
PHILIPPINES

The Aquino murder: in whose interest?

by Richard Katz

The Aug. 21 airport assassination of Philippines opposition leader Benigno Aquino has been used to mount a new round of destabilization against President Ferdinand Marcos and his program for economic development. The campaign to remove Marcos and turn the Philippines into a new Iran is being run by a coalition joining oligarchic families with Maoists and Jesuit priests, with the assistance of the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. State Department.

The Western press accuses Marcos of ordering the assassination, but he did not stand to benefit. Indeed, his government is now being weakened by the accusations. Pressure is growing on President Reagan to cancel the trip to the Philippines he has scheduled for November. Congressman Stephen Solarz (D-N.Y.), a longtime Marcos foe who will visit the Philippines in September, has called for an "impartial" investigation of the killing, warning of problems for the \$900 million aid package in Congress.

The State Department has already announced in warning tones that it "trusts" Marcos will launch a full and impartial investigation, thus acting, as one Washington source put it, "like they acted with the Shah of Iran. They are nominally supporting him, but are in fact undercutting him." During Secretary of State George Shultz's trip to Manila this June, he told reporters on the plane that his subordinates would meet with opposition leaders, lest the United States be caught short, as in Iran, when Marcos falls or dies.

Philippines sources say that Aquino's funeral on Aug. 28 may be spark a prolonged campaign of demonstrations and terrorism to bring down Marcos.

Philippines opposition

Aquino was the most prominent of the opposition leaders against Marcos's rule; a decade of martial law ended only recently. The opposition movement ranges from the radical Maoists of the New People's Army and the Libyan-armed Muslim autonomy rebels in the Philippines' southern islands, to the Jesuit order and Cardinal Jaimie Sin, to right-wing plantation-owning families. The common denominator of all groupings is opposition to the president's efforts to industrial-

ize the country.

Aquino himself, though sentenced to death for an alleged political murder, was allowed by Marcos to leave the Philippines three years ago in order to get a heart operation in the United States. Aquino remained in the United States as an instructor at Harvard, and later MIT. He was sponsored by Harvard's Jerome Cohen, a prominent figure in efforts to undermine modernization in Korea as well as the Philippines, and a major proponent of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski's "China Card" policy. Aquino was also in continual contact with the State Department.

Despite warnings from the Philippines government and his own supporters that he might be killed, Aquino chose to return to the Philippines in order to ignite a mass campaign to bring down Marcos. He told friends on the plane that he might be killed but that he did not expect Marcos would be responsible. He suggested two other possibilities: either the extremists within the opposition movement trying to "radicalize" that movement, or else a faction of the army worried that Aquino would be the strongest contender for succession once Marcos dies.

Shultz's role

Whoever planned the pulling of the trigger, the assassination of Aquino is the latest stage of pressure on the Marcos government, pressure abetted by the State Department and the IMF and World Bank. In opposition to the plantation-owning oligarchic families, who wish to leave the Philippines a raw materials exporter, Marcos had developed an important, albeit flawed, program of industrialization. For example, ten years ago almost all exports were primary commodities; now at least half are manufactured goods. Marcos has also been pursuing nuclear energy, hydroelectric and irrigation dams, and other big industrial construction projects.

The World Bank, charging that such projects are merely boondoggles to enrich Marcos, has pressured the Philippines government to cut down its investment program, to cut its budget, and to devalue its currency. Shultz, on his trip this June, praised the currency devaluation just announced and urged further austerity measures. Shultz is well aware that the economic turmoil caused by such austerity programs undermines popular confidence in Marcos even more.

Under this pressure, in the past few months the Philippines, along with Indonesia and Malaysia—countries hitherto developing rapidly despite the world trade depression—has had to slash billions of dollars worth of investment projects and subsidies on basic consumers staples that maintain bare subsistence.

Opposition leader Eva Estrada Kalaw told the *Washington Post* on Aug. 24 that the opposition "moderates" might seek reconciliation with a "decent sector of the government," naming Prime Minister Cesar Virata. Virata is the World Bank's man within the regime, and rumors have circulated for weeks that Marcos would like to fire him.