

Metropolitan Government under Martial Law: The Metro Manila Commission Experiment

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The pattern of service delivery in metropolitan Manila did not significantly improve despite the reorganization of the metropolitan local governments with the creation of a Metro Manila Commission (MMC). Although the MMC experiment was designed to control rapid urbanization and unrestrained growth in the Metropolitan Manila Area (MMA), it was actually part of successive political maneuvers to stabilize and consolidate the Marcos regime. The reorganization in effect centralized metropolitan governance through the Ministry of Human Settlements and at the same time severely curtailed the power of local governments. As long as metropolitan governance continues to be a direct part in the national power game, there will be no substantial change in the pattern of service delivery and living conditions in the MMA.

Introduction

Rapid urbanization in the Third World has become one of the most pressing developmental problems today. The explosive nature of urbanization is highlighted by its demographic dimension. Whereas in 1975, some 840 million people, or 28 percent of the total population of Third World countries, lived in urban areas, by the year 2000 the urban population will have increased to more than 2 billion, so that by then, some 42 percent of third World population will be city dwellers.¹ According to Kingsley Davis, there will then be from 330 to 420 cities with more than one million residents. The number of urban areas with more than 10 million inhabitants will be somewhere between 40 to 70, including eight with more than 30 million inhabitants.²

Metro Manila is one of these giant cities. According to recent estimates, 8.5 million³ people live in this primate city in a land area of 636 square kilometers. In other words, about 17 percent of the country's population is

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crowded together in less than 0.2 percent of Philippine territory. Metro Manila's growth averages 4.61 percent per annum.⁴ However, the city's slum and squatter areas, the most visible indicators of its rapid growth, would double every 15 years. If demographic projections would prove correct, more than 15 million people will live in Metro Manila at the end of the century.

The countless problems created by rapid and uncontrolled urban growth, which have been well-documented in other large cities, have affected Manila as well: sprawling slums and squatter settlements, un(der)employment, and an inadequate infrastructure characterized by insufficient potable water and power supplies, inadequate sewage and drainage systems, too few toilets, unpaved roads, deteriorating health and sanitary conditions, inadequate public mass transportation, traffic jams and an increasing number of ecological problems such as air and water pollution.

On November 7, 1975, by virtue of Presidential Decree (PD) No. 824, President Ferdinand E. Marcos created the Metro Manila Commission (MMC) which was intended to operate as a supralocal metropolitan government. The decree, as well as official announcements, saw the restructuring of metropolitan government as a fundamental step towards a more effective management to respond to Metro Manila's urban problems. The government expected that administrative reorganization would transform the Philippine capital from a "dying city" into a dynamic "City of Man." This ambitious goal was meant to be pursued through a general improvement of public services and better and more comprehensive urban planning for the entire metropolitan region.

The Philippine government and urban experts considered the MMC as a unique administrative experiment in its attempts to control urban growth in a large agglomeration like the Metropolitan Manila Area (MMA). A lot of inputs were poured in the MMC, especially in the initial phase, by the government, the academic community and international aid organizations, in order to develop a working administrative machinery. The prevailing arrangement of an authoritarian government was considered to be an asset for the MMC experiment, because martial law seemed to have tremendously strengthened the executive capacities of the state and at the same time put an end to the activities of elected politicians, which were believed by many to be obstacles to efficient and rational administration. Based on field research in 1979-1980 and 1981, this article attempts to appraise how far these far-reaching goals have been realized. The organizational changes and their impact on political decision-making will be examined, as well as the MMC's performance in service delivery. Some conclusions will be put forth which seek to explain the decision-making structure and the pattern of service delivery in Metro Manila. A tentative assessment of the present conditions and the future prospects of the MMC will also be provided.

The Creation of the Metro Manila Commission

Even before the declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972, proposals had already been made to reorganize the governmental system of the Greater Manila Area, which hitherto was an agglomeration of numerous independent local governments.⁵ While some of these local entities enjoyed a comparatively broad scope of autonomy, there was little coordination and cooperation in terms of finding common solutions to problems affecting the entire metropolitan area (e.g., fire prevention, housing, peace and order, water supply, flooding, urban planning, etc.). Local governments primarily served as power bases for rival national and local politicians.

The reorganization theme intensified after the declaration of martial law, generating no less than nine new schemes before 1975.⁶ Finally, after holding a referendum on the issue in February 1975, President Marcos issued P.D. No. 824, establishing later in the year a new metropolitan government with jurisdiction over four cities and 13 municipalities. The MMC was created as an organization to encourage the delineation of metrowide urban development projects and to improve metropolitan planning, coordination and plan implementation, thereby bringing about a general upgrading in the delivery of public services.

A brief look at the powers vested in the new metropolitan body revealed that the government painstakingly selected those components of the various reorganization schemes that promised to give it utmost control over the political decision-making process in Metro Manila. For instance, the MMC was given a highly centralized structure. The Commission was placed directly under the control and supervision of the President, thus, endowing him with a wide range of prerogatives in metropolitan affairs. Apart from this, the MMC received policy-making and supervising powers at the expense of the local governments within the MMA. Although the local governments continued to render essential public services, they were stripped of most of their former powers which had earlier given them political weight. This included the severe weakening of the municipal boards and city councils, the scrapping of their budgetary powers and a further erosion of their personnel management functions which were already restricted by Philippine local government legislation.

P.D. No. 824 provided the MMC with the exclusive power to perform executive, policy-making and general administrative functions, which meant the de facto suspension of the hitherto existing vertical and horizontal separation of powers in metropolitan politics.⁷ A metrowide legislative body in which representatives of the people could articulate the needs, demands and complaints of their constituencies was absent. Metro Manila was, thus, ruled by the principle of the concentration and unification of powers in a

single body and, as a result of the composition of that body, in actual fact a single person. The First Lady, Mrs. Imelda R. Marcos, was named Governor of Metro Manila, while the other major positions of the MMC, e.g., the Vice-Governor and one Commissioner each for Planning, Finance and Operations, remained vacant until 1980.⁸

Instead of implementing the organizational structure as provided by P.D. No. 824, the First Lady appointed an Executive Secretary and a team of so-called "Action Officers" responsible for major services like finance, health, infrastructure, housing, peace and order, transport, planning, operations, information, education and traffic.⁹ Most of the Action Officers were at the same time high-ranking officials in various national government agencies with close links either to the President himself or to the First Lady. Through this move, the structure of the MMC became even further centralized, thereby effectively transforming metropolitan governance into a national government concern. Apart from the fact that through the governorship of the First Lady, political decision-making could be completely monopolized by the inner circle of the ruling elites, the dual functions of the Action Officers as national government officials on one hand and as metropolitan managers on the other, made sure that even routine administrative work was under the control of a few trusted supporters of the regime.¹⁰

The de facto administration of Metro Manila, through the national government, was formalized when President Ferdinand E. Marcos created in June 1978 the Ministry of Human Settlements (MHS) through P.D. No. 1396. The vast powers and functions vested in this ministry and the subsequent appointment of Mrs. Marcos as Minister of Human Settlements made the MHS a superbody within the national government. Its action program called BLISS (Bagong Lipunan Improvement of Sites and Services) affected virtually every aspect of human life. BLISS was designed to provide the Filipinos with what the MHS planners liked to call the "eleven basic needs" (e.g., water, power, food, shelter, clothing, health services, education and culture, sports and recreation, ecological management, mobility and livelihood and economic base). Other priorities which were lined up were the planning of infrastructure projects, upgrading of depressed areas, and the development of new towns. As the lead agency of the program, the MHS was given a wide range of powers to interfere with the planning and decision-making of all government services which in some way were involved in the implementation of BLISS.

P.D. No. 1396 placed the administration of Metro Manila under the responsibility of the MHS. This, in effect, made the MMC an "attached agency" of the MHS. The dominating influence of the First Lady and the MHS. The dominating influence of the First Lady and the MHS in metropolitan affairs soon became evident, as some key administrators (among them, the Executive Secretary of the MMC, Eduardo Soliman) and Action

Officers were replaced. The MHS staff increasingly took over administrative functions in the capital region (e.g., planning, housing, land use, etc.) and MHS programs like BLISS or the "rolling stores" project filled the headlines of Manila's major dailies.

The effort to exert tighter control over metropolitan affairs also affected the local and sub-local levels. It has already been pointed out earlier that the local units lost their budgetary powers to the MMC. Left with only a minimal influence on their budgetary decisions, the local governments in the MMA had virtually no chance to develop alternative program activities for their jurisdictions different from the program priorities set by the MHS and the MMC. Furthermore, these alternative program activities had to be reflected in the annual budget proposals of the local governments and submitted to the MMC where it was closely scrutinized by a panel of reviewers before the MMC's approval could be obtained. Politically speaking, the tight control over the local budgets meant that no program activities could be launched in the MMA which could have challenged and thereby consequently threatened the legitimacy of government policies.¹¹

The establishment of the MMC, and later the MHS, also redefined the role of the mayors and local legislatures. The mayors, who formerly enjoyed a relatively strong influence (although this depended on their position vis-a-vis the local council) on municipal politics (at least in the Greater Manila Area), were stripped of their political powers and had to follow the prerogatives of the MHS and the MMC. Although their political stature varied according to the size and importance of the local unit they represented or their proximity to key influentials within the national government, they generally performed as administrative agents of the MMC/MHS at the local level. Mayors like Quezon City's Norberto Amoranto or Caloocan City's Marcial Samson, whose loyalty and cooperation toward the new metropolitan government, and hence toward the martial law administration, were questioned, and who seemed to possess a strong power base of their own, were dismissed and replaced by new appointees. Periodic threats of purging unreliable administrators and politicians, as well as the fact that the new mayors owed their appointments to the President, further ensured that they closely followed the political course of the MMC/MHS.¹²

Unlike the Philippine Congress, the almost 1,500 local government councils in the country were not suspended following the declaration of martial law; possibly such a measure would have been way beyond the actual powers of a political regime that was still in its consolidating stage. However, with the expiration of the tenure of the local councils in October 1975, President Marcos issued P.D. No. 826, which replaced these with the Sangguniang Bayans (SBs). In Metro Manila, the establishment of SBs had been announced earlier as part of the provisions laid down in P.D. No. 824. While the SBs were formally introduced as a device to broaden the representative-

ness of the local councils primarily by extending their membership, in reality, their constitution was a shrewd move to outmaneuver the politically unreliable incumbents who had strongly opposed the reorganization of metropolitan government through sheer numerical superiority of regime supporters. Through the appointment of barangay officials, representatives of the barangay youth organization (Kabataang Barangay) and of various societal sectors (capital, professional, industrial and agricultural labor) following a highly obscure (s)election procedure, the membership of the former local councils was enlarged three or four times its original size. While the SBs of the local units outside Metro Manila retained most of their former legislative functions and budgetary powers, the government played it safe in Metro Manila by giving only recommendatory powers to the SBs. Finally, after only a few sessions which touched primarily on rather irrelevant topics (like the renaming of streets), the SBs were suspended in mid-1976 and were never revitalized ever since.¹³

Within a few months after the declaration of martial law, the government had begun to consolidate its position at the sub-local level by establishing neighborhood organizations (barangays) throughout the country. Although the Marcos administration portrayed the barangays as bodies to broaden citizen participation, to support the bureaucracy in the delivery of vital services, and to act as agents of development, it soon became evident that they served primarily as devices to exert control over poverty-stricken and crisis-ridden (urban) areas. Their lack of democratic substance was clearly demonstrated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the barangay officials were not elected by the neighborhood constituency but were instead appointed and were staunch government loyalists. Instead of promoting democracy and development, the barangays performed a variety of police functions which ranged from assisting the military in hunting down "subversive" elements and dispersing demonstrations, to crime prevention and traffic regulation. Occasionally, they also mobilized the people to participate in regime-sponsored referenda and staged other forms of mass actions which altogether had the sole function of providing the martial law administration with some semblance of legitimacy. Apart from that, they were used as instrumentalities of the government in the implementation of its projects. People participation was thereby defined in a narrow sense as participation in government programs. Communication flow was only one way from top to bottom.

Metropolitan Reorganization and Service Delivery

While the government thoroughly reorganized the metropolitan administrative system in a way that gave it vast controlling and decision-making powers, the pattern of public services did not change significantly in the

majority of service sectors. Although it cannot be denied that occasional or temporary improvements have been achieved in some service sectors, the overriding goals which were the main rationale for the reorganization, e.g., an improved planning and coordination process, a more balanced and economical pattern of services delivery through the metrowide integration of major services and the improvement of the living conditions of the urban poor, have not been substantially met.

Among the more successful changes brought about under the new metropolitan setup was the standardization of the real property and business taxes which ended the hitherto stiff competition among local units in attracting industry, commerce and other business ventures. This competition was a major factor contributing to an accelerated widening of revenue disparities, and hence imbalances, in the delivery of public services among the local units within the MMA. In addition, soon after the creation of the MMC, a unit called Real Property Assessment Services in cooperation with METROFINDS (a planning and research division attached to the MMC on the initiative of the World Bank) and the Bureau of Lands began to implement multicadastral surveys aimed at adjusting the existing real property assessment level to actual market values. According to the World Bank's Manila Urban Sector Survey, the assessment level for real property was way below the 50 percent margin of the market value throughout the MMA. The range was from 50 percent in the City of Manila to 13 percent in Navotas.¹⁴ Between 1974 and 1978, the assessed value of real property increased by almost 100 percent, from ₱15.41 billion to ₱29 billion.¹⁵ In some municipalities such as San Juan and Makati, the improvement of tax maps and pilot projects with computerized tax assessments raised tax collection from 80 to 90 percent of their assessed value.¹⁶

However, despite the fact that between 1975 and 1979, the income of the local governments within the MMA almost doubled, disparities among the local units remained unchanged. Also, by taking into account an average inflation rate of 8.40 percent between 1975 and 1979, the income increase appeared modest in real terms, not exceeding 23 percent. Moreover, at least 78 percent of local government revenues had to be spent for fixed purposes: a 20 percent contribution to the MMC, an 18 percent contribution to the Integrated National Police and around 40 percent for salaries and wages. Taking into account additional expenses for maintenance, supplies and materials, as well as ad hoc expenditures for MMC projects which had not been originally appropriated in the budget, little was left for urban development projects.

In other service sectors, success stories were thinly spread. Neither could government coordination problems¹⁷ be overcome nor the proliferation of agencies checked, because the reorganization of the metropolitan

government became a permanent process and barely adjusted to the existing structures. Moreover, the new supralocal bodies were supported by only a rudimentary organizational infrastructure and this had to rely primarily on various national government agencies in their administrative actions.

Although the MMC and the MHS were extremely busy in launching new projects and programs, the impact of most of them was seemingly felt only in terms of media coverage. Numerous projects, allegedly designed to improve the living conditions of the poorer sectors of the metropolitan population, were started with much fanfare but soon bogged down due to financial constraints, poor planning or implementation and a rather frequent change of policy priorities. Moreover, many projects such as the administrations's showcase projects which were undertaken mostly with foreign assistance, often unilaterally benefitted either supporters of the regime, the better-off, or both groups. In the case of most housing projects, for instance, the impact on the living conditions of the actual target group, the urban poor, was more often than not adverse.

Taking into account the announced purpose of the MMC of integrating public services at the metropolitan level, it has to be stated that, strictly speaking, only one service sector, namely refuse and garbage collection, has been actually integrated. However, after some temporary improvements in the garbage collection and refuse disposal in the second half of the seventies, most observers today agree that this service is in the same deplorable state that it used to be before 1975. Despite the creation of a 12,000 strong work force of street cleaners — the Metro Aides — to absorb otherwise jobless, unskilled laborers, their deployment only along the major thoroughfares, in the central business districts and at tourist spots did not contribute significantly to an improvement of the cleanliness problem in those residential areas where the average Manilan lived.

The list of projects that benefitted a few but mainly disregarded the needs of the common man could be continued at length. The low-cost housing projects built under the aegis of the MMC (with the National Housing Authority as the lead agency and in particular the MHS), are a good example. All four types of housing projects implemented at the time of field research (e.g., slum upgrading, sites-and-services, squatter relocation and Urban BLISS) had one thing in common: they were unaffordable to the majority of the urban poor, but instead benefitted government employees, army personnel, barangay officials and other supporters of the administration. In the case of the ambitious World Bank-assisted Tondo foreshore upgrading project and the sites-and-services project in Dagat-Dagatan, nearly 60 percent of the targetted beneficiaries were unable to pay the rent or the down payment and installments once they opted for the purchase of the improved lots and houses.¹⁸ Due to the application of cost recovery, large numbers of

slum dwellers and squatters who were entitled to a lot in these housing projects have meanwhile sold out their rights to more affluent middle-and lower-middle class families from elsewhere.

However, those families who were not recognized as "legal squatters" (e.g., families that settled on river banks, along railway tracks, on land set aside by the state for infrastructure development or those who settled in a squatter community after a certain deadline specified by the authorities) were evicted and relocated to the resettlement areas of Sapang Palay, San Pedro, Gen. Mariano Alvarez (formerly Carmona) and Dasmariñas, or, before being moved there, to one of five Emergency Relocation Centers in Metro Manila.¹⁹ When it became evident that the existing relocation facilities were unable to absorb more squatters from the capital,²⁰ a fifth relocation center was opened in 1982 in Tala Estate, Caloocan City. Since all of these resettlement areas were located between 20 and 40 kilometers outside Metro Manila, relocation was equivalent to a socio-economic uprooting of the families affected by it. Families lost their employment, costs of living rose tremendously, and services were totally inadequate. Social networks that have developed in the slum and squatter areas over decades and which provided at least some protection against destitution were also destroyed. In the meantime, the anti-squatting law tightened up under martial law. Until 1973, squatting was only treated as a public nuisance, but under P.D. No. 296 and, more explicitly, P.D. No. 772, it was declared a criminal offense, punishable by imprisonment or fine. Without the commensurate government programs to provide the necessary facilities or to improve the financial capability of low-income families so they could afford better housing, the government's anti-squatting legislation tremendously increased the pressure on them in their struggle for survival.²¹

Finally, the Urban BLISS project of the MHS, although initially announced as a housing project for the poorest ten percent of Manilans, was another of the MHS' numerous expensive prestige projects. Whereas the slum upgrading and sites-and-services projects aimed at benefiting more than 200,000 families, Urban BLISS added only 2,471 units to the capital's housing stock.²² Its contribution to the solution of Manila's housing shortage, which was put at 330,000 units, was thus negligible.²³ Moreover, as the rent amounted to no less than ₱500 a month, the project turned out to be affordable only to the upper 10 percent of Manila's family income distribution.²⁴

The problems in the housing sector and the rapid growth of more than 415 depressed areas in the capital were primarily caused by a land use pattern that on the one hand was controlled by market forces and on the other by erratic and unpredictable government interventions that were often inseparably linked with various forms of corruption and manipulation. As a result land prices spiralled within the MMA and, according to a recent study,

increased between 100 and 775 percent within the last five years alone.²⁵ Needless to say, except for the upper 20 percent of the family income distribution, the majority of the urban population was priced out of the housing market and had to resort to squatting or dwelling in overcrowded, dilapidated housing units.

This was the background against which zoning regulations and an urban land reform law were issued. The zoning law of 1978, however, was based on incomplete and at times erroneous data as the land use survey was undertaken only by barangay officials and high school students and had to be replaced by a new zoning ordinance in 1981.²⁶

The urban land reform program, declared by virtue of PD No. 1517 and Proclamation No. 1893 in 1979, was perceived as a counterpart of the agrarian land reform program which the martial law administration launched as a cornerstone of its newly inaugurated "New Society" in 1972. The major provisions of the Decree were that real property transactions now had to be registered with an approval by the government, land use had to be in accordance with government development plans and, through the granting of the right of first refusal, bona fide residents were given greater protection from eviction in case the landlord decided to sell the land. As an ultimate option to implement the regulations laid down in the Decree, the government was endowed with power of expropriation. A few days later, subsequent legislation was passed freezing the prices of land and rentals of residential and commercial units to not more than ₱300 per month.

Understandably, these measures were vehemently opposed by land owners, the construction and real estate industries, and the business community in general. Land was a strategic commodity for use as collateral in securing loans or credits, particularly in times of economic recession. Consequently, increasing land prices augmented an applicant's potential to obtain credits. The opponents of the land reform edict thus argued that the decrees would not only represent an illegitimate intervention into the principle of free enterprise, and cause the collapse of the construction and realty industries, but would in general affect national development prospects in a highly unfavorable way.

Confronted with the concerted opposition of these powerful groups, President Marcos adhered to their counter-proposals aimed at restricting urban land reform to "depressed areas." In line with this amendment, which was later incorporated in Proclamation No. 1967, property transactions were permitted to be conducted as before, without any limitations on 90 percent of the MMA, whereas land reform legislation covered only the remaining 10 percent. All urban land reform activities were now focused in 244 slums and squatter settlements which, from the point of view of capitalist interests, were marginal lands unprofitable for development. However, as

only "legitimate tenants" (e.g., persons who have legally occupied the land by contract continuously for the last 10 years and built their house thereat). could become beneficiaries of urban land reform, all squatters were a priori excluded. Thus, only 15 percent or 150,000 persons of a population of approximately one million living in the land reform zones were eligible to benefit from the legislation. In other words, urban land reform affected only 1.8 percent of the entire metropolitan population.²⁷

As a consequence of such restrictive land reform legislation, the land use pattern in Metro Manila did not change markedly. It continued to benefit the modern economic sector and the upper 20 percent of the family income distribution, which were the only groups able to afford a land use system based on land as a commodity. The modern sector will continue to expand at the expense of the more traditional forms of land use which will continuously be squeezed out from the more favorable urban locations to fringe areas or otherwise marginal and uneconomic places. In a similar vein, the segregation of urban functions will continue with only the most capital-intensive (e.g., hotels, modern tertiary sector and luxury condominiums) being able to compete in the central urban areas. Such a pattern of land use will inevitably further widen the existing spatial and social imbalance within the MMA.

Conclusion

Turning back to the initial question of this article, an explanation has to be given as to why the actual performance of the metropolitan government did not meet its original goals. One major factor contributing to what the press has referred to as an "experiment in failure"²⁸ was that the creation of the MMC followed primarily political motives of regime stabilization. When President Marcos declared martial law in 1972, the local government units in Metro Manila were essentially political strongholds of the opposition, which at that time fiercely fought against the government's development strategy of replacing the country's import-substituting industrialization by an export-oriented industrialization.²⁹ In 1972, Marcos' ruling Nacionalista Party (NP) was only able to control two of the 17 local councils in the MMA, while in five others it had at least reached a pact with the oppositionist Liberal Party (LP) in terms of council seats. With regard to the vice mayors, the ratio was five to 11 in favor of the LP, and only among mayors did the NP enjoy a slight advantage of nine to seven, although the latter figure disguises the fact that among the five biggest and economically most important local units of Metro Manila, e.g., the City of Manila, Quezon City, Pasay City, Caloocan City and Makati, only one mayor was an NP.³⁰ Considering that Metro Manila is the economic core region of the nation as far as non-agricultural activities are concerned,³¹ it becomes quite clear that the opposition's strongly entrenched position in the local governments of Metro Manila

gave it enormous political leverage to impede the governmental development strategy. Hence, the martial law administration had to exert effort to get control of the decision-making processes in Metro Manila. Such strategic considerations dominated all other aspects which were cited as rationale for the restructuring of metropolitan government. In this sense, the expansion and improvement of public services, although objectively contributing to regime stabilization, received only secondary priority. The reorganization of the metropolitan government was thus one more step in the long sequence of measures which the martial law administration undertook in order to consolidate its rule: the enactment of a new Constitution, the suspension of the Congress and the dissolution of political parties, the granting of wide powers to the military, and a tight control over the mass media. The regular holding of plebiscites (referenda), the revitalization of political parties, the holding of both national (1978) and local (1980) elections were further steps aimed at providing the martial law administration with democratic legitimacy.

Another explanation for the generally unsatisfactory performance of the metropolitan government in terms of service delivery, especially with regard to the urban poor, is the fact that the metropolitan government was mainly staffed with technocrats who were trained in the spirit of US-oriented modernization theories. This group of administrators, together with leading politicians of the regime, perceived urban development primarily in terms of Western-style modern sector development. Traditional life-styles, values, forms of land use and income generation were seen as incompatible with such a development perspective. These were viewed as obstacles to modernization, and consequently had to be eradicated. The articulation of demands and attempts to participate in decision-making by a public affected by these modernization strategies were brushed aside as politicking, as traits of the "Old Society," and a costly and time-consuming impediment to rational and efficient administration.³²

A brief follow-up research in December 1984 essentially confirmed earlier findings: that as a policy-making instrument, the metropolitan government was closely linked to the martial law regime and its leading exponents, namely the First Lady and the President. Martial law and the MMC/MHS setup were mutually dependent upon each other: for the authoritarian government the MMC/MHS was an important structure to further consolidate its rule and to gain control over the metropolitan capital, the centerpiece of the Philippine political system. The MMC/MHS could only perform these functions efficiently as long as martial law remained unchallenged and permitted the government to act as a cohesive block. It seems plausible to assume that with the end of the Marcos administration, the present so-called "commission-type" of metropolitan government will disappear as well and give way to a form of metropolitan government which would be compatible with the prevailing power configuration and the interests of the new set of rulers.

In fact, cracks in the regime's Metro Manila fortress have been observed since the formal lifting of martial law in January 1981. Since then, the regime has experienced a gradual process of disintegration, the causes of which are manifold: the deteriorating economic situation, lack of legitimacy, lack of responsiveness towards the needs of the average Filipino, military abuses, etc. This process of disintegration has rapidly gained momentum after the Aquino assassination and the intensified political and economic crisis sparked off by this event. For the first time since the declaration of martial law, the Marcos administration was openly challenged and virtually found itself under a state of siege. Not surprisingly, the rapid erosion of the government's legitimacy did not spare the metropolitan government, which subsequently lost its status of a sacred cow. As early as 1980, former Manila councilor Gemiliano Lopez, Jr. had already filed a case in the Supreme Court questioning the constitutionality of the MMC. The case is still pending. In a similar vein, the United Democratic Opposition (UNIDO) and even some candidates of the administration party, the Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), made the MMC a major issue during the Batasang Pambansa election campaign in 1984, attacking what was considered a failure to improve the service standards within the MMA. The opponents of the MMC scored a great victory. UNIDO reaped 15 of a total of 21 parliamentary seats in the capital, despite the fact that the KBL mobilized the entire MMC apparatus down to the last barangay in support of the regime. Immediately after the opening of the newly elected Batasang Pambansa, UNIDO filed a bill asking for the abolition of the MMC and seeking the reinstatement of the old mayor-council system in the MMA. It was argued that such a change would result in a more effective service delivery and give back autonomy to the local governments. Like in other fields of policy-making, the government seemed to compromise with the opposition in order to absorb the wave of protests. A study with the goal of thoroughly scrutinizing the existing setup was commissioned to the University of the Philippines Law Center which later proposed the election of the Governor and the creation of a Metro Manila Assembly with consultative functions. In general, however, the vast powers of the present MMC top executives were left untouched.

The conflict over the structure will intensify as the local elections scheduled for 1986 approaches. But while the metropolitan reorganizations of 1975 obviously did not fulfill its officially-stated goals, neither will the "nostalgia" proposals of the UNIDO opposition contribute to an improvement of living conditions within the MMA, as was amply demonstrated before 1975. Whatever the ultimate form of metropolitan government will be, no significant changes in the pattern of service delivery and living conditions will be brought about as long as metropolitan governance is primarily considered as a vehicle in the national political power game.

Endnotes

¹E. Jaycox, "Die Weltbank und die Armsten der Welt II (Weltbank und städtische Armut)," *Finanzierung und Entwicklung*, vol. 15 (1978), pp. 10-13.

²Quoted in Jurgen Oestereich, "Sackgassen der Entwicklung (Über Verstädterung in der Britten Welt)," *Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit*, Vol. 2 (1976, p. 11).

³This figure is an estimate based on a barangay census conducted in 1980. The population figures for Metro Manila differ widely. For instance, the National Census and Statistics Office placed the population of Metro Manila at only 5.9 million in 1980. Nevertheless, there is a tendency among urban sociologists to consider the barangay figures closer to reality.

⁴Republic of the Philippines/NEDA/National Census and Statistics Office, 1975, *Integrated Census of the Population and its Economic Activities*, p.x. This figure holds true for the period between 1970 and 1975. From 1975 to 1980 the growth rate declined to 3.5 percent. Although new figures are not yet available, there is high probability that the growth rate due to economic pressures, and especially the breakdown of peace and order in the countryside, increased markedly in the first half of the eighties.

⁵The definition of what constitutes Metro Manila varied at that time considerably. Some proposals considered the Greater Manila area as an agglomeration of four cities and four municipalities, that is, the inner core of the metropolitan region, while others saw it extensively as the Metropolitan Manila Bay Region consisting of five cities and 35 municipalities.

⁶A complete listing of the various proposals can be found in Arturo G. Pacho, "Variations on the Metro Manila Reform Theme," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (April 1974), pp. 159-170.

⁷For an in-depth assessment of the reorganization see Jurgen Ruland, *Politik und Verwaltung in Metro Manila: Aspekte der Herrschaftsstabilisierung in einem autoritären politischen System*, (Munich: Weltforum Verlag, 1982).

⁸Even after 1980, no Commissioner of Operations had been appointed.

⁹See also Manuel A. Caoili, "Recent Developments in Metropolitan Manila Commission Government," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXI, Nos. 3 & 4 (July-October 1977), pp. 374-379.

¹⁰Ruland, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-109.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 98-100.

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 103-119.

¹³For a detailed assessment of barangay activities see Belinda A. Aquino, "Politics in the New Society: Barangay Democracy," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, New York City, March 25-27, 1977; also Raul P. de Guzman and Associates, "Citizen Participation and Decision-Making under Martial Law Administration: A Search for a Viable Political System," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XXI, No. 1 (January 1977), pp. 1-19; and Ruland, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-159.

¹⁴World Bank, *Manila Urban Sector Survey*, 1975, Ch. VII, p. 17.

¹⁵*Times Journal*, July 4, 1978.

- ¹⁶Personal information obtained from officers of the metropolitan government.
- ¹⁷See Ramon D. Bagatsing, "A Critical Study of the Metropolitan Manila Government," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 1978).
- ¹⁸Dieter Oberndorfer, "Strukturdaten zum Squattergebeit Tondo/Manila, Beschreibung und Analyse der amtlichen Forderungsmaßnahmen in dieser Region," University of Freiburg, 1979, p. 12.
- ¹⁹See Ruland, "Squatter Relocation in the Philippines: The Case of Metro Manila," *Occasional Paper No. 5*, University of Bayreuth, 1982.
- ²⁰See Perla Q. Makil, "Slums and Squatters in the Philippines," Concerned Citizens for the Urban Poor, Series No. 3, Manila 1983. In the anti-squatting drives between 1982 and 1984, more than 26,373 families were evicted or relocated. This compares with a total of approximately 46,186 families relocated between 1951 and 1982.
- ²¹See Makil, "Squatting in Metro Manila," paper read at the Breakfast Dialogue of the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference (BBC), Makati, August 27, 1982, p. 8.
- ²²Mila Reforma and Leonor Briones, "Housing Services in Metro Manila," Manila 1983, mimeo., p. 52.
- ²³Metro Manila: the First Three Years. November 1975 to December 1978, p. 11.
- ²⁴See Reforma and Briones, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- ²⁵*Malaysia Business Times*, March 18, 1981.
- ²⁶For a detailed investigation of the metropolitan land use and physical planning, see Jurgen H. Wolff, "Planning in Manila," *Occasional Paper No. 7*, University of Bayreuth, 1983.
- ²⁷*Business Day*, December 13, 1984, p. 8.
- ²⁸Title of a series run by the oppositionist newspaper, *Malaya*, July 22-27, 1984.
- ²⁹For examples, see Ruland, "Politik und Verwaltung . . .," *op. cit.*
- ³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 48-52.
- ³¹The MMA contributes almost 26 percent to the Philippine GNP and provides 85 percent of the national government revenues. Metro Manila is also the financial center of the country. More than 40 percent of all financial institutions have their headquarters in the capital, controlling 68 percent of all assets. Most important, however, is the fact that Metro Manila is the most favored location for industrial investment. More than 60 percent of the large companies (e.g., firms with more than 20 employees) have chosen Manila as the location of their plants. 88.6 percent and 90.9 percent of new industrial investments made in 1979 and 1980 went to Manila. Thus, Metro Manila is producing 63 percent of the value added in the manufacturing sector, 71 percent of the value added in the manufacturing sector, 71 percent in transportation, 69 percent in communication and 54 percent in the service sector.
- ³²See Ruland, "Verwaltungsreform und Stadtentwicklungspolitik in einer Metropolitanregion: Der Fall Metro Manila"; in *Verfassung und Recht in Ubersee*, Vol. 14, Heft 1, 1981, pp. 40-44.