

Land, Poverty and Politics in the Philippines

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Chapter 3

The Political Context

By Mamerto Canlas

Philippine politics has always been fluid and fast-changing. A new phase, however, has begun to unfold; a new political tradition is in the making. The ousting of Ferdinand Marcos in February 1986 marked the end of fourteen years of dictatorial and autocratic rule. The government of Corazon Aquino is forging this new tradition through its declared commitment to 'restore democratic rule'.

Trying to understand the changing face of Philippine politics draws us into conflicting interpretations and frameworks of analysis. This book is an attempt to understand the prospects for development in the Philippines, and this paper is a contribution to clarifying its political context.

An Anatomy of Philippine Politics

The Role of Clans

In the Philippines, any attempt to analyze the political situation requires us to look at the activities of the economically and politically powerful families or clans, which are more important organizations than political parties. Whether the Cojuangco-Aquino clan will become another Romualdez-Marcos clan will be instructive to watch.

In contrast to previous administrations, the pillars of the Marcos regime were the 'cronies' (those people Marcos drew around him and awarded with political and economic power), technocrats and top military officials, rather than predominantly a new configuration of the clans.

At present, various clans have rallied behind President Aquino's leadership and ride on her popularity. The extent of her clan's accommodation has been so great that sooner or later, with the intensification of factionalism and confrontation among themselves, the coalition will become vulnerable and President Aquino's future at best uncertain.

The ousting of Marcos resulted in the dislocation of his faction's power and economic base. President Aquino's immediate decision to replace duly elected local government officials with her own

government- appointed officers-in-charge (pending local elections) was a way of neutralizing and capturing the political base of the Marcos group. The sequestration of the wealth of the identified Marcos cronies by the Presidential Commission for Good Government was a step towards dismantling their economic base. However, the government's efforts to date have not produced substantial results in neutralizing Marcos men.

Some Marcos supporters merely shifted loyalties to the government— something which has become fashionable since President Aquino came to power. (In Pilipino we call them *balimbing*—a many-sided fruit — for they have many faces!). On the other hand, there are also Marcos men who pursue a course of challenging President Aquino and her ruling clan's power by funding rallies and protest demonstrations. They have been responsible for a number of attacks, including bombings and military operations designed to destabilize the government, and have also had a hand in coup attempts.

The former Defense Minister, now Senator, Enrile, is a special case. He has his own political and economic base and his influence in the military is still strong. He has his own political agenda, independent of the Marcos group. In the last election, the Enrile group united under one umbrella, the Grand Alliance for Democracy (GAD), while the Marcos loyalists ran under their original party, the Kilusang ng Bagong Lipunan (KBL).

However, overall, Philippine politics remains strongly influenced by clans.

The Electoral System

The electoral system in the Philippines today is modelled on that of the United States. Public officials are elected by secret ballot with voters writing the names of their preferred candidates on official ballot papers. There are two hundred legislative districts — the constituencies of the members of the Lower House of Congress. The twenty-four Senators are elected nationally. A modification to the electoral system in the new constitution is the party-list system, wherein political parties are to have representation in the Congress proportional to their performance in the elections. Twenty-five seats are allotted to this although they were not allocated in the May 1987 Congressional elections because the Commission on Elections had failed to come up with the necessary procedures.

Elections in the Philippines are invariably a parade of candidates coming from wealthy and powerful families or clans. In the May 1987 elections 9 million pesos (approximately US\$450,000) was the average cost for a senatorial candidate to reach the top thirty. More often than not, election results are at least heavily influenced, if not actually determined, by patronage and influence. Dirty tricks still form part of the game: vote-buying, downright harassment and intimidation of voters, ballot-snatching, ballot switching and manipulation of results. Once elected to office, the victors will try to recover what was spent in the campaign and exploit their position to gain the highest return on their election investment. Big financiers and supporters in the election also expect big favors in return. Thus, graft and corruption have become truly endemic in government bureaucracy.

The vast expense of participation in electoral politics has not changed under the new government, thus still favoring the country's traditional elite and clans and discouraging candidates coming from or representing either the majority of Filipinos who are peasants and workers or even the middle class.

Political Parties

For over 25 years (1946-1972), a two-party system, represented by the Nationalista Party and Liberal Party, dominated Philippine politics. Small third parties occasionally tried to break that monopoly but failed. The two parties were not distinguishable ideologically, being both composed and led by the Philippine landed and business elite, so the existence of the two-party system merely distinguished the 'ins' and the 'outs' and offered no real choice to voters.

In the May 1987 Congressional elections, however, a multi-party system emerged. The parties supporting or within the ruling coalition — Lakas ng Bansa — are the Liberal Party (Salonga Wing), Partido Demokratiko ng Pilipinas-Lakas ng Bayan (PDP-Laban), National Union of Christian Democrats (NUCD), Partido ng Demokratikong Socialista ng Pilipinas (PDSP) and UNIDO (Laurel faction). The parties vying as opposition are the Liberal Party (Kalaw Wing), Grand Alliance for Democracy/Nationalista Party (Enrile), UNIDO (Espina faction), Social Democratic Party (Tatad), Mindanao Alliance (Adaza) and the Kilusang ng Bagong Lipunan (KBL). On the Left are the progressive parties, Partido ng Bayan, Kaiba (an all women's party) and the Partido Kordilyera.

The other feature of the present dispensation in relation to political parties goes beyond the quantitative (i.e., the multi-party) to the qualitative (i.e., the content of political programs). The newer parties represent not just new clan groupings but altogether new social blocs and political tendencies. The Partido ng Bayan and Kaiba tend to represent working class politics although a number of their leaders and members are from the middle class. Partido Kordilyera represents the indigenous peoples of the North. Since the new election rules allow the participation of cause-oriented organizations (i.e., concerned with particular issues or areas) in the election, the entry of Bayan (a federation including trade unions and the national peasant movement) and Bandila also added a new feature to traditional electoral politics. An Alliance of New Politics (ANP) was formed to challenge the big coalitions and clan formations.

Party politics in the last election was translated into a struggle between different political frameworks and conceptions of elections. Approximating to the two-party system tradition, the May 1987 election was reduced to a contest between the Administration and the Opposition, the 'ins' and the 'outs'. A narrower variation reduced this to a choice between pro-Cory and anti-Cory candidates and forces, or in other words, a contest between the 'center' versus the Right and the Left.

The contribution of the progressives in the electoral battle was to depict the contest as one between 'new' and 'old' politics.

'Old' politics was characterized as clan-dominated — relying on traditional forms of organization and relationships, e.g., landlord-tenant, patron-client, tribal, regional etc. It is also personality oriented but with no clear political or economic program. On the other hand, 'new' politics proclaimed itself as personality-plus-program and issue-oriented and committed to establishing new organizations that could transform old relationships, e.g., within particular sectors of society or around key issues.

The verdict of the elections affirmed the continuing dominance of the 'old' politics. The new parties, more attuned to political pluralism, did not fare well. Their lack of logistics, the vulnerability of their political base and lack of experience in electoral politics went a long way towards explaining the poor performance of the Alliance of New Politics. Equally important for the Left was the way in which the dominance of a traditional political framework meant that the large support for cause-oriented groups

did not translate into votes for progressive candidates. The victory of the old political framework had as its corollary the failure of the new to convince voters that elections might have a new meaning in terms of political change.

The Military

The development of the military as a relatively independent political force started with Marcos, even before he imposed martial law in 1972, but it was martial law that really politicized the military. In the process it also became factionalized, as Chief of Staff General Ver was consciously easing out General Ramos and Defense Minister Enrile from effective power. The Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM), which was prominent not only in the 'February Revolution, but also in subsequent coup attempts, is still closely associated with Enrile. The persistent military challenges to the Aquino government reveal not only continuing factionalism but also political activism among the military. While the official rationale and focus of their intervention is the insurgency, there is a distinct power component to their agenda. The establishment of a legislature, which includes a commission on appointments to vet promotions of senior military officers, introduces an additional arena for the continuing struggle between civilian and military leaders for a mutually acceptable arrangement of power relations. The dismal performance of the GAD and KBL candidates, which the military supported in the May elections, rubs salt into the wound.

For the short term, there are no clear prospects of an easy resolution of this tension. The military leadership does not appear willing to simply return to the old arrangements of civilian supremacy. The civilian leaders, including the President, are very much aware that they need to establish their authority and command over the military but have yet to find a suitable formula. Political interventions by the military, former military men, and clans identified with the deposed Marcos regime should not be underestimated. Likewise, the group identified with Enrile is still intact and capable of destabilizing President Aquino's government.

The People's Movement

The sudden change and shift in the political configuration of the Philippines affected the momentum of the people's movement that had gathered force between 1982 and 1986 to reach between one and two million supporters. The popular democratic forces that took the 'anti- US-Marcos dictatorship' protest into what became known as *the parliament of the streets* played a major role in the weakening of Marcos' power. These forces and others associated with so-called People Power are, however, themselves somewhat divided.

One group, identified with the Social and Christian Democrat tendencies (Bandila, Kasapi, FSDM, Tambuli, PDSP), is closer to the ruling coalition, and a number of their leaders were given positions in the government bureaucracy and sequestered corporations. Though their declared stand is one of critical support, they might well be defined as collaborators with, or strong supporters of, President Aquino. In the plebiscite on the new constitution, they were active in the 'Yes for Cory, yes for the Constitution' campaign. They have not yet established a close relationship with the groups identified with the mainstream Left, the National Democrats, and their repeated call to the Left is 'Don't rock the boat — the right might take over'!

The largest and most militant among the open and popular democratic forces are the groups identified with the left-wing coalition Bayan. During the anti-dictatorship struggle they created the momentum of protest through people's strikes or 'welgang bayan*' and demonstrations, and now are the main advocates of the new politics. Their biggest setback was the decision to boycott the February presidential elections, which resulted in their losing the opportunity to take a leading role in parliamentary and street politics to the traditional politicians and the 'middle' forces.

During the first few months after Marcos' departure, Bayan were critical supporters of the President. Later on, they shifted to principled opposition when their basic demands were not met, and human rights violations were rapidly increasing. Most of the targets and victims of the military and right-wing vigilantes come from these groups. The most prominent victim was Rolando Olalia, the Chairman of the KMU union federation and leader of the new Partido ng Bayan, who was murdered in November 1986. In February 1987 19 peasants were killed whilst demonstrating on Mendiola Bridge outside the presidential palace; during the May Congressional elections a number of campaigners for the Alliance for New Politics (ANP) were killed and ANP leaders and other campaigners harassed and ambushed. The repression, combined with the tactical mistakes of the Left in the period 1985-1987, has meant that Bayan groups have been unable to occupy any of the political middle ground or lay claim to its left-of-center possibilities.

A small third force is, however, emerging and acting as a broker between blocs in the people's movement. Included in here are the Volunteers for Popular Democracy, BISIG (the socialist coalition), Kaakbay, Metromanila People's Council. They were active in the formation of the Campaign for the Defense, Preservation and Advancement of Democracy (CDPAD), the Campaign Against the Restoration of Fascism (CARF) and the Movement for New Politics. They advocate popular democracy, both as a political project and as a concrete political coalition.

There are other people's organizations which are essentially single-issue organizations such as the No Nukes campaign, the Philippine Alliance for Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA), the Campaign for a Sovereign Philippines, the Council for Peace, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Advocates, Gabriela (a coalition of women's organizations), the Press Freedom Movement, and many others. Members of these organizations are often simultaneously members of other popular organizations.

In the Philippines there is also a strong people's movement linked to an underground and revolutionary movement pursuing a 'just people's war'. Some of the component organizations, including the Kabataang Makabayan (KM — Patriotic Youth) started organizing open mass protest actions in the 1960s, well before the declaration of martial law in 1972. The KM and other people's organizations such as the Christians for National Liberation, KAGUMA (Nationalist Teachers, Association) and MAKIBAKA (Independent Movement of New Women) are now part of the underground National Democratic Front (NDF).

The Armed Insurgencies

The initial simplistic expectation that the removal of Marcos and the November 1986 initiatives for negotiations would eliminate the insurgencies (or at least their 'soft core,') has yielded to a more sober and realistic appraisal of the depth and complexity of these armed forces.

There are at least three main interrelated insurgencies. By far the most extensive is the National Democratic Front (NDF), with the New People's Army (NPA) as the armed component and Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) as the main ideological influence. The NDF today is present in practically all provinces except a few small islands, and some predominantly Muslim provinces. The second is a Muslim insurgency, represented by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) under Nur Misuari, with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front under Hashim Salamat representing the Maguindanao areas. In the North, the Cordillera People's Democratic Front is part of the NDF.

The armed component of the insurgencies gives them a political significance greater than their immediate numbers (The New People's Army alone has some 20,000-25,000-armed men and women.), but also, as a corollary, gives the Armed Forces of the Philippines a greater role in Philippine politics, especially in tactical issues. However, the various insurgencies also pose more fundamental and strategic challenges to the government, both at the political level (such as issues of representation and power sharing) and at the level of social policy (such as agrarian reform) and on major nationalist issues (especially the United States bases, nuclear weapons, and the role of multinationals).

At the very least, the presence of the armed insurgencies prevents us from considering the question of the prospects for democracy in the Philippines merely in terms of electoral politics — old or new — or even of the relationship between the civilian and military leaders. The existence of the armed struggle raises particularly the question of popular democracy or alternative political structures to the traditional elite democratic system, and the social and nationalist questions raised by the NDF, NPA and CPP.

In the absence of any political accommodation, the guerrilla war will continue to dominate the life of the country, leaving the Philippines as another experiment in counter-insurgency methods, low intensity conflict and a government subordinate to military imperatives.

The United States

More than ever before, the United States is active in the internal political affairs of the Philippines. US government officials and private individuals come and go, dealing with the military, government, and other political leaders. US military advisers have also been seen with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in some areas. The concerns expressed during President Aquino's state visit to the United States indicated US fears about the insurgencies and the government's capacity to handle them effectively. The US seems to have opted for the implementation of the same low intensity conflict strategy as in Central America. The establishment of a popular leadership and a credible government is central to this policy. Because of the damaging conflict and confrontation within the elite, both within the Aquino faction and against Marcos' and Enrile's, the fragmentation within the elite may be high on the US agenda of action.

Some political analysts detect an emerging partnership — between a manager and mediator, the US and some Catholic Church leaders. It is in this light that they would read the apparent contradictions between Cardinal Sin's proclamation of his non-partisanship and supposed withdrawal from politics, and his interventions in the May 1987 elections. If such a manipulative use of the Catholic Church to shore up the traditional elite is under way, it will surely have dire consequences in the longer term for the position of the Church and its commitment to social justice.

The dynamic of Philippine politics can be best understood if we look at the long-term, the overall political project. Unlike Marcos, whose declaration of Martial Law created new political structures and

institutions — a well-thought-out model of development designed for his perpetuation in power —, President Aquino does not appear to have any such clear political project. She seems to be operating within a political framework of restoration (of elite democracy and repressive rule) and repudiation (of fascist rule and progressive popular democracy) the roots of which go back a long way.

The Continuing Thread of the Philippine Crisis

Before Marcos declared martial law in 1972, Philippine society was suffering a fundamental crisis. A graft and corruption-infested bureaucracy presided over a deepening economic crisis characterized by steep inflation, rising unemployment, scarcity of food supply and a stagnant growth rate. This crisis was precipitated by the conjunction of three developments: the failure of a strategy of import substitution as a path to sustained industrialization, the increasing inability of agriculture to meet the country's basic food needs, and the growing pressure from foreign capital to *open up⁵ the economy more completely. The economic in turn precipitated an explosive political crisis. The elite racy — a formal and constitutional democracy — was being due mainly to the intensified competition within the elite for all power. A rapidly growing progressive and nationalist movement □ dents and middle and lower classes was also a key factor in the already critical situation.

The declaration of martial law on 21 September 1972 was an attempt to abort the crisis. Marcos and his faction broke the rules of the game of elite democracy by concentrating and centralizing power at the expense of the other factions of the elite.

His proclaimed efforts 'to save the republic and build a new society' were welcomed by foreign business interests, promising both a new model of economic penetration and increased access for international capital. The role of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank became dominant as they intervened decisively in Philippine economic and political affairs. Those who profited from the crisis were the big landlords, businessmen, multinational companies, government bureaucrats and top military officials.

Having abolished the Congress, Marcos began building the military to tackle the growing insurgency and ruthlessly repressed all opposition. Some 70,000 people were arrested during the ten years of martial law. Having cleared its path of the immediate political obstacles, as the resurgent nationalist movement, the Marcos regime implemented economic strategy under the strict guidance of the IMF, World Bank, and foreign business interests. Although the Marcos technocrats, formula economic development may have registered immediate economic growth in the early years of martial rule, the long-term social impact was devastating.

In 1983, the year 'Ninoy' Aquino (President Aquino's husband) decided to return to the Philippines, by all indications the economy was on the verge of imminent collapse and the social and political ferment was about to explode. The level of debt was critically high, the balance of payments deficit ballooned, inflation raged, and public funds were scarce. The majority of the Filipino people were suffering increasing unemployment and deteriorating living standards. The protest and resistance movement were going from strength to strength.

Vulnerability of Marcos, Viability of Aquino

The Marcos regime entered its twilight months even before the assassination of 'Ninoy' Aquino. This was the assessment not only of Filipino political analysts, but also of key United States officials including Secretary of State George Shultz.

Some analysts believed that the vulnerability of Marcos himself was now the critical factor. The avaricious over-centralization and concentration of power and resources in the hands of himself and what became known as his cronies, carried its own unique price which seemed about to be paid.

The dramatic assassination at Manila's international airport of Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, Marcos' most potent political rival, on 21 August 1983, was the Marcos clique's desperate bid to cling to power.

In addition to the economic crisis, there were other factors which contributed to the regime's vulnerability.

The political uncertainties and anxieties of the 1982-1986 period derived from widespread rumors (which were later confirmed) about Marcos, deteriorating health. His sudden death or terminal disability was perceived as very dangerous for the ruling faction and the ruling elite

in general. The problem was made more urgent by the absence of a competent successor capable of commanding the loyalties of the various factions which had united mainly for political convenience and were saddled with intensifying conflicts and hostilities.

Visible rifts widened within the faction Marcos had built up. The volatile situation might have triggered decisive confrontations within his inner circle. But what was extremely dangerous was the rift within the military establishment.

The growing isolation and defensiveness of Marcos, the wide polarization of political forces, and the intensification of the protest and revolutionary movement, made the situation unbearable for the local ruling elite and the multinationals. The nature, direction, and degree of United States* intervention now became a significant determinant of Marcos' vulnerability.

The policy of the United States was to support Marcos and press him for institutional and political reforms, to prevent the situation from deteriorating further, which would give the advantage firmly to the left. The reforms included the institution of a vice-presidency to ensure a smooth political succession; the holding of a series of elections; and an effective counter-insurgency program. Political stability, continuity and the preservation and protection of United States' economic and strategic interests were naturally seen as more vital than either Marcos or democratic rule.

The 1986 Turning Point

The scheduled elections were to have been local elections in May 1986 and a presidential election in May 1987. However, during 1985 the hidden wealth, of Marcos was leaked to the press. The parliamentary opposition picked up the issue to mount an impeachment campaign against the president. Political pressure was thus mounting and in November 1985 Marcos gambled everything and called a snap election for the presidency to pre-empt the local elections and forestall the building up of a viable opposition. However, two formulae existed for resolving the rift within the Marcos faction and sustaining a restoration of elite democracy under its leadership. One was through the snap election, the other through a military coup d'état. Defense Minister Enrile and members of the RAM opted for the second and began planning for it in late 1985.

At that particular juncture Corazon Aquino was perhaps the only person who could unite the wide range of democratic forces. With her as presidential candidate and Enrile and RAM supporters forced into precipitate action, Marcos' gamble was doomed to failure. What happened in February 1986 was a turning point in Philippine history. Marcos moved against his defense minister, Enrile, and was the biggest loser. Corazon Aquino was the only viable alternative for a post-Marcos transition, coming to power as the product of a political crisis.

The Cory Factor

There is no doubt that President Corazon Aquino remains the most popular and credible leader in the country today. She was considered the symbol of the anti-fascist and anti-Marcos struggles, the role she inherited after the assassination of her husband, 'Ninoy' Aquino. In the political ferment preceding the Presidential elections, Corazon Aquino was able to rally the support of the traditional opposition, disgruntled and disenfranchised politicians, along with leaders of the 'parliament of the streets*' and groups oriented to electoral struggle.

When Marcos rigged the election with massive fraud and terrorism, Corazon Aquino legitimately wrested the presidency and power. Aquino's decision to lead her followers in a civil disobedience campaign opened a new terrain and initiated new forms of struggle. The mass gathering to support military defectors from the Marcos camp became a popular uprising that ousted him and brought prominence to People Power. Corazon Aquino was installed as President of the Philippines and, one year later, her position and popularity was reaffirmed with overwhelming 'yes' votes in the ratification of the new constitution. 'Yes for Cory, Yes for the Constitution!' was the battlecry of her supporters. In the May 1987 congressional elections Aquino's candidates swept the board with a formidable 22-2 majority in the senate and similar results in the lower chamber of the bicameral legislature.

This startling affirmation of the 'Cory Factor, can be better understood if we review the dynamics of President Aquino's rise to power and the political trends since February 1986.

'Cory Power': A Struggle of Interpretations

The processes and forces that ousted Ferdinand Marcos and installed Corazon Aquino were historically unique and have themselves given rise to various politically important interpretations. The interpretations amount to three ideologies of political change in the Philippines. Actions proceeding from these interpretations have profoundly affected the course of events. The point in discussing these interpretations, however, is that they illuminate the intense struggles and contradictions between contending political forces.

Interpretation I

Corazon Aquino was the rightful winner in the February presidential election, making her government *de jure*, i.e., duly constituted and popularly mandated.

Interpretation II

The Aquino government is/was a provisional or transitional *de facto* government brought about by the military revolt led by Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Chief of Staff General Fidel Ramos.

What was installed was both a coalition government and a modified military junta.

Interpretation III

The Aquino government is a revolutionary government brought about principally by the popular uprising, or People Power, supported by an armed group — the defecting faction of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP).

The Elections and the Constitution

At the height of the political crisis in February 1986, Defense Minister Enrile denounced Ferdinand Marcos and declared his support for Corazon Aquino as the real winner in the elections according to Interpretation I. This first interpretation also explains the claim of President Aquino and Vice-President Salvador Laurel to a six-year tenure of office as rightful winners of the presidential elections held under the 1973 Constitution. At the same time, however, Marcos took his oath as the winner duly proclaimed by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and the Batasang Pambansa (the Marcos-controlled Philippine parliament at that time). Thus, a constitutional crisis occurred.

The counter-argument to this first interpretation, put forward by Marcos supporters, asserted that if Corazon Aquino's legitimacy and legal basis of power emanated from the 1973 Constitution, she had no power to dissolve and abolish the Batasang Pambansa, which was a duly constituted body with duly elected members. Similarly, neither COMELEC nor the Batasang Pambansa had proclaimed Aquino as President. This was the legalistic point raised by Marcos' vice-presidential running-mate Arturo Tolentino and the Marcos loyalists to justify the Manila Hotel incident. They used elements of the military to seize the Manila Hotel and proclaimed a new government. But this first 'coup' attempt was quickly crushed.

The second and third interpretations assert that Aquino's popular mandate and legitimate ascension to power was the product of extra-legal and extra-constitutional processes brought about directly by the people combining with a military revolt. The Marcos Constitution of 1973 was deemed to have been repealed by the extra-constitutional and extra-legal direct action of the people and the military revolt. Thus, President Aquino could not afterwards be restricted or bound by its provisions.

The second interpretation, however, acknowledges the claim of Juan Enrile that he, General Ramos and the military rebels installed Aquino in power and established a 'modified junta.' The 'junta' was presented as a partnership between the military, led by Enrile, and Aquino party. This implied, of course, that the exclusion of one party would mean the dissolution of the partnership. The military's heightened role in political affairs, developed during martial law, would be safeguarded.

The effective repealing of the 1973 Constitution might have meant that the tenure of Corazon Aquino and Salvador Laurel as President and Vice-President respectively, according to that constitution, should have been deemed coterminous with the transitional government. Once the constitutional process was restored, they ought to have presented themselves to the people for another mandate.

In reality a transitional Freedom Constitution was promulgated, and a constitutional commission was convened to draft a new fundamental law, despite the pronouncement of Enrile that the action in February 1986 was against Marcos and not against the 1973 Constitution.

The second interpretation's lack of substance was apparently demonstrated by Aquino's assertion of her power. Enrile was sacked and forced to resign as Minister of Defense in November 1986 following,

another coup attempt. The draft 1986 Constitution asserted Interpretation I. The ratification of the new Constitution in February 1987 ended the transitional and revolutionary character of 'Cory Power' and restored a constitutional democracy.

The third interpretation, however, introduced a new framework for discussion and terrain of struggle. The traditional approach to power through electoral struggle had proved futile. The people had defied Marcos' rigged election and had ousted him through non-traditional, extra-constitutional and extra-legal means. The decisive factor in the military revolt and the withdrawal of support for Marcos was the demonstration of 'People Power'. The military conflict was resolved when the United States airlifted Marcos by helicopter from the presidential palace.

The downfall of the dictator was thus the product of key struggles taking place outside the electoral process, and Corazon Aquino's power emanated from the revolutionary action of the people.

But proclaiming a revolutionary government surely necessitates a revolutionary framework of governance: a unified, single-minded, and strong leadership must be in place; a revolutionary agenda, such as the restructuring of the economy and political sphere, must be set out and implemented; a revolutionary organization that can defend, carry forward and consolidate the gains of the revolution is essential.

Yet President Aquino is not, and has never been, an avowed revolutionary. Neither are her closest advisers. In spite of the revolutionary basis of her power, her leadership is more attuned to the same constitutionalist and legalistic framework of government with which the traditional politicians are most at home. People Power, although officially glamorized, has remained spontaneous and unconsolidated. The cause-oriented groups which played a key role in ousting Marcos have been edged out by the traditional elite and conservatives. Aquino therefore lacks any revolutionary organization of her own, and, more importantly, has failed to come up with a clear agenda or policy position on those revolutionary forces arrayed outside her ruling coalition.

How does her popular government view and relate to the revolutionary forces like the National Democratic Front (NDF) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)? Who does she now consider the principal enemies of her government? Who, in her view, are the 'counter-revolutionaries', and the enemies of 'people power'? How does she deal with Marcos loyalists, coup plotters, political turncoats, and military mutineers?

'Cory Power', as a struggle of interpretations, of ideologies of change, is a product of the power struggle within the ruling coalition. The proponents of the first interpretation come mostly from among the traditional politicians and the country's elite, who are trying to recover and revitalize their political base and power. For them, politics is like the movement of a fairground Big Wheel; you wait for it to swing round to put you on top! There are also political groups who subscribe to the first interpretation for a variety of other reasons: they may be committed to electoral struggle as the sole means of bringing change and the only legitimate path to political power; they may want a peaceful post-Marcos transition and fear the dominance of the left or the right in the political field; they may act merely out of convenience.

President Aquino, herself from a rich family traditionally involved in politics, asserted the first interpretation. Her principal criterion for choosing cabinet ministers and key officers for the government

bureaucracy and corporations appears to have been their record of involvement and performance in her election campaigns, which explains the dominance of traditional politicians, conservatives, opportunists, political careerists, and turncoats or *balimbing*.

The Left, both the legal and the revolutionary, who opted for boycott in the presidential elections were left out of the slicing of the political cake. Some liberal democrats and a few progressives who not only became active during the presidential elections but had also risked their lives in the anti-dictatorship struggle were initially included.

However, some supporters of President Aquino were wary that these were the thin end of a Left wedge. They are quite serious in wishing the Left and its supporters pushed back and isolated. The efforts to bar the appointments of former political detainees in the government, the delays in the release of all political detainees, the pressure to sack Augusto Sanchez as labor minister, the media barrage attacking and undermining the Left and their leaders, and worse still the physical elimination of progressive leaders and activists and human rights violations against the Left by the military and right wingers are signs of this pressure at work and have been tolerated. Outstanding examples of the anti-Left pressure have been the murder of the trade union leader Rolando Olalia and the killing of peasant farmers demonstrating at the Mendiola Bridge in Manila.

The forces putting forward the second interpretation, such as Enrile and his supporters in the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) were not satisfied with the way President Aquino was running affairs. They wanted more power and an extension of their political base. If the military action of February 1986 was a semi-coup d'état, what they wanted now was to complete the process. They had seen their best time during martial rule (1972-1982) but their prospects under President Aquino's leadership were at best uncertain. * (*In August 1987, elements of the military under the leadership of Colonel Honasan and the RAM mounted a coup in the most serious challenge yet to the Aquino government. Although the coup was put down by troops loyal to the President, it once again reaffirmed the existence of serious divisions within the military and the desire of some elements to have a greater say in the running of the country, particularly the handling of the insurgencies.*)

The Struggle for Reforms and the Reform of the Struggles

As the political situation unfolds, the overall direction towards restoring an elite democracy and a form of repressive rule, the US and the hierarchical Catholic Church seem promoting this process. Under these conditions, how does the people's movement respond or intervene in the course of political development?

The current leadership came to power primarily because of its desire to change the *form* of rule, from 'Marcos' fascist rule* to democracy, and not necessarily to alleviate or solve the problems of the majority of Filipinos. Therein lies the central weakness of the contemporary political dispensation. The expectations of Filipinos are high. Marcos was not only seen as 'fascist' but the principal cause of their hardship and misery. Although Marcos has gone, the political and economic problems remain as they are essentially structural. The root cause of poverty and underdevelopment lies in the dominance of big landlords and the perpetuation of backward agrarian social structures, and the dominance and control of the transnationals. The current leadership is composed of conservative democrats, some liberals, fascists and born-again democrats, and rightwing anti-communists. To address the people's agenda is not within their framework. In this sense they do not differ much from the Marcos group.

In the coming months popular dissatisfaction at the slow pace of social and economic reforms is likely to accelerate as people's organizations pursue their struggle for reforms. The peasants* call for the implementation of a comprehensive and genuine agrarian reform swept the country after the government's embarrassment over the Mendiola Massacre. It seems that the urban-based middle and upper class recognizes and supports, at least to some extent, the legitimacy and urgency of the peasants' demands. The international community will also be watching to see whether the government has the political will to satisfy the demands of the people on the land question.

With the reconstitution of the Congress in July 1987, the struggle for reforms will have another forum. The legislative agenda the people's movement tried to put forward in the campaign for the ratification of the Constitution and in the last elections will again be raised. Their agenda relates to their basic interests: the struggle for higher wages, security of tenure and jobs for workers, teachers and professionals, regional autonomy for the people of the Cordillera, adequate social services for all Filipinos and so on.

The struggle for social reforms is redolent of growing US intervention. Although the big landlords are the main opponents of the agrarian reform program, the US has been having second thoughts about pursuing such issues. They fear that the insurgents, who are both advocates of social reforms and nationalists, will be behind these struggles and will eventually lead on to the question of sovereignty, the dismantling of the US bases, along with issues of economic nationalism, demands for self-reliance and political independence.

The struggle for democratic reforms will also intensify given the growing shift of government towards policies of repression. The pronouncements of some government officials in support of arming citizens such as the Alsa Masa vigilantes, and the President's declaration of a 'People's War' on terrorists from both left and right, are ominous signs. Its record of military operations, human rights violations, arrest and harassment, political assassinations, and 'salvaging' (summary execution) suggests that the Aquino government is following the outdated Marcos approach in addressing popular demands.

The so-called democratic space and current political dispensation encourages flexibility in the struggle for reforms. The forms of struggle the people's movement used against the US-supported Marcos dictatorship are likely to be modified, though the parliament of the streets seems set to be a permanent feature of Philippines politics. It should also be noted that there are segments in the military, and right-wingers, who are determined to criminalize, undercut, isolate and finally annihilate not only the illegal armed revolutionary movement but also the quite legal progressive people's movement.

The existence of a spectrum of political forces, the growing importance of the new bureaucracy and participation in electoral politics will also affect and influence the forms of struggle. Coalition politics, the art of making political friends and isolating the enemy, is an art that must be mastered if the struggle for social and economic reforms is to progress.

There are important lessons to be learned from the February 1986 events: the reality in Filipino political culture of elections, the decisive participation of the middle class, the role of unorganized sectors of society; the distinct role of the Church, the intervention of armed forces in political change; the city as a new battlefield; the contribution of the international community in isolating Marcos. These features of the 1986 February 'revolution' merit in themselves a reassessment of the forms of struggle, strategy and tactics of the new movements now being launched in the Philippines.

Conclusion

Whether the present features and characteristics of Philippine politics will remain as they are for some time and be categorized as a new phase Philippine political history is something we have to see. Some observers have labelled the new order a post-Marcos transitional government. But exactly what it is a transition to is not clear. However, the essential features and structures of Philippine society have still not changed.

People Power is a legitimate force in the changing face of Philippine politics. Although there are some efforts from some quarters to make it obsolete and irrelevant, it will always be the most effective weapon in the struggle for social transformation. The People Power that ousted a tyrant and dictator has inspired not only the Filipinos, but also the people in various other countries whose conditions and fate are not very far from ours. Many consider it the bright spot in a world increasingly dominated by conservatism and right-wingers. With the tendency for President Aquino to respond to conservative and right-wing pressures in Philippine politics, the same people who euphorically admired her are starting to ask questions. Their question is not just about changing political leaders but about how the Filipino people can take the course of their history along a path where their expectations for justice, freedom, popular democracy, and social progress are fulfilled.

This is the challenge of the changing face of Philippine politics.