

# Imelda Marcos convicted on seven counts of graft in the Philippines

Joseph Santolan  
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On Friday November 9, a Philippine court found the 89-year-old Imelda Marcos guilty of seven counts of graft stemming from the 1970s when she held power as first lady and joint dictator of the country alongside her husband Ferdinand Marcos. The case against Imelda Marcos was filed at the beginning of the 1990s, shortly after her husband's death in 1989. The ruling that has been handed down against Marcos after three decades of protracted delays is an expression of the sharp crisis of political rule in the Philippines under President Rodrigo Duterte.

Marcos was sentenced to up to 77 years in jail and a warrant was issued for her arrest, but she has been allowed to remain free on bail pending what is likely to be an endless series of appeals. Marcos was convicted of the theft of \$US200 million during her rule as Governor of Metro Manila and minister of Human Settlements during the martial law regime of her husband. There is overwhelming evidence that both she and her husband opened a number of Swiss bank accounts in the names of a variety of front organizations where they salted away the wealth they pilfered over the course of their decade and half of rule. The \$US200 million, which she was convicted of stealing, is likely but a fraction of this plunder.

The Marcoses oversaw a brutal dictatorship which lasted from 1972 to their ouster in 1986. They maintained their hold on power through an apparatus of police and military repression, which killed thousands of workers and peasants and arrested and tortured tens of thousands. Washington was responsible for creating and maintaining this dictatorship. Every American president, Democrat and Republican alike, from Nixon to Reagan, backed the regime, arming it, funding it, and ensuring that its leading military figures received training from the CIA.

The martial law regime served the interests of the Philippine bourgeoisie, suppressing the explosive unrest of the time through its crackdown on the working class. The Marcoses used their power as well to enrich themselves with corruption on a scale unprecedented in the country's history. Imelda's million dollar foreign shopping sprees and her vast

collection of shoes became legendary.

Imelda Marcos was more than a profligate parasite, however; she was also an equal partner with her husband, a conjugal dictator, in the apparatus of repression. More than any other political figure she shaped Philippine foreign policy, and, as governor of Metro Manila, she oversaw the policing and control of the sprawling capital. She met and negotiated repeatedly with Johnson, Nixon, Kissinger, Reagan, Mao, Castro, and Gaddafi, among a great many others. Her trips to the United States involved visits to both the Pentagon and Tiffany's.

A majority of the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth was acquired through crony capitalism, skimming off the top from state-run corporations, some of which they had 'nationalized' from their political rivals. For the various sections of the elite opposition to Marcos, the oligarchs who were excluded from state power over the course of the dictatorship, this was the great crime of the Marcos regime.

The Marcos dictatorship was overthrown in an upheaval in February 1986, marked by both a military coup plotted by elements of the Marcos regime looking to control a new junta without the ailing dictator, and a mass movement of millions in the streets demanding the ouster of Marcos. The Reagan White House supported the dictator until the last possible minute before providing him exile in Hawaii and supporting his political opponent, Corazon Aquino, a member of one of the wealthiest landowning families in the country.

Aquino rapidly implemented many of the same repressive measures the Marcos dictatorship had perfected. She funded paramilitary death squads trained by the CIA, and had her troops open fire on protesters. The section of the capitalist class now in power focused all of its ire on the corruption of the Marcos regime and not on its brutality, which they were, in fact, continuing.

Imelda Marcos, her entire family, and all of the leading architects of martial law were rehabilitated in Philippine politics in the early 1990s. Imelda ran for President unsuccessfully before becoming a three-term

congresswoman. Her son Ferdinand Marcos Jr, became a Senator, and her daughter, Imelda 'Imee' Marcos, became governor of Ilocos Norte. This has often been attributed in journalistic accounts to the supposed forgetfulness of the masses or to the vagaries of democracy. This is a slander against the working class. The rehabilitation of the Marcoses was the direct product of the machinations of the elite who, from 1990 onward, formed alliances with them, joined parties with them, and campaigned with them.

The Marcos family and its influential political apparatus was particularly close to the presidencies of Joseph Estrada, the second term of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, and now, above all, to the Rodrigo Duterte administration. During these periods, the bourgeois opposition has attempted to use corruption charges against Imelda Marcos as a weapon against their political rivals.

The Philippines is currently entering a midterm election, an election riven by a deep-seated political crisis which has found sharp expression in the rule of the fascistic populist Duterte. Imee Marcos has announced that she is running for senate and Imelda announced that she would run for governor to replace her daughter's vacated post.

Immediately after the official announcements of these campaigns, the Sandiganbayan Fifth District Court issued a ruling which had been pending for nearly three decades, finding Marcos guilty of graft. If upheld the ruling will prevent her from holding office. Commission on Elections (Comelec) Spokesperson James Jimenez declared over the weekend that Imelda Marcos can continue her bid for governor as long as her appeal is pending.

The intense political crisis in the Philippines is the product of both geopolitical and social tensions. Washington's drive against China, marked by military encirclement, political machinations, and trade war measures, has placed Manila on the front lines of a possible world war. At the same time, staggering levels of social inequality, poverty and exploitation have produced an explosive level of social anger.

These crises have led to the rise of Duterte, paralleling the rise of the far right around the world. Duterte has sought to reorient Philippine diplomatic and economic ties toward China, and to consolidate an apparatus of police state rule by means of his murderous war on drugs. According to official government statistics, more people have already been killed by the police and vigilantes under the Duterte administration than were killed during the decade and a half of the Marcos dictatorship.

Duterte has sought and secured the experienced support of the Marcos family and their cronies to bolster his administration. Ferdinand Marcos Jr was narrowly defeated for the Vice Presidency in 2016, and Duterte has openly

declared his support for an election appeal which Marcos has filed. Duterte arranged to give a state funeral to the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos, whose corpse Imelda had kept on refrigerated display for two decades.

The situation in the Philippines is becoming increasingly sharp. Duterte's popularity has plummeted and social anger is mounting at skyrocketing food prices, long lines to buy rice, and a death toll of nearly 50 people a day from the 'war on drugs.'

The opposition to the president has formed an alliance centered on the Liberal Party of former President Benigno Aquino III, son of Corazon Aquino. President Aquino during his term in office served as a leading proxy of Washington in its drive against China, filing a court case against Beijing's territorial claim in the South China Sea, and signing a deal for the return of US military bases to the country. The Liberal Party and its allies have sought to channel mass outrage against Duterte on the grounds that he is a "puppet" of China, and not against his dictatorial maneuvers.

In the early 1970s, as Marcos made his final preparations for dictatorship, his elite opponents sought to use mass outrage to remove the president from office and install themselves in power. Ninoy Aquino, leader of the opposition to Marcos and husband and father of the later presidents, informed the US embassy in September 1972 that he might attempt to seize power in a revolution, but that Washington need not worry, for he intended to impose a military dictatorship and execute dissidents. There was no section of the bourgeoisie, not the Marcoses nor their opponents, who were opposed to dictatorship.

The historical parallels are stark. Duterte's preparations for police state rule are far advanced but the bourgeois opposition is not engaged in a fight against dictatorship. They are looking to secure state power for themselves by whatever means.



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