

Aug. 1973

ASIA COLLECTION
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII LIBRARY

NOTES FROM THE PHILIPPINES
by Kaibigan ng Masa

Another month of the so-called "New Society" has passed and the regime continues to show both of its faces. On the one side the ruling clique continues to look ridiculous as it puts on obnoxious shows of wealth at the people's expense and on the other the dictator gathers greater legalistic legitimacy, or tries to, for his bandit regime. Yet all the while corruption continues, more and more political "undesirables" are arrested, and the people face a food shortage which promises to be the worst in the country's history.

During the latter part of June the American pianist Van Cliburn came to the Philippines and gave two performances at the Cultural Center. The beautiful and gentle Imelda latched on to him like a leech and the Daily Express mounted a constant barrage of special features on his artistic abilities. The campaign did not, however, seriously weaken Nora Aunor's popularity.

Early this month the Philippines again hosted Mr. Cliburn who returned just in time for the opening ceremonies of the "Marcos Bridge" which spans the San Juanico Straits to connect Samar and Leyte. In addition to Van Cliburn the affair was well attended by other star studded guests such as Christina Ford and her jetset retinue of Italian Countesses, etc. Lavish and gaudy are the only words to describe the ceremonies. Limousines were shipped down from Manila for the 2.16 kilometer drive across the bridge as were two grand pianos (one extra in case anything should happen to the first) for Van to play in case he could be prevailed upon. He couldn't.

Back in Manila a piano concert at the Araneta Coliseum was hastily scheduled for July 4th, Fil-Am Friendship Day. Once again stories about Cliburn were in the papers. So often were Imelda and Cliburn mentioned in the same connection that they became a favorite topic of conversation during women's mahjong games. The point of the discussion was that if Fil could play around as much as he does why couldn't Imelda have a boyfriend for herself. Others who have less faith in the artist's masculinity couldn't understand why there was so much fuss over this American bakla.

At any rate, the tickets quickly sold out for the concert and the crowds jammed the Coliseum at the appointed time of 5:30. On the way inside ladies handbags were checked for "security reasons" and all of General Ver's Presidential Guards must have been present. These fellows are easy to spot as they're always wearing identical polo barongs. Even though Imelda and Cliburn were seen arriving quite early she didn't come out from the backstage area to take her seat until 6:30. Her entrance was announced over the public address system but gained only a weak response from the impatient audience. Van Cliburn came out some fifteen or twenty minutes later and the concert started.

After the concert Imelda's blue ladies, who have become known as green ladies in honor of the green revolution, threw roses onto the stage. Imelda threw a full bouquet which fell short of the target. The day was saved, however, by Mrs. Lucrecia Kasilag the music director of the Cultural Center, who retrieved the flowers from the floor and personally took them up to Van Cliburn and in

the process insured her job tenure.

But Martial Law is not only farce, it is also deadly serious.

As everybody is well aware, the Barangay was first adopted because, as Marcos was surprised to learn, the people were going to soundly defeat the false constitution. The Barangay concept proved to be a valuable tool for the dictator and once again it is proving its utility.

To insure the legality(?) of his continued rule, Marcos again called upon the barangay to rubber stamp the proposal for his staying in power beyond the expiration of his elected term of office. To make sure that nothing would go wrong this time, Jaime Ferrer was relieved of his position as the Chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and was replaced by Marcos' tuta Senator Leonardo Perez. As well, the Commission was increased in size from three to nine members and filled with men of similar backbone as Perez. With these measures the COMELEC was deemed effectively "neutralized" and its organizational machinery and manpower was placed in charge of supervising the barangay "elections" in place of the ad hoc committee which handled this task during the constitutional referendum. Also, the issues to be voted on were announced only shortly before the "election" and this time free debate was not allowed. The only voice of protest was an open letter to the President asking that the "election" be postponed so that the public could fully discuss the issues and that certain steps be taken to insure honesty in the "election". The open letter was signed by such "scoundrels" and "enemies of democracy" as Senator Salonga, Ex-Senator Soc Rodrigo, Fr. Ortiz, S.J., Bishop Ferrer of the United Methodist Church, Dr. Vidal Tan, Joaquin Roces, Antonio Miranda, etc. I am enclosing a copy of the letter in the hopes that the editor of PATAYAG will reproduce it for the readership.

A nationwide registration program was undertaken to make sure that every eligible voter was signed up and penalties were drawn up for those who would fail to do so.

Government officials and employees at all levels were pressed into the service of bringing out a 100% yes vote by phrasing the election question in such a manner that their continuation in office was made contingent upon such an outcome. Needless to say, the government controlled press talked of nothing else but the need for an affirmative resolution.

The actual "election" was held on July 27 and 28 and, under the threat of six months in the stockade for not voting without good cause, the voters swamped the polling places. The actual voting, however, was not secret in any sense of the word as the paper ballots were transparent allowing poll watchers to see how the ballot was marked even as the voter was putting his ballot in the box. In some barangays of Nueva Ecija and Cavite poll watchers went so far as to look at the ballot before allowing the voter to put it in the box. In Abra the voters were warned that those voting no would be picked up for questioning by the PC. In rice scarce Bacolod, voters were given a ganta of rice in exchange for their yes vote.

If all these measures were not enough the COMELEC also had each ballot numbered and fingerprinted thus further intimidating anyone who may have wished to write strongly critical comments in the space on the ballot reserved for the voters to write their own suggestions as to the future course of government. With measures such as these the people who had the courage to vote no should be warmly commended for their bravery.

Yet, many voters didn't even get the chance to go through the motions of voting in this phoney election. In some places voters were given sample ballots marked with an X in the yes box and told to drop them in the ballot box. In Bataan voters were already saved the trouble of voting as it was already done for them. All they had to do was to countersign the registration lists.

With an "election" such as this Marcos has assured himself of a "mandate". and as there is no way to accurately tabulate the written suggestions found in the remarks column of the ballots Marcos can also claim that anything he desires, such as postponement of the convening of the interim National Assembly as proscribed by the new Constitution, is the real wish of the people as well. This "election" has, however, given the people another example of how snake-like the dictator really is and the lesson is not being wasted.

Meanwhile, Senators Aquino and Diokno are still behind bars in Fort Bonifacio but their wives remain active in their crusade to free their loved ones. Early this last month cases of habeas corpus were filled on behalf of the Senators using the simple logic that if Martial Law has restored peace to the countryside and prosperity to the nation, as Marcos has repeatedly claimed, there is no reason why the imprisonment without trial of the Senators should continue. This demand has so stumped the Solicitor-General that he has already asked for three postponements from the Supreme Court to prepare an answer to the petition.

Even while some "political" prisoners are being released, the most notable being Gary Olivar who has been in Camp Crane since the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus almost two years ago, it seems as though the percentage and absolute number of this type of prisoner is becoming much greater. Not only are the "criminal elements" being turned loose but a greater number of "subversives" are being sought for arrest. Although difficult to prove it seems that the intelligence people are being assisted by the Manila Universities. Any student even suspected of activism is denied enrollment by the downtown schools but can usually find a place in U.P. Diliman. On the sprawling U.P. campus surveillance is easier than in the Manila schools and old activists can easily be investigated. Already some people have been arrested on the U.P.'s campus. The arrest of Carol Pagaduan, former Vice-Chairman of the U.P. Student Council elected under the "radicals" party is a case in point. She came out of hiding because she believed the government's stated change in policy towards former activists under the amnesty program. Wiser activists continue their life underground where freedom is comparatively greater than in a Camp Crane detention cell.

Corruption continues unabated even though the forms and levels

of this degeneracy have changed somewhat. As could be expected, the military enlistedmen, not withstanding the claims to the contrary, have assumed the place of the town police and the petty bureaucrats and now collect the small tongs that these fellows formerly received. The PC was always corrupt but now other branches of the Armed Forces are beginning to go "on the take". On the other hand, while petty bureaucrats are now the "untouchables" for fear of losing their jobs this doesn't mean that the civil government has completely changed its ways. Some individuals in the logging business in Northern Luzon claim that in the Old Society the provincial Bureau of Forestry director could be bought off with a couple bottles of Scotch and a small kickback. Gone are the good old days and now B of F VIP's in Manila must be dealt with and in the capital the going price for a logging concession is much higher than in the province. Corruption continues in the Bureau of Customs and the cost of getting freight cleared is higher than before Martial Law due to the increased risks involved in shaking the public down.

In the past few days Marcos has announced a program to weed out "backsliding" civil and military personnel. However, many people believe that this will be a half hearted attempt and may, in part, be aimed at Secretary of National Defense Juan Ponce Enrile whose star in recent weeks has been on a rapid decline.

The current rice shortage was mentioned in relation to vote buying during the recent referendum but the situation deserves much more attention than this as it is extremely critical. After the disastrous floods of last year an emergency rice planting program called "Palagad" was launched in order to make up for expected crop losses. Even with this crash program, however, it was estimated that the country would still be deficient by some 600,000 metric tons of it's rice needs. To fill the gap imports for this amount were arranged. Yet, due to a combination of government mismanagement and a severe drought which followed the floods, the Palagad program fell far short of its goals. Official estimations of the expected shortage were increased to 1.1 metric tons.

In a desperate attempt to remedy the deteriorating situation the government has 1) launched a new rice production program, Masagana-99, 2) tried to arrange for additional rice imports, 3) backed a campaign to induce people to conserve rice, 4) enforced a \$3.50 per ganta price level for retail rice purchases, 5) raided warehouses of rice hoarding middlemen, 6) given constant reassurance to the public that there is plenty of rice for all so as to minimize hoarding by individual families, and 7) has started a campaign to promote the planting of rootcrops such as camote, cassava, ubi, etc. Only the crack-down on rice hoarding middlemen has thus far yielded positive results.

In the first place, there are no more rice imports to be had as all the rest of Asia, including Thailand, is feeling the pinch of rice shortages. Second, the Masagana -99 program will not increase rice stocks for some months yet and even this long range program is meeting severe problems in management, financing, and the availability of necessary in-puts such as fertilizers. Third,

the price ceiling is often ignored and if rice can be found the cost is at least ₱4.50 and usually ₱5.00 a ganta. Fourth, the new rootcrop program is starting too late to give the required relief. And finally, as the severity of the rice shortage is becoming increasingly clear to the people the New Society's reassurance fall on deaf ears and small scale hoarding is rampant.

Even as early as the latter part of July the shortage was reaching acute proportions. Workers in one large logging company in Mindanao are refusing their wages and demanding payment in rice as money holds no importance for them if they can't buy food. On a recent trip to Manila one industrialist from Iligan went to special lengths to buy rice to ship South for his hungry workers. Individual family members coming from the Visayas do the same for their own kin. In Manila market rice stalls are often empty and lines of people, occasionally reaching two city blocks in length, form in front of National Grains Authority (NGA) rice dealers stores or behind NGA "rolling stock" trucks sent out to critical areas in the city. Military enlistedmen are said to be given rations of camotes rather than rice.

As we enter August reserve stocks dip lower and lower. What happens next is anybody's guess.

One final note. Since the President ceremoniously declared that the rebel backbone in Mindanao had been broken the Manila newspapers have undertaken a complete news blackout. Now even occasional AFP victories go unreported. However the fighting continues. As one indication of its severity, the Loyola funeral parlor receives, each week, between five and ten of the most seriously disfigured bodies for specialized treatment. It was further learned that other funeral parlors throughout the Greater Manila area also have contracts with the AFP and are still servicing many military casualties each week. Reports have reached Manila that the Christian bandit gangs known as Ilagas (rats) which are armed and supplied by the AFP have staged at least two ambushes of commercial busses carrying innocent civilians. Anyone driving a private vehicle is thought to be crazy.

And so the New Society marches on.

KM 8/7/73