
Interview: Reynaldo Puno

What's at stake in the coming election

Mr. Puno, minister counselor for public affairs of the Philippine embassy in Washington, D.C., was interviewed on Dec. 13 by EIR's Washington bureau chief Nicholas Benton.

EIR: . . . What do you see as the alternatives facing the Filipino people, and their impact on the United States, in the upcoming Feb. 7 election?

Puno: This will be the first time in our country's history that the elections will involve primarily a case of ideology. Since the post-World War II period, most of our elections have involved parties which generally acknowledge a certain amount of cooperation with the government and people of the United States. They recognize the historic ties that bind our peoples.

In this coming election, both parties involved in the election believe that the issues will be ideological. They will focus on two main issues. The first will have to do with the legalization of the Communist Party in the Philippines. The ruling party, Kilusang Bagong Lipunan (KBL), which translates into English as the New Society Movement, has thus far refused to legalize the Communist Party. The reason for this is that the Communist Party carries, as part of its agenda, the violent overthrow of the legitimate government in our country, and, of course, the ruling party is against this. It refuses to recognize this party and allow it participation in our political process, unless it disavows this trend towards violent overthrow. However, the opposition party, in its current platform, believes in the unconditional legalization of the Communist Party.

The second point at issue has to do with the continuation of the presence of the United States' bases in the Philippines. . . . The position of the ruling party is that regional security must be maintained, and there is every indication that the agreements that have been made thus far do contribute to regional security, and as long as these conditions remain, there is no reason why beyond 1991 the same arrangements of regional security should not be continued. The opposition party, on the other hand, has maintained that they will ask the Filipino people in a plebiscite their views on whether or not the presence of the bases should be maintained. There are two parties involved in the opposition group today. The Unido, which is the party of Sen. Salvador Laurel, the vice-presidential candidate, and the Laban Ng Bayan

(Laban) party, which translates as the Revolutionary Struggle Party, which is the party of Mrs. Aquino, the presidential candidate. The party of the presidential candidate has as one of the points in its platform the removal of U.S. bases from the Philippines. . . .

EIR: Here in Washington, there are the outspoken critics of Marcos in the U.S. Congress, one being Representative Stephen Solarz [D-N.Y.], whose committee seems to have found just this particular time to consider an investigation of some of President Marcos's real-estate holdings here. You wouldn't suspect that there might be an attempt to conduct this investigation for political purposes, would you?

Puno: It is an investigation of President Marcos's alleged real-estate holdings in the United States. Of course, many people are of the firm belief that there is no such thing. With respect to what the intentions are of this congressional investigation, what the U.S. Congress wishes to do is up to its own representatives. However, the perception in the Philippines is that the timing of this investigation is very curious, indeed, because they are covering issues which have been ventilated in your media, your newspapers, for the past couple of months. These are issues that are being brought up by the opposition candidates in the country today. . . .

We believe it is in the interest of the American people and the American Congress that these elections be conducted in as fair and objective a manner as possible, with a minimum amount of interference or commentary from parties that are not directly involved in the process. . . .

EIR: What is your perception of the strategic importance of Clark Air Field and Subic Bay, given the Soviet operations in that region?

Puno: I will make my observations from the point of view of a Filipino. You know, the United States might have its own reasons for having its facilities in the Philippines. However, here you have a small country in a region of the world that is considered a developing region, not as advanced as the other regions of the world. And there are major powers in our area. The United States has been there since early in the century—our country was a colony of the United States since 1898. Recently, of course, there has been an increased presence of the Soviet Union, and of course the People's Republic of China is just a short distance away from our country.

Now, while we wish to maintain friendship with all of these countries, it is of course a matter of concern to us that there not be too many abrupt changes in our region. We believe that the best way to preserve peace and security in our region of the world is for everyone to be able to function as freely as possible in an atmosphere of peace, freedom, and neutrality. And we believe that a development radically in favor of any of the forces in the region, which would cause instability in the balance of power, would be disadvantageous and possibly disastrous countries like ours. . . .