

Marcos didn't pack up his troubles

Corazon Aquino and the land reform problem

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Despite a her victory in the recent constitutional elections, the real test for President Cory Aquino will be based in good measure on her ability to learn from Marcos' failure to meet the needs of the poor and the landless.

The central fact of the Philippines' economy is that the people of the island republic are poor. The UNO reports that 76% of its people live in poverty.

This poverty can be traced directly to the maldistribution of the land. Only 29% of the people own the land in a nation where almost 79% work the land.

Marcos had promised that he would "democratize wealth" and looked to Taiwan's land reform, the most effective in Asia, as a model.

Taiwan had established fair rents and gave farmers leases to provide them with a sense of security. Tenants bought the land at a set percentage of the rice crop and received credit and technological aid as well as health

services. The government also used a tax on land values as an incentive to eliminate absentee landlords and to promote tenant production.

Marcos made some of the same promises, but gutted his program by excluding all lands planted in export crops.

Taiwan made a definite commitment to its agricultural workers. Food production served the needs of the people first. In the Philippines, millions went hungry while increasing amounts of land were planted in export crops. Millions migrated to the urban areas where they still lived in poverty.

Taiwan's land reform built the country's prosperity from the bottom up. The least affluent gained the most. In the Philippines the bottom 50% of the people still receive less than 17% of the nation's wealth. Taiwan is still the model for the Philippines. The Aquino revolution led by the cheering middle class of Manila, must use that model, or something like it, to deal with land reform. Marcos lacked the will. It remains for Cory Aquino to return to the task, for the issue of land reform has not flown away with the leaders of the old regime.

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