

# 1986 could be a real bad year for dictatorships

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1986 is likely to be as dramatic as 1979 as far as the crisis of the dictatorships goes. You will recall that in 1979, several dictatorships collapsed: The Shah of Iran, Dictator Somoza of Nicaragua, Dictator Amin of Uganda, Dictator Gairy of Grenada, Dictator Bokassa of the Central African Empire, Dictator Nguema of the Equatorial Guinea and Racist Dictator Ian Smith of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe).

Even if 1986 does not repeat 1979 in terms of numbers, it would still be dramatic in the sense that two of the most brutal and hated dictatorships fell this year: Duvalier of Haiti and Marcos of the Philippines. Many more dictatorships ought to fall: the fascist dictatorship of Apartheid; Banda in Malawi; Mobutu in Zaire; the Indonesian colonial dictatorship in East Timor; the dictatorships in Korea, Taiwan and Singapore; Stroessner in Paraguay and Pinochet in Chile.

If we were to single out the dictatorship that should urgently be dismantled, we would point at the fascist dictatorship of Apartheid. This is not to minimize the urgency with which other dictatorships should be dispatched. Our choice is based on the regime upon which international attention is focused. This year promises to be a watershed for the survival of Apartheid. It is facing more political and economic crisis than ever before.

Regarding of how long the surviving dictatorships cling on to their thrones, they will eventually fall. History has long inscribed this message in bold letters at the door of each dictatorship.

Victory is increasingly becoming a reality in the Philippines for the majority of the people after the fall of Marcos. Victory will even be more assured if land reform of an unprecedented nature is undertaken. And President Aquino will need to pay a lot of attention to that question.

The Philippines like most of the South could have had a different history. When the Philippine nationalists liberated themselves from the Spanish colonial dictatorship in 1898, they hardly knew what was in store for them. Hardly had they begun to enjoy their independence than the American imperial force invaded and colonized them.

During the period of American colonial dictatorship over the Philippines (1898-1946), the political and economic system was molded to service the imperial interests of the Almighty Himself—America. A small local Philippine comprador elite was created which naturally served American interests. Landholding was the major mainstay of this elite and this land grabbing continued right through independence to today and most likely to tomorrow. It is not an accident that when dictator Marcos abdicated, one of the things he remembered to carry were cartons of boxes containing land deeds. Many people would like to get hold of these land deeds to examine the extent of landholdings that brutal dictator controlled.

After Independence in 1946, the Philippines became a U.S. neo-colony par excellence—inevitably. American General MacArthur reinstated the Philippine Japanese collaborator Manuel Roxas as first president of the Philippines. That in itself was a scandal considering the fact that Roxas was on the side of the Japanese during the war. But neo-colonialism knows no scandals—this act was in keeping with American interests. The following year, 1947, the Americans imposed a neo-colonial military alliance with the Philippines, creating the historically contentious Subic Bay Naval Base and the Clark Air Force Base. This cemented one of the closest military

partnerships that existed up to Marcos' fall and which will survive his exit. Between 1946 and 1975, the US provided the Philippine Dictatorships US\$805,000 (averaging about \$26,860,000 per year) in military aid alone. Economic and other aid amounted to several billions. In return the Americans milked the Philippine economy of billions of dollars in profits from investment, landholding and unfavorable trade.

Resistance to American neocolonialism and the local comprador dictatorship continued throughout the period from 1946 to today. The crisis reached a breaking point in 1972 as signalled by two interrelated events: (1) The Supreme Court of the Philippines ruled in 1972 that the United States could no longer maintain its privileged position in land ownership and that US citizens and corporations were subject to the general ban on foreign ownership of Philippine land, and (2) The declaration of martial law by Marcos (who came to power in 1965) in September 1972 in response to the mounting crisis and to the Supreme Court ruling (which he immediately suspended—only in dictatorships do you hear of leaders suspending supreme court rulings). Martial law of 1972 started a period of unprecedented repression and massive human rights violations that the Philippines had ever been sub-

jected to. Not to forget they had also gone through repressive conditions during American neo-colonialism.

Opposition figures and intellectuals were arrested, detained, lots of them were tortured and some died. (Gruelling details can be obtained in Amnesty International reports of 1976 and 1982.) Many fled into exile and guerilla camps in the countryside. The press was put under tight control. By 1977 over 60,000 persons had been arrested. By 1979, over 100,000 innocent civilians (especially muslims) were killed in military related activities involving the neo-colonial army and the resistance movements.

Because of the human rights abuses of the Marcos dictatorship, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal, an international group of jurists, intellectuals, politicians, labour organizers and church leaders passed a judgement in Antwerp, Belgium in 1980, against Marcos, declaring that he was "guilty of grave and numerous economic and political crimes

against his own people, unfit to govern and subject to serve punishment for his past wrongs". His unfitness to govern has been ratified by the people.

What was the response of the USA to all of this? Condemnation? It responded by giving the Marcos dic-

tatorship US\$783,000,000 between 1973 and 1978 (averaging \$156,000,000 per year) in military and economic aid. That was not all. US business, banks and the IMF and World Bank were greatly encouraged by Marcos' Martial law rule. They prepared him with billions of dollars. The Philippine debt shot from US\$2.2 billion in 1972 to \$6 billion in 1977. Thus perpetuating what the Philippines have always witnessed—their repression being aided by external forces from democratic countries.

When Senator Aquino was murdered at Manila airport on August 21, 1983, most of the world heard about the repression in the Philippines for the first time and they protested. One friend of dictator Marcos remained silent—the US Administration. George Bush the US Vice President acknowledged on October 6, 1983 that Marcos was "less than perfect on human rights" but went on to defend him and cautioned against criticizing Marcos: "We pointed out the imperfections of the Shah and all of that, and today we have something worse." He expressed the concern that "the US not cut away from a person who imperfect though he may be on human rights, has worked with us."

Hardly did he raise the issue that

Khomeini in Iran is the result of US actions in Iran, their support for the shah and their having brought him to power in 1953 and armed him with the SAVAK, one of the most dreaded secret police in the world during its time. And it is the same with the other dictatorships who have fallen and will fall—they were brought into power by western democracy. It is hardly surprising that when they fall, they come home to the West—Bokassa to France, Duvalier to France (he wanted to go to the US), The Shah to the US, Gairy to the US, Somoza to the US and now Marcos to the US.

Thus a paradox is created for the people of the South—the dictatorships under which they live, get arrested, tortured and frequently killed is the dictatorship allied with western democracy, which is coated with a good measure of sugar here and with bullets there. Marcos-US alliance has shown this quite clearly. The debate for people who care should be: how do we ensure that democracy here does not support dictatorship there? Who benefits from the alliance of dictatorship and democracy?

"Though at present we suffer because we uphold truth, Victory will be our," to quote an unknown Philippine.

