

Philippines in 19th century

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Hacienda Luisita is a 6, 435-hectare sugar plantation estate located in the province of Tarlac, Philippines, owned by the Cojuangco family, which includes the late former President Corazon C. Aquino and her son, incumbent President Benigno S. Aquino III. It spans various municipalities in the province, including the capital Tarlac City. The hacienda is primarily within the province's 1st and 2nd legislative districts. The estate is as large as the cities of Makati and Pasig combined. In the 1950s, the onset of the Hukbalahap rebellion led the Spanish owners of Tabacalera to sell Hacienda Luisita and the sugar mill Central Azucarera de Tarlac.

Ramon Magsaysay, then president of the Philippines, blocked the sale of the plantation to the eager and wealthy Lopez of Iloilo. During those times the brothers Fernando Lopez and Eugenio Lopez as well as their cousins were one of the wealthiest in all of the Visayas Islands, save for a few Chinese Filipino families in Cebu and Leyte, as well as the Familias Aliadas de Villegas, Teves, Lopez, y Rodriguez (a family with origins from Santander, Galicia, & Asturias; as well as China - Teves).

Fearing the Lopez might become too powerful after already owning Meralco, Negros Navigation, Manila Chronicle, ABS-CBN, various haciendas in Western Visayas and then the nearby PASUMIL consortium in del Carmen, Pampanga that they purchased from the Americans, the President offered the property to Jose Cojuangco, nicknamed "Pepe" through Magsaysay protegee and Cojuangco's son-in-law, Benigno Aquino. Magsaysay also knew the Cojuangcos through his wife, Luz, of the prosperous Banzons, an old Chinese Filipino family. Unfortunately, President Ramon Magsaysay died in Mount Manunggal, Cebu in 1957.

The sale was consummated in President Carlos P. Garcia's term, a close ally of then Senator Ferdinand Marcos and five years from the day President Magsaysay offered the land. The Jose Cojuangcos were wealthy in land and bank holdings and in Philippine pesos. They were not wealthy in United States dollars which was closely regulated then by the Philippine Central Bank. In fact, Pepe and his wife Metring were not able to send Pepe's younger brother Eduardo Sr. (Danding Cojuangco's father) to the United States for treatment for the mere fact that they could not exchange their pesos to dollars. Eduardo Sr or Endeng Lalake later died of kidney failure.

The Jose Cojuangcos acquired the property in 1958 through a loan from the Government Service Insurance System and a dollar loan from the Manufacturers' Trust Company of New York, which was guaranteed by the Central Bank of the Philippines, with consent from Miguel Cuaderno, its governor. Pepe also reduced his stake in the Paniqui Sugar Mills, though he and his cousins still managed it on behalf of his aunt, Ysidra Cojuangco, the matriarch. Hacienda Luisita was the largest investment he ever made. With the ink barely dry, he appointed not his eldest son Pedro but his son-in-law Benigno Aquino Jr as administrator.

Pepe and Ninoy introduced an almost social welfare state: free medicines and check up, scholarships to colleges, free education, free food and equitable shares to the harvest, free child care and nutrition, free burials, a village with housing earmarked for the farmers, even free gasoline to the tractoras. Like the Paniqui Sugar Mills, not a single workers' strike was instigated during their administration. Pepe barely made any money from the Hacienda Luisita. Understanding that the value of the Luisita is in the

farmers who till it, he chose to rehabilitate the Filipinos who before were almost slaves under the Tabacalera.

He was able to sustain these losses due in part of his other more money making investments in the Bank of Commerce and First Manila Management which owned the Pantranco buses and the Mantrade group. On 6 November 2004, twelve picketing farmers and two children were killed and hundreds were injured when police and soldiers dispatched by then Labour Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas,[3] stormed a blockade by plantation workers. The protesters were pushing for fairer wages, increased benefits and, more broadly, a greater commitment for national land reform.