

A Year After: Between Disenchantment and Irrepressible Faith

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A full year of the Aquino government has quickly passed, and many Filipinos still find it hard to believe that one year has indeed actually passed. The reason for the disbelief is that after the dramatic release of political detainees, the dismantling of the Marcos rubber-stamp parliament, the overhaul of the Supreme Court, and the nullification of the existing Marcos constitution, hardly anything else has followed, which would assure the people that a revolution has indeed happened.

But, when the head of State is someone like Mrs. Aquino, well-liked, totally trusted, and overwhelmingly popular, the people are a lot more tolerant. They themselves would invent excuses for the leaders they had put in power. They would say that the nightmare is over, but it would take some time before we can dismantle the remaining ramparts of the Marcos dictatorship.

In the meanwhile, those ramparts are not just waiting to be scuttled. A faction of the military has remained hostile to the new government. Another faction, the one that teamed up with Mrs. Aquino and people's power in the February revolution, has served notice on more than one occasion that it has its own ideas about the direction that the new government should take.

Similarly, while the heads of the local governments have been replaced with officers-in-charge sympathetic to the Aquino government, the rest of the bureaucracy remains basically unchanged. There are, of course, new chiefs of departments in the different sections of the civil service. But the new leadership has had to work with a structure that had been carefully crafted to serve the ends of an authoritarian leadership. Cory's people have found that they must contend with the entrenched logic of a self-perpetuating bureaucracy.

In the middle of all this, the centuries-old problems of landlessness, poverty and marginalization are being treated as if they were just among the ordinary items of a usual day's agenda. The revolutionary zeal that was expected to be demonstrated by the new government had not come. The

Minister for Agrarian Reform was the last of the Cabinet people to be appointed. The job was not seen as a choice position, but more like a residual gift that had to be given to someone who had helped the new administration in the past.

The first order of the day was the democratization of power. But right here the Aquino government found itself frozen on its tracks. In its quest for normalcy and stability, it followed the path of least resistance — reconciliation, based more on compromise than on justice. This approach is most clearly demonstrated in the way it has dealt so far with the Marcos cronies. Instead of going after them with the full force of the law, it settled for a return of a portion of the wealth they had stolen, provided there would be no charges.

Emboldened by the timidity and tentativeness with which the new government exercised its prerogatives, the Marcos loyalists began to consolidate their ranks. Some of those who had hurriedly fled the country in February last year could find enough confidence to come back. A number of them have even dared to run for public office in the May elections. And definitely, most of them would be staging a comeback in the local elections scheduled for August 1987.

Many sensitive Filipinos have started to talk of a restoration. This view has been challenged only by those who sarcastically ask how we could possibly have a restoration if there had been no displacement in the first place. Indeed there is a growing number of those who would contend that the revolution is not just being intercepted: it simply never happened.

Such judgment might be a little harsh, but it expresses genuine disenchantment. And that disenchantment is increasing everyday. The electoral festivals and the sometimes comic attempts of military plotters have somehow diverted the people's attention from their most basic problems. But when the prices of consumer goods begin to rise, as they will inevitably, the Aquino government would need to show more results to assure the people that it truly deserves the total support that they have so far lavished on it. **K**