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# philippines - shuffles at the top

Nothing brings down dictators quicker than their backers getting cold feet. If anything, recent events in the Philippines have shown just how true this is, and how much influence the US imperialism, has over politics in its client states. In the space of a month, the Philippines have seen a fraudulent election, the installation of two presidents at the same time, a revolt in the army and then the resignation of a dictator who could not even trust his own generals. To cap it all Ferdinand Marcos was replaced by Cory Aquino, widow of a liberal politician and member of one of the most wealthy families. She has no political program nor any political experience.

Before Marcos fled the country politics was relatively easy for Cory Aquino - all she had to do was attack the dictatorship and smile at the television cameras.

Reconciling the strategic interests of the US with the desires of the Philippino people for real independence may prove to be a far more difficult task.

The importance of the Philippines to the US is undeniable. For more than forty years the Philippines

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were a colony of the United States. After World War the Philippines gained formal independence, but not much more. Today the largest US airforce and navy bases outside the United States are in the Philippines. Apart from the Marcos and the Aquino family fortune almost the entire economy is controlled by US corporations. Since he came to power in the 1960s Marcos was backed by the US.

For the US, the elections were like no other in the third world. Over one thousand American journalists covered the campaign. For two weeks the television coverage in the US made it seem as if it was the American people who were going to vote, instead of those in the Philippines. Marcos first announced the election on US television, and it was only announced back home the next day. By calling the elections Marcos was buying time from the US in a last attempt to prove that he could still control and govern the country.

These elections, and the eventual flight of Marcos have been presented in most South African commercial newspapers as a 'victory for democracy'. Things are, however, not that simple. In fact, the major democratic opposition groups in the Philippines did not even participate in the elections.

The largest legal opposition party is Bayan (the New Patriotic Alliance) which has over one million members. Bayan has been at the forefront of the mass mobilisation and organisation of the past 5 years in which millions of people opposed the government.

At the same time the banned National Democratic Front, and its military wing, the New People's Army have won massive victories in the rural areas. The NPA has doubled in size in the past three years and now has 20 000 combatants and over 1 million active

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supporters. Low morale and corruption in the government army has allowed the NPA to defeat them in many battles.

Both Bayan and the National Democratic Front have called for the removal of the US bases, the redistribution of wealth and the establishment of a people's government free from US control. It is the strength of popular support for these demands that has made the US scared. Even large sections of the church and the middle classes had come to support Bayan and the NDF.

Because of this the US saw Aquino as a defence against the Philippino people. Aquino, while opposed to Marcos and his corruption, has said that she will not negotiate with the 'illegal' opposition until they stop the armed struggle, and that the US bases will remain. At the same time she has released political prisoners and says she will make the army more efficient and will stop corruption in the government.

In many ways the new government is only a change at the top. The demands of the people have not been met. Aquino has the support of the United States and history has shown that the interests of the Philippino people and of US imperialism are very different.

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