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Standard Questions -- Friends of the Filipino People

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Standard questions -- Friends of the Filipino People

1. Formation: Why and by whom? Did the goals change over time?

The Friends of the Filipino People (FFP) was formed in October 1973 by a meeting in Philadelphia of some 50 men and women, mainly from cities on the East Coast. At this meeting were Filipino student exiles from the Marcos dictatorship, former Peace Corps volunteers, and those with a special interest in the Philippines from church circles (Protestant and Catholic, clergy and laity) and from academia (students and teachers). The purpose of the organization was to educate the U. S. public so as to bring pressure on the U. S. government to change its policy of support for the Marcos dictatorship. Before the FFP was formed there were already in existence in the U. S. organizations of anti-Marcos student exiles. But those who organized the FFP believed that U. S. voters should take the main responsibility for changing Washington's policy towards the Philippines. Hence they organized the FFP to help bring this about.

The goals originally were to cut off the increasing U. S. economic and military aid to the Marcos dictatorship. Very soon this thrust was deepened to include opposition to U. S. bases in the Philippines, since it became clear that a principal reason for the U. S. support of Marcos was his support of the U. S. bases. Central in the work of the FFP was always support for all those in the Philippines opposing the Marcos dictatorship, and protest against the infringement of their rights.

2. How was the organization run (e. g. by a board, by consensus, by hierarchical arrangement) and by whom?

As it started out the organization had a national committee, an annual national conference, and local chapters. The chapters sent representatives to the national conference, and the conference elected members of the national committee. The national conference also elected a staff, including a national coordinator, treasurer, etc. In fact the organization has always been rather loose and informal, and in recent years -- especially since the overthrow of

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the Marcos dictatorship -- has been reduced to a network of individuals with a national committee and coordinator. Decisions have been reached by consensus or majority vote. In its earliest and strongest years the organization became nation-wide, stretching from the eastern states to Hawaii. Later (in particular after the split in the organization, see below) it tended to return to its eastern base.

3. What were the major or minor successes of the organization's work?

In its first years the FFP did effective lobbying work with a full-time lobbyist in Washington. The FFP joined other organizations in helping bring about reductions in military aid to Marcos on more than one occasion. It helped formulate and pass the Human Rights Amendment to foreign aid bills. Important was its educational campaign against U. S. bases in the Philippines which became especially pronounced after 1976. This was recognized in the Philippines in September 1993 when a number of anti-bases organizations gave awards, in a Manila ceremony, to a leader of the FFP and to two outstanding Philippine Senators for work done to bring about the closure of the bases. As for the FFP policy of giving support to Philippine victims of human rights violations, there were instances where positive results seemed directly traceable to such activity. It is also likely that the work of the organization helped to turn U. S. public opinion against the Marcos dictatorship.

4. What was the composition of the membership, governing bodies, and the staff? How were they recruited?

The composition of the membership, governing bodies, and staff was described in answer to question #1; the founding conference laid down what was to be a pattern in this regard. In general it was made up of those in the United States of a democratic and anti-fascist frame of mind, with a special interest in the Philippines. Membership has been open to all who agreed with the main goals of the organization, without regard to other political beliefs or affiliations. In the Marcos years this meant all those who opposed Marcos and U. S. support

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for Marcos -- post-Marcos, all those who wish to see U. S. policy towards the Philippines more democratic in all its aspects. Recruiting has always been as a result of personal connections, materials published and circulated, and public meetings (as when Charito Planas and other Philippine democratic figures toured the country speaking at meetings which the FFP organized or helped to organize).

5. Did the organization work with other organizations and individuals? If so, what were the most important relationships?

The organization has worked with many U. S. individuals and organizations opposed to U. S. support for the Marcos dictatorship and other undemocratic interventions in Philippine affairs. It has had working relationships over the years with several U. S. Congress people. The U. S. organizations the FFP has worked with have included especially and in the first place church or religious groups, both Catholic and Protestant. In 1977 such groups came together in the Church Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines, or CCHRP. The FFP has also worked with organizations of those in the U. S. with a Philippine background by birth or family ties, such as the League of Democratic Filipinos (Katipunan Democrático Filipino, or KDP), the Movement for a Free Philippines (MFP), Philippine Support Committee, and the Alliance for Philippine Concerns (APC). Early in the '70s in the U. S. an Anti-Martial Law Coalition was organized of such groups (Philippine and church-related), in which the FFP took part. On specific issues such as nuclear weapons and nuclear power, the environment, peace and disarmament, Central America and Korea, etc., the FFP has cooperated with any number of organizations in the U. S.

The FFP had an especially strong working relationship with the exiled Philippine leader, Charito Planas, and friendly relations with other exiled anti-Marcos leaders like Benigno Aquino, Raul Manglapus, Bonifacio Gillego, and Heherson Alvarez. It has had good relationships with democratic leaders

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in the Philippines like Senators Lorenzo and Wigberto Tanada, Senator Jose Diokno, Sister Mary John Mananzan, Edicio de la Torre, etc. It has had good working relationships with Philippine organizations like Task Force Detainees, Anti-Bases Coalition, Nuclear Free Philippines Coalition, etc.

6. What were the major problems, set-backs, road blocks faced by the organization?

The major problem of the organization was, of course, how to reach the ears of the U. S. population. Here lack of funds was a factor. In this instance the split in the organization had a negative effect.

The split came about in this way. Since its inception there had always been those in the FFP who favored only confrontational, anti-establishment policies, and were opposed to attempts to use lobbying or other parliamentary means, any policies approaching electoral activities or procedures; these members believed the latter activities produced false political illusions, false hopes, etc. It was official FFP policy on the other hand, as endorsed by national conferences, to develop work on both lines -- within the system by lobbying and such means, and confrontational-by street manifestations and demonstrations. In the first years these differences were more or less contained within the organization. In 1980 they came to a head as the group that favored reliance on confrontational policies split away, attempting to take the name of the FFP with it. This split caused confusion and weakened the FFP and the anti-Marcos movement in the U. S. as a whole.

The organization, the FFP, also suffered from the conservative ideology influential in the Cold War period, which promoted the idea that those who opposed U. S. support for Marcos and U. S. bases in the Philippines were somehow "subversive."

7. The organization has not dissolved. At a 20th anniversary national conference held in October 1993 it was agreed that the organization should continue as a network of individuals or groups, with a national

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committee and coordinator, maintaining its mailing list, and issuing material on U. S.-Philippine relations from time to time, working on such issues as opposition to the U. S.-Philippine access agreement designed to take the place of the bases, the clean-up of the toxic wastes left by the U. S. military on the former base lands, etc.

8. If you could do it over again, what would you change?

I find it impossible to answer this question. Such a question has never been discussed in our organization, so I would have no basis for an answer. On the other hand the answers I have given to the preceding questions represent, I believe, something approaching a consensus of the opinion of those who have been members or supporters of the FFP. This is because the preceding questions have been thought about, discussed, and worked on, over the years by those who have been active in or around the FFP.

Daniel B. Schirmer
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