

# The Unarmed Opponents of Marcos

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MANILA, Aug. 26 — Those Filipinos who are seeking a nonviolent end to President Ferdinand E. Marcos's rule say they are afraid they could face political extinction.

Since the assassination Sunday of the opposition's most popular leader, former Senator Benigno S. Aquino Jr., his allies have been emphasizing publicly and privately that the armed forces of the left and the right could soon leave the unarmed middle with nothing to do.

"We are only 30 percent of the opposition in this country," former Senator Salvador H. Laurel said in a speech about Mr. Aquino to the National Assembly on Tuesday. "Seventy percent is in the hills," he warned, and the nonviolent opposition is "thinning out."

Many other Filipinos, including the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, some of whose more radical priests are known to have become guerrillas, were voicing the same warning with increasing urgency even before Mr. Aquino was slain.

## A Time for Reappraisal

Since Sunday these worries have deepened and have led the leaders to reappraise where they are now and where they may be going.

The nonviolent opponents of the 18-year-old Marcos Government include a wide variety of Filipinos, whose objections to Mr. Marcos range from his authoritarian policies to the corruption and poverty that have continued to trouble the nation.

The opponents include wealthy politicians from the days of American-style democracy before 1972, when Mr. Marcos declared martial law, as well as organized groups of urban squatters. The opponents include significant sections of the middle class who resent the extraordinary powers that the President retained after martial law was lifted in 1981. It also includes many Catholics who feel that arbitrary power, gross inequalities of wealth and growing political violence are immoral.

President Marcos has created a dominant political party, the New Society Movement, and his own public support is thought to remain strong among farmers who have benefited from a partial redistribution of land and others who have gained from his economic policies.

## Obstacles for the Opposition

The President's control has remained all but absolute, and the moderate opposition has faced many obstacles to their hope that the current Government will be peacefully removed and a workable democracy restored.

The moderate opposition, a loose movement whose members have often

spent more time arguing among themselves than with the Government, does agree on a set of common goals: the restoration of democratic processes, including an end to presidential authoritarianism, a free press and free and fair elections.

For more than a decade President Marcos has had the power to order the arrest of essentially anyone in the country. Normal court procedures and appeals often do not apply in such cases. Opposition politicians, critical journalists and many others, including Mr. Aquino, have been imprisoned over the years on charges of subversion. Many Filipinos refuse to believe the Government's insistence that such prisoners were often connected with armed rebels, including the Communists.

News organizations are tightly controlled in the Philippines. Many newspapers and television stations are owned by personal friends and associates of the Marcos family, and little sustained criticism of the Government appears. In recent months critical columnists have lost their jobs at The Bulletin Today, Manila's largest daily newspaper, and the editors and writers of the small-circulation We Forum have been arrested for subversion and sued for libel by the military after casting doubts on Mr. Marcos's record in World War II.

## Reports of Election Fraud

Elections in the Philippines have always been rough and riotous, but the polls and referendums that have been held since martial law began have been called fundamentally inadequate by many people. In 1978, for example, when the last parliamentary elections were held, there were widespread reports of stuffed ballot boxes and other frauds.

The opposition candidates that year, led by Mr. Aquino, who campaigned from jail, failed to win a single seat in metropolitan Manila despite their obvious popularity in some districts. Some opposition candidates won fewer votes in some precincts than they had voting members of their own families.

There is still great uncertainty about Mr. Aquino's possible replacement as the leader of the opposition. But there are several people who could be considered the political heir of Mr. Aquino.

At 85 years of age, former Senator Lorenzo Tanada is considered too old to be the driving force in a campaign against Mr. Marcos, but he still commands a larger following than any other opposition leader. He was Mr. Aquino's campaign manager in the 1978 elections, founded the Laban (Fight) Party with Mr. Aquino and is considered a possible transitional figure.

Jose W. Diokno, a lawyer and Democratic Socialist, has concentrated on human rights rather than party politics in recent years. His advice is widely sought, and he is believed to have abandoned any presidential ambitions out of a conviction that his ideas are too anti-American to succeed in the Philippines in his lifetime.

Former Senator Laurel is known to have presidential ambitions, and he has become highly visible as president of the United Nationalist Democratic Organization, a coalition of a dozen opposition parties. He is one of the few outspoken opponents of Mr. Marcos who has never been arrested, and he was one of the few elected to the National Assembly in 1978.

Aquilino Pimentel, the Mayor of Cagayan de Oro City, is widely popular and also known as an efficient and articulate administrator. Three years ago he founded the Filipino Democratic Party, a progressive Roman Catholic group that says it has 10,000

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disciplined members. He was recently arrested on charges of subversion. Jaime Cardinal Sin, the Archbishop of Manila, helped persuade President Marcos to reduce the incarceration to house arrest.

Another leader of Mr. Pimentel's party, Ramon Mitra, has a reputation as a seasoned leader with a particular following among the young. He was a member of Mr. Aquino's Liberal Party before martial law and received the nation's largest vote for Senator in the 1971 elections.

## A Formidable Public Speaker

Homobono Adaza is the president of the Mindanao Alliance, an opposition party based on the big southern island of Mindanao. He is also the elected Governor of Misamis Oriental Province, and he helped secure the election of more than 1,500 party members as village and local officials in his area. He is considered a formidable public speaker.

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There has also been much talk in recent days that Mr. Aquino's 44-year-old brother, Agapito, should be raised up in traditional Filipino style to replace Mr. Aquino.

The fear of polarization, meanwhile, has infected recent political discussion. Interviews in the last month with more than a dozen politically active students, Catholic seminarians and community organizers revealed deep cynicism about the democratic opposition and sympathy, in some cases, for the New People's Army, the military wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Nonviolent opposition leaders cite such attitudes as a danger that they have faced for years but one that may now grow worse.

Mr. Adaza, the opposition leader from Mindanao, said the New People's Army made significant inroads in his area in the last decade. Speaking of opposition politics after Mr. Aquino's death, he said, "Nothing will be the same after this."