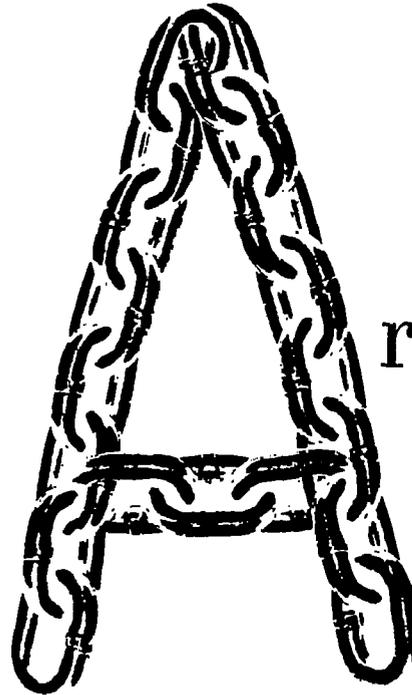


The

A proud "experiment in democracy"
aborted



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Raul S. Manglapus

"**H**urry! Hurry! Hurry!" said the sideshow barker to his customers. "Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!" said the economist to the developing countries. If you don't hurry there will be disaster, echoed the President of the World Bank. Only military governments are capable of stability and order, observed the Rockefeller Report on Latin America.

You must move forward. Democracy is too slow. Human rights can wait.

It was a stirring message, and it reached the executive mansions of Southeast Asia. In the nineteen fifties and sixties, whenever the head of a government there tired of coping with legal opposition, began to fear the people, and decided to run things permanently on his own, he engaged in the amusing practice of issuing a proclamation blaming all his country's ills on "Western-style democracy"—and im-

mediately instituted Western-style repression. He imprisoned the opposition, muzzled the press, and silenced the population by putting the fear of pre-dawn raids in their hearts, devices all so terribly Western and so terribly effective.

Then, following his secret Western idols, he dressed up the repression with delightful euphemisms. One ruler called it "guided democracy," another "basic democracy," still another his "own road to socialism." All these have either floundered or collapsed. Now, however, we have a latecomer of the seventies: the "New Society" of Ferdinand Marcos.

These rulers, these self-discovered Asian messiahs, did not hesitate to adopt Western-style stage management and buck-passing techniques in preparing for the takeover. Hitler burned the Reichstag and blamed it on the Communists. Marcos bombed the toilet of the Constitutional Convention and blamed it on the Maoists. Other toilets in the Manila area were similarly bombed, leading an irrepressible retired jurist to remark that he could not accept the explanation that it was all part of a Communist conspiracy, since he could not believe that what the Communists really wanted was a revolution by constipation!

In each of these instances of repression the villain

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appears to be democracy, and, after so much blood has been shed for it, it might be useful to agree on a simple definition of it. In its barest form democracy would seem to involve government by reasonable consensus, with a conscious aversion to arbitrariness and with substantial respect for human rights. The right to participate in the formation of this consensus is, in fact, one of these human rights. A modern inventory of these rights is found in the declaration of 1948 approved by the United Nations, which was careful to label it "Universal," implying that not only its applicability but also its development transcended all cultures.

One who bothers to investigate the nature of early Asian, South American, and African societies might be amazed to see how many of them conformed to this definition. Early Philippine society was one of these.

"Nothing about the early Filipinos," says historian Horacio de la Costa, "so struck the first Spanish settlers, coming as they did from a Europe of centralized monarchies, than that they had no kings." Islam, with her sultans and kings, had not yet blanketed the northern and central islands, and the Spaniards found settlements ruled by chiefs, called *datus*, who were not hereditary rulers but who rose to power in any of various familiar ways. The Jesuit chronicler Colin, describing the process of acquiring this rank, related that "a man may be of lowly birth, but if he exerts himself, if by dint of hard work and shrewdness he accumulates wealth, whether it be by farming or husbandry, whether it be by trade or the practice of some craft known to them, or whether it be by robbery or oppression . . . such a man acquires ascendancy and renown."

"Those are exactly the ways, not excluding the last," one can almost hear the rabid American Democrat exclaim, "by which a Republican manages to get into power today!" Many an "out" Republican has said the same of the Democrat "ins."

What took shape in these settlements, called *Balan-gays*, is something dramatically resembling the Greek city-state. The chiefs were the nobility, and below them were the gentlemen, called *maharlikas*, who paid neither tax nor tribute to the chief but who were bound to follow him to war; the commoners, called *aliping namamahay*, who were householders who gave half of their farm produce to the lord; and the slaves, called *aliping saguiguilir*, who served the lord in his house and could be sold. The chief could rise from any one of these estates, and his kinsmen did not necessarily rise with him. A *datu* could have a brother or even a son who was a slave. And the land, as in Indonesia, was communally owned.

There emerges here that elemental factor of democracy, the absence of arbitrariness. The *datu* was not absolute, hereditary, landowning monarch. He rose by consensus, though sometimes that consensus, as in modern democracies, might have been secured by

fraud. It was also a superior democracy in that it was not nepotistic, which should demolish the current argument that the Filipino is not historically predisposed to true democracy because, among other things, he is hopelessly snarled in family ties.

All this might amount to a revisionist commentary on Western colonialism. While Western colonialism did bring Western democratic forms to the Asian colonies, it also disturbed, nay, strangled, the healthy development of truly indigenous Asian democratic institutions. On the other hand, those elements in early Asian society (which if left alone may have evolved into modern indigenous institutions) did not retard but on the contrary propelled the development of Asian democracy in borrowed but malleable Western forms.

This is the way it was working in the Philippines when the so-called Western forms were perfected not much later than they were in European democracies. Since 1906, by leave of the American Government, the Filipinos were already voting for national officials if they were male and literate or had a minimum of property or tax payments. Similar restrictions were also placed on the British voter at that time. In 1935 universal male and female suffrage was adopted in the Philippine constitution. This was only eighteen years after the British male voters had acquired unrestricted suffrage and only seven years after the British women had acquired their right to vote.

Philippine democracy had its serious faults, its constitutional infirmities. One of these was the magnitude of presidential power, more overwhelming than that in the United States, where it is now in the center of critical national debate. The other fault was an artificial party system by which two political parties (i.e., one party with two factions whose members freely exchanged places) were given exclusive protection at the counting of the ballots. This system prevented the free evolution of progressive and conservative alternatives. The social and political imbalance (faithfully reflected and, as in all free societies, sometimes magnified in our free press) was due largely to these two faults. In 1972 we were about to correct them in a Constitutional Convention which the people had demanded in massive demonstrations and in which I had the privilege of being elected chairman of the Committee on Electoral Reforms.

Meanwhile, a companion revolutionary development was transpiring in the provinces. The so-called illiterate masses were suddenly meeting success in organizing into the powerful farmers' federations, voting independently of their landlords and delivering an impact on the political institutions. Father Bruno Hieks, the American Franciscan missionary who worked for years among the farmers in the central Philippines and who was expelled by Mr. Marcos

after the declaration of martial law, described the phenomenon as "democracy beginning to work." This judgment, delivered only two and a half decades after the inauguration of the Philippine Republic, must be rated flattering in the light of the doubts currently expressed by some Americans and Europeans on whether *their* democracy is working.

But those who were out to make Philippine democracy work did not realize that they were in a mortal race with naked personal ambition. Before the Constitutional Convention could conclude its work and give effect to its reforms, including the reduction of presidential powers, Mr. Marcos made use of one of these powers, that of declaring martial law without consent of Congress or any other agency, in order to kill democracy and permit himself to continue in office beyond December 30, 1973, the date he was to end his second and last constitutional term as President.

He then used the Convention to legitimize his dictatorship. To ratify his "new constitution," he held mock open-air *viva voce* referendums under the eyes of the constabulary, in a tragic desecration of the valid traditions of Philippine village consensus. With thousands in political prisons and the people effectively silenced by an "antirumor-mongering" edict, Mr. Marcos then had his propagandists picture him as the "smiling dictator." Most of his smiles are now directed toward American business and the American military.

He has tried to reverse the healthy nationalist trend which as late as 1973 former Secretary of State William Rogers admitted to be necessary for developing nations. All that the nationalist movement desired was a return to the spirit and letter of the 1935 Constitution signed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which provided for foreign investment but not foreign economic domination.

Both before and after martial law was imposed in 1973 a substantial amount of foreign investment, mostly American, had been programmed. Most of this investment had been attracted by the Mariveles Free Trade Zone conceived by the Philippine Congress. This was hard evidence that the investors were not getting "scared away" by conditions before martial law, contrary to the claims Mr. Marcos has made since the declaration of that law.

But Mr. Marcos was eager for a quick surge of investment regardless of long-range consequences. He wanted a "quickie" prosperity to prove he was correct in declaring martial law. In this he was fortunate, for a rise in the world prices of lumber, sugar, copra, and coconut oil, our main exports, began two years before martial law and gave the illusion that his dictatorship had produced an immediate foreign-exchange miracle.

More important than the volume of American in-

vestment allegedly inspired by martial law is the manner in which Mr. Marcos has swept aside safeguards against foreign domination in order to cater to the foreign capitalist. "Write your own ticket," he personally told one American businessman. Among other things this ticket has included the free penetration of Filipino banks by foreign banking giants and the expansion of the latter's activities in the securities field.

The Corporate Information Center of the National Council of Churches conducted in 1973 an in-depth investigation of American investment in the Philippines. Among its conclusions were that martial law has "been beneficial in creating a climate for American business," that "virtually no expression of nationalistic protest against American firms, no matter how justified, can be heard," and that "although American business representatives deny any role in the declaration or implementation of martial law, they have at least given their tacit approval and support of the administration's policies."

The last conclusion appears to be an understatement in the light of the unprecedented, enthusiastic telegram of support fired off by the American Chamber of Commerce in Manila to Mr. Marcos a few days after the declaration of martial law. If some observers thought it an act of intervention in bad taste, Mr. Marcos did not. He fired back a warm reply thanking the American businessmen for their "support of my decision."

This and other bits of evidence have led intellectuals like Robert Stauffer, political scientist at the University of Hawaii, to suspect that martial law was in fact a conspiracy of a "refeudalizing coalition": multinationals, U.S.-dominated international agencies (e.g., the World Bank), and the military. In a fine address delivered at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Professor Stauffer found it too delicate to mention that the greatest sin committed by Senator José Diokno—the heroic nationalist who is in prison without charges—was that he dared to initiate an investigation of the activities of the American oil monopoly in the Philippines—a transgression viewed as something of a virtue by a significant portion of the American citizenry today.



It is interesting that while U.S. businessmen have dragged the American image from the position of defender of democracy after World War II down to that of defender of repression today, an institution that once was identified with pure conservatism in the Philippines now is quite alone in standing up peacefully for human rights—the Church.

As in many parts of Latin America and Africa,

indeed as in the United States, the Christian denominations are divided primarily not by questions of faith but by questions of freedom. In the Philippines an increasing (and to Marcos exasperating) number of the Catholic hierarchy and clergy, supported and in many instances led by the progressive leaders of the Protestant minority, have openly rejected Mr. Marcos's excuses for the prolongation of repression and have demanded immediate restoration of constitutional democracy. A significant number of Catholic and Protestant dignitaries remain cautious, some openly endorsing the regime. But the younger and more respected among them are moving to the "Christian Left."

A survey quietly conducted by the Association of Major [Catholic] Religious Superiors released in November, 1973 (but not, of course, published in the controlled press), speaks of "Christian-inspired" guerrillas growing in number and matching the zeal of the more experienced Maoist New People's Army. It denounces the "one-sided economic development at the expense of the poor," the enrichment only of the already rich, the suppression of free democratic farmers' associations, the terrorizing of the people, the imprisonment and torture of male and female citizens without charges or trial, the extortion of money from prisoners, the multiplied, though "more subtle," corruption, the spiraling prices of staple commodities. It confirmed the reports by the Associated Press that crime had doubled since martial law was declared (although the tourist feels a false sense of perfect law and order because crimes are not "news" to the controlled press).

Only last April the same charges were aired in the pulpits of Mindanao and Sulu, contained in a Pastoral Statement of the bishops, priests, and lay leaders of that region. When similar indictments were proffered by the Chilean Cardinal, the military junta there did him the courtesy of allowing them to be published in the Chilean newspapers. But the repression in the Philippines is so complete that the Pastoral Statement was heard only from the pulpits. It was read, of course, in the enlarging underground network.

Mr. Marcos has used the carrot and the stick in dealing with the recalcitrant Church. He has organized joint military-religious committees to "thresh out" complaints. On the other hand, he has deprived the religious schools of their traditional exemption from taxes. To compound the hypocrisy, the First Lady just recently accepted the position of chairman of a fund-raising campaign for the most prestigious private university in the country—the Jesuit Ateneo de Manila. The Philippine Jesuits, whose Provincial is in the forefront of the "progressives" among the Catholic religious, will have to dig deep into the historical experience of their European colleagues for lessons in engaging in the power play at which Mr. and Mrs. Marcos appear to be so adept.

The proudest religious minority in the Philippines is the Muslim—and for good reason. The Muslims have resisted the occupation of their lands and the dilution of their culture by invaders—Spaniards, Americans, Japanese, and finally Christian Filipinos. The well-intentioned resettlement program for Christian Filipinos in Mindanao neglected to reckon with the communal spirit of the ownership of land among Muslims. Individual sales of land from Muslim to Christian resulted in complications difficult to untangle, and in the end the Muslims began to feel the need for substantial autonomy. A Muslim Independence Movement was organized, with secession as the ostensible purpose but with autonomy under Philippine sovereignty as a possible compromise objective. We were about to grant them this autonomy in the Constitutional Convention when Mr. Marcos declared martial law and unceremoniously sent his soldiers to demand that the Muslims immediately surrender the arms that they, like many Americans, were keeping at home for self-defense. He thus provoked them into open rebellion.

At the recent Islamic Conference in Kuala Lumpur, the Libyan Foreign Minister candidly admitted that his country was supporting the rebels. On the other hand, U.S. weaponry is increasingly involved in suppressing them. While the right hand of the U.S. is attempting to appease the Muslims in the Middle East, the left hand is being allowed to be used in suppressing the Muslims in the Philippines. The consequences of this ambivalent strategy should bear close watching.

The explosive condition in Mindanao and Sulu is aggravated by the essential instability which Mr. Marcos has introduced into the Philippine government and of which even American businessmen are beginning to be aware. Mr. Marcos is pretending to govern without a successor. At the same time, his dictatorship has closed the traditional safety valves of free expression that were one of the essential underpinnings of Philippine stability. If anything should happen to Mr. Marcos, or if a people tired of high prices, uncertainty, and repression should suddenly erupt in open revolt, a chaotic situation would arise. Compounded with the Muslim rebellion and the otherwise manageable Maoist threat, this could suck the large American military and economic presence into another protracted debacle. It would be an easy matter for the Marcos cohorts who engineered the toilet crisis of 1972 to throw bombs into American installations and industrial establishments and blame it all on the Maoists, hoping to involve American arms irrevocably on their side.

The obvious bloodless alternative is for the United States to take the unequivocal stand that it is not supporting the Marcos dictatorship. It is idle for the United States Government

to ask indignantly, "Who says we are supporting it?" On October 17, 1972, only three weeks after the Marcos coup, Park Chung Hee declared his own martial law in South Korea. On the same day the *New York Times* reported that according to State Department officials the United States had "conveyed to the South Korean Government in the 'stiffest terms' its disapproval of the imposition of martial law by President Park."

The *Times* added that "Secretary of State William P. Rogers expressed the United States objections to the South Korean Ambassador, Kim Dong Jo, whom he summoned to his office" while "the American Ambassador in Seoul, Philip C. Habib, acting on instructions, delivered a similar statement to Premier Kim Jong Pil and Foreign Minister Kim Yong Shik." The same *Times* report said State Department officials asserted that Park's sudden move was "a blow to American policy" which was intended "to assist democratic developments" in South Korea. The State Department again acted quickly and in "the stiffest terms" in objecting to the kidnapping of the leading Korean political oppositionist in Tokyo last year by agents of the Korean CIA.



Where, oh where is the State Department voice that will utter some word of disapproval over the death of democracy in the Philippines, that country of whose democratic institutions America would so fondly and proudly like to claim to be the foster mother? Where is the voice that will complain against the imprisonment of Senator Aquino, Senator Diokno, and the thousands of Filipinos whose only crime is to stand up for the ideals proclaimed in the American Constitution, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the primers and readers of the early American teachers in Philippine public schools?

There is not the suspicion of a squeak. And with this silence, with continuing U.S. military aid, with World Bank and multinational corporate enthusiasm, Mr. Marcos feels entitled to claim that the United States is in his pocket. And the Filipino people are entitled to believe that he is telling the truth.

An American disavowal would encourage the forces of peaceful change to move quickly and head off a chaotic explosion. Two recent formulae for a bloodless return to constitutional democracy suggest themselves: the Thai and the Portuguese. In the Thai formula, the students found sudden encouragement to organize and act when they established contact with young army officers who were tired of the dictatorship and who promised the students that their units would not fire on them if they marched.

Some police units did fire on the students, and a number were killed. The King took the side of the students at the propitious moment, and Thailand today seems firmly on the way to constitutional freedoms. In the Portuguese formula, the army did it by itself. Young officers found a leader in a general who had opposed his country's overseas policies. Their blow for freedom was almost bloodless.

In the event of no official American disavowal, American public rejection of what appears to be official approval would be most useful in restoring the morale of the Filipino people. This process, however, would take longer, and there is the risk that those who prefer a chaotic condition that would serve their ends might overtake the planning of the forces of peaceful change.

In making an official disavowal the U.S. Government would merely be responding to the new reality. Lucian Pye of MIT recently noted that the authoritarian trend of the sixties has come to a point of reversal. Thailand was the turning point in Asia, Argentina in Latin America, Portugal in Europe. The Argentinians are proud that they have arrested inflation by popular consensus and not by repressing the poor as in Brazil, and they are thumbing their noses at the Rockefeller Report. The "Hurry, hurry, hurry, and never mind human rights" theory is fast getting discredited no matter how desperately World Bank officials and multinationals may cling to it. Even the moderate *U.S. News and World Report* ("Worldgram," March 18, 1974) reports that "from Japan and India, through Europe to the Americas, hundreds of millions still find *democracy, inept as it sometimes seems, the best way to govern*" (italics in original).

The human will to freedom will not be stifled. The Filipino will to democracy is original, not borrowed. It was born in the villages, and it was stunted but not killed by almost four hundred years of Spanish domination. It rose to rally the Filipinos in 1896 in the first successful national upheaval against Western colonialism in Asia. The same will produced in Malolos a constitution in 1898, 30 per cent of which consisted of a Bill of Rights. The same will dragged the American intruder through three years of miserable warfare before it had to bow to superior American weaponry. And the very same will tendered the most stubborn resistance of any nation in Asia to Japanese imperialism.

That will sooner or later shall return human rights to the Philippines. American history of the 1970's would read much better if America were to be remembered, not for actively opposing that return and disgracing her own traditions, but for redeeming her pledges as "the leader of the Free World" and at least not standing in the way but stepping aside so that the Filipinos, in their own time and in their own way, may move to regain their freedom.