

I. POLICE STATE PLEBISCITES ARE BOURGEOIS LIBERAL ELECTIONS WRIT LARGE

The Marcos plebiscite of July 27th, like its counter part, the Papadopoulos plebiscite of July 29th received space in the bourgeois press according to its political color. Both Time and Newsweek, who still believe they can rate democratic institutions by their "fair" elections, expressed dismay over the stage managed debacle. Journalistic stooges of the Marcos-Pentagon payola lauded the plebiscite, its "orderliness" and its "freedom from politics". One such American correspondent, speaking over a Manila telecast news conference, denied in the best Watergate fashion that he had personally ever seen a single soldier patrolling around polling places, unlike the "inaccurate" Newsweek people. Had this same correspondent simply sat in front of his TV instead of touring about on government helicopters, he would not have been able to make such a blanket denial, for uniformed PC regulars were a common enough sight, as were the giant "VOTE YES" wall posters papering the areas behind the poll inspectors. But the coercive... factors in the cunning Marcos plebiscite were not to be found in the presence or absence of soldiers, but in the strut of the manicured officials who had rigged the election percentage-wise even before the first of the 24 million ballots was even printed.

The man on the street had already made up his mind about the plebiscite when it was first announced:

"Ofcourse I'll vote YES. Even if I voted NO it will come out YES, like in the January plebiscite. And if they find out who I am they might tell someone to fire me, or bring me in for questioning....and that takes months. Nacu! My children will starve in times like these... And if I refuse to vote, I can be imprisoned..." The Marcos plebiscite was after all only one more chapter in the sordid history of bourgeois elections, magnified out of all proportion by extreme intimidation and fraud and proving what child's play it is to manipulate the power of the ballot when the people are fearful and do not have the economic and military power to counter the unfair advantage.

The only dictator in modern times who seems to have out-distanced Marcos is Hitler himself. After seven years of martial law, Papadopoulos could boast of a modest 89% endorsement by the Greek people. But in ten months Marcos whipped up a 91% sweep of approval through absolute control of the bureaucracy and through fear. It is painfully reminiscent of Hitler's 92% endorsement of the Nazi Party in the fatal 1933 plebiscite, which was not to be Hitler's last, in which German citizens were threatened with imprisonment if they did not vote. Even at the Dachau concentration camp only 30 prisoners voted NO, the nearly three thousand remaining inmates of Dachau voting YES for the very government that had incarcerated them. A year and a half later, Hitler pushed his mandate to a 95% high as he legalized his seizure of the Chancellorship. In 1938 one of the notorious Nuremberg documents related one of the secrets of his success with plebiscites. The document relates how the Gestapo compiled a master list of all those who voted NO in the Nazi plebiscite of 1933:

Copy is attached enumerating the persons who cast "No" votes or invalid votes at Kappel. The control was affected in the following way: some members of the election committee marked all the ballots with numbers. During the balloting a voters' list was made up. The ballots were handed out in numerical order, therefore it was possible afterwards...to find out the person who cast "NO" votes or invalid votes. The marking was done on the back of the ballot with skimmed milk.

In due time, there was no one left to vote "NO" in the Nazi plebiscites.

Early this month the COMELEC (Commission On Elections) gleefully announced that the mandate of the people was so overwhelming that even behind barbed wire the detainees had endorsed the indefinite dictatorship of Marcos at a two to one ratio; that even in areas like Marikina and Batangas, traditional bastions of Senators Aquino and Diokno, who lie manacled in solitary confinement, the vote for the Dictatorship was overwhelming. A post-plebiscite press conference stressed repeatedly that the numbers on the ballot, which tallied with the voter's poll registration form could not be traced and that there was no way in which the identity of those who voted "NO" could be determined; but their anger and evasiveness in parrying questions on the secrecy of the ballot was only faintly convincing. For experiences and even the testimony of the military proved the contrary.

At one polling place in Makati, a clerk, while tearing off the stub, glanced at a ballot, exclaiming:

"Ah! You voted 'NO'!" Then in a whisper. "But don't worry. I won't tell anyone." The annoyed voter retorted: "Don't think I care if you do!".

The verified anecdote of the month circulated among Underground sources is the unbridled rage of Malacañan over the writing on a comment sheet found in a precinct in Batac, the hometown of the dictator, which read: "I think Marcos and his entire family should be executed." Officials lost no time in ferreting out the identity of the writer, who turned out to be an elderly lady, whom they tried to pinpoint as an example of a personal grudge against the Marcos family. Inquiries were real enough, for the hapless old woman, fearing for her life, has fled the Ilocos region and is now in hiding.

In spite of crocodile pronouncements about freedom of discussion in the weeks before the plebiscite, official behavior from the very beginning has made it clear that a "NO" vote is not an objective matter to the dictatorship. The alleged airing of both sides was only a treacherous means of smoking out new die-hards. The Free Philippines News Service reports how students at the University of the Philippines were arrested prior to the plebiscite for passing out leaflets urging a "No" vote and how students at the University of Santo Tomas found wearing "NO" shirts were mauled. The Marcos-licensed news media was unabashed, eight hour long "Vote Yes" brainwashing session, using every Madison Avenue trick known and at a colossal cost to the taxpayer. The Marcos press itself, has, since June 13 of this year, been formally condemned by the International Press Institute as an example of complete suppression of press freedom.

Even before the canvassing of the ballots had begun, COMELEC officials had already begun outlining, with some malevolence, what action would be taken against those who registered and "willfully refused to vote", as if they need a whipping boy for future plebiscites. The first astonishing butt of the dictatorship's ire was a few thousand hapless Jehovah's Witnesses, a fringe religious sect who collectively refused to vote because it is against their religious principles to wear pants. A case was immediately filed against them as if they were the most odious of malefactors and new threat began steaming off the press that all others who thumbed their nose at the sham referendum would be punished as speedily as possible, like carjacking or drug violation cases. This produced such a reaction of alarm that within a few days the COMELEC had to deny that any arrests would begin until after hearings and convictions had been completed, reassuring petty officials who feared that there would not be jail space enough to hold all the poll violators, and in effect admitting that millions of people had in fact refused to vote.

As soon as the first returns were released, it became clear that many local mayors or governors fixed up the YES vote in their own districts, fearing not only governmental ire, but a slash in the pork barrel should their districts show a strong opposition. Many of these officials have been detainees at Camp Crame where their release was signed after paying ransom money to the dictatorship or succumbing to political blackmail. The residents of Pasay City, in particular, complained over the manner in which their large NO vote was scuttled by the city mayor himself.

At one of the largest Manila high schools, teachers admitted that they had been forced to attend briefing sessions to insure the success of the "YES" vote. Before the ballots were counted, the teachers were given a pre-marked box of YES votes and told to insert them in the ballot boxes if the count of NO votes should exceed a certain pre-determined percentage. The teachers were advised, as a last gesture, to keep any contrary opinions to themselves, if they valued their continuation in the service, while all supervisors and Barangay officials were hand-picked for the final manipulation.

The man who chairmanned this massive national fraud, COMELEC Commissioner Leonardo Perez, was the most hand-picked of them all. Long standing Marcos sycophant, Perez has a ten year history of red-baiting as former Chairman of the notorious Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA) and accepting bribes from Kuomintang Chinese. In spite of his prolonged drinking bouts, next to Ponce Enrile, the Dictator trusts him the most implicitly, and saw to it that former Chairman Jaime Ferrer was effectively sacked long before the plebiscite. During the many long hours in which Perez pontificated over TV, predicting in glowing terms the success of the "YES" mandate and fretting over some obscure legalism about the process of registration, he never once came to terms with the one central fact about the plebiscite: that it had no basis whatever in law, anymore than illegal new constitution from which it derived its authority. All were contingent on the whim of the man who had seized power ten months before through violence and fraud. For Perez to sit there threatening the hapless citizen with six months imprisonment and fine if he refused to acknowledge any illegality as legal would have been almost comic, if the

cost did not come so high.

Nowhere in post-Nazi times has such a sustained and systematic campaign of coercion been concocted to herd people into polling places where they could be photographed standing in long lines waiting their turn to vote. No one had to point a gun at them this time, as goons have done in the past; the compulsions were built in characteristics of martial law itself. Entire sectors were faced with hidden persuaders: the military, who knew too well of the network of prison camps and the countless and unnamed who have rotted there for almost one year without any charges being filed against them, could vote NO and face investigation, treason charges or even the firing squad; Several million government employees knew that at the end of August 200,000 more government employees were to be laid off and by voting NO they could add their name to the roster; Even fifteen to eighteen year olds may have second thoughts as they recalled the national entrance exam which will be required of all college freshmen, knowing the blacklists which have already disqualified thousands of students as "subversives". But the COMELEC's trump card was the announcement only twenty-four hours before the deadline for registration that in the future the Barangay registration card and voters number would be used as an identity card for buying rice in the pilas and that those who could not show their receipt would be out of luck. Rice disenfranchisement is as effective as bullets. The Philippines, like most of Southeast Asia is now gripped by drought and severe rice shortages. It worked.

But why then, did Marcos restage a more expensive version of the massive January electoral fraud after only eight months and at a cost of four million pesos, as admitted by Commissioner Perez? Apparently for two reasons. The first was to please his long-time US military advisers and financial backers by staging a more convincing bourgeois liberal-type electoral spectacle; for the first plebiscite they found something of an embarrassment with its Van Thieu-like crudities and the swiftness of its execution. Then the US Congress will have to be convinced of some token of popular support to justify budget approval of the usual mammoth US military assistance commitments in the Philippines for the next fiscal year -- commitments which have totalled a rough \$800 million since 1946, the lion's share of which, illegally, and openly supports counter-insurgency against National Liberation forces waging guerilla warfare. The July plebiscite was carefully designed down to the last detail to please the most fastidious bourgeois Western pollster in order to reinforce the Dictatorship's credit abroad.

Perhaps Marcos's most important reason for a trumped up popular mandate was to accurately gauge the full extent of resolute opposition to his regime before taking sterner measures on the populace, which he unavoidably must in the next six months as the entire country is swept by drought, famine, and acute economic instability, in spite of all assurances by the dictatorship to the contrary. While the YES vote is unconvincing, for many voted under duress, it is an accurate index of how many can be kept in line through fear and anxiety. But the same cannot be said of the NO vote, which required some courage and defiance to execute. The full extent of the NO vote was never played up in the press; only the 1,856,744 (9.33%) who actually marked their ballots NO were taken note of. But this was only a small proportion of those who refused to endorse the Marcos dictatorship. It is these whom both Marcos and the militant National Democratic Front view with the greatest of interest.

One of the most important aspects to take note of in assessing the full extent of the NO vote is the unfolding of the COMELEC timetable. On July 26th, twenty-four hours before the plebiscite, it was announced that 22 million voters had registered. This is a preposterous figure in a population of 39 million with one of the highest birth rates anywhere in the world. In all previous presidential elections, in which voters were lured into the polls by crisp five or ten peso bills, the median number of voters has never exceeded seven million. Even by jacking up this figure with the controversial 15-18 year old group, 2,388,488 of whom voted in the plebiscite the next day, it would still not swell the electorate by more than ten million. The plebiscite was extended by one day, ending at nine o'clock on July 28th.

Five days later the COMELEC announced that nine million votes out of a possible nineteen million had already been accounted for and that the remaining NINE million would be reported within twenty-four hours and that the proclamation of the results would be final. A breakdown of NO votes by cities and areas was then published, indicating a 20% opposition to the dictatorship in cities like Manila, Quezon City, Batangas City, and Malolos. Certain areas like Eastern Samar had registered an unforeseen 50% opposition. Never again were these area lists ever again published in any newspaper. On the sixth day following the plebiscite, as promised, a miraculous TEN million more votes were pulled out of the COMELEC hat the plebiscite closed and formally proclaimed as some dictator for an indefinite term by a 90.67% landslide endorsement of popular support.

To the 9% NO vote canvassed in the precincts, we must add still another 13% of all registrants, which the COMELEC and Marcos himself accused with some annoyance of boycotting the election. It is this rough three million voters who felt so strongly about the sham plebiscite that they now risk fine and possible imprisonment for their posture of outright boycott. To this computerized five million anti-fascist opposition which could not be cowed by the all the power of the dictatorship to destroy them, if he so chooses, we must now add an unspecified and large segment which boycotted both the registration and the referendum. There are verified reports of entire regions in the Visayas in which not a single soul could be goaded into voting, although the PS is reported to have gone from house to house harranging them. In one area in Samar, five entire communities agreed to boycott the plebiscite and did so with such effectiveness that only the town mayor voted. In the Greater Manila Area massive boycotting has also been reported, but none of this ever reached the Marcos press.

Assuming that nine million voters, under threat of rice disenfranchisement, did actually swell the usual seven million, as reported twenty-four hours before the proclamation by the COMELEC; and likewise assuming, as testified by public school teachers that the other ten million votes extracted with such lightening like speed and never broken down by precincts or regions were the pre-marked extra ballots prepared to jack up the percentage to a more impressive degree; if the five million NO and boycott votes can be matched by a conservative one million more who refused to register at all, it must be concluded that a rough six million Filipinos, or two-thirds of the electorate were resolutely unwilling to endorse the dictatorship. To stand up and be counted in this manner under martial law in a police state is an act of rare courage. As far as the National Democratic Front is concerned, is this approximate six million who, by their acts of defiance, have spoken more clearly than all the alleged 91% who were trumped up for senatorial hawks in Washington D.C.

On August 4th, the seventh day after the plebiscite, Feuhrer Ferdinand made his "inaugural" address at four in the afternoon, proclaiming himself indefinite ruler by popular mandate. That done, in the very next breath he threatened both the military and government officials with new arrests and more extensive crackdowns. He then harranged with great scoffing an opposition Senator who had published at letter attacking the dictatorship in the New York Times. Then, as if he were not entirely satisfied with the results of the plebiscite, he once again harranged the entire nation to reify their "mandate". The choice he repeated, as if making a speech at the Nixon inauguration, is "My leadership or a Communist revolution."

Possibly his rapacious cronies in the Pentagon applauded these words and also his facile demonstration of just how thoroughly they had tutored him on the fine points of a perfect bourgeois-liberal election, down to the last facade. But the Filipino people were not so easily deceived into accepting another police state plebiscite skillfully camouflaged to look like a circumspect US bourgeois election; for they have comprehended that all such elections are of the same vintage: the top swindler forces his dependent wards through either rewards or punishments to legalize his crimes for a longer period of time. In bourgeois liberal elections sugar coated rewards are used and in police state plebiscites armalites and iron fists. But basically they are the same.

The people of the Philippines, like the people of Indochina are tired of being used to increase the well-being of the super-rich; they are equally fed-up with being told that Marcos is a good choice and Communism is a necessarily bad choice. Neither do they understand why the US rams this choice down their throats by financing fat military assistance programs and supplying the training and arms that has put close to 20,000 Filipinos behind barbed wire, destroyed the nation's press and prostituted its schools to the Nixon Doctrine. Approximately six million Filipinos, and possibly millions more who dare not vote NO, have, in effect, closed ranks with revolutionary forces by various forms of dissent during the July plebiscite. It is not likely, in the lean months to come, that they will be less easily cowed by new attempts to whitewash the New Society.

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