



APPENDIX 5.4

THE PRESIDENT'S PHYSIQUE



The President's physique draws executive admiration

“Malakas and Maganda” was not only restricted to portraits commissioned by Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, or to sycophantic verses in works such as *Ferdinand Marcos: An Epic* (1974) by Guillermo C. de Vega and *Imelda Marcos: A Tonal Epic* (1975) by Alejandrino G. Hufana. In an otherwise straightforward document on the Philippine National Railways’s accomplishments, one can find this captioned portrait of Philippine National Railways executives giddily looking at Ferdinand Marcos’s shirtless physique.

Indeed, Marcos’s identification with “Malakas” at times took a surreal/comical turn. Here’s Donald Kirk reporting on Marcos in 1981: “The setting befit the tone of the Marcos presidency. Crowds swarmed for a chance to see the Hulk [Lou Ferrigno] and a bunch of Philippine weight-lifters and bodybuilders The Hulk came in,

talking in tough but genial condescension as security guards elbowed the throng aside. Then came Marcos . . . his guards tried to shoo me away, but I got close enough to chat briefly. He said he was a big fan of body-building . . . Marcos presided over the exhibition, praising the Hulk and the Filipino musclemen, saying how much he admired body-building, how he himself worked out daily. The atmosphere, Marcos on stage, surrounded by body-builders in briefs, flexing muscles, was hysterical, the stuff of satire” (2007, 56).

And these are all for show, indeed. For as his aide, Arturo Aruiza disclosed:

In 1968, he began suffering from hyperuricemia or high levels of uric acid in the blood, and was given a medicine called zylprim. From 1964 to 1970, his haemoglobin levels continued to fluctuate sharply, and his renal condition turned for the worse. By 1979 he was having trouble with his blood pressure, registering alarming highs of 150–160 over 90–120. He showed signs of renal dysfunction: weakness, tremors, and anorexia.

The president’s first hemodialysis was on September 24, 1979. This soon controlled his hypertension. His uremic conditions abated but he still showed the bothersome effects of dialysis, like itching, dryness of the mouth, weakness, congestion, and joint pains, especially in the right hip. He kept a full schedule, however, interrupted occasionally with emergency dialysis because of pulmonary infections.

He had other ailments.

His heart was not all that good, though he liked to boast he had a strong heart. He had cardiomyopathy, a disease of the muscular tissues of the heart, and biventricular dilations or enlargement of both ventricles of the heart. He suffered from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and recurrent asthma. He had arteriosclerotic cardiovascular disease “with extensive calcification of the thoracic and abdominal aorta.” He had chronic recurrent prostatitis and suffered from glucose intolerance.

But his principal ailment—what would kill him eventually—was his failing kidneys. (1991, 110)

References

- Aruiza, Arturo C. 1991. *Ferdinand E. Marcos: Malacañang to Makiki*. Quezon City: ACAruiza Enterprises.
- Kirk, Donald. 2007. “Memories of Marcos.” In *Dateline Manila*, edited by the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines, 55–60. Manila: Anvil Publishing, Inc.

Source

- Philippine National Railways. 1978. *Annual Report: Philippine National Railways ‘78*. Manila: Philippine National Railways.