

Will a new president bring new policies?

The people of the Philippines are embarking on a new era but there is already dissension about the new government. Four Filipino-Canadians — including one who was in the Philippines during the elections — discussed their views of the situation with the Gateway's Audrey Djuwita.

Philippines right now. Sure we are Canadian citizens now, and there is little we can do except to form organizations that keep our ties with the Philippines, but just being concerned is good enough."

Rene believes that Corazon Aquino, the Philippines' new president, will certainly try to clean up the corrupt government left by the Marcos government.

"She has the determination to do it, it's within her, the honesty and sincerity. Even Marcos' loyalists admit that she'll try to clean up the government."

But Adrian is less idealistic. "You can't expect things to change overnight just because Aquino is the president now," he said.

And Nelson Barranda, a student who came from the Philippines in 1975 and who is now taking special courses in rural economy, believes there will be even less change.

"I think it will take the next three or four years to clean up the government. I doubt that the new government will be free of corruption. What's going to happen is that Aquino will kick out some of Marcos' men and replace them with hers. So it's going to be a change in participants only. I am not saying that there are no honest people there, but basically the new government will be dipping from the same containers for its officials," Barranda said.

Again, Rene defended Aquino. "Aquino is answering the cry of the people. The bottom line is that the people are fed up with the Marcos government and they want a transfer of power and a change to a moderate opposition. When Marcos was inaugurated as the president in 1965, the Philippines had a good solid economic foundation. It was second to Japan in progress. Look where he's leaving us now. He left us with \$30 billion in foreign debt, a shaky economy and 40 per cent of the labour force unemployed," said Rene.

Barranda disagreed. "Cory is lucky. She's starting her administration with lower gas prices and interest rates. When Marcos was in power, the gas prices were high and the exports were down in the Philippines. I think in his 20 years of presidency, Marcos had delivered more for the Philippines than all his predecessors combined or the 50 years under U.S. rule.

"A country has the three sources of capital," Barranda said. "One is export, the others are foreign aid and borrowings. Of the non-oil exporting countries, the Philippines has fared the same if not better than other countries in the same situation. The Philippines' main exports, coconut and sugar, have been facing a severe decline in prices. Foreign aid has also been on the decline. What hit the Philippines really badly was the 1982-83 recession. The higher oil prices and interest rates caused the Marcos government to devalue the peso. The internal policies in the Philippines have been made to take advantage of the trade games and the capital inflow."

Barranda continued explaining the problems in the Philippines. "Look at the high literacy in the Philippines. Marcos was able to maintain it. It could have deteriorated, but it didn't. However, the gains could be reduced by the increase in population. In spite of efforts to cut down population growth, the result is still far from satisfactory. The Catholic Church only approves of natural birth control methods, and 93 per cent of the population are Catholics. The use of other birth control means are increasing, but at a slow rate. It strains the financial resources of the country as well as the health services and employment opportunities, among other things.

"Marcos had done a lot for the Philippines," said Barranda. "He initiated the Rural Electrification Program to promote cottage or village based industries. He also started

the National Highway Program. This highway links the northern tip of the Luzon Island to the southern tip of the Mindanao Island."

Then there is the Land Reform Program, a big issue in the Philippines.

"It's a strong point used by the National Democratic Front. The land reform is basically a division of lands for the peasants," said Mila Bongco, an international student from the Philippines.

The National Democratic Front is the civil wing of the communist party in the Philippines.

"The problem with this land reform program is that it is a long term program. You can't just grab lands and give them to the people without some sort of rules or procedures. For example, you have to work out how to pay the landowners or how to collect payments and how much, and with that the judicial system also has to be worked out," said Barranda.

"The massive capital inflow to the agricultural sector and rural areas is also important because it increases their potential to produce and earn higher earnings incomes. This is especially important since the farmers normally can not provide the collaterals for the loans. Loans are sometimes based on growing crops which may fail due to the weather.

"The Marcos government also strengthened the Philippines' import and export capability, in spite of the severely declining prices of the major export products. In addition, the Marcos government also started the development of the geothermal energy sources which made the Philippines the world's greatest user of geothermal power. It means the country depends less on oil," said Barranda.

Barranda went on to cite the Government Housing Program, the Tourism Program, the Heart Foundation, the irrigation system as well as the better and expanded hospital

facilities in towns and provinces in the Philippines among many of the contributions Marcos had made for the Philippines.

"You will notice how badly Marcos has been condemned. I am not saying that the accusations about him are not true or are true, but I think people neglect to mention the things he had done for the Philippines. People do certain things they believe are right and many will continue to think that way. You can ask the same question to Trudeau, and he'll say that he did his best," Barranda said.

"The difficulties in the Philippines are due partly to external and partly to internal forces. and Marcos was trying to reduce the adverse result of these forces," he concluded.

What about all the allegations about Marcos' corruption?

Barranda thinks that the media has completely swallowed the allegations about Marcos' corruption.

"They haven't proved it. It does not of course mean that he did not do it either. The paper said that Marcos tried to sell some art work to try to raise \$2.5 million. If you have \$3 billion, will you try to raise money \$2.5 million?" asked Barranda.

"They couldn't find evidence about Marcos' alleged corruption probably because the evidence is hard to find, or the evidence does not exist. It's also possible that the evidence was disposed of, but if so, how would he be able to claim ownership for his estates or his bank accounts?" said Barranda.

But Rene said he "wouldn't be surprised if the money from the foreign aid went into his Swiss bank account or his real estate investment." Marcos' property includes a 50 acre estate in Long Island, New York worth \$1 million. He was also accused of investing more than \$200 million on four Manhattan buildings and the Long Island estate.

"Marcos is good for his own economy only, not to the Philippines," Rene claimed.

"Instead of turning the aid into good productive assets, the money had gone for ill-conceived and frivolous projects. Imelda, his wife, is an expert at that. It was rumoured that when one of Imelda's projects, a \$10 million Film Centre, partly collapsed during its construction, some of the 35 workers killed were actually buried alive because to rescue them would be 'too much work' and delay the project's completion. Order from the top was that the project had to meet its deadline, no matter what," Rene said.

Imelda Marcos is known in the Philippines as the Iron Butterfly.

"Imelda's extravagance is really a sore point in all the poverty around her," said Bongco, who came to Canada almost one and a half year ago.

"She's an upstart. All this wealth and power probably went to her head. She shouldn't have meddled in the politics. She's a bit loony," said Bongco.

Barranda said he also detests Imelda Marcos. "Imelda certainly has a lot of influence over Marcos. He was sort of thrown into a corner. He had to make other people happy in order to stay in power. He is not solely to be blamed."

But for all of his criticisms of Marcos, Rene believes him to be "a truly brilliant man, a master of debates," but "a guy caught in an obsession for power." Rene said that Marcos' pride is his downfall.

"He was accustomed to success. He stayed for the inauguration just to show people that he wasn't defeated."

According to Barranda, Marcos is one of the most brilliant men the Philippines has ever had. He was captain of the debate team at school and at 22 he defended himself against a murder charge in which he was accused of killing the opponent of his father who was a congressman.

His subsequent appeals to higher courts failed. When he eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, his family's wealth had been dissipated.

He was found guilty although he maintained his innocence. He later appealed to higher courts, all to no avail. When he was in jail, he took the Philippines National Bar and topped the bar examination. Up to this point, no one else has ever topped his score.

The Philippines Supreme Court, suspecting Marcos had cheated on the exam, investigated the case. However, Marcos convinced them of his knowledge of laws when he answered questions from the country's best lawyers most satisfactorily. He even

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Aquino faces shaky present

by Suzette C. Chan

By peaceful means, within the democratic process, Corazon Aquino's election to the presidency has ended 15 years of state oppression. During her campaign, Aquino accused Ferdinand Marcos and his "cronies" of corruption, oppression, torture and assassination. But now that she has defeated Marcos can she contend with the domestic problems she has inherited?

Professor Hugh Wilson, who teaches Southeast Asian history at the University of Alberta, says it will not be easy for Aquino to keep all the Filipino factions in check. It starts with the very people she must trust to run the government.

"The problem with taking over power by a coup" — Wilson sees Aquino's ascension to power as a kind of coup — "is you're obliged to work with the machinery in existence unless you have a complete revolution." And the present Filipino political machinery is, says Wilson, laden with Marcos cronies.

Even amongst her own supporters, Aquino is surrounded by a select group of people.

"The major problem of the Philippines is very much related to rural poverty and the disequilibrium of income," Wilson says. "Mrs. Aquino has been forced to rely on people of her own class. Even if she's really dedicated [to social reform], she still hasn't spelt out a program of reform. She has projected an image of someone who is morally superior to Marcos but has yet to hammer out details of an extensive program of reform."

Already skepticism and dissent has hit the new free Philippines. Rural Filipinos, who live in extreme poverty, wonder how well their needs will be serviced by a woman whose family has made fortunes in rural plantations, a woman who Wilson says is "unmistakably a member of the *illustrados* — the 'enlightened ones.'

"One-fifth of the population is controlled by the NPA," says Wilson. "And the Muslim *Moros* in the south want independence. They feel antagonistic to years of government by the Christian majority." Both Marcos and Aquino are Roman Catholic, the religion of

83 per cent of Filipinos. Muslims comprise about five per cent of the country's 56 million citizens.

And Communists are wondering exactly how free freedom of expression will be under the Aquino government. She has promised the release of political prisoners, but some Communist leaders remain behind bars with indeterminate sentences.

Faced with Marcos' hangers-on, abject poverty, threat of separation, the NPA, dissension from all sides, will Aquino be able to hold onto her principles and her government?

"It depends on if she intends to push through reforms," Wilson says. He reminds that Marcos was elected with promises of social reform before "he got sidetracked."

Wilson says the problem with trying to equalize Filipino society is that "the very people required to enforce reforms are often the very people who will suffer from reform."

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