

Martial Law in the Philippines to Date

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Martial Law, because of its drastic impact on the lives of many, is viewed as a beginning or an end. There are reasons, however, to see it as merely a chapter, although a very important one, in Philippine history.

To begin with, this is not the first time that militarily-backed centralized power has been instituted in the Philippines. The Spanish colonial period was a despotic legacy of military and religious dominance. After the revolution against Spain, the first thing that Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed was a military dictatorship. The American colonizers that took over the Philippines preached local government but firmly held on to centralized control. The Commonwealth government set up in 1935 sought a strong president. The puppet government under the Japanese during World War II was martial. And, as President Marcos tirelessly points out, the old Constitution of the Philippines provided for martial law under troubled times.

The "freedom years" characterized by elections, free speech, constitutional bill of rights, and civil liberties are brief, indeed.

Instead of Martial Law being a break from the past, there are some authors, in fact, who argue that it is a link with the past. S. P. Lopez believes that:

The paradox of the New Society is that it aims at the restoration of the traditional values of Filipino society which the modern, urbanized Filipino has come to regard as old-fashioned, outmoded, and rather quaint. It calls for the reconstruction of Filipino society by using as building blocks the ancient virtues of our forefathers: individual dignity, social discipline, obedience to law, rights counterbalanced by responsibility, respect for the rights of others, honesty, industry, patriotism.¹

R. S. Cuyugan, dean of the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines, goes beyond Philippine history and extends the links to

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all of Asia, viewing recent events in the Philippines as "the Philippine return to Asia."²

What happened in September 21, 1972 can be interpreted as the recovering . . . the recovery was, in effect, the return to Asian ways — Asian institutions, modes of decision-making and of forging consensus. Thus, the declaration of martial law and coming into being of the New Society put the Philippines back to the cultural, economic and political mainstream of Asia.

There are others who compare the present Philippine situation to the Japanese Occupation (1941-45). To those critical of martial law, there are *zonas* (police and military raids on certain zones and the rounding up of opposition elements); backyard gardens (now called the "Green Revolution"); the "underground" (clandestine publications, guerillas) and even "collaborators" (those on the side of the ruling forces). Many of the persons identified with the opposition, in fact, are veterans of the anti-Japanese struggle. Eleuterio Adevos, Raul Manglapus, Joaquin Rocas, Bonifacio Gillego, and others were men who shared the tortures of Fort Santiago or the tough life in the mountains. To these men, the struggle may just be a continuing tradition.

As for the technocrats, the academics turned civil servants now serving the New Society, theirs is adherence to a tradition too. American colonization may have introduced rough and tumble politics but many people also recall the stability, efficiency, and progress of "Peace Time," the pre-independence era when roads were built, sewers were dug, diseases were eradicated, education was offered, and honest, hard-working civil servants in white coats and black ties ran the government. Those days required a reigning governor-general and a Moro "pacification campaign," too — yes, with its grim tales of American Army atrocities as well.

Even the young intellectuals waging a "Propaganda Campaign" in forced or self-imposed exile are following a true Filipino tradition. How many of these young idealists would become Lunas, del Pilars, Mabinis and Rizals?

Taking a longer historical perspective, therefore, helps in putting in context recent trends in the Philippines. Such a long overview reveals that such events may be very significant but that they hardly mean the beginning or the end of freedom in the country. There are larger and stronger forces in Philippine history that say, with the ancient poet, "even this shall pass away."

Personalities and Factions

One of the main threads in Philippine politics that may shed some light on Martial Law is the strong factionalism and adherence to personalistic loyalties that characterize Filipino political behavior. Almost all analysts of Philippine politics have noted the aggregation of political loyalties around individual actors. Bases of aggregation have been kinship to such actors, origin from a specific geographical region, a common language, and other particularistic identities. Political relationships, according to Lende, were structured in dyadic relationships.³ The "alliances" among *leaders* and followers formed the nuclei of political machines.⁴

In time, a shaky system of "political rules of the game" evolved, which made elections, parties, legislative deliberations, and politico-administrative contests possible. The tendency to violate the rules of the game, however, was never really forgotten. As noted earlier, the all-or-nothing language of politics might have provided deeper and more realistic indices to what people really felt.

In many of the troubled areas factionalism and the violence that came to be associated with it had deep familial roots. Family feuds fed into political fights, and vice versa. Vendettas and all-or-nothing feuds are not the best conditions for political democratic processes.

Factionalism and violence were never too far from the surface in Philippine politics. The increasing use of arms and private armies had predictable results — the breaking down of law and order, and the eventual imposition of martial controls in the name of law and order.

Under the conditions of armed conflict and civil disorder that characterized pre-martial law Philippine society, there was a great need for simplifying things. This simplifying process eventually focused on the personality of President Marcos and his family. In fact, one can almost say that in view of the confused condition of Philippine politics before martial law, if President Marcos and his family did not exist, somebody would have had to invent them.

President Marcos seems singularly aware of this focusing and polarization of views on his person. He begins his "Notes on the New Society" in this way:

Great decisions are made for us as much as we make them ... I am ... accountable to history for September 21, 1972. I cannot escape the sense that events, the thrust of history ... somehow guided my hand to the deed ... behind every man who makes history are forces which blur the distinction between individual initiative and historical necessity. ...⁵

The focusing of historical forces on President Marcos was the work of partisans and opponents alike. To his enemies, President Marcos was larger than life — "the richest man in Asia," "the most crooked Filipino," "the wildest of politicians." From his almost legendary physical courage to his reputed sexual prowess, President Marcos was a natural for his "super hero" or "heavy" role. To his adherents, President Marcos could do no wrong. His opponents, on the other hand, by attributing so many sins to him, may have created a personality cult in reverse.

It is difficult to guess whether personalism and factionalism as shown in recent Philippine events are "Asian" or even whether they are typical of developing country politics. There was widespread belief that only a strong hand would be able to impose discipline and control over Philippine events. Almost all the justifications written of martial law point to the anarchy, disorder, violence, and confusion of the times. The ready acceptance of martial law by many Filipinos might be attributed to this demand for order.

The Technocrats

If personalism and factionalism can be termed Asian, one of the main influences on the martial law government in the Philippines today is definitely "imported." This is the idea that a group of talented, skilled, impersonal and rational individuals, divorced from politics, factions and particularistic interests are the instruments by which economic and social development may be achieved. The ideal of an apolitical civil service of good men, selected, trained and promoted strictly according to merit, is an old one. The ideal, however, that a classless civil service drawn from all interested persons, selected by systems of examinations and promoted strictly according to skills and competence, is a peculiarly American one. It may be closely related to the similar idea that there is a group of civic-minded citizens in every community who would work for the public welfare from selfless and idealistic concerns and who would not demean themselves or soil their reputations by using public office for private gain.

As the only American colony, the Philippines became the testing ground for these twin ideals of civic politics and a civil service based on merit. Both ideals found convergence in the hope that education was the key to economic and social progress. Even after independence, the educational establishment became one of the main moulders of

public life. With the commercial and industrial sectors not able to flourish as actively as desired, government became the main "industry" to employ the thousands of educated graduates. Education as the main ladder for economic and social mobility did not end in the country. There was a system of scholarships and grants (the *pensionado* system) extending higher education to the United States and, to a limited extent, to Europe. In the early years, when a political career promised both fame and fortune, many of the scholars went into politics. However, as politics became corrupt, soiled and demeaning, many of the scholars turned to academic pursuits, private business, and eventually to the civil service.

The philosophical and value premises of the academics turned civil servants who are active in the martial law government in the Philippines at present are those which reflect the "value-free" and "rational" ideals of American reformers. Implicitly or explicitly, the "technocrats," as they have become more popularly known, abhor the open conflicts and excesses of electoral politics. Philosophically, they are committed to rationalism as an ends-means relationship. Emotionally, they are drawn to the idea of the selfless, objective, meritorious civil servant with his "passion for anonymity" efficiently doing his appointed task. Herbert Simon writes that most of the technocrats probably believe in the fact-value dichotomy. Political representatives of the people set the goals (values); they as civil servants go about the business of achieving those goals using facts in the best cost-benefit tradition.

Development administration theorists committed to rational problem solving (as well as business administration savants who advocate running government agencies like efficient corporations) will probably cringe at the thought of their ideas being used by strong men, dictators and authoritarian leaders, but the truth is that the military-technocratic alliance is becoming one of the most widely known power bases in most developing countries today. A publication not overly sympathetic to the technocrats in the Philippines describes the situation in this way:

One of the major effects of martial law in the Philippines was the transfer of power from warlord politicians . . . to a new breed of technocrats who now have a pivotal role in policy formation, both in domestic affairs and international negotiations. These technocrats were almost always invariably drawn from UP or Ateneo products in the middle or late fifties who trained abroad, mostly in the US Ivy League and top universities for their Ph.D.'s or MBA's and later returned to the Philippines to serve as deans and directors in the major as well as

consultants to big corporations. . . . Now, they call the shots in the New Society by running the sensitive and powerful offices of the regime such as the Board of Investments, Department of Finance, and the newly created National Economic and Development Authority. They reportedly have no "political clout" and the sole basis of their appointment is their technical expertise.⁶

Prominently mentioned among the "new power-holders" are Cesar Virata, Secretary of Finance (Wharton); Vicente Paterno, Chairman of Board of Investments (Harvard); Gerardo Sicat, Director-General, NEDA (MIT); Orlando Sacay, Assistant Secretary for Cooperatives (Cornell); Arturo Tanco, Secretary of Agriculture (Harvard); Onofre D. Corpuz, Coordinator for Human Settlements Development (Harvard);* Roman Cruz Jr., Manager, Government Service Insurance System (Harvard); and others.

Though many admire the hard work, dedication, and concrete results achieved by the technocrats, there are also some detractors who see them as servile followers of the powers that be. The resurgence of American and Japanese business dominance in the Philippines is worrying some people, and they attribute this to the technocrats. One criticism charges that "their neo-colonial orientation toward economic development and their willingness to commit the resources of Philippine economy to foreign exploitation" would lead the Philippines to ruin. The charges warn that "their servility to foreign interest and readiness to accommodate foreign domination under the guise of internal economic development should be a cause of alarm among Filipinos."⁷

Conversations with technocrats readily reveal their sincerely-felt desire for progress as well as a strong reformist streak. To most of them, the restoration of stability under martial law provides "the chance to do something." With Congress and professional politicians out, government has become a simple ends-means framework. President Marcos sets the goals, the technocrats suggest the means and they simply proceed to the optimal way of translating plans to action.

This idealized simple view of politics-free administration is slowly proving to be troublesome. In their private moments, the technocrats admit that their "think-tanks" and "do-tanks" are not sufficient to achieve the goals they have set — goals set very high, to begin with, because of high expectations from the people.

*Now also concurrently President, both of the Development Academy of the Philippines and the University of the Philippines System. — Ed.

In the Philippines, it is increasingly becoming clear that even with Martial Law powers, when President Marcos says, "do this, do that" things do not necessarily happen. Orders have been given from the clear vantage point of Malacañang Palace in Manila, but they have been changed, revised and altered as they have rippled away toward the provinces by various cases of miscommunication, partial implementation, ignorance, and acts of commission or omission. It is true that, with organizational reform, the lines of authority in the Philippine bureaucracy have been shortened. Still, the technocrats are encountering a lot of static and noise in their communication and authority lines.

Administrative rationality may have replaced political rationality in the Philippines under martial law, but along with it has come about administrative politics as well. In reality, technocrats do not have equal access to the President and this determines their effectiveness in public life. Personal, professional and other rivalries, of course, are usually hidden and glossed over but they are there. Professional watchers of bureaucratic careers are aware that the meteoric rise of one particular technocrat usually follows a path strewn with sore toes, aching arms, and bruised egos.

It is clear that the presence of technocrats in the government of President Marcos has assisted him immensely. In education-conscious Philippines, all those advanced degrees and academic robes spell knowledge, dedication, civic conscience and performance. The "best brains" of the country are now harnessed by government. Planners and doers have replaced politicians. With very rare exceptions there is no scandal or any whiff of corruption or dishonesty among the technocrats. To Filipinos who have been made cynical by the political excesses of yesteryears, this is an unaccustomedly beneficial situation.

NOTES

¹Salvador P. Lopez, "Freedom With Responsibility," Commencement Address, University of the Philippines, May 27, 1973, printed in *UP Gazette*, p. 55.

²Ruben Santos Cuyugan, "The Philippines' Return to Asia," *The Fookien Times Yearbook*, 1973, p. 316.

³Carl Lende, *Structure of Philippine Politics: Leaders, Factions and Parties*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1965).

⁴Mary R. Hollnsteiner, *The Dynamics of Power in a Philippine Municipality* (Quezon City: Community Development Research Council, 1963).

⁵Ferdinand E. Marcos, *Notes on the New Society* (Manila: Marcos Foundation Inc., 1973), p. iii.

⁶*Pahayag*, No. 3, Feb. 1973, p. 1.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 14.