

Philippines: Rebellion fails but dissatisfaction continues

Wednesday 5 December 2007, by [ILTIS Tony](#) (Date first published: 1 December 2007).

Over 50 military and civilian dissidents remain in custody following the storming of the Manila Peninsular luxury hotel on November 29 by troops loyal to President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo to dislodge a group of soldiers who had seized the hotel and used it to hold a press conference calling for a “people’s power” uprising against the unpopular president. Civil society and religious leaders joined the rebels at the press conference.

While their demands met with public sympathy, that was reflected at the thousands-strong workers’ march the next day, the rebellion was suppressed before a “people’s power” uprising had time to materialise.

The dramatic events began with a session of the trial of Senator Antonio Trillanes and a dozen other military officers for their role in an anti-Arroyo uprising in 2003. In May, while in detention awaiting trial, Trillanes was elected to the Senate with 11 million votes.

At the trial, Trillanes and the other defendants got up and marched out of court. Instead of stopping them, the soldiers assigned as their guards marched out with them. After holding a rally outside the court, they marched to the Manila Peninsular, joined by religious and civil society figures, including Bishop Julio Labayen, former vice-president Teofisto Guingona and left-wing academic Professor Francisco Nemenzo from the socialist organisation Laban ng Bayan.

Inside the hotel the rebels, numbering about 30 soldiers and 20 civilians, were joined by representatives of the local and international media. At the ensuing press conference, Trillanes explained that the soldiers had no intention of taking power for themselves, or any other section of the armed forces, but called on the people to rise up and overthrow the corrupt regime.

Arroyo came to power in 2001 after a mass uprising overthrew president Juan Estrada, in whose administration she was vice-president. Estrada was later imprisoned for corruption and links with organised crime but pardoned by Arroyo. While Arroyo won presidential elections in 2004, evidence has since surfaced, including taped conversations, that has confirmed the widespread suspicion that this was achieved through electoral fraud.

The rebels called on other members of the armed forces to withdraw support from the Arroyo regime, which did not eventuate. About 1000 pro-government military and paramilitary forces surrounded the hotel before launching an assault that involved ramming armoured personnel carriers through the front of the hotel and tear-gassing and handcuffing journalists and TV crews as well as the rebels. A curfew was imposed until the following morning.

On November 30, between 5-10,000 trade unionists took part in the annual Bonifacio Day march. The march was joined by bishops representing KNG, an organisation of progressive clerics. A Laban ng Bayan spokesperson, speaking by mobile phone from where demonstrators were massing in front of police lines protecting the Malacanang presidential palace, told Green Left Weekly that the effect of the rebel soldiers’ actions on the workers’ movement was “electrifying”. The Bonifacio Day march

demands were changed from economic demands against Arroyo's neoliberal policies to "Oust GMA [Arroyo]! Resign all! Transitional Government! No martial law!"

The spokesperson told GLW that unionists had reported that the message they were getting from workplaces was that workers would have marched to the Manila Peninsular hotel to support the rebel soldiers had it not been all over before they knew about it. Street vendors called out to the marchers "Where were you yesterday?" The spokesperson said demonstrators were planning to march to Camp Crane, where the detainees are being held.

P.S.

* From: International News, Green Left Weekly issue #734 5 December 2007.