

HARING BAYAN: Democracy and People Power in the Philippines¹

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“It is true you cannot eat freedom and you cannot power machinery with democracy. But then neither can political prisoners turn on the light in the cells of a dictatorship.”

-Cory Aquino

I. Filipinos Invented People Power: Cultural and Historical Roots

People Power is not just those four days in 1986, and it didn’t even start in 1983 with the death of a senator in an airport tarmac. It began with many people continuing the fight and offering their lives as soon as Martial Law was proclaimed.

Filipinos invented the concept of People Power—peaceful ouster of an autocratic one-man rule for a new democratic government. But its spirit has always been embedded in the very root idea of democracy—from the Greek δημοκρατία (*dēmokratía*), DEMOS means people and KRATIA means leadership or power. In the Western world, people had associated democracy with representative government, right of suffrage, political freedom, and civil liberties such as freedom of speech.

National Hero José Rizal, influenced by Western Liberal ideas, especially the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, envisioned in his *La Liga Filipina* a united nation, with one *sentimineto nacional* based not on blood lines but on morality and the culture of the people—A people educating and helping each other, instituting reform and building the nation from the grassroots.

But the Father of the Filipino Nation Supremo Andres Bonifacio and Emilio Jacinto also had an idea of what our nation should be that came from our ancient indigenous concepts. In their Katipunan, a *kababayan* is not a mere citizen but a *kapatid*, an *Anak ng Bayan*, under one motherland *Inang Bayan*. The goal of the society is to unite the Tagalogs (*Taga-ilog*, river people which meant the whole archipelago) and with such unity take off our blinders and find the righteous and just path. *Mabuting kalooban* makes one *maginhawa* (well-being), and with *kaginhwaan* one finds true *kalayaan*—freedom. Bonifacio makes sense since one can have all liberties like the right to suffrage but if he doesn’t eat three times a day or doesn’t have a comfortable life, he doesn’t enjoy his freedom, it remains in paper and in the pages of the constitution. Katipunan stressed unity of the whole nation under the *Haring Bayang Katagalugan*. *Haring Bayan*—sovereignty to the people—Power to the people!

Filipino culture also played a big role during the Philippine Revolution. Before the battles, it was not all nervousness. According to historian Jaime Veneracion, in many battles, the katipons

¹ Part of the discussion papers that became the basis for the exhibit *For Democracy and Human Rights* by the Center for Youth Networking and Advocacy and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the official exhibit of the 40th Anniversary of the Proclamation of Martial Law (Never Again, Remembering Martial Law @ 40 Committee). The exhibit was written by Xiao Chua, Marlon Cornelio, Adonis Elumbre and Alvin Campomanes.

were prepared to fight with a *fiesta*, complete with brass bands and food, celebrating their anticipated freedom—the revolution is also a *fiesta*.

Despite our people's rise and fall under different colonizers, we have won the revolution from the Spaniards and we have won the war from the Japanese. And each time we try to establish a democratic nation. Since the Americans returned our independence in 1946, the people actively participated in the democratic processes—from the halls of Congress, the election precincts to the streets.

II. The Storm Before the Storm: First Quarter Storm, Diliman Commune and the Plaza Miranda Bombing (1965-1972)

When Ferdinand Edralin Marcos came to the helm of the presidency in 1965, there was a worldwide call for change coming from the youth. Mao Zedong and his young idealist red guards spearheaded the cultural revolution in China. In the West, the young people participated in many struggles—the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the hippie counter-culture movement and women's liberation movement.

The Filipinos would later be caught up by the young people's call to change the status quo. Marcos supported the Vietnam War by sending more contingent of military personnel supporting civil and medical operation, the Philippine Civic Action Group-Vietnam (PHILCAG-V). This was seen by many university students as an evidence of the Philippines being an American neo-colony and our lack of independence.

A young English instructor from the University of the Philippines, José Maria Sison, founded the Kabataang Makabayan (KM), which became one of the many youth organizations that spearheaded the broad movement against the Marcos Administration which included Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK) and the moderate National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP).

On 29 December 1969, US Vice President Spiro T. Agnew arrived for Marcos's second inauguration the next day, anti-war protesters "welcomed" him. The anti-riot police tried to disperse protesters using truncheons. A few days later, on 26 January 1970, during the opening prayer for the State of the Nation Address of President Marcos to the joint-session of Congress, the First Filipino President of the Ateneo de Manila University, Fr. Pacifico Ortiz, prayed for a country in "a trembling edge of revolution." Outside the old Congress building, 50,000 people were in rage. As President Marcos was coming out of the building, stones were thrown to his direction by the radical activists. The anti-riot police retaliated using their rattan sticks to anyone's head, and made no distinction between radicals and moderates. The students retaliated by throwing stones and bottles. The pitch battle between the police and the protesters lasted for hours.

On 30 January 1970, President Marcos invited the moderates Edgar Jopson of NUSP and Portia Ilagan of the National Students' League (NSL) for a dialogue inside the presidential palace. He recognized that "students have the right to manifest their grievances in public" and that he is supporting their "just demands." But when Edjop asked the president to sign a commitment not

to run for a third term, the president quipped, “Who are you tell me what to do! You’re only a son of a grocer!” Their dialogue was interrupted by a palace aide and the meeting had to end. The students were escorted at the back doors of the palace.

For outside the palace gates at Mendiola Street, the radical protesters were already throwing *pill boxes* and *Molotov cocktails*, a fire truck that was being used to disperse them was “liberated” and was rammed to the palace gates. There was an eerie silence after the palace gates swung open, and then sounds of gunfire coming from the Presidential Guard Battalion. That night, four students lay dead, hundreds wounded. The confrontation spread to the surrounding streets of Azcarraga (Recto), Divisoria and España and lasted until the wee hours of the morning.

The Battle of Mendiola was the climax of what was known as the First Quarter Storm. But it was not to be the last.

On 1 February 1971, students from the University of the Philippines supported the jeepney strike against the rising prices of oil by barricading the Diliman campus. A Mathematics professor who was refused entry to the campus fired on the students killing Pastor “Sonny” Mesina, Jr. The students arrested him and burned his car. The police broke through the human barricades and the Kamia and Sampaguita dormitories were raided without permission. Many students were arrested. This angered the *iskos*, *iskas* and their professors and they started fully barricading the whole campus and declared it a “liberated zone”. The so-called “Diliman Commune” lasted until 9 February.

On 21 August 1971, two grenades exploded on stage at the *miting de avance* rally of the Liberal Party at Plaza Miranda in Quiapo, Manila. Nine people were killed and hundreds were injured. President Marcos immediately suspended the *Writ of Habeas Corpus*. Anyone now can be arrested without warrant of arrest—an omen of things to come.

III. Filipinos Treated as Kids: The Proclamation of Martial Law (1972-1986)

To cure the “sick society,” Marcos secretly signed Proclamation No. 1081 placing the entire archipelago under Martial Law on 21 September 1971. The next evening, Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile had himself ambushed, “ambush me,” and this was used to justify the proclamation. Opposition senators Ninoy Aquino and José W. Diokno were the first to be arrested, followed by arrests of other oppositionists, journalists and activists. These arrests were made before announcing the state of Martial Law the next day via television. Congress, and most radio and TV stations were already padlocked. The people woke up on 23 September without any newspapers.

The very first broadcasts that came through government station Channel 9 after the crackdown was an episode of the American cartoon series called *The Wacky Races*. An appropriate parallelism—Marcos now treats the Filipino people as his children. We cannot anymore think for ourselves. One man will tell us what to think, one man will tell us what is right for us. One man will think for 48 Million Filipinos.

During Martial Law, even the cartoon series *Voltes V* was stopped and its concluding episodes were not shown by the censors because of so-called “excessive violence.” In 1999, with the resurgence of its popularity, the Filipino people finally saw why. That even this cartoon series can have a subversive message that one must resist an evil regime.

President Marcos and his wife Imelda assumed the role of Father and Mother of the Philippines, *Malakas* and *Maganda*. He was also the embodiment of the ancient chieftain (*datu*) of the barangay with Imelda as his muse (*binukot*) and spiritual leader (*babaylan*). The conjugal dictatorship became the sole wellspring of well-being (*daluyan ng ginhawa*). They provided all the basic needs of man—infrastructure, culture, food and hospitals. Also, the regime can also have the power (*gahum*) to stop *ginhawa* for anyone who will disobey the *datu*.

“Democracy is dead in the Philippines,” declared 23-year old Liliosa Hilao to her captors. Lily herself will be first one to die under military custody after being gang-raped, 5 April 1973. Thousands were arrested without warrant, tortured and killed.

In place of civil liberties, the regime gave spectacles for the people and for the world. Metro Manila became a showcase for many international conferences, the Miss Universe pageant, the *Kasaysayan ng Lahi* parade, the Thrilla in Manila bout between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier, and the Manila International Film Festival.

With the curtailment of freedom of speech, slogans proclaiming the New Society were proliferated such as, “*Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disiplina ang kailangan.*” The most famous TV host in the Philippines at that time Ariel Ureta made fun of it by telling his colleagues at the GMA 7 cafeteria of a joke he heard from a boy, “*Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, bisikleta ang kailangan.*” And then goes the legendary tale, he was made to ride a bicycle for a whole day in a military camp. Ureta claimed to me that it never happened. The Marcoses liked Ureta and invited him to parties at the palace, but the regime he believed had to float the story because they cannot appear to have tolerated such joke.

Amado Luis Lagdameo, co-founder of the National Union of Christian Democrats with Evelio Javier said, “Marcos stole away our future.” Evelio Javier himself will be murdered in February 1986.

Many wilfully surrendered their freedoms for the early peace and progress offered by Martial Law. But, as Filosofo Tasio said in the Noli Me Tangere, “not everyone slept in the dark night of their ancestors.” Many were willing to reclaim their future.

IV.U.G.: Armed Struggle

Many went underground and joined the Communist Party of the Philippines which was founded by José Maria Sison (Amado Guerrero), and its armed wing in the countryside, the New People’s Army (NPA). The CPP-NPA, numbering less than 500 in 1972, was used as one of the justifications in declaring Martial Law. It grew to 23,000 to 26,000 regular cadres in 1986. The critics chided President Marcos as actually being the number one recruiter for the NPA.

In 1972, agitated mainly by the killing of young Muslim warriors who were recruited for Marcos's plan to invade Sabah known as the Jabidah Massacre, Nur Misuari launched the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) to assert the rights and sovereignty of the Bangsamoro people against the dictatorship.

Many moderates were radicalized by the dictatorship. Edgar Jopson joined the likes of Laurie Barros, Eman Lacaba, Bill Begg, Dr. Johnny Escandor, Tonyhil Hilario, Antonio Tagamolila and Ishmael Quimpo, Jr., among others as a martyr of the armed struggle.

V. Weapons of the Weak: The Students and the Youth

As soon as classes resumed by 19 October 1972 after the Proclamation of Martial Law, students in UP Diliman already started different forms of protests such as banging trays in the sound of "Marcos-Hitler! Diktador! Tuta!" at Yakal and Kamia cafeterias on 2 November, the singing of the National Anthem at the Arts and Sciences (AS) 1st floor lobby on 3 November, banging trays in the sound of "Marcos-Hitler! Mabuhay ang NPA!" at the Vinzons canteen, the singing of the National Anthem at the AS 2nd floor lobby and the shouting of protest slogans at the AS 1st floor lobby on 6 November.

The late Prof. Dante Ambrosio's stories in our history classes about UP Diliman students during Martial Law were not found in official narratives, but they deserve to be told as an illustration of what James Scott calls the "weapons of the weak." In the usually free campus, guards would greet the students searching for their IDs. Some people would pin their IDs at their lower back and show their bottom part to the guards. Some would put black ribbons as a protest and when asked by the guards, will tell them that one have a dead relative. Soon, it seems that there would be too many black ribbons and too many dead relatives! The next time, flowers will be held or placed in one's pocket, and the alibi would be that it was given by a lover. Soon there would be too many people holding flowers! Later on, lighting rallies will be held at the corridors of AS. Silently, there would be a few people who would start marching and people will start joining them. They will march through the corridors and when they are too many will be noticed by the police outside, who would now climb up the building and chase them. As the police came near, the National Anthem will be sung, prompting the police to stand at attention. During the last lines "*Aming ligaya na 'pag may mang-aapi, ang pumatay nang dahil sa iyo*" the students would start dispersing and running. When these students graduated, many of them went to organized communities underground and above ground.

VI. Kung Hindi Ngayon, Kailan Pa? : The Press

Today, people show their opinion and criticism of government using web log, facebook and twitter. Before, magic paper would be used to stick slogans on walls or manila paper will be used as "periyodikit." These operations were known as *Operasyon Dikit* (OD). When the *Philippine Collegian* closed down, mimeographed copies of the *Rebel Collegian*, *Revolutionary Collegian*, *Signs of the Times* of the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) and *Liberation* of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) clandestinely proliferated. When foreign newspapers were telling more factual stories from the Philippines, making foreigners and overseas Filipinos more updated than people here, they

started photocopying news clippings and started sending them to their compatriots here. This was known as *Xerox journalism*. During the height of Martial Law, anyone caught doing these simple “expressions” of opinions will be arrested. But Filipino humor prevailed even in fear with lampoon issues of *Sick of the Times*. In the poetry section of the 14 July 1973 section of FOCUS Philippines, Ruben Cuevas (Pete Lacaba) was able to have his “Prometheus Unbound” piece published without the censors realizing that the first letters of each line formed “MARCOS HITLER DIKTADOR TUTA.”

Under the editorship of Ditto Sarmiento, *Philippine Collegian* circulated a cover with a line sketch of the Oblation and the words “Kung Hindi Tayo Kikibo, Sinong Kikibo, Kung Di Tayo Kikilos, Sinong Kikilos, Kung Hindi Ngayon, Kailan Pa?” At the top were the words “For Free Expression in a Free University in a Free Society.” This edition was distributed at the 65th anniversary of the UP College of Law on 12 January 1976 where the President and the First Lady were the guests of honor. Ditto was arrested and after being released from prison in 1977 died of heart attack at the age of 27.

VII. Church of the People: The Religious

The Protestant Christians, through the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), condemned Martial Law from the start. At first, the Catholic Church took the “critical collaboration” as its official stand. Yet the Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines (AMRSP) formed Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) in 1974 with Sister Mariani Dimaranan, a political detainee herself as its head. It assisted human rights victims and maintained close contact with international human rights groups which could also pressure world powers to condemn the dictatorship. Father Edicio dela Torre was placed under solitary confinement for launching a hunger strike against military torture. Prof. Mary Racelis called them “an especially prickly thorn in Marcos’s side.”

But on 25 August 1975, the Sacred Heart Novitiate in Novaliches was raided without permission by the military searching for rebels. The Archbishop of Manila, Jaime Sin, since then became more critical than collaborative and played an active role in the struggle against the regime. Seldom meddling with politics, churches chose to fight for freedom with the people.

VIII. Fighting For Our Rights: Labor and Urban Poor

Despite the prohibition of illegal assemblies, Crispin Beltran led the first full-blown workers’ strike under Martial Law at the La Tondeña Distilleries in 24 October 1975 with the help of Edgar Jopson and Fr. Luis Jalandoni. Despite dispersals and arrests, the workers stood their ground helped by students, church people and activists. After 44 hours, they got their demands and have won. In three months, 25 more strikes involving 40,000 workers were staged in Metro Manila.

On 3 November 1975, President Marcos decreed that non-labor groups foreign or domestic, like church people, were prohibited from taking part in trade union protests. The Archbishop of Manila wrote Marcos protesting about this prohibition. On 23 November, 4,000 workers, urban poor, clergy and middle forces held the *Misa para sa mga manggagawa* at Santa Cruz Church—

the biggest demonstration against Marcos since Martial Law was proclaimed—thus far! On 1 May 1976, the first Labor Day rally under Martial Law was held at St. Joseph's College auditorium. Ka Ed Nolasco continued organizing trade and labor unions despite harassment by the military and the proclamation prohibiting illegal assemblies. The urban poor sectors were constantly organized by various NGOs and organizers which included Dennis and Alice Murphy.

IX. Offering Your Talents for the People: Politicians and Professionals

Part of the struggle against Marcos was simply giving your talents and efforts for the people.

Despite detention, many politicians and professionals continued to fight the regime and were called "civil libertarians:" Jose Wright Diokno, Lorenzo Tañada, Joaquin "Chino" Roces, Rene Saguisag, and many others. Lawyers formed the Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG) and MABINI. Many of them joined protest marches and participated in various elections to challenge Marcos's political machinery especially during the 1978 Interim Batasang Pambansa with Lakas ng Bayan (LABAN). A pre-election noise barrage was held on 6 April 1978 and suddenly, for a night, a whole people became fearless as they banged their pans and blew their horns. This inspired groups such as the Light-A-Fire Movement and the April 6 Liberation Movement which aimed to destabilize the Marcos dictatorship through terrorist bombings until it is brought down in its knees and negotiated a turn-over. Doris Baffrey was able to successfully detonate a bomb at the conference of the American Society of Travel Agents at the Philippine Information Agency after President Marcos's speech.

The artists did not let themselves be left behind in the struggle. Despite state-sponsored culture being proliferated for good and for bad especially by the First Lady, Lino Brocka's films showed the true face of poverty and repression in the new society and went on to become the most internationally known Filipino filmmaker in the world. Seditious theatre became the stage for Behn Cervantes and Cecille Guidote Alvarez's PETA to creatively condemn the excesses of the regime. Underground artists assembled a recording of revolutionary songs in 1984 entitled *Mga Kanta ng Rebolusyong Pilipino*. Even mainstream performers turned protest singers like Apo Hiking Society and Freddie Aguilar, who sang the prohibited song *Bayan Ko* so beautifully that it was Teodoro Valencia himself, a friend of Marcos, who encouraged its recording. The song helped bring down the regime.

There were also doctors who, despite opportunities to go abroad, served the very needy in the barrios. These good Samaritans were many times harassed and were suspected to be collaborating with the rebels. One such doctor, Dr. Bobby de la Paz was murdered in his clinic in broad daylight on 22 April 1982.

X. Movement for A Free Philippines: The Overseas Filipinos

Overseas Filipinos also made their active share in the struggle. The Movement for a Free Philippines led by Senator Raul Manglapus with Heherson Alvarez, Serge Osmeña, Geny Lopez, Steve Psinakis among others lobbied with the US Congress, lectured, appeared on TV and staged protests against US support of the Marcos Dictatorship. The 1986 People Power in the Philippines also saw simultaneous marches of Filipinos in the US.

XI. Endgame: Towards The Twilight of the Marcos Dictatorship (1983-1986)

As we have seen, the road to People Power clearly did not start with the death of Senator Ninoy Aquino as he returned from exile in the United States on 21 August 1983. To say this is to insult the memory of the many heroes and martyrs who fought and died before him. It will also insult Ninoy's own struggle inside detention for seven years and seven months to join the motherland in her suffering. The sincerity of the former traditional politician was proved when he went on a 40-day fast to protest against the dictatorship in 1975 and for his defiance in front of the military commission that sentenced him to death by firing squad in 1977.

What Ninoy's assassination really accomplished is that it became the catalyst that made the other sectors of society: many of the ordinary folk, the elites and the middle classes, to take the road less travelled and join the revolt already paved by Ninoy Aquino, the blood of martyrs and the efforts of many heroes. Ten days after Ninoy's death, two million people brought him to his final resting place, his funeral even bigger than Mahatma Gandhi's.

The next month, on 21 September 1983, to commemorate the 11th anniversary of Martial Law, a group of protesters went again to Mendiola. It was violently dispersed and it was reported that the authorities used guns. When the smoke cleared, there were ten dead, 200 wounded. Maximum tolerance was not the order of the day.

A year later, on 27 September 1984, a peaceful protest rally at the Welcome Rotonda was attended by civil libertarians and lawyers. Despite old age, Chino Roces and Lorenzo Tañada braved the water cannons and the tear gas smoke that were used to disperse them. According to Attorney Jun Factoran of MABINI said, "I think this was the protest (where Tanada was hit with water cannons and tear gas) that sparked people to join our side. I believe Marcos lost a lot of support after that."

The protest movement galvanized and solidified, forming alliances such as the Justice for Aquino, Justice for All (JAJA) and Kongreso ng Mamayang Pilipino (KOMPIL). The protests almost went everyday at Liwasang Bonifacio and Welcome Rotonda in Manila, and Ayala Avenue and Ugarte Field in Makati. Office workers showed their support to the protesters by throwing confetti cut from yellow pages. Despite censorship of the mainstream media, the alternative press like Joe Burgos's *Malaya* and Eggie Apostol's *Mr. and Ms. Special Edition* and later the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* reported about the protests. The regime dismissed them as mosquito press.

Despite the infrastructure and early economic gains of the Martial Law years, the situation was no better for many ordinary Filipinos. Corruption from the top and heavy borrowing took their toll. Poverty was symbolized by the image of a thin and neglected dying boy from Negros named Joel Abong.

XII. Naging Langit Itong Bahagi ng Mundo: The 1986 EDSA People Power

But it took two more years of insistent protests after the Aquino Assassination before President Marcos, under pressure from the United States, called for a snap presidential elections set on 7 February 1986. On that day Filipinos showed their love for democracy by protecting the ballot, tying the ballot boxes to themselves, not letting anyone get it even under threat and violence, some even dying in the process like Rodrigo Ponce, a National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) volunteer. Commission on Elections (COMELEC) computer tabulators who discovered they were being used for cheating walked-out. After a few days, the National Assembly declared Marcos the winner while NAMFREL in its own count saw Ninoy's widow and the challenger candidate for president under UNIDO, Cory Aquino leading. Aquino protested and called for a boycott of Marcos crony businesses like San Miguel, Coca-Cola and Philippine National Bank at the "Tagumpay ng Bayan" rally on 16 February at the Luneta. The boycott would have succeeded in bringing down the economy as Marcos prepared for his fourth inauguration on 25 February, the date set for the national non-working civil disobedience by the opposition, had the planned coup d'état by the Reform the Armed Forces Movement (RAM) not been foiled on 22 February. Marcos got wind of their plans and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, for 14 years the Martial Law administrator, and Vice Chief of Staff of the AFP and Philippine Constabulary Chief Fidel V. Ramos had to stand their ground at the two military camps Aguinaldo and Crame along Epifanio Delos Santos Avenue (EDSA) with a few hundred RAM men.

At first, many thought it unbelievable that two top Marcos men would defect, but Ninoy's brother Butz Aquino, head of the August Twenty One Movement (ATOM) and Jaime Cardinal Sin called on the people to go to EDSA and support the rebellion by giving food. The next day, 23 February, when the tanks from the Philippine Marines under General Artemio Tadiar came to crush the rebellion, two million people blocked the forces of violence with prayers, flowers, food and songs. Cory's boycott and the previous Marian Year 1985 set the tone for a non-violent, even religious manifestation of protest. Once again, the dangerous revolution was also a fiesta, and for many even a family affair where they brought their children to witness history. This is revolution Philippine style. This is People Power.

Feeling the moment, it took only a few minutes for Apo Hiking Society's Jim Paredes to pen the song, "Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo:"

*Masdan ang nagaganap sa aming bayan
Magkasama nang mahirap at mayamam
Kapit bisig madre, pari at sundalo
Naging langit itong bahagi ng mundo*

A series of defections from the military, which included a strike wing of the Philippine Air Force under Col. Antonio Sotelo, weakened the regime. Marcos loyalist troops were also blocked at the Delta Avenue and Guadalupe. And it was not confined in Metro Manila. Cities like Baguio, Davao and many other provinces also had their own People Power.

On 25 February, Cory Aquino was sworn-in as the new president at the Club Filipino in San Juan while Marcos also had his own inauguration at the Presidential Palace. Despite this show of

defiance, that morning they were convinced by the United States government to peacefully leave and were already packing.

By 9:05 pm, the Marcoses and their friends left the palace aboard American helicopters and eventually were exiled to Hawaii.

XIII. Filipinos Gift to the World: Legacy of People Power

“Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo”—In those four days we showed the world the values of *kabutihang loob* that is in Filipino culture—*Pananampalataya*, *Pakikipagkapwa*, *Pakikiramay*, *Pagiging Masiyahnin*, *Bayanihan*, *Pagiging Mapayapa*, and *Pagiging Malikhain*. That peaceful dismantling of an autocratic dictatorship is possible.

Many countries were inspired by the Philippine experience—Poland, Czech Republic, Germany, the Soviet Union, South Korea, and more recently, the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Bahrain and Syria. Many of them had become more developed countries after restoring their democracies.

People Power was our greatest moment in the history of the World. Yet, we have remained undeveloped after a quarter century. The poor had become poorer and the rich richer. Many fault People Power and wished that the greatest president in their eyes, President Marcos was not replaced. Was it People Power’s fault or was it OUR fault? Since we showed our values in just four days and then many of us returned to our old ways after that. The old oligarchy and traditional politics also came back. Behn Cervantes believes that there should have been a change and reinforcement in education of a new culture but we wasted that opportunity after EDSA.

But People Power had an undeniable legacy—the openness and democratic space brought forth intensified participation by the citizenry to help their fellowmen through NGOs and volunteer groups like the Gawad Kalinga. People Power, according to the pioneers of internet in the Philippines, made possible the digital revolution in this country, making our nation one of the top users of social media. This democratized our participation in the national discourse that was once monopolized by the rich and powerful.

As Cory Aquino said in her famous address to the US Congress in 1986:

Wherever I went in the campaign, slum area or impoverished village. They came to me with one cry, DEMOCRACY. Not food although they clearly needed it but DEMOCRACY. Not work, although they surely wanted it but DEMOCRACY. Not money, for they gave what little they had to my campaign. They didn’t expect me to work a miracle that would instantly put food into their mouths, clothes on their back, education in their children and give them work that will put dignity in their lives. But I feel the pressing obligation to respond quickly as the leader of the people so deserving of all these things.

The bottom line is that the simple legacy of EDSA is that we can chart now the direction of our own lives. During Martial Law one man would like to have the power to think and decide for us.

Many times the victory of People Power was being claimed by one sector—the military, the church, the United States. But we should see People Power as a jigsaw puzzle, with one piece missing there would have been bloodshed.

But as Prof. Dante Ambrosio told his students in UP, the peaceful revolution should be seen with its context of violence. The state violence and terror sowed by the regime and the often times violent struggle by many freedom fighters to resist it. All those who fought in the struggle in those twenty long years, despite different persuasions, should also be credited with its victory. As Conrado de Quiros said in his Philippine Daily Inquirer of 15 February 1995:

What we do need to be reminded about are the deeds of those who fell in the deepest darkness of Martial Law, when no light streaked in the sky to tell them their blood would conjure up the dawn. EDSA might have looked like a sudden burst of fire, but it took a long time to stroke its ashes and fan it into a flame. Human rights workers, priests, nun, lay leaders, lawyers, [artists,] peasant organizers, students, activists, rebels: Their death kept the hope, and anger, alive in the heart of a nation, smoldering embers that would later leap into the fire that was EDSA.

The greatest tribute we can give them is to continue their unfinished fight for a better Philippines, as Senator José Diokno said, “A Nation for Our Children.” And we can only assure that our children will not suffer the same darkness if we tell these stories and remember those who fell in the dark of night.

Never forget. Never again.

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