



by Raissa Robles

Never Again

Alan Robles
EDITOR

**Marcos
Martial
Law Never
Again**

A Brief History of Torture and Atrocity under the New Society

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book like this needs lots of helping hands, especially when written in a Third World, resource-challenged country like the Philippines.

My thanks to my husband Alan who, as the book editor, conceptualized the entire book down to the look, the colors, the outline, chaptering and story path, built the skeleton of the bibliography, identified key online sources and drew up the preliminary list of interviewees, then wrestled with my rebellious text and provided the titles and subheads. He gave the style that made the ideas that I wanted to convey clearer, the sentences crisper and the flow much better. When he edits he totally forgets I'm the spouse and that is a good thing for this book. He was always looking at the lay of the forest while I was down among the trees.

My son Julian patiently waited to be served late meals while I finished page after page of the manuscript.

Special thanks to the generous, publicity-shy funders who made this book possible. They let me pick my own team and gave me full editorial control of the text.

Filipinos for a Better Philippines put its reputation on the line by choosing me as the author. It could have taken the easy way out by simply publishing pictures to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the 1986 EDSA People Power. But it decided that it wanted to break new ground and tackle the very controversial and taboo topic of torture and atrocities during Martial Law. Hats off to them. And for their patience while the manuscript got delayed. And delayed.

The members of the Editorial Board gave very helpful suggestions as they critiqued the manuscript, for instance, on the way the chapters flowed, especially the Introduction. These made the book so much better.

Part of the strength of this book is in its cover design and the overall book design. For that, I wish to thank artist Felix Mago Miguel who took on this very difficult project. I knew I could count on his artistry to convey the brutality of that era in an elegant manner. Despite the very stringent deadline he delivered excellent work that did not reflect the frantic pace. Since I failed to meet an earlier deadline, this became a book to commemorate EDSA. Unlike other commemorative books, this one examines the deadly undercurrents that swirled before and long after EDSA.

When I was covering the Senate 29 years ago, I would have laughed if anyone told me that one day Senator Rene Saguisag would write the Foreword to my book. The Publisher asked him to and I'm glad he agreed. I am honored to have a distinguished senator who was known for his integrity to have written it.

Part of the difficulty I had with this book was the tremendous amount of footnotes — the secret code academics use to signal readers their source of information. After swimming for months in footnote hell, I decided to seek the help of my brother-in-law, newly-retired International

Relations professor from De la Salle University, Dr. Alfredo Robles, possibly the most overqualified academic editor a local book has ever had. He holds a Ph.D. in International and European Studies from the Université de Paris I (Panthéon-Sorbonne) and a Ph.D. in Political Science from Syracuse University. He was asked at the last minute to be the official interpreter for both French President François Hollande and Philippine President Benigno Aquino III for their joint press conference in February 2015.

I was in footnote heaven after he came in. He not only verified each and every footnote, he also edited my manuscript with an eye to making it sound enough for classroom use. If you see any contractions in the text like "didn't" or "should've" or "OK", I insisted on it to bridge the academic with journalism. He also did the extensive Index and the Bibliography. I can't thank him enough.

The speed with which I was able to write this is partly due to technology. Alan bought a computer program that enabled me to keep all my notes together and quickly toggle from one to the other. He also identified the books, digital tape recorder, video recorder and digital transcriber that I needed. To ship them from the US to Manila, we relied heavily on Alfred Gaw, a former Metrobank branch manager who had joined the New York Fire Department as an emergency medic. Ricardo Sobreviñas also hand-carried from New York books that we found out we still needed at the last minute.

When most of the manuscript was finished, I realized a truism. Authors are bad at proofreading their own work. They tend to glide at imperfections like typos. After going over the same text twice and still finding typos, I told myself, "I wish I had Booma Cruz." Booma is a fellow investigative journalist, former General Manager/Producer of Probe Productions, Inc. and a former colleague of Alan at the *Manila Chronicle*, who had very kindly proofread my first book. Lucky for me, Booma — who is now based in California — was in Manila for Christmas holidays. She scrapped her sightseeing to proofread this book. Many, many thanks.

Three people worked in the background, providing vital staff support. Evangeline "Vangie" M. Santiago went above and beyond the call of duty, smoothing the flow of manuscript and communication between me, the publisher, the Editorial Board and the printer; preparing for the soft launch and getting the ISBNs. Lhea Lozano assisted her, while Joseph Alison went all over town delivering and fetching manuscripts and documents.

During production, another pair of fresh eyes examined the proofs to see to it that corrections were put in place. Carmen Felicisima Reyes-Odulio, a retired Citibanker and Math/Physics *summa cum laude* graduate from De la Salle University, generously offered a hand, which I took gladly.

I also wish to thank the members of Cyber Plaza Miranda who continued to congregate on my site and discuss the hot button issues even though I wasn't able to update my blog much last year. They kept the fate and the fire burning. One of them, Rosario Gunter, overwhelmed me with her expression of faith. As soon as I announced I had written a book she suddenly wired me money to pre-order without even knowing what the price was.

A book is only as good as its sources and insights. Dr. Ricardo T. Jose, Director of the Third World Studies Center, not only lent me his rare books on the Philippine military, he also explained to me the military viewpoint and pointed out people I could interview. The Center's staff, Bienvenida C. Lacsamana, Miguel Paolo P. Reyes and

Joel F. Ariate Jr., all helped dig out books and newspapers from the Martial Law era.

The Task Force Detainees of the Philippines, through its Executive Director Emmanuel Amistad, gave me full access to its Martial Law documents and photos. Sunshine Serrano pulled them all out of storage. Without TFDP and the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines in the darkest days of Martial Law, this book would not have been possible.

The Philippine Commission on Human Rights shared unpublished statistics on human rights violations, culled from a study supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Later, the Swiss Peace Foundation assisted in getting the data interpreted by archivists from Argentina. Karla Michelle S. Mique and Gabriel Jesus Aguinaldo, who were involved in the project, briefed me on the findings. My thanks to Marc Titus D. Cebreros, Chief of the CHR Information and Communication Division.

Manuel Mogato of the wire agency *Reuters* also shared valuable insights on the military. I am grateful to my colleagues in the Foreign Correspondents Association of the Philippines (FOCAP) for allowing me to ask so many questions during our news briefings. It was the only way, for instance, that I could have asked Senator Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos some questions regarding the family loot and the massive human rights violations during his father’s regime.

I am touched by the way my colleagues in the media took an interest in this book. *ABS-CBN* news anchor Karen Davila devoted valuable time to be the panel moderator during my soft launch, then invited me over to guest on her show, *ANC Headstart*. *Al Jazeera’s* Bob McBride included me in his news feature on the EDSA Anniversary. So did Floyd Whaley of the *New York Times*. Maria Ressa of *Rappler* sent Katerina Francisco and a crew over to do a feature. So did Isagani de Castro of *ABS-CBNNews.com*, Jaemark Tordecilla of *GMA7* and Luchi Cruz-Valdez of *News5*. Jing Castañeda of *ABS-CBN News* interviewed me, while Aya Tantiangco of *GMA News* wrote a very insightful review of Chapter 1, which was given away for free.

It was thrilling to see the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* use my soft launch as its banner story on the EDSA People Power Anniversary written by Niña Calleja. My thanks to *Inquirer’s* Fe Zamora for sending her over. I found it extremely instructive to be at the butt end of questions from fellow reporters. *BusinessWorld* Editor Roberto Basilio asked me some of the toughest questions which I myself would have asked.

Andrew London, the Deputy International Editor of *South China Morning Post*, allowed me time off to finish this book. I learned a lot from him on the angling of stories, which helped me write this book.

I am deeply grateful to American Attorney Robert Swift who litigated the civil lawsuit of the human rights victims against Marcos in the US. Swift provided rare insight and sent me the complete testimony of the late US Ambassador Stephen Bosworth before the Hawaii District Court of Judge Manuel Real. I have included this in the Appendix. It will be the first time Filipinos will read this.

My thanks to Germany’s state-run broadcasting station *Deutsche Welle* for extending to me a serendipitous invitation to attend its 2015 Global Media Forum in Bonn last June on “Media and Foreign Policy in the Digital Age”. Because of this, I was able to make side trips to Berlin and to Utrecht to do interviews. The following made this trip possible: Michael Hasper, Deputy Head of Mission of the German Embassy in

Manila, who turned out to be a historian by training; Michael Fuchs, First Secretary, Cultural Affairs and Press Attache; and Carmina Barcelon of the Press and Cultural Section. I would also like to thank *Deutsche Welle’s* Executive Press Officer Sarah Berning for her help in arranging for me an interview with Dr. Iris Graef-Callies about trauma and torture.

In Berlin, Kay-Uwe von Damaros, Head of Communications of the Topography of Terror Foundation, arranged my interview with Dr. Thomas Lutz, Head of its Memorial Museums Department.

A partly historical book like this would not be complete without images. Aside from TFDP, photojournalist Sonny Camarillo shared with me his stunning photos of Martial Law, Benigno Aquino’s wake and funeral, street protests and the 1986 EDSA People Power. Thank you as well to photojournalists Andy Hernandez, Pat Roque and Recto Mercene for their photographs. And of course to Presidential Communications Undersecretary Manolo Quezon, who placed online valuable historical photographs. Many found their way into this book.

Political commentator Teodoro Locsin, Jr. allowed me to use the editorial cartoons of the family-owned, pre-Martial Law Philippines *Free Press*, and came to the book’s soft launch. Jonathan Best, author and Filipiniana collector, permitted me to use from his collection a photo of the “water cure” during the American Occupation. Best’s partner, John Silva, author and Executive Director of the Ortigas Foundation Library, gave me leave to tap its collection. The Foundation’s librarian Celia Cruz, my former colleague in *Business Day* newspaper, found for me the *Daily Express* newspaper I used in this book. Silva also allowed me to use the picture he took of a dying child in Negros and his thoughts about it.

As a newbie in publishing, I turned for advice to three friends who are veterans in the publishing business: Karina Bolasco, Founder and Publishing Manager of Anvil Publishing, Inc., book editor Nancy Pe-Rodrigo and poet-publisher-book designer Ramón “RayVi” Sunico. They shared valuable advice most enthusiastically.

This book would not have been possible if Professor Alfred McCoy had not broken ground on the issue of torture. His three books — *Policing America’s Empire*, *Closer than Brothers*, and *Torture and Impunity* — inspired me to go one step further.

I wish to thank the torture victims for sharing their terrible stories with me: Human Rights Commission Chairperson Loretta Ann Rosales (who also provided some of the survivors’ stories in this book), Communist Party of the Philippines Founding Chairman Jose Maria Sison, author Ninotchka Rosca, spiritual therapist Hilda Narciso, “Michael”, Susan Tagle, Pete Lacaba, Roberto Verzola, and Robert Francis Garcia. Retired businessman Abdon Balde shared his poem on the Film Center, while Joy Kintanar told me about her late husband Edgar Jopson. Judge Priscilla Mijares and her daughter Pilita trusted me with their deeply personal stories about Primitivo Mijares.

A book like this is understandably intrusive. I am grateful that the following persons did not clam up when I asked them highly personal questions regarding torture: President Benigno Aquino III, former President Fidel V. Ramos, Colonel Eduardo Matillano, the ex-NISA officer, General Ramon Montaña, General Victor Batac, Senator Panfilo Lacson and General Resty Aguilar.

Finally, thanks to Google, the Gutenberg Project, archive.org, the hathitrust.org., Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, the US National Archives and the United Nations for making available online valuable primary source materials on the Marcos era.



THE BOY WHO FELL FROM THE SKY



On the morning of May 31, 1977, residents of Antipolo — a mountainous municipality just east of Manila — saw a military helicopter circling low over a deserted area.

Minutes later something fell out of the helicopter onto the rocks below. Then the aircraft clattered away.

Curious residents ran to see what had fallen.

They found the bloody, battered corpse of a young man.

He had been cruelly treated. His head was bashed in, there were burn marks and dark bruises all over his body. On his torso, an examining doctor would later count 33 shallow wounds apparently gouged with an ice pick.

Several meters away from where the body had fallen, somebody found an eyeball.

The police came, took the corpse to a funeral parlor and started the process of identifying the remains.

Somebody remembered a news story about a teenager who had been missing for more than two weeks. He was 16-year-old Luis Manuel “Boyet” Mijares, son of Primitivo, a former aide of the dictator, President Ferdinand Marcos.

Later that day, the phone of Manila Judge Priscilla Mijares rang. Journalist and family friend Teddy Owen tried to break the news about her son gently to her, advising her to send somebody to the Filipinas Funeral Parlor to identify the victim.

The person she sent called back with the devastating news: “It’s your boy.” All that remained of her good-looking boy was a mangled, tortured body.

He had been kidnapped, because shortly after he vanished the family had started receiving phone calls demanding a ransom of P200,000.

By then, Boyet’s sister Pilita recalled, a Philippine Constabulary official named Panfilo Lacson (who became a Philippine Senator in 2001) had been assigned to the case and managed to trace one of the calls to a building inside the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman, Quezon City.

Although the family told the kidnapers they would pay the ransom, the calls suddenly stopped.

Over the objections of the police, Judge Mijares had followed Owen’s advice to leak the news of her son’s kidnapping to the dailies. The news came out on May 30.

The next day, Boyet’s mangled body was found.

There was a huge turnout for Boyet’s wake, his mother told me in an interview.¹ He had just finished third year high school at Lourdes School of Quezon City and it seemed all the students attended.

After burying her boy at Marikina’s Loyola Memorial Park, Judge Mijares set out to solve his murder, starting with May 14, 1977, the day he disappeared.

She was not satisfied with how the case had turned out. After Boyet was buried, Lacson’s anti- kidnapping unit claimed it had solved the case with the arrest of three UP students. The police announced that Boyet was a victim of “hazing” — a violent initiation ceremony into a college fraternity. The police told the family the three alleged killers (a fourth was let off for lack of evidence) all came from UP’s Tau Gamma fraternity. Rolando Poe and Emmanuel Patajo were sentenced to death but both escaped — Poe from Pasig jail and Patajo from maximum security by feigning an asthmatic attack. A third accused surnamed Abude died of a heart attack in detention. (For Tau Gamma’s reaction and denial, see page 221).

None of the alleged killers was ever heard of again.

But why would Boyet want to join a college fraternity? He wasn’t even about to enter college, he still had a year of high school to finish.

And why would anybody want to kidnap him? The boy had no enemies. His hobby was harmless — catching butterflies and dragon flies and sticking them onto cotton to display them. He wanted to take up law like his parents.

Judge Mijares’ suspicions grew that her son’s case was not some random abduction.

It all came back to his father.

A journalist who had become a propagandist and confidant for Ferdinand Marcos, Primitivo “Tibo” Mijares had served his master faithfully since 1963 and had been privy to government’s high-level doings, its dirty little secrets and many of Marcos’ innermost thoughts.

When Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972, Mijares became a de facto “media czar”, a Cabinet member in all but name. A year later he was literally a mouthpiece of the dictator, his newspaper columns directly dictated to him by the President.²

By then Mijares had also become a man with two secrets.

One will be explained in Chapter 1 of this book.

The other was that he had become disenchanted with Marcos. Mijares realized that the dictator’s goal wasn’t to save the country but to hold on to power indefinitely.

His wife recalled that “he was already fed up. He told me, *nakakasuka na* (it’s enough to make me vomit). I cannot swallow it anymore.”³

In 1975 Tibo did the unthinkable. He convinced Marcos to send him to the US for an important propaganda mission and when he got there, he abandoned the regime and sought political asylum.

The confidant became a whistleblower. He appeared before the House International Organizations Subcommittee of the US Congress and testified about Marcos’ plot to grab power, his corruption and his regime’s human rights abuses. As if that wasn’t enough, Mijares later on published a 499-page book, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos I*, which pulled no punches in exposing what the erstwhile propagandist knew. He regaled readers with detailed exposés on the crude and vicious avarice and misdeeds of the Marcoses, their relatives (such as Benjamin “Kokoy” Romualdez), cronies (such as Juan Ponce Enrile) and flunkies (such as Information Minister Francisco Tatad). He talked about Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos’ backgrounds, crimes, corruption and record of prevarication.

In his book, Mijares unloaded feelings he had apparently bottled up for years, calling Ferdinand Marcos a “tinpot dictator”, his wife Imelda an “old beauty queen” and their chief lackey Fabian Ver, a “pimp”. He also made mocking and sardonic remarks about the First Couple’s sexual proclivities, complete with not so veiled allusions to the parentage of one of the Marcos children as well as Imelda’s anatomy.

“Imelda was very angry with my husband because of this book,” Priscilla Mijares flatly told me during the interview, pointing to a copy of *Conjugal Dictatorship*.

It was the sort of publication that would have earned its author a horrible fate, if he were still in the Philippines. But Tibo was safe in the US, out of reach of the dictator. Or so he thought.

Apparently, in the third week of January 1977, Primitivo Mijares went to Guam on a speaking engagement. There, he was somehow lured to go back to Manila. According to Priscilla, “*doon siya kinuha ni* (that was where he was taken by) General Ver because Imelda asked General Ver to fetch him. He (Tibo) was (residing) in the US and then they went to Guam.”

“They” referred to Tibo, Ver and a newsman surnamed Makalintal, a nephew of Marcos’ former Chief Justice Querube Makalintal. Mijares described the newsman Makalintal as a “*bata ng administration*” (lackey of the Marcos administration).

I asked her why Tibo would even go with General Ver and she told me, “because my husband is *matapang* (brave), small but terrible. Fearless *yon*. (He’s fearless.)” Tibo was only five foot two inches tall, she said, which was why he was called Marcos’ “*niño bonito*” (wonder boy).

January 23, 1977 was the last time Primitivo Mijares had called home and asked to speak to every member of the family.

Four months later, his youngest son was kidnapped and murdered.

Recalling the day Boyet vanished, his mother said he had asked her permission to watch the movie *Cassandra Crossing* with some friends at Ali Mall — the country’s first shopping mall built in 1976 to celebrate boxer Muhammad Ali’s “Thrilla in Manila” victory over Joe Frazier. She had agreed but stipulated that “you wait for the car. The car will bring you there” after dropping her off somewhere else first.

“But he left the house without waiting for the car. He just asked the maid (Inday) to give him 20 pesos and some *barya* (coins),” Mijares recalled.

Later, the maid would reveal what Boyet had excitedly confided to her that day: “He said, Inday, I’m going to see my daddy today. So I will not wait for mommy. I will just use a bus in going to the place.”

“And it was my boy who told my maid that he was talking to his father (on the phone),” she told me.

The maid would also remind the Judge that the same man who had invited Boyet to watch the movie had been calling Boyet several times that month of May 1977. Mijares recalled there were times that the maid had told her that Boyet had been talking to “his phone pal”.

She said she had obtained a lot of information that “during the torture of my son the father was made to appear by the torturers to witness his son’s agony.”

Through the years, the Judge gathered enough information to guess what had happened, but told only a few, like human rights lawyer and former Senator Jose Diokno. Judge Mijares would wait for over a decade before joining in the filing of a civil lawsuit against Marcos for the murder of her son and the disappearance of her spouse. She became one of the lead claimants in the damage suit filed in Hawaii by 10,000 human rights victims. Later, they collectively became known as “Claimants 1081”, named after Marcos’ infamous Proclamation 1081 imposing Martial Law.

In an oral deposition⁴ that she made for the Hawaii lawsuit, Judge Mijares called the family tragedy the result of “a political vendetta involving my husband Primitivo and our son Boyet.” As proof, she narrated the following facts of her case. She said that on October 23, 1974, her husband had left the country. On February 5, 1975, he had issued a “defection statement” in the US. In 1976, he had published his book on the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos.

Then she said: “In January 1977, after the publication of the book *Conjugal Dictatorship*, my husband was lured into joining Philippine government agents, particularly Querube Macalintal, to come to the Philippines for a visit. That after my husband was lured into coming back, he was unheard of and could not be located until now.”

“That after my husband’s disappearance my youngest son, who is Manuel ‘Boyet’ Mijares, was kidnapped and brutally murdered on the last day of May 1977,” she said. The Judge linked in no uncertain terms her spouse’s disappearance with her son’s murder. She said she had obtained a lot of information that “during the torture of my son the father was made to appear by the torturers to witness his son’s agony. That the Commission on Human Rights then under the stewardship of Jose W. Diokno (in 1986) conducted an investigation. However, after his death, the case was never continued.”

In an interview on February 6, 2016, former Senator Panfilo Lacson confirmed to me that he was the “case officer” in the Boyet Mijares kidnap-for-ransom-slay case. He said it was the family who had informed him that the boy’s body had been found on May 31, 1977 but was unable to recall whether a military helicopter had dropped the corpse. Neither could he remember how the body ended up in Antipolo. He also said that while there were reports of a homosexual angle, he was not able to independently confirm it and “I did not have the heart to ask” the family.

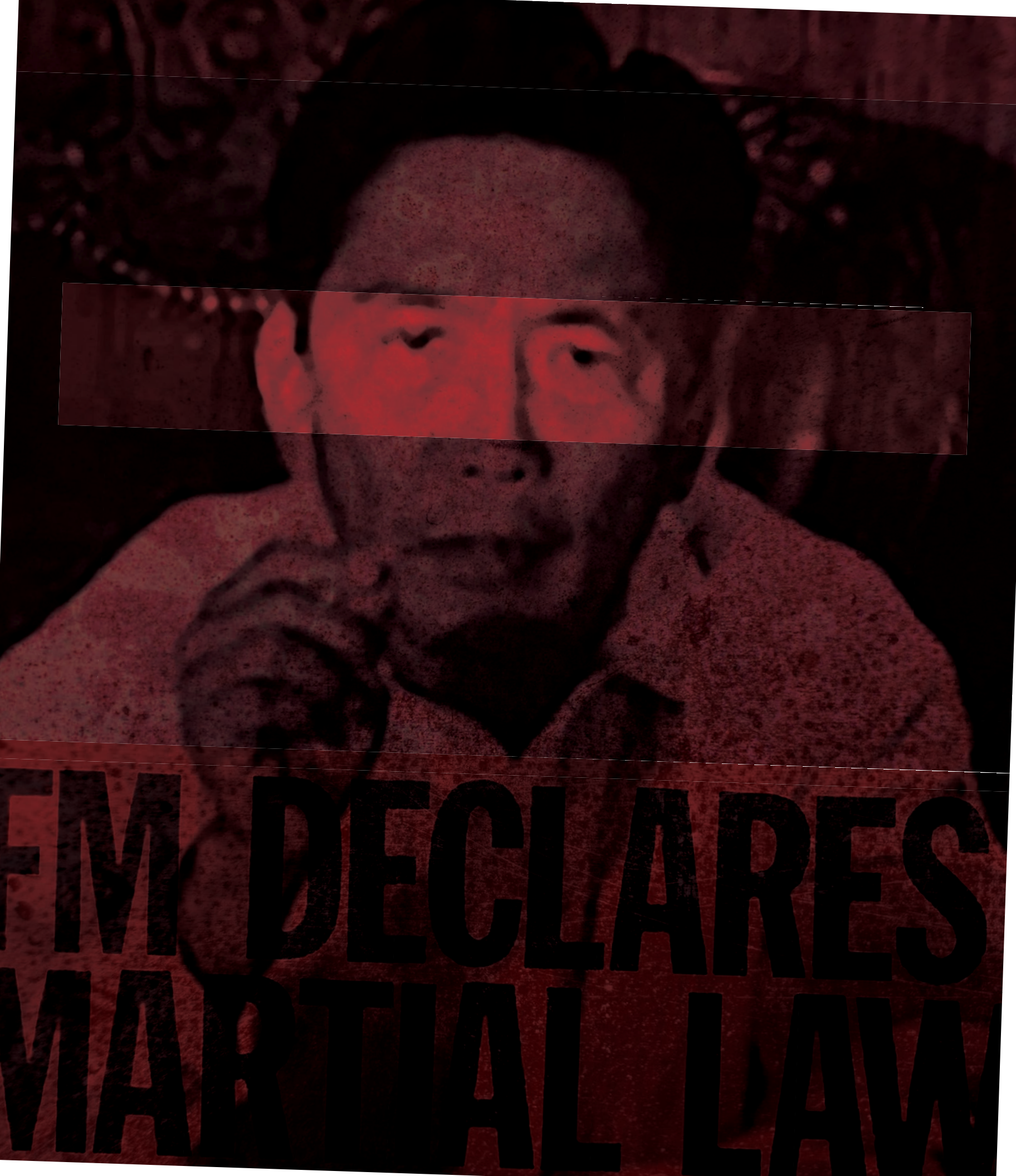
He confirmed that the three suspects who were tried in court were all college students belonging to one fraternity. They all denied any hand in the kidnapping and murder. He did not know if they were convicted since he was not made to attend the court hearings.

When Boyet went missing in May 1977, Lacson said Priscilla Mijares never told him about any link between the boy’s abduction and the disappearance of her husband Primitivo four months earlier. In fact, he said, Mrs. Mijares “seemed elusive” in talking to Lacson about her husband. “Sensing that, I did not pursue the matter further,” he said.

Lacson also recalled that long after the murder suspects were tried in court, he learned that Mrs. Mijares continued to quietly investigate the death of her son. He said he did not know why. He said that while he was on the case, he had treated it as a simple kidnap-for-ransom incident.



Painting of Luis Manuel Mijares commissioned by his mother.



**FM DECLARES
MARTIAL LAW**

Advent of the New Society

CHAPTER 1



On September 22, 1972, President Ferdinand Marcos imposed Martial Law through Proclamation 1081. Claiming the government was in mortal danger of being overthrown by a widespread Communist conspiracy and armed rebellion, Marcos gave

himself emergency powers that put the military and police at his personal beck and call.*

With the stroke of a pen (see box on the next page), the Philippines' 10th President destroyed democracy, concentrating executive, legislative and judiciary powers in his person, removing institutional checks and balances, accountability and the citizens' rights and liberties.

For the next 14 years he would rule as he pleased by issuing decrees (which took the place of laws) that he wrote himself, accountable to no one.

*There was no such imminent threat of a Communist takeover. In fact, according to a Staff Report prepared for the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in 1973, an executive session of the Philippine National Security Council on September 19, 1972 — just three days before Marcos imposed Martial Law — placed security conditions between “normal” and “Internal Defense Condition No. 1” (the worst condition was No. 3). Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom (eds.), “Martial Law, Staff Report for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” in the *Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship, and Resistance* (Quezon City: Ken Incorporated, 1987), 166-67. The same document is mentioned by Albert Celozza in *Ferdinand Marcos and the Philippines: The Political Economy of Authoritarianism* (Westport, Ct.: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 40.



Screen Grab from Ferdinand Marcos' video announcing he had declared Martial Law.

Overnight, Filipinos lost freedoms they had enjoyed for generations. Squads of soldiers, brandishing scraps of paper instead of judge-issued warrants (and in many cases dispensing with any documentation at all), rounded up thousands of citizens. Those arrested were supposedly part of the Communist conspiracy and enemies of the state but many were, in reality, political foes, personal opponents and critics of Ferdinand Marcos.

The military took over public utilities, shut down Congress, suppressed the media (except those owned by the Marcoses and their relatives), imposed a curfew and restricted travel out of the country. Any civilian caught with a firearm faced the death penalty.

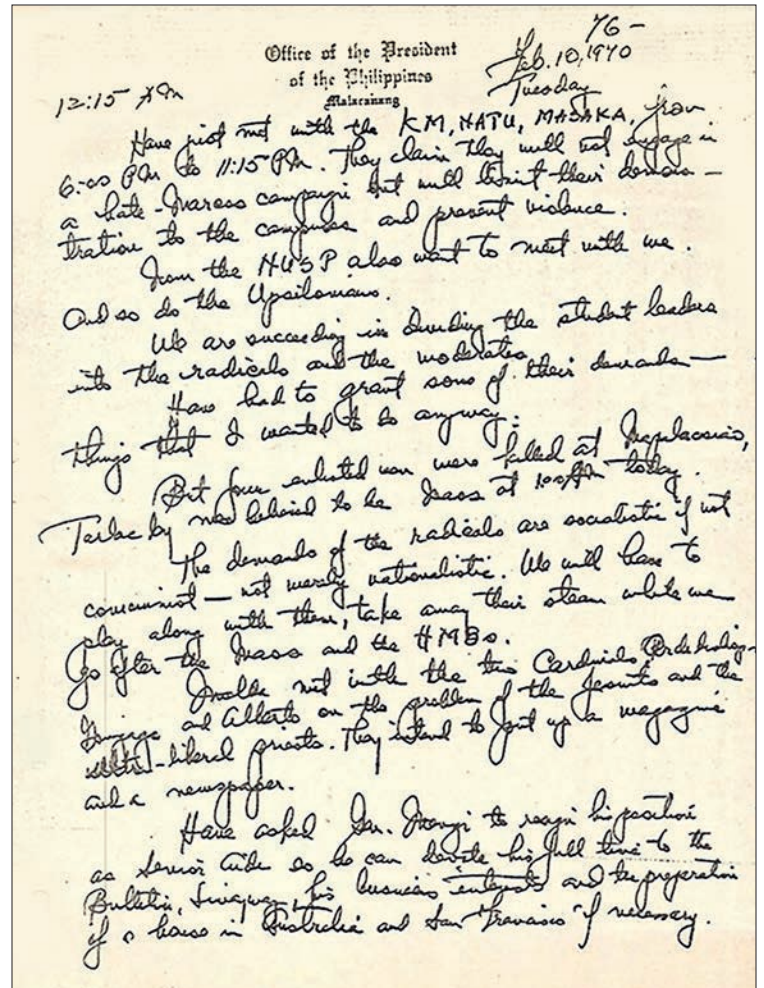
Former Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police (PC-INP) Director General Ramon Montaña recalled how the arrests were conducted: “We were organized into special task forces. The first order was to close the media. The second order was to arrest people based on association. I was the one who went to *Manila Times* to close it myself, because I was once a newsboy delivering the *Times*.” Although he said that that particular raid went off without a hitch, he admitted having erred in sending a subaltern from a different unit to shut down the country's biggest TV station. “F—k, I made a mistake. I sent Rolly (Rolando) Abadilla to close down ABS-CBN. He and his men mauled everyone there.”¹ Abadilla would later turn out to be one of the regime's most brutal torturers.

WHEN DID MARCOS DECLARE MARTIAL LAW?

It all had to do with the fact that Marcos was a very superstitious person who believed that numbers that were multiples of seven were lucky for him. So although arrests began on the night of September 22, a Friday, Marcos made the official declaration on television only the next day, September 23 after most of the arrests had been made; he backdated the Proclamation to September 21 because of his superstitious preference for numbers that were multiples of seven. Later he disclosed that he had actually signed Proclamation 1081 a week earlier, on September 17, 1972. An official publication of the Philippine Navy confirmed this information. It revealed that during the Annual Convention of the Philippine Historical Association held at Maharlika Hall in Malacañang on November 28, 1973, Marcos gave a speech saying: "There are many who say the proclamation was made on the 22nd of September. If by proclamation is meant my appearing on television and saying that Martial Law is enforced, it was September 23. But when did I sign the proclamation on Martial Law? I actually signed it on September 17. But it was held and it was suspended and I kept it in my possession. I kept it in my possession, because on September 17, I wanted to be sure that the things I wanted to know were definitely confirmed."

"This is the first time I reveal this because I believe that the Philippine Historical Association is entitled to this particular fact of history. I signed two copies, only two copies of this Proclamation. One copy was supposed to be signed on September 21. Actually it was signed on September 17, but it was dated September 21. I wanted a period within which I could commune with myself and with God and ask Him whether it was correct for me to proclaim Martial Law."²

²From his diary entry dated February 10, 1970. Marcos' hefty handwritten diary, which he apparently started writing in 1969, was discovered in the Palace after he was chased out of the country. Though extensive, the document is not trustworthy: the dictator clearly wrote it with an eye on his imagined niche in history and the pages contain a self-serving mixture of truth, fantasy, lies and propaganda. Each entry has to be cross-checked, verified and put in context. The site of an author who annotated and published part of the diary notes that "...it is not reliably accurate. In fact, it is filled with lies and disinformation" but, with proper context, reveals the Marcos' couple's "shared delusions of grandeur." William C. Rempel, "Diary of a Dictator," *William C. Rempel: Author · Investigative Journalist · Storyteller*, <http://williamrempel.com/diary-of-a-dictator/> (accessed on November 12, 2015).



The last paragraph from Marcos' diary entry of February 10, 1970 said he had asked his military aide General Hans Menzi to prepare a safehouse for him abroad. Malacañang Museum and Library.

"According to the government's own estimates, about 30,000 people were arrested and detained in the few weeks following the proclamation of Martial Law," Amnesty International reported in 1976 after conferring with Marcos himself and other officials.³

Declaring Martial Law was an audacious move, but one so meticulously thought through that Marcos even allowed for the possibility of failure. According to Primitivo Mijares, a high-level propagandist working closely with Marcos at that time, if Marcos' gambit backfired, the President planned to flee abroad.⁴

In his diary, Marcos also wrote that he had directed his senior aide Hans Menzi to prepare "a house in Australia and San Francisco, if necessary."⁵

As it turned out, Marcos need not have worried. Although thousands had attended a huge rally in Manila precisely against Martial Law the day before it was proclaimed, when the hammer dropped the population

meekly accepted their metaphorical shackles. The man who had addressed the rally — warning about Marcos’ plans to impose military rule — was 39-year-old Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr.

For all his bluster, Aquino went quietly when the captors came for him.

It was a naked power grab, but Marcos claimed that emergency powers were needed to restore peace and order to a troubled country. Indeed, the public seemed relieved that once Martial Law was imposed, violent demonstrations and rallies ceased, crime dropped, and the government confiscated more than half a million firearms.⁵ In a widely unexpected but much applauded move, he even had one of his closest political allies and fraternity mate, Ilocos Norte Congressman Roquito Ablan, picked up. “That’s why we were very happy. It was really no holds barred,” Montaño told me in an interview.

And to show he meant business, he ordered the execution of drug trafficker Lim Seng, alias Gan Sou So, by an eight-man firing squad of the Philippine Constabulary on January 9, 1973.⁶ According to General Ramon E. Montaño, “only a few months after its declaration, the crime rate dipped to an unprecedented low. And by the end of Martial Law (meaning, when it was “lifted” in 1981), robbery had gone down by about 21 percent, murder by 10 percent, and rape by 16 percent.”⁷ Crimes using firearms had also drastically gone down, he said.

The regime advertised the tyranny as a “smiling Martial Law”.

The dictator announced he would use one-man rule not only to bring peace and order to the country but also to reform Philippine society and politics — a toxic, oligarch-and-landlord-dominated system based on patronage and graft. He called Martial Law a “democratic revolution” that would bring about what he termed “The New Society” — *Ang Bagong Lipunan*. Writing a few years after imposing military rule, Marcos said:

The New Society is in fact a revolution of the poor. By means of it, Filipinos today are attempting, through disciplined vision, to make the rewards of their labors and the fruits of their resources available to all. By means of it, they are walking out of a stupor filled with Walter Mitty fantasies, the opium of the oppressed and underprivileged. To share together in real life is the heart of democracy. Accordingly, the New Society is democratizing the wealth.⁸



Philippines Free Press editorial. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.

“Of what good is democracy if it is not for the poor?,” he asked. He also described his imposition of military rule as “a blow struck in the name of human rights.”⁹

Nothing could be further from the truth. His dictatorship was a long dark night in Philippine history, a regime marked by repression, greed and plunder. Within a few years of Marcos’ assuming power, the reform drive had lost steam, mired in corruption and red tape.¹⁰ According to the man who helped “finalize” for publication Marcos’ book, *Today’s Revolution: Democracy*, the reformist bent of Martial Law did not last long. Retired General Jose Almonte revealed in his own memoirs that “more than a year after Martial Law, I could see, however, that this reformist sheen was giving way to the true nature of Martial Law. Once Marcos consolidated his political power, he did not use this to build the nation.”¹¹

Almonte was not the only Marcos official who saw Martial Law’s true nature unmasked. Marcos’ relative, Philippine Constabulary Chief Fidel V. Ramos, would remark some 40 years later in 2012, “I would say that the smile of this Martial Law shone brightest in 1976. From then on, it soured.”¹² Ramos (elected Philippine President in 1992) blamed massive, creeping corruption. He said, “a slow rot soon began. Private monopolies and syndicates created by political patronage steadily worked to make the economy the dominion of a few. Corruption grew to massive proportions.”¹³

Corruption and political patronage were what made the rebellion grow, Ramos said with the benefit of hindsight, because “insurgency fed on these evils.” And as a result, “the early economic gains slowly disappeared. Inflation grew and real income plummeted.”¹⁴

Ramos said he tried to mitigate the tyranny's ill effects as he stayed on in his post for the next 10 years.

Another Marcos official, however, just could not take it anymore and bolted. He was Primitivo Mijares, Marcos' propagandist and chief censor, who published *The Conjugal Dictatorship* in 1976 (see **The Secrets of Primitivo Mijares**).

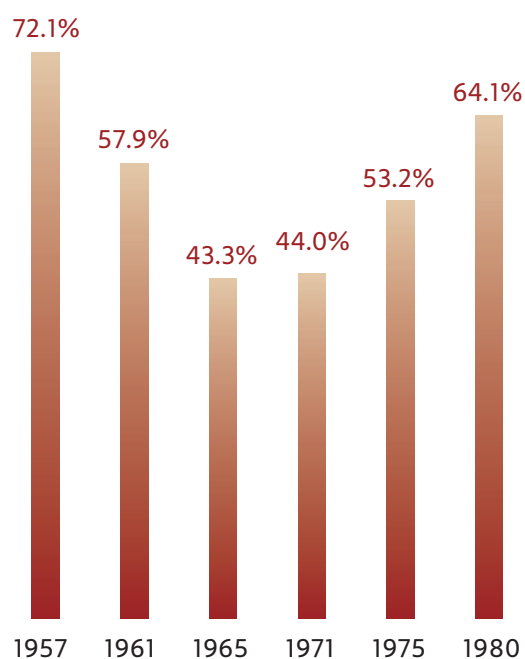
Unfortunately for Mijares, few copies of his book would reach Manila after publication. His son's murder would be all but forgotten. However, his book would outlive the dictator and become a lasting memorial to Marcos' atrocities and greed.

Meanwhile, however, the tyranny would continue for 10 more years.

Martial Law (which the dictator made a show of lifting in 1981, while retaining all the powers), would indeed restructure Philippine society – but only to install a fresh set of oligarchs: the Marcoses, their relatives, cronies and senior generals. It was the most destructive period the nation experienced following the Second World War. Before the regime collapsed in 1986, with Marcos and his family scuttling frantically and ignominiously into the night, it had killed thousands of Filipinos (many of whom vanished without a trace), tortured tens of thousands more and brought political instability and economic misery to the country.

In 1983, I wrote a report for the newspaper *Business Day* titled *Time Trends in Poverty* (see graph below),

Percent of families below the poverty line



using data from the World Bank's *Aspects of Poverty in the Philippines: A Review and Assessment* and official government statistics from FIES (Family Income and Expenditures Survey). The data showed that after 18 years of leading the country, 11 of them as a dictator, Marcos had failed to bring prosperity to the poor – in fact, poverty had worsened. Marcos' predecessor, President Diosdado Macapagal, had reduced the percentage of Filipinos below the poverty line from 57.9 percent in 1961 to 43.3 percent by the time he left office in 1965. In 1971, during Marcos' second term and a year before he grabbed unlimited power, the number of poor families rose to 44 percent. In 1975, the figure grew to 53 percent. By 1980, 64.1 percent of Filipino families had fallen below the poverty line.¹⁹



THE SECRETS OF PRIMITIVO MIJARES

In October 1974, Marcos' propagandist and chief censor Primitivo Mijares left the country for the US and the following year, he turned whistleblower. Mijares appeared on June 17, 1975 before the House International Relations Subcommittee of the US Congress and bared the systematic torture and corruption of the Marcos dictatorship. He revealed the dictator had offered him US\$100,000 if he would not testify.¹⁵

The following year, 1976,¹⁶ Mijares went on to write a tell-all book, *The Conjugal Dictatorship*. In it he called himself "an unwitting tool in some of the plans of Mr. Marcos for the imposition of Martial Law." But, he confessed, "I subsequently became a willing tool in the execution of measures designed to stabilize the Martial Regime. I became a close confidant of President Marcos, at times performing the role of a Joseph Goebbels and wielding greater powers in the propaganda field than his own official Information Secretary."¹⁷

"And I performed my duties faithfully until it dawned on me that what I was helping to get entrenched was not a regime of constitutional authoritarianism dedicated to the establishment of law and order and of a New Society. I

began to realize that it was nothing but an infamous design dedicated shamelessly to the establishment by the law of the gun of an imperial dynasty in the Philippines,” Mijares said.

Mijares’ wife, Priscilla, called her husband’s exposé “the best book about Martial Law.” During my interview with her in January 2016, I asked her if her husband had ever brought her and the children to Malacañang Palace to meet the Marcos couple. “Never,” she said. “My husband did not invite us.” She suspected it was for a reason — he had planned to defect and he did not want to involve the family. “As for me, I am not the type of wife who meddles” in her husband’s affairs.

When I asked Judge Mijares what she and her husband had talked about during his last phone call to the family from Guam on January 23, 1977, she told me without hesitation, “I did not (talk to him then). I was angry. I did not want to talk to him.”

Why not?

In a calm voice, she revealed to me a secret that she had kept locked in her heart for the last 38 years. Her husband was a bigamist: he hadn’t just betrayed his master, he had also betrayed his family. Six years before he defected he had married another woman in the US. When he sought political asylum he and the woman stayed together in California.

While Mijares was in Guam “at that time, my daughter was trying to hand me the phone,” she recalled that fateful day. “And I said, ‘No, I’m angry at him. Tell him to find someone else to talk to. The girl was there. He married a girl — Virginia Concha — in the US. I understand they went to Las Vegas.’”



Unconsciously, while talking about her spouse “Tibo”, she shifted to the present tense and said, “He has his excuses. He’s been telling his friends he couldn’t avoid it *kasi nabuntis niya* (because he got her pregnant).”

To make matters worse, she found out that in one of her US-bound trips with Tibo, “that girl” was seated at the back of the plane and would often walk by their seat. Which must have been why, she said, Tibo kept going to the back of the plane during that trip.

“I’m angry, I was fooled,” Mijares flatly said. “But when I pray, I also pray for him and I tell the Lord, I have forgiven him already. But deep inside, (I ask) why this thing happened, when I had helped him (to earn and to) raise our children. And then,



Wedding day of Priscilla and Primitivo Mijares.
Courtesy of the Mijares family.

(after he had gone) I raised them. All (four) of them.”

I asked Judge Mijares when she had forgiven her husband. She replied, “five years ago.”

In her bare living room (her house had just been renovated after a fire due to faulty electrical wiring had partly gutted it on December 11, 2015), there was no reminder of her spouse. She had no photo of him. But she showed me photos of her murdered son Luis Manuel and a painting of him — forever young, handsome and smiling.

Her daughter Pilita produced a small album she had managed to keep of her parents’ wedding. Primitivo and Priscilla had met as classmates studying pre-law at the Lyceum University. Because he was attending daytime classes while she was with the evening class, they decided to share the same set of law books.

Their wedding day, Judge Priscilla told me, was “the happiest day of my life.”

Judge Priscilla was right. Her husband had illegally married a Virginia Concha. According to Nevada records, Concha married Primitivo Mijares on September 6, 1969, in Reno.¹⁸



Philippines Free Press editorial. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.

Far from democratizing wealth, the New Society concentrated it in the hands of a new elite — Marcos' relatives and cronies. Democracy gave way to what came to be called kleptocracy as the freshly-minted oligarchs stole everything that was not nailed down, dipped their fingers in every transaction, diverted foreign aid to their accounts and helped themselves to the national treasury. A World Bank study found that Martial Law led to the 20 percent richest Filipino families cornering more and more of the national income during Martial Law — from 52.9 percent in 1971 to 58.8 percent in 1983.²⁰

Marcos' own wife Imelda became legendary for her avarice and colossal shopping sprees around the world.²¹

The Marcoses alone plundered around US\$13 billion,²² leaving the Philippine economy in ruins, saddled with a colossal debt of US\$26.389 billion,²³ its civil and military institutions corrupted and distrusted.

Gauging the effect that Marcos had on the country, an American diplomat stationed in Manila estimated that “for almost 20 years, 10 percent of the GNP had been siphoned off into non-productive activities, much of it abroad.”* The diplomat, Robert G. Rich, Jr., stated: “that 10 percent probably made the difference between the Philippines being as economically successful as Taiwan, Hong Kong, or South Korea and just rocking and stumbling along as they did.”²⁴

*Gross National Product or “a measure of the country’s output of final goods and services, in terms of its market or purchaser’s value,” in this case, yearly.

Side by side with the plunder, theft and looting were repression, torture and atrocity. Marcos' Martial law introduced sinister new words to Filipinos: sedition, subversion, salvaging, hamletting, tactical interrogation. From 1972 to 1986, anyone who protested, or spoke out against the Marcoses, or was suspected of being a threat, was branded a “Communist”, or “subversive” and arrested. At least 3,257 Filipinos were murdered, more than 35,000 tortured and tens of thousands more were illegally detained.²⁵ Formed in 2012 by Congress to determine the extent of the Marcos regime’s atrocities, the Human Rights Claims Victims Board said that as of September 2015 it had received 75,730 claims of abuses.²⁶

Marcos' regime was a grisly one-stop butcher shop for human rights abuses, a system that swiftly turned citizens into victims by dispensing with inconvenient requirements such as constitutional protections, basic rights, due process and evidence. Marcos became the first President to introduce detention camps and “safehouses” where enemies of the regime could be confined, tortured and murdered. Massacres were a regular feature of the regime, and wholesale brutal atrocities, unprecedented in the country’s postwar history, were perpetrated by the soldiers, police and agents of a 14-year dictatorship dedicated to power, plunder and terror. The New Society was a pyramid of oppression and exploitation, built on the bodies and looted wealth of Filipinos.

At its apex, calling all the shots, was Ferdinand Marcos.

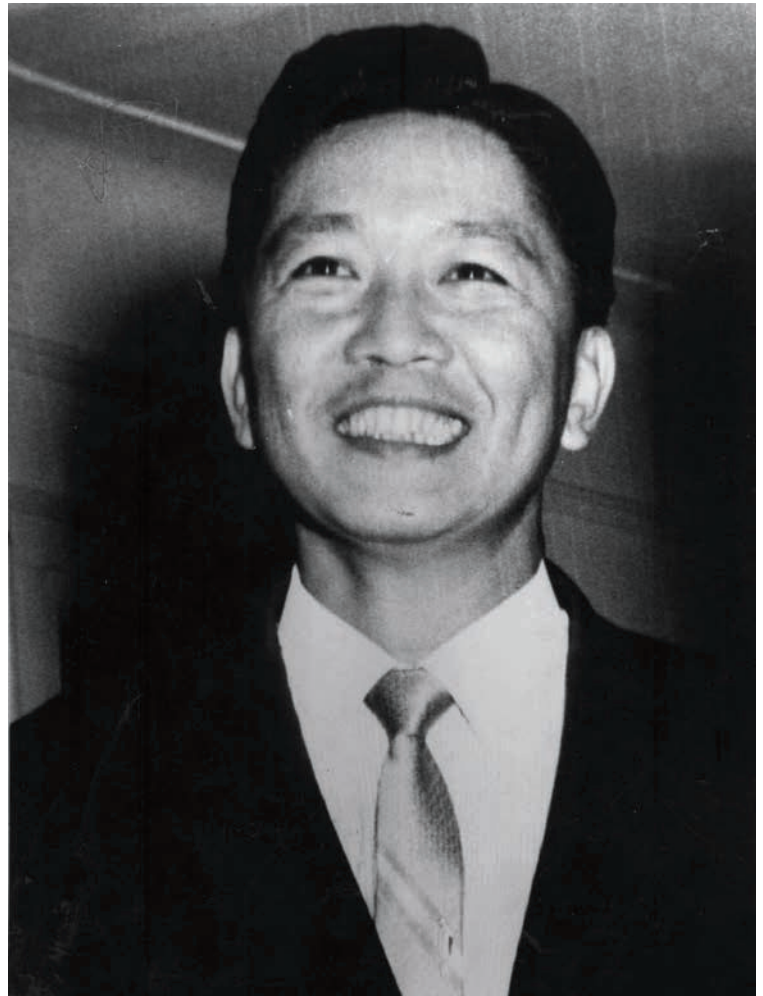
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FERDINAND MARCOS

President Ferdinand Edralin Marcos, 55 years old in 1972, was a thin-lipped, dark-skinned wiry man who exuded a dangerous charm. He could speak in a stentorian voice, was a consummate wheeler-dealer and had eyes that never smiled even when the man was cracking a joke. He had a photographic memory and plotted political moves like a consummate chess player. Mijares claimed that when the President was a senior law student at the University of the Philippines he had written a thesis on the need for a “strong man” rule which he called “constitutional authoritarianism”.²⁷ There was no doubt he saw himself as that man. “Marcos really aspired that early and intended to employ cunning and deceit to be his country’s dictator one day,” said Mijares.

Two infamous murders marked Ferdinand Marcos’ life. The first helped launch his political career, the second, 48 years later, started the tailspin that sent his regime crashing to the ground. In both instances the victim was an enemy who was shot in the back. On the night of September 20, 1935,* Julio Nalundasan, 41, a newly-elected Assemblyman from Sarrat, Ilocos Norte, was killed by a single shot fired from long range while he was brushing his teeth. The suspected trigger man was the son of Nalundasan’s political opponent — 18-year-old Ferdinand Marcos, a law student at the University of the Philippines and a member of the University’s rifle team.

*This is according to court records. However, Mijares says September 21 (p. 237).



Ferdinand Marcos as Senate President. Malacañang Museum and Library.

Investigation showed the rifle assigned to him was on the gun rack at the University of the Philippines, but another weapon was missing.²⁸ In addition, Nalundasan had been killed by a “a single Western Lubaloy .22 long bullet that entered his back and penetrated his heart,” according to Hartzell Spence, Marcos’ official biographer. Spence noted that Marcos at that time was the national rifle champion and the .22 calibre rifles used in competitions were loaded with Western Lubaloy bullets.²⁹

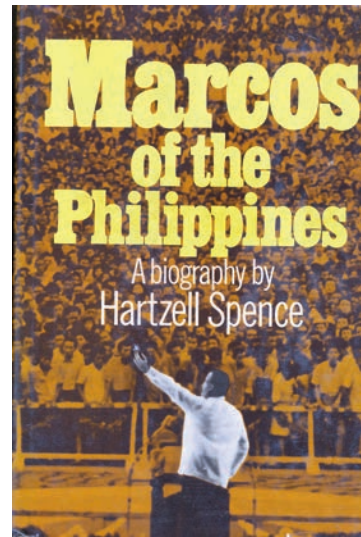
Three years after the killing, the young suspect Marcos was arrested. Allowed to graduate, he took the Bar Examination and placed first in 1939 — the year he was convicted and sentenced to 17 years imprisonment for murder.³⁰ He didn’t stay long in jail: in 1940, the Supreme Court overturned the judgment and set him free.³¹ Ever after, the dictator, his propagandists and sycophants loved boasting that it was his legal prowess that got his conviction reversed (he wrote his own appeal). But that was only part of the story. The real reason why Marcos



As a young man, Supreme Court Associate Justice Jose P. Laurel had also stabbed to death a romantic rival. Malacañang Museum and Library.

walked was a bizarre one: a Supreme Court justice had developed a soft spot for the killer. According to Mijares, it was the “unusual interest” of Associate Justice Jose P. Laurel that saved the young murder convict. Laurel, who volunteered to write the decision, had himself been involved in a similar crime. As a young UP law student who had gone on to top the Bar,³² Laurel had stabbed and killed a romantic rival, been found guilty of homicide but was acquitted by a sympathetic Supreme Court justice. Mijares claimed the Nalundasan case struck a chord of sentimental sympathy with Associate Justice Laurel,³³ who felt the country couldn’t afford to lose a person of such potential. If this is true, Justice Laurel’s softhearted sentimentality was to cost the country dear, letting loose a plague that would inflict death and suffering on tens of thousands of Filipinos. For his part, Marcos considered himself indebted to Laurel and his descendants.

Whistle blower Mijares himself thought Marcos was guilty of the treacherous murder. He said, “When his (Marcos’) father was defeated by Julio Nalundasan, Marcos obviously saw what could have been a political eclipse for the Marcos family. As one who coolly scheme(s) in crisis, Marcos assessed the situation and decided on the ultimate solution to the big stumbling block to his political future: Kill Nalundasan. This was his first display of the ‘overkill’ type of operation for which he has acquired notoriety.”³⁴ To Mijares, this was in keeping with the man’s character: “Bribery, treachery, violence and murder dominate the genealogy of the Marcos...families and served as the



This Marcos official biography was originally published in 1964 with the title, *For Every Tear a Victory*.

molds which formed the mentality and character of Ferdinand Marcos.”³⁵

The sensational Nalundasan case shot Marcos to national prominence. Philippine Commonwealth President Manuel Quezon summoned him to Malacañang Palace, offered him a job and said: “You are the most famous young man in this country. You can capitalize on that to catapult yourself into a political career.”³⁶

The second murder to signpost Marcos’ life happened 48 years after Nalundasan was assassinated. On August 21, 1983, Senator Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr. was gunned down, shot from behind while being escorted off an aircraft by government agents. Aquino had been seen as the best alternative to the dictator and probably would have become President had Martial Law not been imposed. Fearing Aquino as the biggest political threat, Marcos kept him jailed from 1972 to 1980, when Ninoy suffered a heart attack and needed a triple-bypass operation. Aquino refused to be operated on by military doctors, and the dictator was forced to let the prisoner go to the United States.³⁷

In 1983, hearing reports that Marcos in turn was ailing, Aquino returned to Manila on August 21. As soon as his commercial flight landed it was boarded by armed uniformed agents who singled out Aquino, led him out the door, down a flight of stairs and straight into history.

Ninoy’s assassination by a lone gunman (the government claimed it was a Communist who had somehow infiltrated the massive security cordon, but

nobody bought that story) started the tremors and groundswell that, three years afterward, led to the regime collapsing and the dictator being chased out of the country. Ironically, it was Ninoy's wife, Corazon "Cory" Aquino, whom Marcos forces sneeringly dismissed as a "mere housewife", who stepped forward to become President and an icon of "People Power".

Between these two murders, Marcos built a career marked by political astuteness, superb calculation, patient planning, opportunism, corruption and deceit. Called up as an officer during World War II, he later fabricated a record of service that, in his recounting, saw him single-handedly change history by delaying the fall of Bataan, receiving as a result of his actions a recommendation for the US Medal of Honor of Congress.³⁸ Not content with that tale, Marcos also claimed that when the Philippines fell to the Japanese, he led a band of guerrillas on daring missions and that he was captured and then tortured by the Japanese in the dungeons of the notorious Fort Santiago in Manila.

None of it was true. No official Filipino, American or Japanese sources mentions his heroics, or even his name. He was never recommended for the US Congressional Medal of Honor (though he did receive some medals — nearly a decade after the War). No prisoner in Fort Santiago ever recalled Marcos being incarcerated there.*³⁹

Marcos' own father was reportedly executed by the guerrillas for being a Japanese collaborator.⁴⁰ The son

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*Fort Santiago survivor Conrado Agustin did not mention Marcos as one of the Fort Santiago detainees in his book, which came out during Martial Law. Agustin even had to obtain permission from Marcos' Public Information Minister Francisco Tatad to have it published. See Conrado Gar. Agustin, *Men and Memories in Confinement* (Manila: MCS Enterprises, Inc., 1973). Interestingly, Agustin gave at the end of his book a "partial listing" of 615 names of detainees. Marcos' name was not listed, although he would have been the most prominent since he was, at that time of the book's publication, the Philippine dictator. Another memoir written by Edmundo G. Navarro also did not mention Marcos. See Edmundo G. Navarro, *Beds of Nails* (Manila: By the author, 1988).



Marcos wearing some of his controversial war medals. Malacañang Museum and Library.

claimed that his father Mariano had been shunned by the guerrillas who had suspected he was a spy, and that he then fell into the hands of the Japanese who tortured and killed him for refusing to reveal where his son was.⁴¹ The US Army itself, citing its records, cast doubt on Marcos' claims about his father.⁴²

The inconvenient fact that his wartime record was bogus did not stop the alleged war hero from using it to promote his political career, banking heavily on his false claim to being the country's most decorated veteran. Journalist Raymond Bonner wrote:

Altogether Marcos said he received at least thirty awards, medals, and citations (the exact number varies in his accounts, usually between twenty-seven and thirty-three). If he did, not only was he, as claimed, the most decorated Filipino soldier in history, but Audie Murphy, who received twenty-seven awards, becomes a footnote. It was all a monumental fraud, and Marcos was nothing if not daring in perpetuating it.⁴³



Movie posters for Marcos' 1965 election campaign movie, *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* (Marked by Destiny).

According to writer Charles C. McDougald, the politician from Ilocos “decided if he couldn’t get official recognition, he would write his own version of the war... his biography, *For Every Tear a Victory*, and later the book *Valor* had to fulfill all of his fantasies as a hero of biblical proportions, something he never was.”⁴⁴ When he ran for President in 1965, Marcos even made his life into an epic war film, *Iginuhit ng Tadhana* (Marked by Destiny), which also depicted the Nalundasan murder as a personal triumph and vindication. McDougald wrote:

Marcos the soldier was an illusion. His claims are so full of discrepancies and inconsistencies that it is difficult to believe he performed any of those alleged deeds. The claims appear to be part of an elaborate hoax perpetrated by someone who couldn’t settle for just being brave. He had to be the bravest. Therein somewhere probably lies a key to the man who couldn’t settle for just being president. He wanted more — a whole lot more.*

Bankrolled by a fortune that he likely built from controlling the filing and collection of back pay for thousands of war veterans,⁴⁵ the young Marcos launched a career in national politics. Charismatic, ruthless, unscrupulous and a cynically brilliant political player, he

*By 1986, Marcos’ lies had taken such firm root in his own mind that, on a satellite hookup on “This Week With David Brinkley”, he asserted his wartime exploits had been cited in the memoirs of none other than the Japanese Emperor Hirohito. Columnist George Will exasperatedly told the dictator there were no such memoirs and that the only books Hirohito had written were on botany and marine biology. After that interview Will told the White House that Marcos was an “inveterate liar”. Bonner, *Waltzing*, 417-18.

made no bones about his vaulting ambition. Running for Congress in 1949, he promised his province mates from the harsh, hardscrabble northern region of Ilocos: “Elect me as your congressman today, I promise you an Ilocano president in 20 years.”⁴⁶ He would fulfill that promise in sixteen. He became a congressman in 1949, served three terms, then was elected a senator in 1959. As a congressman, he authored an import-control law which reportedly allowed him to clean up big time, amassing illegal wealth by collecting bribes in exchange for releasing import licenses to businessmen (a minimum of P10,000 per license).⁴⁷ (All “P” symbols refer to Philippine Pesos).

By 1965, he was running for the presidency, mesmerizing voters with ringing rhetoric promising that “this country can be great again.” Long before that, in 1954, he had also mesmerized and acquired a statuesque wife, a former beauty pageant winner, the tall and fair Imelda Romualdez. She proved to be far from a retiring housewife, and became his secret weapon — and years later a global symbol of plunder, excess and greed — as infamously manifested by her owning 3,000 pairs of shoes.⁴⁸ Marcos had married Imelda after an 11-day courtship, during which he promised to make her the Philippine First Lady.⁴⁹ Besides her beauty, she was a political prize catch since the Romualdez clan controlled a bloc of votes, although, as her husband would reportedly learn much later, she was from a branch of the clan that was penurious. It might explain why she was eager to marry. According to Mijares:

What is universally accepted in the Philippines is the story that the Marcos fortune in millions of cold cash was displayed to Imelda before her marriage to Ferdinand. So smitten was Marcos with Imelda that to inveigle her to accepting a dinner date, he asked two ladies then with Imelda to come along.

On the way to the restaurant, Marcos made some excuse to stop by his bank and invited the three ladies to step inside the vault. As later recounted by one of the witnesses, Imelda’s eyes nearly popped out beholding all that cash, not in pesos, but in good old American dollars. Forthwith the courtship of Imelda Marcos became not only smooth sailing but (a) whirlwind.⁵⁰

Accompanying her husband on his campaign sorties, Imelda crooned love songs to entranced crowds and —



Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos. Malacañang Museum and Library.

addressing insinuations about the Nalundasan murder — asked with tears in her eyes, would someone as lovely as she marry a murderer? One observer wrote:

She offered herself as the star character witness for her husband. And her punch line was: “They say that my husband is a forger, a murderer, a land-grabber. Look at me. Do you think I would have married this man if he was that bad? Do you think I would have stayed with him and campaigned for him, if the charges were true? I should have been the first to know about the character of my husband. He is the best, the tenderest husband in the world...”⁵¹

Her seemingly artless appeal was the Marcos campaign’s calculated riposte to the sudden appearance of the murdered Nalundasan’s son on national TV. The son “not only insinuated that Marcos had been the guilty party but explicitly stated that the guilty party had been allowed to freely run around and worse, to aspire for the highest office of the nation.”⁵² Marcos himself had anticipated that the murder would be raised as an issue against him.

It was also Imelda who proved decisive in getting the support of a key power player, oligarch Eugenio “Iñing” Lopez, Sr., who had been refusing to back the senator because he believed that “Marcos killed Nalundasan. People are convinced about that, even if he had won

acquittal from old man (Justice) Laurel. We should not have a murderer in Malacañang. It would be like aligning ourselves with the devil to achieve our objectives of toppling (incumbent President Diosdado) Macapagal.”⁵³ Imelda’s tears not only changed the old man’s mind but also convinced the elder Lopez’s cousin Fernando Lopez to run as Marcos’ vice-presidential mate.⁵⁴ The Lopezes would live to regret their decision.

Marcos won the the presidential election in 1965, but even as he exulted in his victory he had not forgotten (at least according to Mijares) his thesis on constitutional authoritarianism and was already thinking ahead. As author McDougald pointed out, Marcos was “a man who couldn’t just settle for being president...he wanted more — a whole lot more.” It would take a second term, seven years of planning, plotting and devious political maneuvering, but even as he took the most powerful position in the Philippines, Marcos already had his eyes fixed on one-man rule.

Imelda Marcos persuaded voters to elect an accused murderer. Malacañang Museum and Library.



In his 1965 inauguration as President, Marcos swears to defend the Constitution (top). By the 1969 inauguration, cracks between Vice-President Fernando Lopez and the Marcoses began to show (bottom). Malacañang Museum and Library.



THE ROAD TO MARTIAL LAW

By 1972, near the end of Marcos' second term, everybody knew he was bent on declaring Martial Law — it was just a question of when. Politicians, journalists, even the general public sensed that the President, restricted to two terms, had no intention of stepping down in 1973 and exposing himself to investigations for corruption and the dirty campaign he had waged to be reelected. According to foreign media his reelection was (at that time) the “dirtiest”, “the most violent” and “the most corrupt election” in Filipino history.⁵⁵

The bright glow of his first term (1965-69) which *Time* magazine initially noted⁵⁶ was marked by the President's “dynamic, selfless leadership”, had rapidly faded. Although it had built roads and bridges and increased rice productivity to the point that the Philippines became an exporter, the administration became increasingly notorious for its extravagance and corruption. Imelda dipped into public funds to build a Cultural Center that eventually cost \$12.5 million.⁵⁷ **(All “\$” symbols refer to US Dollars.)** One author noted: “The country's leading writers, artists, and intellectuals bitterly criticized the Cultural Center, arguing that it was hardly intended for the advancement of Philippine culture, but rather to entice international artists with whom Imelda Marcos wanted to cavort.” Aquino called the building “a monument to the nation's elite bereft of social conscience.”⁵⁸ Looking back, one US embassy official ruefully remarked, “We believed his promises to renovate the society, to introduce land reform, social justice, real democracy.”⁵⁹

In Marcos' second term, land reform was only minimally implemented and violence went unchecked as warlords and their private armies flourished. Although



the Huk movement (the Communist peasant insurgency that dated back to the end of the Second World War) had degenerated into little more than gangsterism, on December 26, 1968, a new Communist Party had formed under Jose Maria Sison, a scion of a wealthy Ilocano family who took on the nom de guerre Amado Guerrero (beloved warrior).⁶⁰ The alias was understandable since at that time, mere membership in the Communist Party was punishable by imprisonment to death under Republic Act 1700 or the Anti-Subversion Law.⁶¹

Committed to fight a guerrilla war according to the precepts of the Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong, the group was organized by Sison, a lecturer in the University of the Philippines Department of English. On March 29, 1969, he hooked up with a Huk chief, Bernabe Buscayno (alias *Kumander Dante*), who formed the New People's Army (NPA) — an “army” which initially boasted 65 fighters and all of 70 weapons. It would play a growing role in the coming dictatorship.⁶²

In winning a second term in 1969, something no president of the Republic had ever done before or since, Marcos spared no coin and trick, ruthlessly employing what came to be memorably called “guns, goons and gold”. To woo voters, his administration went on a spending binge on projects, running through about US\$50 million in public and private funds, weakening the economy so much that the government ran short of money for its payroll and had to ask for an emergency loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As its price for helping Marcos, the IMF required the President to devalue the peso.⁶³ The exchange rate, 3.9 pesos to 1 US dollar in 1969, plummeted to 6 to 1 in 1970,⁶⁴ causing inflation, sending prices rocketing and creating major social unrest.

To students, Marcos and Imelda personified all that was wrong in Philippine society. To the President, the students were misled by Communists, confused and naive.

The social unrest, disenchantment of the youth and violence on the streets were showcased a month after Marcos was sworn into his second term. On January 26, 1970, after delivering a State of the Nation Address at the Congress building, he emerged to find a crowd of furious protesters who had just burned his effigy. A cardboard coffin, symbolizing the death of democracy, was pushed toward the President and a green-painted crocodile “hurled at him”.⁶⁵ The riot police moved in and the rocks started flying.⁶⁶ Four days later, the President invited some “moderate” student leaders to meet with him inside the Palace. Among them was Edgar Jopson, a grocer’s son from the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Manila University, who would be heard of again in a few years’ time. Marcos was stunned when the young man thrust a piece of paper and



The grocer’s son Edgar Jopson demanded in a meeting that Marcos put it in writing that he would step down by 1973 when his term ended. Malacañang Museum and Library.

demanding, “you sign that. You are not running for a third time.” Marcos replied that he had already repeatedly given that assurance to students whenever he met them. But Jopson, who led the National Union of Students of the Philippines, yelled “We don’t believe you!” Marcos snapped back with contempt: “Is this what the groceries produce?” Recalling the encounter, Marcos told Nick Joaquin of the *Philippines Free Press*: “I guess he was only nervous. They were all nervous. I should have noticed that immediately. These (students) are not the kind of people you give a lecture to. They give you a lecture.”⁶⁷

They could do more than give lectures. The evening of the day he met Jopson, Marcos felt student power at its rawest and deadliest form. Rampaging demonstrators succeeded in smashing their way through the gates of Malacañang where they burned down a firetruck and a car. The Presidential Guard Battalion swarmed out, fired tear gas bombs and live bullets into the air and beat up the students.⁶⁸ Four students were shot dead by state forces and almost 300 were arrested.

One of the organizers of these mammoth rallies was Sison, who had a talent for organizing, first the Student Cultural Association of the Philippines in 1959, then the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM, Nationalist Youth) in 1964 and finally the Movement for a Democratic Philippines in 1970.⁶⁹ Author Ninotchka Rosca, who wrote a revealing biography on Sison, said of KM: “at its full strength in the 1970-1972 period, the youth movement could mobilize up to 150,000 for demonstrations and rallies in Manila alone.”⁷⁰

As more and more rallies turned violent, with bombs (called “pillboxes”) thrown and shop windows smashed in retaliation for police brutality, Marcos waited for his chance to implement what he called “the total solution to the ideological impasse.”⁷¹ He did not elaborate what he meant by that.

With law and order seeming to unravel and politicians appearing to be more interested in squabbling than solving society’s problems, the door was slowly opening to the possibility of strongman rule. Marcos saw himself as the leader who fit that bill. On March 5, 1971, he wrote to himself in his diary:

This is your principal mission in life — save the country again from the Maoists, the anarchists and the radicals. This is the message that I deduce from the visions that I see asleep and awake.

“Subordinate everything to this,” God seems to be saying to me.



Philippines Free Press editorial. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.

‘And you are the only person who can do it,’ He says. ‘Nobody else can.’

‘So do not miss the opportunity given you.’

God’s urgings notwithstanding, there was another good reason why the President wanted to grab power: to protect his ill-gotten fortune. By the time Marcos started his second term, allegations of his corruption were so thick on the ground, they were a staple fare of sardonic media comments and cartoons. To deal with the accusations, Marcos announced that he had put his wealth, allegedly totaling \$30,000, in a “blind trust” dedicated to “scientific research for the public welfare”.⁷²

He also wrote the following draft in his diary:

DECEMBER 31, 1969

DRAFT

I have today given away by general instrument of transfer all my worldly possessions to the Filipino people through a foundation to be organized known as the Marcos Foundation.

Moved by the strongest desire and the purest will to set the example of self-denial and self-sacrifice for all our people, I have today decided to give away all my worldly possessions so that they may serve the greater needs of the greater number of our people.

It is my wish that these properties will be used in advancing education, science, technology and the arts.

This act I undertake of my own free will, knowing that my need of material possessions will, having always been a simple man, my needs will always be lesser than those of many of our people, who have given me the highest honor within their gift, an honor unshared by any one of my predecessors and not likely to be shared by any one else in the future.

Since about a year ago, I have asked my closest, some of my very closest confidants to study the mechanics of this decision. Today studies have been completed, and a foundation will be formed to administer these properties and all funds that may be generated therefrom.

My wife, Imelda, is in agreement with this decision. Provisions will be made for my children, so that they shall be assured of satisfactory education and be prepared to meet their lifetime duties and endeavors.

For the moment, my most sincere hope is that this humble act shall set the example and move to greater deeds of unselfishness and compassion, many of our countrymen whose position in society gives them a stronger duty to minister to the needs of our less fortunate brothers and countrymen.

PFM

Needless to say, no such wealth was ever given to the Filipino public.*

Mijares wrote how, by 1970, rumors swirled that the President was by then the richest man in Asia. Marcos tried to deal with the accusation by summoning reporters and admitting that, yes he was rich, but it was because he had “discovered” the fabled treasure of General Tomoyuki Yamashita (the Japanese World War II commander who allegedly plundered Southeast Asia to amass a fabulous hoard he brought to the Philippines). The President, Mijares tartly noted, did not bother to explain why, if he

*As of late 2015, Marcos loyalists continued to claim on social media that the election of Marcos’ son Ferdinand “Bongbong” Jr. to the vice-presidency in 2016 would pave the way for the distribution of the assets held in trust for the Filipino people by the Marcos Foundation. Claims were also made that the accumulated wealth was enough to repay the national debt. An examination of Securities and Exchange Commission records showed that a “Ferdinand E. Marcos Foundation” continued to be listed with the SEC as of November 14, 2015. But the SEC site said the registration of this particular foundation had been “revoked”. It didn’t say why. Likewise, three other foundations named after Marcos’ late mother Doña Josefa Edralin Marcos have also had their registration “revoked”. During Martial Law, the Marcos couple actually set up numerous his-and-hers shell foundations abroad to hide what the Swiss Federal Court described in its 2003 ruling as assets “of criminal origin”.



Ferdinand Marcos left this Swiss Credit Bank document in Malacañang showing he had opened a secret deposit account using the nom de guerre, William Saunders. I got this copy from the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) while I was covering it in 1986.

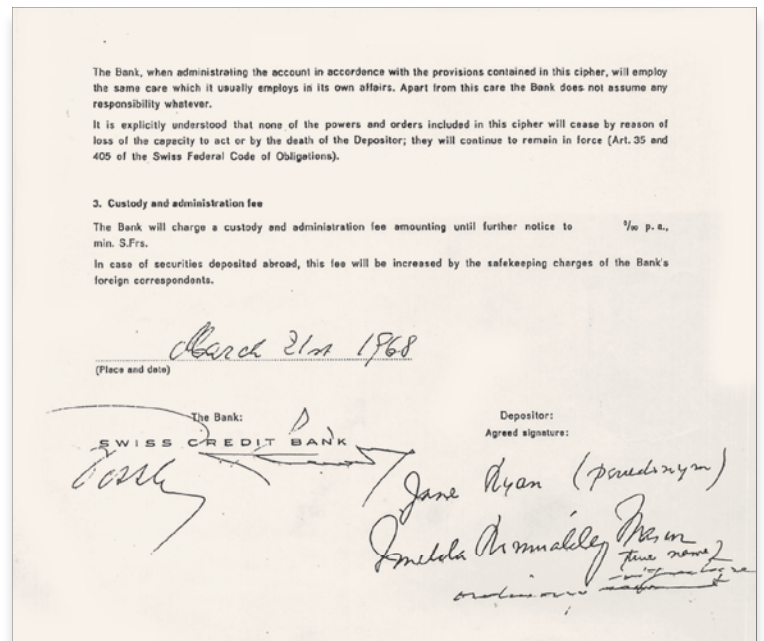
indeed had found the treasure, he hadn't declared it nor given half of it to the government as required by law.⁷³

Allegations that he was salting dollars abroad were so rife that they irked Marcos enough to write in his diary entry for December 7, 1970:

I am slightly disturbed by the licentious attacks against me insinuating dishonesty. So I have decided to file a case against Franz Pick, the monetary writer who claimed that I have dollars hidden away somewhere which is more than the dollar reserves of the country. I believe it is about time we took a stand on this.

Nearly a year later, on April 19, 1971, an angry Marcos wrote again:

Imelda and I have decided to file libel cases against the magazines and newspapers that have been libelling (sic) us. The straw that broke the camel's back was a nasty letter to Bongbong calling him a future thief and asking what kind of a crook is your daddy attaching a *Weekly Nation* cartoon apparently of me kneeling down praying "Dear Lord, I have 145 million dollars stashed away abroad, I own 223 corporations, properties at home. Just another year I swear, I'll quit, Amen."



Swiss Credit Bank document left by Marcos in Malacañang showed Imelda Marcos opening her own secret account with the alias, Jane Ryan. I also got this from PCGG in 1986.

A legal question that may arise is: "Can I waive the presidential cloak of immunity against services of legal process since this immunity is of and for the public interest?"....But as I see it, libel cases are the only ways in which I can redeem my good name in view of the viciousness of the newspapers. They have not attempted to cloak their lies with alleged reporting or journalistic candor. The stories have been concocted and they have been printed for one purpose only – to maliciously degrade and demean my reputation.

So, tomorrow I have to work on the cases.

I cannot delay the filing as the crime may prescribe.

He never filed any cases, perhaps because – as he conveniently omitted telling his diary – the stories were true. He and his wife were indeed stashing huge sums of dollars abroad in secret accounts. When the dictator fled in 1986, among the papers he left behind in the abandoned Palace were documents showing that Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos had opened illegal accounts at the Credit Suisse in Zurich as early as 1968 under the respective aliases "William Saunders" and "Jane Ryan".⁷⁴ The ill-gotten wealth came from kickbacks the President got for granting government contracts to cronies. In March 1968, he deposited a total of \$950,000 in accounts

Marcos of the Philippines

pino Retail Associations. During this employment he was picked up by the Kempei Tai for distributing U.S. propaganda leaflets in Manila. Under severe torture he refused to reveal how he had made contact with the Americans. Escaping the Japanese, he fled to Bulacan, north of Manila, and joined a guerrilla band.

In September 1944, he was drugged in a Manila tavern and taken to Maharlika headquarters on Leroy Street, Paco. Salvador suspected that Deblois was a Japanese agent. Deblois was worked over with a blackjack until the proud constable fell unconscious. Marcos, then operating under the *nom de guerre* Major Saunders, happened to enter the headquarters and, with apologies, released the victim.

Deblois, however, would not forgive the incident. Both he and Salvador rejoined their respective peace-officer organizations in 1945. The first time they met, a fist fight ensued, although Salvador was much the larger and stronger man. Friends parted the pair and, for the good of the service, pleaded for them to shake hands, but Deblois refused.

This was the situation when President Roxas, in response to a public clamor, directed the chief of constabulary to investigate the Manila Police Department, particularly its dereliction in failing to cooperate with the NBI, and its bruited brutality and dishonesty. The charge of this inquiry was given to Agent Deblois. He was overzealous to such an extent that the Manila police chief complained to Malacañang of the agent's methods. But Roxas by now was dead. His successor, Quirino, made no response. So the Manila cops defended themselves in their own way, roughing up and frustrating the

The dictator incriminated himself in his biography by Spence, which identified him as "Major Saunders".

under the Saunders and Ryan aliases as well as in his name.⁷⁵ Government investigators later discovered that the lawful income declared by the Marcoses in their income tax returns from 1949 to 1984 amounted to only 16.4 million pesos.⁷⁶

After the copies of the Credit Suisse bank documents fell into the hands of authorities in 1986, the Marcos couple steadfastly refused to admit they were the "William Saunders" and "Jane Ryan" in Philippine and Swiss courts — yet it was the dictator who incriminated himself in his own biography. There he reveals that when he was an alleged guerrilla during the war, he used the alias "Major Saunders".⁷⁷

The dollars stashed in Credit Suisse were the first seeds in what would turn out to be a gross, abundant harvest of greed. After the dictator's fall in 1986, dazed investigators guessed that the Marcos loot — stolen from the treasury, pocketed from commissions, nicked from foreign aid — came to at least \$10 billion.*

As Marcos secretly plotted to set up a dictatorship, he maneuvered to consolidate and further conceal his Swiss treasure. In February 1970, perhaps as a fallback, he

*Mijares claimed that even before he became a dictator, Marcos was observed by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to be "incredibly corrupt", and that as of 1969 his fortune was supposedly worth two billion dollars. See Mijares, *Conjugal Dictatorship*, 90.

directed his senior aide Hans Menzi to prepare "a house in Australia and San Francisco, if necessary." He also closed down the secret William Saunders and Jane Ryan Credit Suisse accounts and transferred the loot to a "Xandy Foundation" on March 3, 1970.⁷⁸

A side agreement with the Bank was then drawn up, naming the Marcos couple as "first beneficiaries". In case they died, the agreement directed that the money should go to their three children, "Imee, Ferdinand, Jr. (Bongbong) and Irene — as equal third beneficiaries." Nothing was said about the Filipino people taking part in the fortune.⁷⁹

By the second half of 1972, the young Senator Aquino was warning the public that military rule was coming, saying a secret source had given him the plans, codenamed "Oplan Sagittarius".⁸⁰ Marcos himself encouraged the stories of a military takeover, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. What the dictator's foes did not know was that Martial Law was the culmination of an intricate, sophisticated plot years in the making.

Far from stumbling into declaring military rule, Marcos had patiently, with calculated and calibrated steps, prepared the death of Philippine democracy. Few people understood the depth and scope of Marcos' plan. One of those who did was Primitivo Mijares, who asserted that "Marcos did not panic into dictatorship." The whistleblower claimed that the President had started the spadework on setting up a dictatorship at the start of his first term. "The beginning infrastructure for Martial Law was actually laid down by Marcos as early as the first day of his assumption of the Philippine presidency on December 30, 1965."⁸¹ Immediately after taking his oath as President, Marcos appointed himself to be his own Defense Secretary. He also, as one political scientist observed, went about increasing government's power: "In his first presidential term he consolidated that power by centralizing state institutions on a scale unseen since Manuel Quezon's Commonwealth presidency (1935-1944)."⁸² Jovito Salonga was a senator then. Writing 35 years later, he noted:

The first term of Marcos saw the emergence of relatives, cronies and close associates in key positions — in the Armed Forces, the public banking and financing institutions, important government corporations and the Cabinet. Before the first term of four years was over, almost the entire government apparatus, including the public treasury, had fallen under Marcos' complete control.⁸³

Marcos' plan to grab power unfolded slowly and had seven key objectives:

1. Control the military and police

In his inaugural speech in 1965, Marcos promised to fight criminality, lawlessness and smuggling. To do so, he announced, he was going to increase the funding and personnel of the military and implement organizational reforms. The speech seemed to strike the right, reassuring notes to a public concerned about peace and order, but what Filipinos did not know was that the actions were designed to increase the President's hold on the Armed Forces.

What most Filipinos did not realize was they were cheering on the casting of the first links in a chain of steel that would later bind them. Marcos' Proposal No. 1 — “a more vigorous implementation of the National Defense Act” — let him increase the size of the Armed Forces through conscription, ostensibly to deal with Communist and Muslim rebels, but in reality to create and shape an expanded military that would suit his personal purposes. In 1965, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) only had 51,500 men. Ten years later, the figure had nearly doubled to 101,900. In 1985, a year before Marcos' downfall, the military had bloated to 165,000 men.⁸⁴

Controlling the military was the key and lynchpin to his plan for destroying democracy. In a significant, unusual, step he appointed himself his own Secretary of Defense.

Donald Berlin, an American defense analyst-turned-academic, said that by occupying the defense portfolio,



Senator Rodolfo Ganzon (middle) with Marcos (left). Malacañang Museum and Library.

Marcos' plan to grab power:

1. Control the military and police
2. Control the Supreme Court
3. Undermine the Philippine public's faith in democracy
4. Exploit and abet lawlessness and instability
5. Exaggerate the Communist threat
6. Get US backing
7. Hijack the Constitutional Convention

the President “ensured frequent and direct contact between the senior military leadership and Marcos.”⁸⁵ By putting himself in charge of military promotions and appointments, the President made sure the senior commanders were loyal to him — not to the country or to the constitution but to Marcos alone. Berlin pointed out:

The political character of AFP promotions and appointments under Marcos, in fact, was apparent by the end of January 1966, the new administration's first month in office. In these few weeks, the largest reshuffle in previous AFP history was effected. This was highlighted by the forced retirement of 14 of the military's 25 flag officers, including the Chief and Vice Chief of Staff, the Army Commanding General, the Chief of Constabulary, and all four Constabulary Zone Commanders.⁸⁶

Slowly, the President gained influence on the military's highest ranks through kinship, clan ties and patronage. Meritocracy in the military was determined by loyalty to the President.⁸⁷ Marcos also packed the Armed Forces with officers and enlisted men from the Ilocos region.⁸⁸ Traditionally, Berlin observed, Ilocanos proliferated in the military. As one pro-Marcos senator, Rodolfo Ganzon, jokingly noted in 1965 when Marcos first assumed



Audience at Plaza Miranda scrambled away in panic as an incendiary device goes off. The Gerry Roxas Foundation, courtesy of the Malacañang Museum and Library.

office: “40 percent of the Armed Forces personnel are G.I. (Genuine Ilocano); 20 percent of the members of the force are S.I. (Semi-Ilocano); only 40 percent are from other regions; 50 percent of the force are die-hard F.M. (Ferdinand Marcos) supporters; and 90 percent are sympathetic to the cause.” What Marcos did, though, was to place more Ilocano officers in key positions. In 1967, he made Armed Forces Chief General Mata his Defense Secretary, and placed Major General Victor Osias in the vacated post. He promoted PC Chief Velasco to AFP Vice Chief-of-Staff. He appointed Colonel Amelio Bulan and Colonel Paterno Oppus as commanders of the Second and Fourth PC Zones, respectively.⁸⁹

“That political responsiveness was the goal is indicated by the the ethnic complexion of the new appointees as well as the scale of the reshuffle. Disproportionately rewarded were Ilocano co-regionalists of President Marcos,” Berlin noted.⁹⁰

After a political rally of the opposition Liberal Party was bombed in Plaza Miranda, Manila, on the night of August 21, 1971, Marcos swiftly assumed for the second time the post of defense secretary and held on until January 1972. He then appointed another Ilocano, Juan Ponce Enrile, to the post of Defense Chief and ordered him to do a major reshuffle. Through Enrile, Marcos retired 18 flag officers; appointed new commanders to all the military services, PC Zones, Army divisions, even brigades; and appointed a new military top brass.⁹¹ Berlin said “the purpose of the reshuffle, of course, was to elevate a defense leadership willing and able, if need be, to execute a declaration of Martial Law.”⁹²

To enhance his command, control and intelligence capabilities, Marcos became the first President to formally establish in the Army “15 intelligence stations in critical areas, nine of which he equipped with Single Side Band (SSB) transreceiver sets”.⁹³ These intelligence stations “covered 46 labor strikes, 191 rallies and demonstrations and performed 157 security missions”.⁹⁴

Marcos was the first Philippine President who could talk to his military field commanders even in far-flung areas, bypassing his senior military officers and his Defense Secretary.*

Through his terms, Marcos used soldiers for construction projects, building roads and schools, letting the public get used to the idea of uniformed men as a “force for development”.⁹⁵ This cheap labor constructed 33,359 kilometers of gravel roads, 210 kilometers of feeder roads, and eight spans of bridges. It also put up 52 irrigation projects.⁹⁶

Writing a letter to the graduating class of 1971 of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), he said he looked forward to “the full exercise by the graduates of the PMA of their knowledge, skills and loyalty in service to the nation.”⁹⁷ Coming of age during Martial Law, members of that class would go on to become notorious murderers, torturers and/or coup plotters.

By March 11, 1971, Marcos moved a key piece in his Martial Law chessboard, promoting his province mate, erstwhile personal bodyguard and driver, Fabian Ver, to the rank of general. When Marcos finally grabbed power, he did so with a group of conspirators who became known as the Rolex 12,** because each later received a Rolex watch from the dictator. Of the twelve, ten were military officers, one the Defense Secretary and another a businessman. Seven of these individuals — Enrile, Espino, Zagala, Ramos, Rancudo, Ruiz and Diaz — had just been appointed that January and supported the imposition of

*This is from the testimony of Stephen Bosworth, a former American envoy to Manila, before the Hawaii Court of Judge Manuel Real. The transcript of Bosworth’s testimony was made available for this book by American lawyer Robert Swift who successfully litigated the civil damage suit of some 10,000 Filipino human rights victims against Marcos. The lawsuit is discussed further in Chapter 7.

**The 12 were: Defense Secretary Enrile; Armed Forces Chief Romeo C. Espino; Army Chief Brig. Gen. Rafael Zagala; PC Chief General Fidel V Ramos; Air Force Chief Brig. Gen. Jose Rancudo; Presidential Security Commander Brig. Gen. Fabian Ver; Navy Chief Commodore Hilario Ruz; AFP Chief of Intelligence Brig. Gen. Ignacio Paz; First PC Zone Commander Brig. Gen. Tomas Diaz; PC Metrocom Commander Brig. Gen. Alfredo Montoya; Rizal Province PC Commander Col. Romeo Gatan; and Congressman Eduardo Cojuangco who was recalled to active duty with the rank of colonel. Berlin, *Before Gringo*, 126.

Martial Law.⁹⁸ In appointing Espino as AFP-COS, he had actually removed General Manuel Yan, who didn’t want to endorse Martial Law. He also placed in the freezer another general — Rafael ‘Rocky’ Ileta — for the same reason.⁹⁹

In private conversations months after he declared Martial Law, Marcos told Mijares that while he had used the military to seize power, he would make sure the soldiers would stay subservient. “I know what’s on your mind, Tibo,” Mijares recalled Marcos telling him. “He smiled at me as I knitted my eyebrows and prepared to say something about a military dictatorship.” Marcos had assured Tibo, “I will never share powers with a military junta. It will be worse than sharing the powers of government with Congress.”¹⁰⁰ One academic has written that “the most impressive aspect of Marcos’ accomplishment is that he was able to transform a generally de-politicized military into a degraded institution subservient to his authority.”¹⁰¹

2. Control the Supreme Court

As a lawyer, Marcos well understood the need to ground whatever he did in legality, or the semblance thereof. By holding office for two terms, Marcos was able to appoint so many justices to the Supreme Court that when he declared Martial Law in 1972, only three out of 11 justices were not his choices.¹⁰² But even before Marcos packed the High Court, it had already tended to be deferential towards executive power, something which the President used artfully. On August 21, 1971, two grenades were hurled at a political rally in Plaza Miranda, killing nine and injuring 95.***

Marcos used the occasion to promptly suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus and order the arrest of dozens of suspects. It would prove to be a trial run for the imposition of Martial Law that would follow a year later. When those arrested challenged the constitutionality of the suspension, the Supreme Court upheld the President. Marcos would cite the Court’s decision as a precedent for justifying the abusive powers he would later wield.

Throughout Martial Law, Marcos kept the judiciary intact and working because it gave a veneer of legality and

***Mijares and the opposition blamed Marcos. Marcos blamed the Communists. Eighteen years after the Plaza Miranda bombing, Victor Corpus — who had defected to the Communist New People’s Army — revealed in a book that the Communist Party of the Philippines was actually behind it. The idea first hatched by Jose Maria Sison, he said, was to force Marcos to take more repressive measures. Victor N. Corpus, *Silent War* (Quezon City: VNC Enterprises, 1989), 15-16.

legitimacy to the dictator, the unspoken threat being that he would dismiss judges and justices anytime they made a decision that did not suit him. To rub it in, he specifically wrote a decree forbidding the judicial system from ruling on the validity of any decisions he made. To its eternal disgrace the Supreme Court meekly acceded and rejected an appeal filed by former Solicitor General and opposition Senator Lorenzo Tañada to stop Marcos' blatant attempt to use Martial Law to suspend the 1935 Constitution and turn himself into a dictator.¹⁰³ Among Marcos' Supreme Court appointees whom Mijares identified were Fred Ruiz Castro, Enrique Fernando, Claudio Teehankee, Felix Makasiar and Antonio Barredo.¹⁰⁴ The judicial branch essentially became a rubber stamp, a supine entity whose servile status was best exemplified by a photo, taken several years later, of Chief Justice Enrique Fernando holding an umbrella over Imelda Marcos to protect her from the rain.

Very much in the dictator's pocket, the lick-spittle justices and judges, by their silence, acquiescence or active participation, would enable the regime to get away with wholesale murder, torture and atrocities.

3. Undermine the Philippine public's faith in democracy

In the years leading up to the imposition of military rule, Marcos sought to give Filipinos the impression that democracy and democratic institutions were failing them and could not be trusted to deal with what seemed to be growing disorder.



University of the Philippines students set up the "Diliman Commune" in February 1970. Photos from the Doreen Fernandez Collection as published by *The Diliman Review*, October-December 1979.

Speaking in California just before Martial Law was declared, Marcos' Foreign Affairs Secretary Carlos P. Romulo claimed the Philippines was "mired in the other darker depths of democracy — the bickering, the factionalism, the corruption, the aimless drift, and more than these, the rebellion of the alienated."¹⁰⁵ Actually, Romulo's master was not interested in doing anything for the rebellion of the alienated other than using it as a pretext for seizing power. As for the factionalism and corruption of the country's politicians, it certainly helped Marcos that Philippine politics had (and has) always been a sordid mixture of oligarchic interest, opportunism, corruption, violence and shortsighted greed.

In one instance, he exploited this brilliantly. According to Mijares, in 1969 President Marcos transferred P69 million from the Palace contingency fund to the House of Representatives to finance pro-Marcos lawmakers who wanted to run as delegates to the Constitutional Convention. When congressmen started squabbling about the way the money was shared, Marcos helped expose the quarrel, stoking what came to be called the "Fund Transfer Scandal" to show the media and the public how corrupt politicians were. As a bonus, the quarreling congressmen in 1971 deposed their own Speaker of the House and House Minority Leader, depriving Congress of leaders who might have stood up to Marcos when he finally declared military rule.¹⁰⁶

4. Exploit and abet lawlessness and instability

In the late 1960s the Philippines seemed to be unraveling, beset by economic difficulties, an oligarch-dominated feudalistic socioeconomic system, poverty, pervasive corruption, private armies, criminality,

violent student demonstrations and armed rebellion. With hundreds of thousands of firearms in the hands of civilians, the capital was wracked by violent crime, while in Mindanao a brutal, pitiless war was fought by rival armed gangs of Christians and Muslims. It was a time of deep social ferment: students rebelled against gross inequality in a country where a stupendously wealthy few could hold a banquet with a fountain spewing imported champagne instead of water, while the majority lived wretched lives.

A young UP English instructor, Jose Maria Sison, struck a chord among the youth when he applied the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao Zedong to the Philippine condition.

Fired by nationalism and radicalism, thousands of youth believed direct action and violent revolution were the answers: they took to Manila's streets in demonstrations that quickly became violent, with pillboxes and Molotov cocktails — gasoline bombs — pitted against the assault rifles and submachine guns of the brutal military and police. In the first three months of 1970, what became known as the First Quarter Storm engulfed the capital's streets. In one night thousands of students and laborers attacked Malacañang Palace, managing to ram a captured firetruck through the gates before they were driven off by gunfire.¹⁰⁷

The violent rallies and demonstrations against his government fell in nicely with Marcos' own plans to paint the country as falling apart and in need of a strong despotic hand to fend off a Communist threat. On February 21, 1970, he told his diary: "a little more destruction and vandalism and I can do anything." A year later, on March 5, 1971, he wrote: "...there must be massive destruction and sabotage before I do this (Martial Law). I keep repeating this to myself." Not one to sit idly, he helped things along by assigning psy-war experts and provocateurs to go around Manila to incite violent demonstrations and plant bombs, which he then blamed on Communists.¹⁰⁸ Between March and August of 1972, Manila was rocked by 20 bombings; on September there were six explosions, including one that killed people in a crowded department store. Marcos blamed the Communists, singling out the tiny New People's Army,¹⁰⁹ but there was evidence he himself was responsible. One remorseful Constabulary sergeant confessed to having planted the time bomb in the department store "on superior orders". Senator Aquino was about to deliver an exposé pointing to a special military unit

as the perpetrator of the bombings when Martial Law was declared.¹¹⁰ According to historian Alfred McCoy, General Ramon Cannu, one of General Ver's deputies in the Presidential Security Unit, "organized some of the bombings that were done to convince people that there was a crisis and democracy was not working."¹¹¹

5. Exaggerate the Communist threat

From the time he first became President, Marcos invariably and regularly warned members of his National Security Council about the Communist rebellion.¹¹² Strangely, in spite of all the President's concern and his extensive military reforms, it seemed the Communist menace just seemed to get stronger each year, at least that was what he and his officials said.

However, a former intelligence officer whom I interviewed said that "even when Martial Law was declared the Communists were not a real threat. The military could handle them." The officer who once worked under General Fabian Ver conceded that the number of armed rebels was growing then "but to me it was not really a threat."

When I asked him whether the armed rebel threat was enough reason to impose Martial Law, he replied, "Well, you know, Marcos found it convenient to cite it as a cause for declaring Martial Law."

The Communist insurgency dated back to shortly after the end of World War II when the peasant-based Huks waged a campaign of terror and armed assaults in Luzon. But the rebellion had largely been quelled by the 1960s through government tactics that included terror, massacres, torture and psychological warfare.¹¹³

According to noted military historian Ricardo Jose, cases of human rights abuses were committed by both sides when the military was quelling the Huk rebellion. The Huks attacked a military hospital and killed patients, doctors and nurses there.¹¹⁴ However, he added, "some units of the AFP — particularly the quickly-inducted Military Police Command (MPC) — conducted serious atrocities against Huk suspects — rather than taking them alive, summary executions were carried out. Villages were burned, looting was conducted."

Jose scored the silence surrounding these abuses: "These atrocities are not reported in most military histories. Instead of winning over the population to the side of the government, the excesses of the MPC — and the way the officers tolerated such excesses — turned at least one PMA graduate away from the Armed Forces."¹¹⁵

By the 1960s, the Huks were reduced to what amounted to banditry. They were displaced in 1968 by a tiny new movement, the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which allied with Huk commander Bernabe Buscayno in 1969. That year, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) hyped up the miniscule CPP-NPA (New People's Army) as a serious threat — first because the military was pathologically obsessed with Communism, and second because it was good for the budget — the military could cite the “threat” as a reason for increased funding. Ironically, by publicizing the movement “the AFP mythologized the group, investing it with a revolutionary aura that only attracted more supporters.”¹¹⁶

With the CPP and its armed group, the NPA, mustering less than 9,000 military and support cadres in all in 1972,¹¹⁷ it was hardly in a position to overthrow the government, take over the country, or even mount actions assuming “the magnitude of an actual state of war” (Marcos' words). According to a 1972 Staff Report for the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, “we met no outside observer who considered (the insurgent Left) a real or near threat to the government.”¹¹⁸ As one writer noted: “In actuality, there were fewer than 800 Communist guerrillas in the Philippines when Marcos declared Martial Law, according to interviews with the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.”¹¹⁹

This did not stop Marcos from inflating the CPP-NPA's size and influence. He devoted entire pages of his Martial Law declaration to describing the acts, power and influence of the CPP and its “well-trained, well-armed and highly indoctrinated and greatly expanded insurrectionary force”, the NPA.

The Filipino Communists played right into Marcos' hands when they tried to smuggle weapons and ammunition donated by China for their rebellion. Ricardo Malay, who was among those who negotiated with China the planned shipments, recalled in 2014: “The initial shipment in 1972 undertaken by the vessel *MV Karagatan* ended in a debacle. During a deadly firefight with government troops alerted to the boat's movements, the rebels on the receiving ground abandoned most of the Chinese armaments, including powerful assault rifles, to the enemy. The *Karagatan* incident was one of the reasons President Marcos cited for declaring Martial Law.”¹²⁰

American journalist Bonner also noted that “Marcos, as part of his justification for Martial Law, came up with all kinds of exaggerated numbers for the Communist cadres...The numbers were hyperbole.”¹²¹ Political scientist

Boudreau remarked how “Marcos saw that he would gain international support for authoritarian rule by claiming a life and death struggle against Leftist insurgency; he abetted the impression by faking attacks on his officials, and staging explosions around Manila.”¹²² Communism was a tremendously useful bogeyman for the would-be dictator because anti-Communism played well to the Philippine public as well as to the US government, then immersed in its Cold War with the Soviet Union and China.

However, a retired intelligence officer, whose area of operation was in Central Luzon, the area where the Huks and NPA were concentrated, told me in a 2015 interview that “even when Martial Law was declared the Communists were not a real threat.”¹²³

“No more, no more,” he stressed, referring to both the Huks and the NPA. “They were not. The military could handle them (both).”

6. Get American backing

From 1903 to 1992, the United States maintained an Air Base in the Philippines, Clark Field, which eventually grew to be its largest overseas military installation in the world. The second largest, Subic Naval Base, was also in the Philippines. Those two giant military installations, present because of a military agreement, played a crucial role in the war the US was then waging in Vietnam, and were essential to the overall Cold War strategy being pursued against the Soviet Union and China. They helped define the nature of relations between the Philippines and the US. In 1948 American statesman George Kennan included the Philippines in a list of nations that the superpower could not allow “to fall into hands hostile to us.”¹²⁴

The US, a former colonizer, was not just the Philippines' unavoidable strategic ally but its main trade partner and provider of aid and military support. It was not only very much interested in the way the country was governed, but also played an active role influencing and even directing events, an unequal relationship condemned as neocolonial.¹²⁵ The US military gave assistance and advice on dealing with the Huk insurgency and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) adviser Edward Lansdale helped get a pro-US candidate, Ramon Magsaysay, voted President in 1953.¹²⁶ It was essential for Marcos to get American support for his plan to take over the country.

Uncle Sam was receptive: after Marcos asked how the American government would react to Martial Law, on January 15, 1971, US Ambassador to the Philippines



US President Richard Nixon greenlighted Marcos' plan to impose a dictatorship. Malacañang Museum and Library.

Henry Byroade met with President Richard Nixon and relayed Marcos' query. According to the Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and Byroade declassified and posted at the US National Archives website:

The President declared that we would “absolutely” back Marcos up, and “to the hilt” so long as what he was doing was to preserve the system against those who would destroy it in the name of liberty... [Nixon said] We would not support anyone who was trying to set himself up as a military dictator, but we would do everything we could to back a man who was trying to make the system work and to preserve order. Of course, we understood that Marcos would not be entirely motivated by national interests, but this was something which we had come to expect from Asian leaders.¹²⁷

A year later — a month before he grabbed power — Marcos was assured by Ambassador Byroade that the US would support Martial Law “in the event of a genuine Communist danger”.¹²⁸

American officials were far from dumb. They knew Marcos was hardly defending democracy by moving to

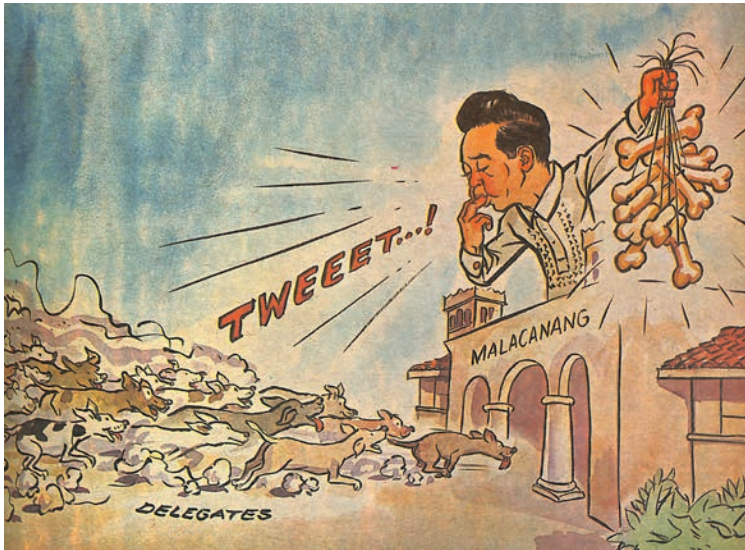
destroy it — and he would probably set himself up as a dictator. But officials rationalized that an authoritarian leader was needed to prevent the Philippines from falling apart. The US Chief Political Officer in Manila, Francis Underhill, said the Nixon administration thought the Philippines “a hopeless mess” needing “a strong man, a man on horseback to get the country organized and going again”.¹²⁹ US officials also worried how the growing radicalism and nationalism might affect the bases and American economic interests.¹³⁰ Anyway, it wouldn't be the first time the US supported tyrants — it by then already had a long, extensive record of propping up murderous psychopathic dictators in Latin America and the Caribbean. As one author pointed out, “though it talked a good game about preserving democracy, the actions of the CIA, and the United States government as a whole, consistently undermined and attacked democracy throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.”¹³¹

With the US blessing, Marcos proceeded with his plan, creating what critics would later call a “US-Marcos dictatorship”. For as long as Marcos assured the Americans he was fighting Communism, for as long as he allowed the US bases to stay, America would waltz with the dictator. In fact the US would provide the hardware to equip the military and police that Marcos used to oppress the populace, and Americans would provide the skills and training — particularly in interrogation and torture¹³² — that Filipino officers would use to keep the regime's enemies and victims suppressed.

7. Hijack the Constitutional Convention

Marcos needed a way to dress up his power grab and dictatorship with the cloak of legality. He needed a new Constitution tailored to his ends. In 1970, under the guise of heeding the clamor of the people for reforms, he personally drafted a Congressional resolution — complete with a budget — calling for the creation of a Constitutional Convention and the election of its delegates.¹³³

He made sure, though, that he had allies planted inside the Convention who would steer the body to what he wanted. His political foes were fully aware of what he was up to and so the Convention became a battleground for trying to prevent Marcos from extending his term beyond the constitutional limit. The battle revolved in particular around two proposed provisions for the new Constitution that was being drafted. One would ban Marcos and wife Imelda from running for office for life. The other had to



Philippines Free Press editorial cartoon showing Marcos bribing delegates of the Constitutional Convention. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.

do with the form of government — whether to remain presidential or switch to a parliamentary form. The latter would allow Marcos to run again.¹³⁴

The pro-Marcos delegates succeeded in scrapping the ban-Marcos provision and in approving a shift to a parliamentary form of government, which would enable Marcos to run again. Then the unexpected happened: Eduardo Quintero, a representative from Imelda's province of Leyte, dropped a bombshell. Saying his conscience bothered him, the 72-year-old retired Ambassador revealed in a speech on the Convention floor on May 19, 1972, that he and other delegates were being handed envelopes — he himself had received 18 in all filled with money amounting to a total of P11,150 — to do Marcos' bidding.¹³⁵

Not only that, Quintero told his colleagues, Marcos had personally invited him to Malacañang and asked him not to vote "Yes" to the "Ban Marcos resolution" because the situation was serious and the Army had "definite information" of a Communist plot to assassinate top government officials and take over government.

Quintero told his colleagues in the Constitutional Convention that he had thought of asking Marcos, "Mr. President, do you think that you are the only one who can help the country?' But I did not say that."¹³⁶ Quintero also submitted an affidavit linking Imelda Marcos to the payoffs.¹³⁷ The National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) under the Justice Department raided Quintero's house and "found" P379,320 in an unlocked drawer in his bedroom, but the public widely believed the raiding team had planted it.¹³⁸

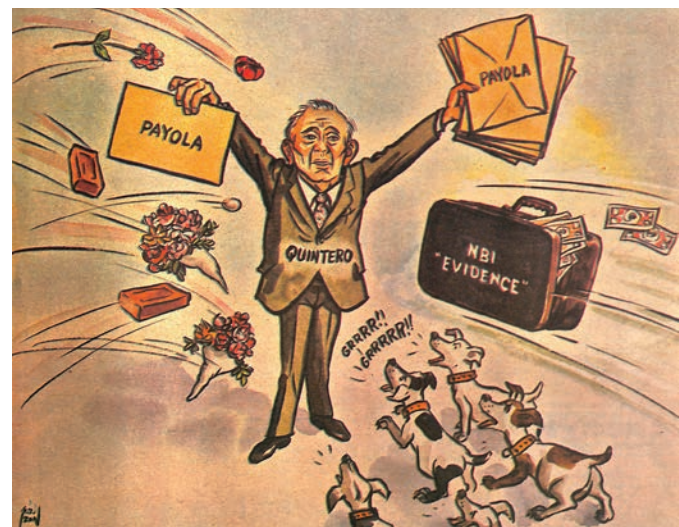
The fallout from the Quintero exposé was overtaken by Martial Law. Marcos arrested 10 delegates who openly

opposed him: Teofisto Guingona, Bren Guiao, Ernesto Rondon, Jose Concepcion, Jr., Jose Nollado, Alejandro Lichauco, Natalio Bacalso, Jose Mari Velez, Napoleon Rama and Antonio Araneta, Jr. Seventeen others stopped attending. The rest found heavily armed soldiers posted at the Convention Hall, ostensibly to "protect" them but in reality to cow them while the dictator proceeded to hijack the Convention. The delegates who were Marcos creatures simply inserted whole sections to write one-man rule into the proposed Constitution. In January 1973, a sham ratification — through Citizens Assemblies voting viva voce and not through secret ballots — was held across the country. Petitions questioning this manner of voting were filed at the Supreme Court but the body dismissed these saying, there was "no further judicial obstacle" to the new Constitution because the people had accepted it.¹³⁹

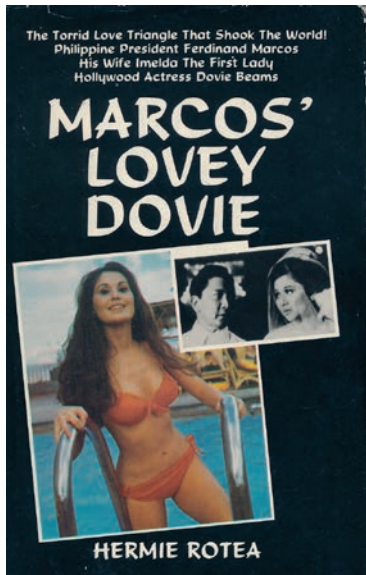
Earlier in 1970, Marcos told his diary: "I have the feeling of certainty that I will end up with dictatorial powers."¹⁴⁰ He was being coy — he had been plotting to grab those powers for years. It was just a matter of finding the right moment to execute the plan before his term ended in 1973.

By then, Marcos had been taking years of battering in the press, where he was reviled as "the most hated and despised man in the country".¹⁴¹ It didn't help that 1970 was the year the media broke the story about the affair in 1968 that the 51-year-old President had with 36-year-old B-movie American actress, Dovie Beams.

In his diary, Marcos flatly denied the affair with what he called "that Boehms woman". He publicly distanced himself from the actress. Unfazed, the divorced "Mrs. Boehms" retaliated by producing and playing for fascinated



Constitutional Convention delegate Eduardo Quintero exposed a payoff scandal. Philippines Free Press editorial. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.



reporters a recording of her lovemaking with Marcos that she had secretly taped. The highlights were the President's croaking request for oral sex, and his off-key singing of the Ilocano song "Pamulinawen".¹⁴² The scandal enraged Imelda Marcos and nearly wrecked the presidential marriage: Beams had to flee the country, allegedly pursued by an assassin dispatched by the vengeful First Lady. Behind the scenes, Marcos ordered a magazine controlled by his allies to publish the nude photos he had taken of her as a souvenir. When Marcos tried to spend Christmas day giving away typhoon relief goods in a remote village in Mindoro island, he found posters plastered with the word "Fred" — the name that Beams said her President-lover had used. In 1971, when student activists took over the University of the Philippines campus in Diliman, the "commune" played the Beams recording on the college station over and over, convulsing besieging government security forces with laughter.¹⁴³

Livid at the mockery and humiliation, Marcos turned to his diary where he sketched in more details the dictatorship he was planning to erect:

Armed Forces, a Military Administration should be established under which the civil officials could function with military overseers.

But all judicial decisions and legislative acts should be subject to review by the Commander-in-Chief or his office.

Immediately establish — an Internal Security Agency and a Psywar Office in the DND...¹⁴⁴

He noted: "If we do not have enough men to take over

all the media then we should close all the newspapers and television and radio stations leaving only one of each to communicate to the people."¹⁴⁵

On January 3, 1971, Marcos wrote that he had finally revealed his intention to declare Martial Law to his crony and current Defense Secretary, Juan Ponce Enrile:

But I told him there must be massive sabotage or terrorism before I declare Martial Law.

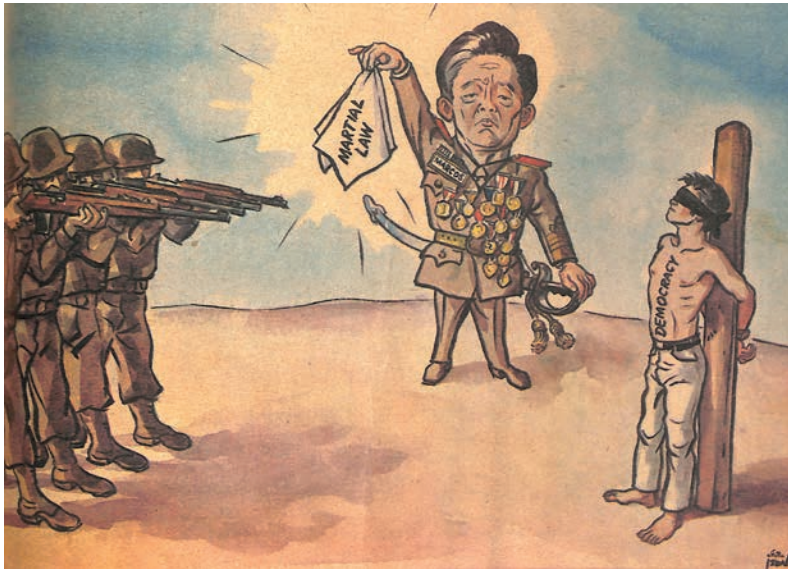
His immediate reply was, "It is time you did. You will be surprised at the number of people in all walks of life who will support such a move. Even Ambassador Byroade has hinted that the Americans were expecting it."

And I explained that there must be violence and destruction by the terrorists so that the people and foreign governments would support our move of proclaiming Martial Law.

His diary entry for January 14, 1971 showed he intended to ignore and violate the 1935 Constitution provision on presidential succession: "Today I signed the undated Proclamation of Martial Law and gave a copy to Sec. Ponce Enrile so that if anything happens to me he (whom I have appointed as Deputy Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of Staff Gen. Manuel T. Yan as Assistant Deputy Commander-in-Chief) can execute and implement the Proclamation." He was in effect appointing a civilian-military junta to succeed him, bypassing the constitutional successor, Vice-President Fernando Lopez, whom Marcos had come to loathe. However, a year later, Gen. Yan would be out as military chief after Marcos sensed he wasn't going to cooperate. Enrile, in his memoirs published by the Lopez group, has a different recollection of those events. He said he received a copy of Proclamation 1081 sometime in late 1971.¹⁴⁶

The President's list of enemies was growing: it included not just Communist rebels, but also student activists, his political foes, the media, untrustworthy military men and members of the old oligarchy, whom he particularly loathed. He inveighed in his diary against "the frivolous and shallow" rich — "They seem happy only when they are drunk or are insulting others, friends and foe alike." On March 7, 1971, he went to his diary where, like a hungry man smacking his lips while perusing a dinner menu, he savored what he would do to his country and his enemies —

If and when I declare Martial Law, it will become necessary not merely to assume greater powers



Philippines Free Press editorial cartoon on Marcos' plan to impose Martial Law. Courtesy of Teodoro Locsin, Jr.

but to impose what is referred to as Martial Law in its severest form or in its technical senses — “that of the will of the commander, unlimited by any restrictions from statutes or the Bill of Rights.”

Thus I would have to immediately suspend the constitution.

He had concluded 19 months before he actually did it.

- Take over all public utilities.
- Impose censorship, curfew and limit assembly.
- This would mean taking over all media and communications.
- Order the immediate arrest of all persons in any way connected with the rebellion.

On April 17, 1971, he met with his generals and told them that since a mere suspension of the writ would still require them to file charges within eight hours against anyone they arrested, “to simplify matters I would proclaim Martial Law.”

“This was received with apparent relief,” he wrote.¹⁴⁷

But, Marcos cautioned them, “there must be no unnecessary bloodshed, no abuses and no personal vengeance. We must control our officers and men.”

By late 1972, events had reached such a fever pitch that he judged circumstances right to make his move. The instrument he would use to seize power was Martial Law, a state of emergency given to the President to declare in exceptional circumstances by the 1935 Constitution. It allowed the Chief Executive to mobilize the military and

police and to detain thousands of citizens. Ostensibly Marcos would declare it to deal with the imminent threat of armed Communist rebellion. But he intended to violate the Constitution’s restrictions and use the emergency powers for purposes they were never intended: first to keep himself in power indefinitely; and second, to rearrange the country’s social order.

On September 21, 1972, US Ambassador Byroade fired off a telegram marked “Top Secret” to his home office in Washington, disclosing that an American business executive, Bob Wales, had written him a memo about his September 19, 1972 conversation with Marcos. Wales wrote to Byroade, “Marcos ended up the discussion by saying that it would be a tragedy if he had to declare Martial Law if he was not supported by his ally, the United States.”¹⁴⁸ The news, Byroade said, prompted him “to undertake quickly the potentially dangerous task of a real heart to heart with Marcos on issues as delicate as his own plans and ambitions.”¹⁴⁹

In the morning of September 21, Byroade said he had:

“a very long session” with Marcos. He bluntly told Marcos he knew what he had told Bob Wales. Byroade then asked him about Martial Law. And Marcos’ reply was, “He said he thought maybe we had better not discuss it directly, because he had to remain in a position where he could say that he had not accepted my advice”. I told him that I was not in his presence to advise him on such a decision that only he can make, but I thought we did have to discuss the matter and quite frankly. I told him that he himself had told me that he might have to move if there were some new and significant event. This could mean at any given time that we might be only one day away. Also that one of his last remarks to Wales had brought up the question of our support.¹⁵⁰

Byroade impressed upon Marcos that he was not talking as the US Ambassador but as

...only I, a friend, talking to him personally and privately. In that context, I said I wanted to talk to him about the type of things that cause me to pace the floor. He said he understood completely and I should go ahead without hesitation. I then reminded him that we are in the wind-up phase of an extremely important election campaign in

our own country. I said I thought (Democratic Party Senator George) McGovern would seize on anything like a military takeover in the Philippines in an effort to use it as the final proof of his charge that the foreign policies of Nixon, particularly in the Asian area, were a total failure.¹⁵¹

US elections were six weeks away and Nixon was running for reelection. Byroade delicately tried to tell Marcos that the Communists were not a threat to his government.

At one point I said maybe we needed his help and the help of his intelligence people, as it was obvious that he and they must know many things in this country that we could not know. I said it was difficult for us to start off with a band of armed men numbering somewhere around a thousand, mostly in the hills and, with assumed figures as to the extent of their base and mass support, to conclude that the Philippine Government was in danger of being toppled.

Marcos surprisingly agreed with Byroade's low threat assessment. "He said that, of course, was true, and he did not consider the government to be under that threat at the present time, but he said the very effectiveness of government was threatened and that was enough for him to move legally," Byroade wrote in his cable to the home office.

A week earlier on September 15, Byroade had asked Marcos the same question, whether he was about to declare Martial Law.

I asked Marcos yesterday if he were about to surprise us with a declaration of Martial Law. He said no, not under present circumstances. He said he would not hesitate at all in doing so if the terrorists stepped up their activities further, and to a new stage. He said that if a part of Manila were burned, a top official of his Government, or foreign ambassador, assassinated or kidnapped, then he would act very promptly.¹⁵²

Marcos had told Byroade exactly the same justification that he had repeatedly written in his diaries, that in order to justify Martial Law, he needed a trigger event — an act of "massive sabotage", "violence" or "destruction". In short, he had a plot that was just looking for a pretext.

But he also told Byroade the Communist threat was not that serious:

He said that he questioned Communist capability to move things to such a stage just now and asked my views. I said I thought it a bit premature in their plans, but the present atmosphere undoubtedly increased their recruiting capability. He said 3,000 students were no longer in greater Manila universities (implying they have allied themselves with the dissidents — a figure we cannot sustain), and that if it were inevitable he would just as soon see them go for big things now in order to get this period of indecision over with!¹⁵³

Byroade also conveyed back to Washington Marcos' frustration with the political system: "He said after all of his years in government, including seven in the Presidency, that he did indeed question the ability of the Philippines to achieve adequate reforms in time under the present system...It is hard to escape [garble] that he thinks that his place in history might be made if he had the power of drastic reform."¹⁵⁴

On the night of September 22, Marcos told his diary he had found the trigger event. An hour after it happened, he wrote: "Senator Juan Ponce Enrile was ambushed near Wack Wack at about 8:00 P.M. tonight. It was a good thing he was riding in his security car as a protective measure. His first car which he usually uses was the one riddled by bullets from a car parked in ambush."



Three paragraphs later, he said: “This makes the Martial Law proclamation a necessity.”

The “ambush” of Enrile became an article of faith for Marcos and his sycophants as the straw that broke the camel’s back — the final atrocity that justified military rule. Until 14 years later. On February 22, 1986, a defecting Enrile (he had been discovered plotting against the dictator and faced arrest) blurted out to the public that the whole thing had been faked.¹⁵⁵ What actually happened was that Enrile was not aboard the vehicle at all, he had ordered his men to shoot up his empty car.¹⁵⁶

In his 2012 memoirs, Enrile tried to back out of his 1986 confession, calling it “a lie that has gone around for far too long such that it has acquired acceptance as the ‘truth’.”¹⁵⁷

“This accusation is ridiculous and preposterous,” he spluttered. “What would I have faked my ambush for? When it happened, the military operation to impose Martial Law was already going on. I had already delivered Proclamation 1081 and all the General Orders and Letters of Instructions to the military leaders. I had already ordered them to proceed with the military operation that carried out the orders of President Marcos to place the country under Martial Law.”¹⁵⁸

However, a 2012 book — backed by his fellow defector and former protégé General Ramos — belied Enrile’s claims. The book was co-published by Ramos’ NGO, The Ramos Peace and Development Foundation, Inc., and he wrote the foreword. It stated that in 1986, “Enrile himself admitted that his reported ambush was a ‘fake’ and that his unoccupied car had been riddled with machine gun bullets fired by his own men on the night Proclamation 1081 was signed.”¹⁵⁹

Unfortunately for Enrile, his effort to rewrite history is also belied by the account of a ghostly eyewitness — Mijares, Marcos’ chief propagandist, who happened to be in the President’s study in the Palace the night Martial Law was declared. Marcos seemed jumpy and irritated that night. He was trying to get hold of his Defense Chief Enrile on the phone. He even muttered, as he waited for one of his aides to locate Enrile so he could talk to him, “*Masyadong mabagal ang mga taong ‘yan kung kailan pa naman kailangan magmadali.*” (Those people [without alluding to anyone in particular] move so sluggishly at a time when I want them to move fast enough.)

When Enrile finally came on the line, Marcos barked at his friend, “Secretary Enrile? Where are you? You have to do it now...ya, ya, the one we discussed this noon. We cannot postpone it any longer. Another day of



Bomb ripped open a water pipe in Manlia. Marcos blamed Communists, who blamed Marcos. Scanned photo of September 13, 1972 front page of *Daily Express* courtesy of Ortigas Foundation Inc. Library.

delay may be too late.” Mijares wrote that Marcos’ next words were: “Make it look good. *Kailangan seguro ay may masaktan o kung mayroon mapatay ay mas mabuti.* (Maybe it would be better if somebody got hurt or killed.) O, *hala, sigue,* Johnny (Okay, go ahead) and be sure the story catches the *Big News* and *Newswatch*...and call me as soon as it is over.”¹⁶⁰

At any rate, finally, on September 22, 1972, Marcos had his pretext to set in motion all his well-laid plans in order to “save the Republic and build a New Society”.¹⁶¹ Troops and policemen fanned out to execute their assignments in a precise and complex operation that was meant to trap and round up thousands of people and shut down and takeover many installations and buildings. Even Imelda played a role in the power grab. Alice Villadolid, then the *New York Times* correspondent, recalled how the First Lady summoned the foreign media to the Nayong Pilipino Museum and Reception Hall for a 5 PM press conference. “She arrived an hour later, dressed to the nines, and invited us to a lavish dining table, too lavish for a press dinner...She chatted away, about many things and nothing in particular, till about 11 PM. By then some of us realized something very important must have happened and that we in the media had been sequestered so we would not observe it.”¹⁶²

As the night grew deeper over the Philippines, it turned out Marcos was correct. There was, indeed, a conspiracy directed against the Republic. But it was not one plotted by Communists and their allies. It was a conspiracy masterminded and directed by the President of the Philippines against his country's democracy.

His enemies had doubted he could pull it off. They believed the President was so unpopular that if he tried seizing power there would be a public backlash and he would fail. They were convinced, Mijares wrote, that for Marcos to impose military rule would be an "irrational plunge towards political suicide". In fact, wanting to be in on the fun, some politicians made it a point to stay in Manila rather than travel abroad that year. "They believed then that Martial Law would give them the colorful scenario to become national heroes...It was going to be a priceless badge of honor to be arrested by the military when Martial Law is declared."¹⁶³ They miscalculated horribly. When Marcos finally made his move, the public gave up their freedoms without so much as a sigh. As historian McCoy put it, "Martial Law meant the death of Philippine democracy but by 1972 a quarter century of violence had so eroded the Republic's legitimacy that few among the masses or middle class mourned its passing."¹⁶⁴

Aquino himself did not put up a fight and went quietly to jail. In 1979, still a prisoner, he ruefully told a friend: "I judged Marcos correctly, but I misjudged the people."¹⁶⁵

THE NEW SOCIETY

Filipinos woke up to find a country where the streets were quiet, patrolled by armed soldiers. Crime had vanished, squabbling corrupt politicians had been carted off or had fled, and the scurrilous press had been silenced.

Only the newspaper run by a Marcos crony was available, and there were no radio or TV broadcasts, except for one station that repeatedly transmitted Marcos' declaration of Martial Law — echoed by Information Secretary Francisco Tatad — in between almost non-stop airing of American cartoons.

Marcos claimed that what he had in mind was a government-led "Revolution from the Center" to counter the Communists. His centerpiece program — to create a New Society that would close the wide economic gap between the rich and the poor because "what good is democracy if it is not for the poor?"¹⁶⁶ He claimed the New

Society had "the interests, objectives, and needs of the poorest of the working people take precedence over those of the rest."¹⁶⁷ It turned out that Marcos had a little help fashioning his New Society ideology.

In 2015, one of his former close aides, Jose Almonte, disclosed in his memoirs that Marcos' "Revolution from the Center" was in fact Almonte's university dissertation.¹⁶⁸ In short, Almonte was the ghostwriter of the New Society ideology.

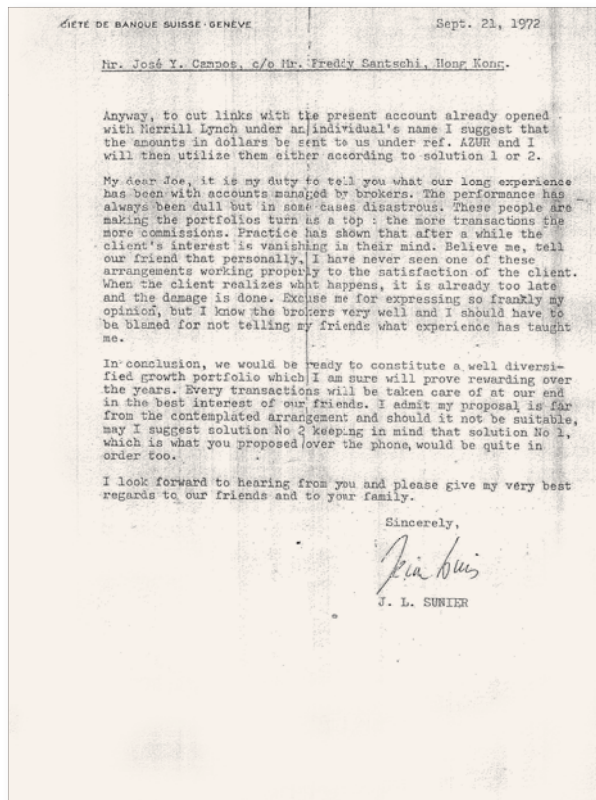
Almonte also disclosed that Marcos had asked his Executive Secretary Alex Melchor to write a paper on Martial Law and Almonte had helped out. "Our findings led to the conclusion that the nation would be destroyed because, apart from the divisiveness it would cause, Martial Law would offer Marcos absolute power which would corrupt absolutely. Alex believed this conclusion and advised Marcos not to declare Martial Law."¹⁶⁹ Marcos of course ignored Melchor and proceeded to abolish his post of Executive Secretary.¹⁷⁰

At that time, however, the public thought the ideology was wholly Marcos'. After Martial Law, many pinned their hopes on his "Democratic Revolution", that "the task of responsible leadership is to regain for each citizen the human values lost through the abuses of oligarchs, the opportunism of the media of communication, the prevalence of corruption in the public and private sectors, the existence of private armies, and the avarice and ambition of politicians."¹⁷¹

It was, Filipinos were assured, the dawning of a new day, in fact the dawning of a New Society which came complete with slogans, marches and even a hymn that had been conveniently prepared beforehand. In place of a free press, the public was continuously deluged by the sacred thoughts of a dictator.

In those early days, the bulk of the population supported Marcos. The US government acquiesced in Marcos' declaration of Martial Law in exchange for concessions. This was upon the advice of Henry Kissinger, the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs, who had fired off a memorandum to Nixon on September 23 saying:

President Marcos imposed Martial Law throughout the Philippines at midnight September 22. He proclaimed it officially at mid-day September 23, according to press reports, saying that it did not involve military rule and that civilian government would continue. We do not yet have the text of the proclamation, and thus do not at this point know



Swiss Bank Senior Vice-President Jean-Louis Sunier wrote a letter dated September 21, 1972 to Marcos' dummy Jose Yao Campos, updating him on the Marcoses' secret Swiss deposits. Scanned document submitted as evidence in Republic of the Philippines v. Sandiganbayan (special first division), Ferdinand E Marcos.

its specifics, particularly as to whether Marcos suspended the Congress.

The situation at present is as follows:

- Numerous arrests of Marcos' critics have reportedly been made, according to Embassy Manila, including opposition Liberal Party Secretary General (Benigno) Aquino (whom Marcos recently accused of conspiring with the Communists), several other opposition politicians, and *Manila Times* editor (Joaquin) Roces and several other journalists and commentators.
- All television stations and most radio stations have been closed, and no major newspapers appeared the morning of September 23. Radio stations are broadcasting no news.
- Domestic commercial flights have been canceled, and Filipinos are allowed to board international flights only upon government permission.
- International cable and telephone traffic has been suspended.

—No US citizens are known to be involved or endangered.¹⁷²

However, Kissinger expressed the belief that Martial Law was not justified despite Enrile's ambush. He hinted that the real reason for its imposition was Marcos' "ambition to hold onto the Presidency". Kissinger's memo read in part:

Marcos' action followed an assassination attempt the evening of September 23 against his Defense Secretary in which no one was injured and the attackers were not apprehended. This attempt climaxed a two-week rash of urban bombings of government buildings, which have been somewhat unusual in that all occurred at night and very few have been injured. (Embassy Manila reports that public opinion remains about evenly divided as to whether these have been perpetrated by Left extremists or staged by the government.) These acts have occurred against a backdrop of a steady growth over the past three years of rural insurgency — and more recently urban terrorism. Our Embassy believes that this increasing violence could render continued effective government difficult or impossible, but could not threaten its existence.

President Marcos' ambition to hold on to the Presidency after his constitutional limit of two terms runs out at the end of next year is well known. In this context, and as his first-term lustre as a reform President has dulled, he has constantly underlined the deteriorating security situation as posing a need for a strong leader and improved discipline. He is assisted in this by a growing public concern, especially among influential Filipino businessmen and government technocrats, over the declining civil order. Particularly the latter believe that badly needed reforms are now possible only under strengthened governmental controls.¹⁷³

Kissinger correctly guessed that Filipinos would "react with resigned acceptance...particularly if there is early evidence of movement toward meaningful reform." As for how long Marcos could keep it up,

The Embassy believes that Martial Law could not be maintained over a long period without either a gradual return to normal constitutional rule or a

drift toward more authoritarian forms. We believe that continued tight prohibition of dissent normally vented through the political opposition and media, important safety valves for the volatile Filipinos, would generate potentially dangerous political and social pressures.¹⁷⁴

Martial Law in the short term would be good for US interests, Kissinger pointed out

In fact, the climate for individual business operations might even be improved. As to our position, I believe we should refrain from comment on Marcos' action, regarding it as a Philippine matter.... Marcos probably will appreciate such a stance on our part, and this should result in his continued cooperation in our maintaining effective access to our bases in the Philippines and his assistance in resolving US private investment problems resulting from last month's Quasha decision.

Kissinger was referring to a Supreme Court decision that had shocked Americans living in the Philippines with a ruling that by 1974, when parity rights for Americans expired, they would no longer be able to own land.¹⁷⁵

During Martial Law, the Department of Public Information controlled everything the citizens read and saw. It thoughtfully provided a long-playing phonograph record of excerpts of Marcos speeches titled "No Shade But Light"¹⁷⁶ It hammered on the slogan — *Sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disiplina ang kailangan* (For the nation's progress, discipline is necessary.)

Soon however, the true nature of Martial Law began to emerge. Marcos' political analyst and ghostwriter General Almonte recalled it happened sooner than later: "More than a year after Martial Law, I could see, however, that this reformist sheen was giving way to the true nature of Martial Law. Once Marcos consolidated his political power, he did not use this to build the nation. That was the start of the deterioration of Martial Law because abuses began to permeate the system."¹⁷⁷

Anybody who made fun of the Marcoses or the New Society found himself or herself facing arrest. Anybody who complained or criticized was labeled a "subversive" and arrested.

According to one writer, "it was a witch hunt and had nothing to do with Communists, subversives, conspiracy,

or rebellion. It was enemies of Marcos, not enemies of the state, who were rounded up. The 'conspirators' all turned out to be his political opponents and journalists who were critical of his regime."¹⁷⁸

On the night he imposed martial rule, soldiers had raided DZUP, the radio station of his alma mater, and confiscated the Dovie Beams tape it had been playing non-stop. He shut down all newspapers except the *Manila Bulletin* owned by his military aide Hans Menzi and the *Daily Express* of his law school classmate Roberto Benedicto. Marcos did not just use a mailed fist to put a stop to a critical, mocking press by jailing and torturing journalists; he also used the military to squelch any reports of the illegal wealth he and his wife were busy amassing.

Military repression would suppress mockery directed at the First Couple's pillage of the state treasury and the economy to amass even more ill-gotten wealth. By the time the Marcoses fled in 1986, all of the Marcoses' foreign foundations — the names of which the couple kept changing to hide ownership — altogether held at least US\$356 million in Switzerland.¹⁷⁹

When President Marcos furtively signed Proclamation 1081 to impose Martial Law and dated this September 21, 1972, he had signed off on another order, according to a veteran investigator on the Marcos loot. "Simultaneous with the declaration of Martial Law, Marcos sent an order, originally to create the Maler Foundation. He later changed the name to Arelma," according to Danilo Daniel, long-time research director of PCGG.¹⁸⁰

Arelma was not a foundation but a financial holding company. Curiously, the letter notifying Marcos about its incorporation was also dated September 21, 1972 — the same date as Proclamation 1081. The letter was signed by Swiss Bank Senior Vice-President Jean-Louis Sunier. Evidence on these secret Marcos foundations only came to light after the Marcoses fled Malacañang and left thousands of their financial documents behind.

There was never an attempt to flesh out or implement whatever vague principles the "New Society" stood for because what Mijares called "the conjugal dictatorship" was too busy looting and plundering the country.¹⁸¹

Marcos propagandists called the dictatorship "the smiling Martial Law." But the smile was that of a skull because Martial Law rested on force — the military, the police and the paramilitaries — that were turned against the people.

The regime ruled through fear, its spear was terror, and the tip of that spear was torture.

THE TURNING POINT

On the sunny, windy afternoon of August 21, 1983, yellow ribbons fluttered from lamp posts along streets leading to the airport. They were welcome symbols put up by supporters of Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino, Jr., who was arriving home from a three-year exile in the US (See Chapter 1).

Ninoy never made it out of the airport. Before his feet even touched Philippine soil, as he was descending the aircraft’s stairs, he was shot from behind, murdered by one of his escorting guards. The Marcos regime immediately claimed the assassin was a Communist hitman who had miraculously streaked past the guards, gotten behind Aquino, shot him, and then been gunned down in turn. Nobody believed that story. It was inconceivable to the public that Aquino could be murdered in an area teeming with thousands of government agents, the entire zone tightly secured by the Aviation Security Command (AVSECOM), a unit under the control of the Armed Forces Chief of Staff and NISA Chief General Fabian Ver.¹³⁰

To human rights activists long familiar with the regime’s record, the murder was appalling but not surprising. Aquino’s assassination “came as no great surprise but for the shocking audacity of it,” said the human rights lawyers’ group MABINI (Movement of Attorneys for Brotherhood, Integrity, and Nationalism, Inc.).¹³¹ The Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists saw the murder as part of “a pattern of political killings in the Philippines.”¹³²

There was one difference between the salvaging of Aquino and the ones before it. Literally taking place in broad daylight, with foreign media around, the brazen murder of the top opposition leader electrified the country. Shock rippled through several groups all at once: the church, businessmen, media, foreign creditors and US officials. Even the Philippine military and some of Marcos’ allies started having misgivings.

WHO KILLED NINYOY?

To General Ramon Montaña the assassination was similar to the kidnapping of Tommy Manotoc, the divorced sportsman Imelda Marcos didn’t want as a son-in-law. He said in an interview that, as in the case of the Manotoc disappearance, “who gave the order to kill Ninoy? No one.”

“It was, again, a wish of Imelda. A wish. ‘I don’t like that guy to come back. We already sent him abroad for his hospitalization. Why is he going to come back?’ The problem with them is they did it like a policeman. They hired the killer who will kill him, *susmaria* (Jesus, Mary).”¹³³

Montaña pointed out that at that time “everything is (being done for the) preservation of power” of the Marcoses.¹³⁴

Immediately after the Aquino murder, Ferdinand Marcos acknowledged that “no matter what explanation we make now, there will always be some kind of shadow over the entire government.” He also said, enigmatically, “we had hoped that the matter could be handled with a little more finesse.”¹³⁵

What gave wings to the rumor that Marcos knew or that he was involved in the killing was that

in July (1983), after Aquino had made several statements in the United States that he would return soon, Marcos asked some of his most trusted research assistants to compile what they could about political assassinations. He was particularly interested in the killing of Archbishop (Oscar) Romero, the Salvadorean prelate who was an outspoken critic of human rights abuses. Romero was assassinated with a single shot while saying mass in March 1980.¹³⁶

On October 24, 1984, a Marcos-appointed fact-finding board chaired by Justice Corazon Agrava issued a 450-page “majority report” recommending the indictment of 26 men for “premeditated murder”. This included General Ver, AVSECOM commander Brigadier General Luther Custodio and Major General Prospero Olivas, in charge of the Metropolitan Command. The day before, however, the board chair Agrava had issued her very own dissenting report absolving Ver of any crime. She said Ver could not have conspired to kill Aquino because “the high command of the Armed Forces (which Ver headed) was conscious of the fact that upon Senator Aquino’s return, the verdict of death by firing squad, already confirmed by the President, would eventually be carried out.”¹³⁷ She also said “Gen. Ver was not a plotter.”

Aquino’s widow Corazon expressed displeasure with the report, pointing out that it did not answer one question. “Why was Ninoy assassinated by the military?”¹³⁸



This iconic photo by *Times Journal* photographer Recto Mercene earned the ire of the owner, Benjamin “Kokoy” Romualdez. Photo by Recto Mercene.

“Are we to believe that Mr. Marcos is innocent of the death of Ninoy in the hands of the military under his control? Are we now going to believe that the assassination was planned and executed without Mr. Marcos’ fore-knowledge or express approval? Or that Marcos was kept in complete ignorance of what was going to be done to Ninoy? Wasn’t Ninoy’s assassination a political decision of the greatest import so that no military man, no matter how high in authority, would think of making that decision on his own? Can Mr. Marcos, in Ninoy’s words, ‘wash his hands of my blood?’ “

Explaining to reporters why she believed Marcos had a hand in the murder, she recalled that ever since Aquino was detained in 1972, the military had always cleared with Marcos every move it made regarding Ninoy. “How then can I now believe that the President had nothing to do with the murder of my husband?” she asked.

For his part, the former NISA officer I interviewed expressed the belief that

...there was a decision that Ninoy must be done away with. That is a decision. Because he will be a pain in the neck. So I analyzed what are the ways to do it, to do away with him, And I just realized that (assassination) was the best way it could be done.

Unfortunately, the best way had repercussions. Because, look, how will you do it? Poison him? Ambush him? So blatant. And it might be difficult to execute....what happened was easier to execute. Only, it had repercussions.¹³⁹

When charges were filed against Ver before the anti-graft court Sandiganbayan, Marcos made a show of suspending his loyal minion as military chief, but kept him on as chief of the vast spy and security network NISA and all its attached units, including AVSECOM — the unit that was in charge of securing Aquino from harm at the airport.

During the Sandiganbayan trial, Ver told a *Business Day* reporter in 1984, he could not understand all that fuss over a convicted felon:

So much has been said about the Aquino assassination. (Although) there have been more than eight assassination attempts on the President, the publicity was not the same. I do not know why the media is (sic) talking so much about it. We never talked so much about the attempts on the President’s life.¹⁴⁰

Ver said there was no more reason to kill Aquino because:

Ninoy was a convict. This has never been told. He was convicted and had a death sentence on him. There was no more motive for killing him. Why should they have wanted Ninoy killed? I knew he was dead legally.¹⁴¹

Finally, on December 2, 1985, Sandiganbayan acquitted Ver of all charges. Ver told *Tempo* newspaper, Thank God it’s all over. There never was any evidence against me.”¹⁴²

He then issued a press statement saying,

With the promulgation of the decision, it is my fervent hope that the cloud of suspicion over me and my comrades in the military shall be cleared. We can



never erase the sadness and shame that befell us as a result of the assassination, but we can all hope to put the country back on the road of greatness by joining hands, especially at this time in our history.¹⁴³

This time, Corazon Aquino was more blunt. She said:

My number one suspect is Mr. Marcos. Since he was not even mentioned among those accused, it's not really of much concern to me whether one or all would be acquitted...

Now that the verdict is out, the Filipino people can fully understand why I said from the very beginning that justice is not possible so long as Mr. Marcos continues to be head of our government.¹⁴⁴

More than three decades after the murder, the world still doesn't know the mastermind. Shortly after Marcos was overthrown the guards escorting Aquino were tried and sentenced. Years later, the convicted shooter claimed it was Aquino's relative and Marcos crony Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco who ordered the hit. That hasn't stopped speculations, including the demented Marcos loyalist claim that Aquino plotted to kill himself so his wife could assume power three years later.

The day Aquino was killed, the dictator was gravely ill and there was uncertainty who would succeed him. According to Robert Rich Jr., who was then the Deputy Chief of Mission in the US Embassy, "Imelda clearly intended to be Ferdinand's successor." In his judgment:

Imelda clearly saw herself as the next head of the Philippines, a successor to her husband. I think she felt that with Aquino coming back and her husband apparently on his deathbed, this rival had to be eliminated. And I don't think she really would have had any moral qualms about it at all. It was clearly a question of power.¹⁴⁵

In 1998, Marcos' former PC Chief, Ramos, who later became President, broke his silence on the issue and said Imelda knew who killed Aquino because she, along with Ver and her brother Benjamin "Kokoy" Romualdez, were secretly running the government at that time for the "very ill" Marcos.¹⁴⁶

Whoever actually ordered the assassination, Ferdinand Marcos still has to take responsibility. He made no effort to discover the plotter and he muddied the investigations.

There was one difference between the salvaging of Aquino and the ones before it. Literally taking place in broad daylight, with foreign media around, the brazen murder of the top opposition leader electrified the country.

Politically, the reaction to the murder was the snowball rolling downhill that, 42 months later, would become a roaring avalanche. As one historian observed: "The political crisis that consumed the Marcos regime began on 21 August 1983, when Ninoy Aquino was assassinated by the military as he deplaned in Manila." The historian concluded that Aquino's murder "gave the opposition a person and symbol to rally around and to unify behind."¹⁴⁷

Ninoy's mother Aurora asked that his body be displayed as it looked, in an open coffin, "for all the world to see what the Marcos regime had done to him."¹⁴⁸ The bloody corpse in an open casket became a powerful, riveting symbol. It turned the regime's theater of terror and fear into one of grief and anger. It was as if a spell had been broken. Only a year before the murder, a senior US official — widely believed to be State Secretary George Shultz — was reported to have contemptuously dismissed the Philippines as "a nation of 40 million cowards and one son of a bitch".¹⁴⁹ If it was true, then it was about to change.

Aquino was the might-have-been president. He was as intelligent, ruthless and determined as Marcos, but the difference was he was willing to put it all on the line.*

Journalist Niñez Cacho-Olivares spoke for millions when she said that although she had thought Ninoy was just another politician, the sight of his body changed her mind. "I looked at his ashen face, the bullet wound, and the

*Analyst William Overholt recalled of Aquino that "while he spoke sweetly of democracy and human rights, in actions he was a tough guy...he had a program and a sense of mission." In a four-hour interview with Overholt in June 1983, Ninoy conceded he might be killed by Marcos but claimed that in that case "I would play a larger role in Philippine history than I ever could alive." Overholt, "The Rise and Fall," 1155.



Thousands of mourners gazed at the slain senator's remains.
Photo by Sonny Camarillo.

blood all over his shirt. No, Ninoy, I said to myself. I have no more doubts. You loved your country and your people. God be with you, always, wherever you may be.”¹⁵⁰

Defying their fears, Filipinos turned out to pay homage. Ninoy's wake in the huge church of Santo Domingo lasted one week, seven days during which an endless stream of silent mourners walked past his body. Jaime Cardinal Sin officiated the funeral mass and gave the sermon. When the time came to lay him to rest, two million people¹⁵¹ lined Manila's streets to watch the cortege, which was accompanied by hundreds of thousands of mourners. The long, slow procession cut through the heart of the city, coming at one point to just over a kilometer's distance from Malacañang Palace itself. To millions of Filipinos, Aquino's funeral on August 31, 1983 became their long walk to freedom, when their mourning turned into morning.

That day, millions of ordinary citizens became activists. They found their battle cry — *Ninoy, hindi ka nag-iisa* — (Ninoy, you are not alone) — and their battle song, *Bayan Ko* (My Country) — a revolutionary tune composed during the American occupation which Marcos had long banned. Well into the night, as the funeral cortege inched its way across five towns and cities, the song would often break out among the crowd like a tidal wave and, unbidden, mourners would mark the song's end with raised fists, despite the presence of military spies everywhere.¹⁵²

The assassination was followed by an explosion of spontaneous protest actions throughout the country — 165 between August 21 and September 30.¹⁵³ Denied any voice and meaningful representation, Filipinos turned to the “Parliament of the Streets”. Demonstrations, marches and prayer rallies with fluttering yellow ribbons were held even in the staid, conservative business district of Makati, where employees shredded office forms and threw showers





That day, millions of ordinary citizens became activists. They found their battle cry — Ninoy, *hindi ka nag-iisa* (Ninoy, you are not alone).

To millions of Filipinos, Aquino's funeral on August 31, 1983 became their long walk to freedom, when their mourning turned into morning. All photos by Sonny Camarillo.

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September 11, 2016

Dear Reader,

Thank you for being interested. This forms part of the context of what I have been writing and why I am wary of those who want to just sweep aside our civil liberties with the promise of peace and order, stability and a comfortable life.

I would appreciate feedback from you. Pls. email admin@raissarobles.com for this.

We are now working on a digital edition of the book.

We hope you won't mind if we e-mail you as soon as it's available.

Fingers crossed we also hope to be able to come out with a new paperback edition soon. I will announce where it will be available as soon as it is available.

At the moment, the hardbound Collectors Edition - which is in full color - is still available. Although it is on a horrific topic, it is gorgeously beautiful.

This can be ordered and delivered for free anywhere in the Philippines. The extract you are viewing is from the Collectors Edition. **If you live outside the Philippines**, you can have it delivered to a relative or friend back home. Pls. remember, though, that each Collectors Edition book weights 2.1 kilos.

In the coming days, I will be posting two more extracts. One is how Marcos thoroughly prepared for Martial Law. This is the companion piece to the biography of Marcos. Another extract is about the Woman who Vanished into the Night.

Thanks again,

Raissa