



APPENDIX 1.6

CONFIDENTIAL CABLE FROM THE US EMBASSY IN MANILA, “IMELDA AND THE INTELLECTUALS,” 25 FEBRUARY 1976

This document shows another side of UP and the Marcos dictatorship besides outright dissent (from the likes of Francisco “Dodong” Nemenzo) and straight sycophancy. A little over a year later, Imelda would be given an honorary doctorate by UP.

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Tags: PFOR, RP

Subject: Imelda and the Intellectuals

1. February 23 Asian editor of Newsweek carries four page spread on Imelda Marcos, the result of a visit here by two editors earlier this month. Articles, which include verbatim interviews with Imelda and president, are generally favorable and Imelda likes them.

2. However, story contains comment attributed to “western diplomat,” which says, inter alia, “the upper middle class and the

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SUBJECT: IMELDA AND THE INTELLECTUALS

1. FEBRUARY 23 ASIAN EDITOR OF NEWSWEEK CARRIES FOUR PAGE SPREAD ON IMELDA MARCOS, THE RESULT OF A VISIT HERE BY TWO EDITORS EARLIER THIS MONTH. ARTICLES, WHICH INCLUDE VERBATIM INTERVIEWS WITH IMELDA AND PRESIDENT, ARE GENERALLY FAVORABLE AND IMELDA LIKES THEM.

2. HOWEVER, STORY CONTAINS COMMENT ATTRIBUTED TO "WESTERN DIPLOMAT," WHICH SAYS, INTER ALIA, "THE UPPER MIDDLE CLASS AND THE INTELLECTUALS CAN'T STAND HER." SINCE I WAS THE ONLY "WESTERN DIPLOMAT" THE NEWSWEEK EDITORS SPOKE TO, IT HAS NOT BEEN DIFFICULT FOR IMELDA TO IDENTIFY ME AS THE SOURCE, AND I HAVE NOT DENIED THE GENERAL THRUST OF THE QUOTE, EVEN THOUGH THE LANGUAGE IS NOT ENTIRELY ACCURATE.

3. GIVEN THIS BACKGROUND, IMELDA HASTILY ORGANIZED A DINNER FEBRUARY 24, TO WHICH SHE INVITED "GROUP OF INTELLECTUALS AND AMERICAN AMBASSADOR," IN POSH NEW SUBURBAN RESTAURANT. I ARRIVED JUDICIOUSLY LATE (ABOUT 9 P.M.) TO FIND A RESTLESS GROUP OF ABOUT 30 "INTELLECTUALS," WELL INTO THEIR THIRD OR FOURTH PRE-PRANDIAL LIBATION. THEY WERE MOSTLY PROFESSORS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES AND WERE BEING WATCHED OVER BY TWO OF IMELDA'S

Figure 1. A copy of the declassified cable.

Source: US Department of State. 1976 February 25. "Imelda and the Intellectuals." Document number 1976MANILA02685, film number D760073-0310.

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/createpdf?rid=102976&dt=2082&dl=1345>.

intellectuals can't stand her." Since I was the only "Western diplomat" the *Newsweek* editors spoke to, it has not been difficult for Imelda to identify me as the source, and I have not denied the general thrust of the quote, even though the language is not entirely accurate.

3. Given this background, Imelda hastily organized a dinner February 24, to which she invited "group of intellectuals and American ambassador," in posh new suburban restaurant. I arrived judiciously late (about 9 p.m.) to find a restless group of about 30 "intellectuals," well into their third or fourth pre-prandial libation. They were mostly professors from the University of the Philippines and were being watched over by two of Imelda's sheepdogs, Carmen Guerrero Nakpil and Adriano Cristobal.

4. About 9:30, Imelda swept in with a group of friends, all of whom identified themselves to me as "upper middle class" (except for one, who whispered that she was an oligarch). We were then disposed at a large u-shaped table, where I was seated at the center, between Imelda and Carmen Nakpil. Four "intellectuals" were seated opposite us, but as the dinner progressed, they were replaced in relays by other teams of four. Not one of them ever said a word, but all were allowed, between courses, to overhear ineffable expressions of wisdom.

5. Conversation opened civilly, with Imelda depreciating Bali summit, approving Nixon in China (she scoffed when I suggested we ought to invite Teng Hsiao-Ping to Washington), and eventually raising the *Newsweek* articles. In due course, however, it turned into a monologue, pronounced largely for the relay teams of attentive intellectuals, about the folly of pandering to the Western press, the fact that U.S. businessmen would invest in the Philippines for a profit no matter what the regime, etc. Eventually, this prose swept into the grander vistas of a queen regent expounding plans for the future of the kingdom. Universities are to be broken up and dispersed to the provinces, co-located with "sources of electric power" and new satellite population clusters are to be formed, with industrial centers of their own, cottage industries are to be eschewed as mere palliatives, agriculture is to be mechanized, but creature comforts are to be moderate, because "we Asians prefer the simple life."

6. During all this fascinating disquisition, several of the professors who had imbibed well were distracted by the music of the orchestra and invited some of the upper middle class ladies to dance. One distinguished [sic], but decidedly inebriated UP department head approached Imelda with the same intention. After gently carressing

[sic] her hand several times in an effort to gain her attention, he was led quietly [sic] away to the bar by one of the security men, who occupied two smaller round tables immediately adjacent to our dais. It was shortly after this event that Cristobal, apparently on the urging of other professors, approached and suggested that curfew had arrived (one a.m.).

7. As we broke from the table to go, Imelda, with some humor, made clear that I had failed to catch the spark of her enthusiasm by telling me that I was still obviously “not on her wavelength.” I replied by saying that I thought I was fairly well tuned in to FM. She replied immediately, “here you have to be on stereo.” In case I didn’t get the point, Ms. Makpil [sic] observed “here we have IM, too.”

8. Finally, remembering the intellectuals, Imelda convened them around here [sic] in a huddle for a few final words of wisdom. Then, gathering up a couple of upper middle class ladies, she swept into her limousine and sped off into the night. As I left, the intellectuals were clustered in some bewilderment on the sidewalk, while one of the security men passed among them handing out curfew passes. Newsweek missed a great vignette.

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