for them by staking the seat of dictatorship in an electoral contest it thought it could get away with.

By the middle of 1985, the Marcos clique was reliant almost exclusively on the military apparatus. Its crony capitalist basis was in disarray due to its own appetite for plunder. Its technocracy was discredited. Its ideological apparatuses lost all credibility. Its provincial warlords were besieged by armed peasant revolutionaries. What the Marcos clique passed off as a political party looted its own campaign funds as a matter of habit.

Thus, when the military broke and defected last February, the Marcos clique had no other fallback position. Its last basis of power disintegrated and a lynching mob was at the Palace gates. Marcos and his gang of looters were literally running for their lives.

### Towards Revolution

As the structure of dictatorship are now being dismantled, it becomes more and more evident that the hated Marcos regime is a politico-economic, and not merely political, phenomenon. While it was relatively easy to drive away the vulture who nested at the core of the dictatorial system, authentic popular democracy can only be realized by dispersing the economic premises of social power.

Unless ownership structures are reinvented with revolutionary decisiveness, the oligarchy that the February revolution mercifully spared shall soon produce new vultures to roost in the aftermath of an unfinished revolution.

The challenge now is to advance the social revolutionary project as we strengthen the political democracy we won in February.

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*Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and the exploited. At no other time are the mass of the people in a position to come forward so actively as creators of a new social order, as at a time of revolution. At such times the people are capable of performing miracles, if judged by the limited, philistine yardstick of gradualist progress. But it is essential that leaders of the revolutionary forces, too, should advance their aims more comprehensively and boldly at such a time, so that their slogans shall always be in advance of the revolutionary initiative of the masses, serve as a beacon, reveal to them our democratic and socialist ideal in all its magnitude and splendour, and show them the shortest and most direct route to complete, absolute, and decisive victory.*

— V. I. Lenin

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