



Half of the Hospital Union's membership will remain in RWDSU, roughly 75,000 workers from the New York District 1199.

Hospital Union battle partly settled

By David Moberg

The raging controversy between the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees and its parent union, the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU), has finally been resolved—somewhat. The Hospital Union—long an autonomous unit within RWDSU that had grown out of the celebrated efforts of ill-paid, largely minority New York City hospital workers to form their union, District 1199—will now exist as a separate union with a charter granted by the AFL-CIO. But they will leave behind in RWDSU half of their membership, roughly 75,000 workers from the New York District 1199.

The battle erupted last fall when RWDSU President Alvin Heaps, with the support of District 1199 President Doris Turner, proposed dismantling the autonomous Hospital Union. The fight took on special meaning because the Hospital Union has in many ways been a model for the labor movement. It is comparatively democratic, it has active organizers with a success rate half again better than the national union average and it represents service workers who are mainly women and in large part minorities, politically left and active in civil rights, peace and cultural affairs.

Now the union is divided and at least temporarily weakened, although Hospital Union President Henry Nicholas is glad that he and the rest of his staff will now be freed from legal and intra-union battles. Yet the fight continues within the New York district where opponents of Turner, a black woman who once worked as a hospital service employee, charge that elections held last month which she claims to have won—were tainted with fraud, intimidation

The Hospital Union continued to be threatened by the lawsuits, adverse actions by the RWDSU executive board and the certainty that the July 9 special RWDSU convention would end both their existence and their legal standing to protest. Hospital Union leaders also believed that Turner had made arrangements to sign the contracts that expire July 1 with the League of Voluntary Hospitals with District 1199, effectively leaving the Hospital Union in any case.

Despite the turmoil, the Hospital Union has continued its organizing this year, winning 30 of 41 elections that have brought in more than 3,000 new members this year. To compensate for the split, national union leaders plan to call a referendum vote on increasing district per capita taxes, which could also raise dues. Some austerity measures will be needed, but there are no plans to cut organizers.

The Hospital Union executive board will meet June 6, when it is expected to vote to give 90-day notice of its plans to withdraw after the agreement goes into effect July 1. Although Hospital Union leaders had pushed vigorously in years past to merge with the Service Employees—a campaign that precipitated the recent moves by Heaps and Turner—it is now intent on building a strong independent union. Most Hospital Union leaders still hold out hopes that District 1199 will rejoin their union.

For that to occur, there would probably need to be a leadership change in District 1199. Turner, a protege of long-time union leader Leon Davis, who opposed her re-election, felt bitter that Nicholas, another black leader, succeeded Davis as president. Her followers portray her as a woman representative of black rank and file fighting against control of the union by white men with ties to the Communist Party. But her critics describe her as personally paranoid, interested solely in narrow business unionism, as well as politically compromised—supporting Ed Koch over Mario Cuomo, for example, in the last New York gubernatorial primary.

Turner's opponents have charged that the April election was thoroughly corrupt: opponents were barred from hospitals, refused nominating petitions, physically threatened and persistently redbaited. They also claim that paid staff—whose numbers, salaries and perks were recently boosted by Turner—worked on union time for Turner, and that the election board was rigged. Federal district judge Leonard B. Sands issued a temporary restraining order on ballot counting on the basis of evidence accumulated in Hospital Union hearings, but counting started anyway. In early May, after the agreement had been reached, a new count was started, but part way through the tally observers for opponents were excluded. A few days later Turner claimed victory, but a week later District 1199 still would not release the results. (Neither Turner nor any other leader from her faction was willing to discuss the controversy with *In These Times*.)

On the basis of the preliminary count they did observe, opponents say that they led Turner in the 31,000-member professional, technical and clerical unit by 68 percent and in the 5,000-member registered nurses unit by 62 percent. Turner led by 70 percent in the 36,000-member service and maintenance unit, the poorer and more heavily black section of the union that, along with the geographical regions of Manhattan and the Bronx, make up Turner's base. Results in the smaller pharmacy unit were unclear. Opponents conceded Turner may have had a majority, but the union by-laws require a run-off if no candidate wins in all four divisions. The Hospital Union is charging in court that the election violated the agreement while Turner opponents pursue internal appeals and prepare to ask the Labor Department to hold new elections. Meanwhile, some registered nurses are talking about disaffiliating from District 1199.

"Doris Turner says to members that whites are out to get me, and a lot of black women identify with her," laments Dennis Rivera, an opposition candidate. Race, politics, union philosophy, personal ambitions and much more fuel the fight. Yet it seems—considering only about 23,000 of 75,000 District 1199 members voted—that the conflagration has not sucked in much of the membership. They are, unfortunately, likely to suffer the most in a battle that has been partly settled, partly shifted to other ground.

THE STORY INSIDERY

and numerous violations of law and the terms of the agreement between RWDSU and the Hospital Union.

The agreement, worked out as a result of meetings during the complicated round of suits and countersuits filed by all three principal parties, gave the Hospital Union the option of remaining as a protected, autonomous unit of RWDSU that would receive a financial settlement over three years to compensate for the withdrawal of District 1199. But the Hospital Union opted for independence. Much to their surprise, since many AFL-CIO unions claim jurisdiction among health-care employees, they were promptly granted a new charter.

"Why should we stay in when we had another option that was more in keeping with our objectives?" Nicholas said. "If someone cut off both of your arms and legs [a reference to the RWDSU attacks on the Hospital Union and the separation of District 1199], why would you stay? We saw that money offer as blood money."

There was dissent among Hospital Union executive board members, and some New York opponents of Turner protested that the rights of District 1199 members had not been sufficiently protected in the agreement. But the majority of the board felt that, "given all the circumstances, it's the best that could be done," said Executive Vice-President Bob Muehlenkamp. Secretary-Treasurer Jerry Brown, who voted against the deal, said, "I felt that the agreement should have given more guarantees for membership rights in their current battle in this [District 1199] election. But we were not able to continue to protect them from outside without risking extinction."



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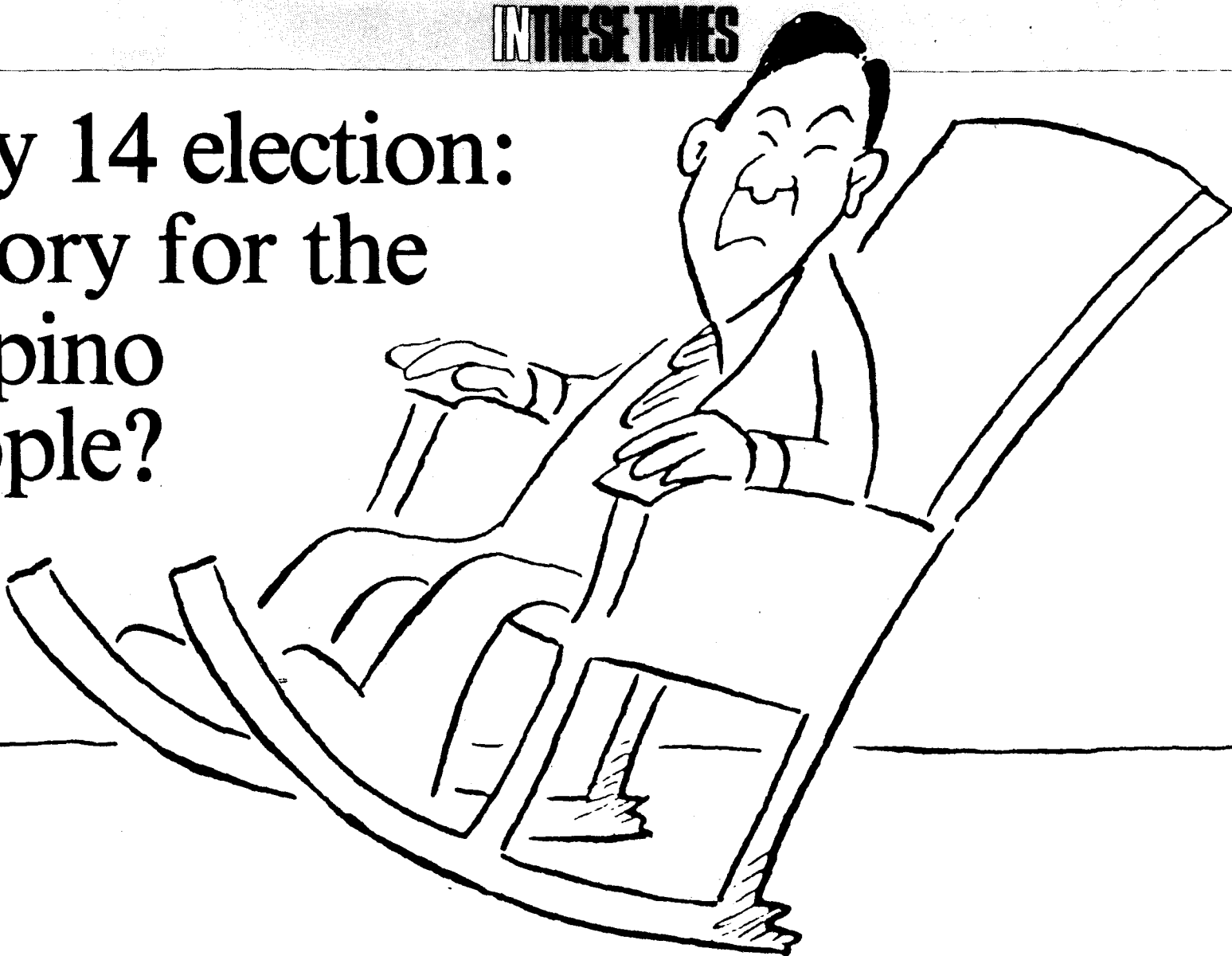
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IN THESE TIMES

May 14 election: victory for the Filipino people?



By A. Lin Neumann

MANILA

"SEND LAWYERS, GUNS AND money 'cause the shit has hit the fan," goes the refrain of a Warren Zevon song. Those lines could easily be the subtitle to the Philippine election story of May 14 as early results put government opponents in the lead. But the final outcome was still very much in doubt as *In These Times* went to press.

On election day at the Pedro Cruz elementary school in San Juan, Metro Manila, attorney Pacifico Tacub tried to maintain a little order on behalf of the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), a surprisingly influential poll-monitoring body. Earlier in the day, he had discovered that several precinct voting lists had been switched. So when the time came for vote counting, Tacub pleaded with a journalist, "Please stay. Please. We are helpless."

He then held up his walkie-talkie and asked NAMFREL for reinforcements. In the counting room, the results from the suspicious precincts were mysteriously higher for the ruling New Society Movement (KBL) candidate than they had been in any other precincts at Pedro Cruz.

As Tacub struggled to keep tabs on the count, several other men lurked about the room with their own walkie-talkies. They explained that they were "concerned citizens."

In a neighborhood in Makati, Metro Manila, the voting center was on the property of the local Barangay captain, a government official roughly comparable to a ward boss. A NAMFREL volunteer explained that he had caught several "flying voters" in the precinct who were using bogus registration forms to vote more than once for the government candidate.

In a provincial center in Tarlac, north of Manila, police under command of the mayor refused to release the ballot boxes to election officials. In another area of Metro Manila, a man was beaten and threatened with arrest for questioning other men who had stolen his wife's registration form. The man claimed that they would use it to pad the government's vote.

But none of that was unexpected. Throughout the campaign, President Ferdinand Marcos, who has ruled here

since 1965, and his powerful First Lady Imelda had predicted a KBL landslide. And on the morning of the elections, Marcos went on nationwide TV to predict a 21 to 0 KBL victory in Metro Manila. Imelda Marcos offered thousands of pesos to mayors of towns that voted straight KBL. Barangay captains were given hundreds of pesos (14 pesos equals \$1) to deliver the votes in their area. A popular singer of protest songs, Freddy Aguilar, was offered half a million pesos to sing for a KBL rally. He refused.

Such episodes were generally chalked up to the power of the incumbency. And what a power it is. These National Assembly elections were the first since 1978, when the nation was in the sixth year of martial law, which was nominally lifted in 1981. The 183 seats at stake should have been no contest. A local movement to boycott the polls claimed all along that clean elections were impossible under the Marcos government. The moderate opposition was so badly divided that the family of slain opposition leader Benigno Aquino split over the issue of whether or not to participate. His widow Cory backed running, while his younger brother Agapito led the boycott camp. The evidence from 1978 was clear: in those polls Benigno Aquino, running from prison, lost amid massive fraud in Metro Manila, and only 13 opposition members sat in the parliament.

As May 14 drew near, it looked like the fix was on in a big way. Even Prime Minister Cesar Virata, the regime's point man with the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) and international banks, complained to *In These Times* that overspending by the government was a major problem. His main opponent in his home province of Cavite was a close friend of Imelda Marcos, Helen Benitez, who was running with "madame's support," due to Imelda's irritation at Virata's austere monetary policies. "She is really just spending too much," said Virata, whose aides claimed that Benitez offered 30,000 pesos to Cavite mayors in return for support.

But through it all a group of true believers and moderates vaguely identified with the opposition were building up the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections. Wealthy industrialist Jose Concepcion recruited businessmen, students and housewives—anyone he could find—to donate time and money in an effort to monitor the elections. Following a nationwide re-registration of voters in late March and early April, Concepcion had been outraged. "I have never seen such blatant cheating," he told *In These Times* as he ran down a list of precincts in which the lists were padded, voters were registered several times or whole blocks of registration forms had disappeared into the hands of local officials. The government's Commission on Elections was eventually pressured into accrediting NAMFREL as an official poll-watching body.

Then there was the explosive climate in which every Philippine election is held. More than 90 people died during the May campaign in election-related violence. The Communist New People's Army (NPA) pledged to prevent voting in areas under its control. As a result, the military was "deputized" by the Commission on Elections to safeguard the polls, leading to the dispatch of several battalions of marines to the island of Mindanao to do battle with the rebels.

And while the NPA did threaten the polls in many rural precincts, Gen. Jaime Echeverria, commander of the armed forces in eastern Mindanao, admitted that the military was an intimidating factor to the electorate in some areas. "Yes, I cannot deny that," he told *In These Times*.

Intimidation or not, several administration opponents did not run because they considered the legislature an exercise in futility. This version of a National Assembly was put together by Marcos in 1978 to replace the Philippine Congress, which he disbanded when he declared martial law in 1972. In addition to the

183 seats at stake in the elections, the president retains the right to appoint 17 more members. He has veto power over any legislation, and through the controversial Amendment 6, can override any bill by issuing his own decrees. Up to now, the parliament has been of little interest, with the president ignoring it at will, and Assembly members proposing little independent legislation.

In the wake of the Aquino assassination, however, it was hoped by many that Marcos could be pressured by public opinion into dropping his decree powers and relaxing his hold on the state apparatus. This would allow him to stage a more credible election, which was badly needed to appease his American allies and his international creditors.

But it was not to happen. Enough of

One sign in San Juan read: "Take the money, but vote your conscience."

the moderate opposition went to the polls to make Marcos forget about further major concessions. The justification, according to Sen. Salvador Laurel, chairman of UNIDO, a large moderate coalition, was: "The elections are the last chance to prevent violence here."

In addition, American officials both in Manila and Washington reminded reporters frequently that they were "carefully monitoring" the process. Ronald Reagan went so far as to send a letter to Marcos relating his concern for "free and fair elections."

But when May 14 dawned, the lawyers, guns and money seemed mostly on the government's side. A sign in San Juan summed up the last hope of the Marcos opponents this way: "Take the money, but vote your conscience."

Apparently that happened. NAMFREL, in addition to monitoring the balloting, established an elaborate tallying operation in an exclusive Catholic school in Manila. Its intention was to get a copy of each tally sheet in the more than 85,000 precincts covering the 7,000 Phil-

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Image-making in Marcos land

On May 15, the day after the elections, President Ferdinand Marcos confidently predicted that the ruling New Society Movement (KBL) would retain overwhelming control of the National Assembly when the final results were tabulated.

Concerning early reports of major KBL losses, Marcos said, "I would presume that our instructions to our people to allow...the opposition to win some seats might have been taken too literally." He then added that the results would allow him to "truthfully say we have presented to the world the image of a free democracy."