

Thirty-five years since the “People Power” ouster of Marcos in the Philippines

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On February 26, 1986, Ferdinand Marcos and his family, confronting ouster by significant sections of the military and popular opposition from millions of Filipinos who had taken to the streets, were hastily evacuated from Malacañang presidential palace by US military helicopters. They were brought to Hawai’i, where the former dictator, who had exercised brutal rule over the Philippines since 1972, lived out the rest of his life in comfortable exile.

The overthrow of Marcos is popularly associated with the nonviolent assembly of millions of ordinary Filipinos on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (Edsa), who courageously stood their ground in front of Marcos’ tanks, in an event that became known as “People Power.” Reality is more complicated. Behind the removal of Marcos was a military coup, the political machinations of a leading cleric, and the belated intervention of the US government.

The crisis of bourgeois rule occasioned by the removal of Marcos opened a potentially revolutionary situation in the Philippines. It took a year for the newly installed administration of Corazon Aquino to consolidate power. The Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) played a critical role in restabilizing the political rule of the capitalist class in the country, promoting illusions in the working class and peasantry about Aquino, whom they hailed as a “progressive representative of the national bourgeoisie.”

On May Day, 1986, CPP founder and ideological leader Jose Maria Sison, stood side-by-side with President Aquino and Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos on the Luneta grandstand, the preeminent official gathering place in the country, while union and peasant organizations allied to the CPP played the Internationale and raised the hammer-and-sickle flag. The CPP claimed that Aquino would carry out the national democratic revolution and they worked over the course of 1986 to enter her administration.

Aquino instead allied with the military and deployed its might to crush the Filipino working class and peasantry. Ramos had been head of the Philippine Constabulary under the Marcos dictatorship and he established a continuity of military repression between the two administrations. In January, 1987, Aquino’s military and police forces opened fire on an unarmed march of 17,000 peasant farmers, who had gathered on the instructions of the CPP to appeal to the president for land reform.

The excitement and enthusiasm surrounding the ouster of the tyrant Marcos was rapidly disappointed. “People power” was betrayed. The landed capitalist elite remained in power and they were as brutal as ever. The basic problems confronting the Filipino masses remain unresolved and have, in fact, worsened.

The WSWS is republishing a historical piece examining the Marcos dictatorship, its ouster, the presidency of Corazon Aquino, and the role of the CPP. The article, reprinted in full below, was originally written on the occasion of Aquino’s death in August 2009.

Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, 1933–2009

Corazon Aquino, former president of the Philippines, died of colon cancer on August 1. She had scarcely been dead for thirty minutes when eulogies and encomia began to flood the mainstream media.

Her death took no one by surprise. She had been struggling with cancer for eighteen months and her condition had worsened dramatically in the last six weeks.

News outlets, political groups of all ideological bents, and foreign heads of state had ample time to prepare their response to the passing of this woman. There is no excuse for the lack of historical analysis in the obituaries printed in the international and Philippine press. That they universally hail Aquino as the reluctant housewife, thrust into politics by the brutality of the Marcos regime and swept to power by nonviolent revolution, is shoddy journalism, an admixture of bourgeois cynicism and willful historical ignorance.

Philippine politicians have lavished praise upon Aquino in a truly shameless manner. The parties and petty-bourgeois organizations of the Philippine left have joined the stampede commemorating Aquino, each issuing its own solemn statement of grief at her passing. Two decades ago they shrilly denounced Aquino’s ‘fascist regime.’ Today they laud her as a ‘champion of democracy’ and ‘fierce opponent of totalitarianism.’

Corazon Aquino was a member of the Cojuangco family. The Philippines is dominated by oligarchic interests, familial economic dynasties which emerged during Spanish colonialism. The Cojuangco family owns vast landholdings in the Central Luzon province of Tarlac, including the 10,000 hectare Hacienda Luisita, and an empire of financial interests and agricultural and urban real estate.

This wealth both supports and emerges out of the Cojuangcos’ involvement in politics. In addition to Corazon Aquino’s presidency, Cojuangcos have been governors, mayors, senators and congressional representatives. This is characteristic of cacique democracy and oligarchic economic rule, and is the legacy of Spanish and American colonialism.

The origins of oligarchy

Spain held the Philippines as a colonial possession for 350 years with no real intention of developing any commercial ventures, industry, mining or agriculture. Manila served as an entrepot, a trading port for the galleon trade. Chinese silks and porcelain were traded for Mexican silver from Acapulco. These items were then sold at exorbitant prices in Europe. Colonial bureaucrats profited by administering and skimming off the top of this trade. The provincial Philippines was controlled almost exclusively by the Spanish clergy, who acquired vast estates.

The Mexican revolution of 1820 effectively severed the Seville-

Acapulco-Manila galleon trade, leaving the Philippines isolated and unproductive. British investors were eager to seize upon the opportunities available to them in the undeveloped Philippines.

Fearful of colonial encroachment and Protestant influence, the Spanish enacted a series of capricious laws preventing foreigners from living outside of Manila. British investors set up commercial houses to facilitate trade, creating banks with sufficient capital on hand to cover letters of credit issued in Europe. They thus had capital sitting idle for much of the year, and were eager to find an outlet for investment. It was illegal to loan large amounts of money to indios, members of the native population.

An influx of Chinese males in the mid-eighteenth century, and a second influx after 1850, filled the economic gap needed for the development of an import-export trade, and provided an outlet for British capital looking for investment opportunities. The immigrant bachelors married indios; their families became Chinese mestizos.

To avoid racial reprisals from the colonial administration and from the indio population, these Chinese mestizo families hispanized themselves, adopting Spanish names, the Spanish language, and artifacts, accents, behavior and culture from the Spanish metropole. Within a generation, all indication of indio and Chinese origin had been erased, with the exception of the Hokkienese *k'o*, a title of respect, which was often incorporated at the end of the new surname—thus, Cojuangco.

The mestizos rapidly developed capitalist agriculture in the Philippines, export-oriented mono-cropping, funded by British capital and employing rural wage laborers and sharecroppers. The mestizos themselves were often tenants on the vast landholdings of the Catholic religious orders. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, direct trade with Europe was established. The Philippines became firmly incorporated into global capitalism.

In the wake of the Philippine revolution against Spain in 1896, the United States, eager to have colonial possessions of its own, conquered the islands in a brutal campaign which lasted well into the twentieth century. The mestizo oligarchs had long resented being the possession of a third-rate colonial power and had regarded Spain as a European backwater. They recognized that being an American possession could further their economic and political aspirations and they welcomed the new conquerors.

The United States colonial government eventually dispossessed the friars of their landholdings and the vast haciendas fell into the hands of the mestizo elite. The Americans established a representative democracy of sorts, which they closely monitored, limiting voting rights strictly to the propertied.

Even by the Second World War, only 14 percent of the population had the right to vote. The bicameral legislature which the Americans set up in Manila provided the opportunity for the oligarchs to dole out coveted positions in the rapidly expanding civil service, thus extending their power of patronage within their region. Every family sought to have members seated in government.

In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation and the Second World War, the Americans granted nominal independence to the Philippines, retaining substantial economic control over the islands through a system of parity agreements. With the end of direct American political control and the dramatic weakening of the central state, oligarchic politics entered its heyday. Familial dynasties acquired private armies, drawn from rural and urban lumpen elements. Elections were no longer simply corrupt. They were bloody affairs in which rivals were murdered and voters were routinely threatened.

During the American colonial period, many of the leading families had built their wealth upon special access to the United States market. Gradually in the post-independence period, tariffs and trade barriers were set up which cut sharply into profits.

The elite compensated for this by manipulating the state's financial

power. "Under the guise of promoting economic independence and import-substitution industrialization, exchange rates were manipulated, monopolistic licenses were parceled out, huge, cheap, often unrepaid bank loans passed around, and the national budget frittered away in pork-barrel legislation. Some of the more enterprising dynasties diversified into urban real estate, hotels, utilities, insurance, the mass media, and so forth." (Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines," in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, London: Verso, 1998, p. 208). Politicians learned to mouth nationalist phrases, vacuous words serving sordid ends. It was during this heyday that Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino and Ferdinand Marcos entered politics.

Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos

Marcos was highly intelligent. Both he and his wife had limitless ambition, and they rose from the lower levels of the oligarchy to dominate Philippine politics. Marcos ran a charismatic campaign against cacique politicians and their private armies, and against communism, a largely non-existent and manufactured menace in the Philippines in the 1960s.

He won the support of the urban middle class, aspiring to be technocrats within a functioning, orderly state. Marcos was from the Ilokano-speaking region of the northern Philippines, and he won the support of the Ilokano peasantry and some sections of the urban poor. This was the class base of support for Marcos which brought him to power in 1965.

Ferdinand and Imelda, working in tandem, used the office of the president for their personal enrichment with stunning success. Imelda, simultaneously beautiful and grotesque, flitted about the globe, meeting with world leaders and shopping. Ferdinand entrenched his political power by dramatically expanding the armed forces and promoting through the ranks Ilokano officers beholden to him. The upper echelons of the military led lives of luxury once reserved only for the cacique leaders. When Marcos confiscated corporations from political rivals during martial law, he would place them under control of trusted generals. The military was simultaneously politicized and riven by Marcos' ethno-nepotism.

Imelda Marcos conducted much of the Marcos' foreign policy. She met with world leaders and gained support—military, political and financial—employing diplomatic machinations and personal chicanery. She could seem naive when it served her purposes. She wheedled, flirted, and haughtily demanded. She met privately with five American presidents, and became the confidante of Nancy Reagan.

She and her husband had a far better understanding of the ins and outs of American politics and policy than any American had of theirs. They used this to their advantage, manipulating American politicians to serve their ends, playing upon anticommunist fears, and always coyly flirting with the possibility of not extending the lease on the American bases in the Philippines. The Marcoses contributed \$1 million to Nixon's 1968 election campaign, and another million in 1972. The money, of course, came from the coffers of the Philippine state.

Marcos bought his second term in office in 1969, spending on his campaign so egregiously that inflation in the Philippines increased 18 percent. To cope with inflation Marcos demanded, and received, \$100 million in prepayment on the rent of the US military bases in the Philippines.

The Philippine constitution, directly modeled after the US, imposed a limit of two terms on any president. The impending election of 1973 loomed large in Marcos' mind. He attempted in 1971 to force a revision of the constitution, eliminating term limits. He encountered trenchant opposition from rival political families, headed by Ninoy Aquino, and failed in the attempted revision. Thwarted in his legal machinations, he

resorted instead to a declaration of martial law.

Working with a council of generals and two civilians, Eduardo “Danding” Cojuangco—cousin and bitter rival of Cory—and Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile, Marcos plotted his declaration. He received advice from Suharto’s generals, who had seized power in Indonesia in 1965 in an unmitigated blood bath, slaughtering 500,000 to one million members and supporters of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

In August and September 1972, a string of bombings occurred in the dead of night at prominent business and government buildings throughout Manila. Marcos had orchestrated the bombings; he blamed the communists. Enrile, principal architect of martial law, staged an ambush on his own entourage, with gunmen opening fire on his vehicle. He rode with his security detail in a separate car. Marcos again blamed the communists, signed Proclamation 1081 declaring martial law, and dispatched soldiers to arrest all of his political rivals. The first arrested was Ninoy Aquino.

Aquino was a charismatic politician, similar to Marcos in many regards. His political career set a series of records: he was the youngest mayor, youngest vice-governor, and, at 35, the youngest senator in Philippine history. He came from a prominent political family.

His father had been speaker of the assembly under the Japanese occupation. Elite collaborators were quickly pardoned by the returning American forces and by the first administration of the newly independent Philippines. The peasant army which fought against the Japanese during the American absence, the Hukbalahap, fared far worse—they were summarily disarmed, many were arrested.

In addition to charisma and political prominence, Ninoy had the funding of the Cojuangco family. He was the man who would have been president in 1973, but 1973 found him in a cell in Camp Aguinaldo.

The writ of habeas corpus was suspended. Marcos arrested thousands of opponents. He seized control of the assets of rival families, turned them over to the control of his cohort of cronies, and plundered them. Certain sections of the oligarchy flourished under Marcos; others were pillaged.

Mass opposition met with brutal repression. Kidnapping, torture, and summary execution were routinely carried out by the military; the practice became known as ‘salvaging.’ As the 1970s progressed, Marcos lost his class base of support. The urban middle class, erstwhile aspiring technocrats, were slowly disillusioned. Those that could migrated from the country; those that could not kept their head down and silently and impotently watched for an end to the Marcos regime. Marcos’ power was now based on his firm control over a military which had tripled in size since his entrance to power.

Two groups benefitted from martial law: the military and the new Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People’s Army (NPA).

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and martial law

By the mid-1950s, the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines, known by its Tagalog name Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), had entered a period of stagnation and dissolution. The rebellion of the PKP’s guerrilla army, Hukbo Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB)—the peasant Hukbalahap reshaped after the Second World War—had been successfully suppressed by the Magsaysay administration through the combined use of psychological warfare and a limited program of land reform for surrendering “Huks.”

This program and the presidential candidacy of Magsaysay had been thoroughly orchestrated by CIA operative Edward Lansdale. In 1957, having already shifted tactics from guerrilla warfare to legal struggle, the

leadership of the PKP announced its “single-file” policy. All cadres were to have contact with only one other party member and directives were to be disseminated orally in a “single file.” The networks and organizing groups of the PKP, in essence, self-dissolved. A few guerrilla units were preserved as bodyguards and security for those engaged in the legal struggle. Among the preserved units was Kumander Dante’s central Luzon command, which would be the founding unit of the New People’s Army (NPA).

The Philippine Communist Party was thus a nearly defunct organization when the simultaneous waves of bourgeois nationalist politics and student rebellion broke across Philippine society in the late 1950s. It continued in this moribund state throughout the 1960s. While Imelda Marcos hysterically denounced communist agitation in private conversations with LBJ and Nixon and gained millions of dollars in military funding, the Philippine Communist Party had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist.

Jose Maria Sison, known as Joma, founded a new communist party in the Philippines in 1969, this time under the acronym CPP. Joma was the child of a landholding mestizo family from Ilocos. He grew up on the rhetoric of politicians in the 1950s, and was profoundly inspired by their nationalism.

In the early 1960s, he briefly moved to Indonesia, where he encountered the Maoism of the PKI under Aidit. He returned to the Philippines, joined the PKP and established an active youth section. His activism and sharp criticism of the existing leadership earned him the ire of the central committee and he was expelled from the party in the late 1960s.

At the beginning of January 1969, in a remote barrio of Mangatarem, Pangasinan, Joma Sison met with 11 associates to found the Communist Party of the Philippines. The conference began on January 3, but by joint agreement the date of the congress was recorded as December 26, 1968, to honor Mao Zedong’s birthday. At the Congress, Sison submitted a previously written report, which he titled “Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party.” Philippine society, he claimed, had a semi-feudal, semi-colonial mode of production, and the only viable solution was a “protracted people’s war” which was based on the idea that the “universal truth of the theory of using the countryside to encircle the city has been proven invincible.”

In need of a people’s army to carry out this “people’s war,” Joma Sison contacted one of the last remaining HMB guerrillas still in the field, Bernabe Buscayno, known as Kumander Dante. Under the leadership of Kumander Dante, the armed wing of the CPP was established on March 29, 1969 as the New People’s Army (NPA).

The CPP-NPA remained a small, insignificant organization. It recruited few and accomplished little. However, with the declaration of martial law and the crackdown on legal forms of organization, many felt that they no alternative but to join the NPA and the armed struggle of the guerillas in the mountains. Petty-bourgeois intellectuals, disgruntled peasants, and leaders of the working class—all were sent off to “surround the city from the countryside.” The tighter the imposition of the Marcos dictatorship, the more the NPA flourished. Martial law was the best thing that ever happened to the ideologically bankrupt CPP. The NPA grew in the 1970s from 60 members to 12,000.

The assassination of Ninoy Aquino

Economic crisis struck in 1981. The Philippine economy throughout the 1970s had been buoyed by increasing international prices of raw materials and by ongoing external support from the United States and multilateral lending institutions. Now, the bad debts of the various enterprises run by

Marcos' cronies and the effects of US dollar appreciation on the cost of debt servicing produced a significant contraction in the Philippine economy. What residue of middle-class support Marcos still had, vanished.

It was not just the economy which was ailing, however. Marcos had lupus; he was dying. This was known only to a very limited circle of Marcos associates. Marcos' public appearances were infrequent. He spoke in slow, thick speech. Among his intimates, there was a jockeying for power, a struggle to determine who should succeed Marcos.

Enrile, defense minister and architect of martial law, had long felt he would take Marcos' place when the latter stepped down. Marcos had other plans, intending for Imelda to be his successor. Marcos placed his confidence to enforce his interests in his brutal thug henchman, General Ver, an Ilokano soldier who had risen under Marcos from personal bodyguard to head of the Philippine Armed Forces. The treacherous Enrile began plotting other ways of achieving power.

Rumors of Marcos' illness and impending death spread. Ninoy Aquino, now exiled in Boston, heard the rumors and decided to return to the Philippines, determined to be present when the presidency became available. On August 21, 1983, Aquino landed in Manila. He was shot once in the back of the head as he descended the stairs to the airport tarmac.

A scapegoat was blamed; his body lay beside Aquino's on the tarmac, riddled with bullets from security forces. Everyone knew, however, that the murder of Aquino was ordered by the Marcos regime. Imelda and Ver clearly had a hand in the matter. They were determined to retain their hold on power.

Corazon Aquino returned to the Philippines for her husband's funeral. She displayed political acumen, ordering that her husband's remains be untouched, his body displayed bloodied in an open casket. Ninoy's funeral procession became a political rally against Marcos, in which two million people marched.

An organization was formed to attempt to control the protests which were emerging in the wake of the assassination of Ninoy. It represented the interests of the national bourgeoisie, opposed to Marcos' pillaging of the Philippine economy, but terrified of the power of the working class and the possibility of socialist revolution. Justice for Aquino, Justice for All (JAJA), as the organization was called, sought to mobilize the Philippine working class and peasantry behind the anti-Marcos agenda, but also to prevent them from pursuing their own class interests. JAJA vacillated in orientation on a daily basis.

"People Power"

International and domestic pressure compelled Marcos in late 1985 to call for a snap election, to be held in February, 1986. He was confident that the competing family interests of the opposition would prevent them from mounting a cohesive campaign and that, regardless, he could control the outcome of the election. His calculations would likely have been correct, but for the intrusion of the head of the Philippine Catholic Church, Jaime Cardinal Sin.

Cardinal Sin, from the 1970s until his death in 2005, was the Philippines' eminence rouge—a kingmaker and a skillfully calculating political manipulator. His endorsement could make a political candidate; his disapproval could spell the end of a political career. Cardinal Sin intervened in the squabbles of the opposition, dictating that Cory, the aggrieved widow, would run as president and her leading rival within the opposition, Salvador Laurel, would serve as her vice presidential candidate.

Marcos' open fraud in the February, 1986 election was staggering, even by the standards of excess set by the dictatorship. Ballot boxes were stuffed, others stolen; millions of names disappeared from voting rolls. Despite the massive cheating, it was apparent that Aquino had won.

Marcos declared victory. Aquino's response was a clear example of the impotence of the national bourgeoisie—she called for a boycott of crony companies. Her supporters were no longer to buy products manufactured by Marcos' cronies. In a country where most cronies held a monopoly on a vast range of products, including all electricity and telecommunications, this was not only impotent, but impossible.

Enrile, however, saw this as his opportunity to seize power. Marcos' hold over the military had fragmented. Middle-ranking and junior officers incensed at being passed over for promotions by Marcos' ethno-nepotism formed a bloc of disgruntled opposition to the continuation of the dictatorship.

This right-wing military clique had no interest in democracy or the victory of Corazon Aquino. They desired a disciplined armed force and saw Marcos' favoritism undermining the power and effectiveness of the military. Enrile and General Fidel Ramos, second cousin to Marcos, organized this opposition. In the chaos that followed the contested elections, they seized two military installations on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (Edsa), the main thoroughfare of metropolitan Manila. Enrile intended to oust Marcos and declare himself prime minister.

Marcos was ill and weary. He failed to respond promptly to the uprising. Twenty-four hours elapsed, more and more troops defected, and Cardinal Sin again intervened. He broadcast an appeal over the Catholic Radio Veritas, calling on supporters of Cory to flood Edsa and create a human cordon around the coup plotters. He effectively declared that the coup was on behalf of Cory Aquino.

Tens of thousands of Filipinos answered the call. When Marcos finally ordered tanks sent against the coup, they found their way blocked by protesters. This event, which provided the international media startling images of unarmed nuns kneeling in front of tanks, became known as "People Power." Ver wanted to order the tanks to fire, but Marcos, again, hesitated.

Many in the US State Department had long resented Reagan's intimate ties with Marcos. Marcos was bad for public relations; he was bad for business. Crony-controlled businesses and rampant corruption and bribery were not conducive to neoliberal free market policies which many desired to implement.

The Reagans, however, had been close to the Marcoses since the 1960s, when Ronald and Nancy had visited the Philippines on a state visit as governor of California. Nancy and Imelda spoke to each other on the phone at times on a weekly basis. Vice President Bush famously toasted Marcos' "adherence to democratic principles" during a visit to the Philippines in the 1980s. After the snap election of February 1986, Reagan declared in a press conference that there had been violence and fraud "occurring on both sides."

As the events of February unfolded, even Reagan's closest advisors abandoned Marcos. On Sunday, February 25, in a meeting at the White House, top advisers Shultz, Wolfowitz, Armacost and Poindexter argued that Marcos should relinquish power. CIA director Robert Gates and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger stuck with Marcos. So did Reagan.

After much discussion, it was decided that Marcos should be offered exile in the United States. The message was conveyed to Marcos and at 9 p.m. on February 26, four helicopters flew him, Imelda, their children and Ver out of the country. The US put its support behind Aquino, who, thanks to the machinations of Sin, was positioned to be declared president. Enrile accepted the position of minister of defense under Aquino.

The Aquino presidency

The ousting of a dictator has always been depicted as Aquino's supreme accomplishment. She restored democracy to the Philippines, all of the obituaries claim. She was not a great president, they concede, but what could you expect from "a simple housewife thrust into power?"

This is but the fatuous repetition of myth. Marcos was removed from office by a military coup, the political machinations of a leading cleric, and the belated intervention of the US government.

"People Power" has acquired a magical significance in Philippine politics. The idea seems to be that a strange combination of Marian devotion and the gathering of a mass of people undifferentiated by class on the corner of Edsa and Ortigas Avenue will somehow effect substantive change in Philippine society.

This is not the only myth, however. Aquino was far from a "simple housewife" when she ran for president. This was, to be sure, how she presented herself in her campaign, a "simple housewife" driven by injustice to fight a dictator. It was a powerful image, but far from true.

Corazon Aquino had been treasurer of the Cojuangco empire for 13 years when she ran for president. She was shrewd and calculating, a woman accustomed to power, able to acquire wealth and able to keep it. She was also devoutly religious.

This formed the subjective basis of her presidency. She had the psychology of a hacendera—she was owner of the vast Hacienda Luisita—and the mindset of a traditional Catholic.

The hispanized Chinese mestizo oligarchy had changed over the previous century. Any trace of Chinese ancestry had long since been deliberately effaced. The Spanish heritage lingered only in the pretence to Castilian mannerisms—the oligarchs still fashioned themselves as Dons and Doñas.

Their intimate ties to landed estates had also faded into the background as the oligarchs bought their way into every possible form of financial and industrial capitalism, both in the Philippines and abroad. They no longer lived on their estates. They lived in mansions in Manila—palaces of opulence but a short walk past heavily guarded barricades from sprawling shantytowns and grinding poverty.

This, the psychology of Cory, scion of the Cojuangco dynasty, shaped how she responded to the objective basis of her presidency. She came to power on the basis of a fragmentary and tense alliance of hostile class forces.

The junior-ranking officers of the coup attempt followed Enrile into support of the Aquino administration. They looked for a reform of the armed forces, rapid promotion for those previously passed over, and a sharp crackdown on the Communist Party, which had grown exponentially during the Marcos regime, and the new organizations of an active and mobilized urban working class.

Aquino had the backing of all of the oligarchic families who had been excluded from power during the Marcos regime. They looked for the restoration of their property and political power.

Aquino had also received support from the members of the urban middle class who had not succeeded in leaving the country during the Marcos era. They, again, desired a technocratic role within an efficient, Western-style democracy, free of graft and corruption.

Aquino enjoyed as well the full backing of Cardinal Sin and the Catholic Church.

Finally, petty-bourgeois intellectuals long disaffected with the CPP-NPA now sought a place within the administration of Aquino, hoping to steer her policies in the direction of certain loosely defined social democratic goals.

As the first year of her presidency progressed, the coalition of class forces which formed the basis of her presidency broke apart in

increasingly hostile confrontations. Aquino attempted to accommodate all groups and wound up displeasing each. The disaffected military officers, under the leadership of Gregorio Honasan, engaged in a series of seven coup attempts, each increasingly bloody. Enrile resigned his position as minister of defense in late 1986, and was directly linked with several of the military coups.

In response to the coups, Aquino shifted her government sharply rightward. She removed the social democratic intellectuals from their positions in her cabinet. She backed the creation of paramilitary anticommunist groups, armed bodies of thugs known as CAFGUs (Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units). These paramilitary groups of vigilantes engaged in harassment, terrorism, torture and murder, all under the auspices of official anticommunism, and funded by the Philippine military. Aquino notoriously labeled the CAFGUs "an example of people power."

The urban middle class flooded the press with demands for land reform. They aimed to simultaneously break the power of the oligarchy and of the NPA, whose membership grew in response to landlord abuses.

Here Aquino's true class allegiances emerged. She engaged in a series of halfhearted attempts, culminating in the misnamed Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP). Large landholders avoided the redistribution of their land to tenants under this law by either reclassifying their land as commercial or industrial land, or by changing the ownership of the land to joint stock ownership and distributing a small portion of the shares to the tenant farmers.

The Cojuangcos did both with their land. They reclassified a portion of it and placed the rest under joint stock ownership. Cory kept the family hacienda. The urban middle class was thus gradually disillusioned with Aquino as well.

On January 22, 1987, a group of 10,000 peasants marched across Mendiola Bridge to demand genuine land reform from the Aquino administration. Security forces opened fire, killing thirteen and injuring fifty. This became known as the Mendiola massacre. It embodied the increasingly callous attitude of Aquino and her willingness to defend the interests of the oligarchy with violence.

National elections were held in May, 1987. Of the 200 seats in the House of Representatives, 169 went to representatives from dominant families. Of these, 102 were from the pre-1986 anti-Marcos movement, while 67 had been pro-Marcos. It was "a shake in the kaleidoscope of oligarchic power." (Benedict Anderson, "Cacique Democracy in the Philippines," in *The Spectre of Comparisons*, London, Verso, 1998, p. 222).

Aquino began her time in office giving the impression that she might possibly oppose the extension of the US bases. By the time the lease came up for renewal in 1991, the Aquino government, in desperate need of funds, was eager to negotiate the renewal.

Mount Pinatubo erupted in June, 1991, destroying Clark Airbase and making renewal a moot point. The Aquino administration negotiated the renewal of Subic naval base with American diplomats, but was unable to get the renegotiated lease ratified in the Philippine Senate. The US Navy withdrew from the Philippines in 1992.

Growing poverty and increasing class conflict marked the Aquino administration. Power outages and failures in telecommunications were endemic. Oligarchic politics continued. The election of 1992 saw, among other candidates, Danding Cojuangco, Imelda Marcos and Fidel Ramos run for office. Ramos won the presidency with a small plurality. The same political actors continued the same political machinations. Enrile is now Senate president; Gregorio Honasan, a senator.

The CPP, bourgeois nationalism, and the two-stage theory of

revolution

The eulogies in the Philippine media at the passing of Aquino stem from different sources. For some, their admiration of Cory is genuine, the result of historical miseducation. They see Aquino's ascension to power as a political immaculate conception. In commemorating her, they are celebrating a day when the Philippines occupied the international eye without embarrassment or scandal.

For others, their fond farewell to Cory is an historically jaundiced recollection of past participation in events of importance. This is the empty and historically unfounded nostalgia of the petty bourgeoisie, impotent before the predations of the current president—Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo—a diminutive virago with dictatorial aspirations, a Marcos without talent or charisma.

But for the Communist Party of the Philippines and its ilk, the eulogies offered upon the death of Aquino are but the continuation of the bankrupt policies based on the anti-Marxist two-stage theory of revolution.

During the snap election of 1986, the CPP called upon the masses to passively abstain from participation. It put forward no alternative to Marcos or Aquino. Its call for a boycott placed the masses in the hands of the national bourgeoisie and Aquino.

The CPP stated that there was no difference between Marcos and Aquino in the days leading up to the election. After Aquino took office, the CPP was eager to negotiate with Aquino, advocating "reconciliation" and a "coalition government" which, Joma Sison argued in a series of lectures in May 1986, would be "mutually advantageous" to "the Aquino government and the revolutionary forces."

If this coalition government should fail, he continued, "Monopoly of political power by a new clique of big compradors and landlords subservient to US imperialism attended to by a retinue of fresh recruits from the middle class, and the use of the same military that had been used by the fallen fascist dictator to oppress the people, will serve only to hasten the possible return of the fascist dictatorship and the consequent victory of the armed revolutionary movement." Reimposition of the dictatorship would aid the victory of the revolution.

Nick Beams, writing in 1987 in the *Workers News*, organ of the Socialist Labour League, predecessor of the Australian Socialist Equality Party, responded, "The politics of Sison and the CPP are a double dose of poison. On the one hand they promote illusions in the Aquino regime and then, when the danger of military dictatorship emerges, they disarm the working class with the theory that such a dictatorship will hasten the victory of the revolutionary forces."

The movement of the masses at Edsa and the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos could have opened the way for a revolutionary movement of the working class to seize political power in the Philippines. What was needed was revolutionary leadership. The Communist Party of the Philippines first told the masses to abstain from participation and then, when the masses ignored the calls of the CPP for a boycott, the CPP attempted to subsume the working class under bourgeois leadership.

The CPP adheres to the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution. The tasks of the revolution in the Philippines, it claims, are national democratic, not socialist. The Philippines, according to the CPP, is a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country, a backward status which has been imposed upon the Philippines by US imperialism. The national bourgeoisie must thus play a revolutionary role in the throwing off of imperialism and the industrialization and democratic development of the Philippines.

The twentieth century is littered with examples of the tragic results of this policy. In 1925–1927, Stalin ordered the Chinese Communists to subordinate themselves to the national bourgeois Kuomintang. Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Kuomintang, slaughtered the working class of Shanghai.

In Indonesia in 1965, the Stalinist PKI collaborated with the national bourgeois administration of Sukarno on the basis of the two-stage theory of revolution. It was disarmed when Suharto seized power and proceeded to slaughter 500,000 to 1,000,000 PKI members. Similar bloody results followed from the same basic Stalinist policy in India, Sudan and Iraq and other countries in the post-World War II period. The two-stage theory of revolution disarms the proletariat in the face of its class enemy, the bourgeoisie.

The CPP thus desperately tries to find a bourgeois champion, one who will carry forward the "national democratic" revolution. In its rhetoric, prior to the election Aquino was no different from Marcos; during peace negotiations, she was a possible ally; when peace negotiations broke down, she was, once again, a fascist; now that she has died, what do they make of her?

Joma Sison and other heads of the National Democratic Front, the legal front of the CPP, wrote on August 2, "Corazon Aquino was an outstanding and inspiring figure in the anti-fascist alliance against the Marcos dictatorship." The Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), the CPP's organization of labor unions, wrote: "She died as an ally of the Filipino people... [She] was part of the historical display of the power of the Filipino people's unity that was Edsa 1. Today we are called upon by history to create the broadest unity to continue the unfinished task of fighting for genuine democracy and social change." No word of criticism is written.

Corazon Cojuangco Aquino did not represent "people's power." She served the interests of the capitalist-landlord ruling class in the Philippines, and was an instrument of US imperialism. To eulogize her as an "enemy of totalitarianism" or the "mother of democracy" is to lie to the Filipino and international working class.

The national bourgeoisie is organically incapable of playing a consistently revolutionary or even progressive role in backward countries. It is intimately linked with imperialist capital and with the class of landowners. While tensions may emerge between these groups, they are subordinated to their shared hostility and fear of the working class.

In countries with a belated capitalist development, such as the Philippines, the national bourgeoisie cannot achieve the goals of the bourgeois democratic revolution. These goals can be achieved only through a revolution led by the proletariat with the support of the peasantry that establishes a workers' state and initiates not only democratic, but also socialist measures. They cannot be completed within a national framework, but only as part of a broader international movement of the working class and oppressed.

The perspective guiding such a revolutionary struggle must be based on internationalism. The level of capitalist development in the Philippines is a part of the combined and uneven development of global capitalism. The Philippine working class must consciously conduct its struggle against the Philippine bourgeoisie and big landowners as part of the struggle against world imperialism and for the liberation of the working class and oppressed masses throughout Asia and internationally.

The proletariat is an international class; its tasks are global. Socialism can be achieved only internationally; the proletarian revolution, if it is to succeed, must be an international revolution.

The interests of the proletariat are inimical to those of the bourgeoisie. To subordinate the proletariat to any section of the bourgeoisie—"create the broadest unity"—in the pursuit of a "national democratic revolution" is to prepare colossal defeats for the working class.

Nick Beams concluded his article in 1986 with words that are as pertinent now as they were when they were written:

"The future of the Philippine working class depends on the construction of a revolutionary party to lead it to power. That is why we call on Filipino revolutionists and militants to act now in the interests of their class, to place themselves under the banner of Trotskyism and begin the

task of constructing the Philippine section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.”



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