From the colonization by Spain to the US takeover, as well as the Japanese puppet state, the Philippines has had a very tumultuous history. However, the name Ferdinand Marcos still looms in the minds of many. The dictator ruled for 21 years. During his time, he made blatant abuse of his power. Some of the most important pillars that upheld the Marcos Regime included the military, sympathetic political parties, the wealthy/outside powers, and the media. The movement drew on the tactics of human barriers, bombings, and civil disobedience to compromise the power of the regime.

Marcos had begun his campaign as president with a vision of a “New Society” or Bagong Lipunan. In this vision, Marcos saw a country that was free of corruption and equal in all regards. Marcos vowed “...to fight the corruption that was rife in public life and to carry out land reform to reduce the country’s vast disparities of wealth” (Ackerman and Duvall 372). In the beginning, Marcos’ vision was widely accepted and gained a lot of support from the populace. This new society was one of the main reasons that Marcos got elected in the first place. One thing that also made Marcos more popular was his wartime accolades. While the claims were exaggerated and sometimes outright lies, his “heroic deeds” during World War II won the hearts of many. This meant that there were also many supportive parties when he was elected. On top of this, Marcos was the son of a successful politician. However, at the time, it was unheard of for a politician to proclaim that they wanted to equalize the economy, especially not one of Marcos’ background who could reap the benefits of the disparity. On top of the aforementioned factors, Marcos became the crowd-favorite candidate.

The disparity was severe in the Philippines at the time. During the time under US colonial rule, the US would buy land from poor farmers for cheap which the elite of the Philippines would buy. This meant the poor were without land and the rich would only grow. With this money, “they attained political positions of power... [and] would make a mess of Philippine elite democracy” (Litonjua 379). This “democracy” made it easy for corruption. After World War II, when the Philippines gained its independence, America became a sort of crutch in the presidential scene. This was because America would provide incentives and support for presidential candidates that would conform to their standards. As M. D. Litonjua explains, “[n]ot only would candidates for the Philippine presidency vie with one another in being anointed ‘America's boy,’ but once elected they would resist confronting the problems of the country because ‘America will always come to the rescue,’ ‘America will not let the Philippines down’” (Litonjua 380). This turned the Philippines into a pseudo-puppet state and allowed for the rift between economic classes to grow. The US saw Marcos as their next person of interest and offered to help.

Not only were the US government supporting Marcos in his presidency but technocrats with ties to other foreign governments and international banks were as well. In exchange for their support, Marcos would introduce reforms that would make it easier for foreign exchange and exports. This along with reforms on taxation and investment laws reduced the disparity between economic classes and helped gain him more support among political parties and lower classes. While this improved the country's economic condition, it did not decrease the hold the wealthy had on it. The disparity might have decreased but the wealthy could still enjoy their lives and the power they had accumulated. So, while the wealthy could vote against Marcos, Marcos was an extremely skilled politician and had excellent public relations skills. This meant that “[m]ost businessmen other than those close to Marcos adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude, appreciative of real and promised reforms, but cautious regarding ultimate implementation." (Overholt 1142). As long as Marcos did not do anything drastic and anger the upper class, they would not do anything to actively push Marcos out of office.

The military was Marcos’ biggest supporter while he was in power. During Marcos’ 2nd term as president of the Philippines, the citizens of the Philippines were not happy with the way Marcos was using his power. To keep good relations with outside powers which meant the US, Marcos used his power to support the US war effort in Vietnam, something he originally had no thought of supporting. Marcos sent Filipino troops to die in a war that they had no business in fighting. While the war was upsetting to the public, the higher-ups in the military could use the funds from the US for personal benefit. Marcos, knowing that this was happening, allowed it to continue if they would stay at his side. With this, Marcos could still have power even while protests and oppositionists threatened to remove him from office. However, this did not last long as the death toll continued to increase in Vietnam. The outrage that it brought became too much for both Marcos and his military.

Due to all the turmoil that was happening in the country and the oppositionists growing in power, Marcos became anxious. His dream of staying as the president of the Philippines forever seemed like it was ending. As William Overholt puts it, “Marcos wanted this period to be indefinitely long, whereas a majority at the constitutional convention wished for a brief period” (Overholt 1139). To make matters worse, his most outspoken oppositionist seemed like they were going to be elected in his place, a man by the name of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino. To circumvent this, he gathered all his chiefs in the military like intelligence chief General Fabian Ver and defense chief Juan Ponce Enrile. They were all meeting with one goal in mind; how do we stay in power? The plan that Enrile offered was to enforce martial law. Martial law would place the entire country under the authority of the military. However, as the top military generals were colluding with Marcos, “[a] constitutionally elected president had turned himself into a dictator” (Ackerman and Duvall 372). With this newfound power, the pressure that the military put on the citizens made it hard for them to act out. With such control over the populace, Marcos could comfortably extend his term as president for what seemed like an eternity. This tyranny caused the once sympathetic parties to turn against him.

Even during the start of martial law, Marcos was trying to find a way to coerce these once sympathetic parties back to his side and secure the enforcement of martial law. This solution Marcos ended up finding was blackmail. With the help of General Ver, Marcos found infractions committed by these officials. These included “...their various failures to pay taxes, occasions on which their security guards had killed people under dubious circumstances, and other misdeeds which, according to the general, the judicial system would of course have to confront unless the delegates saw fit to serve their nation by voting appropriately on the duration of the interim period” (Overholt 1139). In other words, as stated by David Wurfel, “[n]early half of the delegates to the Convention were elected with his support and he was able to buy enough more to secure initial approval of a parliamentary form in which he could become prime minister without any restrictions on his term of office” (Wurfel 6). With this, Marcos could silence most parties who could speak out against him. This was not the only thing that Marcos could silence under martial law.

Using martial law, Marcos took control of the media. This meant that Marcos controlled the flow of information within the Philippines. With the swift enaction of martial law in the country, the public was none the wiser that all radio, television, and news stations were under Marcos’ control. The media played a crucial role in how informed the people were about the condition of the country. A major concern of the citizens and cause for outcry was the amount of murder, more specifically, election-related murder. This type of murder was something that, over Marcos’ presidency, had risen dramatically. Reports of these murders were no longer announced, and it meant that corruption ran rampant during martial law.

Another way Marcos used the media was to skew the public perception of oppositionist groups. Marcos outlawed the act of public assembly. This did not stop activist groups from doing it at first. Marcos then started to frame the acts as terrorism, which stopped most groups in their tracks. However, there was one Marcos could not stop. That was a radical group by the name of the April 6th Liberation Movement (A6LM).

Under martial law, Marcos had arrested Ninoy Aquino with a false accusation of a bombing and was exiled to the United States. While in the States, Aquino advocated for A6LM. A6LM was a group that would bomb buildings of government officials in the name of ending martial law. Most of these would not gain any support as Marcos would utilize his control over the media to label A6LM as a communist terrorist group. The bombings would never cause any real damage and only ended up injuring 2 people. However, A6LM continued their bombings until they discovered a plan that would surely get Marcos’ attention. Marcos would be attending a convention with American travel agents to discuss tourism agendas. A6LM bombed the convention which injured Marcos along with eleven other delegates. This never gained public sentiment; however, it did create a dialogue between Marcos and Aquino. Later, in January, Marcos lifted martial law. This reduced the military's reach and allowed for more media freedom. However, this was not the deciding factor in the end of Marcos’ reign.

After the assassination of Aquino, Marcos had lost the complacency of the upper class. This meant that not only did Marcos have the lower and middle class against him, but now the wealthy, who had a lot more resources at their disposal. All the pressure from the opposition had caused Marcos to hold a snap election. Running in it was Corazon “Cory” Aquino, Ninoy Aquino’s wife. Aquino was the crowd favorite. Certain that Aquino would win, the populace voted and waited for the count. Surprisingly, Marcos ended up winning. Nobody believed it and suspected the election was rigged. With the election boycotted, 2 million people took to the streets to voice their opinions in an act of mass civil disobedience. Loyalist and oppositionist military forces were present in the crowds. This would lead to armed standoffs in the streets. However, the citizens did not want bloodshed. Putting their bodies on the line, they stood between the armed forces as barricades. Along with this, nuns and priests would go around to military vehicles during conflicts to hand out food, water, and flowers. The soldiers began to share the public sentiment that bloodshed was not the answer and defected. Eventually, the US government stepped in and offered Marcos safe passage out of the Philippines.

All in all, many pillars sustained Marcos’ grip on the Filipino people. But by using human barriers, bombings, and civil disobedience, they could not only ease Marcos’ grip but also remove him completely. These tactics became instruments of defiance which set the stage for a pivotal and crucial moment in Filipino history. By demonstrating the unity and heart of the people in this triumph over tyranny, they leave an everlasting legacy for the generations to come.

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