

CORY'S PEOPLE POWER

By BENITO LIM

Almost everyone who joined the "February Revolution" (Feb. 22-25, 1986) attributed their success to "people power." Since then, close advisers of President Corazon C. Aquino have believed that she owes her presidency to "people power" and will count on its support whenever she faces intransigent forces or insurmountable problems. A faction of these advisers even argues that precisely because it is "people power" that brought her to the presidency of the Republic, President Aquino should install a "revolutionary or new constitutional government" to bring about the reforms demanded by "people power."

Exactly what is "people power" and what President Aquino can count on is not clear. Like most labels in Philippine politics, "people power" stands for a mosaic of groups and programs whose parts do not fit together neatly.

Anyone who observed closely the events of Feb. 22-25, 1986 will easily see that several forces comprise "people power" — and that at least there were five distinct vested interest groups. One consists of the various religious groups (Catholics, Protestants, Iglesia ni Cristo and Muslims) headed by the Catholic majority which have sprung up in reaction to Marcos repression during the past fourteen years. The church became the forum of dissent and for condemning Marcos violation of human rights. The second group consists of politicians from Laban and UNIDO, upper and middle class businessmen and professionals who along with their families joined the NAMFREL to insure an Aquino victory. Many members of this group joined and later bolted the Marcos administration because of personal grievances, massive corruption in the officialdom and a flagging economy. Others who just tolerated the Marcos regime found the "snap elections" an occasion to act against and eventually depose Marcos. The third force consists of military officers who had collaborated with Marcos when he declared Martial Law but rebelled later because they were disenchanted and by-passed in promotions. Another cause of disaffection with former President Marcos was his decision to convert a special group in the military into his private army. The disenchanted and embittered group organized what is known as the "reformist" group within the AFP.

The fourth group consists of the cause-oriented organizations espousing nationalistic programs whose membership is drawn from students, workers,

This essay was written two months after the February Revolution of 1986.

farmers and left-wingers. These are people who saw in the "revolution" an opportunity to politicize the people not only about the evils of Marcos autocratic government but the dangers of imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism, warlordism and corruption in the bureaucracy. They wanted to prevent those who massed at Camp Aquinaldo and Camp Crame, EDSA, and Malacañang from becoming helpless cannon fodder of Cardinal Sin, the military rebels and the US forces.

The fifth and most powerful group, which was shielded from public eye, is the so-called "second level of American officials" in the Philippines, who orchestrated the operations — who wheeled and dealed with Filipino officials, politicos and military leaders on both sides of the political fence.

All of these diverse groups representing heterogeneous ideological lines including those without any position were united by one common goal — the removal of Marcos from office. They rallied the "other heroes": priests, nuns, students, shopkeepers, workers, peasants, housewives, drivers, hawkers, artists, performers, bureaucrats, hospitality girls and even the riff-raff of society to stage the "February revolution."

However, beyond this anti-Marcos sentiment, the aims of these groups who constitute "people power" are far from harmonious and at times oppose one another.

The US forces, of course, would like to keep the military bases beyond 1991 and to renew the "special relations" which will once again grant nationality treatment to American businessmen in the Philippines, an arrangement they enjoyed before 1974. They want to keep the concessions they exacted from ex-President Marcos when they supported his Martial Law regime such as the retention of P.D. 194 which abrogated the Rice and Corn Nationalization Law, P.D. 1942 which exempted new rice and corn lands from land reform, P.D. 704 which permits foreigners to fish in Philippine waters, P.D. 714 which neutralized RA No. 1180 Nationalizing Retail Trade, P.D. 92 and 151 which open the Philippines to foreign investments.

In addition, they will want more privileges in the exploitation of natural resources, leasing of public property, operation of public utilities, ownership and management of mass media and the establishment of US-controlled or managed educational institutions. They will act against any move to reaffirm the Supreme Court decision in the *Quasha* case which makes it illegal for Americans to own private residential lands. They will move for the repeal of General Banking Acts, the Act Regulating Foreign Business and RA No. 4848 which prohibits the export of cultural treasures.

In view of their experience with an intransigent Marcos who had absolute control over the military for some time, the US will likely press for the "professionalization of the military." According to Henry Kissinger, this means, among others, the removal of the military commander's "personal

ties to the chief of state . . ." and preventing "the military chief from exercising his monopoly of power for his own purposes."

"Professionalization" will also permit US military and intelligence services to main its contacts and influence over the Philippine military establishment through training on "counter-insurgency operations." The US forces hope that through these training programs they can integrate Philippine military institutions under the aegis of the CIA.

By contrast, the cause-oriented groups, such as the nationalists, want an end to US military presence in the Philippines, the removal of all laws and PDs that favor American and other foreign businesses, and an end to American influence over the AFP. The workers want the repeal of anti-union legislations, they want stricter regulations over remittance of profits by multinationals and the return of the right of workers to strike against firms that are unjust to labor. Peasants want genuine land reform, lower prices for fertilizer and pesticides, and better marketing systems.

Filipino businessmen want the repeal of all law favoring foreign business interests, specially those laws favoring American and Japanese businessmen.

The Catholic church, under the ieadership of Cardinal Sin, has its own agenda. Although the battlecry is to work for a "God-centered society," the Catholic Church not only wants a say in the appointment of key government ministers but also a share in making national policy decisions.

The Catholic church advances the position that because it initiated "people power," its institutions are now sacrosanct. Its schools must be given government support through more loans and less taxes. Since the Marcos regime, Cardinal Sin has claimed that the Catholic Church is in the best position to administer US economic aid to the Philippines. No doubt he will reaffirm this view.

The Protestants, who cooperated closely with the Catholics during the "February revolution," have their own agenda. Some of their goals are at cross-purposes with the Catholic church. Their aim of reducing Catholic influence and increasing their own in the Philippines has not changed. For over a decade now they have dominated radio and TV media with canned programs from their corporate centers in the U.S.A. They made substantial gains during the Marcos regime and many of their "fire-breathing" ministers made pilgrimages to Malacañang and extolled Marcos for the support they received from him. Like their Catholic counterparts, the Protestants want government support for their institutions and above all, they are also interested in wielding political power.

For most of the latter part of martial law years, the military's problem was how to bring about moral regeneration within its ranks and the building

of a credible image before the Filipino public. It instituted a series of seminar programs called *Tanglaw* (acronym for Tanod at Gabay ng Lahi at Watawat, and is a Tagalog word which means "guiding light.") These were said to have been painstakingly organized to neutralize the general view that the military was the most blatant abuser of human rights and one of the most corrupt agencies of the Marcos government. But the coup d'état of Enrile and Ramos which led to the bloodless "February Revolution" restored some sheen to the military's tarnished image. There was great expectation that Ramos, being a genuine professional, would cleanse the military completely of its "rascals, scalawags and torturers."

However, as the military was "reorganized" and consolidated, many people who joined the "February Revolution" were disappointed if not disgusted outright. They complained that many of the promoted officers were the same "rascals, scalawags and torturers" during the Marcos regime, except that now they have put on the "reformist uniform."

Legitimization and public acceptance are not the only goals of the military. In fact, image refurbishing is only incidental to its larger goal of supervising and administering the state. The collective experience of sharing sovereignty with ex-President Marcos have convinced many of them that they can rule the Republic more efficiently than the civilians. The view that the military is subordinate to civilian authority is anathema to many line officers today. What has inhibited the military from imposing a military junta after the "February Revolution" is the knowledge of US desire to make the Philippines a showcase of democratic and constitutional government in Southeast Asia.

Whatever were the differences they have among themselves, "people power" therefore is a collage of disparate interests whose followers were outraged by the Marcos dictatorship. What bound all them together was the enemy, Ferdinand E. Marcos and Company.

The question is what will hold them now that Marcos has been banished. Examining the phenomenon closely Kissinger observed:

"Even with democratic impetus, it is highly likely that when the immediate euphoria has worn off, disparate tendencies will begin to contest for primacy. The history of revolutions teaches that the coalition of resentments which united the opposition disintegrates once the status quo is overthrown."

No doubt the major victors of the "February Revolution" are the vested interest groups. The major spoils go to the Americans. President Aquino already expressed her desire to strengthen our "special relations" with the US — this means the Americans can keep all concessions they had extracted from Marcos and could get some more. Vice President Laurel already announced that the military bases can remain until 1991. The most amazing

aspect of American victory is that they invested so little in their "unfocused harassment" and won so much.

The next biggest winner is the military. Besides acquiring a new sheen for its tarnished image, it managed to keep its power intact. Many people believe that it is the only organized bureaucracy today. Some even believe that it has the capability to stage another coup d'état, although Minister Enrile and Gen. Ramos have made repeated statements that they believe in "civilian supremacy."

The Catholic church is another big winner. Besides President Aquino, Cardinal Sin, no doubt, is the other superstar. He and Ambassador Bosworth are the newly elevated king-makers. Not only did they succeed in discouraging the presidential ambitions of Salvador Laurel and in building support for Cory Aquino, but they also had a hand in the selection of some cabinet members and other high government officials. Definitely Cardinal Sin's opinions matter in the shaping of political decisions.

The cause-oriented groups are not certain about their gains. Some of their leaders are now in key government ministries. The question is how long will President Aquino side with them against the other vested interest groups. Some observers believe that they have already extracted the maximum concession from President Aquino in the release of all political detainees.

No doubt the vested-interests groups are the key beneficiaries of the "February Revolution." Those people whom they manipulated to become cannon fodder of their revolution are still awaiting the fruits of their victory. A letter writer complained to the editor of a major daily that: "President Aquino's people are talking about a revolutionary government; all I am asking is when can the government lower the prices of basic commodities." A caller to a radio station said: "Minister Quisumbing is interested about God-centered education; I am interested in whether she will lower tuition fees and whether schools will provide better educational facilities for my children."

Only two months have elapsed and already the communication lines of those who forged "people power" are no longer on the same wave length. This makes hollow President Aquino's marching orders: "If anyone in government does not listen to you, bring it to my attention through the structures to be set up for the purpose. If your concerns are just, they will be acted on."

Many people want to know what President Aquino will do with the "balimbings", those people who shifted loyalties to the new regime when the old one collapsed. In its derogatory sense, "balimbang" means "opportunist," although the word is also used euphemistically to mean "reconciliation." The gravest question about the "balimbings" is whether those who

committed abuses and other excesses, particularly violation of human rights, will be forgiven for the sake of peace and reconciliation. The other side of the problem is fulfillment of one of the key campaign issues of President Aquino — "Justice for Ninoy, Justice for All!" Will those who suffered under the previous regime find redress?

Many of President Aquino's appointments and announcements are now the object of serious criticisms from among her own avid supporters. Fortunately many of these criticisms are, for now, directed against her appointees. Nonetheless, the fact is, disenchantment may slowly seep in.

It is these disturbing developments that led observers to raise doubts on whether President Aquino can turn to "people power" for support whenever she needs them. Can she draw on its continuous support without serving the interests of the majority who comprise "people power" in return?

President Aquino seemed aware of this problem when she gave her "marching orders" during a thanksgiving mass to celebrate her victory at the Luneta. Her orders show what the Aquino administration believes, in apparently more idealistic moments, and how this belief is consistent with its perception of what government is all about: keeping the government tuned to the voice of the people.

But who or what groups speak for the people, President Aquino did not say. Equally important is the question of who or what groups will man the listening posts of President Aquino. Will they be the representatives of the vested interest groups which are already securely ensconced in her cabinet? Or is she going to set up another independent bureaucratic structure to make sure that the voice of the majority of our people will be heard?

The transposition of serving the needs of vested interests to serving the needs of the people is fraught with difficulty and uncertainty. This early, the contours of a cordon sanitaire are already shaping up — when it materializes she may find her government viewed as simply a new political elite, documenting Pareto's view that revolutions can only bring about the "circulation of elites", and her commitment to help the poor as little more than a rhetorical device for ambitions of powerful hungry men.

The important step required in the transportation of "people power" into people's power requires a fundamental commitment of government to a common program that can both serve our people and our national interests.

This means domestic policies are needed that would move toward building a broad-based, inclusive government. Vested interests should not take precedence over public interests. The fact is, at this point, vested interest groups are already influencing the policy directions of the Aquino government. What President Aquino can do to redirect this state of affairs — to commit government to public interest — is an open question. But if she wants to count on the people's support whenever she faces difficult problems and enemy forces, she must resolve this problem soon.