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# The Philippine press under martial law

No one could quibble with the statement that the press of the Philippines until September 1972, was the freest in Asia. It was a fact of which Filipinos were extremely proud and to which Asian journalists pointed when it was said press freedom in Asia was dead. Philippine bills in recent years had been passed, or were being considered, to safeguard newsmen's sources of information, to protect reporters with detailed libel and privilege laws and to penalise government officials who withheld public records.

Since September 1972, however, the Philippine press has become one of the most controlled presses in Asia, a region where governments traditionally allow media very little leeway. Martial law or emergency controlled states such as South Korea, South Vietnam, Laos, Khmer, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand or Taiwan can almost take pride now in their limited degrees of press freedom; they have not killed off entire presses nor imprisoned such a large proportion of their journalists as Marcos has in the Philippines.

**Prelude to martial law**

Since independence in 1946, all Philippine governments have levelled protests against the mass media, but most of these protests were not taken very seriously. The press was strong and freedom of expression was unrestricted to the extent that no politician or public figure could hope to escape permanently from press revelations. No doubt irresponsible acts were conducted by the media throughout these raucous times, but in the 1960s, efforts were being made by the media, through the Philippine Press Institute and others, to make themselves more socially responsible.

Most of the inhibiting bills proposed in Congress during those years were defeated under a philosophy that abuse *by* the press was still better than subversion *of* the press. However, as the deliberately-guided press theory of the developing world caught up with Manila in the 1960s, the government began building its own information structure to compete with the private mass media. Cries rang out consistently against the increasing use of government handouts to control media content. But the government, especially that of Marcos, responded by telling the people to worship new gods and adopt new creeds which said that developing nations such as the Philippines could not afford the luxury of a free press. And as one columnist lamented, 'in the self-serving assertion of government, a free press is falsely equated with irresponsibility, subversion and even treason'.[1]

In order to bring the press under control, the Marcos government of the late 1960s and early 1970s launched one of the largest government media operations in Asia, seducing lowly paid journalists into the government information services in the process. Through a system of public financing, the comprehensive Marcos media network by mid-1971 included the National Media Production Center (1971 budget of eight million pesos), which by then had been placed under the Office of the President; the Malacañang (Presidential Palace) Press Office; and the Public Information Offices budgeted under all departments of the government. The total budget of these government media centres was said to equal that of at least four of the six major dailies of the Philippines.[2] (Malacañang alone had three buildings used for press offices, one including complete television studios and equipment. Among the products of the Malacañang press office was a weekly tabloid, *Government Report*, detailing the glories of the President while at the same time attacking the rest of the Philippine press.)

Besides these operations Marcos also acquired control – directly or through relatives and friends – of some of the commercially-operated mass media.

1 Amando Doronila in *Press Forum*, August-September 1971.
2 *Press Forum*, October-November 1971.

For example, a top military aide, Hans Menzi, acquired the *Manila Bulletin* and its broadcasting outlets and other Marcos interests took over the Kanloan Broadcasting System. In April 1972 a new paper, the *Philippines Daily Express,* appeared with the purpose of deliberately-guided presses everywhere: to play down crime, sensation and political muckraking and stress positive news, especially that relating to national development and the good image of the government. The publisher of the *Express* is Juan A. Perez, jr., a former Malacañang assistant; the editor is Enrique Romualdez, cousin of the President's wife.

To man these government information enterprises, Marcos raided the commercially operated media for staff members. As columnist Luis Beltran pointed out in late 1971: 'Newspapermen were wined and dined by Marcos, and worse – appointed to government positions in important offices and corporations where they now remain, sniping at their former colleagues.'[3] Additionally, Marcos used newsmen on a part-time basis, installing them or their wives on the board of censors and other official agencies. Top journalistic mudslingers of only a few years previously, such as the *Manila Times* columnist J. V. Cruz (who became an ambassador), found themselves in important and lucrative government posts. Opposition leader Benigno Aquino had warned as early as 1969 that Marcos was paying radio commentators through public funds, under the guise that they were independent.[4]

As the Marcos information complex expanded, so did the criticism levelled at mass media practitioners. The Marcos administration increasingly accused the press of actions designed to subvert and bring down the government. Nearly every time the President and his Spiro Agnew (his wife Imelda) spoke, they blasted the media. Some of the charges bordered on paranoia. For example, when Imelda Marcos had a miscarriage in 1971, the President attributed its cause to press attacks accusing the first lady of bribery.

On another occasion, Imelda Marcos had this to say about the press:

> You see, another drawback, all our press is in English, you don't need translation, the moment it's printed here it's all over the world. It's not like, say, in Japan. There, if UPI wants something, they will say: 'Wait a minute, we will translate it for you.' While translating it, they can eliminate the bad parts. Of course, my husband and I have no skeletons in the closet, even though in our press even non-skeletons can become skeletons. All our papers here are owned by the oligarchs of vested interests. The President is fighting them. He wants to close the gap between rich and poor. So, every man I look at, in our press, immediately becomes my lover, and every woman the President looks at automatically becomes his mistress.[5]

Marcos was also hitting out at the media oligarchies long before martial law came into effect. For years the Philippine mass media had been owned by the giant business concerns of a small number of families, especially the Lopez, Soriano, Menzi and Elizalde families. One of the largest, the Lopez conglomerate, included the *Manila Chronicle* and ABS-CBN radio-TV networks owned partly by Fernando Lopez, who had been Vice-President of the Philippines under Marcos for many years. But after Marcos and his Vice-President split in late 1970, administration officials intensified their criticisms of the mass media owned by large vested interests. Marcos, according to Senator Aquino, suspected the Lopez family of financing student activists in a 'wilful effort' to embarrass the President. In the same year, Marcos charged Lopez with sabotage when, while he was on nationwide radio and television, the Manila Electric Company, owned by the Lopez family, broke down, plunging the city into a blackout.[6]

In other instances, Marcos took to name-calling, terming the newspapers 'whiners, gripers and time-wasters'. Expanding on this phrase, press secretary Francisco Tatad in September 1971, said:

> Today we say, there continue to be distortion, misrepresentation, private management, private censorship and downright falsification of the news;

3 *Ibid.*
4 *Press Forum,* June 1969.
5 *Asia Magazine,* 12 September, 1971. The last reference is to rumours that both the Marcos partners were indulging in extra-marital affairs.
6 *Bangkok Post,* 21 February, 1973.

but that there seems but little, if at all, worthwhile effort to cure them. There persists, on the other hand, a dangerous arrogance which, as a matter of policy, refuses to rectify error, defamation, or abuse wilfully committed against private reputations or official integrity in public office. . . . What we hear . . . is an infantile lament. An irresponsible charge that government is about to trample, crush and bury freedom of the press![7]

This continual haranguing of the press had its effect, according to Beltran. Writing in late 1971, Beltran said that criticisms were being toned down by the press and that many journalists, hearing 'cell doors clanging', had switched to less controversial subjects such as environmental pollution. He added that 'without even imposing martial law, the President has decimated the ranks of the press, and only a handful are left to contest his assertions on what constitutes good government and honest administration.'[8]

According to another columnist, Armando Doronila, 'journalist of the year' in 1967 and later imprisoned by Marcos, the President had judges, police, the army and security forces on his side and when he demonstrated hostility to the mass media, this set off a 'coercive atmosphere that spreads down the line of the bureaucracy'.[9]

Indeed, the Marcos administration made the press nervous. A series of libel suits initiated by the government – the largest against *Time* magazine for 50 million pesos – added to the tension. One paper, the *Dumaguete Times*, died even though acquitted of the grievous criminal charges brought against its editor and staff by the government.

Self-restraint was being used by some editors as a result. Thus, when Marcos suspended the writ of habeas corpus after the August 1971 grenade bombing at a political rally in Plaza Miranda, only the *Manila Times* and *Manila Chronicle* were totally opposed, while the *Evening News, Philippines Herald* and *Daily Mirror* agreed with the President's move. The *Bulletin* played it safe and did not comment.

As 1972 approached, the mass media-Marcos battle was reaching fever pitch. In reply to Marcos' charges, the 'handful' of the press Beltran had mentioned pointed out that the President, by barricading himself from public inquiry, had become the least accessible chief executive in the nation's history. Newsmen complained of the distortion and misrepresentations flooding their offices and carrying Malacañang datelines. Marcos was blamed for creating credibility problems by saying one thing and doing another. As one columnist pointed out, the President had told the press he would not send troops to Vietnam, but did; that he would not allow nepotism to enter his administration, but did.

Other direct pressures were brought to bear upon the press during the pre-martial law period. One 1972 source reported how extensive the guided press principle had become in the Philippines: 'On the theory that the press should be a partner of government in the pursuit of national development, ideas were put out for import cutbacks on advertisers, the starting of a government paper and even of arresting "irresponsible" journalists.'[10] On one occasion the Marcos government even paid movie exhibitors not to advertise in the vehemently anti-Marcos *Manila Times*. In December 1971 a former National Press Club president complained that the government was trying to make the availability of newsprint so prohibitive that papers would be at the mercy of the government.[11]

Probably the most shocking action the Marcos forces took against the press occurred in mid-1970 with the arrest of journalists Rizal and Quintin Yuyitung, brothers who operated the *Chinese Commercial News* of Manila. The Yuyitungs had been harassed by other Philippine governments, having been accused of everything from being pro-Kuomintang to pro-loyalist, pro-Japanese (during the occupation), and more recently, pro-Communist.[12] But, early on the morning of 5 May, 1970, they were taken from

7 *Press Forum*, August-September 1971.
8 *Press Forum*, October-November 1971.
9 *Press Forum*, August-September 1971.
10 *Far Eastern Economic Yearbook, 1972.*
11 *Press Forum*, December 1971.
12 Personal interview, Quintin Yuyitung, Manila, 1964.

their homes and deported to Taiwan under very suspicious circumstances by the Philippine immigration director personally. In his deportation order, Marcos accused the Yuyitungs of committing 'overt acts favourable to the communist cause'. Despite an outcry from world press organisations, the Yuyitungs received prison sentences as recommended by the military court that tried them on Taiwan. Why they were sent to Taiwan, which they had never even been in before, was never explained, but it was well known that Taiwan was also critical of their reporting.

Evidence against the brothers was very scanty; it was explained they were pro-communist because they monitored the New China News Agency of Peking and used certain language that was communistic in nature (*e.g.* they preferred 'Mao Tse-tung' to 'Bandit Mao', the title other Manila Chinese papers use in referring to the leader of the People's Republic of China). Quintin Yuyitung was released from a Taiwanese prison in August 1972, after serving two years. He was told he was free to go anywhere except back to his Philippine homeland. Rizal was released a year later.

Meanwhile Manila pressmen and politicians were keenly aware of what was happening to them. A former Press Foundation of Asia executive said in September 1971 that a significant segment of the Philippine press was fearful that 'political authority is being mobilised and pruned to launch an attack on the constitution itself so that human liberties may be placed in jeopardy'.[13] The Philippine Press Institute also pointed out the increasing dangers the press was facing and campaigned for passage of legislation such as the Padilla Press Freedom Bill, which sought to penalise public officials who refused to show public records to the media. Constitutional Convention delegates approved a bill in January 1972 which held that a committee on public information should be established, that the right of every citizen to have full access to public records should be insured, that the state should not nationalise the mass media, and that censorship should not prevail.

But by January 1972 it was too late to do much about the government. Realising that he, the only re-elected President in the Philippines, was also becoming its most unpopular chief executive, Marcos moved to secure his power base. More and more he used his critics as scapegoats for the mounting number of bombings, the increasing crime wave, the July 1972 floods, the devaluation of the peso, the Muslim-Christian fracas in Mindanao, the attempted or planned assassinations of administrative personnel and the drubbing his Nationalist Party received at the 1971 Senate elections.

Moreover in early January 1972, according to the Aquino Papers,[14] a Marcos think-tank report had revealed seven options open to the President if he wanted to remain in power. They included amending the Constitution to remove the two-term, eight-year limitation of the presidency, changing the form of government from presidential to parliamentary, fielding Imelda Marcos as presidential candidate, hand-picking his successor, sabotaging the opposition party candidate, founding a new party – or declaring martial law.

**Martial law introduced**

Martial law, when it was introduced, came swiftly and, as is traditional, in the middle of the night, catching most of its victims unawares. Some idea of its impact may be gathered from the patchy stories of those most directly involved.

A group of journalists were at Manila Airport at about 3 a.m. on 23 September, 1972, awaiting a flight south, when they noticed that planes from the night before had not departed and that the news-stands were devoid of newspapers. Telephoning contacts in the city, they discovered that Marcos had declared martial law during the night.

Meanwhile authorities went to the home of Joaquin Roces, venerable publisher of the *Manila Times* group of newspapers, at 2.30 a.m. that morning with specific orders to arrest Roces immediately. The troops ordered him to come out or they would shoot down his door. The publisher was not home, but when contacted by his wife, voluntarily turned himself in to the police.

News director Ronnie Nathanielsz, according

13 *Press Forum*, August-September 1971.

14 *Bangkok Post*, 23 February, 1973.

to a UPI dispatch, was waiting anxiously for 2 a.m. to inform his DZHP radio audience that Senator Benigno Aquino had been arrested by government troops. But he never did go on the air. Troops in camouflage uniforms entered his studio just before 2 a.m., 'politely told everyone to go home and sealed the doors with masking tape'.

That same morning, soldiers arrived at the Eagle Broadcasting studios, owned by the Iglesia ng Kristo church, to serve a copy of the presidential decree declaring martial law on them. The station's guards resisted and opened fire, killing about nine soldiers. The military returned with additional arms and killed nearly a dozen Eagle guards before serving the decree. This incident was not reported in any of the media, foreign or domestic.

Such were the ways in which media personnel learned of the blow the Marcos government had inflicted on the Philippine press. Citing the media as a prime enemy and target, Marcos wasted very little time. Without warning, police walked into newspaper offices and broadcasting studios, ordered staff members to leave and posted announcements stating: 'This building is closed and sealed and placed under military control.' They were operating under a letter of instruction from the President to the press secretary and national defence secretary. In that letter, dated 22 September, 1972, the President ordered that all media of communication be taken over for the duration of the national emergency. Such drastic action was rationalised by one military official as necessary to prevent subversives from being warned about operations to pick them up. Thus by daybreak on 23 September he had wiped out the entire news media of the Philippines in a fashion reminiscent of the Japanese occupation of the 1940s. All he exempted was his own *Daily Express,* his KBS radio station and a few others of his supporters.

Later on 23 September, when the media sanctioned by Marcos were allowed to resume, it was only to enable the President to inform the people – at last – of his martial law decision. He did this at 7.17 p.m. on 23 September, over a special national radio-TV network. Actually, Marcos was due to speak to the nation at noon; when he failed to do so, his time was allocated to a cartoon, using American voices, which depicted a character carrying a big stick. Whether intentionally or not, this television cartoon spoke realistically of what was on the way in the Philippines.

During the first 48 hours of martial law, the one television station, the English-language *Daily Express* and three radio stations operating in the country played up the full texts of the decrees, presidential speeches, general orders and information on 'a unique day in history', when no crimes were officially reported. The three radio stations devoted their programming to horse-racing, Marcos speeches or continuous music. By 26 September, four or five radio stations were permitted to operate, this out of a pre-martial law total of well over 200. Additionally, the *Philippines Herald* was granted approval to publish during the initial week, but a strike that had been called the night before martial law prevented it from ever making a reappearance. Furthermore it was also affected by martial law stipulations that the media should not be adjuncts of other business houses, for the *Herald* was owned by the large Soriano business empire.

On 26 September, an announcement by executive secretary Alejandro Melchor sealed the fate of a number of papers. Melchor said some papers would never resume, claiming Manila had too many dailies (fifteen in pre-martial law Manila). 'I don't know of any American city with that many newspapers,' he said. Marcos, in a *New York Times* interview of 27 September, said the publishing rights of six dailies would be withheld indefinitely. His reason was different from Melchor's but quite familiar by that time: the press and radio had been infiltrated by communist propagandists 'and have been guilty of distortions, tendentious reporting, speculation and criticism that have damaged society and weakened resistance to Communism'. Two weeks later, Marcos denied what appeared then (and increasingly so since) to be his only reason for suspending the papers, saying they were 'locked up not because they were critical of me but because they participated in a conspiracy, a conspiracy of the Communist Party'. At other times, when the government was receiving criticism for its unpopular actions against the press, Marcos officials relented enough to say these were only temporary measures.

Immediately following the introduction of martial law, a Department of Public Information was established, replacing the Presidential Press Office. This new department of the executive branch, which was also one of the most important, was designated to merge all the public information offices of the various branches of government. Named as Secretary of Public Information was 33-year-old Francisco Tatad, a former diplomatic correspondent and columnist of the *Manila Daily Bulletin,* well known for his earlier hard-hitting writing and liberal leanings. His Undersecretary, Lorenzo Cruz, was also a professional journalist turned government official.

On 25 September the new Department issued its first two decrees. The first decree [see p. 61] laid down guidelines for the conduct of the news media and instituted a formidable array of government controls and censorship devices. As for the second decree, this dealt with the operation of printing presses, informing printing firms they could not print any matter for mass dissemination without prior approval of the Department and that they could not print any of the prohibited items mentioned in the first decree.

Besides suspending mass media operations, strengthening the governmental information office and issuing stringent censorship rules, the Marcos regime also arrested its chief opponents, charging that they had been involved in a communist conspiracy. The Roces incident has been mentioned already to indicate how swiftly this took place. Besides politicians of the stature of Aquino (chief opposition leader and potential presidential candidate) and Senator Jose Diokno, numerous journalists were detained. Among the first to be arrested were Teodoro Locsin, editor of the *Philippines Free Press,* a weekly magazine; Luis Mauricio, *Graphic* magazine editor; Napoleon Rama, *Free Press* writer; Maximo Soliven, *Manila Times* columnist; Jose Mari Velez, Channel 5; Rosalinda Galang, *Times;* Rolando Fadul, *Taliba;* Go Eng Kuan, *Chinese Commercial News.* On 26 September the Supreme Court heard a petition for habeas corpus filed on behalf of these newsmen by the National Press Club of the Philippines and the Philippine Press Institute.

Still other prominent journalists detained for varying periods were Juan Mercado, first director of the Philippine Press Institute; Amando Doronila, editor of the Lopez-owned *Manila Chronicle;* Manuel Almario, a Philippine News Service editor; Luis Beltran, the fiery *Manila Evening News* columnist and broadcasting commentator; Ruben Cusipag, *Taliba* crime reporter; Veronica Yuyitung, wife of the deported Rizal Yuyitung; Rogelio Arienda, radio-TV commentator (sentenced to 12 years hard labour in November 1972 for incitement to rebellion over radio); Eugenio Lopez, jr., publisher of the *Manila Chronicle* and of *The Asian* in Hong Kong; Renato Constantino, *Graphic* columnist; Antonio Zumel, *Chronicle;* Francisco Rodrigo, *Taliba* columnist; and many others.

Detainees were confined to constabulary headquarters where they shared double bunk beds in what was previously a basketball gymnasium. Conditions of detention seem to have been quite liberal according to various reports. Distinguished detainees such as Aquino, Diokno or Roces were lodged in what were described as very comfortable air-conditioned rooms at Fort Bonifacio. Aquino later was moved to a prison with the bare necessities, as was Diokno. The government had announced early in martial law that these individuals would be held for the duration of the national emergency or until Marcos ordered their release. By mid-1973, a large number of the detainees had been released and some placed under house arrest.

To arrest such personalities, as the *Far Eastern Economic Review* said on 30 September, on charges of sedition and conspiracy was to stretch credibility. Most of the arrested individuals had been pushing for the same types of reform Marcos claimed to initiate after martial law. Roces, for example, had led anti-crime campaigns through his *Manila Times* for over a decade. He, along with Mercado, had been instrumental in many of the efforts made by the Philippine Press Institute and Press Foundation of Asia to create an ethical and responsible standard for the Philippine press. Maximo Soliven had been warning Filipinos for months that Marcos was attempting to frighten the people into martial law. So had Beltran and Doronila. Overall, despite Marcos' claims to the contrary, there is little doubt that the only reason most of these individuals were imprisoned related to their anti-Marcos writings. Rama, for example, was probably detained be-

cause he was a critic of the President in the Constitutional Convention and because he had come to the defence of the *Chinese Commercial News* when the Yuyitungs were deported.

Within the first two weeks of martial law, international and regional press organisations had voiced strong objections to what had happened to Manila's media. During the first week, the Manila-based Press Foundation of Asia (PFA) had intervened with the purpose of bringing normality back to the relationship between government and media. A PFA regional deputation (including representatives from Indonesia, India and Japan) held four days of talks with the press secretary, and finally, with Marcos himself. Tatad re-emphasised that the press measures were temporary. On 4 October, 1972, Marcos instructed his press secretary to take the following actions:

1 Form, in consultation with PFA's representatives, a Press Consultative Panel which would serve as a self-regulatory body for the mass media.

2 Work out the composition of the Panel and its mode of operation.

3 Ensure that the Panel consists of representatives of the mass media who are directly responsible for the production of newspapers and broadcasts, along with the Secretary of Information and a representative of the Department of National Defence.

4 See that the Panel promptly draws up a code of conduct for the profession and guidelines for news and comment.

5 Ensure that the Panel functions as a continuing self-regulatory body to evaluate and guide the operations of the mass media and deepen understanding between the government and the media.

6 Take active steps that would make censorship and the present guidelines decreed by the government unnecessary.

The President also heard the deputation's appeal on behalf of the detained journalists and said he would review the remaining cases immediately. According to a PFA official, Marcos was very cordial during the talks and agreed not to interfere in the PFA or other international groups stationed in Manila. However, despite the latter pledge, the PFA in September 1973 gave Marcos a list of items on which he had reneged and a month later threatened to move its headquarters to Kuala Lumpur, feeling it could not function at maximum efficiency under a martial law government.

Marcos' minor relaxation of the press restrictions in October and November 1972 probably related to his desire to have the new government appear 'civilian and constitutional, rather than military' and to placate international opinion, rather than to any intention to reform. For although the panel idea was sound and seemed fair and representative on paper, in reality it was a joke. By virtue of the fact that all existing press personnel worked for the government or government-approved media, the panel was inevitably pro-Marcos. One source said the panel was not very operative anyway because journalists did not know to whom to go for clearance and guidance – both the Secretary of Information and a representative of the Secretary of Defence were panel members.

Marcos, in an interview in *The Asian*, explaining why it was necessary for the military to work closely with civilian agencies such as the Department of Public Information, said: 'The extent of subversive activity overran the work of the mass media, and since the military is our principal source of data on the activities of communists and subversives, the matter, say, of cleaning certain organs of the mass media, becomes a matter both for the military and the Department of Public Information.'

The press panel was given its first case during the first week of November 1972, when the United States news agency, Associated Press, and the Philippines *Daily Express* were accused of violating martial law guidelines. The *Express* had published an AP dispatch from New York citing a split in the Philippine army, which the Department of Public Information termed 'false, unfounded and tending to sow discord'. The *Express* apologised and promised that those staff members responsible would be disciplined (the business editor was asked to resign). However, AP, through its acting bureau chief Lynn Newland, was not so willing to bow to the Philippine government. It accused Tatad of naiveté and said AP could not be a party to such censorship. As a result, the government reimposed upon Associated Press the newly-lifted censorship on outgoing press

dispatches. The ban lasted six days, but outgoing AP reports would in the future have to get prior departmental clearance, even though the censorship of foreign news agencies had been formally abolished on 2 November.

The PFA was clearly not satisfied with the progress of the panel it had helped develop. A second deputation met with Marcos in early November to follow up the agreement, but not to much avail as the government felt it had lived up to its part of the bargain. Officials in November explained that the government would resist any outside pressure on the matter of prematurely releasing detained journalists; in fact, Tatad issued a strongly-worded statement that the government would not be cowed even by a bad press abroad. The story goes that in November, Marcos was preparing to sign a release order when news reached him that an International Press Institute group was coming to Manila, which he interpreted as a sign of pressure tactics by foreigners. As a result, he refused to sign the order. IPI involvement began on 26 September with a wired protest to Marcos, stating that the detention of journalists was unjustified. An IPI resolution to the same effect followed on 6 October.

The PFA deputation in mid-November, feeling Marcos had betrayed the nature of the October agreement, called upon the world press to take a serious look at Philippine martial law: 'Up to now no detainee has been released, none of the old newspapers has been allowed to resume publication, and the self-regulatory body the government has created violates the spirit and intent of the agreement, since none of the old newspapers is represented in this body.' The deputation said that for forty days they had restrained themselves and other international press organisations from making statements – giving the government a chance to act – but they would no longer be a party to this moratorium. They pledged themselves to remind their readers back home of the denial of civil liberties and the death of the press in the Philippines in at least monthly editorials.

**Long term consequences**

Whereas other Asian nations instituting martial law have often allowed the media to resume within a few days, Marcos' government favoured a whole new set of politically-acceptable newspapers instead. After a month of martial law, editors, publishers and broadcasters grew pessimistic about their chances of operating. Government papers expanded operations, the *Daily Express,* for instance, planning for an afternoon edition, a second morning edition in Filipino and a weekly *Expressweek*. The second paper allowed to function, the *Times Journal,* was published for the first time in October 1972 and, like the *Express,* was financed by Marcos' friends, particularly, at the outset, Edmundo Ongsianko. The *Express* was reportedly paid for by Roberto Benedicto, ambassador to Japan.

Being the only papers available for the initial months of martial law, the *Express* and *Times Journal* were placed in extremely advantageous positions. From a circulation of 110,000 on 25 September, the *Express* had risen to 520,000 by mid-October, about three weeks after martial law. Advertisers queued up for space, even though advertising rates had been increased from 15 to 45 pesos per column inch. The situation was so lucrative that the *Express* could afford to turn down advertisements. Post-martial law newspapers also had the advantage of low capital overhead costs – in most cases they simply leased the premises of defunct papers. For example, *Bulletin Today* leases the *Philippines Herald* properties; *Express* the *Chronicle* offices and *Times Journal* the *Daily Star* premises. By early 1973, it was questionable if the *Express* planned to pay the rent on the *Chronicle* offices, which was then three months in arrears.

Being government-sanctioned, the press failed to report activities that could reflect on Marcos. And when, in late October, a new constitutional provision was adopted making it possible for Marcos to remain in power indefinitely, Filipinos were unaware of this because *Express, Business Day* and the broadcasters passed over it in silence.

In mid-November, Marcos talked about permitting pre-martial law dailies to resume publication but emphasised that a 'wide dispersal of ownership by public subscription' was necessary. New rulings stressed that no one person or family could own more than 20 per cent in any one medium. He hinted that some of these papers, once scrutinised by the press panel, might be permitted to set up shop if they drastically

changed their management pattern and capital structure. But those publications that in the eyes of the military had participated in a 'conspiracy to overthrow the republic' were permanently disenfranchised. Apparently, all pre-martial law publications, save the *Bulletin Today,* were in this category as it was the only paper to resume, despite rumours that the old *Philippines Herald* and *Manila Evening News* would start up again.

On 16 November 1972, the President signed his 36th decree calling for the establishment of the Mass Media Council with Tatad as chairman and the secretary of national defence as co-chairman. MMC set guidelines for the reopening of media, and was to supervise and control the 'performance and conduct of all mass media relevant to the promotion of closer coordination with the objectives of the government'. MMC ceased functioning in the spring of 1973 with the formation of the Media Advisory Council.

As indicated earlier, Marcos was inclined to loosen the screws on the media during November and December 1972; at least he wanted it to appear this way during a period when he hoped to get a new constitution approved. The censorship ruling applied to news agencies was lifted and authorised publications and broadcasting outlets were allowed to carry editorials, columns and commentaries, but all of these reports still had to abide by the guidelines. As for the detainees, Marcos authorities said they would be released if they signed oaths promising not to participate in anti-national activities. In addition, they could not resume work without a permit from the army, had to report periodically to the army (which meant they were under house arrest) and could not communicate with foreign correspondents. Some media personnel were released under these conditions in early December, among them Roces, Rama, Locsin, Soliven, Mercado and Doronila.

Before Imelda Marcos was stabbed in early December 1972, there were definite indications Marcos was keen to generate an 'atmosphere conducive to free and untramelled' discussions on his new constitution to be voted upon in a national plebiscite on 15 January 1973. He had given assurances that opinions favourable and unfavourable could be voiced on the charter; in fact he ordered the suspension of martial law restrictions on printed, broadcast and live public discussions of the constitution. Of course, he could get away with such an announcement, knowing full well the media were too frightened to take him literally, and opposition views continued to be muted by the media.

Marcos realised the national debate on the constitution was a monologue, not a dialogue, and at one point, admitted that the government television panel discussion on the subject, 'Constitution and You', was dull. 'Constitution and You' was being shown on all three TV channels twice daily for a month. Realising the poor ratings the show was receiving, the government permitted the opposition to participate, whereupon viewership increased. But, the debates then became anti-government, which was not permissible by the earlier guidelines and the military stopped the show.

Although Marcos had promised to allow free expression of views on the constitution until polling day (15 January) he rescinded this liberal ruling on 7 January. His rationale was that because of threats from 'clerico-fascists' and other rightist conspirators on the one hand and communists on the other, he had to go back on his promise. At the same time, he declared rumour mongering to be punishable as subversive propaganda. A few months later the Foreign Secretary Carlos P. Romulo, once a newspaperman himself, asserted that in developing nations, where the worry of man concerns his next meal, civil liberties must take a back seat.

This was in May 1973, after nearly six months under martial law, by which time the mass media had become so syrupy in their praise of the regime that the government, through Tatad, actually ordered newspapers to suspend signed opinion pieces which had become embarrassingly pro-Marcos. One columnist in his effort to please had quoted Marcos as promising a million more jobs, which, of course, the President was not in a position to accommodate. Three days later the columns were allowed again, but only after editors had agreed that objective and thoughtful commentaries would be published. Columnists in fact had been specifically banned under martial law, but those approved had gradually been allowed to write. Once noted for their credibility,

columnists such as Teodoro Valencia and José Guevara, among others, had become partisan supporters of the President. To politically-astute Filipinos, their efforts had become counter-productive.

A number of journalists joined either the pro-government newspapers or government information services, but many others were forced to look to Hong Kong and other Asian cities for employment. They had to because after martial law the mass media represented the largest single source of unemployment, with 15,000 to 20,000 (the government estimated 50,000) jobless. Several public relations firms closed or greatly reduced their staffs, and advertising agencies were in trouble with so many of the old media closed. In addition, the government had limited the number of commercials approved on TV stations to ten per hour and most of these carried non-commercial messages such as 'support the new society'. Thus, the need for advertising men in the new society was not as great as in the old. Journalism education, probably more developed in the Philippines than in any other Asian country before martial law, was severely hit as well. Journalism school enrolments dropped considerably as the prospects for jobs in the mass media dwindled and, in some cases, journalism faculties had to be slashed.

The government, meanwhile, continues to keep the few remaining independent journalists in hand by flashing them reminders. Military censors make nightly rounds of newspapers, frequently intervening if they feel Marcos' or Imelda's picture is not displayed prominently enough on page one. For example, when Joaquin Roces was released from detention, *Bulletin Today* placed his picture above the fold on page one, while a picture and story of the President appeared in the lower half of the page. The *Bulletin* editor was warned for his imprudence. Other types of harassment have been used to keep practising journalists in line. On one occasion, the entire *Times Journal* staff was told to report to Camp Aquinalde where their photographs were taken. Suspected journalists' mail is opened regularly and their telephones are tapped. When the mail of one former editor was opened, authorities found two books – one on communism, the other on the genetic revolution. Because he possessed the latter book, which the censors thought dealt with political revolution, the editor was detained for one day.

Most practising journalists in the Philippines do not need reminders, however; they know that government policies on the media exercise a tight control seldom seen outside the communist world. The September 1972 regulations for the most part remain intact, authorised media outlets continue to be only those owned by Marcos' friends and relatives and the continuous expansion of the Public Information Department keeps newsrooms flooded with government handouts. One press official said that by February 1973, Public Information was churning out enough press releases in its full-scale newsrooms to fill each newspaper daily. In a reorganisation of the Department of Public Information, the government set up four constituent bureaux: one was called the Bureau of Standards, which had no real job description, but according to one source, was meant to subsume the Press Council and the Philippine Press Institute.

In May 1973, a civilian body, the Media Advisory Council (MAC), was established by presidential decree to supervise all the mass media and replace the Press Consultative Panel. MAC was to undertake the encouragement of responsible opinion writing dealing with social and economic conditions, the freeing of media from monopoly ownership, a national and orderly allocation of radio and TV frequencies. Also, newspapers should be encouraged to publish in the provinces, mass media should be examined to see if they meet national needs, vernacularisation of media should be encouraged, as well as fiction and essay writing, Filipino-produced phonograph records, the preservation of the Filipino literary heritage, professional press standards, higher wages for media personnel and 'reasonable working arrangements between advertising agencies and the media'.

Marcos claimed its purpose was to relax government control of the media and authorise media operations subject to his approval, but the appointment of the National Press Club president, Primitivo Mijares, as its head revealed how much autonomy was destined for the media. Mijares was an *Express* columnist-reporter and one of the

men closest to Marcos.

MAC members also make up the membership of the subsidiary Media Practices Board which is to 'administer and supervise a system that will enable mass media . . . to police itself (sic)'. MPB was to operate as a press council with sanctions to do anything from seeking rectification or clarification from erring media men to suspension or criminal prosecution. The very comprehensive 45-page MAC guideline set rules on what constitutes responsible opinion writing, honour and freedom of others, independence and integrity of media personnel. Under broadcast guidelines, rules and regulations, MPB delineated roles according to advancement of education and culture, responsibility toward children, community responsibility, general programme standards, treatment of news and public events, religious programmes, general advertising standards, presentation of advertising, and time standards for non-programme material. Additional guidelines and restrictions pinpointed roles of advertising agencies, public relations and research groups, film and special media.

By September 1973, the Council had submitted to Marcos a proposal to take over the Philippine business activities of Reuters, Agence France Press, Associated Press and United Press International. The Council, in effect, would handle the distribution of all foreign news in the country as well as 'control the collection of world news through a to-be-created international agency'. MAC also tried to take over the functions of the Department of Public Information, the Bureau of Posts and the Textbook Board in a bid to become the supreme authority on anything remotely related to the mass media, but by mid-October 1973 seemed to be failing as reaction set in from these other bodies.

News coverage in the Philippine mass media therefore remained under tight control throughout 1973, the Filipinos getting only white-washed versions, if any, of significant happenings in their own backyards. Thus Filipinos saw or heard little of Senator Benigno Aquino's dramatic speech to the Marcos government in August 1973, when he decided not to participate in his own trial. The media were allowed to cover the military hearing, although at first there had been talk of one 'pool' reporter for all the agencies and limited coverage overall. Surprisingly, the military felt the Aquino hearing should be open to the public and press. The press was warned, however, not to sensationalise the Aquino trial, as if any of the controlled pressmen were likely to be so foolhardy at this late stage of martial law. Many did not even take the opportunity to cover the trial.

Nor did the Filipino learn much from his media when the conspiracy-to-kill-Marcos case came to court in August 1973. No decision was reached on these 31 defendants, including Aquino, Senator Osmeña and Eugenio Lopez, jr., former publisher of the *Manila Chronicle*.

There was, however, a second time during the first year of martial law when restrictions on freedom of expression were briefly lifted and that was in late July 1973, when Filipinos went to the polls to vote on the loaded question: 'Under the present constitution, the President, if he so desires, can continue in office beyond 1973. Do you want President Marcos to continue beyond 1973 and finish the reforms he has initiated under martial law?' Filipinos were free to express their views publicly for four days before polling began on 27 July. The only real opposition expressed publicly came through an open letter released ten days before polling but briefly reported in the Manila press only on ballot day. Among the signers of the letter was Joaquin Roces. The letter writers, sensing Marcos would win anyway, asked for a month's postponement of the referendum, restoration of the freedom of speech, assembly and press, and the lifting of martial law.

After Marcos' overwhelming victory in July, Filipinos came to believe that whatever Marcos wants, he gets. Proof was added in September when Eugenio Lopez, sr., from exile in the United States, wired his willingness to sell his controlling interest in the Manila Electric Company. Rumour had had it for months that the Lopez family would surrender their vast economic holdings for a reprieve for Eugenio Lopez, jr., still detained on charges of conspiring to assassinate the President.

**Present situation**

The one tiny bright spot in all this is that certain other unapproved sources of information have come into existence since martial law. Through

an assortment of means, Filipinos can obtain, if they wish to take the risk, alternative views on the new society. Underground newspapers published at the risk of severe punishments have been circulated throughout the islands almost from the day martial law was declared. Also, anonymous letters, reports, documents and overseas anti-Marcos literature are passed from person to person, The penalty for possession of such materials is six months' imprisonment.

Mimeographed chain letters encouraging resistance to martial law have been written, sermons critical of the government delivered to congregations, and secret discussion groups formed in factories and communities for news exchange. To show their protest, students in heavily-guarded classrooms have been known to tap in unison on desks and plates, the beat of slogans such as 'Marcos, Hitler, Dictator, Tuda' (*Tuda* or *tuta* is equivalent to 'lapdog'). One source has claimed that 'cultural propaganda teams succeed in holding short skits and rallies in alleyways, warehouses and sometimes in open places where people stand guard to warn of the police'.

*Liberation,* printed in the Philippines since early October 1972 and occasionally inserted in *Kalayaan,* a San Francisco newspaper, has claimed it is only one of many such underground newspapers flourishing, listing others in the Manila-Rizal area as *Taliba ng Bayan, Bangon, Ulos, The Report, The Rebel Pandayan, Ang Taong Bayan, Bagong Moog ng Maynila, Kasarinlan, Citizen, Ka-Ingat Kayo, Tinig ng Masa.* The papers have been boldly distributed in marketplaces, on campuses and by house-to-house canvassing. Usually mimeographed and written in Filipino, the underground press takes a very strong anti-Marcos stance, referring to the President as a Hitlerite character and portraying Imelda Marcos as a finely dressed peacock strutting among the poor imploring them to be frugal. They quote banned issues of outside publications critical of the President and present a picture of repression and violence in the Philippines that is not revealed elsewhere.

In other instances, Filipinos have been successful in embarrassing the government by having anti-Marcos material cleverly inserted in pro-Marcos publications. Probably one of the most humorous examples concerned a poem published in the 14 July issue of *Focus Philippines,* a weekly edited by Imelda Marcos' official biographer. The first letters of each line spelled out 'Marcos Hitler' and 'Diktador Tuta'. The issue was impounded, but not before a few copies had been circulated.

Apart from such exploits the picture is one of unrelieved gloom. The guidelines still exist and are implemented by the very powerful government-backed Media Advisory Council. Censors are still physically in the newsrooms; editors are intimidated by being threatened with the loss of their publications' printing permits; newsmen are still in prison (most notably, Eugenio Lopez, jr., and Ernesto Granada, columnist and editorial writer of the *Manila Chronicle*); and released detainees are extremely limited in their day-to-day activities, not being allowed to leave the Manila area without permission. Broadcasting stations are permitted six-month licences, renewable on basis of performance. Unemployment among former newspaper and broadcast personnel remains high; broadcasting is controlled through the Radio Control Board, Department of Public Information, and Office of Civil Relations; and fear, which permeates all media offices, makes journalists show great self-restraint.

Furthermore, organisations such as the Press Council, the National Press Club and the Philippine Press Institute, although still in existence, are not very active or have been subsumed under government branches, headed by hand-picked Marcos friends. The opposition has no mass media of any form, only word of mouth, mimeographed underground sheets and jokes about President Marcos. The government, on the other hand, through its gigantic information services, continues to use unashamedly all the authorised media to promote its members' political, social and personal aims.

At the date of writing there are few signs of any significant lessening of control by the government on the media. The Philippines, in one swift movement in September 1972, joined most of the rest of Asia in subscribing to the fashionable but dubious theory that freedom of the press is a luxury that developing countries cannot really afford.

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