

Theorizing and Living the Transition: The Aquino Government's First Seven Months

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The member countries of ASEAN are going through a difficult period that is bound to change the basic contour of their political and economic systems. The dependent satellite economies which constitute this regional community are being betrayed by protectionism and dumping practices of the global market which induced their birth in the first place.

The authoritarian regimes which preside over these transnationalized economies are also in deep crisis, their legitimacy placed under severe doubt, as the economic programs they nurtured around the global capitalist market are collapsing before their very eyes. Ironically, the same forces that occasioned their rise are now also threatening their survival. The global crisis has found resonance in Southeast Asia. It is clearly a crisis of the transnationalized economy and of the dependent authoritarian State.

That type of State was overthrown in the Philippines in February 1986. In its place, the Filipino people have installed a liberal democratic regime that is, however, rapidly discovering the limits of maneuverability imposed by the realities of global capitalism. As Filipinos attempt to rebuild what remains of an economy savaged by crony capitalists and their transnational partners, they are also realizing that "democratic space" does not necessarily translate to "national space", that the ouster of a dictator has no effect on the dwindling value of a country's exports, nor does it erase the contemporary slavery of the foreign debt.

The collapse of Philippine authoritarianism was accelerated by political events specific to the country. But the economic and social conditions which marked its collapse may be found in all of ASEAN. The economic crisis is everywhere, but its eruption into political crisis is necessarily contingent on the

existence of political forces that have the capability to mobilize the people around the crucial issues. In the Philippines, those forces were gradually formed in the years following the declaration of martial rule, but the critical broadening of their class base occurred after the assassination of former senator Benigno Aquino Jr. That single event sufficiently outraged the hitherto passive middle class, and unleashed a frenetic mobilizing campaign which culminated in the formation of popular movements which transcended the barriers of social classes.

What happened in the two-and-a-half years following the 1983 assassination is now a treasured part of Philippine history. The story of the February 1986 Philippine revolution is told everywhere.

This paper deals with the problems of the immediate post-Marcos period. This is the period of transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, where people are conscious that they are living in a fragile democratic conjuncture. But between the vision of democracy and its complete attainment is the reality and particularity of every historical situation. The transition brings into focus the interface of three basic factors: (1) the alternative vision, (2) the immediate problems, and (3) the concrete internal and external conditions which either limit or actualize the possibilities of social transformation. With the Philippine experience as context, this paper examines the dynamics of this interface, and poses certain questions about the future of democratic consolidation following the exit of authoritarian regimes.

Multiple Groups, Many Visions

The long struggle against the Marcos dictatorship gave rise to many political groups, parties and movements all offering one version or another of an alternative social order. Some were comprehensive in scope, touching on all aspects of life, while others were woven around a few crucial issues, thus implicitly recognizing the otherwise essential soundness of the

*Paper read at the 4th Meeting of the United Nations University Perspectives Project (South East Asia Sub-Region) on Transnationalization, the State and the People, Haadyai, Thailand, October 10-15, 1986.

existing social system.

Many of these alternative visions of the desirable society remained at the level of basic documents. Rare have been the instances when these visions could be brought under careful scrutiny, their terms clarified and fully debated. In this sense, the February Revolution was not preceded by an intense ideological discussion which could have distilled what might have been the unequivocal mandate of that revolution. In fact, there was almost a studious avoidance of such debate among the forces that were opposed to the dictatorship for fear that this might divide the concerted struggle against the regime. The net result of this, as we now know, is the dramatic ouster of a dictator and his replacement by a popular leader, whose support is precisely broad because she personifies not so much an alternative program of government but simply a whole people's determined struggle against a tyrant. Few leaders have had the enviable fortune (or misfortune) of coming to power with practically a blank cheque. Cory Aquino is one.

So instead of elucidating the alternative vision of the February Revolution, which up to this point remains ambiguous, we ask a somewhat different but related question: How far has the government of Cory Aquino managed to go, given the specific circumstances in which the February revolution actually happened?

II. Whose Revolution?

Enough material has now surfaced to substantiate the conclusion that the February Revolution was actually the "unintended" product of an aborted military coup.

It was unintended not in the sense that the people were unconscious of what they were doing for they clearly understood their presence at EDSA as a statement of rejection of the Marcos dictatorship. It was unintended rather in the sense that those who triggered the succession of events, Defense Minister Enrile and Vice Chief of Staff General Ramos did not anticipate the decisive intervention of the mass of unarmed civilians to frustrate what would have been the massacre of the mutinous forces under their command by the numerically superior soldiers of General Fabian Ver.

The aborted coup had been planned to take place at midnight of February 23rd to be signalled by the arrest of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos and the take-over of Malacañang by rebel troops. Had it succeeded, the provisional committee to run the government for the next 2-3 years would have included the present Minister of Defense Juan Ponce Enrile, (probably as head of the junta); the present Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos, Mrs. Cory Aquino herself (though in all likelihood not as head of that government), Jaime Cardinal Sin, Cesar Virata, Prime Minister in the Marcos government, and some businessmen.

Following the unprecedented display of militant vigilantism by the people in the presidential election, Cory Aquino had called, in mid-February, for a nationwide civil disobedience campaign which initially took the form of a boycott of crony companies and banks, newspapers and television stations. But no one in Cory's camp knew exactly how such a campaign could bring down Marcos and install a new government.

On the other hand, the underground revolutionary movement, through its open mass organizations, had endorsed Cory's call for civil disobedience though it refused to be bound by the timetable and mode of non-violent resistance advocated by Cory. The underground leaders had their own elaborate timetable, which by all accounts, appeared to concede to Marcos a longer staying power. Since they belittled the opportunities opened by the February snap elections, no one from the underground movement anticipated that the regime they had been battling for the last 18 years could be toppled in just four days, and by an amorphous movement armed only with rosaries, religious icons, and flowers.

When the Marcos-controlled Batasan decided to officially proclaim Marcos the winner of the February presidential election, the question that Mrs. Aquino's supporters had to answer was whether it was appropriate to file an official electoral protest before the Batasan as part of its struggle. It is safe to say that at that time, they had no clear concept of an alternative route to power outside of the electoral road. Unknown to them, a group of officers belonging to RAM had plotted to seize the government in order to intercept what they saw as the inevitable drift of the country towards the Left as long as Marcos remained president.

The betrayal of the plot by a frightened and reluctant officer led the RAM leaders to call off the execution of the plan at the last minute. Bolstered by the participation of Defense Minister Enrile and of General Ramos, who joined Enrile and the RAM at the last hour, the military rebels decided on the night of February 22 to stake out at the Ministry of National Defense building where most of the leaders held office, there to await their arrests by Marcos loyalist forces. Fully exploiting their access to the Catholic radio station, Radio Veritas, the rebels, now openly led by Enrile and Ramos, announced before a gathering of foreign and local journalists their resignation from the Marcos government, as well as their determination to fight to the death those whom Marcos had sent to arrest them.

Consequently, Minister Enrile became the civilian leader of an uprising by a small segment of the military (mostly members of the MND Security Group), which desperately solicited civilian support on that early evening of February 22nd. The support came after the affirmative calls made by Cardinal Sin and Butz Aquino were aired over Radio Veritas. At that precise moment the future president was not in Manila, but her symbolic presence was assured by the throngs of Cory supporters that surrounded and protected the two rebel military camps over the next four days of that eventful month of February 1986. No one, and especially not Mr. Marcos or his loyal Chief of Staff, General Fabian Ver, anticipated the magnitude of the crowds that came to manifest their oneness with the cause of the military rebels. Those who came knew that the defection of the soldiers to the cause of the people was the culmination of their long arduous effort to decisively isolate the regime by cutting off all its supports.

The people who came to join that peaceful uprising were drawn from all social classes, though there was indeed a marked dominance of the middle classes. The leadership was most definitely not working class nor peasant. It was middle class at best, and elite at worst. Popular organizations of all



kinds and sizes brought their own respective contingents. There was no central unified command throughout those four days, only a loosely structured system of coordination made possible by quickly-installed public address systems.

Yet on the eve of the dictator's final flight, those who gathered at the swearing-in of the new president were the politicians from the traditional political parties, the businessmen, and the tandem of Enrile and Ramos who had made that timely political somersault. The mass movement that supported Cory and protected the rebel soldiers from the assaults of the Marcos loyalists were still too disorganized and too fragmented to claim a meaningful role in the formation of a new government. They had proved effective in mobilizations that culminated in the ouster of the dictatorship, but at that crucial moment, they found themselves completely outmaneuvered by the more seasoned politicians.

The simple removal of the tyrant had given the people a feeling of such great relief that it also became practically a matter of indifference to them how Cory would eventually organize and manage a new government. There was total faith that things would, in any event, be different.

It is important to keep in mind what kind of personalities finally claimed the leadership of the February revolution and subsequently formed the government of that revolution. For there is a natural tendency to expect radical measures to emanate from a government placed in power by a popular revolution. The February revolution in the Philippines was indeed a popular political revolution. It was not a socialist revolution led by representatives of the working masses. It was a democratic revolution, but only in a political sense, since it was not even anti-feudal. Neither was it anti-imperialist. In short, the social and national questions (of class and national sovereignty) were relegated to the background as the struggle came to focus more and more sharply on the distinctly political and moral issues of authoritarianism and lack of accountability, mismanagement of the economy, corruption, abuse of power, and grave violations of human rights.

In spite of its limits, that revolution unleashed a flood of expectations that would be difficult to resist. The experience in mass mobilization, which it abundantly provided, sundered the existing political culture, and concretely opened the political agenda to many issues and questions which hitherto had been taken for granted. Revolution itself, as a legitimate means of ousting a tyranny, was added to the contemporary Filipino's vocabulary of permissible political action. A revolution, in this sense, no matter if it is tamed in the process, remains essentially open-ended in its effects. Such a situation is a most

fertile ground in which to nurture authentic democracy in all its aspects.

III. The February Revolution Government: A Tenuous Coalition

Shortly before Marcos' flight to Hawaii, Mr. Enrile had reportedly asked Mrs. Aquino's advisers to form a new civilian government, with Cory and Doy Laurel assuming their places as duly-elected president and vice-president respectively, based on the results of the February snap election. The first step was to swear-in Aquino and Laurel on the morning of February 25th. This was just a few hours ahead of Marcos's own oath-taking in the afternoon of the same day.

Mrs. Aquino's first official act was to appoint Juan Ponce Enrile as Defense Minister in her government and to promote Fidel Ramos to the position of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The military version of this event is that the two "original leaders" of the revolution, Enrile and Ramos, voluntarily handed over the reins of government to Cory Aquino supposedly in accordance with their belief in civilian authority and leadership. Having served in the Marcos cabinet for over 16 years, Enrile's presence in the Aquino cabinet was a discordant note in an otherwise harmonious transfer of power. Ramos, on the other hand, had always been regarded as a professional soldier, and thus his appointment to the top position in the AFP was not perceived as controversial.

It is the dominant presence of Enrile in the Cory government which makes that government a coalition. For Enrile represents not only himself, but the Ilocano vote which was clearly Marcos' but which has since passed on to him as the new Ilocano godfather. More than Ramos, Enrile also represents that segment of the military establishment which remains wary of the Aquino government. It is quite clear that he is trying to consolidate the entire military, or at least the great part of it, under his personal leadership.

As if to demonstrate that he represents the other pole in a dual-power structure, Minister Enrile has gone on a very high profile to explain his basic differences with the Aquino half of the government. The differences are sharpest on two issues: (1) Firstly, on the correct approach to the guerilla movement, and (2) Secondly, on the legal basis itself of the Aquino government. On the question of the underground communist threat, he has called for a firmer and much more forceful way of dealing with the rebels. He has not concealed his skepticism for the ongoing peace talks between the government and the National Democratic Front. And on the legality of the Aquino government, he has recently said that Mrs. Aquino repudiated the mandate given her by the people in the February election when she chose to abrogate the 1973 Constitution, dismantle the existing Batasan, and install a *de facto* revolutionary government with its own provisional constitution. He has also criticized what he views as the arbitrary replacement of local government officials with appointive officers-in-charge (OICs). Consequently, he says, the Aquino government has remained unstable, and the only remedy that he foresees is the holding of a presidential election as soon as possible.

Apart from Minister Enrile, Cory Aquino's cabinet repre-

sents a mixed bag of personalities whose political beliefs range from social democrat, to liberal democrat, to conservative elite democrat. The most sensitive positions, like that of the Executive Secretary and Minister of Labor, are in the hands of left-of-center human rights lawyers who were active in the so-called parliament of the streets (to distinguish them from the opposition electoral politicians like Vice-President Salvador Laurel). There are tensions between the politicians and the "cause-oriented" personalities, but these are never as severe as the almost permanent contradictions between the civilian leadership and the Enrile-ists in the military establishment.

It is these two elements within the coalition government - i.e., the traditional politicians belonging to the conservative electoral parties and the Enrile bloc in the military - which constitute the most powerful pressure pushing the Aquino government towards the right. Both factions advocate new elections for the presidency, both want the country to remain within the United States' sphere of influence, and both have sought to place the Aquino bloc on the defensive by highlighting the communist threat as the country's most important problem and by calling for resolute action against the communists. These two factions are natural allies for they represent the same dominant economic interests in the Philippines: the landlord class, big business, and transnational corporations. It is these basic interests that are most threatened by the expansion of the democratization process and the fundamental questioning of social structures that the new wave of liberality unleashed.

In choosing to focus attention on supposed communist infiltration of government and on the presumed imminence of a communist take-over, these two allied blocs in the Aquino government, which clearly represent a recycling of the old Marcos forces, are manifestly attempting to gradually absorb Cory Aquino herself into their fold, or at least neutralize the liberal elements within her camp who would push her to adopt a consistent reformist line. In short, while the whipping boys are the guerillas, whose numbers have been grossly overstated, the real offensive is aimed at the liberal democrats who are receptive to fundamental changes in the economic structure, in Philippine foreign policy, and in the rules of politics itself. The idea, in short, is to domesticate the reformist zeal of Cory Aquino, the anti-politician who was thrust into power by a mass movement rather than by the political parties or the military.

IV. How Far Can Cory's Coalition Government Go?

It will be seen from the discussion above that the first meaningful limits to reform and revolution are supplied by the composition of the government itself and the manner in which it came to power. Of these two, the more crucial one is the latter. In hindsight, there is every reason to think that the popular organizations, which formed the backbone of the militant mass actions during and after the election as well as in the February revolution, could have played a much larger role in the formation of the new government. But they were prevented from doing so by the more aggressive politicians who offered to Cory the security of familiarity since most of them had previously occupied positions in government. In contrast, the leaders from the popular organizations found the maneuvering distasteful, and their common lack of experience in running a government only reinforced their own diffidence. They who manned the polls and guarded the barricades soon found themselves marginalized in the ensuing scramble for government positions. Cory herself became insulated by an almost impenetrable *cordon sanitaire*. The few handpicked "cause-oriented" activists she had appointed to some positions during the first few days of her presidency themselves became very busy with the routine of government work. Because they were not large enough in number to constitute a critical mass in government, their voices were easily drowned out by the professional charlatans who dominated the new government.

How far can a government so dramatically launched to power, but so eclectically constituted, proceed?

For as long as it was the euphoria of the February revolution prodding it, the new government managed to go quite far. There were no countervailing voices, and if there were, they were too weak to oppose the wide clamor for change. The Marcos loyalists were too stunned to make any move except to look for safer hiding places. The situation was still too fluid, and only an immensely popular Cory was in actual control by virtue of the spell she had cast on an adoring public. They would have done anything for her.

Thus, with supreme confidence, and all in the first month of her presidency, Cory Aquino:

1. Ordered the immediate unconditional release of more than 500 political prisoners, including key figures of the underground movement, who were kept in the maximum

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security prison, like Jose Ma. Sison, former chairman and theoretician of the communist Party of the Philippines (CPP); Bernabe Buscayno alias Commander Dante, former head of the New People's Army (NPA); Horacio "Boy" Morales, suspected former chairman of the National Democratic Front (NDF); Fr. Edicio de la Torre, suspected Chairman and founder of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL); and Dr. Nemesio Prudente, suspected head of the Philippine Liberation Movement (PLM), among others.

2. Created the Presidential Committee on Human Rights (PCHR), and appointed the noted human rights lawyer, Jose W. Diokno, to the chairmanship. The PCHR was explicitly assigned to investigate all cases of corruption and human rights violation involving military personnel.
3. Created the Presidential Commission on Good government (PCGG), and named former Senator Jovito Salonga, a highly-respected lawyer, to head it. The PCGG was given the power to investigate the properties of Marcos and his cronies, to determine if they were ill-gotten, and to confiscate these if proven to be anomalously accumulated.
4. Created the Presidential Commission on Government Reorganization (PCGR) to prepare a comprehensive plan to restructure and streamline the entire government bureaucracy.
5. Abolished all the repressive decrees of the Marcos regime.
6. Restored total freedom of the press.
7. Invalidated the so-called Marcos Constitution of 1973 and promulgated a provisional Freedom Constitution with the Bill of Rights as its centerpiece.
8. Abolished the rubber-stamp Marcos legislature or Batasan, the majority of whose members had obediently proclaimed Marcos the legitimate winner of the snap presidential election on February 15th 1986.
9. Dismissed or retired most of the members of the Supreme Court who were known to have consistently set aside the interest of justice in order to accommodate Marcos' wishes.
10. Restored the effectivity of the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus*, the last bulwark against disappearances and illegal detentions.

Of these, the most crucial and perhaps also the most controversial were the abolition of the Batasan and the invalidation of the 1973 Constitution. In the following months, these revolutionary moves were repeated in the mass dismissal of local government officials at the level of town and city mayors and provincial governors. These actions struck the most sensitive nerves of the legal-political system that Marcos had so carefully crafted in the more than 13 years that he ruled the country as a dictator. By virtue of these decisions, all political powers were concentrated in Cory Aquino. The stage was set for her either to actualize a comprehensive revolutionary program of government or to restore the

country to the pattern of elite rule before the declaration of Martial Law in 1972. The instrument to carry out radical change was there, but Cory's government decided in the last analysis *not* to employ it. The question we must therefore ask is: why? But before we address this question, it would be useful to review the rest of the early progressive policies issued by the Aquino government, and to contrast these with the later ones which unmistakably exemplify a gradual drift to the right.

V. The Progressive Phase

The most progressive phase of Cory's administration was the first three months, from March to May 1986. Her confidence greatly reinforced by the mammoth crowds that flocked to the many rallies she had called, Cory went about violating every expectation that many people entertained about her on account of her being a woman and a non-politician. Her critics as well as some of her own supporters expected her to be indecisive and weak-willed, dependent on her male advisers, and panicky. The forcefulness of her first policy announcements jolted many.

Labor. In the middle of the worst economic crisis, she announced in May the full restoration of labor's right to organize and to strike. She had earlier appointed the controversial human rights lawyer Augusto "Bobbit" Sanchez to the position of Minister of Labor. Sanchez' openly pro-labor leanings and his tirades against multinationals became the object of a capitalist crusade to get him out of the Labor Ministry. He had once suggested that management must now begin to work out profit-sharing schemes for their workers as a way of actualizing the goal of social justice. This, too, did not escape the assault of the business community, which had self-righteously advised Mrs. Aquino to find ways of attracting more investments instead of scaring them away with "quasi-socialistic" talk such as "profit-sharing".

The Con-Com. Mrs. Aquino created a Constitutional Commission, with 48 hand-picked members drawn from various political persuasions, to draft a new constitution. Many, including her closest advisers, had warned her about the dangers posed by an appointive constitutional body. But she went ahead and proceeded to name 48 individuals to that commission. To the dismay of the right, the commission included well-known activists identified with the national democratic movement. At least two of them had campaigned for a boycott of the February presidential election. And to the consternation of the left, politicians from the Marcos party were offered five seats, without prior screening. There were professors, a student, a businessmen. There were Muslims, a Catholic priest and nun, a bishop, and a Protestant minister. There were traditional politicians and activists from the parliament of the streets. There were lawyers, ex-soldiers, landlords and journalists. It was a good mix, on the whole, but like Cory Aquino, it was not impervious to external influence.

People's Councils. Immediately after the February uprising, there was an urgent call from the popular movements to "institutionalize" people's power. It proceeded from a recognition that the people's power revolution rested on an amor-

phous movement that might be effective in toppling down a tyrannical government, but would be entirely useless in building an alternative social order. For that, organized people's power was needed. Some people had suggested the Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS) as a model, but these were structures that matured in the course of the struggle, not after. In any event, President Aquino lent her popularity to the concept of "Popular Councils", which were to be created at the level of the village community. They would be the people's mechanisms for collective intervention in the affairs of government. This was a decisive homage to the notion of popular democracy.

Foreign Debt. In the area of the economy, the Aquino government initially moved as if it had no intention of being bound by the pragmatism that the business community was pressing upon it. The question of the \$26.4 billion external debt was the most important item in the economic agenda. When she was campaigning for the presidency, Mrs. Aquino

popular support she enjoyed, she magnanimously held out the hand of peace to all groups that had until then opposed the government. Her theory, perhaps simplistic as it was, was that the armed underground forces were basically anti-Marcos, and since the dictator has fled, she expected that the time was ripe for sincere dialogues between government and rebel groups. She was confident that her sincerity was her greatest asset, and that there was no way the rebels could reasonably spurn her offer of peace. Such an approach, clearly a political one, threatened to peripheralize the defense establishment and further diminish the reasons for the maintenance of its present bloated size.

VI. The Drift To the Right

At the time of this writing, Cory's government will have been in power for just slightly over seven months. Her first three months in office, as we have tried to show above,



had stated that, if elected, she would call for a selective repudiation of all external obligations that may be shown to have been fraudulently contracted. In short, the Filipino people would pay only legitimately contracted debts. That position was subsequently formalized by her appointee, Economic Planning Minister Solita Monsod. In accordance with this stand, the Aquino government sought dialogues with the finance ministers of some Latin American countries notably Peru, which had then just announced a unilateral policy of paying not more than 10% of its export earnings towards debt service.

The Guerrillas. In the area of national security, Mrs. Aquino made no effort to conceal her aversion towards the militaristic solution adopted by the Marcos government towards guerilla movements, whether of the ideological or ethnic variety. Like a president who knew the large base of

mirrored all the basic aspirations of the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship. The next four months, however, have been a dramatic retreat from the earlier positions she had taken.

The Con-Com. Filipinos remember how the crowd had cheered almost every name she mentioned as members of the Constitutional Commission that would draft the fundamental charter of the government produced by the February Revolution. The occasion she had chosen for this announcement was a public rally on EDSA, the site of the February Revolution, to mark the first 100 days of that revolution. The crowd wildly cheered until she announced that the remaining five members of the commission were to be drawn from the politicians from the other side, meaning the Marcos party. The day before this announcement, an influential American newspaper had urged her to include elements from the opposi-

tion as a step towards political normalization. No one believed that she would succumb to such pressure, but the final appointment of known Marcos henchmen, led by former Labor Minister Blas Ople, left no doubt about Cory's vulnerability to American pressure.

The Military. The main prop of the Marcos dictatorship was the military. In the span of 20 years, Marcos succeeded in transforming almost the entire Armed Forces of the Philippines into a gigantic security agency wholly devoted to the preservation of the lives and interests of Marcos and his family. As a measure of protection, Enrile had nurtured his own Ministry of National Defense security group, led by Col. Gringo Honasan who subsequently founded the RAM. But the bulk of the military establishment was solidly under the control of Gen. Fabian Ver and his three sons. Outside of the regular armed forces, Marcos had also encouraged his own cronies and political supporters in the provinces to create their own private armies. Most of members of these private armies were armed and organized as members of the paramilitary units known as the Integrated Civilian Home Defense Forces (ICHDF). These were notorious in the countryside for the abuses and atrocities committed against civilians. Following the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship, the cause-oriented organizations called for the massive revamp of the armed forces, the dismantling of the private armies and the paramilitary units, and the prosecution and punishment of notorious torturers and corrupt officers. The record of the Aquino government as far as the armed forces is concerned has been almost zero. It is almost as if the last-minute turn-around of the military in those critical days of February had completely cleansed the crimes committed by many of its members.

The apparent helplessness of the Aquino government insofar as the military is concerned was dramatically manifested during the abortive July 6, 1986 Manila Hotel coup, which was participated in by at least 3 generals, some colonels, and about 200 enlisted men. The record shows that not a single one of these soldiers had been asked to account for their participation in this act of rebellion, nor was anybody meted any penalty heavier than the 30 push-ups that Gen. Ramos had imposed on them.

Land Reform. Every revolutionary government, including even the pseudo-revolutionary ones, typically begin their programs with a dramatic announcement of a genuine land reform. When Cory Aquino was still a presidential candidate she had made vague references to a genuine land reform program, however, upon assuming the Presidential office, she became disturbingly silent on this important issue. The Minister of Agrarian Reform, Mr. Heherson Alvarez, also the very last of the ministers to be named, had grandly announced the expansion of the scope of the existing land reform program to include all agricultural croplands, instead of limiting its effectivity to rice and corn lands. But the concrete program or implementation and the creation of support institutions that would make the program more than just a paper proclamation have not yet materialized. The reason being given is financial, i.e. that there are no funds with which to finance a comprehensive program. Even so, the presidential silence is deafening, especially since she herself had announced, when she was still a candidate, that her own family's

huge sugar *hacienda* in Tarlac province would be the first example of land reform under her administration.

The Guerillas. In her much-applauded speech before the joint session of the US Congress, President Aquino had said that her peace effort with the guerillas does not mean that she was not prepared to "unsheath the sword of war" if the negotiations fail because of the intransigence of the rebels. During her American sojourn, she actually began to sound more and more militaristic. In one TV interview in the US, she actually said explicitly that if everything else fails, she was prepared to use force against a segment of her own people. Such a policy is, of course, conventional; but it is definitely out of character for Mrs. Aquino who had awed the entire world by her resolute adoption of the non-violent approach during the struggle against Marcos. Today, when her Minister of Defense speaks openly of "active defense", Mrs. Aquino no longer feels compelled to stress the defensive aspect, an obvious concession to the military establishment's more offensive posture on this question. The shift to a military solution to the problem posed by the guerillas can only deepen her government's dependence of US military assistance.

Retreat From Selective Repudiation. We have earlier noted that Mrs. Aquino had appointed a liberal-minded economic Planning Minister (Monsod) who coined the term "selective repudiation" to describe the principle by which the Aquino government would seek to settle the question of the country's external debt. Unfortunately, it is not the Planning Minister who negotiates with the IMF-WB and the international commercial banks, but the Minister of Finance and the Governor of the Central Bank. Both of them were against any mention of the word "repudiation", and both had pressed for the unconditional honoring of all the foreign debts left behind by the Marcos regime. For as long as repudiation was being officially used, the IMF-WB would not sit down for any serious talk. In time, the "offensive" phrase was dropped, and an ambiguous euphemism was substituted: "case-to-case disengagement". Nobody knows what this clumsy phrase means up to now, but everybody heard Mrs. Aquino loud and clear when she assured America that her government would honor all her foreign debts. Before she left America, the IMF and the WB expressed satisfaction with the economic memorandum that her government had drawn, and a new loan of \$808 million was approved by these two powerful multilateral institutions.

Debt-to-Equity. Cory the candidate had stated that self-reliance would be an abiding principle in her government. No new loans would be contracted as much as possible, and foreign investments would be welcomed and encouraged only in those areas that could not be adequately handled by local capital. This comes close to the formula Clive Thomas had once proposed for the Caribbean as far as foreign loans and investment were concerned: the minimum that we cannot do without, rather than the maximum that we can get. But all this has been buried and forgotten. A new scheme which aims to sell the Philippine debt threatens to de-nationalize a great portion of the Philippine economy. The program which has been launched works as follows: investors will be enticed to buy Philippine loan papers which are currently being traded in

the international capital market at a 30-40% discount from their face value. Buyers of these loan papers can redeem them with the Philippine Central Bank for their full value in Philippine currency. The only stipulation is that the peso proceeds be used to purchase equity in Philippine enterprises. A total of \$14 billion worth of Philippine debts are redeemable in this manner. Filipino nationalists had warned that this amount is enough to control every sector of the Philippine economy.

IMF Conditionality. A measure of the criticism against the Marcos regime was its subservience to the IMF and the World Bank. The recovery of the nation's self-esteem during the February revolution had given rise to the expectation that the country's dealings with the IMF-WB would henceforth be different -- that Cory's government would defend the national economy from the assaults imposed from outside. The post-February record has not shown any substantial departure from the practice set by the Marcos regime. In dutiful compliance with IMF-WB conditions, the Aquino government embarked on a determined program to liberalize importations by lifting quantity restrictions on a range of imported items. Only the vigorous campaign of Filipino businessmen, which found resonance in the position taken by the Minister of Trade and Industry Jose Concepcion, to halt the implementation of this impending decimation of Filipino capital prevented the full-scale enforcement of this WB condition. In a period marked by the most intense protection of Western and Japanese markets, a severely weakened Filipino economy, suffering from dwindling export earnings, is being asked to open its door to foreign products. But the Aquino government has not been able to employ its immense popularity as an effective bargaining resource in its negotiations with international money-lenders.

The Return of the Elite from Exile. Upon the declaration of Martial Law, some wealthy families who had been branded as oligarchs fled the country after their properties were taken over through various means by Marcos and his cronies. The February Revolution served to liberate these properties from the grasping hands of Marcos, members of his family, and his cronies. People expected that these properties would either become State property or be offered for sale to their workers. This has not happened; in many instances, the elites who had returned from exile came to reclaim their properties. Some of them had been active supporters of the struggle against Marcos while they were abroad, and they felt justified to demand that the wealth that Marcos had taken away from them be restored.

The Provincial Elites. Apart from the military, the other vital rampart of Marcos rule were the mayors and governors who constituted the critical nodes in the elaborate political network that Marcos had developed nationwide. These were set to work in the snap presidential election, which saw the most massive cheating and fraudulence ever committed in any Philippine election. There was no way that Mrs. Aquino's government could have functioned unless these local politicians were displaced from their positions. A presidential memorandum from Cory made that possible. But the replacements have all been mostly drawn from the same elites belonging to either UNIDO or PDP-Laban. Leaders from the cause-oriented movements have seldom been considered.

As for the much-touted "people's councils" which were supposed to institutionalize people's power, nothing more was heard about them, either from Mrs. Aquino or the Ministry of Local Government or from the popular organizations who had initially lobbied for their creation. For the movement, everybody seems to be gearing up for the coming local elections. Movements are transforming themselves into electoral parties, and the new politics of popular pressure is shunned aside.

The Bureaucracy. If the military has more or less been immovable, so has the bureaucracy. The creation of the Presidential Commission on Government Reorganization notwithstanding, the Aquino government continues to function with the same unchanged bureaucracy. Only the very top officials have been replaced. The newly-appointed ones, practically crippled by a presidential memorandum which prevents them from laying off or replacing personnel, have had to live at the mercy of the existing personnel who could easily sabotage any innovation that threatens their security of tenure. But the real struggle of the new bureaucrats has been how to determine the trustworthy from the fakes or "balimbings". Add to this the difficulty of securing important documents that would attest to wrongdoings committed by the previous administrators. Yet, Cory has chosen to err on the side of conservatism with respect to this issue. Her concern was that these people should not be displaced and should not be added to an already serious problem of unemployment.

VII. The Dilemmas of Political Consolidation

Cory was aware that her tremendous popularity would soon wane if she failed to address the single most important and immediate demand of the people: livelihood. The onset of the financial crisis in 1983 had led to the rapid contraction of the Philippine economy. The measures imposed by the IMF-WB to arrest inflation only served to accelerate the decomposition of what was once a vibrant economy, despite its high dependency of foreign loans and imports. By the time Marcos fled the country, the whole economy had been devastated. The crisis of Third World commodity prices left a deep scar on the face of Negros, a region entirely dependent on the production of sugar. When Cory took over, 400,000 sugar workers and their families were nearing a state of starvation. Half of the region's sugar lands were no longer being planted because of the depressed price of sugar in the world market.

In the cities, factories, big and small, were being hit left and right by workers, pickets and strikes. The issues which they carried were: payment of prescribed minimum wages and other approved benefits, and the right to form their own unions different from existing company unions.

Export-oriented enterprises have retrenched and production capacities were being idled by the drop in global demand. Garments, electronic semi-conductors, footwear and furniture were all feeling the effects of the slump.

Filipino contract workers from the Middle East have started to come home, with unrenewed contracts, as the construction boom in the Gulf countries began to slow down as a result of the drastic decline in petroleum prices. Domestic construction has practically disappeared, killed a hundred

times over by high interest rates in the preceding two years.

Against this backdrop, President Aquino spoke to the local business community and urged them to invest in the country: that it was time to bring back the capital they had brought abroad for safety. However, local capital was adamant, and they invented all kinds of reasons: that the political situation was unstable; that the radical labor unions were sowing trouble; that the government had not yet promulgated a clear economic policy; that they were awaiting clearance from the IMF, etc. One suspect that the real reason is that these people did not know what to produce as there was no meaningful demand either locally or from abroad. Locally, Filipinos had simply no money because most had no regular employment. Internationally, what could one produce which the Western industrialized countries have not yet produced at subsidized prices?

The government ministers knew the virtues of self-reliance, yet how could one change an extremely dependent economy overnight? In time, the Aquino government realized that its problem was not yet how to regulate foreign capital participation but how to entice it to come in. Many times her finance minister had said that jobs could only be created by investments, and investment could only come from within or from outside. Since local capitalists were disinterested in investing, the appeal must be addressed to the foreigners. This was the whole point of Mrs. Aquino's door-to-door sales blitz to Singapore and America and later to Japan. But in the interim, without either local or foreign private capital coming in, the government must bear the task of generating livelihood-generation program for the countryside. The idea is to allocate government funds to build, repair and maintain rural infrastructure, and in so doing, generate a measure of local demand. The money allotted for the purpose is about P4 billion or \$200 million, a good amount that will definitely to fuel even a small amount of economic recovery. That amount is only about twice the yearly interest that is paid on the \$2.1 billion Bataan Nuclear Power Plant, which has recently been mothballed by the Aquino government for safety reasons.

The countryside needs larger capital assistance to get agricultural production back on the track. Without credit, even

the most elegantly designed land reform program would go down in failure. The government clearly must assume a far more interventionist role in the economy than it has so far been willing to play. But the nightmare of the Marcos interventionist State is still too fresh in its mind that it has prominently projected private capital as the engine of economic recovery. At this crucial point the Aquino government has erred in equating the trauma created by the Marcos State upon the Philippine economy with all instances of State intervention. Whether it chooses to do it or not, the Aquino government will soon find itself having to play the role of catalyst or engine of economic recovery, instead of banking permanently on the non-existent dynamism of private capital.

The Political Implications. For every day that the Aquino government fails to revive the economy, several more Filipinos either join criminal gangs now prowling the cities or they join the NPA. Each day that a strike is left unresolved, disenchantment seeps in. The key is the resumption of normal economic activity, and that cannot materialize unless capital comes in. This is the only reason one can think of to explain why Mrs. Aquino has agreed to place her government at the mercy of the IMF-WB and the international creditor banks.

Ironically, therefore, the same dependency relationship which was responsible for the fragility of the Philippine economy under Marcos, and which indirectly led to his downfall, is being pursued by Mrs. Aquino's government. *Does she have a choice?*

It may be argued that she does. She may opt to broaden the base of her country's dependency by courting support from the socialist countries. She can try to get the economy going by precisely compelling the propertied classes to utilize idle capital under pain of sequestration by the State. A good example are the agricultural lands. If they are not being made productive by planters for some reason or other, the government should take them over and allow them to be used by the landless to raise food crops.

If export prices are extraordinarily low, the Aquino government may try to re-orient the direction of economic activity from foreign export to production for the domestic market. Such autocentric development stands no chance

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of being implemented without considerable State intervention. Yet, the dilemma is that each time the State intervenes to nurture economic activity and direct to more distinctly social ends, it is in effect violating the market and stepping on the prerogatives of private property.

The point is that there is hardly anything that the present government can do in the interest of social justice which does not somehow threaten the entrenched interests of the dominant classes. Consequently, it must make a choice between pleasing the entrenched classes in the interest of short-term political consolidation, or addressing the interests of the vast majority who are poor, with the eye to broadening the base of her support and thus securing the popular legitimacy of her regime. Cory's program of government stands somewhere in-between these two options.

It is perhaps a testimony to her ideological ingenuousness and political stubbornness that she precisely intends to realize certain goals that have been proven to be not feasible in other settings. Economically, her government seeks to maintain a market economy with a far less interventionist State, while hoping to uplift the condition of super-exploited workers and peasants. Her economic program, as we have shown before, manifests an almost dogmatic belief in the global capitalist market as the motor of national growth at a time when the anarchy of this market is wreaking havoc on the economies of countries like that of Thailand and Malaysia.

Politically, the Aquino government seems determined to maintain an open democratic regime in which fundamental freedoms are not only preserved but also fiercely promoted. There is likewise a conscious insistence on the unequivocal supremacy of civilian authority over the military. Both principles are sought to be enforced within a precarious political situation marked by the presence of an active underground guerilla movement on one hand and US-oriented and rabidly anti-communist military establishment, on the other.

Conclusion

What the Aquino government seeks to tame and preside over is what is known as the "democratic conjuncture", a politico-economic phase which, in the era of imperialism 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 does the Aquino experiment attempt, with great confidence, to accomplish what many generally consider to be untenable dreams.

Yet, in a strange way, most Filipino analysts find themselves slowly being infected by the naive and probably foolish optimism of a government whose survival seems to rest almost completely on the energy supplied by tenacious faith and personal goodwill, even as they all desperately watch the unfolding of the resolute logic of structures and processes no longer informed by human reason.

That the government presently faces tremendous odds is perhaps already obvious. But even so, its problems are nowhere near those confronting the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua. For Cory is not perceived as a threat by the guardians of the so-called Free World. Had she turned clearly to the left, perhaps the reception would be different.

On the other hand, the urgent reforms aimed at redressing centuries of social injustice in the economy are impatiently waiting to be addressed.

There are times when Cory's government, which millions of Filipino democrats installed to power, begins to look like a recycled version of the regime that it recently replaced - the same unreformed army, worsening unemployment, gross disparity in wealth, income and privilege, hunger and mass poverty, a feverish anti-communist drive, subservience to foreign institutions, etc.

Yet the least substantial reforms, even if Cory felt inclined towards them, would not have been possible unless pressed for and supported by an organized public. The democratic space for political articulation is clearly there, indicating the receptivity of this government to popular pressure, a thing so alien to the previous regime.

In addition, the inertia of the old structures remain strong. One can say that perhaps the only important thing that the enemies of change have going for them is the people's comfort with the familiar, their corresponding fear of the unfamiliar, and the presumed legitimacy of existing arrangements. Such attitudes are sustained by ignorance - ignorance of the real state of the nation, ignorance of the causes of and relationships between events, and ignorance of the options or alternative possibilities. In short: by helplessness and despair, which in turn breeds a people's classic lack of distrust in their own efficacy.

What this means is that even assuming it were possible to install a more revolutionary government in the Philippines today, it is still doubtful whether it can last, or whether it can call upon the masses to defend it, whether it can withstand the domestic and external assaults against it. The organized mass base for a truly revolutionary government is not yet there.

In spite of all of this, it is undeniable that we are living through a transition process that is in itself a vehicle for an entire agenda of thoroughgoing social democratization. The Gordian knot of tyranny and abuse of power has been cut. Many latent forces were awakened by the emergence of Cory Aquino, and these are all basically democratic in inclination. People who have known what it is to live under a tyranny for 13 years cannot easily forget. They would staunchly resist the rise of another authoritarianism.

To be sure, a military coup may be attempted anytime in the Philippines. It may even succeed installing to power another dictator, but it is highly doubtful that it can last. The seeds of popular resistance had been nourished by the February revolution. We are therefore quite certain that it will not be easy for a military government to rule for any extended period now. But the primary question remains: what does it take to consolidate popular democracy? The Philippine experience has taught us that the conditions that led to the collapse of the Marcos regime are vastly different from those that are necessary to preserve and advance democracy. The theory of an alternative praxis for the transition period should point that way for the meaningful participation of all democratic forces in this process, if the fatal abstentionism which has afflicted many left parties in the past is to be avoided. The basic elements of such a theory are likely to be formed on the soil of Philippine practice in the coming years. **K**