

Rise and Fall of Marcos Fascist Dictatorship: Causes and Consequences up to the Present

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September 21, the formal date of the proclamation of martial law forty years ago, reminds us of the Marcos fascist dictatorship that the Filipino nation had to suffer for 14 long years until 1986. In our forthcoming commemoration, we honor the people and all the martyrs and heroes for their resolute and courageous struggle against the dictatorship. We reflect on the rise and fall of this dictatorship and on the causes and consequences up to the present, in order to know what we as a nation have achieved and how much more we need to do in order to complete the people's struggle for national freedom and democracy.

It is highly important to undertake such reflection because the political heirs of Marcos and even quite a number of those who benefited politically from the assassination of Ninoy Aquino want to obfuscate the real and most important causes of the Marcos fascist dictatorship and shift the blame for the rise of the dictatorship to the revolutionary movement of the people. It is in the self-serving nature of the reactionaries to engage in deception and violence to preserve their ruling system and to blame the people for resisting oppression and exploitation.

The political operatives of the ruling classes of big compradors and landlords continue to pursue and carry out anti-national and anti-democratic policies against the people. They have consistently failed or refused to render justice to the victims of human rights violations under the Marcos fascist dictatorship as well as compensate them in accordance with the decision of the US court system in the human rights case against the Marcos estate. They have been deliberately blind to the millions of people who suffered deprivation, indignities and death as a result of military operations and forced evacuations and evictions.

I. Causes of the Rise of the Marcos Fascist Dictatorship

At the reestablishment of the Communist Party of Philippines (CPP) in 1968, we the proletarian revolutionaries recognized the worsening social crisis and the increasing inability of the ruling classes of big compradors and landlords to rule in the old way, the growing desire of the people for a change of system and the urgent need for a revolutionary party of the proletariat to lead the people.

In 1969 we became aware of the growing trend towards fascism in the pronouncements and actions of Marcos; and the book, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, dared to predict that he would impose a fascist dictatorship on the Filipino people. We became more convinced that he was up to something terribly evil, the louder he talked of the social volcano about to

explode, the greatness he was poised to achieve for the nation and the need for a bigger military force to protect the country.

The two biggest causes of the Marcos fascist dictatorship chronologically were firstly the objective conditions and chronic crisis of the semicolonial and semifeudal ruling system and secondly the subjective factor, Marcos' overweening ambition to perpetuate himself in power. Marcos estimated that he could use his presidential powers to manipulate the entire system to his personal advantage and invent the compelling reasons for using violence and deception to suppress the opposition and achieve his despotic purposes.

Marcos had a good estimate that the US imperialists would allow him to stay in power for so long as he served their economic, political, military and cultural interests; and so long as he acted to suppress the patriotic and progressive forces demanding national independence and democracy. After all, such forces did not yet have the strength to really threaten US dominance and the ruling system. Behind the scenes, he even encouraged the Supreme Court to issue certain decisions against US interests. But surreptitiously, he assured the US that he would undercut and reverse such decisions.

He also had a good measure of the mettle of his political rivals among his fellow reactionaries.

The latter loved to orate against Marcos but they had no more than platoons and companies as private armies. Many of them also fell for the illusion Marcos himself conjured that they could reform and improve on the system through a constitutional convention. Marcos' ulterior motive was to have a new constitution to do away with the limit of two consecutive four-year terms for the presidency and to rewrite further the new constitution under conditions of martial rule and fascist dictatorship. He also anticipated that Cardinal Santos and the Catholic hierarchy would welcome the martial law proclamation and give him the chance to undertake reforms.

From 1969 to 1972, Marcos demonstrated his propensity for violence against the workers, peasants and youth. He viciously attacked the First Quarter Storm of 1970 and carried out a series of massacres in Tarlac (in the barrios of Culatingan, Paraiso, Sta. Lucia, etc). He and his ruling clique perpetrated the Plaza Miranda bombing of August 21, 1971 and yet within a few hours and without any investigation he immediately scapegoated his arch political rival Benigno Aquino and the New People's Army (NPA) and declared the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in 1971. This suspension of the writ was the dress rehearsal for the premeditated proclamation of martial law in 1972.

The fake assassination attempt on Enrile on the eve of the martial law proclamation was just a little piece of drama, a sop to media sensationalism. The biggest lie in Marcos' martial law proclamation was the exaggeration that the NPA had an armed strength of 10,000 rifles. There were no more than 400 rifles at that time. But Marcos excelled at conjuring the illusion of communists, separatists and anarchists threatening the ruling system and giving cause to his slogan of "save the republic and build a new society."

II. Struggle Against Fascist Dictatorship

Even before Marcos proclaimed martial law in 1972, the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army had been waging the new democratic revolution through people's war against the US-directed Marcos regime. They integrated the revolutionary armed struggle with genuine land reform and mass base building by setting up organs of political power on the basis of the worker-peasant alliance and the mass organizations of workers, peasants, women, youth, children and cultural activists.

The legal movement of patriotic and progressive forces had developed since the early 1960s, much ahead of the revolutionary armed struggle which started in 1969. After the proclamation of martial rule in 1972, the aforesaid legal forces went underground, retained some of their activists aboveground and encouraged others to join the people's war in the countryside. The Preparatory Commission of the National Democratic Front (NDF) continued in urban areas in order to develop new forces and new opportunities for continuing resistance.

It is an incontrovertible fact that the CPP, NPA, NDF and other revolutionary forces were the most outstanding in fighting the Marcos fascist dictatorship along the antifascist, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal line. They grew in strength and advanced in all regions of the country during the 14 years of dictatorship, even as they paid a heavy price for their victories with daily hard work, militant struggle and bitter sacrifices.

Among those who dared to fight the dictatorship and join the NPA were the best and brightest youth and students at the time. These included Edgar Jopson, Gregorio Rosal, Lorena Barros and Maita Gomez, to name a few among the thousands upon thousands of young men and women who took up arms against the dictatorship.

They were among those who suffered the most such criminal acts of the fascist regime as abductions, forced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings. But they inspired and assured the people that the overwhelming power of the dictatorship was being opposed effectively by the armed struggle in the countryside and the revolutionary urban underground.

The broad masses of the people waged heroic resistance, even as the dictatorship engaged in zonings in urban communities and bombardments to evict people from their homes and farms and grab their land in favor of plantations owned by foreign-owned agro-corporations and big comprador-landlords. Most of those who suffered illegal detention, torture, summary executions and massacres were workers and peasants.

Marcos imprisoned his fellow reactionary politicians in the opposition whom he regarded as most dangerous to the stability of his autocratic rule. But many of those whom he did not imprison or he would release from prison tended to wait for a change of US attitude towards Marcos and seek compromise by recommending to him new elections under the 1935 constitution or under the fascist constitution. They consistently refused the NDF offer of forming a broad united front and a government in exile.

The Marcos regime was also confronted by the armed Bangsa Moro secessionist movement led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). The AFP had to deploy in the early years of martial rule about half of its combat forces in the Moro areas, especially in Southwest Mindanao, where it suffered heavy losses. The armed struggles of the Filipino people and Bangsamoro against a common enemy objectively helped each other, even in the absence of a formal alliance. When the MNLF signed the Tripoli Agreement with the Manila government in 1976, the MILF arose to wage armed struggle.

After Cardinal Santos died and Cardinal Sin succeeded him, the Catholic hierarchy opened up to listen to the complaints of human rights violations and became more active in demanding that justice be rendered. It took some strenuous efforts by the Christians for National Liberation and the NDF to persuade the majority of bishops to stand up for human rights and publicly denounce the violations.

The US government supported the Marcos fascist dictatorship for as long as it served US interests and remained more of an asset than a liability. The retention of US military bases in the Philippines, the enlargement of privileges for US investments and the prerogative of US corporations to hold land and exploit natural resources were reasons for the US to provide economic and military aid to the fascist regime. But ultimately in 1982, the US recognized that Marcos was hopelessly isolated and hated by the people for his extreme brutality and corruption; that he had become seriously ill, with the line of succession unclear and risky; and that the revolutionary movement could benefit from the tenuous situation. Thus, the US arranged the return of Aquino to the Philippines.

But Marcos and his closest cronies and generals decided to assassinate Aquino upon his return in 1983. They tried in vain to conjure the illusion that a “communist assassin” killed Aquino. The people understood that Galman was just a stage prop in a scene fully controlled by General Ver and other generals in various services of the AFP. The assassination sparked the upsurge of the anti-fascist mass movement from 1983 until Marcos fell from power in 1986. For three years, the armed revolutionary movement and the legal forces of the national democratic movement played a crucial role in the groundswell of the anti-fascist movement which led to the fall of Marcos.

III. Causes of the Fall of the Dictatorship

Even before the assassination of Aquino, the Washington top officials were already seriously concerned that the longer Marcos stayed in power, the armed revolutionary movement led by the CPP would become stronger and the US would face bigger problems in the future. US inter-agency meetings were being held as early as 1982 to study and draw up recommendations on how to preempt the further growth of the armed revolutionary movement in the Philippines and how to make a soft landing from the fascist dictatorship to sham democracy. Clearly, the continuing advance of the people’s war led by the CPP was a major cause of and compelling factor for the US decision to prepare for getting rid of Marcos.

After Aquino was assassinated in 1983, the US officials became even more worried by the persistence of Marcos in power and were angered that Aquino was assassinated despite assurances to Solarz and Wolfowitz by regime officials that he would not be harmed. The US State Department was the most offended and went gung-ho for the overthrow of Marcos. The Pentagon resisted for a while by arguing that the overthrow would entail a serious split in the reactionary armed forces in the Philippines. Eventually it accepted the "Armacost formula" which would indeed allow a calibrated split calculated to be repaired in due course. Thus, Reagan signed the national security directive for getting rid of Marcos.

As in the earlier overthrow of Duvalier in Haiti, the US devised the Laxalt proposal for a snap presidential election of 1986 to trick Marcos into calling for it ("make him a part of the solution" was the cynical US catchphrase) and then to accuse him of cheating in order to pave the way for his overthrow through a military mutiny and paralysis of the reactionary armed forces; and through mass actions of the people. As early as November 1985, the US instructed Cory Aquino to keep out of her campaign organization the leaders of the Left, not to touch the issue of US military bases and not to appoint anyone from the Left to her prospective cabinet. By his own Comelec count and pseudo-parliament proclamation, Marcos was the electoral winner but a predictable series of events would overthrow him and nullify his claim. Immediately after the sham results of the snap presidential election, the CPP ran ahead of all forces in denouncing the results and calling for people's uprisings, contrary to latter-day claims that the CPP was paralyzed by its boycott policy in the elections. Only subsequently, after several days, did Cory Aquino call for civil disobedience. The third powerful blow that fell on the head of Marcos came from the Catholic bishops who, in their pastoral letter, denounced the Marcos regime as immoral and illegitimate. Then, the Reform the AFP Movement (RAM) launched its failed coup attempt. But Cardinal Sin, Butch Aquino and BAYAN called on the people to go to EDSA highway to support the military mutineers and frustrate the anticipated military offensive of Marcos.

During the last few days of the life of the Marcos fascist dictatorship, the forces of the national democratic movement mobilized large masses of people to converge on EDSA and in front of Malacañang Palace and in so many other public places in the country, especially in provincial capitals and major cities. At least 20 per cent of the hundreds of thousands of people at EDSA were mobilized by BAYAN, with the rest being mobilized mainly by the calls of Cardinal Sin and broadcasts of Radio Veritas. But 85 per cent of the thousands upon thousands of people in front of Malacañang palace were mobilized by the KMU and LFS.

In the provinces, BAYAN was the dominant force in organizing the mass actions. Let us mention a few notable examples. BAYAN of Angeles city was outstanding for stopping the army tanks of General Palafox which came from Tarlac. In the Bicol region, the close friend of Ramos, General de Villa could appear big as an opponent of Marcos only because he was backed up by BAYAN, aside from his military followers. It is absurd for anyone to claim that

because of the election boycott policy the forces of the Left kept themselves not only out of the farcical elections but also out of the people's uprising that overthrew Marcos.

It can be concluded that in the long haul of 1969 to 1986 as well as in the short haul of 1983 to 1986 of the struggle to overthrow the Marcos fascist dictatorship, the armed revolutionary movement led by the CPP and the legal forces of the national democratic movement encompassed by BAYAN were the most consistent, most important and most effective in arousing, organizing and mobilizing the people. The US and the most rabid pro-US reactionaries started to do their best to fight the dictatorship only in 1983, after the Aquino assassination. It can be said that in the short haul the contradictory forces of the national democratic movement, the US, the Catholic church hierarchy and the anti-Marcos reactionaries converged to overthrow Marcos.

It is true that so far the Aquino family and its associates (like Ramos and Macapagal-Arroyo) have benefited most from the overthrow of Marcos in terms of acquiring reactionary political power and accumulating wealth. But this does not give the hangers-on and propagandists of the Aquino regime the license to claim that the forces of the national democratic movement were nowhere in the struggle to overthrow Marcos. The revolutionary movement led by the CPP greatly benefited from the process of overthrowing the Marcos dictatorship but the gain it made was neither for getting a share of reactionary power nor jockeying for some posts in the reactionary government but for accumulating strength for the overthrow of the entire ruling system.

IV. Consequences Up to the Present

The people's struggle to overthrow the Marcos fascist dictatorship was not strong enough to overthrow the entire ruling system of big compradors and landlords. Thus, the brazen fascist dictatorship has been succeeded by a series of anti-national and pseudo-democratic and anti-democratic regimes. They are essentially similar to the Marcos regime in terms of puppetry to the US, exploitative class character, corruption and brutality against the people. The only obvious difference of these post-Marcos regimes from the Marcos fascist regime is the fact that they have carried out state terrorism without having to proclaim martial law.

It is of crucial importance to the anti-Marcos reactionaries, especially the Cojuangco-Aquino big comprador-landlords, their allies and their propagandists, to deny the role of the revolutionary movement in the overthrow of the Marcos fascist dictatorship and to claim more than their share in the process in order to misrepresent themselves as the saviors of the people and as champions of democracy and continue the counterrevolutionary role of Marcos in trying to destroy the revolutionary movement of the people for national liberation and democracy.

When the Cory Aquino regime was still consolidating its power against the Marcos, Enrile and other reactionary cliques, it offered ceasefire negotiations to the CPP, NPA and NDF and

signed a ceasefire agreement. But it cast away the ceasefire agreement and “unsheathed the sword of war” after the Mendiola massacre of peasants and their urban supporters in 1987. It followed the US-dictated neoliberal economic policy and prated much about trade liberalization. It carried out a series of strategic military campaign plans in a vain attempt to destroy the revolutionary movement. After some years, when it was faced with further coup threats in 1989, it offered to engage the revolutionary forces in peace negotiations.

The US skillfully prepared and made Ramos the president in order to realize the “Armacost formula” and patch up the splits that had occurred in the reactionary armed forces before and after the overthrow of Marcos. Ramos amnestied the anti-Aquino military mutineers and the political prisoners in a show of dealing evenly with the Right and the Left. In its full course the Ramos regime used the two-handed policy of military force and peace negotiations. It went full-blast in carrying out the neoliberal economic policy to the great detriment of the Filipino people.

The armed revolutionary movement slackened in the first half of the 1990s, not because of the peace negotiations or effectiveness of enemy military campaigns but because of major errors in the revolutionary movement since the 1980s and the need to rectify these and revitalize the CPP and other revolutionary forces through the Second Great Rectification Movement. In the second half of the 1990s, the NPA was carrying out and winning more tactical offensives on a nationwide scale. The neoliberal economic policy of Ramos was thoroughly discredited when the “Asian financial crisis” of 1998 struck the Philippines hard.

Estrada succeeded Ramos and continued the policy of repression, going to the extent of terminating the peace negotiations with the NDFP and waging a costly and disastrous “all-out war” against the MILF, with adverse effects on the economy. His regime was in the backwash of the global and domestic economic crisis wrought by neoliberal economic policy. Estrada could not conceal his direct culpability for corruption as he took cash from jueteng and raided the social security funds for shady deals. As in the overthrow of Marcos, the national democratic movement employed the broad united front to isolate Estrada, call for his ouster; and to actually oust him through a people’s uprising. His term of office was cut short as he was compelled to resign by tens of thousands of youth massing at the gates of the presidential palace at the decisive moment.

The US-Arroyo regime ran for 10 years, exceeding the ousted regime in puppetry, rapacity, corruption and brutality. The policy of the broad united front succeeded in isolating Arroyo but failed to oust her from power. Upon the prompting of the US and the Vatican, the reactionary classes, their major institutions (schools, churches and mass media) and the pro-Arroyo and anti-Arroyo reactionary politicians spread the line that the people had been stricken by protest fatigue and that the best way to achieve regime change was through elections.

In fact they were frightened that the revolutionary movement could further gain strength from the extra-constitutional process of ousting one regime after another thorough mass uprisings, even if unarmed. The forces of the national democratic movement was not able to exercise independence and initiative in order to enlarge their own protest mass actions aside from those with the participation of reactionary allies and did not overcome the repeated tactics of the anti-Arroyo reactionary allies to keep the focal mass protest actions in Ayala, Makati as well as the regime's consistent tactics of harassing, delaying and disrupting lakbayans and intra-city marches. Arroyo was able to prevent sizeable rallies of students at the university belt and marches converging on and occupying the vicinity of the presidential palace.

The current Aquino regime is good at capitalizing on the ritualistic celebration of people power (like manpower or horse power, not people's power) insofar as it brought down Marcos and brought to power the reactionary Aquino faction of the exploiting classes. In addition, the current Aquino regime is good at pretending to denounce the corruption and human rights violations under the Arroyo regime. But corruption remains rampant at all levels of the reactionary government. The Aquino regime has condoned and supported the gross and systematic human rights violations under the Arroyo regime. And it is now culpable for the escalation of such human rights violations.

Under the US-designed Oplan Bayanihan, Aquino deceptively calls military operations "peace and development operations" and emboldens the military, police and paramilitary forces to carry out forced disappearances, illegal detention, torture, extrajudicial killings and the forced eviction of entire communities for the benefit of mining, logging and plantation companies. He is obsessed with seeking to destroy the revolutionary movement by military force and has gone so far as to paralyze the peace negotiations between his government and the NDFP.

The exploitative and violent character of the post-Marcos regimes from Cory to Noynoy Aquino clearly shows that no social revolution occurred in 1986. The Marcos fascist dictatorship which arose in 1972 did not result in a new society different from the semicolonial and feudal system of big compradors and landlords. Neither did the fall of such dictatorship in 1986 result in the national and social liberation of the Filipino people. The perseverance of the revolutionary movement remains valid and just against the persistence of the reactionary ruling system under US hegemony.

The revolutionary struggle is bound to strengthen and grow as the Aquino regime shamelessly collaborates with the US and in return benefits from the recently announced US strategic balance shift to Asia-Pacific region. This is meant to tighten US hegemony over the region. It entails the increased military presence and interventionism of the US, aggravation of political and economic domination, and intensified exploitation and oppression of the Filipino people.

As the crisis of the world capitalist system and the ruling system worsens, the reactionaries continue to engage in a bitter struggle for power and bureaucratic loot among themselves. As the Filipino people suffer more exploitation and oppression, more poverty and misery, they are driven to intensify and advance their revolutionary struggle for national liberation, democracy, development through national industrialization and genuine land reform, social justice and world peace.