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The Philippines After Marcos, by May and Francisco

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Book Reviews

THE PHILIPPINES AFTER MARCOS. Edited by R. J. May and Francisco Nemenzo. Beckenham, Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1985. 239 pages.

Like weather forecasting and the attempt to predict earthquakes, but even more so, the writing of political forecasts is a hazardous enterprise. The social scientist, like the meteorologist and seismologist, is dealing with half-understood interactions among forces which cannot be accurately measured; and he cannot make more than probability statements about when or where a particular combination of forces will produce a typhoon, an earthquake, or a revolution. Moreover the social scientist is faced with imponderables which the physical scientist normally need not consider: the decisions of key individuals which may change the course of history; the power of prayer and the Lord of History; the fact that his own predictions may influence the decisions of others, becoming part of the historical process and thus either "self-fulfilling" or "self-defeating."

In reviewing *The Philippines After Marcos*, therefore, I shall not take advantage of the cheap shot offered by the failure of the authors, at a conference held in Australia in late 1983, to anticipate the very special conjuncture of events, persons and forces which made up the February Revolution of 1986.

For the conference at which the papers contained in this book were presented, a group of Philippine specialists were asked by R. J. May and Francisco Nemenzo, to assess the Philippine situation with an eye to the future. The editors note that their occasionally divergent judgments "are left to the judgment of the reader, and of time" (p. i), but also that there was a certain amount of convergence among their views. Going over these points of agreement, one sees that time has thus far been kinder to some than to others. It was agreed, first of all, that however Marcos might depart the scene, a return to the *status quo ante* was hardly conceivable; again that "a revolutionary change is not likely within the next decade"; that the Catholic Church "is divided over political issues and therefore unlikely to act as a monolithic force"; that "the US government and the international banking community

will exercise a critical influence in the immediate post-Marcos period, and that they are unlikely to welcome the establishment of a military regime (though whoever succeeds will have to reckon with a politicized military); and that any successor regime will inherit massive problems, including a huge foreign debt, communist and Muslim insurgencies, politicized tribal Filipinos, and widespread urban and rural poverty deeply rooted in the economic structures of the nation (p. ii).

Descending to particulars, Jose W. Diokno writes on the crisis following the assassination of Ninoy, and possible succession scenarios, resting his hopes on a Marcos resignation and a transition government oriented to national unity, reform and sovereignty. Reynaldo C. Ileto follows with a piece which, in retrospect, seems to have come closest to anticipating the EDSA events; he emphasizes the mystical element undergirding the "other politics" of the masses and the appeal of martyr-heroes such as Rizal and Ninoy. David Wurfel takes up the anticipated succession struggle and its participants with his usual care and detail, ending with some rather discouraging reflections on the probability of elite opposition to any serious reform, leading eventually to class polarization and violence.

Francisco Nemenzo provides an informed analysis of the Left. Interestingly, he finds the major strength of the latter not in the New People's Army which in the absence of an external patron will always be limited in its access to arms, but in the National Democratic Front, which with its cadres situated in the key institutions and mass organizations of society "has the utmost capacity to destabilize the successor regime" (p. 58). Nemenzo also produces a set of scenarios, ranging from a military coup followed by increased dissident activity to a restoration of constitutional democracy. Like Wurfel he doubts that the latter could survive its internal tensions and contradictions; he holds that in "the long run it is the historic confrontation between the Left and the military-technocratic complex that will decide the Philippines's future" (p. 67). Thus he places his hopes in an eventual succession to power by a broad coalition of the Left, while warning the Communist Party in no uncertain terms that "an arrogant party leadership that claims a monopoly of wisdom and righteousness, a bureaucratic centralist leadership that stifles critical thinking and muzzles debate, is doomed to waste a historic opportunity" (p. 68).

Dennis Shoesmith focuses on the role of the Catholic Church, with an emphasis on the ideological divisions within it and special attention to revolutionary groups and the Christians for National Liberation, an emphasis which — in the light of the February events — seems for the present at least to have been misplaced. Felipe B. Miranda discusses the military and the social forces which would be expected to produce unrest following Marcos' departure, and produces his own set of scenarios. His particular contribution perhaps consists in his reflections on how the possibility of military interven-

tion might be reduced by wise and conciliatory civilian leadership in the period following Marcos' departure. R.J. May takes up the Muslim and tribal Filipinos, their politics and politicalization and probable reactions to various scenarios on the national scene.

On the basis of his fieldwork in a Manila squatter community, Michael Finches contributes some reflections on the urban poor, their position in the economic structure and their social attitudes, which he sees as characterized by a traditional desire for economic advancement combined with a certain resentment and hostility toward the wealthy. He suggests that these sentiments could eventually be mobilized for political purposes by strong leadership coming either from the Left or from a populist movement (p. 162). Brian Fegan does something similar for the peasantry of Central Luzon, describing the changes in social structure brought about by the technology in rice production and by the Marcos land reform program. According to Fegan, these changes have demobilized the peasantry politically and thus, together with the organizations put in place by the Marcos regime, they constitute a force making for conservatism and stability in the countryside.

Hal Hill and Sisira Jayasuriya have produced an enlightening and very useful short analysis of the Philippine economy, underlining (as Diokno, Wurfel, Miranda and Lim also do) the problem of equity. And Alfred W. McCoy, probably best known for his key role in the "fake medal" excitement during the last election campaign, takes up the problem of modernization and consequent unemployment in the sugar industry. Amando Doronila has produced a well-documented piece on the media and who controlled them before and during the Marcos regime, and the rise of the alternative press, together with some perceptive reflections on the problems which would be faced by a democratic successor regime in relating to the media. Robyn Lim takes up foreign affairs, focusing on the issue of the American bases, the history of the agreements relative to them, existing ambiguities and options, with a look at ASEAN relations as well.

As things turned out, none of the writers really anticipated the manner in which the post-Marcos era would be inaugurated, and hence their discussions seem at times oddly out of focus. At times also, they seem a bit too wordy-wise and almost world-weary, too much based on calculations of the interests of individuals and groups. One wonders whether, had some of their prognostications been widely circulated before February, the EDSA events would have ever taken place. Fortunately, however, the faith and solidarity of the Filipino proved for a moment at least more powerful than most of the forces so carefully analyzed by our authors. "I shall destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing all the learning of the learned" (I. Cor. 1:19).

Yet there is a wealth of both information and reflection in the papers, information and reflection which with a bit of refocusing can still be very useful, mainly because many of the underlying forces and tensions to which the authors point are still distressingly with us: the problem of inequality,

for example; and the resistance of the middle and upper classes to anything more than rhetorical reform and the consequent danger of rising class tensions and polarization if the hopes for fundamental change prove illusory. These are the deep subterranean forces whose movements cannot perhaps be predicted with accuracy, but which will surely influence future developments. Indeed, if the government of President Aquino becomes mired down in political battles and unable to address fundamental issues affecting the people, or if she herself should in taking the "military option" become a prisoner of the military and of those who supply them with arms, some of the worst scenarios could yet be realized.

To end on a more mundane note: at close to thirty dollars the book is expensive, particularly for a work which has not been set in type but produced from computer print-out; moreover, I found the print rather hard on the eyes.

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REAPPRAISING AN EMPIRE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PHILIPPINE-AMERICAN HISTORY. Edited by Peter W. Stanley. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1984. vi, 407 pages.

This collection of studies on Filipino-American relations grew out of a workshop and a seminar held at Harvard University during the summers of 1977 and 1978, in which most of the historians, Filipino and American, whose research transformed the historiography of twentieth-century Philippines in the late 1960s and early 1970s, took part. One characteristic of this new historiography was its attention to provincial and regional history, which made it possible to test earlier generalizations against detailed local research, particularly in the Philippine National Archives. Another was the greater attention given to the social, cultural, and psychological sides of the Filipino-American encounter, instead of the earlier concentration on political, economic, and nationalist concerns. The result has been a new evaluation of the American impact on the Philippines.

In his Introduction, Peter Stanley refers to the "official mythology" on which the traditional belief in the "special relationship" between the two countries rested: that American policy in the Philippines had been an enlightened one of development and benevolent assimilation, moving steadily toward independence, in which "the Americans were liberal tutors and the Filipinos receptive students." The leftist critique of that myth, on the other hand, has maintained that this benevolence was merely an American cover for