

UPI ARCHIVES

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Corazon Agrava: Chairman of Aquino commission



Corazon Agrava, the Philippines' first woman judge, was called out of retirement to head the board investigating dissident Benigno Aquino's murder. Until then she had largely avoided controversy through skillful compromise.

But Tuesday, her face wet with tears and her voice choking with emotion, she conceded she 'felt like a piece of dough under a rolling pin' after failing to win over her fellow panelists in what would have been the biggest compromise of her judicial career.

Agrava, 69, submitting her own report on the Aquino assassination, absolved Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Fabian Ver of any role. Her four male colleagues decided otherwise and planned to submit a dissenting report Wednesday, Agrava said.

Opposition leaders hurled accusations that Agrava's break with the others 'smacked of collusion' with President Ferdinand Marcos, and a crowd attending her news conference booed her.

Agrava and Marcos have known each other for some 50 years.

She was one year ahead of him in the nation's top law school at the University of the Philippines. She became an attorney after placing second in the 1938 bar exams. The following year, Marcos placed first.

As a judge on the juvenile and domestic relations court, Agrava sought to resolve family conflicts through compromise. Assigned to the post by Marcos' predecessor Diosdado Macapagal, she figured prominently in Marcos' first presidential elections campaign in 1965.

She was called a 'blue lady' because of the blue uniform Marcos' volunteers wore. 'Blue lady' has remained a term designating those considered close to Marcos' powerful wife, Imelda.

Agrava, called 'Rosie' by her friends, remained a juvenile court judge until 1977 when Marcos elevated her to the Appeals Court. It was not seen as a political appointment.

Married to a lawyer but childless, Agrava became the unofficial guardian of hundreds of so-called Filipino 'street kids.'

She scolded and lectured soldiers on the witness stand as if they were her children in theatrical antics that became routine comedy on evening television newscasts.

In a move that caught all off guard, Mrs. Agrava led the board in singing 'Happy Birthday' -- twice, because she said the first was not good enough -- to Imelda Marcos when the first lady testified before the investigating board on her birthday.

That fueled allegations Agrava was going too easy.

The 'thorn in her side' was Lupino Lazaro, the lawyer representing the family of alleged assassin Rolando Galman, who was killed by the military after Aquino was shot. Agrava exonerated Galman but Lazaro had bitter words.

'I felt since the very beginning that Justice Agrava did not have the makings of someone who would go all out. She has failed the people, and failed miserably at that,' Lazaro said.

But Agrava has not given up.

'You who are booing,' she addressed the crowd taunting her Tuesday, 'I can in all conscience state that what I placed in my report is what I believe in ... You can even slander me. I couldn't care.

'If my best is not good enough for you, just because I didn't conform with your own prejudice of the case, then I'm just sorry for you.'

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