

After Marcos: The Scenario as Reality

THE PHILIPPINES AFTER MARCOS:

R.J. May and Francisco Nemenzo, Editors.
Croom Holm, Australia. 1985.

Since Senator Benigno S. Aquino's assassination, August 21, 1983 has become everybody's watershed: the day when the Filipino middle class woke up to the folly of its complicity by complacency with the Marcos regime; when slumbering Left-wing activists resumed taking up their positions in the frontlines; when erstwhile armed minions began thinking rebellious thoughts; when, in short, the anti-dictatorship movement gained its irreversible momentum.

To be sure, prescient observers had, before then, foreseen that President Marcos's ill health and that of the economy justified speculations on the character of the "post-Marcos order". But the Aquino murder put any skepticism about such prognoses to rest.

The present volume is a product of that anticipatory mood. The fourteen writers here assembled met in Australia in November 1983 to exchange views on how Marcos would go (or be made to go) and on what the economic and political scenario would be like without him.

It would be easy, but unfair, given the advantage of hindsight, to just point to what the contributors were not able to predict. After all, in November 1983, who would have accurately sensed that 1) Corazon Aquino would emerge as undisputed leader of the opposition and forge a popular moderate challenge to Marcos; 2) Marcos would commit the grave miscalculation of running against her in a snap election; 3) a reformist army group would coalesce around the leadership of Marcos men Enrile and Ramos to break with the dictatorship?

What is remarkable, in fact, is how close the analysts were to sensing some of the emergent trends. Reynaldo Iletto's essay focused on the deep undercurrents

of millenarianism, religious imagery and the folk values of grief and sympathy during post-Aquino mobilizations; these factors would come alive again in the course of the 1986 Presidential campaign and its rebellious aftermath.

In an advocative argument, Felipe Miranda urged a subtler perception of the military: far from regarding it as a monolithic bloc, the anti-dictatorship movement would do well to devise a strategy of winning the support of "democratic" elements within it, he wrote; not much later, the Reform AFP (Armed Forces of the Philippines) Movement was born. Francisco Nemenzo's description of a constitutional democratic regime's coming to power, and the tasks confronting it, comes close to being a pre-vision of the present Aquino government.

There is much else to recommend this book, especially if it is read as a guide to the long-term trends that will continue to operate well after Marcos's fall, and as a survey of the important class, sectoral and political forces that will doubtless play a major role in the future.

The contributions of Alfred McCoy and Brian Fegan highlight the transformations occurring in an increasingly technologized agriculture, which relentlessly marginalize the lower strata of the rural population while enhancing the prospects of those in command of rural resources. Then there is Michael Pinches's account of the politicization occurring among Manila's urban poor who have, he argues, been underestimated as a potent and revolutionary proletarian section. R.J. May's piece on the situation of the ethnic minorities allows us insights into the motivations of the growing resistance

movements among them, and — particularly in the case of the Muslims — acquaints us with the growing complexity of political realignments occurring within them.

The media sector is examined by Amando Doronila, who rightly insists that freeing the Philippine press will necessitate not only the dismantling of repressive laws, but also the democratization of the ownership structure.

Dennis Shoesmith, meanwhile, conveys effectively the tensions now brewing in the Catholic Church, where the ideological divisions in society of left, right, and middle are coming increasingly to be reflected intramurally.

Looming large over the evolution of the political situation in the post-Marcos era is, of course, the United States. In her thoughtful appraisal, Robyn Lim shows how America's calculation of her strategic interests in the Pacific will bear on the prospects of establishing a truly "distributive" regime in this country.

So whither the Philippines, then? For Filipinos, this naturally is of more than academic interest. If by now chastened by the surprises of February, hence wary of prognostications, they can at least say, as Senator Diokno does in the first essay, that:

The task is not going to be easy and it is not going to be quick, and we are going to need the best help that we can get from all the talent that could be made available. We may well fail and fail miserably, but we have to try. We will try, and I am certain that however it ends we will be a better people for having tried.