

# Fifty years since the First Quarter Storm: the revolution diffused

Tuesday 1 June 2021, by [SCALICE Joseph](#) (Date first published: 16 April 2020).

**An eruption of protests and violence — molotov cocktails and gunfire — in the streets of Manila, launched the heady, charged days of January to March 1970. The paroxysm that opened the decade came to be known as the First Quarter Storm (FQS), a period which began on January 26 as Marcos delivered his State of the Nation address and which ended in late March as final exams commenced, the semester drew to a close, and students returned to their homes for the summer.**

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The events of the FQS, the explosion of protests and their eventual dispersal, marked a turning point in Philippine history. Marcos prepared the apparatus of military dictatorship; the ruling class opposition plotted assassinations and coups d’etat, angling to secure the reins of martial law for themselves.

The defense of democratic rights required the emerging mass movement presaged by the FQS to find its interests expressed in a political program independent from all of the rival factions of the elite and their headlong rush to dictatorship. The recently founded Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its allied organizations, particularly its youth wing, the Kabataang Makabayan (KM), directed the anger of the FQS away from such a program.

They claimed repeatedly that state repression would increase mass resistance and that the rise of ‘fascism’ would bring about revolution. In the name of the program of national democracy, they tied the restless energy of the storm to the political interests of the elite opposition to Marcos, claiming that it represented a progressive section of the ‘national bourgeoisie.’

The concentrated social outrage of the storm was diffused and dispersed by its leaders. It cropped up again and again, insistently seeking an independent way forward, but it was stymied at every turn. A little more than a year and half later, Marcos imposed his dictatorship.

What follows is a five part examination of the history of the First Quarter Storm based on contemporary accounts and the printed material produced by all of the competing political tendencies.

## Prelude

### *The build up to an explosion and political themes of the storm*

Fifty years ago this month an eruption of protests and violence — molotov cocktails and gunfire — in the streets of Manila, launched the heady, charged days of January to March 1970. The paroxysm that opened the decade came to be known as the First Quarter Storm (FQS), a period which began on January 26 as Marcos delivered his State of the Nation address and which ended in late March as final exams commenced, the semester drew to a close, and students returned to their homes for the summer.

What follows is the first of a series dealing with the critical events of the First Quarter Storm, a revolutionary moment in Philippine history. This initial post deals with the political themes which emerged to give shape to the storm during the first rumbling signs of its onset. More detailed development of these ideas, as well as citations for the quotations and facts included here, can be found in my [doctoral dissertation](#). I would encourage interested readers to find a copy of Jose Lacaba's *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage*, a compilation of articles originally written for the *Philippines Free Press*, which stands preeminent among the firsthand accounts documenting the events of the FQS. The slim volume transcends reportage and embodies in its prose both the shock and anger of the storm and ranks among the better works of Philippine literature in English. Lacaba wrote of the FQS:

... the blood-spattered truncheons, the fires in the night, the staccato of Armalites, the thunder of home-made bombs, the tear gas crawling down streets and alleys, the flag carried with the red field up, the fists in the air, the tramp of tired but resolute feet, and most of all the faces of an awakened nation, the dusty, sweaty, exultant faces of militant young men and women on the march, signing the vivid air with their courage. It was a glorious time, a time of terror and of wrath, but also a time for hope. The signs of change were on the horizon. A powerful storm was sweeping the land, a storm whose inexorable advance no earthly force could stop, and the name of the storm was history.

The new decade dawned to protests and repression in the streets of Manila, and Marcos, who had been re-elected president in November 1969 at the end of a campaign marked by immense corruption and violence, readied the apparatus of martial law. In January 1970, in the thick of demonstrations, "Marcos sent a large military convoy racing north to the Mansion House in Baguio, filled with money, guns, ammunition and government papers in crates, to set up an alternative seat of government." Amando Doronila, then writing for the *Daily Mirror*, "exposed a Department of Foreign Affairs circular asking all Philippine embassies and missions abroad to conduct research on cases where martial law had been imposed in other countries." According to Rodrigo, Marcos wrote in his diary in 1970

"The disorders must now be induced into a crisis so that stricter measures can be taken ... A little more destruction and vandalism, and I can do anything." He also wrote: "we should allow the communists to gather strength, but not such strength that we cannot overcome them." On February 12, 1970, he rued that a noisy student demo had ended peacefully: "I secretly hoped that the demonstration would attack the Palace so we could employ the total solution." His end goal was plain: "I have that feeling of certainty that I will end up with dictatorial powers."

As Marcos wound up the spiral spring of state repression, his rivals funded the protests; but when his leading opponents, the Lopez brothers, reached a temporary truce with Marcos in March, the FQS dissipated. The social anger of the masses marching in the streets was fueled by the

skyrocketing prices of basic necessities, massive social inequality and state repression in defense of it. They were organized, however, behind banners which denounced Marcos alone, citing his 'puppetry' and calling for his ouster. At no point did the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) or its front organizations, which came to play the leading role in the development of the storm, address the root of the social ills confronting the working class — capitalism.

From 1970 to 1972, in the midst of a devastating economic crisis which saw the price of basic goods move beyond the reach of the working class and peasantry, the CPP and its front organizations were in an alliance with leading representatives of the old landed oligarchy. The wealth of Lopez and Aquino was based in sugar, Laurel in coffee, and their sugar and coffee money provided financial and political support to the CPP. The Kabataang Makabayan (KM) and Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK), closely tied to the party, received favorable press coverage, television and radio slots to broadcast their ideas, and funding. Famed director and activist Behn Cervantes remarked, "Since this was the crest of the First Quarter Storm, it was relatively easy to get contributions [for the KM and SDK] from big business tycoons." This funding did not create the unrest, which arose from an explosive outrage at the political and economic crisis, but it did assist those responsible for directing it behind a specific set of elite interests.

The CPP used its forces among the youth, peasantry and working class to direct protests and strikes exclusively against Marcos on behalf of their allies, channeling all of the immense social anger of the time behind the interests of a section of the ruling class. The CPP entered alliances with the right-wing Social Democrat (SocDem) forces, whose roots lay in the ouster of Sukarno and the genocide of the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) and whose political orientation in the Philippines was to agitating for a military coup. Thus, the CPP not only provided Marcos with a pretext for martial law, they disarmed the only genuine opposition to military rule. None of the ruling class allies of the CPP were opposed to martial law; many, including Aquino, favored it, but desired to be sitting in Malacañang when the curtain of dictatorship rung down. Successful opposition to dictatorship rested in securing the independence of the working class from the entirety of the bourgeoisie, with its coup plotting and assassination schemes and machinations toward military rule. The CPP, in keeping with its Stalinist program, labored to thwart this independence, working at every turn to subordinate the class struggle of workers to the interests of the bourgeoisie. That the explosion of massive anger from the working class, confronting crisis and near starvation, was directed behind the interests of the ruling class rivals of Marcos was almost entirely the work of the CPP.

Marcos, meanwhile, plotting the imposition of dictatorship and laying the blame for the vast social unrest at the feet of the CPP, was secretly allied to the CPP's rival, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). The PKP, over the course of the next two years, assisted Marcos in his declaration of martial law, ghostwriting his justification for dictatorship and entering his cabinet. For all his denunciations of Communism, Marcos established his dictatorship with the complete support of one of the country's two Stalinist parties.

A series of protests, held in front of Malacañang on January 7, 16 and 22, saw tensions mount in the lead-up to the State of Nation Address on the twenty-sixth. Over the first weeks of January, the language of the protests shifted from the Kabataang Makabayan's (KM) initial rhetoric of "student reform" to the denunciation of Marcos as a "fascist."

The KM and SDK launched the first demonstration of 1970 narrowly focused on the issue of student reform. They envisioned protests proceeding along similar lines to those of early 1969, which had been marked by a series of university strikes demanding campus reforms, but sought this time to be at their head. Assembling in front of Malacañang on January 7, they described themselves to the press as the "student reform movement," and the *Collegian* reported that "Close to a thousand students from the University and other schools rallied before the Malacañang Palace yesterday [Jan

7] ... Workers who were on strike at Northern Motors joined the students." The rally turned, however, from the question of student reform to that of police brutality and the 'fascism' of the Marcos administration. This cantus firmus, adopted by group after group in counterpoint, served as the theme of the political fugue that was the FQS.

Rene Ciria-Cruz and Gary Olivar were among those who addressed the crowd. They explained that "the real enemies of the police are not the students, nor the workers and farmers but the American imperialists and the hacendero-comprador class who exploit them indirectly." In arguing that the police were somehow really the class allies of the students, workers and peasants, Ciria-Cruz and Olivar were repeating the perspective of Joma Sison, head of the KM, in his 1966 speech at Ateneo, "Nationalism and Youth," when he had referred to the "good elements" of the police force, "sympathetic to the cause of nationalism," as the spiritual offspring of Gregorio Del Pilar. With a flippancy of political rhetoric, these spokesmen of the SDK argued to a rally which was in part dedicated to denouncing 'fascism' and police brutality, that the police were in truth the allies of the assembled workers and students.

Demonstrations followed on January 16 and 22; the theme of student reform — still audible — was fading, while the staves on fascism augmented. According to the Samahang Pangkaunlaran ng Kaisipan (SPK), students gathered outside Malacañang on both the sixteenth and the twenty-second to request from the government the disbursement of funds which had been promised for public education. The placards and slogans of the assembled demonstrators, however, revealed that the political logic of the emerging movement was tending toward a far sharper conclusion. Over a thousand workers and students from a range of organizations, including KM, SDK, and SPK, rallied on the sixteenth; their signboards read "Justice is a slow process, revolution is faster," "PC-MPD-military arm of the ruling class," and "Ibagsak ang pasismo. [Down with fascism]" The assembled demonstrators denounced "the alliance between alien capitalists and the armed forces and the rise of fascism under the Marcos administration." Rodolfo del Rosario, the Vice President of the National Association of Trade Unions (NATU), and a member of KM, addressed the crowd, denouncing the conspiracy of foreign capitalists [kapitalistang kayuhan (sic)] and the police in suppressing the ongoing strike at Northern Motors — at the time the largest General Motors assembly plant outside the United States — and arresting workers without cause. The union leaders who spoke at the rally "revealed the increasing unrest in the labor sector as they spoke against the exploitative relationship perpetuated by American capitalists in collusion with their Filipino puppets in the business and government sectors." The demonstrators — workers and students — were violently dispersed by the police.

A new theme — neither student reform nor fascism, but a non-partisan Constitutional Convention — was briefly heard during the protests outside of the legislature during Marcos' State of the Nation Address as moderate student groups initially held the stage — the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP), National Student League (NSL) and the Young Christian Socialists of the Philippines (YCSP), a group tied to Raul Manglapus. Edgar Jopson, head of the NUSP, produced a statement entitled "A Call for a Constitutional Convention Without Interference from Political Parties." Sison responded with a statement, "The Correct Orientation on the Constitutional Convention," in which he argued that the "essential nature of the Philippine Constitution since the very start has been its being an instrument of national and class oppression and exploitation." It was "patently a colonial document on incontrovertible grounds." The 1971 Convention was thus being formed to raise "false hopes" that it could serve as "a possible means of 'revolutionary' change to head off a real armed revolution of the broad masses of oppressed and exploited people."

Sison hid the fact that the KM had placed working within the Convention at the center of its program in 1967 and that, as late as July 1969, it had remained the core focus of both the KM and SCAUP and had served as the basis of their common campus election platform in the Young

Philippines. He now claimed that “the main task of all proletarian revolutionaries and all those who adhere to the people’s democratic revolution is to expose and oppose the 1971 constitutional convention as a farce.” The convention was “another swindle perpetrated on the people.” Both the immediate political orientation of the bourgeois opposition and the mood of the masses had shifted, and the tactic of participation in the Convention was no longer politically viable. The bourgeois allies of the CPP desired an explosion in the streets against Marcos. In a partially articulated but nonetheless palpable fashion, the masses of workers, students and peasants sought a solution to the stranglehold of economic crisis through increasingly drastic political means. The task of the CPP was to subordinate the latter to the former and this required burying, at least for the present, the question of the convention.

A leaflet which the KM produced for the initial January 7 rally concluded with a formulation that encapsulated the fundamental political logic of the CPP and its front organizations in the critical period between the storm and the onset of military dictatorship: “the intensification of the fascistic suppression of the national democratic aspirations of the people by the Marcos military regime only serves to enlist more adherents to the struggle for genuine emancipation from US imperialism and local feudalism.” *Fascism, they argued, only causes the movement to grow.*

This was the basic logic underpinning all of the mimeographed leaflets circulated by the KM during the First Quarter Storm. Marcos was a fascist puppet, the main representative of US imperialism and local feudalism, and as such he should be the primary target of all protests. The people would rise up to demand national democracy and they would be violently suppressed. This suppression would expose the character of the fascist Marcos regime to even more people, who would then rise up and be suppressed. The people would never be cowed by fascism. The more that Marcos was “fascist” and violent, the more people would rise up. But rise up to what end?

At no point were workers and students educated in the need for an independent struggle of the working class for the seizure of power, or that in order to implement national democratic tasks, socialist measures must be taken. Rather the students were instructed to demand, to request — stridently, but nonetheless to ask — of the ruling class that national democratic measures be carried out. In fact, no political program at all was presented. None beyond the need for what became the clichéd slogan of the movement, “Makibaka, huwag matakot! / Struggle, don’t be afraid!” The act of struggling, of making demands to the state, would precipitate state violence, which would, in turn, cause the movement to grow. This was the entire perspective of the KM during this period.

Whose political interests did the First Quarter Storm wind up serving? Not workers or students. They fought courageously and were bloodied in the affair, but the Stalinist leadership of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its rival, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), worked to ensure that they did not draw independent political conclusions from the experience, and that workers did not organize themselves separately from the bourgeoisie for their own class interests.

The PKP lost out as a result of the FQS. They fought a rearguard battle to simultaneously negotiate ties with Marcos and maintain support among the youth. This was an impossible task, and they lost a good deal of their political credibility in the process.

The CPP and its front organizations benefited immensely from the FQS. Both the shared barricades of Mendiola and the exposure of the Malayang Pagkakaisa ng Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP), youth wing of the PKP, served to heal many of the wounds which had been caused during the 1967 breach between the KM and the SDK. A generation of students were radicalized by the FQS — some only briefly, but for others it was a life-changing experience — and many found their way into the ranks of the CPP.

The greatest short-term beneficiaries of the storm sat in the board rooms of Meralco and the political headquarters of the Liberal Party. For Lopez and Aquino and their allies, the protesting students were an ideal proxy in their fight against Marcos. These forces aspired to destabilize and overthrow him, and the blood in the streets served this purpose. They did not succeed in this, however.

In the end, the events which began on January 26 1970 set in motion a countdown to martial law. Marcos recognized in the violent demonstrations a pretext for dictatorship. He fomented violence through agents provocateur and began preparing the architecture of a police state.

Thus, by the final week of January, the forces who would decide the fate of the First Quarter Storm were all in place: Marcos, aspiring for a pretext for dictatorship, his bourgeois opponents for violent destabilization; a restive youth and working class; and two Communist Parties, one subordinate to each faction of the ruling class. The storm that burst on 26 January 1970 and the events that transpired over the next three months were among the most explosive in the country's history.

## **January 26 — “On the trembling edge of Revolution”**

*Marcos' State of the Nation, social protest, and the unleashed violence of the Metrocom.*

Fifty years ago this month an explosion of social protests and brutal police repression rocked the Philippines, launching a series of demonstrations and street battles that lasted from January to March. The events came to be known as the First Quarter Storm (FQS). What follows is the second in a [series of articles](#) examining the history of the events and ideas of the storm. Those interested in further details, or citations for the facts and quotations below, are encouraged to consult my dissertation, [Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership](#).

### **January 26**

As 1970 opened Ferdinand Marcos had just secured re-election, becoming the only President in Philippine history to do so. The election was likely the bloodiest and most corrupt the country had yet seen. Entire towns had been burned to the ground in a manner that was being compared in the press to the massacre carried out by American soldiers at My Lai, an event which had just come to public awareness. Sergio Osmeña Jr., the defeated rival candidate, famously remarked, “We were outgunned, outgunned, and outgold,” although it might be said, that it was not for want of trying.

Monday, January 26, was the newly re-elected President's State of the Nation Address. Anticipating unrest, Metrocom, the unit of the Philippine Constabulary operating in Metro Manila, made preparations to suppress it. Two organizations were granted permits to rally in front of Congress, the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP) and Ang Magigiting [The Brave], the political vehicle of radio personality Roger Arienda, while the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) youth organ, Malayang Pagkakaisa ng Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP), was able to secure a permit to stage a protest behind Congress. Neither of the youth organizations affiliated with the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) and the Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK) were able to obtain a permit at all. As late as January 22, there was still discussion in these organizations as to how best to protest during the State of the Nation address. The University of the Philippines Student Council (UPSC) chaired by Jerry Barican of the SDK stated that it intended to demonstrate to “clarify its stand on the Constitutional Convention and to bid for public support.” They weighed holding a separate rally at Plaza Miranda, where, Tagamolila reported, the Kamanyang Players would perform, “reinforcing the issues with dance and drama.” This proposal wound up being rejected and the UPSC, KM and SDK all decided to join the NUSP rally in front of

Congress.

Opening the first session of the Seventh Congress, on Monday, January 26, Fr. Pacifico Ortiz — the president of Ateneo University — delivered an invocation. The country was standing, he intoned, “on the trembling edge of revolution.” Marcos delivered his State of the Nation speech, which he entitled “National Discipline: the Key to our Future.” Marcos had ordered speakers to be set up in front of Congress to broadcast his speech, overpowering the public address system of the protesters, whose “lone amplifier was ... drowned out by four loudspeakers set up by the Army Signals Corps.” The protesters dispatched a representative who quickly met with Senator Aquino to request that Marcos’ speakers be taken down, but they were not removed. Newspapers estimated that forty thousand people rallied outside of the halls of Congress, while “the number of security forces mustered for the occasion was estimated at 7,000” Arienda’s group had brought a mock coffin which they said symbolized the death of democracy, while a separate group of demonstrators from UP carried a papier-mâché crocodile with a dollar sign on its belly and they set the crocodile on top of the coffin.

In a manner unintentionally symbolic of their increasing political isolation, the MPKP distributed their leaflet, *The Sad State of the Nation*, behind the house of Congress. The statement stressed that the organization had no illusion that “Mr. Marcos will take advantage of his position as the first reelected president to pull the country out of the disastrous path of neocolonial development ... Change can only come from the people themselves, particularly those who are most oppressed.” The MPKP called for “a mighty wave of mass action to deal with the following problems: The Fascist Menace ... ” In this section the MPKP charged the military with “recruiting student leaders to intelligence agencies and using them to infiltrate progressive youth organizations ... to push these organizations along a disastrous adventurist line and to sow dissensions in the ranks of the genuine anti-imperialist groups. Just the other day they again circulated a slanderous leaflet against MPKP, charging it of subversion and denigrating its leaders.” While denouncing ‘fascism,’ the MPKP rooted this political danger not in capitalism, but in the KM and SDK who, infiltrated by the military, were pursuing a “disastrous adventurist line.” The other problems which mass action needed to solve were “Economic Sabotage” on behalf of US imperialism; “Bogus land reform;” and the worsening economic conditions of the masses. They put forward no concrete program to solve any of these problems but simply issued a repeated call for mass action. Action to what end? This was never addressed. The MPKP’s call for mass action was subsumed under the slogan: “Build Parliament in the Streets!” Given the political line articulated by the MPKP it was logical to assume that mass action should be mobilized to pressure Marcos to “take advantage of his position.”

Arriving at four in the afternoon, just as Marcos was about to speak, “the KM members surged forward through the crowd in a diamond formation until they positioned themselves in the forefront of the demonstration site, their huge red streamer very noticeable and overshadowing all the other placards.” They distributed a “position paper” to the crowd entitled “A Neo-colony in Crisis” which began, “As the Seventh Congress of the Philippines opens today, the Kabataang Makabayan presents to the Filipino people the real state of the nation. In the interest of exposing to the people the conditions in the country so that they may act to change them, the KM joins today’s demonstration in unity with progressive and national democratic organizations and individuals.” The “reactionary Marcos administration,” they stated, “has strengthened and deepened its commitments to the neo-colonial schemes of the imperialist United States and Japan and social-imperialist Soviet Union in Asia.” The KM denounced Marcos’ “plan to open trade relations with pseudo-socialist countries, specifically the Soviet Union.” Marcos’ plan was “in consonance with the US-Soviet policy of dividing the world between themselves. ... the Soviet Union has been transformed into a neo-capitalist state that exploits and oppresses not only the Soviet people but also the peoples of its colonies in the same fashion as the United States does.” The KM repeated Sison’s recent denunciation of the

Constitutional Convention, and warned that “resurging fascism ... emphatically characterizes the Marcos administration.” This was evidenced by violence against “the people” carried out by “Hitler-worshippers in the reactionary armed forces.” The KM drew this conclusion:

But one thing is sure. As the ruling class can not rule anymore in the old way, more violent repressions are bound to unfold. Yet, it is a truism that in any society, as the ruling class becomes more violent, the resistance of the oppressed is increased tenfold. The revolutionary movement emerges to destroy the inequities of the old order.

This was the standard line of the CPP: *fascism and repression only cause the revolutionary movement to grow.*

An array of speakers addressed the crowd, struggling to be heard over Marcos. When Luis Taruc was given the microphone the demonstrators loudly booed him and shouted, “We want Dante!,” referring to Bernabe Buscayno, Kumander Dante, head of the New People’s Army (NPA). Lacaba reported that “There were two mikes, taped together; and this may sound frivolous, but I think the mikes were the immediate cause of the trouble that ensued. ... Now, at about half past five, Jopson, who was in polo barong and sported a red armband with the inscription “J26M,” announced that the next speaker would be Gary Olivar of the SDK.” Jopson then hesitated, reluctant to give the mic to Olivar. He led the crowd in singing the national anthem. When the singing finished, he continued to clutch the microphones, and then announced that the NUSP rally was over and called on students to disperse. “It was at this point that one of the militants grabbed the mikes from Jopson,” and passed them to “a labor union leader” — most likely Rodolfo del Rosario. He “attacked the ‘counter-revolutionaries who want to end this demonstration,’ going on from there to attack fascists and imperialists in general. By the time he was through his audience had a new, a more insistent chant: ‘Rebolusyon! Rebolusyon! Rebolusyon!’”

Marcos emerged from Congress. “No less than Col. Fabian Ver, chief of the presidential security force, and Col. James Barbers, Manila deputy chief of police [and Joma Sison’s maternal uncle], personally led the heavy escort. Brig. Gen. Hans Menzi, [publisher of the *Manila Bulletin*] the inseparable chief presidential aide, trotted behind.” The protesters set Marcos’ effigy on fire, hurling the crocodile and coffin at his entourage; the police charged the protesters and “flailed away, the demonstrators scattered.” The President and his wife safely drove away. The protesters quickly regrouped and began throwing rocks and soft-drink bottles at the police, who arrested some of the demonstrators on the spot. Rotea wrote that “[t]hey continued hitting demonstrators they had just caught even if they were not resisting at all, or were pleading for mercy, or were already down.” The police violence was indiscriminate and a number of reporters were beaten alongside the demonstrators. The police then “retreated into Congress with hostages. The demonstrators re-occupied the area they had vacated in their panic. The majority of NUSP members must have been safe in their buses by then, on their way home, but the militants were still in possession of the mikes.”

About two thousand demonstrators remained in front of Congress. They began chanting “Makibaka! Huwag matakot!” and then sang the Internationale. Senator, and former Vice President, Emmanuel Pelaez emerged from the Congressional building to address the crowd and the SDK supplied him the microphone. The crowd chanted for the arrested protesters being held inside by the police to be released, but the KM and SDK leaders silenced the crowd so that Pelaez could speak. Pelaez made a lengthy speech in an attempt to calm the crowd, while the police regrouped, moving around to the north side of the building. As Pelaez completed his speech, they charged the demonstrators. Lacaba recounted that

The demonstrators fled in all directions ... Three cops cornered one demonstrator

against a traffic sign and clubbed him until the signpost gave way and fell with a crash. ... The demonstrators who had fled regrouped, on the Luneta side of Congress, and with holler and whoop, they charged. The cops slowly retreated before this surging mass, then ran, ran for their lives, pursued by rage, rocks and burning placard handles. ... In the next two hours, the pattern of battle would be set. The cops would charge, the demonstrators would retreat; the demonstrators would regroup and come forward again, the cops would back off to their former position. ... There were about seven waves of attack and retreat by both sides, each attack preceded by a tense noisy lull, during which there would be sporadic stoning, by both cops and demonstrators.

The demonstrators had hired a jeepney and some crowded into it for shelter. The police “swooped down on the jeepney with their rattan sticks, striking out at the students who surrounded it until they fled, then venting their rage some more on those inside the jeepney who could not get out to run. The shrill screams of women inside the jeepney rent the air. The driver, bloody all over, managed to stagger out; the cops quickly grabbed him.” The police began firing shots in the air and the demonstrators fled.

By eight in the evening, less than two hours after it had started, the battle in front of Congress had ended. Among those injured were members of both the NUSP and the KM. Rotea reported that “initial official reports showed that about 300 youths were injured while 72 law enforcers were wounded in the Congress riot.” A great many demonstrators were arrested — “thrown into and packed like sardines at the city detention jail.” Salvador Laurel and John Osmeña, along with a handful of other politicians, “personally spent the night there and helped expedite their release.” Of those arrested, nineteen were charged but were released without bail.

## **Aftermath**

The next three days saw a relentless stream of recriminations and posturing with regard to the violence of January 26. Nemesio Prudente, President of the PCC, who had been beaten by the police alongside students, told the press, “I will support a nationwide revolutionary movement of students to protest the brutalities of the state.” James Barbers, Deputy Chief of the MPD, who had for years received the support of the KM, issued a statement that “We maintain that the police acted swiftly at a particular time when the life of the President of the Republic — and that of the First Lady — was being endangered by the vicious and unscrupulous elements among the student demonstrators. One can just imagine what would have resulted had something happened to the First Lady!” Mayor Villegas defended “the police action and said they acted on his orders to protect the President.” Edgar Jopson published a statement washing his hands of the event, claiming that the riot started when he attempted to end the demonstration. Ruben Torres, chair of the MPKP, issued a brief statement, which concluded, “Police brutality, blatantly displayed in the January 26<sup>th</sup> demonstration will not dampen the surging activism of the youth. All the more, this even increases the enthusiasm and determination of the youth in their struggle for national democracy.” The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation (BRPF), which, like the MPKP, was allied to the PKP, issued a similar statement denouncing the “the use of naked force” by “the power holders.” Neither the MPKP nor the BRPF mentioned Marcos at all, for he was their political ally.

Marcos released a press statement regarding the events.

Reports received by me on the demonstration tend to show that the students were not responsible for the riot that ensued during the demonstration.

I accept the veracity of these reports and I accept the statement of responsible student leaders present at the demonstration that they were not responsible for the riots.

Initial reports from police and intelligence indicate that the riot was instigated by non-student provocateurs who had infiltrated the ranks of the legitimate demonstrators. This is being investigated.

Marcos was looking to blame the riots on the CPP — whom he labeled provocateurs infiltrating the ranks of the demonstrators — yet he was well aware that part of the responsibility for the riot rested with police agent provocateurs who had infiltrated the ranks of the students, a number of whom played leading roles in the January 26 events and in the subsequent development of the FQS. Lacaba related how a young woman denounced the police during the riot — “Those sons of bitches, their day is coming. [Putangna nila, me araw din sila.]” She was Elnora ‘Babette’ Estrada, a member of the National Council of the KM, and an undercover police agent with the rank of sergeant.

On Tuesday, the day after the violence, Jerry Barican announced that students at UP would be staging a week-long boycott of classes to express the students’ “vehement denunciation of police brutality and of other terroristic means being perpetrated by the Marcos administration.” Student leaders held a meeting at Far Eastern University (FEU) where they resolved to stage a demonstration on January 30.

On Wednesday, January 28, the KM issued a leaflet in which they claimed that the “students dramatically exposed to the people the deteriorating conditions in the country” and called for the continuation of the “anti-fascist” struggle. A Senate and House joint committee, chaired by Lorenzo Tañada, was formed to investigate the “root causes of demonstrations in general.” Five hundred UP Faculty members gathered on the same day and drafted a declaration, adopted unanimously, which stated that they

strongly denounce the use of brutal force by state authorities against student demonstrators on January 26 1970 ... We strongly urge that congressional and other investigations be so conducted and concluded as to reaffirm democratic principles ... The Faculty holds the present administration accountable and responsible for the pattern of repression and the violation of rights. Open letter of UP faculty on January 28 denouncing the police brutality of the 26<sup>th</sup>.

On Thursday, January 29, the UP Faculty, including President Salvador Lopez, marched to Malacañang where they held a rally and then met with Marcos and presented him their declaration.

The events of the next day, January 30, would come to be known as the Battle of Mendiola, an explosion far larger, and more violently suppressed, than that of January 26. The First Quarter Storm had begun.

## **January 30 — Battle of Mendiola**

*The nightlong battle, fought with molotov cocktails and gunfire, for control of Mendiola.*

What follows is the third post in an [ongoing series](#) on the fiftieth anniversary of the explosion of protests and police violence that marked the first three months of 1970 and which became known as the First Quarter Storm. For further details and citations please consult my dissertation, [Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership](#).

The demonstrators regrouped on January 30, a split emerging in their ranks. The majority, shocked by the violence of the twenty-sixth, rallied in front of Congress behind the banners of the KM and SDK denouncing the “fascism” of Marcos; the moderate student groups, clinging to the theme of a

non-partisan convention, sent a delegation to meet with the president at Malacañang. Tensions were high. *Ang Bayan* declared that the January 26 protest “was merely the opening salvo for bigger mass actions of the near future. It is a blow against the reactionaries to be followed by more and bigger blows.” On the morning of the thirtieth, UP Student Catholic Action (UPSCA) circulated forged leaflets purporting to be from the UP Student Council, claiming that the demonstration did not have the sanction of the Council and warning students, “Don’t blame anyone if you get hurt!”

Finding that neither camp expressed its interests, and unable to articulate an independent position, the MPKP tagged along to the KM and SDK rally. They circulated a leaflet grossly incongruous with the mood of the assembled masses, calling for a partisan constitutional convention. The MPKP, they wrote, “did not and does not support the slogan of ‘non-partisan constitutional convention.’ ... [This slogan] is deliberately designed to create illusion [*sic*] about the convention and to conceal the truth that the convention, whether openly partisan or not, will reflect the bankruptcy of the present political system.” The leaflet continued,

We must therefore rally the masses in a relentless struggle against neo-colonialism. The election of delegates and the convention itself may, however, be good opportunities to accomplish this principal task; but this could only be accomplished if we dispel all illusions in the minds of the masses ...

MPKP calls for a People’s Constitution that will declare illegal and obsolete the power of imperialism, feudalism and capitalism, and project the concept of people’s power. The People’s Constitution should be a rallying program of the struggle for national democracy.

By rejecting the call for a non-partisan constitutional convention, the MPKP kept voting open to the two major political parties, while with its demand for a People’s Constitution it promoted the idea that by voting for delegates — including representatives from the Liberal Party (LP) and Nacionalista Party (NP) — the ‘people’ could secure representatives who would by legislative fiat make imperialism, feudalism and capitalism illegal. The reformist illusions which the MPKP were attempting to promote are staggering. As Marcos’ forces trained their guns on the protesters and fired, the MPKP activists had this leaflet in their hands. It made no mention — none — of the violence of January 26, and it claimed that the central task was to elect representatives to the constitutional convention who would simply declare capitalism illegal. The events of January 30 and the public outcry that they produced, compelled the MPKP to begin speaking of “fascism” while attempting to deflect the focus of public ire away from Marcos.

In the afternoon, Edgar Jopson, Portia Ilagan and others of the NSL and NUSP held a meeting with Marcos. Jopson demanded that Marcos put his commitment not to run for another presidential term in writing, and Marcos, irritated by Jopson’s demand, famously denounced him as the mere “son of a grocer.” As they were leaving, at shortly after six in the evening, violence broke out at the entrance to the presidential palace. The demonstrators had moved from Congress to Malacañang and as Marcos emerged from his meeting with Jopson they had gathered at Gate Four. Col. Fabian Ver and Major Fidel Ramos were “waiting for the President to give the order to shoot and the President did order: ‘Shoot them with water and tear gas.’”

As security forces launched their assault, Gary Olivar issued instructions to the protesters by means of an ABS-CBN soundtruck, which Eugenio Lopez had apparently supplied to the protesters. Olivar used the vehicle to direct the ensuing Battle of Mendiola. A firetruck arrived to blast the protesters with water, but members of the SDKM (Mendiola) commandeered the vehicle, which they crashed through the palace gates. A series of explosions followed and the protesters retreated, constructing barricades on Mendiola bridge as they fell back from Malacañang. They briefly held this position and

then fell back again.

For several hours police and protesters waged a battle for the bridge. The police and military repeatedly fired on the student protesters, who responded with pillboxes, molotov cocktails and rocks, setting fire to vehicles in the street to slow the passage of the military. The barricades on Mendiola fell at around midnight. "There was nonstop hail of bullets, deafening gunfire as we scrambled on the sidewalk on the left side of Recto Avenue towards Lepanto and Morayta." As they retreated the protesters overturned the concrete flower beds set up by Villegas along Recto, and some "abandoned vehicles were cannibalized, their tires turned into bonfires that gave off the pungent smell of burning rubber and the unmistakable look of an insurrection."

Radio news reports initially announced that five or six protesters had been killed, but four were eventually named: Ricardo Alcantara, a student from UP; Fernando Catabay, MLQU; Bernardo Tausa, Mapa High School; and Felicisimo Singh Roldan, of UE. The dead ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-one; each had been shot by the police. One hundred seven students were injured on January 30, seventy-four of them from gunshot wounds, among them a boy from Roosevelt Academy in Cubao whose leg had to be amputated. Hundreds of students were arrested. They were detained in Camp Crame long past the legal maximum of six hours without charges. When protests were raised over the illegality of the mass detention, the PC charged the students with sedition, holding them for eighteen hours without food and then dismissing all charges for lack of evidence.

Marcos promoted the commander of the Metrocom, Colonel Ordoñez, who had directly overseen the assault on the students, to General on the spot. In 1972, the AFP admitted that a number of "government penetration agents" had participated in the "violent demonstration," including Sgt. Elnora Estrada.

## **The People's Congresses of February**

*Mass social outrage began to take organized political form, repeatedly gathering en masse at Plaza Miranda.*

What follows is the fourth part in an [ongoing series](#) on the fiftieth anniversary of the First Quarter Storm (FQS), the explosion of protests at the beginning of the 1970s in Manila. For details and citations please consult my dissertation, [Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership](#).

In the wake of the violent January 30 Battle of Mendiola, the forces of the protesters and the state regrouped. Four dead youths were buried. Marcos arranged to meet with the leaders of the developing storm, including the SDK and KM, and secured a commitment to call off the next major demonstration. Communist Party leader Joma Sison intervened, instructing the KM to demand that the previously announced People's Congress at Plaza Miranda go ahead as planned. The First Quarter Storm regained momentum, but where was it heading?

### **Aftermath**

The day after the Battle of Mendiola, Marcos delivered a nationally televised address, denouncing the demonstrators as "Communists" and warning that he would respond to such demonstrations with the force of military arms.

To the insurrectionary elements, I have a message. My message is: any attempt at the forcible overthrow of the government will be put down immediately. I will not tolerate nor allow communists to take over ... The Republic will defend itself with all the force at

its command until your armed elements are annihilated. And I shall lead them.

Everyone began to speak of martial law. E.L Victoriano, wrote in the *Philippine Herald* on February 1, "Widespread disturbances throughout the country would give [Marcos] the excuse to declare martial law with all its unlimited executive powers." A wave of fear swept through the better-off layers of society; Saturday morning saw panic buying in the supermarkets and military patrols in the streets.

Government troops made no effort to be inconspicuous: though supposedly no longer on red alert, they roamed the city in rumbling trucks from which carbines and Armalites stuck out like sore thumbs, and occasionally made forays into the universities. Banks and stores started boarding up their glass facades with plywood or steel sheets. The stock market didn't crash, but the prices of stock took a sharp plunge that brought about an orgy of short selling. Refugees from Forbes Park nervously paced the carpeted floors of the Hotel Inter-Continental, filled to capacity for the first time since its inauguration. Classes in Greater Manila were suspended for a whole week, and for a whole week the mayors of Manila and Makati refused to grant permits to demonstrate.

A series of recriminations, threats and demands filled the daily papers. Commander Dante sent a letter to Marcos warning that "the New People's Army would exact reprisals from senior Government agents for incidents of this type." Jopson and Ilagan issued a statement, on behalf of the NUSP and NSL, demanding the ouster — "not mere retirement," they insisted — of Gen. Vicente Raval, head of the PC. Manuel Alabado, Executive Vice President of the US Tobacco Corporation Labor Union testified before Tañada's joint congressional committee that he had been kidnapped on January 26 by five soldiers and made to assert that he was a Huk and that the Huks were behind the demonstrations. He claimed to have escaped and to have sought refuge with Ignacio Lacsina.

Immediately after the events of January 30, the CPP published a statement in *Ang Bayan* — "On the January 30-31 Demonstration" — hailing the "four student heroes" who had been killed. The CPP argued that the violence of January 26 and 30 indicated that the entire Filipino people are increasingly awakened to the need for armed revolutionary struggle in the face of armed counter-revolution." (40) The demonstrations "have served as a rich source of activists for the national democratic revolution and, therefore, of prospective members and fighters of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army." (44) *Ang Bayan* saw in the violent suppression of the students — who had gathered behind a confused array of political banners — the ideal scenario for recruitment to the armed struggle, and concluded excitedly, "The revolutionary situation has never been so excellent!" (45)

The funeral rites for the four who had been killed on January 30 saw a massive turnout of students. Jerry Barican and Dick Gordon — political rivals on the UP campus — served as Alcantara's pallbearers. The peaceful cooperation lasted for the duration of the funeral, as a group of UP students, led by Manuel Ortega and Dick Gordon, issued a manifesto and a declaration of principles on February 2 denouncing both police brutality and what it called "student brutality." It condemned the "violent," "rabble-rousing," "vociferous minority" among the students who were responsible for the violence of the protests. The phrase "student brutality" would become a mantra of right-wing elements on the UP campus over the next two years, particularly under the leadership of Ortega.

Marcos began claiming that his political rivals were acting in cahoots with the "Maoists" to overthrow him, and on February 2, the KM published a response. Marcos was "going berserk and so fearful of popular criticism that he imagines at every turn that his political opponents are out to destroy him. He has even started to voice out the fear that his own vice president is interested in his assassination or his political failure." Marcos' fears were not mere paranoia; there was in fact a

conspiracy between Lopez and the CPP and the KM leadership knew it. The KM was receiving financial support from Lopez to prepare and mount their demonstrations.

Marcos, the KM continued, "having been given the go-signal by his imperialist masters" had entered into relations with "the Russian 'communists.'" At the same time, however, he was denouncing the "Maoists" in the Philippines, who were, he claimed, attempting to seize power on January 30. In this Marcos revealed his "appalling ignorance," the KM claimed. First, they insisted "the theory of protracted people's war that applies to a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country like the Philippines does not permit that a mass action as that of January 30 would suffice to overthrow the present reactionary state." What is more, the KM was at pains to be clear that "the issue is not yet communism. We are clearly fighting for a national democratic revolution."

Determined to dispel the claim that they were fighting for socialism, the CPP published a statement, "Turn Grief into Revolutionary Courage," signed by both Guerrero [Sison] and Dante on February 8. To Marcos' claim that the demonstrations were led by "Maoists" who were "raising the issue of communism," they responded, "We communists recognize that the nature of Philippine society is semicolonial and semifeudal and that the pressing issue is national democracy. The issue now in the Philippines is neither socialism nor communism." What is more they were not fighting for an uprising of workers, but insisted rather that:

The Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army are not putschists. They firmly adhere to Chairman Mao's strategic principle of encircling the cities from the countryside. All counterrevolutionaries should rest assured that the day will surely come when the people's armed forces shall have defeated the reactionary armed forces in the countryside and are ready to act in concert with general uprisings by workers and students in the final seizure of power in the city.

The CPP was not fighting for socialism, and it would not act in concert with an uprising of workers until the people's war had won victory in the countryside. While this people's war would be of a protracted character, Sison and Dante insisted that "fascism" hastened its success, for "the use of counterrevolutionary violence, restrictive procedures and doubletalk will only result in more intensified revolutionary violence." Sison and Dante gave direct political instructions to the student protesters. The Party would distribute to "militant demonstrators" three works for their political education: *Guide for Cadres and Members of the CPP*, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong*. Students should form "propaganda teams (of at least three members)." Such a team

assumes the specific task of arousing and mobilizing the students and workers in a well-defined area in the city; or the students, peasants, farm workers, national minorities and fishermen in a well-defined area in the provinces.

The mass work of student propaganda teams in urban areas and in provinces close to Manila will result in bigger and more articulate demonstrations and more powerful general strikes. The mass work of student propaganda teams in the provinces will create the best conditions for getting hold of a gun and fighting the armed counterrevolution successfully.

Sison and Dante concluded by assuring students that "they shall certainly be approached by the Party for recruitment or for cooperation on the basis of what they have already contributed to the national democratic revolution."

## **Negotiations**

On February 9, classes resumed across Manila, and the Movement for a Democratic Philippines (MDP), which was emerging as the umbrella organization of the protests, secured a permit to stage a rally at Plaza Miranda on the twelfth. Looking to negotiate a commitment to call off the demonstration, Marcos held a five hour long meeting in Malacañang with the MDP leadership. Representing the MDP and NATU were Ignacio Lacsina, who — undisclosed to the others — was working as a regular informant for Malacañang; PCC President Nemesio Prudente; Teodosio Lansang; Felixberto Olalia; Carlos del Rosario; Jerry Barican; and Ramon Sanchez, “among others.” The SDK had at least two representatives in the room; the KM at least one.

The MDP presented thirteen concrete demands to Marcos, “among them the dissolution of the Special Forces, the disbandment of the Monkees, the dropping of charges against the *Dumaguete Times* newsmen,” and five long-term demands, “nationalization or transfer to public ownership of oil, mining, communications, and other vital industries; nationalization of all educational institutions to thwart commercialization and sectarianism; abrogation of all inequitous treaties with the United States; promotion of trade and cultural relations with all countries, whatever their political color; implementation of land reform by expropriating big landed estates.”

Marcos warned the MDP representatives of the danger that the protests and instability would be used as a pretext for a right-wing coup. Rotea reported that Prudente responded “If that is your only fear, Mr. President ... then arm us, lead us, and we will fight and rally behind you! We are ready to die for you if you are sincere in helping the Filipino people!” The *Collegian* wrote

Representatives of the Nationalist-Progressive sector met with President Marcos at Malacañang for a five hour conference on the issues and developments that arose from the January 30 bloody demonstrations. ...

They [the representatives] also deplored the overt attempts of some sectors in the ruling oligarchy to convert student activism into a Hate Marcos campaign to conceal its own share of the guilt for American domination and local feudalism afflicting Philippine society. They reiterated their position that the Marcos administration is only a small segment of the ruling oligarchy and its downfall by right-wing conception [sic] and agitation can only bring about a military and repressive government.

Marcos declared his intention to “grant what he could, to study what he could not,” and in return the MDP representatives agreed to call off the Plaza Miranda rally and to hold small “localized demonstrations” to discuss issues. They stated that “this move would entail minimum security risks since smaller groups would be easier to control.” Tera wrote on this: “Out of fear of a *coup d’etat* by the extreme Right [meaning the concerns of Marcos about the plottings of the Lopez-Osmeña bloc] Marcos immediately called for a dialogue with the leaders of the nationalist groups, including the MDK [sic], SDK, MASAKA, NATU, KM, Molabe and others. In a closed door meeting at the palace ... Marcos acceded [sic] to 13 of their demands.”

Sison immediately responded, instructing the KM to distribute a leaflet which denounced fears that Marcos might face a military *coup d’etat* if the protests continued. The KM put forward the simple-minded argument that “Events have shown that Marcos is rightist and bad enough to deserve the denunciation of the Filipino people ... We must always bear in mind that Marcos stands as the chief agent of US imperialism and domestic feudalism in our society.” Sison later stated that “I consider as my most important contribution to the First Quarter Storm of 1970 the reversal and undoing of the agreement entered into with Marcos by leaders of major mass organizations calling off the mass action scheduled for February 12 in protest against the outrageous killing of six students and other barbarities on January 30-31, 1970.”

## February 12: the First People's Congress

Headlines on the morning of the twelfth announced that the Miranda rally had been called off and that separate rallies were to be held on individual campuses. There was widespread speculation that the MDP leaders had been "bought off." The *Collegian*, for example, ran the headline "Demonstration goes on tomorrow in UP: Plaza Miranda plan put off due to 'risk.'"

The MDP held an emergency meeting that morning and the perspective of the KM won over the majority. The umbrella group reached a compromise: they would hold simultaneous separate rallies — largely to save face over the reversal — and then converge on Plaza Miranda for "a People's Congress." An estimated fifty thousand participated, the largest attendance of any rally during the First Quarter Storm as subsequent events saw fewer and fewer people turn up.

The KM and the SDK were now clearly in the leadership of the storm, and the NUSP and NSL were not to be seen in the plaza. Their rivalry was rapidly disappearing, but the KM was under direct instructions from the CPP and the SDK was not. At the first People's Congress and at subsequent rallies throughout the storm, the KM sought to provoke the crowd to violence, while SDK sought to calm it. As the SDK continued its rectification process and as the CPP recruited its leadership to its ranks, this tactical division gradually disappeared and by the opening of 1971 the two organizations proceeded in lockstep in response to the instructions of party leadership.

A speech delivered by the KM's Nonie Villanueva, full of irreverent profanity, established the tone which would dominate the rostrums of the storm going forward, with *putang ina* and *hindot* standing in for political analysis and program.

Lacaba recounted that "[e]ach time a small group right in front of the speakers got up calling for a march to Malacañang, other demonstrators surrounding the group — suspected to be one led by an LP hatchetman — persuaded or ordered them to sit down." It is significant that the "hatchetmen" of the Liberal Party were known to be present at the First Quarter Storm rallies and were suspected of attempting to instigate violent protest. The fact that Lopez and the LP benefited from these rallies was a poorly kept secret. To calm the crowd, the SDK repeatedly led them in the singing of the national anthem as a means of defusing tension. As the rally drew to a close, they sung the national anthem one last time and then announced that the MDP would be holding a meeting on Valentine's day at Vinzons Hall, UP.

*Ang Bayan* hailed the February 12 demonstration, which it claimed one hundred thousand people had attended. They blamed the PKP for negotiating with Marcos to call off the protests, asserting that the "Lava revisionist renegades took the initiative of peddling through the MPKP spokesman as early as February 4 the erroneous line that 'Marcos is only a small, although significant part' of 'the neocolonial-bourgeois political system' (whatever that means) and to complain about a 'purely anti-Marcos line.'" Using this language the MPKP had sought to call off the protests, and according to *Ang Bayan*, a BRPF statement declared that dialogues with Marcos could be used to "further intensify the national democratic struggle," while an MPKP press release "announced that they were in a quandary whether or not to join the February 12 demonstration." This defense of Marcos, *Ang Bayan* claimed was made in exchange for a set of promises from the President that "trade and cultural ties will be instituted with Eastern European countries immediately with the sending of officially accredited representatives. The possibility of securing loans or aid from said countries shall be explored." *Ang Bayan* observed,

This is obviously the booty being dangled before the Lava revisionist running dogs of Soviet social-imperialism for their cooperation with the Marcos fascist puppet regime. ... Relations with Soviet social-imperialism ... will only add to the intensification of the

exploitation of the Filipino people. The Soviet Union is no longer a socialist country; it has become capitalist, social-fascist and social-imperialist. Soviet social-imperialist “loans” and “aid” are no different from US imperialist “loans” and “aid”...

The CPP again insisted on its claim that dictatorship facilitated revolutionary struggle, openly expressing their hope that Marcos would suspend democratic processes: “How much nicer it would be if the US imperialists and reactionaries in the Philippines can no longer boast of their regular election! That would be a striking manifestation of how strong the revolutionary mass movement has become.”

The party, *Ang Bayan* claimed, had no responsibility for the emergence of “fascism,” stating “It is stupid to blame revolutionaries for the rise of fascism and the supposed possibility of a rightist coup.” The CPP rejected the revolutionary task of fighting against the rise of dictatorship, which can be waged neither by passive abstention nor anarchistic violence, both of which facilitate its emergence, but rather through the conscious organizing of the masses in an independent struggle for power. Thus, while the MPKP looked to defuse protests, the KM sought to provoke repression; both facilitated the declaration of martial law.

On February 14, fifty representatives from various student and labor organizations met to plan the next steps of the protest movement. They resolved that the February 18 rally, which had already been scheduled, would be a second people’s congress. The KM circulated a leaflet at the meeting calling for the “intensification of the struggle against the fascist puppet government of Marcos.” Following the political line of *Ang Bayan*, they denounced the “opportunist line” of the MPKP that “Marcos is a small but important part of the political system.” Countering that “the fascist puppet Marcos is the primary political agent of the native exploiting and oppressing classes and of American imperialism in our country,” they called for continued and strengthened anti-Marcos protests, and concluded by expanding the tripartite “Down with Fascism! Down with Imperialism! Down with Feudalism!” to include a final slogan: “Down with Soviet Social Imperialism!”

The remaining conservative layers of the MDP were being edged out and were looking to pull the umbrella group back from the clutches of the KM. On the same day that the majority of the organization agreed to hold a second people’s congress, the spokesperson of the MDP, Nelson Navarro, met with Justice Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile, at the Butterfly Restaurant where he was celebrating his forty-sixth birthday. Miriam Defensor and Violeta Calvo were both now employed in his office and they had arranged his meeting with the MDP spokesperson.

## **February 18: the Second People’s Congress**

An estimated twenty thousand students — and “a sprinkling of workers and farmers” — assembled in Plaza Miranda on February 18 for the Second People’s Congress. The MPKP was reeling from the criticisms of the KM; they produced two leaflets for the demonstration, each written in a petulant and defensive tone. The first hailed the assembly as the development of their perspective of building “parliament in the streets,” and declared that

MPKP views Marcos as an agent of American Imperialism. However, it does not equate the system as a whole with the person of Marcos. MPKP is well aware of the contradictions within the ruling class (and these contradictions tend to grow sharper in periods of crisis like the present). It therefore warns against a possible plan of rival factions of the same ruling class to seize power and create the illusion of change. The goal of the national democratic movement is to abolish neo-colonialism, not just to replace the man who presides over the operation of the same exploitative system.

The MPKP stated that the “only real alternative ... is *people’s power* — the collective might of the workers, peasants, students, and all other anti-imperialist forces,” mobilized to build “national democracy.”

The language of this leaflet expressed the dilemma of the MPKP during the First Quarter Storm. They could not endorse Marcos and would not endorse his bourgeois opponents. The only alternative was an independent fight of the working class leading the students and peasantry in opposition to the entire capitalist class, but the Stalinism of the PKP and its front organizations was intrinsically hostile to this perspective. The MPKP thus warned against both Marcos as well as the rival factions of the ruling class, while at the same time calling for a united front of “people’s power” with all “anti-imperialist forces” for national democracy. The MPKP unwaveringly insisted that a section of the national bourgeoisie was a component part of these progressive forces, and a necessary element of “people’s power,” yet they could not during the FQS publicly identify which section of the capitalist class was in their opinion progressive. This was precisely because their allegiances lay with Marcos and to say as much in early 1970 was political suicide.

Later the same day the MPKP released a second leaflet defending themselves against charges made by the KM that they were diffusing anger against Marcos. They accused the KM of the “unwarranted resort to slanderous phrase-mongering” and distorting the MPKP political line. (One wonders what resort to “slanderous phrase-mongering” would be warranted.) Protesting overmuch, they stated,

MPKP never advocated shifting the people’s revolutionary actions against Marcos to “dissipated attacks” against various forces. MPKP did not exculpate the blood debts of Marcos by branding the revolutionary actions of the youth as a purely anti-Marcos line. MPKP has not fallen for the Marcos “nationalist” line at all, and it does not becloud the issue of puppetry and fascism of the Marcos regime. MPKP is not disarmed by the rhetorics [*sic*] of Marcos. MPKP does not underestimate the role of Marcos in the neocolonial-bourgeois system. MPKP does not consider Marcos as only a “victim” of this system.

The demonstrators marched to the Embassy, despite attempts by some of the organizers of the event to prevent them from doing so. Gary Olivar of the SDK told the crowd that there would be a rally at the Washington Day Ball at the Embassy on Saturday the twenty-first and that they should wait to demonstrate at the Embassy then. He led the crowd in repeated renditions of the national anthem in an attempt to defuse the mounting anger of the demonstrators.

While the SDK was carefully attempting to limit the protests and prevent violence the KM was seeking to provoke it. *Ang Bayan* celebrated how the demonstrators “brilliantly” feinted to Malacañang, “completely outwitted practically all the fascist brutes” who deployed to the presidential palace, and then marched on the Embassy. At nine thirty at night, violence erupted at the Embassy.

Nelson Navarro, spokesperson for the MDP, stated that the organization peacefully finished its rally, and “the events that transpired afterwards it was unable to prevent or control,” as demonstrating students broke into the Embassy compound with “sticks, stones and homemade bombs.” *Ang Bayan* hailed the demonstrators who left the Embassy and “broke up into several groups and attacked such alien establishments as Caltex, Esso, Philamlife and other imperialist enterprises. They carefully avoided doing harm to petty bourgeois and middle bourgeois establishments.”

## **February 21: Devaluation**

The economic crisis continued to worsen, and on February 21, upon the insistence of the IMF,

Marcos devalued the peso and adopted the floating rate. The peso declined from \$1:P4 to \$1:5.90, falling 47.5% almost overnight. Gradually the conception emerged that the collapse of the peso had been the product of Marcos' profligate election spending.

[Marcos] it is generally concluded, so debauched the Philippine peso — he is said to have spent no less than 800 million during his campaign — that the Government could not but devalue under the pressure of the International Monetary Fund, thus aggravating further the widespread poverty that characterizes Philippine society.

As a result of the IMF-imposed "floating-rate", the prices of all prime commodities soared by nearly 40 per cent while wages inched up by 10-15 per cent ... In an attempt to give the people the impression that his government is not powerless to halt spiraling costs, Marcos created in mid-1970 a Price Control Council which proved to be more than ready to grant official approval to price increases, especially when these were "requested" by American oil companies.

### **Rodrigo writes**

The devaluation slowed the economy and stoked even more the public discontent. The peso wobbled further to \$1:P6.50 in 1971. As a result of the rise in the cost of imports, the Philippine economy slowed to a crawl. GNP growth dropped to 2.74%, the worst level since 1960 and the second worst since 1946. Public discontent, already high, soared even further. Inflation rose to 15%, compared to the average of 4.5% in previous years. By 1971, nearly half the population were not earning enough to buy their minimum food needs.

As late as December 9 1969, in a speech at the Asian Institute of Management Marcos had declared, in the presence of Eugenio Lopez, that he would not devalue the peso. "The devaluation's impact on Meralco was direct and considerable. Meralco got many dollar denominated loans during 1962-70. Its old financial projections were now obsolete and unless rates were hiked, the company was in danger of defaulting on some loans." Tensions between Marcos and Lopez persisted and deepened.

### **February 26: Sunken Garden and the Raid on PCC**

The MDP called off its promised Washington Day demonstration at the last moment but the front groups of the PKP it seems did not receive notification of the cancellation. Approximately fifty demonstrators, all associated with the PKP showed up in front of the embassy, which was surrounded by nearly one thousand police officers. The attention of the MDP was turned to the staging of a "Third People's Congress" at Plaza Miranda on February 26.

Manila Mayor Villegas announced on the twenty-third that he would not grant a permit for a rally at Plaza Miranda, but would issue one for the use of the Sunken Gardens instead. The Sunken Gardens were part of the old moat outside the southern walls of Intramuros, and now served as a hazard in the nine hole municipal golf course circling the ancient city bulwarks. While it was but a stroll away from Agrifina Circle and Congress, it was nonetheless isolated and, from the perspective of law-enforcement, easily controlled.

On February 24, in a meeting of the MDP leadership at UP, spokesperson Nelson Navarro announced that the MDP would appeal Villegas decision before the Supreme Court. The appeal was filed by E. Voltaire Garcia, now employed in the offices of Senator Salvador Laurel, the next day. On February 26, at four in the afternoon on the day of the rally, the court upheld Villegas denial of a permit for a gathering in Miranda by a vote 8-2. The forces of the MDP gathered outside Plaza

Miranda, waiting for the Supreme Court ruling, and there was a tense stand-off as they were blocked by anti-riot police “in full combat gear” from entering. On word of the decision, they moved to the Sunken Gardens. From the rally at the Sunken Garden the MDP proceeded to the Embassy.

Late that night — at two-thirty in the morning on February 27 — the Manila Police Department (MPD) raided the Philippine College of Commerce (PCC) [later PUP] with a warrant issued by Judge Hilarion Jarencio, arresting thirty-nine people, including Teodosio Lansang, and claiming to have confiscated several weapons.

## **People’s Marches and the end of the FQS**

*Prevented from gathering in Miranda, the mass dissent turned to marches, but by the end of its third month, with no clear political goal, the storm blew itself out.*

This is the fifth and final part of a series on the fiftieth anniversary of the First Quarter Storm. For details and citations please consult my dissertation, *Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership*.

### **March 3: People’s Anti-Fascist March**

Denied access to Plaza Miranda, the MDP adopted a new strategy — “People’s Marches” — and on March 2 they circulated a leaflet announcing a “People’s Anti-Fascist March” to be held the next day.

The leaflet cited the raid on the PCC as evidence of the fascism of the state and insisted that despite this fascism the movement would continue. It called on everyone to join the march, which was to begin at one in the afternoon at the Welcome Rotonda. The MDP was able to promote the march on national television, as at the beginning of the month, Lopez had provided the MDP with a weekly television program which broadcast from nine-thirty to ten-thirty on Thursday nights on ABS-CBN. The SDK, KM, and MDP were given extensive access to radio as well, where the Lopez family and others in the media industry supplied them with regular free airtime. The MDP ran a daily two hour program, *Impressions of the Nation*, hosted by SDK member and future NPA leader Rafael Baylosis, with the explicit intent of broadcasting material regarding imperialism, feudalism, and fascism and the program of national democracy. The KM and SDK were provided with their own separate radio broadcasts as well.

The KM issued a leaflet, calling as always for the “continuation of the struggle for national democracy.” The developing struggle, they claimed, was evidence of the “growing revolutionary consciousness of the Filipino people who are fighting to destroy the evil forces of exploitation and suppression.” Fascism, the leaflet claimed, was the last weapon of American imperialism and was being deployed to hide the weakness of their puppet Marcos, who had lost the trust of the masses, something a government needed in order to succeed, as a result of the unceasing struggle of the forces of national democracy.

The MPKP published their own leaflet for the march, responding to charges of violence which were being raised against the protest movement. It stressed that the root of violence was the “fascist repression and brutality” of the “neocolonial bourgeois state,” and “an oppressed and exploited people have a right to meet force with force.”

Seeking, however, to blame the KM as well, the MPKP continued

The national democratic forces do not plan or participate in or condone acts of

‘vandalism’ or violent acts on the persons and properties of individuals who are not their violent enemies. These are the isolated deeds of provocateurs, looters, and thrill-seekers, or of emotional and extremist elements whose wrath is understandable but whose leaders are duty bound to guide them into a recognition of the distinction between enemies and friends.

Provocateurs must be identified and exposed as mercenary tools of the imperialist-fascist puppet factions now intensely engaged in their own fierce competition for neocolonial power and authority. Extremist and anarchistic elements must be led into the correct revolutionary line, or consciously isolated should they prove to be intractable ...

**Expose Mercenary Provocateurs! Struggle Against Anarchists!**

A highly sympathetic account in the *Collegian* reported that as the march past through Binondo “the Chinese have boarded up. The marchers scream at them before them [sic] are calmed by their leaders and their fury redirected at police brutality and colonialism.”

At the end of a circuitous route through Manila, approximately twenty thousand marchers converged on Plaza Lawton, where they were violently dispersed by police who set upon them with truncheons. Fleeing to Intramuros, Enrique Sta. Brigida, a freshman in Commerce at Lyceum and a member of the Lyceum Student Reform Movement, was killed by a blow to the skull. The CPP published a statement on the March 3 People’s March in the June 1 issue of *Ang Bayan*, which hailed Enrique Sta. Brigida for “adding one more to the list of heroes who have sacrificed their lives.” “However,” the article continued, “the bloody suppression of the March 3 People’s March failed to intimidate the masses of workers, student [sic] and youth who joined the historic mass action. It only goaded them more to wage a resolute struggle for national democracy.”

On March 10, three thousand students marched from Lyceum to South Cemetery in a funeral procession for Sta. Brigida that was at the same time a protest rally. Renato Constantino, Amado Hernandez, Jesus Barrera, Voltaire Garcia, and Crispin Aranda spoke at the funeral, and Lyceum President Sotero Laurel led the procession. It was Hernandez last political act, as he died two weeks later.

### **March 17: Anti-Poverty March**

The MDP held a meeting on Saturday March 14 to finalize plans for another march, to be held on Tuesday the seventeenth and to be called “an anti-poverty march.” The event became known in Tagalog as the *Martsa ng Mahihirap*, or the Poor People’s March. Olivar told the press that the MDP “takes the uncompromising position that poverty is historically a mere consequence of the exploitative semi-feudal and semi-colonial character of our society.” In the early morning of the sixteenth, the ROTC and armory buildings on the UP campus burned to the ground. The *Collegian* wrote, “On the eve of final exams, dormers scampered out in night clothes to watch the DMST [Department of Military Science and Tactics] giant hut, seen by many as sanctuary of local fascist authority, burn down as dormer-activists shouted ‘Maki-BAKA, huwag MA-TA-kot.’” A leaflet, put out under the name *Ang Tutol* [The Protest], hailed the burning of the DMST building as a victory of the national democratic movement over the fascist state.

The day before the anti-poverty march, the MPKP published a leaflet proclaiming that the organization adhered to four basic principles.

The first was people’s power, a formulation which they opposed to “student power,” writing, “MPKP rejects the slogan of Student Power.” The second basic principle was integration with the masses,

which they asserted was not merely “philanthropy,” targeting with this remark the SDK controlled campus organization, the Nationalist Corps. True integration with the masses, the MPKP wrote, was reflected in the fact that seventy percent of the six thousand members of the MPKP were workers and peasants. The third principle was “revolution from below,” stating that the “MPKP rejects Marcos’ concept of ‘revolution at the top’ ... revolutionary change can only be brought about by democratic action from below. It cannot come as concessions from the oppressors and exploiters.” The final principle was “Internationalism.” By this, the MPKP did not mean the international struggle of the working class for socialism, but rather referred to the need to promote the interests of the Soviet Union, writing that “MPKP deplors the current efforts of reactionaries to inculcate chauvinist emotions in the anti-imperialist movement.” With these principles, the MPKP attempted to distinguish itself from the SDK (first principle), the NC (second), the Marcos administration (third), and the KM (fourth).

On Tuesday, March 17, the MDP launched its anti-poverty march. The march began at nine in the morning at three locations and converged on Plaza Moriones in Tondo to stage what they termed a People’s Court [Hukuman ng Bayan]. The speakers at the rally accused Marcos and his cohort of a list of crimes “against the Filipino people,” pronounced a death sentence, and publicly hanged their effigies.

The College Editors Guild of the Philippines (CEGP), which was increasingly entering the camp of the KM, issued a statement, “We call for egalitarianism, which diffuses socio-economic and political powers from the few to the many, from the present ruling oligarchy to the people at large ... The CEGP sees two valid and realistic means: one peaceful, the other violent ... [which means are used] is highly dependent on how the forces of reaction — the beneficiaries of this highly exploitative system — will react.” Either, the CEGP claimed, the elites would allow “an authentic Constitutional Convention ... [of] delegates without vested interests and unbrainwashed,” or they would face violent revolution. The statement concluded: “Ours is a democracy for the elite, a bourgeois democracy, and must be replaced by a genuine national democracy of, for and by the Filipino people.” Because this was a march against poverty, the leaflet mentioned socialism twice and even mentioned the 1917 Russian Revolution. Its political conclusions, however, were strictly limited to pressuring the elite — with the threat of violence — to carry out national democratic measures.

The KM distributed a leaflet which developed its analysis somewhat. While it pointed to the “mounting fascism” of the Marcos administration, this was no longer depicted as its subjective response to the mass protests, but was rooted in the larger crisis of US imperialism. In its attempts to resolve this crisis, the United States was compelled to increase its exploitation of its semi-colonies and this required the growing use of the repressive apparatus of the state. In this aspect of their analysis, the KM was correct. The architecture of dictatorship being erected in the Philippines paralleled the rise of dictatorship around the globe beginning in the mid-1960s and was an expression of the crisis of US imperialism. The international character of this threat highlighted the bankruptcy of local, nationalist solutions to the crisis. Only the coordinated international struggle of the working class for socialism could respond to the international drive to military dictatorship from Chile to Greece and from Indonesia to the Philippines. The KM drew no new political conclusions from this analysis however, and still called for a broad united front in the struggle for national democracy. The solution to the problems of poverty and the threat of dictatorship in the Philippines, they asserted, was national industrialization and agrarian revolution under a national democratic government. What is more, in their subsequent analyses and leaflets, the KM reverted to their older conception, claiming again that the ‘fascism’ of the Marcos administration was rooted simply in the subjective response of Marcos to the protest movement.

The MPKP also circulated a leaflet at the March 17 rally, which stated that “One of the many questions of people regarding the issues raised by the demonstrators is what is meant by

imperialism, feudalism and fascism.” The key, the MPKP argued, to ending poverty was national industrialist development of the “basic industries,” in particular, the creation of complex machinery using metal from Philippine mines. However, “because the prevailing system is bad, it needs to be changed and not merely the people. Even if we get good leaders if the system itself is rotten, they will still not succeed because they themselves will become its victims.” The MPKP made no reference to any specific political event or person, and Marcos was never mentioned. The logic of their leaflet however, could easily be interpreted to argue that Marcos himself was a good leader but the rotten system was corrupting him. It was not a stretch of logic to assume that if the system could be repaired then Marcos could be rescued to be the good leader that he had always intended to be.

*Ang Bayan* claimed that “hundreds of thousands of people” participated in the anti-poverty march. The numerical estimates of revolutionary strength being issued by the CPP were increasingly out of keeping with reality. In the same issue of *Ang Bayan*, they asserted that “more than 90 per cent of the masses ... are on the side of the revolution.” These figures were not merely dishonest, they were absurd. If ninety per cent of the masses were on the side of the revolution in any meaningful sense of the word, the party would have already taken power.

### **The Storm Subsides**

The First Quarter Storm was a student protest movement, and while the majority of these students were intimately connected to the working class and peasantry, the FQS never moved beyond its social base in the student population. At no point did the leadership of this movement, which rested largely with the CPP, fight for its independence from the bourgeoisie and the traditional political elite. On the contrary, it consciously and secretly pursued the interests of a faction of the ruling class and profited out of the relationship.

At the same time, the CPP did not orient the protesting students to broader layers of the working class. The chanted slogans and newsprint manifestos all directed the students merely to escalate their denunciations of Marcos and “fascism,” and ultimately to join the armed struggle in the countryside.

For all its fiery rhetoric and pitched battles in the street — and no matter how truly courageous and self-sacrificing many of the young people were who joined its ranks — the First Quarter Storm was, in the end, but a violent venting of steam. The political turbines through which this steam coursed were those of Lopez and Osmeña, with their scheming plots, and Marcos, who steadily readied the architecture of martial law.

On April 5, the MDP and an organization calling itself Crusaders for Democracy held a rally of five thousand people at Plaza Miranda. Nonie Villanueva spoke for the KM, telling the crowd that People’s War was the answer to the “threat of martial law.” The crowd moved from Miranda to the Embassy, but the police attempted to divert the demonstration with tear gas as it neared Manila City Hall. The protesters responded with Molotov cocktails and pillboxes, and the Metrocom fired their guns to disperse the crowd. It was the last gasp of the First Quarter Storm.

As a movement composed almost exclusively of students the storm’s life was necessarily a short one. Graduation rites succeeded final examinations, and the second week of April saw the majority of students returning home to the province or taking up full-time summer work. As the semester ended and Lopez temporarily reconciled with Marcos, the storm subsided as rapidly as it had started. On March 22, Marcos addressed the graduation rites at the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), vowing to impose martial law “in case the communist threat becomes a positive danger that would imperil the security of the country.”

On April 11, UP staged its graduation rites and the MDP produced a leaflet which it distributed to the class of 1970. It expressed its “firmest fraternal support for the planned protest actions at this year’s UP commencement exercises by graduating national democratic activists,” and denounced US imperialism and their Filipino and Chinese accomplices in the Philippines. The denunciation of the local Chinese accomplices of US imperialism was a striking addition to the rhetoric of the national democratic movement and it would develop rapidly into explicitly racist attacks on the *kumintang intsik* [Guomindang Chinese], playing an increasingly prominent and noxious role in the propaganda of the KM, SDK, and their allies over the next year.

The First Quarter Storm was over.

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**P.S.**

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