

# Aquino challenged in Philippines by Grand Alliance for Democracy

by Linda de Hoyos

In the 13 months since the United States orchestrated the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos, the events in the Philippines have borne out the warnings of this news service: The Aquino government has been unable to bring stability to either the nation or the economy. Especially since the U.S.-orchestrated ouster of Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile in November, the alliance between Aquino and the military has been shattered, with the political momentum going to the New People's Army. By all accounts, the Philippines was on its way to becoming "another Vietnam."

But on March 8, the Philippines was given a new chance, with the formal announcement of the formation of the Grand Alliance for Democracy, the opposition slate that will present a formidable challenge to Aquino in the May national elections for congress. The Grand Alliance, led by its chairman, Vicente Puyat, brings together a coalition of leaders from four different parties to present to the voters an alternative platform based on national sovereignty—as opposed to the Aquino government's disastrous policy-combination of appeasement toward the NPA and adherence to the economic austerity dictated by its international creditors.

The Grand Alliance is fielding a full slate of 24 senators against Aquino in the elections, bringing together many of the most respected among Filipino leaders, including many of the key figures, like Puyat himself, who fought against Ferdinand Marcos.

"We have been promised democracy, but we do not have it," stated Puyat at the press conference announcing the Alliance. The Alliance, he stated, will take issue with Aquino on three major points—the government's "cavalier manner in the handling of the rapidly deteriorating insurgency problem"; the "inadequacy of the Aquino government's economic program"; and the "dismal re-emergence of corruption in government."

On the nationally televised "Issues and Answers" program on March 10, Puyat elaborated the Alliance's economic program, in a direct challenge to the Aquino cabinet's kowtowing to the international banks. "The Philippines must not carry out a carbon-copy of the prescriptions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on the domestic economy," he said. "The Peru or Brazil model should be

followed by our government," Puyat stated, in reference to these nations' rebuff to IMF conditionalities. "The Latin Americans have been tough in their negotiations. They are telling the banks, 'We either pay you according to our capability, or we don't pay at all.' We should follow their example."

Puyat noted that the Philippines cannot expect large inflows of capital investment until the near civil war conditions in the country are abated. "We need a clear and unified policy against the insurgency," he said. But in a clear rejection of the Operation Phoenix assassination programs that failed in Vietnam and are peddled in the Philippines by Gen. (ret.) John Singlaub, Puyat affirmed: "This policy cannot be based on counter-insurgency; it must be based on nation-building."

The Alliance is also demanding a full renegotiation of the lease for the U.S. bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay, negotiations based on "national sovereignty" and the strategic interests of both the United States and the Philippines. "We do not need a 'good advice' and pats on the back from the U.S.," stated Alliance candidate Blas Ople. "What we need is capital investment and transfers of technology, Marshall Plan style."

## What is the Grand Alliance for Democracy?

The Grand Alliance is composed of leaders of the Nacionalista Party, the Liberal Party, the Philippines Nationalist Party, and leaders who have left the KBL party of Marcos. Among its leading candidates are Eva Kalaw of the Liberal Party; René Espina, who recently resigned as secretary general of the government coalition Unido Party; Francisco Tatad, a former information minister who became the first cabinet member to leave the Marcos government in protest; former defense minister Enrile; former labor minister Blas Ople; Wilson Gamboa, formerly of the Unido party who has just resigned as undersecretary of defense in the Aquino cabinet; Isidro Rodriguez, former governor of Rizal and former KBL member; and former justice minister Arturo Tolentino.

Eight of the 24-member list are considered "shoo-ins." However, Tolentino told the press March 8, "We intend to take the majority. That is, anywhere between 13 and 24." If

the Alliance succeeds in this mission, it will call into question Aquino's ability to serve out her term.

Many of the Alliance senate candidates could have found places on the slates of either Aquino or Salvador Laurel's Unido Party, but declined. In a televised breakfast meeting March 9, Alliance chairman Puyat explained his reasons for founding the opposition slate, given his well-known role in bringing down the Marcos government. In answer to reporters' queries, Puyat explained: "Since my father was the president of the Senate and the head of the Nacionalista Party, I inherited from him my respect for the republic, which brought me into opposition against Marcos." Puyat told how this opposition had led him to play a leading personal role in bringing together the coalition of Aquino and Salvador Laurel's Unido Party, to challenge Marcos in the February 1986 elections. But, he stated, "I must tell you that I have been gravely disappointed in the government. I have no personal quarrels with Mrs. Aquino, but I believe she has permitted herself to be surrounded by people who will destroy the country, the republic, and this is why I have reluctantly taken this position."

### **Cory: a narrowing political base**

This is a formidable moral challenge to "Saint Cory" at a point when the Aquino government has proven itself unable to bring economic and political stability to the country. Since the November removal of Enrile from the Aquino government, the political base of that government has steadily narrowed. On the one side, the government has lost its broad support among the left—the NPA and its political fronts. The left let its controlled constituents vote "yes" for the draft constitution on Feb. 2, boosting the 80% "people's power" mandate Aquino had called for. Otherwise, the left is at war.

On the other side, Aquino's continual insults to the military have alienated the armed forces and destroyed the AFP—"people's power" alliance that brought down Marcos. The split surfaced openly with the declaration in late February by Armed Forces chief of staff Fidel Ramos, a staunch Aquino loyalist, that the army would take resolute action against the NPA, given that the level of violence has reverted to the highest levels of 1985 since the end of the NPA-AFP cease-fire Feb. 10.

Ramos received an immediate answer from the Aquino-controlled *Manila Chronicle*, whose lead editorial was headlined: "Ramos Proposal Reverts to Martial Law." The armed forces want a "monolith" against the insurgency, the *Chronicle* complained, leaving the government on the sidelines. "This felicitous combination of insight and military dogma" coming from Ramos is why "the military and the government cannot act in concert," the daily concluded.

The Aquino cabinet currently mimics that coalition of oligarchs and jacobins that carried out the British-instigated French Revolution in opposition to the principles of the American Revolution in 1791-93. At the center of the coterie

around Aquino is Jovito Salonga, the reported "Rasputin" of Malacanang Palace. The head of the "Good Government Commission," to retrieve the Marcos billions, Salonga is an executive board member of the World Council of Churches, the Soviet front. Aquino's slate is led by such pro-NPA jacobins as René Saguisag, Raul Manglapus, Salonga, and Sonny Alvarez, Marcos foes who—like Benigno Aquino himself—left the Philippines during the Marcos years to hit the cocktail circuits of Boston, New York, and Washington, and were protected by benefactors such as Ramsey Clark and the Project Democracy networks in the United States.

In league with the jacobins are the oligarchs, represented by Aquino herself and her brothers in the Cojuangco family who run the Filipino gambling and prostitution franchise; Central Bank chief José Fernandez; and Finance Minister Jaime Ongpin.

There is also a minority strain of nationalists in the Aquino cabinet: Leticia Shehani, former deputy foreign minister; Solita Monsod, the head of the National Economic Development Agency (NEDA); and presidential executive secretary Joker Arroyo, who has stated on U.S. television that national economic development is the only route toward solving the insurgency.

The demands from the Grand Alliance for economic sovereignty and the "Peruvian solution" for the Philippines has given this nationalist faction new leverage. Shortly after Puyat's televised speech demanding a rejection of the IMF, Aquino candidate Shehani, the sister of Armed Forces chief Fidel Ramos, declared that "our creditors must realize that they cannot get blood from a stone." Monsod simultaneously released figures showing that if a settlement with the bankers goes through, the Philippines will be forced to send a net outflow of \$7 billion from the country over the next five years.

On March 16, Manila's newspapers were headlined with broadside attacks from Joker Arroyo against Ongpin, accusing the finance minister of "blindly advocating World Bank and International Monetary Fund formulas for repayment of the nation's debt," reported UPI. Ongpin is "battling for IMF-World Bank conditions even if they treat the Aquino government as if it were the Marcos government," Arroyo charged. Ongpin, in turn, complained that Arroyo is blocking government projects by delaying a proposed tax increase.

Arroyo is now being ousted by the so-called Council of Trent—Ongpin, Cojuangco, et al.—surrounding Aquino. Aquino, however, while acquiescing in his removal, has stated that she will determine its timing. If Arroyo is removed, Manila sources indicate, he could take with him the entire nationalist faction in the Aquino slate over to the opposition.

The shifting currents in the Aquino cabinet already attest to the political and programmatic strength represented by the Alliance for Democracy, a strength that could forge the pathway out of the dire crisis this ally faces.