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Malagino
Blossoms of an Aborted Revolution
February 2020

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An anarchist reflection of the 1987 People Power Revolution
which deposed the dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

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Let us not mince our words. The EDSA Revolution has failed.

If you look around at the state of society in our archipelago, you can see clear parallels to the horrors of 1972. A dictator, with the military and police in the palm of his hand, supported by sycophants blindly loyal to his person and by local and foreign capitalist interests, brutally murdering and terrorizing the poor, and the dissidents who fight for them.

It's as if we never woke up from the nightmare.

Supporters of the revolution have praised it for being bloodless, and for setting an example of a peaceful transition to democracy. It is said to have inspired the revolts in Eastern Europe, the democratization of South Korea, and even the recent Arab Spring of 2011. What would have been the beginning of a bloody civil war, instead brought the all sectors of society to rally in the capital and force a dictator to resign. If there is any validation of the strength of civil disobedience, it is on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue from February 24 to 25, 1986.

However, detractors vilify its failure of replacing the prevailing order, instead replacing old oligarchs with new ones. For all the irony in their words, the right do have a point: EDSA 1 ended up futile in the end. That mass movement could have sown the seeds of a social revolution, towards the weakening and dismantling of Capital and State that has brutalized them for so long. It instead brought about the return of a cacique democracy: the perfect breeding ground for cultivating the return of a tyrant.

We cannot pinpoint where the Revolution was defeated by the interests of the ruling class. However, the events unfolding after February were already premonitions of its failure.

Unsuccessful attempts of the Cory Aquino administration at agrarian reform, already insufficient to address the feudalistic control of landowning families, caused peasants' organizations to strike in the nation's capital. Their concerns for recognition in land ownership were ignored by the government they supported to supplant the indulgently capitalist Marcos regime. They also criticized the background of the President, who came from the Cojuangco family, wealthy *hacenderos* who came to control the San Miguel Corporation. This all came to a head in Mendiola Bridge, on January 1987, when 13 were shot and killed and 51 demonstrators were injured by security forces.

The Reform the Armed Forces Movement, led by Col. Gregorio Honasan, who joined forces with pro-Marcos soldiers, couped the government multiple times from 1987–1990. The gravest one was on August 28, 1987, when forces launched a coordinated attack on multiple military bases and even Malacañang itself, which claimed 53 lives. There were also around 200 military and civilian injuries, including the future President, Benigno Aquino III. Ka Louie Beltran reported that the President “hid under her bed” during the revolt, prompting a libel charge and arguably, the first instance of the repression of press freedom since the Marcos era.

These incidents concerned the military officials from within the government. As a result, reformist and radical voices, once resounding in government, were silenced and pushed away. There was also tightened control over agitation by workers' organizations and human rights groups. These events all led to the rise of Fidel Ramos, from a coup's co-conspirator, to the right-hand man of the President. The rightist forces prevailed in the administration.

The government also authorized the establishment of paramilitary groups, ostensibly to counter the insurgency of the CPP-NPA-NDF. This, however, became pretense for politicians and military officers to create private armies at their own disposal, terrorizing political opponents and dissidents. To this day, we still deal with the legacy of these quasi-military forces, who offer no loyalty but to their financiers and patrons.

These incidents, along with neoliberal reforms and corruption by the President's own family, started to convince dissidents that we are still at status quo. First, of course, were the Marcos loyalists and Aquino critics that were itching for an electoral win. However, as the leftists woke up from their political accommodation—perhaps after shots were fired in Mendiola—it soon became apparent that EDSA didn't topple a system, it merely changed the king (or rather queen), on the throne.

This should be considered a missed opportunity, and possibly even a shame. Here was a chance to destroy a broken society fueled by capitalism and oppression of minorities, women, and the poor. Here was a peaceful movement that brought people of all social strata to commit mass civil disobedience. Here was a moment to propagate the ideas of egalitarianism and bayanihan, that could have led towards the dismantling of hierarchical and violent social structures that plague us today. Yet, in the end, the bourgeoisie, the *compradors*, and the imperialists prevailed.

However, there are also lessons that we can learn from this stillborn revolution as citizens of this archipelago. We cannot rely on electoralism to achieve the necessary fundamental changes in society. The State that is so intimately tied to Capital is not the vehicle for achieving lasting freedom and equality. The ruling classes that tailored the government for their own benefit cannot be the true representatives of the people, and their struggle. We have seen it before and after the EDSA Revolution. Marcos used the instruments of State to funnel wealth into his own pocket and the corporations of his cronies and financial backers. The same can be said for all presidents after, from Cory to Erap to Gloria and Duterte. Cory, for her part, blocked the passage of laws that would have brought needed reforms to the millions of Filipinos laboring away in the agricultural sector. It is the epitome of the ruling class protecting their own interests at the cost of the masses.

Simply, what we should take from EDSA is that regime change and replacing our presidents cannot bring about liberation. Liberation is the task of the oppressed and dispossessed alone.

Now, we are seeing history repeat itself in the form of Rodrigo Duterte. The ideals that made EDSA the foundation of the Fifth Republic have crumbled under the weight of an authoritarian government filled with lapdogs, lackeys, and opportunists. As we commemorate the end of an era, let us remind ourselves that we are entering another, perhaps as vile and oppressive. If we are called by our own consciences to rise up again; for the poor shot dead in the streets, for those arrested and tortured for speaking the truth; for the laborers organizing to receive the true value of their labor against the complex of Capital and State; let us lay the groundwork for an outright revolution, towards the total liberation of all people, and the end of all masters on this archipelago. Even an aborted revolution can bring the blossoms of freedom. A reminder of the failures past can be a guide for the success and victory of tomorrow.