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## The Philippines

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# New scandals hit the Marcos government

by Vin Berg

Three days after President Reagan's refusal, during his second televised debate with Walter Mondale, to withdraw U.S. support for the government of the Philippines, a new wave of scandals rocked the political and military associates of President Ferdinand Marcos, threatening to fissure the government's base of support in the army and business community. Three army generals and 26 officers, including the chief of staff, General Ver, were forced to at least temporarily step down when the Oct. 24 report of an investigative commission implicated them in the murder of opposition leader Benigno Aquino one year ago. In addition, Eduardo Cojuangco, a powerful industrial magnate close to Marcos, was named as a co-conspirator. Other of the so-called "cronies" of the President have had their roles in public corporations attacked.

How dangerously close to chaos this could bring the country is indicated by reports carried in the *Metro Manila Times* of a 20,000-man vigilante army operating in Mindanao, which could disrupt the normal chain of command of the military and national police forces, from which its ranks are said to be drawn.

A day before the Aquino report was issued, Corazon Agrava, the head of the commission, jumped the gun by presenting her own minority report on the Aquino murder, which also blamed a "military conspiracy," but instead of General Ver, named General Custodion of the Aviation Security Command. While 68 generals, including the four heads of the armed forces, declared their "unswerving loyalty" to General Ver, Marcos immediately named a special civilian tribunal to prosecute the case because the military is involved.

During the second presidential debate, Reagan pointedly declared that, while there are many things relating to democratic rights in the Philippines that do not please his administration, the sole alternative to the "current government" is chaos and a probable takeover by a rapidly growing communist-controlled guerrilla movement, the NPA—a point with which even fragmented Filipino opposition leaders privately concur. Were the country plunged into chaos, the United States would be driven out of its strategically vital Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay navy logistics center, effectively abandoning the Pacific to Soviet domination.

Desertion of Asia by the United States is precisely the

policy of Henry Kissinger's circles, including those inside the U.S. Executive Branch. The new political destabilization, which occurs as the policies of the International Monetary Fund are plunging the country into economic chaos, has the public support of the U.S. State Department. In what is universally read as an endorsement for the prosecution of General Ver, for example, State Department spokesman John Hughes told the press on Oct. 23: "What I am suggesting is that, when the majority report is available, we expect that just as effective and comprehensive action will be taken in the courts against anybody named in the majority report, should those names be different from those named in the minority report. What we support in the Philippines is the rule of law and justice, and we would expect that President Marcos would pursue the rule of law and justice in this case. And we certainly hope that that will be pursued vigorously."

In the days since the debate, pressures aimed at forcing Reagan to distance himself from Marcos have mounted. Geraldine Ferraro issued a statement condemning the Marcos government, as Mondale did in the debate. An Oct. 24 *New York Times* editorial on the Philippines took the side of the State Department against the President, writing: "Since the elimination of his chief democratic rival [Aquino], Mr. Marcos has been energetically arguing that the only alternative to his repressive rule is Communism—a false argument unthinkingly echoed by President Reagan in Sunday's debate. . . . The main opposition to Mr. Marcos is not Communist but a resolutely democratic coalition. It aims to return the country to its republican, American-inspired traditions. . . . Perhaps the best reply to Mr. Reagan is that of Ramon Maitra, an opposition leader. 'The alternative to Marcos is democratic government,' he said. 'But if there's one thing that may lead to Communism here, it is Marcos staying in power.'"

But behind the Filipino destabilization is not "American-tradition" republicans, but the same U.S.-based terrorist and dirty-operations network linked to the State Department and famously involved in toppling the Shah of Iran, led by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and the Council on Foreign Relations' Richard Falk, of Princeton. At a demonstration against Marcos and President Reagan staged by three U.S.-based Filipino opposition groups, an AP reporter was overheard asking a coalition leader, "Where's Ramsey Clark?" He couldn't make it, but sends his support, was the reply.

If there is "one thing" that will lead to communism and U.S. withdrawal from Asia, it is not Marcos but the International Monetary Fund. The fund, in the name of financial restructuring, is destroying the Philippines economy by forcing of an end to food subsidies, currency devaluation, and dismantling of public-sector corporations (i.e., the "cronies"). Marcos's Oct. 16 signature of a letter of intent to comply with IMF demands—under pressure from the U.S.!—led to two days of strikes and demonstrations throughout the country.