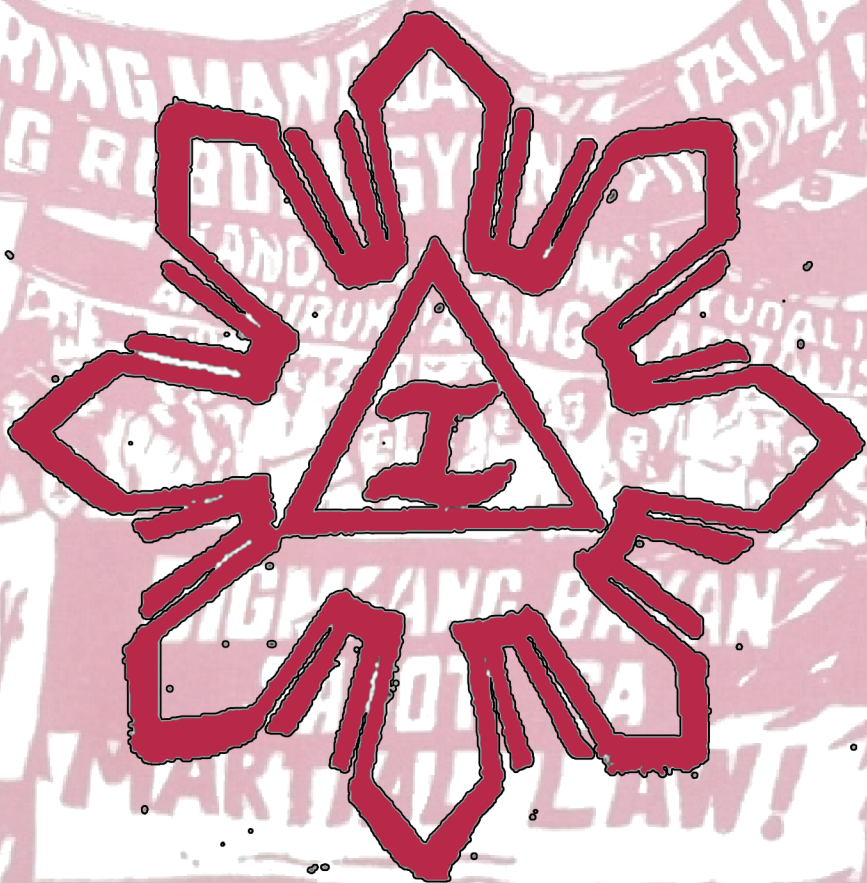


# **WE ARE REVOLUTION**



**A REFLECTIVE HISTORY  
OF THE UNION OF  
DEMOCRATIC FILIPINOS (KDP)**

**BY HELEN C. TORIBIO**

This article was published online in the journal Amerasian in 2019 by Helen C. Toribio who is an instructor of Asian American Studies at City College of San Francisco. You can download the article with full notes at <https://www.marxists.org/history//erol/ncm-6/kdp.pdf> or search for it online.

You can learn more about the history of the KDP at <https://kdplegacy.org/>

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# **WE ARE REVOLUTION**

## **A Reflective History of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)**

By Helen C. Toribio

In July 1973 a group of about eighty young activists met at a retreat in the Santa Cruz mountains. Inspired by the social movements in the United States and by revolutions in third world countries, especially the Philippines, they founded the Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino. For the next thirteen years, until it formally disbanded in 1986, the KDP organized Filipino Americans around anti-imperialist and anti-racist issues, challenging the community's conservative leadership with militant politics that openly supported socialism.

The organization identified with the legacy of an earlier generation of Filipino American socialists whose vision was expressed by Carlos Bulosan. Like Bulosan and his contemporaries, KDP activists believed their place was to be "where the Communists and socialists are vanguarding the revolution. . . ."

By the time the KDP emerged very few of the older revolutionaries were around to share their experience. The KDP, therefore, relied on its own members and leaders, most of them twenty something baby boomers, to develop the organization's political program and train its activists. Continuous community organizing, and the production and distribution of vast amounts of propaganda material established the organization in the forefront of protests against the Marcos regime and racial injustices. An almost endless amount of activity-demonstrations, community meetings, petition drives, national conferences, cultural productions, studies, etc.-kept activists busy even through periods of political lull. Through it all the organization weathered harassment, intimidation, and the murders of two members, Silme Domingo and Gene Viemes.

The KDP attracted both immigrant and American-raised Filipinos from different political and social movements: the Civil Rights, anti-war, and student movements, the Third World, Asian American, and New Communist movements, the Philippine communist and national democratic movements, and the liberal-progressive Christian churches. In size the organization was comparatively small, an estimated two to three hundred at its height in the mid-seventies. But it covered a wide geographic territory from New York to Guam and Canada.

This article is an attempt to provide a sense of the scope of the KDP's work during its brief history. It does not pretend to cover the entire breadth of the KDP's accomplishments, much less provide an in-depth analysis. It is written from an individual perspective based on personal knowledge and limited research on the organization's history. Hopefully, in the next few years more will be written that will provide insight into the significance of the KDP and what it meant to the U.S. Left, Filipino American community, and those who were part of it.

## **I. A COLLECTIVE ERA**

From the KDP's perspective, the participation of U.S. Filipinos in left-wing organizations during the 1920s and 30s validated the KDP's existence fifty years later. Unlike what some might have thought, the KDP was not a fancy dreamed up by young radicals. Much of what characterized the KDP had precedents forty to fifty years before. Then, the Russian Bolshevik Revolution had instilled hope that a society governed in the interests of the working class was possible. Reflecting on this period, Carlos Bulosan noted,

*Now I knew that I was living in the collective era. . . . I read Marxist literature. Russia was then much in the minds of the contemporaries. In the Soviet system we seemed to have found a workable system and a common belief that bound*

*racess and peoples together for a creative purpose. . . . Socialist thinking was spreading among the workers, professionals and intellectuals. Labor demanded immediate political action. For the first time a collective faith seemed to have appeared. To most of us it was a revelation-and a new morning in America.*

Throughout this earlier period one labor organization in particular, the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), was involved with the majority of farmworker strikes where Filipinos participated in significant numbers. Established by the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA), the TUUL had a multiracial membership. Among the Communists it sent to the fields to organize mutual aid associations and unions were Filipinos.

Until the early 1950s, the union which generated socialist inspired Filipino "left-progressive" leadership and which perhaps attracted the largest number of Filipino trade unionists was the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU). The leadership and members of two of its locals, Local 142 in Hawaii and Local 37 in Seattle, were predominantly Filipino. As recorded in the Local 37 Yearbook of 1952, this generation of Filipino "left-progressives," as Local 37 president Chris Mensalves called them, defended the rights of the foreign born, wrote newspapers, and supported the Communist-led Hukbalahap in the Philippines during and after WWII. These activities were the forerunners of the KDP's program that included immigrant rights, a bi-weekly newspaper, and support for the New People's Army in the Philippines.

The anti-communist repression of the fifties coupled with the relative economic stability throughout the country pressured Filipino leftists to retreat from political involvement, leaving the growing post-war community without progressive leadership. With declining memberships and depleting funds in progressive unions like the ILWU, the activism of these early leftists was difficult to

sustain. But the effects of socialist-inspired politicization on this generation of Filipinos never completely died out.

The progressive strain which lay dormant through the 1950s was still very much alive into the 1960s, although much smaller in size than it was thirty years before. The Filipino farmworkers who initiated the strike in 1965 which eventually led to the formation of the United Farm Workers illustrated this point. Philip Vera Cruz attributed the success of the 1965 grape strike to the labor consciousness of the Filipino workers.

*We had been working in this country for over 40 years, and we were aware of prices and profits because we listened to market reports on the radio and then discussed these reports in Ilocano, our dialect. This 'worker's consciousness' helped us to be the most organized and united of all the different ethnic groups of farmworkers at that time."*

For Filipino labor leaders like Vera Cruz, their working class consciousness was instilled with an awareness of socialism as the only viable alternative to capitalism. "All the system's got to be changed, " Vera Cruz noted, "and it's got to be socialism because if you stick to private enterprise, there is always misappropriation; some will be wealthy, and too many people will be without."

The history of Filipino labor in the U.S. and the example of farmworkers indicate that, in spite of the overwhelming conservatism in the community, Filipinos in America were not passive players in the conflict between capital and labor. To the KDP the community's capacity to rally around issues like wages and unionism showed that: (1) the community could be organized around progressive issues and, (2) that a revolutionary organization could exist within the community that linked the community's interests to the long-term goal of socialism.

Like their contemporaries of the 1960s and 70s, many activists who joined the KDP were inspired by China and Mao Tse Tung Thought. Not all necessarily espoused socialism at first but found revelation in Mao's idea of the "third world": the empowerment of nonwhite people. For those who came from the New Communist Movement (NCM), Maoism was the standard for militancy and communist leadership for the social upheaval of the period. The Soviet model which had inspired Bulosan's generation was discredited for pursuing detente instead of revolution.

In the creation of the KDP, however, it was not the Communist Movement in the U.S. but that of the Philippines which served as the model for its political and organizational foundations. Unlike the U.S., Communists in the Philippines who were also critical of the Soviet Union underwent a process of "rectification and re-establishment" of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Younger members of the old Partidong Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) initiated the process in the early 1960s, eventually breaking away from the PKP, formalizing a new party in December 1968, and setting up the New People's Army three months later.

Although the CPP was founded on Mao Tse Tung Thought as its "supreme guide in analyzing and summing up the experience of the CPP," its own particular experience and analysis of Philippine social conditions placed it at odds with the principles of Mao Tse Tung Thought. When China, for example, declared the Soviet Union as the "main enemy" of socialism, the CPP continued to view the U.S. as the main enemy of the Philippine revolution. It was this view towards U.S. imperialism, incorporated into the CPP's national democratic program, that became a centerpiece in the KDP's two-sided political program: national democratic (Philippine focused) and socialist (U.S. focused). At the same time it also served to delineate the KDP from other Maoist groups in the NCM.



Photograph by Rick Rocamora, circa 1980. Courtesy of Rick Rocamora Collection.

By the late seventies, a distinct Marxist-Leninist grouping was emerging which eventually organized into the Line of March (LOM). The development of the LOM by a multiracial group of Marxist-Leninists, including leading members of the KDP, provided the political bearings vis-a-vis the U.S. Communist Movement which had been lacking during the first few years of the KDP's existence and helped to steer the organization away from Maoism by 1979. The LOM's strategy for revolution in the U.S., for example, provided the overall framework for linking the KDP's work in the Filipino community with the goal of socialism. The relationship that developed between the LOM and the KDP was similar in a sense to the relationship that the CPUSA-TUUL had with the associations and unions organized by earlier Filipino revolutionaries. In the case of the KDP, however, it drew lessons from one Communist Movement (the Philippines) and contributed in the development of another (the U.S.).



## **II. THE COLOR OF REVOLUTION**

What set the KDP apart from its national democratic counterparts in the Philippines was more than geographic given its location in the racially-conscious U.S.A.. The decades long Civil Rights Movement which finally grew into massive proportions by the early 1960s underscored this consciousness. The question of race was the core issue in the other half of the KDP's program it labeled socialist.

When the KDP was established, it filled a void left by the earlier generation of left-progressives. Most Filipino community organizations were regional associations, mutual aid organizations, professional groups, etc., whose primary functions centered around annual inauguration dinners or terno balls. While these organizations filled the social and cultural needs of the community, they reflected not only its conservative nature, but also the community's liminality in mainstream America. Given the racial divide in the country, the KDP actually had something in common with the community organizations it often derided.

As a revolutionary organization its existence highlighted the color-coded divisions in the U.S. left-progressive movement, inclusive of the women's, student, anti-war, and Communist movements. Prior to joining the KDP, a number of activists were influenced by progressive and revolutionary organizations in the black and Latino communities such as the Black Panther Party and MEChA. These organizations served as examples of militancy and progressive politics which addressed the racial oppression of minority communities.

A KDP activist who was raised in the U.S. typically grew up in predominantly nonwhite neighborhoods, from the housing projects in New York City to the plantations in Hawaii, and the urban and rural areas in-between. In high school and college they naturally

gravitated toward groups and organizations where they felt they could belong, even if they were not of the same ethnicity as the others in the group. Their social circles, therefore, were composed of Blacks, Latinos, other Asians, and Pacific Islanders besides Filipinos. In the political ferment of the late sixties and early seventies, then, they were inclined to participate in those struggles having a "third world" character prior to joining the KDP. Some began their activism while still in high school, demanding Asian American Studies in their school, for example, or advocating for the needs of the elderly in the Chinatowns of Seattle, Oakland, Stockton, and other cities. Others became active while in college, drawn to the protests demanding ethnic studies on campuses and an end to the Vietnam War.

This was the political scene that Cynthia Maglaya found when she immigrated to the United States in 1970 and settled in the San Francisco Bay Area. Earlier that same year Maglaya had been a student leader in the *Kabataang Makabayan* (KM), a CPP-led student organization which participated in the series of massive demonstrations in Manila called the First Quarter Storm. Prior to her departure from the Philippines, she was charged with a responsibility to build support for the Philippine revolution in the U.S. She would later become one of the founders and national leaders of the KDP. She, along with other immigrants who came out of the national democratic movement, brought the experience of the KM and CPP to share with their American-raised counterparts.

Maglaya and a small number of immigrant and American-raised Filipino activists organized a collective which published the *Kalayaan* newspaper in June 1971. It was the *Kalayaan* collective, as they came to be known, which initiated and led the process towards the creation of the KDP. Named after the official newspaper of the Philippine Katipunan (KKK), the turn of the century revolutionary society founded by Andres Bonifacio, the *Kalayaan* voiced the anti-racist and anti-imperialist sentiments of a new

generation. Through its pages Filipinos in the U.S. were introduced to the CPP, the NPA, and the national democratic revolution in the Philippines. It was radical for a Filipino American newspaper just by the fact that it did not carry "heavy pictorials of beauty queens" nor an over-indulgence on prominent personalities. Instead, it related stories about liberation and self-determination in the Philippines, the U.S. and other countries. It chronicled the organizing activities among students, local neighborhoods, and workplaces. And it featured artworks, poems, short stories, and even a lexicon of Filipino words.

The coverage of the *Kalayaan* expressed a strong sense of ethnic pride which characterized the Filipino American identity movement of the early 1970s; it was a movement that generated numerous conferences within a short span of two years. Almost every issue of the *Kalayaan* reported or announced a conference usually sponsored by a Filipino student or youth organization on the west coast. The first conference it reported, held in San Francisco in 1970, reflected a sense of solidarity between the Filipino American and the Philippine movements. One hundred delegates from west coast cities deliberated and passed resolutions, one of which was sent to the Philippines that read,

*To the People: The Filipino American Youth Conference meeting in San Francisco, California, hereby unanimously endorse this proposal to unequivocally support the just struggle of our Filipino brothers and sisters for national liberation and democracy. We want it known that we denounce the vicious oppression and exploitation perpetrated by the fascist Marcos puppet regime in the doggish service of the American imperialists.*

In Los Angeles that same year, the Search for Pilipino Involvement (SIPA) held its own conference. In July 1971 it organized a second conference around the identity theme of "Are you curious

(brown)?" Focused more on the racial oppression of Filipino Americans, the conference held sensitivity sessions where "Filipinos could rap about learning to be people 'cause Amerikan (sic) society dehumanizes," as one participant put it.

Within a month of SIPA's conference, Seattle hosted the first Pilipino People's Far West Convention (originally entitled Young Filipino Peoples' Far West Convention) in August 1971. The FWC, as it became popularly known, would become an important venue for the KDP to interact with Filipino progressives on community and Philippine issues over the next ten years. At these conventions the KDP proposed organizing projects like the Education Task Force, which addressed the racist portrayal of Filipinos in textbooks, and the National Immigrant Rights Task Force. When the momentum of community conferences slowed down, due in part to the graduation of student activists, the FWC continued to attract 300 to 500 people to its annual meetings. The last FWC was held in Los Angeles in 1982.

Just a few months after the first FWC, Samahan out of San Diego State held its "Panahon Na!" conference with a full program that included workshops on organizing, women, the "people's struggle in the Philippines and US Pilipinos' role," and on "Pilipinos and other minorities." In its February/March 1972 issue, the *Kalayaan* collective proposed the formation of an organization that would be "activist in nature" and "based on collectivity and struggle." It suggested that discussions about such an organization begin at the Samahan "Panahon Na" conference in San Diego that March. The idea was to bring together all locally based progressive and revolutionary organizations into one national formation. The plethora of conferences had served to create informal networks, and a need had risen for a more formal relationship. By this time many left-progressive organizations had already sprouted throughout the country in the two years just prior to the *Kalayaan's* proposal. Among them were Kilusan ng Masang Pilipino in New York,

Kabataang Katipunan (Youth Association) in Hawaii, and the producers of local newspapers and newsletters like Bagong Silangan in San Jose, Panahon Na (the Time Is Now) in San Diego, Kaibigan in Seattle, and the numerous Filipino student organizations in college campuses. The *Kalayaan* identified three areas of collectivity in its proposal: “We should learn to relax and have fun together. We should learn to work and discuss things seriously together. We should learn to study together.”

The process towards developing such an organization, however, took a detour when Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in September 1972. All efforts went into organizing a massive response which coalesced into the National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines (NCRCLP) a month after Marcos’ declaration. Perhaps it was a fortuitous detour because the NCRCLP attracted activists more rooted in anti-imperialist and anti-racist politics. The level of unity within the NCRCLP, however, still left a void on how the Filipino community would systematically support the national democratic revolution underway in the Philippines while also addressing its own oppression as a racial minority in the U.S..

### **III. RED BROWNS AND OTHER SHADES**

The meeting the *Kalayaan* collective had sought came together July 27, 1973. For two days, activists from around the country discussed capitalism, its social ills, and the need for fundamental changes through revolution. In the end, they passed three resolutions which became the basis for the KDP’s political and organizational identity: support for the Philippine revolution, socialism in the U.S., and the establishment of a revolutionary mass organization (RMO) with a “democratic-centralist” structure. The new organization was situated within an international context:

*Imperialism, in particular US. imperialism, is the main enemy of the people of the whole world. As such it creates the conditions to unite the vast majority of mankind in one struggle against a common enemy. This revolutionary force stands for progress, peace and cooperation among peoples; it stands opposed to the exploitation and aggressive wars caused by the imperialists, who represent only a tiny minority of the world's population. The KDP views itself as part of this world-wide, anti-imperialist movement.*

The meeting became the founding congress of the KDP where activists resolved to “unite Pilipino-Americans and Pilipino immigrants, workers and students in one organization with common political tasks.” The congress established the democratic-centralist nature of the organization by electing a nine-member national council, which in turn elected a three-member national executive board (NEB) to lead the day to day operation of the organization. This structure, patterned after the KM in the Philippines, included a congress of all members every two years, and national council meetings every six months.

From the onset, the KDP's dual political identity was a source of confusion. The program appeared to be two-tiered: anti-imperialist at the level of national democracy for the Philippines, and socialist for the U.S. ”where the means of production would be owned and controlled by the working class.” Six months after its founding, a clarification was made in which the KDP defined itself as an RMO which ”strives to bring many new people into the movement who see basically the necessity for a fundamental and revolutionary (sic) change in this exploitative and oppressive society.” In other words its initial identity was anti-imperialist, reinforced by the emphasis on the national democratic support work which, in turn, was predominantly focused on opposition to the Marcos dictatorship. It was not until 1983 that the KDP declared itself as principally

socialist which supported revolutionary movements in both the Philippines and the U.S..

In the early years, however, the clarification on KDP as a revolutionary mass organization did not settle other questions which grew out of the dual political program. Could a seemingly split program be integrated in one organization? Were both of equal importance or was one primary over the other? If there were two revolutions supported by the KDP, what did it mean for the Filipino American community itself? Which nation was it a part of? The U.S.? The Philippines? Both?

Frustration over these questions resulted in a split within the KDP chapter in Chicago. The splinter group, feeling that the socialist program got in the way of the national democratic work, formed Filipinos for National Democracy. The group eventually reintegrated with the KDP on the basis that both groups had more political unity than differences. However, the experience highlighted a theoretical question: what is the character of the Filipino community in the U.S.? At first, the KDP viewed the community as principally a part of the American working class:

*The KDP views the Pilipino people's movement in America as an integral part of the larger struggle of the whole American people for justice and democracy. **The Katipunan sees that the Pilipinos here are, by and large, part of the U.S. working class** (emphasis added). In their day to day lives they share the same experiences and aspirations and face identical problems along with the rest of the American people. As such, progressive Filipinos are an inseparable part of the whole American people's struggle to take political power out of the hands of the handful of big capitalists and into the hands of the working people, who make up the vast majority of the population.*

In 1981 this characterization of the community was refined when the KDP assessed the community as “dual in nature.”

*On the one hand, it is part of the overseas Filipino community, binding it in many ways to the history and culture of the Philippine nation ... rejuvenated by the current ever-growing third wave of immigration, which has strengthened the national identity of the community with the Philippine nation. On the other hand, the community is an internal element of US society and constitutes. . . a growing minority, immigrant community within the US working class.*

The third resolution passed at the founding congress established the KDP's organizational structure and conduct as a revolutionary mass organization:

*The Katipunan will be a democratic-centralist organization, combining democratically elected leadership at all levels with centralized guidance and authority. . . . The KDP will practice criticism-self-criticism for the purpose of regularly summing up the experiences of its activists; identifying its mistakes and correcting errors on time, thereby keeping close ties with the people. . . . The KDP is committed to becoming a large, militant organization whose membership should display the revolutionary spirit of serving the people, working hard and sacrificing for the good of the whole!*

For the first four years of its existence, the KDP struggled with developing its revolutionary identity. Not all members were convinced of its standards of conduct, structure, and the political tasks it set for itself within the Filipino community. Some advocated for a looser structure rather than democratic-centralism; others felt the community was not ready for revolutionary politics.



A more prevailing problem, however, was the inexperience among its ranks. Although many had already been activists prior to joining the KDP, membership in a highly structured organization was a relatively new experience. The process of instilling revolutionary standards was guided by an experienced core of leaders in the NEB which included Cynthia Maglaya, Bruce Occeña and Melinda Paras. Occeña and Paras were both American-raised Filipinos. Occeña was a veteran of the Third World Strike at UC Berkeley and a leading member in the *Kulayaan* collective; Paras was a activist in both the US. and the Philippines where she was active in the KM. They established a system of review and summation, organized studies, and initiated the publication of the *Ang Aktibista* (AA) as an internal bulletin for activists. The AA, first published in November 1973, became a valuable source for studies on a wide variety of theoretical, political, and organizational topics from democratic-centralism to international developments such as Vietnam's incursion into Kampuchea in 1979. It included regular reports on the status of organizing in each area, campaign plans, as well as updates on the situation in the Philippines. Studies on national democracy were organized which required the reading of the "PSR (Philippine Society and Revolution) and "Specific Characteristics of Our People's War," both of which were reproduced in the U.S. by the KDP. In between congresses, the NEB organized leadership conferences and week long theoretical schools on Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Tse Tung Thought. Studies were always emphasized. Beginning in 1975, the KDP sent groups of activists to the Goddard Program at Cambridge for graduate studies in Philippine and Filipino American history. The intent was for these scholar-activists to become teachers in colleges and a few did.

The KDP attracted a representative cross section of the Filipino American community: immigrant and U.S.-raised. Most of the U.S.-raised were of working class background: children of the pioneering migrant workers of the 1920s and Filipino soldiers of World War II who brought their war brides from the Philippines soon after the

war. The immigrants were a mixed group of working class, para-professional, and professional individuals who came with the post-1965 wave of newcomers. The vast majority were young adults in their twenties; a few were in their teens or their thirties. Women made up over half of the membership as well as the leadership. About a dozen were gay and lesbian, over half of whom served in the national leadership with the National Council or the NEB.

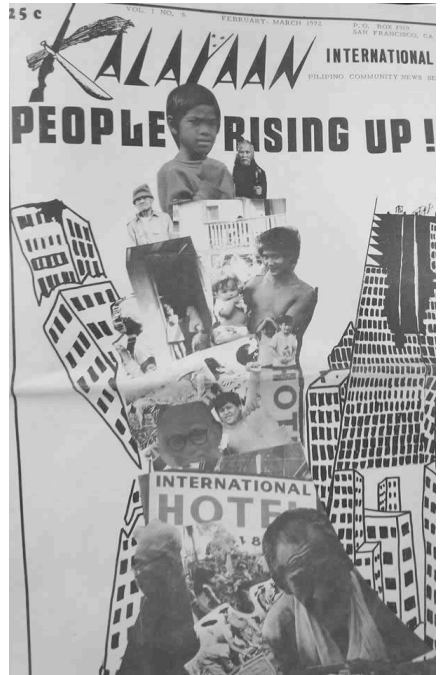
Not all activists who joined the KDP were Filipino. Although it identified itself as "principally a Pilipino organization," it welcomed "revolutionaries of non-Pilipino origin whose political work is among Pilipino people or around support for the Philippine revolution. . . ." A number of white, Japanese, Chinese, and Pacific Islander activists joined the organization. Some had been turned off by the more hard-line Maoist formations on the left, while for others there simply was no other revolutionary organization they could identify and work with. Much of what the KDP provided—e.g. its internationalist perspective, the training provided in revolutionary theory, experience in organizing—were universal and not only applicable to the Filipino community. For both Filipino and non-Filipino activists, the KDP provided the training ground for their later involvement in other areas of activism such as Central American and South African solidarity work, Native Hawaiian sovereignty, trade unionism, the fight against HIV/AIDS and for gay and lesbian rights.

KDP chapters existed in Guam, Honolulu, San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland/East Bay, Sacramento, San Jose, Seattle, Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, plus a national staff including the NEB located in the San Francisco Bay Area. In Canada, three chapters (Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver), were organized under the International Association of Filipino Patriots (IAFP) which the KDP helped to establish in 1976. Not all chapters functioned at the same level of discipline, nor did all activists operate with the same amount of rigor required by the standards of

struggle and criticism-selfcriticism of the KDP. Given the demands of the organization and the work it set out for itself, even the most leading activists were not immune to wavering in the midst of battle. The results were some resignations and a scaling back of operations. By the late 1970s with a leading activist core of about seventy-five and a general membership of perhaps not more than double that amount, the KDP refocused its energies in Honolulu, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, Seattle, New York, and Washington D.C.

#### **IV. PROPAGANDA, PROPAGANDA, PROPAGANDA**

The KDP might have been known more for its organizing efforts, but what it called "propaganda" was probably its most tangible and far reaching accomplishment. Propaganda was anything that informed the community about its issues, history, developments in the Philippines and around the world, and popularized the KDP and its politics. Encompassing many forms and reaching much more than the people organized, it included a national newspaper, a theater group, cultural programs, calendars, books, pamphlets, a record album, songbook, slideshows, posters, workshops, speaking tours, an endless number of leaflets, and more. Local chapters also developed their own forms including newsletters, and a "revolutionary" cookbook of Filipino dishes complete with not-so-appetizing



illustrations of dead people killed at Kent State and massacres in the Philippines; the cookbook was sold as a fundraiser. Propaganda was also worn and included t-shirts commemorating Andres Bonifacio's birthday, denim aprons with the Katipunan sun logo used for selling the *Ang Katipunan* newspaper, and even loose fitting red pants worn during performances of revolutionary songs at community events.

Propaganda was emphasized from the beginning. The second AA issued in December 1973 was entitled "The Role of Propaganda in the Struggle." "The ultimate purpose," it said, "of KDP's propaganda should be to bring people to the conscious understanding and recognition of the need for revolutionary change as the only genuine solution to our problems." For KDP activists, propaganda was also meant to facilitate their relationship with the community, stressing the use of "mass line," not revolutionary jargon, to help the community understand the KDP's politics. The *Ang Katipunan* (AK) newspaper illustrated this point. Introduced in October 1973, the AK replaced the *Kalayaan* which stopped publication in August that year. The newspaper articulated the KDP's partisan politics. Its layout exhibited a more professional demeanor, and its tone was markedly more staid from the *Kalayaan's* "identity movement" language. Perhaps signifying the KDP's evolution from its identity movement beginnings, the AK established the use of "Filipino" instead of "Pilipino" which was popularized during the identity movement. Like the *Kalayaan*, the AK devoted much of every issue to the developments in the Philippines. Utilizing a variety of sources, from the New York Times to underground publications from the Philippine, the AK provided analyses on the status of the Marcos regime, the anti-martial opposition on the right and the left, the Philippine economy, updates on the NPA's advances and the progress of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the southern Philippines. A regular feature in the AK was international news which reported on revolutionary developments in areas like the Middle East, Central America, and South Africa. As the KDP's voice, the AK reported on the KDP's organizing activities. At one

point it even boasted that the AK "not only report the news, we help make them," a slogan which threatened to compromise its journalistic ethic of reporting the truth. The slogan was later dropped. The AK was the most sustained of the various forms of propaganda, surviving even after the KDP disbanded. In September-October 1987, it became an independent publication, dropping the "Ang" and renamed Katipunan. It continued publication through October 1991 when the lack of financial support forced it out of circulation.

Perhaps the most appealing propaganda was the cultural work. In 1976 the *Bangon/Arise* record album was released. Produced over a three-year period, it featured nineteen revolutionary songs from the 1896 revolution to the 1970s national democratic movement sung by KDP activists, and included a songbook. The songs were performed at rallies, or commemorative events like the anniversary of Andres Bonifacio's birthday or founding of the NPA. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, the KDP produced a number of skits, one-act plays, and full theatrical productions which toured in different parts of the country. They depicted stories of people's resistance against injustices in the Philippines and the U.S., dramatizing the lives of the elderly in Chinatowns (Tagatupad, 1976), immigrant nurses (The Frame-up of Narciso and Perez, 1977), Filipino Muslims (Mindanao, 1978), the young wives of Filipino American soldiers after World War II (War Brides, 1979), Philippine sugar workers (Sakada, 1980), and the first wave of Filipino immigrants (Ti Mangyuna, 1981). To organize these productions, a performing arts group, Sining Bayan, was established which recruited volunteer actors and crew members from the community, and sought funds for the productions. Another institution, Pandayan, was set up to distribute *Bangon* and numerous publications produced by the CPP/NDF and anti-martial law organizations. These included: *Four Years of Martial Law*, KDP, 1976; *What's Happening in the Philippines*, Far East Reporter, 1976; *Logistics of Repression* FFP/AMLC, 1977; *Human Rights and Martial Law in the Philippines*, FFP/AMLC, 1977; *Democracy in Form, Dictatorship in Substance*, FFP/AMLC 1978; *Conditions of*

*the Filipino People Under Martial Law*, FFP/AMLC, 1979; combined republication of *Philippine Society & Revolution* and *Specific Characteristics of Our People's War*, Amado Guerrero, 1979; *Conditions of the Filipino People Under Martial Law*, FFP/AMLC, 1979; and an annual calendar, Tala-arawang Bayan (People's Calendar), beginning in 1977. Lastly, in 1983 the KDP established the Institute for Filipino Resources and Information (IFRI) as a non-profit resource for educational materials on Philippine and Filipino American history. The IFRI still exists but is inactive.

Propaganda had to be accessible to the community. Thus in addition to selling AKs directly in the community (churches, workplaces, neighborhoods), and performances in local community halls, the KDP led in organizing annual events such as Philippine National Day celebrations (PND) and the FWCs. The PNDs were meant to counter the Philippine Consulate-led celebrations of June 12 as Philippine Independence Day, and draw attention to the issue of questionable "independence" given the stranglehold of U.S. imperialism on the Philippines. They were also meant to counter the more "traditional" forms of Filipino community celebrations: formal evening dances with beauty queens. PNDs were organized to be fun and educational at the same time. Performances of the *tinikling* and *pangandang sa ilaw* shared the stage with the singing of revolutionary songs and skits about the struggles of immigrants past and present. Usually held in the day-time in "barrio fiesta" fashion, the PNDs drew crowds that ranged from a few hundred to thousands. In some areas, the PNDs were the most visible Filipino cultural events. Today, as a cultural celebration rather than a revolutionary activity, the PND is still celebrated in Sacramento where it was institutionalized by the PND Association.

## **V. ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE**

One of the immediate tasks the KDP set for itself in 1973 was to organize a broad coalition of the U.S. anti-martial law opposition inclusive of left-progressives such as the NCRCLP and conservatives

in what became the Movement for a Free Philippines (MFP). The first organization it helped establish was the Friends of the Filipino People (FFP), founded in October 1973 in Philadelphia. The FFP's purpose was to direct attention of the American public outside the Filipino community to the situation in the Philippines. Besides opposing martial law, the FFP sought an end to U.S. military, political, and economic domination in the Philippines. Its work focused on Congress noting "the real possibility that the U.S. government may drag the American people into another war against the Asian people" as opposition to Marcos escalated.

After the FFP's founding, a campaign was coordinated among various anti-martial law groups to petition Congress to stop support for Marcos. The joint campaign was followed by the first national anti-martial law conference in Chicago at the end of December 1974. The conference established the National Coordinating Committee of the Anti-Martial Movement which, a year later, became the Anti-Martial Law Coalition (AMLC) at its conference in New York. The MFP never joined the coalition, but that did not stop the KDP from continually pressing for coordinated opposition to the Marcos regime.

Local chapters of the AMLC were developed to allow the participation of individuals who were not members of existing anti-martial law groups. The points of unity were pitched at the level of opposition to martial law, but the AMLC also attracted individuals who were open to the national democratic alternative. Thus, its membership was characteristically left-progressive. By 1983, the AMLC, renamed the Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship (CAMD), had identifiably become an anti-imperialist organization which necessitated the KDP to distinguish itself as a socialist organization.

For twelve years, the AMLC and the FFP were the most responsive anti-martial law groups in the U.S., organizing protests before Philippine consulates, lobbying Congress to end U.S. support to Marcos, sending investigative teams to the Philippines, confronting

Marcos face to face when he visited the U.S. The two organizations merged in 1983 as CAMD/PSN. Regularized activities like annual protests on the anniversary of martial law, Christmas caroling, community forums, annual conferences, and mass distribution of the *Taliba* newsletter kept the controversy over martial law alive in the Filipino community and general public during periods of low political activity (“ebbs”) around the Philippines. All KDP activists, regardless of their principle area of work (e.g., anti-racist, cultural, national staff, etc.), participated in some aspect of the martial law work. The consistency of the activities paid off when developments began to heighten in the Philippines during the early 1980s, accelerated by the assassination of Senator Benigno (Ninoy) Aquino in August 1983, and erupting into the “people’s revolution” three years later. People who regularly received CAMD materials or attended its activities identified with the CAMD even though they had not been active. By the time Mrs. Corazon Aquino wrested power away from Marcos in February 1986, the CAMD/PSN was recognized as a leading anti-dictatorship organization among LABAN (Mrs. Aquino’s political party) supporters in the U.S.

On the domestic front, issues confronting the Filipino American community required a more dispersed organizing response. Unlike the Philippine support work which had the CAMD/PSN, there was no counterpart in the work around domestic community issues. Thus, the KDP organized them along specific issues and sectors in the Filipino community. The defense of foreign trained medical graduates (FMGs, e.g., Filipino doctors, nurses) was one of the earlier organizing efforts. In question were issues of licensure and immigration status. Failure in obtaining licensure meant imminent deportation. Surrounding these issues were questions about cultural biases in the licensure exam, the lack of preparation time when FMGs were required to work full-time, the brief interim between arrival in the country and taking the first available test, and the undocumented status of those who failed licensure. Organizing FMGs began in the east coast on 1974, but it was not until mid-1977 that the KDP organized a standing group with the founding of the



National Alliance for Fair Licensure for Foreign Nurse Graduates (NAFL-FNG) in New York. The NAFL-FNG advocated on behalf of nurses on H-1 visas whose legal status depended on licensure, negotiating directly with the director of the INS, state licensing boards, and challenging the Philippine Nurses Association regarding the fairness of licensure exams.

At the same time that the KDP was organizing the NAFL-FNG, it began organizing community support for Filipina Narciso and Leonora Perez, two nurses accused of fatally poisoning patients at a veteran's hospital in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Through extensive coverage in the AK, a play that was performed in community forums, a petition drive, demonstrations and rallies, the KDP drew national attention to the case. The nurses were initially found guilty but were later released in February 1978 when the U.S. Attorney General declined to re-file criminal charges against them.

Similar justice work was done on behalf of Dr. Bienvenido Alona in 1979. Dr. Alona was a Navy medical officer accused of negligence. A National Committee to Defend Dr. Alona was organized. Unlike Narciso/Perez, though, the KDP had a more direct relationship with the defendant. A KDP activist moved in with Dr. Alona's family and worked with the local community. The Alonas were made clear about the KDP's politics. When his case was acquitted, Dr. Alona wrote a thank you letter to the KDP noting, "One lesson we must all share is that though we may differ in our own political and religious principles and beliefs, yet when such injustice exists fogged with racism, only through a united front can we overcome such unfairness."

An issue which involved the collaboration of the U.S. and Philippine governments was the 4-H trainee exchange program. In a 1974 agreement, groups of 4-H trainees would be sent from the Philippines for two-year training in American agriculture. Rather than the training they expected, however, the trainees did menial work: collecting eggs, watching pigs, catching turkeys, doing clerical

work. The trainees made their complaints known to their hosts and the Philippine Embassy. When nothing was done, they took their case to the community. In the east coast, they first came into contact with the FFP; in the west coast, they were assisted by a Filipino nun who got them press coverage in the Oakland Tribune. The KDP helped to organize community support for the trainees, pressuring the farm owners, the Philippine Embassy, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, and the State Department on the plight of the trainees. While the U.S. government continued to deny the allegations of exploitation, the Philippine Embassy finally acknowledged the validity of the trainees' complaints. The entire program was ultimately discontinued.

Not all cases of injustices against Filipinos became national campaigns. Much of the KDP's organizing on community issues was locally based. These included the discrimination against a Filipino bilingual teacher in L.A., the exploitation of two maids at the Philippine Consulate in Seattle, a Filipino mother's malpractice suit against the Navy in Oakland, an immigrant's battle against deportation for not practicing her accounting profession in San Francisco even though she was a bank clerk, etc. Nor was organizing limited to Filipino-specific cases. There were issues which affected primarily Filipinos but many others as well, such as the International Hotel in San Francisco and similar housing situations in Seattle and Honolulu, the labor dispute at the California Blue Shield, and the struggle for union reforms in Seattle. KDP activists participated and often played leadership roles in these local struggles. Likewise, the KDP participated in national coalitions such as the National Committee to Overturn the Bakke Decision on affirmative action and the opposition against the S-1 congressional "criminal justice reform" which would have increased repression against protests. With the trend toward restricting immigration and immigrant rights in the 1970s, the KDP proposed the formation of a national task force on immigrant rights at the 1979 FWC. The task force eventually became the National Filipino Immigrant Rights Organization which addressed issues such as SSI for elderly

immigrants, and the rights of the undocumented. By the early 1980s the KDP became involved in electoral politics, supporting Democratic Party candidates like Mondale/Ferraro more as a statement against the repressive politics of the Republican Party rather than support of the Democrats. When Jesse Jackson declared his candidacy for the 1984 presidential elections, the KDP organized Filipinos to join in the Rainbow Coalition and helped form Filipinos for Jackson.

## **VI. UNDAUNTED**

From the mid-1970s on, the KDP was thoroughly entrenched in Filipino community politics. By 1977 it considered itself at "the very center of the community's political life" as a "distinct and recognizable left wing" which was seen as both "integral. . .and 'legitimate.'" While most of the people the KDP organized were open to its politics and even expected the KDP's leadership on community matters, others saw differently. Any group that openly espoused socialism and supported the CPP and NPA was bound to raise suspicion. US. government agencies and the Marcos regime took notice early on, maintaining FBI files on leading activists and employing a "Philippine Infiltration Plan" (PIP) allowing Marcos agents to spy on the US. based opposition. Documents obtained in 1983 through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) uncovered 1,300 pages of information on the KDP filed by the FBI.

Long before the FBI documents were known to the KDP, the organization was already well aware of attempts to suppress it. In 1977 an activist in Seattle was arrested for a "traffic violation" and interrogated by police who demanded the names of individuals the activist worked with; in 1979, a leading activist in New York who was instrumental in organizing for the rights of H-1 nurses was paid an unexpected visit by INS agents who demanded to enter her home

without a warrant and ask her questions; in 1980 suspected arson burned just outside the door of an activist's home in Chicago.

The attempts by official agencies to harass and intimidate the KDP was boosted by an incident in 1979. KDP activists working on the staff of the Congress Education Project of the FFP had asked for an accounting of funds donated by church groups. Instead they were locked out of their jobs and unilaterally fired. The incident split the FFP, the majority of the FFP board siding with the staff and later re-grouping as the PSN. Resulting from the split was a wave of anti-communist assaults on the KDP from the Philippine News (PN) which was informed about the FFP controversy and given copies of the *Ang Aktibista*. The PN devoted several issues on the KDP, the only time the organization received such attention from the community. Nothing was revealed that was not already reported in the AK. And when the dust settled, the KDP was still intact.

The atmosphere of hostility towards the KDP created by the FFP incident was very likely welcomed by the Marcos regime. With the PIP and the full support of the U.S., the Marcos regime had free reign in surveilling the Filipino community. Marcos supporters were strategically positioned in Filipino community councils, associations, and labor unions. Therefore, when Gene Viernes took his one and only trip to the Philippines in the spring of 1981, he felt he was being watched everywhere he traveled. Viernes had just been elected dispatcher in Local 37, the cannery workers union in Seattle founded by the earlier generation of Filipino left-progressives. His trip was both personal and political: to visit relatives he had never met and observe the conditions of workers. On the way back from the Philippines, Viernes rendezvoused in Hawaii with fellow KDP members and labor activists from Seattle. They were attending the international convention of the ILWU where he and Silme Domingo introduced a resolution for an investigation into the conditions of workers in the Philippines. The resolution passed after a heated debate. By June 1, 1981, within a month of the convention, Viernes and Domingo were dead of gunshot wounds. But before he died,

Domingo gave the names of his and Viernes' assassins. A series of investigations and trials put away the killers and gang leader for life, arrested the union president whose gun was used in the murders, and charged the U.S. and Philippine governments for the wrongful deaths of the two activists. In the end, the U.S. never stood trial, but the Marcos' were found guilty December 15, 1989, and ordered to pay \$15 million to the families of Viernes and Domingo.

The KDP's resolve to be the most militant and organized of any Filipino American organization allowed it to remain steadfast against these assaults. It was confident of its vision and standing in the community, developed over years of base building- the continuous organizing and dissemination of information.

## **VII. LSULONG**

By the 1980s, the KDP operated as a component of the LOM (Line of March -ed). The relationship enabled KDP activists to interact with other activists around a common socialist perspective as applied to different communities and to issues of mutual concern. The effect was a blurring of political and organizational boundaries. With the turn of events in the 1986 people's revolution in the Philippines, an opportunity was presented which served as a catalyst for examining the future of the KDP. The CPP/NDF's position of boycotting the 1986 elections created a "rectification" trend in the Philippine communist movement. The KDP assessed that a number of its activists had the political and theoretical basis to be "an important contributing factor to the current debate at (a) time when the Philippine communist movement finds itself at a crossroads." To enable these activists to focus on and be part of the debates internal to the Philippine communist movement meant they had to be independently organized outside of the KDP. The KDP's membership and capacity was thus diminished which placed the burden on the LOM to take "more direct responsibility for both Filipino community work. . .and Philippine solidarity work." The end result was the separation of activists along different

revolutionary movements which ultimately led to the dissolution of the KDP in July 1986.

When the KDP was founded it pledged to “take up the revolutionary banner of the first Katipunan organization” which fought against Spanish and American colonialism, and committed itself to “mobilizing the broadest number of Pilipino people in the United States to support and participate in struggle.” In many respects the organization did what it set out to do. Its legacies are the ongoing contributions former KDP members have made and continue to make in civil rights organizations, institutions that address the rights of women, immigrants, minority workers, and gays and lesbians; unions; legislative bodies; schools from the grade level to institutions of higher learning; social service programs that prioritize the needs of the youth, elderly and the indigent; cultural programs. . .the list goes on. But the full significance of KDP’s history is yet to be written. In this centennial decade of the Philippine revolution, it is much easier to appreciate a history which has undergone some scrutiny. The KDP’s history has yet to be examined. Hopefully, this article has begun that process.



A red graphic of a machete blade, oriented horizontally, with the text 'MACHETERO PRESS' and the website address 'WWW.REDMACHETE.COM' centered on it.

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