

## Reading the Revolution

**W**hile many radical interpreters find it easier now than a few months ago to use the term "revolution" in referring to the February events in the Philippines, the task of interpreting in more analytical terms what actually happened in those four days is unfinished.

Outside of the Philippines, we still read some accounts which cannot quite decide whether to refer to the Philippine revolution as a "people's coup", or, worse, a "military coup" legitimized by extensive civilian popular participation. The military-civilian axis is only one aspect of what is clearly still an ongoing debate.

A second axis of the discussion is the role of the US. Many are still asking whether the February events had not, after all, followed a script that was carefully prepared by the US, in which both Marcos and the new Philippine governing class consciously acquiesced. US policymakers and the US media have been the most active in highlighting the role played by the US government in ousting Marcos. This self-congratulatory mood has also, by an ironic twist of logic, given rise to the view that the Philippine revolution represents a new and desirable model of US intervention in the Third World which may well be tried in countries like Nicaragua.

The third axis around which current interpretations of the Philippine February event revolve concerns the class content of the uprising itself. The dominant view is that while the February revolution was a popular one in the sense that it cut across all social classes, it is nevertheless conceded that the middle classes were preponderant. According to this view the peasants and workers who

constitute the majority (about 65%) of the Philippine population were not proportionally represented in either the electoral activism which preceded and followed the February 7th election or in the non-violent resistance waged from February 22-25, 1986.

### Popular Perceptions of the Revolution

While analysts and scholars argue over the specific characteristics of the February uprising, the matter is however more simply resolved in the Filipino public mind. The current public view of the Philippine February is: (1) that it was a popular revolution, not just a seizure of power by a few civilians or military people; (2) that it was won by the joint action of military people who had declared their withdrawal of loyalty from the Marcos regime, and civilians who saw in the occasion the opportunity to express once and for all their rejection of Marcos rule; (3) that it was won exclusively by the efforts of the Filipino people, and not in conjunction with solicited or offered aid from the US, although the decision of the US government not to continue supporting Marcos is generally seen as having contributed to the relatively bloodless outcome; and finally, (4) that it was directly won mainly by middle class Metro Manila residents but with the manifest encouragement, support and sympathy of the entire nation. These are the basic elements of the popular consciousness concerning the February revolution.

What ordinary people, including the direct participants of the February event, experience and believe in everyday life may, however, be quite different from the perceptions of those who now wield power in their name, or from the

interpretations of analysts who view events from the standpoint of an interest in real structural changes, or from the perspective of social activists who view the same events from the standpoint of a societal project.

Even so, an understanding of the subjective point of view of the Filipino public is important because it provides a key to the problem whether and how far the people are prepared to support meaningful changes in Philippine society. Experiences, however, like the historical past itself, tend to be malleable. They are subject to unceasing change and re-interpretation. This is what the struggle for consciousness is all about — competing ideologies seeking to provide an account of the past which legitimizes present conduct and aspirations for the future.

### The Ideological Dimensions of the Democratic Struggle

The ideological struggle to preserve the democratic gains of the February revolution must be waged on a number of crucial points. At the most basic level, the people must remain convinced that the revolution in February was the collective reflex of a morally and politically outraged people, rather than the craftily executed move of a few ambitious and opportunistic individuals. Consequently, there must be a continuing de-legitimization of the Marcos regime, and a constant harping on the continuity between the mandate given to Cory by the February 7th election and the forceful assertion of the same mandate in the February revolution by a people who had grown sick and weary of the previous regime's brazen use of power and general contempt for the Filipino people.



At another level, the popular perception of the February revolution as a military-civilian joint venture must be preserved. The view that the people came in throngs in order to protect the military, when it decided to switch loyalties and denounce the dictatorship, must be reinforced especially against the challenge now being posed by those who want to see the military play a greater role in society. The simple conclusion that this view should suggest is that the military, without the support of the people, is nothing. Thus, civilian supremacy over the army, reflective of the defining characteristic of the February revolution, must be emphasized.

Furthermore, the national character of the February events must be emphasized in at least two senses: (1) the Americans had no active participation in the liberation of the Filipino people from Marcos other than in restraining themselves from further supporting their beleaguered client when it was clear that the people had already repudiated him; and (2) while to the Metro Manilans and the middle classes belong the honor of having been physically present in the 4-day EDSA revolution, it must always be stressed that the struggle for liberation from the dictatorship had been waged much earlier and by all Filipinos, in their own respective ways, throughout the entire country.

Finally, the February revolution was not just a struggle for democracy. It was above all a struggle for the genuine development of the vast majority of the Filipino people, whose interests had been marginalized under the authoritarian government. That struggle for development must inevitably confront the twin problems of class rule and imperialist domination, both of which have been shelved when all efforts singularly focused on how to bring about the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship.

The political struggle will inescapably be returning to these same themes for as long as inequality and sovereignty are not squarely addressed. For the dictatorship precisely became what it was because of the combination of class rule and foreign domination. Class rule acquired an authoritarian, super-exploita-

tive, and fascist face precisely in response to the changing requirements of global imperialist domination.

### The Lingering Questions

Analytically, the question that is however being asked is: How long can a liberal democratic regime such as the Aquino government last before it finally succumbs to the combined pressure of elite and imperialist demands? Cory was thrust into power by a popular movement not just to overthrow the Marcos regime, but to democratize Philippine society. Yet it seems quite clear that democratization will require not just the re-establishment of the conventional structures and mechanisms of political participation, but also the invention of new ones in order to realize the meaning of popular participation. Furthermore, the people will be looking for manifestations of democratization in the sphere of the economy. The question then is: Can this quest be pursued without challenging existing property structures?

There is, secondly, the problem of economic reconstruction whose most important expression is the search for employment opportunities and the revival of economic activity. Can this be combined with the continuation of subservience to foreign capital and the multilateral institutions like the IMF and the World Bank? In short, can the Aquino government lift the vast majority, who are restive and hopeful, from their present level of impoverishment without any alterations in the framework of elite rule and without ultimately going against transnational capital subjugation?

### The View From Cory's Government

It is perhaps a testimony to the ideological ingenuousness and political stubbornness of the Cory Aquino regime that it precisely intends to realize certain conditions that have been proven to be either unworkable or fragile in other settings. Economically, the Cory government seeks to maintain a market economy with a far less interventionist State than that seen in Marcos's time, while

hoping to uplift the condition of super-exploited Filipino workers and peasants. Her economic program also shows an implicit trust in the global capitalist market as the motor of national growth at a time when the anarchy of this market is actually wreaking havoc on the economies of small nations like the Philippines.

Politically, the Aquino government seems determined to maintain an open democratic regime in which fundamental freedoms are not only preserved but fiercely promoted. There is likewise a conscious insistence on unequivocal civilian supremacy over the military. These guideposts are sought to be strictly followed in a political situation characterized by the presence of an active long-standing underground revolutionary movement, on one hand, and by a US-oriented and rabidly anti-communist military establishment, on the other.

### Between An Untenable Dream and a Tenacious Optimism

What the Aquino regime seeks to stabilize and preside over is what is known in the literature as the "democratic conjuncture", a politico-economic phase which, in the era of imperialist domination and authoritarian developmentalism, is precisely defined by its essential unwieldiness. Just as the February Revolution is regarded as having confirmed the viability of a non-violent route to social change, so also the Aquino experiment attempts, with enormous confidence, to accomplish what many generally consider to be an untenable dream.

In a rather strange way, most Filipino analysts desperately watch the resolute logic of events unfold, even as they find themselves slowly being infected by the sometimes naive and foolish optimism of a government whose survival seems to rest almost completely on tenacious goodwill and unflinching faith. Indeed, in the modern period, one would probably have a hard time finding any other regime in the Third World that is as single-mindedly voluntaristic as Cory Aquino's government.