

Pres. Ferdinand E. Marcos □

From rebellion to revolution

THE BEST of societies, if there is anything to agree on, has its share of shortcomings. More so, indeed, in the case of a society that had just been born. About the gloomiest observation made of peoples in developing societies is that they are caught between two worlds: one that is dead and another too important to be born. I consider it remarkable, therefore, that the New Society was born at all.

If for this reason alone, the New Society, like any society, is not above criticism. As a matter of fact, a critique of that society may even be longer than a straightforward description of it. And as the main architect of the New Society, I should think that I know its shortcomings as much, if not more, than anyone.

Socially speaking, we are confronted with certain problems in the democratization of wealth through agrarian reform. While it is admitted even by our bitterest critics that government has achieved more in three years than any government in thirty, still there are some demands for zero retention, which means the dispossession of all landlords. On the other hand, I have allowed retention up to seven hectares, for the majority of these landlords are retired military men and government civil servants not a few of whom are former teachers. Certainly, in my view, they cannot by any stretch of the imagination be counted among the *caciques* of old.

It is true, however, that there are landlords who resist in various ways, to the extent even of harassing tenants, sometimes with the assistance of misquidated military officials. I am not unaware of this as I am not unaware of other abuses of official authority.

The abuse of power is one area I am not insensitive about. There has been ill-treatment of detainees, extortion, and other misbehavior on the part of the military and the police. While these are isolated cases, they nonetheless are offensive to civilized mankind. The factual establishment of guilt is sometimes difficult, but I am determined that these should stop, as arrogance, insensibility, and inaccessibility of high-ranking officials must stop.

The bureaucracy has its share of misdeeds as too. They perpetrate bureaucratic delay and venality. It will be recalled that last year, I carried out a general cleansing of the bureaucracy, though perhaps in too summary a manner. Consequently, I have had to reinstate several of those dismissed. As for the retirees who remain in office to this moment, I can only plead some difficulty in finding their replacements. To my mind, in any case, the age of an official should not be a disqualification, unless, of course, deterioration is evident. In any case, the important lesson of the "purge" is that human beings, even if they are government officials, cannot be computerized.

The errors of the "purge list" itself revealed certain propensities which endanger our sense of society. Power, in this case, has been used by several to settle old political or personal scores, as there have been cases of false reports and mistaken apprehensions because duly constituted authorities have been influenced—both by public servants and private citizens—into unjustly prosecuting their personal vendettas. I continue to observe this trend, gathering evidence quietly, for as in all other matters, I must be wary about prevarications.

Resurgence of Oligarchy

I AM APPALLED by the resurgence of oligarchic behavior not only in the public but also in the private sector. Conspicuous consumption continues. The well-off have yet to learn the necessity and virtue of restraint; ostentation dramatizes a lack of consideration for the sensitivities of the poor. I cannot command the privileged—for to be in government now and to be rich by virtue of inheritance, industry, or luck are both privileges—to abandon their tastes, but I do urge them to restrain their "styles." As any true artist will tell them, elegance of style is simplicity and restraint. Moreover, the spring of foreign modes of living is reflective of a colonial mentality.

I understand that human nature can hardly be changed, although social structures can be drastically changed. But the ethics of the New Society are not alien to us Filipinos: it has been with every popular aspiration in the past for a better life in a better society. In sum, the New Society ethics is rooted in our historical and cultural heritage. It is only that the old society repudiated the ethics, precisely because its measure was economic or social advancement by any means.

I will say, therefore, that now the perversity is not in the society but in the individual who believes that the old way is still the most effective

way of achieving his personal goals. That individual is to be found both inside government and outside government, and it is their interaction which causes distortions in our new society.

Stopping this interaction through vigilance in the bureaucratic authority is one part of the job; that is mine. The other half is a citizen task; he must not succumb to the bureaucrat; he must exercise his right of vigilance through the proper channels, through his *barangays*, and through every avenue offered by the government, including the Office of the President. Graft and corruption, as I have emphasized in my previous books, is a conspiracy of at least two persons, often between an official and a citizen.

Having cited all these and other shortcomings, I make an opening for the few remaining detractors of the New Society. The critics, I must say here and now, are always welcome, for they are presumed to have the welfare of the society in mind. But detractors have a sinister purpose: to discredit—and do away with the society. To them, the shortcomings I have cited and the "ills" that they themselves cite, "prove" that the New Society is a failure. I need only remind them that we have had their version of democracy and civil liberties for 27 years; it had destroyed an entire society, and yet it took that long—27 years—before it was given up as a destructive experiment. Now, on the other hand, we have had only four years of the New Society with its acknowledged achievements for the Filipino people, but because detractors are dissatisfied, they would dismantle it as dictated by the old political habit. Worse still, they would have us turn back the clock and return to the old society.

On Criticisms

THAT the New Society is oppressive is neither an accurate observation nor a valid criticism. But that its crisis government is authoritarian, that is true, however, I do not accept it as a criticism that I am obliged to respond to. The terms *authoritarian* and *martial law* upset some people, most of whom have no claim in the country. As for some of my countrymen whose disapproval is well-known, it is not altogether clear whether they are against the situation as it is or are just simply against me. I am aware of such remarks as, "I like Martial Law without Marcos," which is just as capricious as the remark—"I like Marcos without Martial Law."

There is, quite frankly, nothing that can be done about it, as far as my adversaries are concerned, except to get rid of me. However, if they are willing to have a principled discussion about it, then certain things can be done. Thus, the criticism of the New Society has two aspects: personal, which relates to me, and objective, which relates to the situation.

I am, of course, an old veteran in personal criticism. Indeed, if many of my bitterest critics had the same attacks leveled on them, public or private, they might have died of apoplexy or called out the troops for a bloodbath. In my long career as a politician in the old society, I have dined with ardent civil libertarians who were crushed by a snub or would call in the police to defend an error in grammar. The most reverend repeaters of Lord Acton's "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"—would not give their clerks the discretion to requisition coupon bonds. This shows, if anything, a

misapprehension of power and a lack of appreciation for coupon bonds. But I suppose I am obliged, at this point, to explain myself in relation to the power I exercise.

It will be noted at once that I do not speak of the power I possess, but of the power I exercise. These are not one and the same thing. If, indeed, power were a matter of possession by me, it follows that I could transfer it at will, and I know I cannot. Thus, power is exercised by virtue of the position that I fill. Should I be incapacitated, the position will be vacant, and I can no more dictate who shall be in it than I can command the tides to recede. What happens then? By testament, I have decreed that a committee will take over the reins of government and submit themselves to a referendum election.

How do I know that I will be obeyed? Is my testament binding on others? The obvious answer is that the people know. My testament cannot prevent the ambitious from trying to stage a coup, or determined groups from making a revolution, but that, in either case, will depend on the temper of the people.

My detractors and adversaries speak as if I had stolen a march on the Filipino people. They can only say that because they are not occupying my office. Nor have they ever made a truly crucial political decision, but that, of course, is entirely my affair. Consider, however, what my decision meant: I have altered the course of the nation, and in doing so, I placed my life and honor and my family's life, honor, and future at the mercy of history and the judgment of the people.

Is that a price for a few more years in the Presidency?

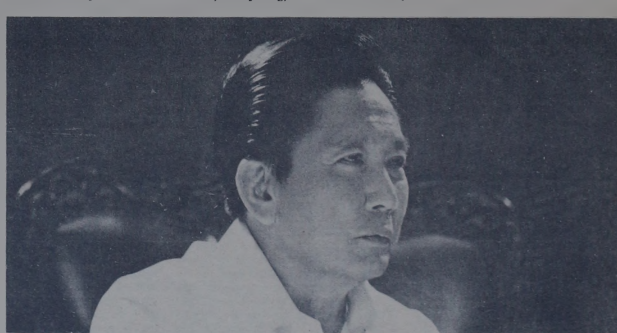
I am afraid that my adversaries cannot judge me on the basis of the so-called "power drive." There are more things in the exercise of power than are dreamt of in their philosophy.

It is an unfortunate occasion in history when a free people would have to need a "great man"—that is, if they were free. As Lincoln once said, the mission of a democracy is to prevent the rise of eagles; true, quite true. But Philippine democracy in the old society was, if not run by eagles, populated by vultures. In this instance, an eagle, even a hawk, was preferable. This was the note I emphasized in a speech before constitutionalists: *to seek the historic decision not only to preserve the Republic but to build a society, a political society, in which a Marcos would neither be necessary nor desirable. Some have called my leadership Cromwellian, which is not altogether unacceptable, and others predict a Cromwellian fate, to which neither they nor I have much of a say.*

I know, however, that protestations of good faith is not enough. I would not mind this so much if those who deny my protestations would also inhibit theirs. But political instincts die hard.

Coming back to power, the criticism narrows down to its sharing. But since as I have said, I possess not the power to distribute, what I have done is to spread the work, the duties, and the responsibilities, a rather ordinary act which is misunderstood as a "grand alliance." However, in fairness to this criticism, I will note the assertion that "the ruling elite now possesses greater power than ever before," compared to my statement that "among some of the poor, there is still the nagging fear that they have again been left behind, and that we have liquidated an oligarchy to set up a new oligarchy." My actual context, however, was in reference to the throw-backs of the old society who either had not changed their ways or were trying to forge their own alliances in power-centers below the Presidency. That this "ruling elite has greater power" is, of course, a wrong observation.

(Excerpted from President Marcos' Notes on the New Society Part II. To be continued)



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