

Six Acts of Defiance

By Sen. Joker P. Arroyo

In 1972, Ferdinand Marcos contemptuously imposed martial law on the entire country and ordered the arrest and incarceration of Ninoy Aquino.

The most expedient for Ninoy was simply to collaborate with the dictator as many leaders did. Marcos was just waiting. But Ninoy, the most prominent among the arrested oppositionists, flatly refused.

So Marcos ordered him tried on false charges of rebellion, murder, and illegal possession of firearms before a military commission. That started Ninoy's defiance and a war of attrition between the tormentor and tormented, a battle of wills all the way.

Act I

Ninoy challenged the jurisdiction and independence of Military Commission No. 2, composed of generals and colonels appointed by Marcos. So he refused to participate in the trials – “Convict me if you must,” he told them, “but I will not dignify your illegal trials with my participation.”

The Military Commission responded by having him dragged from his prison cell where he was held in solitary confinement to the Fort Bonifacio gymnasium, the venue of his trial.

Act II

He went on hunger strike. On May 13, 1975, the 40th day of his protest fast, Ninoy's condition became critical.

Marcos would not have the blood of a political martyr on his hands. Ninoy was forcibly rushed to the V. Luna General Hospital to be medically revived. Marcos knew that anointing Ninoy as a hero would be sheer folly. History would later prove him right.

Act III

Military Commission No. 2 resumed its proceedings after Ninoy regained his health. He challenged the individual competence and impartiality of each and every member of the commission.

On November 25, 1977, two days before Ninoy's birthday, the Commission, in a supreme act of sadism, sentenced him to die by musketry. The international outcry that followed prevented Marcos from confirming the death order.

Act IV

In 1978, Marcos allowed the election of the members of the Interim Batasan Pambansa. Ninoy led the opposition slate Laban, launching his campaign from solitary confinement.

The unprecedented success of a noise barrage on the eve of the elections forced Marcos to proclaim all his KBL candidates as winners with only 25 percent of the votes canvassed.

In 1980, Ninoy was afflicted with a heart problem while in stockade. Believing that he would be rid of his most potent rival, Marcos allowed Ninoy to go to the United States for a heart bypass. After his operation, Ninoy energetically barnstormed the United States and other countries to denounce the Marcos regime.

Act V

In 1983, he felt that he had to go home, his place was in the Philippines.

Despite the strong certainty of his being liquidated, Ninoy, in his fifth act of defiance, came home. He paid for the act with his own life. Filipinos responded by showing up by the millions at his wake and funeral.

Act VI

In 1985 or two years after Ninoy's death, Marcos called for snap elections. Ninoy's widow took up what could be called his sixth act of defiance by running against Marcos.

Marcos cheated as he did in the 1978 elections. The people responded resoundingly and trooped to EDSA, in a final defiance that jolted the world.

* Sen. Joker P. Arroyo stood by Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino Jr throughout his incarceration and struggle until his assassination, as lawyer, fraternity brother and kindred spirit.