

LIBERATION

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Assessing the lessons of August 21

**In unity, our struggle will flourish;
In division, our struggle will perish**

"I'm going home to help in the quest for national unity and reconciliation with justice."

This was Ninoy Aquino's grand dream that sunny afternoon of Aug. 21, 1983. A bullet ended that dream. On a deserted airport tarmac, military assassins gunned him down in a heinous deed that could only have been perpetrated at the behest of the highest official of the land.

But Ninoy's dream did not die with him. His assassination galvanized a silent and grieving nation already chafing under the yoke of despotism. In tens and hundreds of thousands, the people followed him to Times St. and to Tarlac, then to his final resting place and on to the massive marches and rallies that metamorphosed into the Parliament of the Streets.

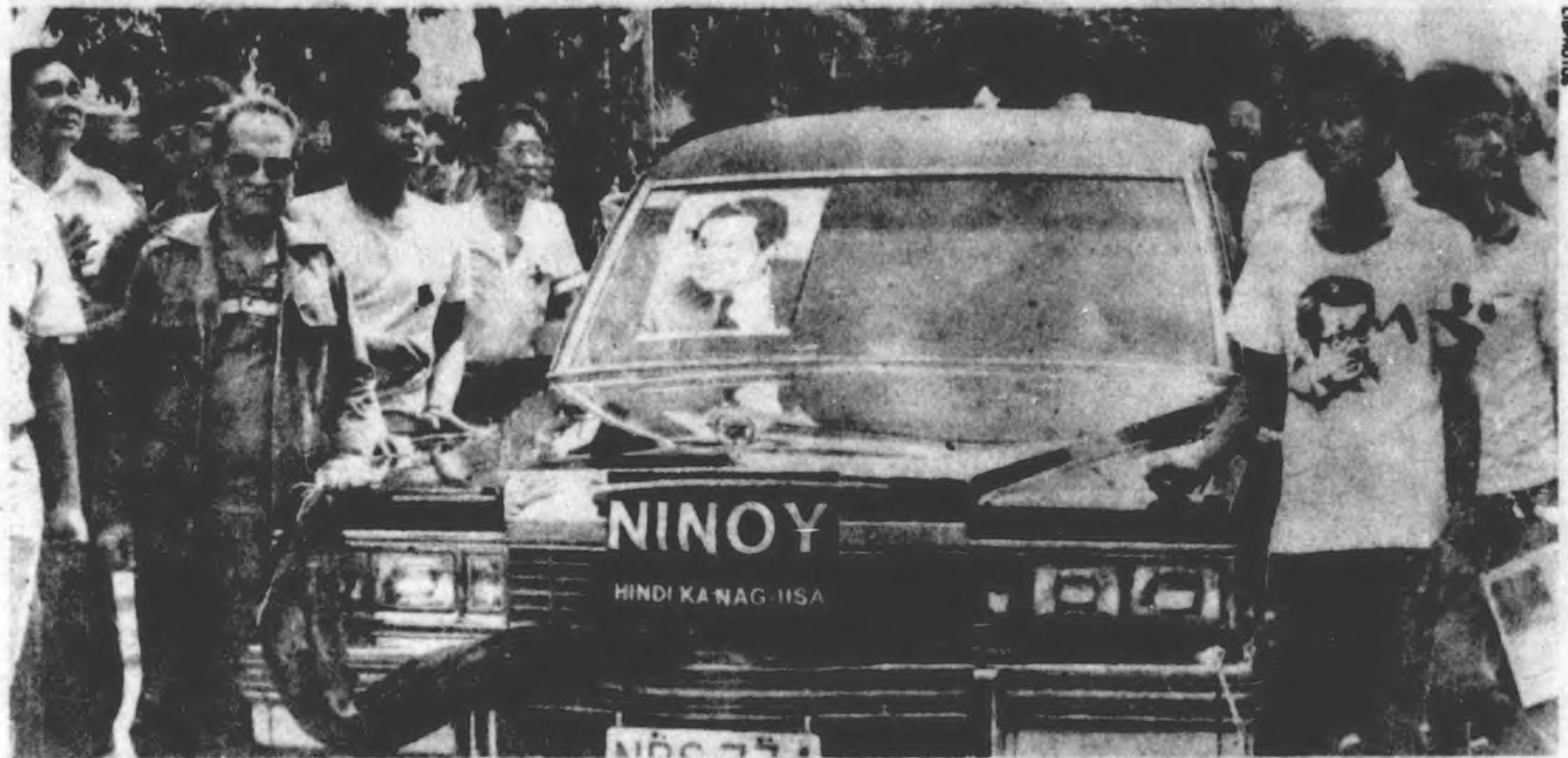
Today, Ninoy's memory is as alive as ever, but his dream is in danger of dying. His noble goal of unity is being killed by a few who would seek to create division and discord, to pit yellow against red, to malign progressive organizations and forces active in the anti-dictatorship struggle. It is being killed by a

few who would seek to confuse the issues and misdirect the fire of the people's anger away from the US-Marcos dictatorship. It is being killed by a few who would seek to negate the significant gains won by the broad opposition front following Ninoy's murder.

It is in this context that the significance of the Aquino assassination should be reassessed. If we are to be true to his memory, if we are to give bone and substance to his death, we must commit ourselves to seek the true meaning and unity behind his martyrdom. This is especially most urgent today for sincere leaders of the legal opposition and some political organizations and their followers who are being swayed by the divisive ploys of certain elements within their ranks and by the regime itself.

The historical significance of August 21

August 21 is a day when we recall the barbaric and murderous acts of the Marcos regime. On this day in 1983, Benigno S.



Last journey of a fallen hero: Procession accompanies Ninoy's funeral car to the Sto. Domingo church on Aug. 26, 1983

Aquino Jr., the chief political rival of the dictator Marcos, was assassinated. Ninoy had thought that even without an armed force of his own or enough followers within the regime's armed forces, he could disarm Marcos by pleading for reconciliation.

The Aquino slaying was done so arrogantly and so scandalously before the eyes of the Filipino people and the world that public outrage in its enormity threatened not only the Marcos regime, but also the entire ruling system in the country. Swiftly, the US imperialist master and its chief puppet colluded to adopt cosmetic measures in a calculated attempt to mollify the people and preserve the dictatorship in a fundamental way.

But the cosmetic measures failed to stop the deluge of problems that soon engulfed the US-Marcos dictatorship. In the wake of the Aquino assassination came the worst economic and political crisis in Philippine postwar history. This further heightened the Marcos regime's extreme political isolation and defensive position, while spurring the widespread politicalization of the people.

It was also on August 21 when a no less infamous event took place in 1971 – the Plaza Miranda Massacre. This is a date the traditional opposition will never forget because on this day, the entire national leadership of the Liberal Party was almost wiped out and hundreds of people became casualties.

The Plaza Miranda Massacre was used by the US-Marcos regime as the excuse for the 1971 suspension of the writ of habeas corpus – the trial run for the 1972 declaration of martial law and the establishment of the fascist dictatorship. Upon the imposition of martial law, the US imperialists instigated the destruction of every semblance of bourgeois democracy and supported the prolongation of the open rule of terror. What used to be a two-party big comprador-big landlord dictatorship pretending to be democratic was transformed into an outright autocracy. This big bourgeois autocracy or fascist dictatorship has since then continued to ride roughshod over the people despite the supposed lifting of martial law in 1981.

If there is one lesson to be learned from both Aug. 21, 1971 and 1983, it is that tyrants will never give up their power voluntarily. They will never hesitate to kill people, including their rivals in the neocolonial system, in order to maintain themselves in the seat of power. The key to their continuing hold on power and getting away with countless crimes is their control and use of the military.

All throughout his career of infamy, Marcos has used the Armed Forces of the Philippines in his bid to monopolize political power and bureaucratic loot as well as to attack the resurgent anti-fascist and anti-imperialist movement. Marcos is able to do and say whatever he pleases, no matter how apparently irrational and self-contradictory this may be, only because he can use and manipulate the AFP as his own private army.

Thus, it is wrong, as some oppositionists are now doing, to insist that the people should cease waging armed resistance. To do so is to actually endorse the US-Marcos monopoly of armed force and the continuance of terrorist oppression. To do so is to disarm the people and undermine the struggle to assert national sovereignty against US imperialism and to dismantle the repressive Marcos dictatorship.

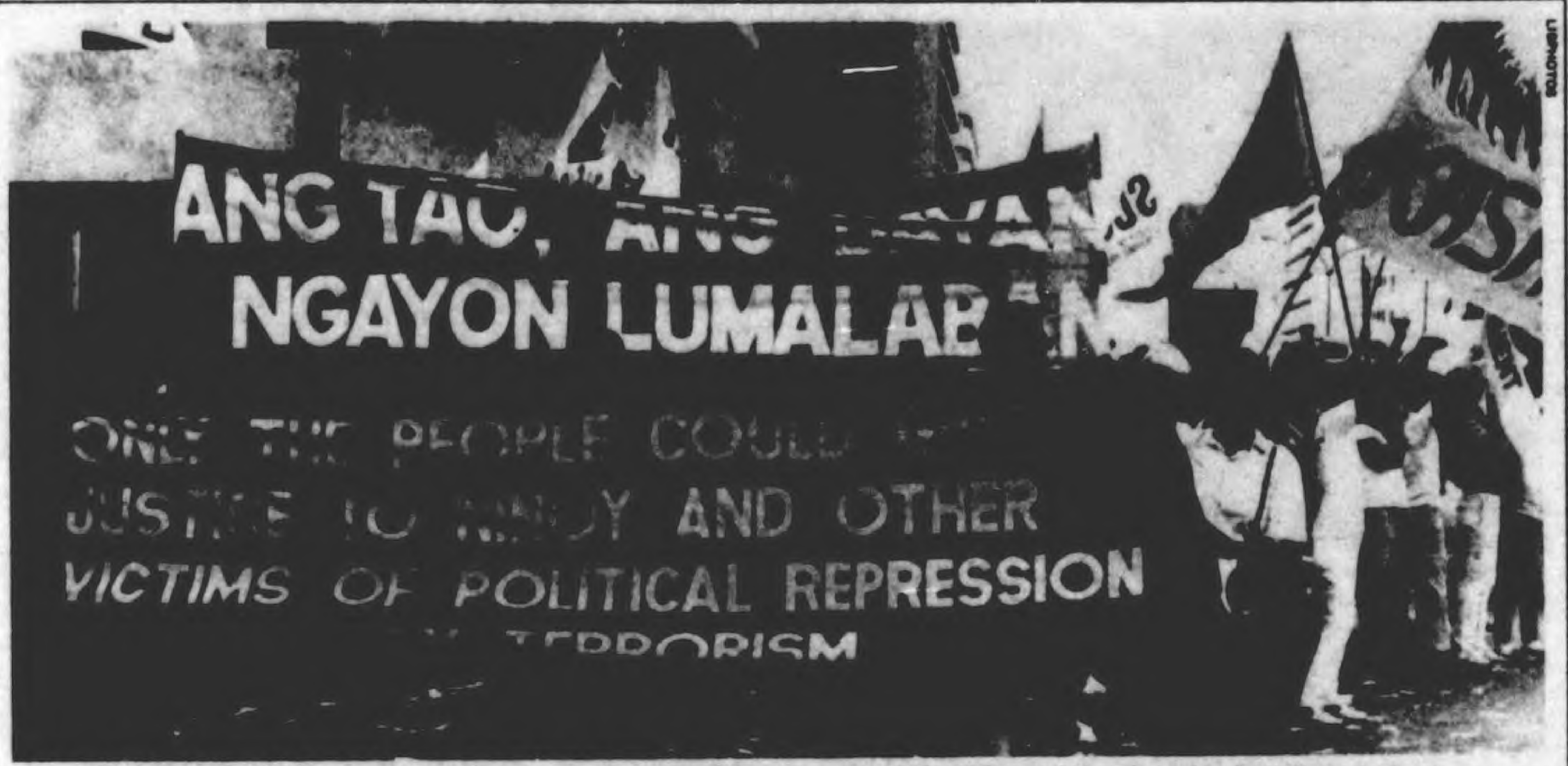
The use of the anti-communist ploy to disrupt unity

There is another lesson to be learned from the historic events of Aug. 21, 1971 and 1983. It is the devious way Marcos has time and again made use of the dirty trick and bloody intrigue of sowing anti-communist paranoia to destroy his opponents.

In the Plaza Miranda Massacre, Marcos quickly accused the Liberal Party as an ally of the Communist Party of the Philippines while at the same time accusing the latter of seeking to eliminate the former. He resurrected this same ploy against Ninoy when he accused him of being a communist. Yet in his methodical madness, Marcos blamed Ninoy's assassination on the communists despite the fact that he was murdered while under maximum security by his military custodians.

It is extremely unfortunate, therefore, that this very same tactic which victimized Ninoy in his lifetime and until his death should now be used by certain oppositionists in a bid to isolate progressive groups and forces. And it is extremely sad that some of them should seek to exclude these groups from the celebration of Ninoy's martyrdom which they seek to monopolize within the narrow parameters of their own political organizations.

In their anti-communist blindness, these oppositionists miss the significance of Ninoy's martyrdom, his legacy of courage that personified the Filipino's bravery in the face of oppression and crystallized the people's unity against the dictatorship.



USA-TODAY

"We will never forget": Bayan demonstrators march on Ayala Ave. on Aug. 21, 1985 to demand justice for Ninoy and others

The impact of Ninoy's death was not partisan or sectarian; it did not extend only to the Aquino family or to the August Twenty-One Movement or to the traditional opposition. The significance of his martyrdom was national; it crossed party lines and regional boundaries, class barriers and political ideologies.

The National Democratic Front considers Ninoy a hero because he was a consistent opponent of the Marcos dictatorship and was even an occasional critic of the worst US policies. And it was for this very reason that the regime murdered him. Ninoy was not a hero in the sense that, as some quarters would now wish to use his name, had he become president he would have made the Philippines safe for US and local reactionary interests under the banner of anti-communism.

By linking the Aquino assassination to the martyrdom of so many other people as well as to the intolerable oppression and exploitation of the entire people, the national democratic movement has given it its broadest and most profound significance. Thus, the people's outrage over the Aquino assassination has flowed into the further development of a powerful movement for justice, national freedom and democracy.

Today, the broad masses of the people continue to rise and condemn all of the regime's bloody crimes, honor the victims and seek justice for all of them. Despite the regime's systematic campaigns of repression, the people's level of consciousness and militancy continues to rise for the ultimate purpose of overthrowing the dictatorship and installing a new democratic system free from foreign and feudal domination.

The National Democratic Front has never allowed philosophical and theological differences within its ranks or in its relations with other anti-dictatorship forces to interfere with the development of the broadest possible unity of forces and elements opposed to the dictatorship. Furthermore, the NDF has always allowed varying degrees of commitment to the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal cause among the anti-fascist forces.

We believe that the broadest possible unity of the people, irrespective of philosophical, theological or religious differences, must be maintained and further developed against the regime. We affirm that all forms of struggle must be waged.

It is in this light that we must condemn the attempts of US imperialist agents and a handful of clerico-fascists (some elements of Opus Dei and some Jesuits of the type of Frs. John

Carroll and Jose Blanco) to create petty incidents so as to ignite philosophical and religious controversy and organizational disruption within the united front. Such attempts must be exposed and thwarted.

It is wrong to insist that communism or a certain religious belief is the main political issue. The few who do so only objectively help the dictatorship. They wittingly and unwittingly join the US imperialists and the Marcos regime in obscuring the real issue confronting the Filipino people today. And that issue of urgent necessity to the people at present is the struggle for national liberation and democracy against the US-Marcos dictatorship.

Targeting the real enemy

This brings us to another instructive lesson of August 21. It is the outstanding fact that the Aquino assassination, as well as the regime's other multiple crimes against the people, were only made possible because of continued US patronage and support of the Marcos regime. It is US imperialism that masterminded, propped up and is prolonging the reign of this unpopular and brutal regime.

It is therefore wrong, as some oppositionists are now wont to do, to insist that US imperialism has no responsibility for the installation and prolongation of the Marcos regime and for the plunder and underdevelopment of the Philippine economy, and that democracy simply means a relatively wider sharing of power and wealth among the big compradors and landlords and their political agents.

Furthermore, it is wrong to insist that the US can be a positive force in the struggle to end the dictatorship or that the struggle against US imperialism can be postponed while fighting the Marcos regime. Only the Marcos camp — or those who would want to be little dictators themselves under imperialist sponsorship — can benefit from this. Only US imperialism — which would gain that much latitude to concoct new schemes aimed at preserving the extremely profitable and advantageous ruling it had set up — can benefit from this.

Contrary to the assurances made by US imperialist agents to a few gullible elements within the opposition that Marcos is already being eased out in a gradual and peaceful manner, the US policy toward Marcos is clear. As stated in the National Security



The people's principal enemy: US imperialism and Marcos

ty Study Directive (NSSD) released by the US State Department on March 12, 1985: "The US does not want to remove Marcos to destabilize the Government of the Philippines."

This policy is already underway. US bilateral military and economic assistance to the Marcos regime has been unconditionally approved for 1986 and 1987. The US, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the foreign private banks are helping out the regime so long as it accepts every dictate to enable them to suck more blood from the Filipino people.

Contrary too to US assurances of the democratization of Philippine political institutions and processes, no substantial steps have been taken in this direction. The US method of incentives and disincentives for Marcos to accommodate the anti-Marcos and pro-US oppositionists has not yielded anything beyond token and negligible results for the legal opposition.

Marcos continues to have a tight grip on the Armed Forces of the Philippines. He continues to keep the courts and the sham parliament within the bounds of his dictatorial rule. He is frantically militarizing local officials and expanding the paramilitary forces. His fake legislature is about to rig up an electoral code to his complete satisfaction. The Commission on Elections is prepared to fix the results of the forthcoming elections.

Already, the serialized whitewashing of the Aquino assassination is in its final stage, with the nearing acquittal of Marcos' chief henchman, Gen. Fabian Ver. The Sandiganbayan, the Tanodbayan and the defense in the Aquino murder trial are all being coordinated in Malacanang by Marcos himself. Most of the accused military men are slated to be acquitted and the small fry who may be convicted will eventually be acquitted by the Supreme Court because of deliberate errors by the Sandiganbayan and the Tanodbayan. And to cap it all, Marcos will make use of the coming elections as a laundering process for his bloody and corrupt rule.

So what is left of the much vaunted US pressures on Marcos? Only some US press exposés are now left to annoy the regime. And as usual, it is the gullible Filipino oppositionists who are made to hold the empty bag of US promises.

And yet, ironically, there are still those among the legal opposition who would fall for Marcos' sweet talk about the elections. It would do them good to carefully study how Marcos can make the legal opposition look dismantled even if it succeeds in uniting and how he can have it defeated through the fragmented accreditation of the opposition parties. Without the proper reservations concerning participation in the forthcoming elections,

the legal opposition is again being trapped into endorsing yet another US-inspired and Marcos-rigged demonstration-type of elections as a democratic process.

The National Democratic Front believes that the forthcoming elections will be farcical in general. However, the NDF may be open to electoral participation if only to support progressive candidates; breach the structure of the Marcos dictatorship; propagate the anti-fascist, anti-imperialist and anti-feudal line; and be in a position to swing people disappointed by the overall results of the elections to more effective courses of action.

The worsening of the political and economic crisis is now so rapid that, despite repressive constraints, a sizeable number of progressive candidates will have a good chance of winning. At any rate, widespread fraud and terror by the regime will only incite the people to expand and intensify their armed resistance.

Renewed call for unity

It is therefore timely, as the nation marks the second anniversary of the martyrdom of Ninoy and other Filipino martyrs and gears for the thirteenth year of the declaration of repressive martial rule, to remind the people that the struggle to dismantle the US-Marcos dictatorship is still uphill and entails all forms of struggle. Elections under the auspices of tyranny can never be the major or sole method for defeating it and cannot be superior to armed struggle and daily mass struggles.

It would be self-defeating for any legal oppositionist to fall for the false assurances made by the US and the black intrigues of clerico-fascists, or to get carried away by the illusion of coming to power soon, or to join Marcos in an anti-communist witchhunt against the leaders and organizations of workers, peasants and other progressive sectors.

Anti-communism translated into political action is self-destructive. Legal oppositionists who take a rabid anti-communist line only undermine their own position, help prolong the dictatorship and become its accomplices in the ruthless suppression of all democratic forces.

The National Democratic Front, however, firmly asserts that every individual and every organization are entitled to the freedom of thought and belief. But fundamental ideological or religious differences should not be used to disrupt political unity and prevent a political program against the common enemy from being pursued.

No time is more crucial than now to direct our concentrated fire against the principal enemy — the US-Marcos dictatorship. We call on the entire Filipino people to forge ranks and exercise greater vigilance against the splittist moves of the dictatorship and a few reactionary leaders in the legal opposition and in some political organizations. No group of persons must ever be allowed to disrupt and sabotage the great unity that has been forged by the combined efforts of the entire people.

Fight on and persist in unity, and our struggle will survive.

Sow discord and persist in division, and our struggle will perish.

The memory of our martyrs will best be served by fighting on and persisting in unity.

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT (NDF)

September 11, 1985

The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF) serves as the organizational framework and channel for the unity, cooperation and coordination of all anti-imperialist and democratic forces in the Philippines and for uniting groups and progressive Filipinos abroad. It traces its beginning to the establishment of the Preparatory Committee for the National Democratic Front on April 24, 1973. LIBERATION is the official publication of the NDF.