

# Bush Administration Backs Police State Measures in the Philippines

by Michael Billington

In January, reading from the same U.S.-authored script used to overthrow Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, the Filipino financial oligarchy, the press, and the appropriately named Cardinal Sin, orchestrated mass “middle-class” demonstrations in Manila against the popularly elected government of President Joseph Estrada. The “anti-corruption” demonstrations provided a cover for a military coup, placing Vice President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in the Presidency. Behind the overthrow was former President Gen. Fidel Ramos, who had also served as Washington’s tool in the operation to overthrow the Marcos regime in 1986, and, at the end of his own Presidential term in 1998, had attempted unsuccessfully to change the Constitution to allow himself another term.

Then, in April, after deposed President Estrada was placed under arrest, hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, mostly from the poorest layers of society, mounted huge demonstrations in support of Estrada and against the unconstitutional January coup. On May 1, thousands of demonstrators marched on the Presidential Palace, demanding Estrada’s release from incarceration.

The January events were described by the U.S. government and press as “democracy in action,” while those in April and May, have been characterized as an insurrectionary plot, supposedly justifying the declaration of a “State of Rebellion” by President Macapagal-Arroyo and the arrest without warrants of the leading opposition figures, including three members of the Senate and other Senatorial candidates, even though the election was only days away, on May 14.

How can such police-state actions be defended under the guise of “democracy”? This hypocrisy is evident to all, and is haunting Macapagal-Arroyo and her backers. The uprising against the Ramos/Macapagal-Arroyo junta has been dubbed “Edsa III” — for Epiphany of the Saints Avenue, which commemorates the independence movement against Spain in the 19th Century, and is the site which served as the gathering point for the 1985 demonstrations against Marcos, as well as the January demonstrations against Estrada (Edsa II), and now the demonstrations defending Estrada and the Constitution (Edsa III). The brutal military crackdown on Edsa III killed six and injured more than 100. President Macapagal-Arroyo, on the day of the crackdown, speaking with the cocksure attitude of a little Hitler, told an emissary of Estrada:

“Take your best shot. Come here now, strike now, so I can crush you.” She warned the demonstrators she would “beat them to a pulp. Even the enemies of the state did not realize that this wisp of a girl can be tough.” She told the press that she had modelled herself on Britain’s “Iron Lady,” former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Opposition leader Juan Ponce Enrile and former Ambassador to the United States Ernesto Maceda were taken into custody, while nine others were ordered arrested. Two of those targeted for arrest, Sen. Gregorio “Gringo” Honasan, a longtime opponent of Ramos and his circles, and former Police Chief Panfilo Lacson, went into hiding. Sources in the Philippines indicate that these two have good reason to fear for their lives. The new Police Chief, Reynaldo Barroya, was once successfully prosecuted, under Estrada’s direction (as head of an anti-crime task force during the Ramos Administration), for complicity with the gangs that were kidnapping Chinese-Filipinos for ransom. Ramos later released Barroya from prison, just as Estrada was mounting his campaign for the Presidency.

However, just days before the May 14 election, under widespread accusations that she had subverted the elections by jailing her opponents, Macapagal-Arroyo lifted the “State of Rebellion,” and announced a “safe conduct” for the fugitives to come out of hiding, to campaign without fear of arrest. As the “offer” may not have been enforced by Police Chief Barroya, it was not accepted.

## No Clean Sweep

Nonetheless, as of May 16, based on unofficial results coming in from the May 14 elections, all three of the Senatorial candidates charged with rebellion have been re-elected, along with the election of Estrada’s wife, Luisa Ejercito. Although official results will not be in for several days, the attempt by Macapagal-Arroyo to gain a “clean sweep” in the elections, in order to legitimize the police-state measures, has been defeated. A more contrite President has now changed her tune, pleading: “Let’s be united again. It’s time for healing.” Asked if that included the opposition leaders who face charges of rebellion, she said, “I’ll pray on that.”

What most frightens the President and her controllers, foreign and domestic, was expressed in a May 4 column in the *Manila Times* by Herman Tiu Laurel (who often carries

reports from *EIR*), entitled “The Situation Is Excellent”: “Edsa III brought us a truly historic moment, and the country will never be the same again. Overnight, the nation realized: Philippine democracy has become a myth, the freedom and integrity of the mainstream press and media is a lie, the Catholic Church is of the rich and not of the poor. . . . The military institutions are in a quandary. They have generals who kowtowed to a minority and withdrew support from the constitutionally established order, only to stake claims to juicy posts. Turncoat military officers and suspected rogue police officers are ensconced in positions of information and power. Civil liberties are threatened with warrant-less arrests. The Left is thrown into confusion as its popular symbols [are] defending the Ramos-GMA [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo] fascist regime from the masses.”

Just as the idiocy and recklessness of the Bush Administration is forcing populations and political leaders around the world to re-examine their acceptance of Anglo-American dictates, so also the Philippine population is beginning to show that they can only be pushed so far. It is increasingly apparent that the nation has lost much of its sovereignty, that decisions affecting the welfare of the nation are being made in Washington—at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) headquarters, the State Department, or the White House. Was it mere coincidence that General Ramos was visiting with Bush Administration officials in Washington during Edsa III, while longtime ally of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and “Philippines handler” Hank Greenberg of AIG was having tea with Macapagal-Arroyo in the Palace?

The policy of the Bush Administration toward Asia is a tired re-run of “divide and conquer” tactics. Blundering forward with destabilizations and the “confrontation of China” policy espoused by Administration fanatics around Paul Wolfowitz and Richard Armitage, Asian nations are being told, directly or indirectly, that they must “take sides” on the manufactured U.S.-China conflict. Australia has already sided with the United States, offering up its territory for deployment of the provocative National Missile Defense being pushed by the Bush team. Those who resist such Cold War tactics are liable to get the Indonesia treatment, where the IMF has suspended support, while Western governments and the press are using the economic crisis to further aggravate ethnic, religious, and separatist tensions.

### **More of the IMF Program**

In the Philippines, the Ramos/Arroyo regime is rushing to implement the IMF program for selling off national industries to foreign bidders, privatizing the electric power grid, and otherwise sacrificing the general welfare to the gods of globalization. On China, the new National Security Adviser to Macapagal-Arroyo, Roilo Golez, a longtime collaborator of knee-jerk conservative U.S. Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), is orchestrating provocations against China over the contested Spratly Islands. Golez has reversed Manila’s policy of engagement with China followed by the Estrada regime,

declaring China to be “too close for comfort” and a strategic threat.

The extensive “Left” in the Philippines has been left in a quandary by the police-state measures taken against Edsa III, as expressed by Walden Bello of the Focus on the Global South, a guru of the non-governmental organizations. He reported in a column in the *Philippines Inquirer* that he had heeded Macapagal-Arroyo’s appeal to call out his forces to defend her against the mob, but was most uncomfortable about the fact “that we, supposedly a mass party for the masses, were ranged against masses mobilized by almost millinarian fervor.” As to the Catholic Church under the direction of Cardinal Sin, Bello admitted: “Recent events underlined how badly out of synch it is with the vast masses of Filipinos. Indeed, along with President Arroyo and former Presidents Cory Aquino and Fidel Ramos, Cardinal Jaime Sin was one of the principal figures of the so-called Edsa III’s rogues’ gallery.” Bello concluded: “The traditional elite in this country is notorious for its lack of a truly enlightened faction, and with much of the political counter-elite consolidated around Estrada’s bankrupt populism, a Filipino Franklin D. Roosevelt simply is not in the cards.”

Ironically, there is in fact a growing movement in the Philippines in the tradition of FDR—that of the LaRouche Society of the Philippines, named after Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., the founding editor of *EIR* and a Democratic U.S. Presidential pre-candidate for 2004. LaRouche’s economic, political, and cultural ideas are spreading in the Philippines, supported by a weekly radio show in Manila, hosted by Herman Tiu Laurel, which interviews LaRouche or one of his associates from *EIR* each week. LaRouche has warned that the sovereignty of the nation, like that of many nations around the world today, has been subverted through foreign controls over the economy, and increasingly over the political process itself. To regain the nation’s sovereignty, Philippine leaders must move outside the controlled local environment, to join with the emerging alliance of Eurasian nations, as represented at the historic Schiller Institute conference in Bad Schwabach, Germany on May 4-6 (see *EIR*, May 18, 2001, and this week’s *Feature*), to build a new world financial system and launch the development of the Eurasian continent as a whole.

The Philippines, as a nation itself shaped in part by the policies of FDR, and as the only Catholic nation in Asia, has a particularly crucial role to play in bringing about that new world economic order. The role of Pope John Paul II over the past weeks, in his mission of peace to Greece and Syria, “in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul,” and in his defense of the “the common good” against the ravages of globalization, are in stark contrast to the policies of political intrigue and collaboration with the financial oligarchy carried out by Cardinal Sin. The policies of LaRouche, in conjunction with those of the Pope, provide the global framework for the people of the Philippines to regain their sovereignty and save their national heritage.