

APPEARED  
ON PAGE 34

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

5 December 1985

**JOSEPH C. HARSCH**

## The fragility of dictators

**O**NE trouble with dictators or tyrants is that they seldom arrange for an orderly succession to their rule.

There are exceptions. Gen. Francisco Franco ruled Spain, absolutely, from 1939 to 1975. During the last six years Prince Juan Carlos was the official Crown Prince and became King on Franco's death.

To the surprise of almost everyone concerned, Juan Carlos as King proceeded with great skill to dismantle the political machinery of the dictatorship and guide Spain to democracy. It was presumably not what General Franco had intended. It has worked.

A classic example of a dictatorship not providing successfully for the succession was that of the former Shah of Iran. When his regime collapsed, it did so into a far worse dictatorship, that of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The Shah seemed to be such a splendid fulcrum for American policies in the Middle East while he was in full strength. But the United States was so closely associated with him that his downfall brought with it the exclusion of the US from Iran.

The memory of the story of the Shah is now stimulating US policy toward President Marcos of the Philippines. Can the US disentangle itself from him in time? The question is made acute by the expected but nonetheless disturbing judicial whitewash of Philippine Gen. Fabian Ver.

There is little doubt in the minds of anyone who has studied the records of the trial that former opposition leader Benigno Aquino was assassinated by the Army, which at that time (Aug. 21, 1983) was under the command of General Ver. His acquittal is merely more ammunition for the opposition. It proves in the minds of most people in the Philippine Islands that the Marcos dictatorship will stoop to anything to protect its own and perpetuate its regime.

Under vigorous prodding from Washington, President Marcos has now agreed to a special election in February. The theory is that if only the moderate opposition can be persuaded to put forward a single and reputable candidate and if the elections are actually fair and free, the result could be a legal shift to a new and still democratic regime. That could defuse the rising communist movement.

Marcos was elected President of the Philippines in 1969. He declared martial law in 1972. He has run the country ever since as his personal property. His wife, Imelda, is reputed to have amassed a large fortune during this period. So too have many of the people in the group, including General Ver, that surrounds the President.

The Reagan administration took off in 1981 in a pro-Marcos mood. The Carter administration had been criticizing Marcos for violation of human rights. Vice-president George Bush went to Manila in June 1981 and toasted Marcos for his "adherence to democratic principles and to the democratic processes." Mr. Bush promised that the US would not desert him, and he invited him to the White House.

Marcos came to Washington the next year for a five-day official visit, and President Reagan on Sept. 16 gave him a White House banquet and praised him as "a respected voice for reason and moderation."

By June 1983 Washington was beginning to have doubts about the Marcos regime and its dedication to the highest principles of democracy. US Secretary of State George Shultz stopped off in Manila on June 25 and, at the inevitable formal dinner, referred to "the very special relationship" between the US and the Philippines. But members of his delegation informed accompanying US reporters that one purpose of the trip was to expand US relations with other political leaders of the Philippines.

Last spring CIA Director William Casey stopped off in Manila and urged Marcos to hold an early election. On Oct. 12 Sen. Paul Laxalt, a personal friend of President Reagan, made a special trip to Manila to deliver on behalf of the President "an extremely blunt message of warning."

In other words, Washington is extremely worried that the rising communist movement will sweep the islands unless Mr. Marcos can be maneuvered into allowing an honest election which will lead to a moderate new regime. They are doing their best to maneuver him out of the way before it is too late.

But, as often happens, it is difficult for dictators to bring themselves to arrange for an orderly succession.