

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Crisis in the Philippines: The Marcos Era and Beyond.* Edited by John Bresnan. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986. 267 pp.

As the editor, John Bresnan, indicates in his Preface, this book attempts to do three things: to describe the rise and fall of Ferdinand Marcos; to assess the impact of his regime on the political and social life of the Philippine people; and to consider the implications of this experience for the United States. The book was commissioned by the Asia Society in New York in the fall of 1983, following the assassination of Philippine opposition leader Benigno Aquino, Jr. Its publication was overtaken by the February 1986 "snap election" called by Marcos, which started an unusual chain of events that culminated in the dramatic overthrow of his regime in what is now enshrined in Philippine history as the "People Power Revolution of 1986".

The nine articles by reputable authors comprising the book are quite thorough and almost exhaustive. By themselves they are nearly complete accounts of the various aspects of the Philippine situation in the period covered. But collectively, they do not quite add up to a coherent book. Neither do they address adequately the three objectives mentioned above. Although many of the articles touch on the political career of Marcos, for instance, there is really no analysis of his "rise and fall". This could have included his early experience as a young warlord politician in his native Ilocos Norte, with its ethos of violence and corruption which he would later bring to the presidency of the country. Such an analysis could also have probed Marcos's obsession with power, the "fire that drove him", which isolated him from reality and consumed him in the end.

While that essential part is lacking in the book, there is an abundance of certain topics, which could have been cut down for balance. For instance, almost a quarter of the book is devoted to two long historical articles by well-known American specialists on Philippine history, Theodore Friend and David Joel Steinberg. A historical background is always necessary, but since this is a book on the crisis of the Marcos era, these two articles could have been more focused, instead of giving encapsulated histories of the entire country, covering the whole gamut from pre-Christian times through the "mestizo-shaped culture" and "American compadre colonialism" to the present. Friend's article on Philippine-American "tensions" in Philippine history is not sharp enough. It is more of a discussion of Filipino co-operation with or capitulation to American sovereignty and the development of a political culture with a "peculiar amalgam of Filipino and American elements". There is no mention of the continuing social unrest that characterized much of the American period, the various uprisings like the Sakdal that resisted American colonial rule, the Filipino nationalist arguments against such impositions as "free trade" as early as 1910, and the continued presence of the American bases on Philippine territory. Neither is there discussion of other "tensions" or "irritants", such as the "new Filipino nationalism" of the

1960s, nor the militant activism of students and other disaffected elements in society, which eventually triggered the declaration of martial law. Many of the roots of that activism can be traced to the continued American military presence in the country and its stranglehold on the Philippine economy. However, William Barnds' last chapter on "Political and Security Relations" touches on some of these critical points. This brings up what probably is the major flaw of the book: disjointedness and lack of organization, which is primarily an editorial responsibility.

If the editor had organized the articles better, he could have spotted the gaps. The articles by Friend, Steinberg, Estanislao and Barnds could have been grouped together under the subtitle of "Philippine History and Philippine-American Relations". The editor would then have noticed that this section was top-heavy, and could have tightened it up to prepare the reader for the supposed focus of the book — the Marcos era.

The second section, logically, would have been the article by Wilfredo Arce and Ricardo Abad on the "Social Situation". Again, the editor would have seen that this portion was too thin and probably needed another couple of articles to present and analyse the basic issues of poverty, inequality, social unrest, the rural sector, and development, in so far as they were contributing to the deterioration of society during the Marcos dictatorship.

The third logical grouping would have consisted of the articles by Lela Noble, Carl Lande and Carolina Hernandez on the antecedents and dimensions of the political crisis under Marcos. Similarly, this section could have been pulled together more tightly: there is much overlap, and some important developments are missing. For instance, I could not find even brief discussions of the Muslim problem or the tribal and indigenous minorities. I am surprised that Lela Noble, who has done excellent studies on the Moro National Liberation Front and other aspects of the Muslim question, has not included any of that in her broad essay on "Politics in the Marcos Era". Likewise, Carolina Hernandez, who has also written excellent works on the Philippine military, has not incorporated much of that expertise in her essay on "Reconstituting the Political Order". It was left to Carl Lande to comment, at times superficially, on a wide range of complex topics — the Aquino assassination, the middle and upper classes, the Catholic Church, the political opposition, the communists, the military, the students, elections, and finally, Marcos. There is a great deal of unevenness in this subgrouping.

The fourth component of the book would have been a thorough analysis of the economic crisis which hastened the political demise of the Marcos dictatorship. Here, a perceptive editor would have sensed that one or two articles on the economy, preferably written by nationalist or non-mainstream economists, would have complemented or supplemented Bernardo Villegas' analysis. Harvard-trained Villegas, who also heads the Center for Research and Communication, a sort of Rand Corporation think-tank, articulates the mainstream economic view, which is criticized by the Left and other nationalist groups for its bias towards agriculture, privatization, the participation of the World Bank and other financial institutions in the Philippine economy, and a model of development based on Western capitalist principles and practices.

Finally, a fifth section could have been devoted to assessing the political survival of the successor Aquino government, particularly the difficult problems of "re-democratization". The emergence of Cory Aquino as a tremendously popular leader of 54 million Filipinos is a fascinating story by itself, which merits a serious study. No social scientist specializing on the Philippine political scene, no matter how skilful, was able to predict this phenomenon, even remotely. This portion of the book would have been in keeping with the "Beyond" part of its subtitle ("The Marcos Era and Beyond"). This vital part, however, is

missing and only Carolina Hernandez' article addresses some of the major issues confronting the Aquino government, such as economic recovery, the new Constitution, the role of political parties, "people power", and "the future of the democratic ethic". Ideally, an assessment of the Left (CPP, NPA, NDF, and so on) and the various cause-oriented groups, and the military establishment under the new administration would have been in order.

Fortunately again, the article by Barnds contains some meaty exploration of the future issues facing the United States in its relations with the Philippines. Barnds' advice is that the basic U.S. approach to the Philippine situation should be to keep a low profile. "The same approach should govern the U.S. stance on the issue of strategy and tactics — for negotiating with — and fighting — the NPA. More U.S. military assistance and training for Philippine military forces are desirable, but we must recognize that U.S. involvement beyond such measures probably would be counterproductive" (p. 251). I emphasize this because, contrary to Barnds' suggestion, the United States has had a high profile in the Philippines since Aquino assumed power. U.S. officials could not resist the temptation to pat Cory on the back every time they liked what she was doing, as though she was their "patsy". Old habits die hard but the United States has to learn to deal professionally and equitably with the Philippines, instead of looking at Cory Aquino as a "little brown sister".

Some errors of fact, and probably of judgment too, may also be pointed out. Carl Lande's characterization of the "communist movement" that "the general public knows" may be erroneous. He lists the movement as consisting of "the New People's Army (NPA), its noncombatant political counterpart, the National Democratic Front (NDF), and the more secretive body which appears to control them both: the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) [sic]" (p. 129.)

If one goes through the literature on the Left, or talk to people who are knowledgeable concerning the movement, there is really no doubt about who is controlling whom. The CPP and its military arm, the NPA, are the leading members of the NDF, usually described as an umbrella organization composed of other progressive and left-of-centre groups. It has put forward a twelve-point political programme. It was the NDF which appeared to be a "more secretive" body during the Marcos years. Although clandestine, the CPP and the NPA had a much higher profile, having been in the forefront of the struggle. They were also more organized and visible at the grass-roots. The leaders of the CPP/NPA, such as Jose Maria Sison and "Kumander" Dante were quite well known. The NDF-types on the other hand, were not generally well known. And to many people, it was not clear what the relationship of the CPP/NPA and the NDF was, but "control" is probably not the term to characterize it. It was not as though there was some kind of a power struggle going on to gain control of the movement.

Another point that Lande brings up is debatable. He says "The Communist Party of the Philippines and its various front organizations also played no part in the Aquino-Laurel victory. Indeed, Mrs Aquino declined their offers to help" (p. 144). This was an improbable scenario and Lande should have checked the facts first. The CPP did not offer Cory Aquino their help, so such an offer could not have been refused. They decided, after months of long and painstaking internal debate, to boycott the 1986 "snap election" on the grounds that it was just another manifestation of "U.S. imperialism". Thus, the CPP was "marginalized" and missed a chance to play a major role in the "people power" revolution that toppled Marcos. Realizing their mistake, the CPP in its own mouthpiece, *Ang Bayan*, issued a "rectification" statement, a sort of self-criticism for its flawed stand in boycotting the election. According to University of the Philippines professor, Francisco Nemenzo, the CPP

leadership miscalculated the intentions of “U.S. imperialism”, failed to perceive and appreciate the “contradictions” in the government’s armed forces, erred in reading the nature of the opposition to Marcos, and underestimated the people’s readiness to go beyond electoral politics (hence “people power”) should Marcos cheat in the elections.

Even if the CPP had offered their support to Cory Aquino, it was more than likely that she would have accepted the offer, rather than refused, as Lande contends. After all, many of the “cause-oriented” groups that supported her were not really that far apart from the CPP on several of the issues they were fighting for, particularly concerning the Marcos dictatorship.

Villegas’ explanations of the “crony capitalism” phenomenon, the agricultural monopolies, and the staggering foreign debt of the Marcos regime are either weak or incomplete. For example, “It is very likely that they [the cronies] were more interested in enriching themselves . . .” (p. 164) is an understatement. The Marcoses, particularly Imelda, and their cronies flaunted their wealth, and corruption in high places was flagrant. It was not just “likely”, but blatant. They skimmed off not just the “usual ten per cent” but even more considerable amounts from the numerous multimillion dollar loans that the World Bank and other international institutions kept providing to the regime. Military, economic, and other forms of international assistance were diverted to Swiss banks and other repositories of the private fortunes of Marcos and his inner circle. Bastions of corruption in the regime, such as the Ministry of Human Settlements, which Imelda Marcos headed, siphoned off government loans and resources to private companies that they themselves controlled. Massive “losses” in state corporations were manipulated to a point where it was more than likely that they were being pocketed by a few individuals. The cronies faltered one by one in their business “misadventures” but the government repeatedly bailed them out, using precious foreign exchange and funds intended for social services, housing, and other vital functions. These practices contributed significantly to the near collapse of the economy, yet Villegas’ explanations emphasize the increases in government borrowings, the oil shock in 1979 and the subsequent international recession, “missed opportunities”, higher interest rates, and other “economic” factors that could not have fully accounted for the economic crisis under Marcos. Villegas’ “sanguine view of the Philippines” does not appear to be that sanguine either because it is premised on the usual hope on “agribusiness” development. There is no mention of any kind of industrialization policy, which many of the country’s economists say would alleviate some of the major ills of the Philippine economy.

Another glaring omission in this book, which intended to explain the ramifications of the Marcos disaster, is a discussion of the country’s militarization and its consequence — the gross violations of the human and civil rights of Filipinos on a scale never experienced before. The repression escalated with each year of the regime. The acquisition of too much power made the military establishment not only arrogant but brutal. A combination of this political repression and economic deprivation for a large segment of the population no doubt led to the radicalization of the countryside. It is really unfortunate that the book analysing the Marcos era should overlook the scale and scope of human repression that the regime unleashed on its own people.

Finally, the growth of the “state technocracy” under Marcos should have merited some serious examination. For the first time in the Philippines’ political history, Western-trained technocrats were put in charge of state economic planning and development. The number of state enterprises rose from no more than 10 before martial law to more than 300 by 1984. Why the country suffered its worst economic crisis under their direction is a study that could produce startling findings. Were the technocrats politically naive or were they in

collusion with the "plunderers" of the regime? It was strange that most of them opted to stick it out with the regime even when they were constantly overruled or ignored by the political warlords. Because of their honest backgrounds and sophisticated academic training, the technocrats were expected by most Filipinos to have had some self-respect instead of remaining apologists for the regime to the bitter end.

In any case, the book is a welcome addition to the increasing literature on the Marcos years. One only wishes, however, that it was better edited and organized more coherently because there is much substance and analysis in the individual articles. This plus the addition of the suggestions above could have made this book a solid postscript to the Marcos era.

Belinda A. Aquino  
*University of the Philippines*

ISIS Research Notes: Hans H. Indorf, *Strategies for Small-State Survival* (1985, 54pp); Muthiah Alagappa, *US-ASEAN Security Co-operation: Limits and Possibilities* (1986, 31pp); Mohamed Noordin Sopiee, *The Russian Threat: Between Alarm and Complacency* (1985, 15pp).

ISIS ASEAN Series: Chin Kin Wah and Narciso G. Reyes, *Two Views on Summit Three* (1986, 39pp); J.N. Mak, *Directions for Greater Defence Cooperation* (1986, 32pp); Sukhumbhand Paribatra, *Kampuchea without Delusion* (1986, 27pp); J. Soedjati Djwandono, *Southeast Asia as a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone* (1986, 7pp).

ISIS Seminar Papers: Robert C. Horn, *The Soviet Threat in Southeast Asia: Illusion or Reality?* (1985, 16pp); Michael Yahuda, *The China Threat* (1986, 41pp); J.R. Pouvatcky, *The Vietnamisation of Cambodia* (1986, 14pp).

As a recent study\* by John Chipman of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) emphasizes, in recent years the diffusion of economic and military power to the Third World has been matched by the proliferation of institutes and centres concerned with the analysis of local and regional strategic and political issues. This logical development should be welcomed. The London-based IISS and its European and North American cohorts have, unsurprisingly, generally failed to break out of their NATO-oriented "mind-set", notwithstanding recent efforts by the IISS to broaden the scope of its "regional" studies. The North Atlantic remains the focus of these Institutes' interests, with Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America cast in the roles of peripheral "regions".

All the ASEAN countries (except Brunei) now have strategic studies centres of one sort or another: one of the more recently established is the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia, in Kuala Lumpur. Like most such institutes, ISIS has started its own publications programme and by the end of 1986 it had produced a score or more of monographs in three series: ISIS Research Notes; ISIS ASEAN Series; and ISIS Seminar Papers. The ten titles reviewed here are all concerned with international security issues; several others have dealt with domestic politics and economic matters. One wonders

---

\*John Chipman, *Survey of International Relations Institutes in the Developing World* (London: IISS, 1987).