

Fordham International Law Journal

Volume 2, Issue 1

1978

Article 4

The Decline of Democracy in the Philippines

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BOOK REVIEW

William J. Butler, John P. Humphrey, and G. E. Bisson, The Decline of Democracy in the Philippines, Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1977, Pp. viii, 97, \$4.00.

Ferdinand Marcos was twice elected President of the Philippines: in 1965, and again in 1969. His nomination for a third term would have been barred under the Philippine Constitution, which prohibits a President serving more than eight consecutive years. In September 1972, fourteen months before his second and final term of office was due to expire, Marcos proclaimed Martial Law in the Philippines, for the announced purpose of suppressing Communist revolutionaries and Moslem secessionists.

In addition to strengthening national security, during the past seven years Marcos has established himself as a virtual dictator. He has suspended the Philippine Congress indefinitely. Ruling by Presidential fiat, with the complete loyalty and support of the military and police, his regime has all but extinguished democratic freedom. Newspapers and radio stations that would not conform have been shut down. Arbitrary arrest, interrogation, torture, and prolonged detention without trial are commonplace. Political opposition is repressed through fear and terror. President Marcos jailed his chief opponent, Senator Aquino, shortly after the proclamation of Martial Law. Two years ago Aquino's scheduled execution was halted only by an international protest.

The authors of this report have each made separate visits to the Philippines on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists. Despite its conclusory title, their report takes a balanced and scholarly route to its reluctant finding that the present Philippine government is employing its authority "to perpetuate the personal power of the President and his collaborators and to increase the power of the

military to control Philippine society."* As attorneys, the authors emphasize the legal sleight of hand involved in Marcos' usurpation of power. The similarities between the Philippine governmental system and our own, upon which their system is modelled, lend an Orwellian ring to the dubious pronouncements of a hostage Supreme Court.

This legalistic approach, however, tends to minimize the human dimension of the Philippine tragedy. The authors, doubtless aware of this limitation, provide an appendix which effectively balances the work. A series of "subversive documents," employed as exhibits in support of mass indictments handed down by Philippine prosecutors, tellingly relate the plight of the Filipinos under Marcos' regime.

The text concludes respectfully urging the government of the Philippines to restore democracy, with detailed plans and recommendations. A mere plea has limited effect upon a police state, yet publication of its abuses to the international community may serve to create new pressures upon the present Philippine regime, and thereby aid in the reinstatement of democracy.

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