

**makibaka huwag matakot!  
a history of the katipunan  
ng mga demokratikong pilipino**

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The Civil Rights Movement, Third World liberation struggles, the Vietnam War, the women's movement of the sixties and seventies drew scores of students to activism. The identity movement and Third World struggle in particular inspired Asian-Americans into political activism.

It was in this context that the Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP) was born and attracted many Pilipino-American students to its ranks. In fact, students from the University of California and San Francisco State University were among the founders of the organization in 1973. On the West Coast, students formed the core of the many of the chapters from leadership to mass members. Many of us were the first in our families to attend college. Coming from working class families, our parents hoped we "do better than they," and become lawyers, doctors, engineers, and the like. A few of us realized these aspirations while others among us delayed professional careers as we steeped ourselves in community activism. Although the KDP no longer exists, many of its former members today remain active in numerous community activities, from political organizations to unions to community based organizations.

***On Behalf of My Own Humanity***

*On behalf of my own humanity--I would like to live  
I would like to live - to be part of something  
To be part of something alive and righteous  
And I call that revolution*

*On behalf of my own humanity--I would like to love  
I would like to love everything and everyone I experience  
Everything and everyone I experience I can learn and  
grow from  
And I call that revolution*

*On behalf of my own humanity--I would like to share  
I would like to share my thoughts, my goods, my future  
My thoughts, my goods, my future are bound with my people  
And I call that revolution*

*On behalf of my own humanity--I want to fight  
I want to struggle with my brothers and sisters  
With my brothers and sisters bring this monster down  
and build again  
And I call that revolution*

*To want less is only half my humanity  
To want less is only half my humanity*

Written by Chris Iijima for the wedding of two KDP activists, 1974.

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## Makibaka, Huwag Matakot

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During the summer of 1973 in the mountains of Santa Cruz, California, some seventy Pilipino-Americans and recent Pilipino immigrants from all over the United States came together to constitute a new organization, the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino* or Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP). The KDP's founding marked another chapter in the continuing legacy of Pilipino participation in radical movements in America [During the 1930's through the 1950's in the U.S., the Pilipinos were active in the labor organizing of the period and a few eventually linked themselves to socialist or communist organizations. Two former members of the Communist Party-USA would join the KDP. Thus, radical activity was not new to the Pilipino-American community.] The founding congress document was explicit:

...the KDP pledges to take up the revolutionary banner of the first *Katipunan* organization which led the Philippine revolution of the 1890's against the Spanish colonists and U.S. aggressors. In the same honored tradition of the first *Katipunan*, the new organization is committed to mobilizing the broadest number of Pilipino people in the United States to support and participate in struggle...against the numerous injustices faced by all the people who are forced to live under the imperialist and capitalist social system. The KDP will work to draw Pilipino people here into this movement which is seeking long-range and revolutionary solutions to the common problems that face mankind. (Kalayaan International)

This broad vision emerging from this founding conference was not easily reached. Founding member Clarita recalls, "the founding conference was filled with much heated debate...people attending the conference represented a broad range of political views...even choosing the name of the organization represented a struggle of whether or not to include 'socialist' in it." Out of the conference came a far-reaching and revolutionary programme:

The *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino* is a revolutionary mass organization that will seek to expand its ranks to embrace all Pilipino activists who are resolutely opposed to U.S. imperialism and who are committed to the people's struggle for revolutionary change. The *Katipunan* will have two general political tasks: 1) to mobilize militant support for the National Democratic Revolution in the Philippines, and 2) to participate in building the U.S. working class struggle for socialism" (Kalayaan International).

Chapters were established in San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Honolulu. The KDP would be organized on the basis of "democratic-centralism which combined with democratically elected leadership at all levels with centralized guidance and authority" (Kalayaan International). At the KDP's height, it numbered some 300 activists. The organization established a newspaper called *Ang Katipunan* to give voice to its political perspectives and partisan reporting on issues affecting Pilipinos in America and the Philippines. [The paper name became *The Katipunan* after the formal ending of the KDP in July 1987. It was not an independent entity. The paper continued on until October 1991 ending 18 years of a progressive, independent, and partisan voice in the Pilipino-American community.]

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### Identity and Radicalization

Like other communities of color, the Pilipino-American community intersected with the major struggles for civil rights and later the struggle to end U.S. intervention in Vietnam during the sixties and seventies. Many of those drawn to the KDP were the second-generation college-age Pilipino-Americans on the West Coast. They spearheaded the community's entry into broader political struggles of the time. As noted by Rene Cruz, former editor of the KDP's national newspaper *Ang Katipunan*:

Many started joining peace marches and strikes for ethnic studies on campuses. Many also began questioning the acquiescence to second class citizenship that they have known as community tradition.... They brought this restiveness into the community, agitating for 'community involvement' in issues of affirmative action, low-cost housing, and equal job opportunity.

### Organizing the Pilipino-American Left

Prior to the KDP's founding, the Pilipino-American leftist movement was a collection of unaffiliated individuals and "small localized collectives...defined along general lines of anti-imperialism, socialism, Marxism-Leninism, and Mao Tse Tung Thought" (KDP 9-year Summation). Among the most prominent was the *Kalayaan* collective based in San Francisco. The collective, formed in 1971, comprised of a dozen Pilipino-Americans and recent immigrant activists, and published a monthly newspaper *Kalayaan*. Cruz writes:

*Kalayaan* articulated the views of the Identity movement through anti-racist and anti-imperialist lenses. Simultaneously, it called for community support for the Philippine revolutionary movement. Many U.S. Pilipinos were first introduced to the CPP [Communist Party of the Philippines], the NPA [New People's Army], and the cause of National Democracy through *Kalayaan*.

Among the third wave Pilipino immigrants<sup>1</sup>, events like the 1970 First Quarter Storm<sup>2</sup> in the Philippines energized them into erecting the short-lived organization called the National Association of Filipinos in the United States (NAFUS) as a "forum to discuss events in the Philippines" (Cruz) The founding NAFUS conference brought together third wave Pilipinos from New York, New Jersey, and Washington D.C. While in New York and Chicago, "recent college graduates of the University of the Philippines (a hotbed of radicalism) and immigrants who had relatives and friends in the youth movement formed study groups "on national democracy in the Philippines." (Cruz) These groups promptly established a correspondence with the *Kalayaan* collective.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos' suspension of the writ of *habeas corpus* in 1971 and the arrests of prominent student leaders prompted these U.S. grouping to call for more coordinated action to support the national democratic struggle in the Philippines. In September 1972, the *Kalayaan* collective called for a national conference in San Francisco to organize an anti-imperialist network. Marcos' declaration of martial law dramatically interrupted the conference. Out of the conference came a call for nationwide demonstrations and the forming of the National Committee for the Restoration of Civil Liberties in the Philippines (NCRCLP). Cruz stated, "Martial law clearly had a profound effect on the emerging political activism among U.S. Pilipinos. It fused the concerns of both third wave and Pilipino-American progressives into one movement. The resistance led by the CPP deepened the interest in revolution and Marxism, pushing the radicalization process further." The development finally came to fruition with *Kalayaan* collective's call for a three day conference and the resulting formation of the KDP.

Former KDP member Gloria said, "my joining the KDP seemed to

me to be a natural extension of finding my identity as a Pilipino-American...I visited the Philippines after Martial Law was declared and I wanted to get involved to fight it.... The KDP's radical politics didn't frighten me, in fact, the independent studying that we did in the organization helped me understand the world a lot better." While former activist Ann recalls "I joined the KDP because it was a community-based organization taking on issues like affirmative action, civil rights...and also because being a member of an organization offered the chance to be part of the larger movement."

## Building the Anti-Dictatorship Movement

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One of the first challenges for this young organization was developing a "grassroots network of opposition" against the Marcos dictatorship (Cruz). In 1974, KDP supported the establishment of the Anti-Martial Law Coalition (AMLC) in Chicago, which later became the Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship (CAMD) after the sham lifting of Martial Law in 1981. Rene Cruz states

For the rest of the decade, the AMLC launched well-coordinated campaigns, educating the community and non-Pilipino sectors on the plight of political prisoners, the U.S. motivation in supporting the regime, Marcos' various maneuvers for legitimacy and more.... These campaigns took the form of petition drives, demonstrations, Christmas caroling, speaking tours of exiled or deported oppositionists, and fund-raisers for the workers movement. The AMLC also sent human rights delegations to the Philippines, and during the rigged 1978 election, staged occupations of Philippine consulates in five cities.

Within this anti-Marcos front, the KDP independently championed the leading role played by the CPP and NPA [the military wing of the CPP] in the liberation of the Philippines. One venue was nationwide celebrations honoring Andres Bonifacio to link the unfinished revolution of 1896 to the continuing revolution waged by the New People's Army. In other words, the NPA was the new *Katipunan* fighting to liberate the Philippines from the Marcos dictatorship.

## On the Homefront

While carrying out the struggle against what it called the U.S.-Marcos dictatorship, the KDP took on the struggles of Pilipinos for their democratic and human rights in America. Against the backdrop of civil rights and anti-war protests, overt and covert discrimination of Pilipinos, "[t]he KDP," said Cruz, succeeded in mobilizing unprecedented numbers of Pilipinos in a rapid flow of national and local campaigns for domestic and civil rights."

Among these were the campaigns to prevent the deportation of Foreign Medical Graduates (FMG) and Foreign Nurse Graduates (FNG), the frame-up of two Pilipina nurses for the mysterious and unsolved deaths in a Michigan V.A. hospital. The KDP also helped anchor an educational task force which "challenged the racist depiction of Filipinos and other minorities in California school textbooks in 1976" (Cruz). Another KDP-led issue which gained nationwide prominence in the Pilipino community was the case of the Pilipino 4-H trainees who had come to the U.S. to be trained in modern farming methods but were being exploited as cheap labor by their host farmers. KDP activists played prominent roles in broader struggles for low-cost housing like the International Hotel in San Francisco, Chinatown in Honolulu, and Seattle's International District. Seattle KDP activists played leading roles in the effort to reform ILWU Local 37 Alaska Cannery Workers Union (Clever). Cruz states because of the KDP's role in these and other struggles, "Pilipinos began reporting incidents of injustice directly to the KDP." As a result, its chapters took up local issues such as job discrimination and police harassment.

West Coast KDP activists figured prominently in the annual community institution known as the Filipino People's Far West Convention (FWC). The FWC was held through the seventies and early eighties. It played an important role in the political growth and maturation of the West Coast Pilipino community by being a forum through which the prominent issues of the day affecting Pilipino-Americans could be discussed and as a result, concrete

action taken. The FWC established two main points of unity: "(1) to take active struggle against racial and national discrimination and (2) to take active concern with the conditions in the Philippines" (FWC). Another important part of the FWC was its working character:

Working resolutions have...also become an important product of the [FWC]. In the past, resolutions have been adopted by the general body which called for definite action. Examples are: the formation of the Educational Task Force and the Student Confederation of Pilipino Students. The Educational Task Force led a campaign to impact the California State Department of Education from adopting textbooks into the public educational system which contained racist images of Pilipinos and other minorities.... These resolution have proven the real capacity of the Filipino community to organize and move on issues of both West Coast-wide and national scope in a common direction in upholding the rights of equality.

## "Art and Culture Must Serve the People"

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The KDP employed popular culture forms through the *Sining Bayan* (or Pilipino People's Performing Arts) as another means to politicize the community. As the cultural arm of the KDP, *Sining Bayan* performed numerous plays and skits that reached thousands of Pilipinos. Among the most successful plays was *Ti Mangyuna* (Those Who Led the Way) which was KDP's contribution to the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the arrival of Pilipino laborers to Hawaii. *Ti Mangyuna* depicted the Pilipinos' role in building labor unity and the multi-racial labor movement in Hawaii. The play garnered wide community and union support. It toured statewide in Hawaii reaching thousands of people. The International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) Local 142 said in its congratulatory letter that

While the play is a docu-drama based on the events surrounding the 1937 Vibora Luzviminda Puunene strike on Maui.... The production goes beyond simply being a story of Filipinos in Hawaii. "Ti Mangyuna" (sic) brings forth values and traditions that touch the lives of all of us who work for a living, especially those who have struggled so long and so hard to organized (sic) the ILWU...We feel that the struggle to organize into a Union for a better life, as depicted in the play "Ti Mangyuna" (sic) may be different from today in time and place, but is no different in spirit, desire, or necessity.

Another major touring play produced and directed by *Sining Bayan* was the musical drama *Mindanao (Ang Katipunan)*. *Mindanao* toured the west coast cities of Seattle, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Oakland in the summer of 1978. The following year, *Mindanao* toured Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Washington D.C., Toronto, and Montreal. The play's aim was to shed light on the Moro people's resistance in the southern Philippines by providing the community a historical and contemporary background on the conflict.

Another venture into popular culture was the production of a record album featuring songs of the Philippine National Democratic struggle. The 1976 album, entitled *Bangon* or Arise, was a "joint project of revolutionary cultural workers from the Preparatory Commission for the National Democratic Front" and the KDP. (Philippines: Bangon! Arise!)

## Repression and Backlash

KDP's rise as a left-wing organization in the Pilipino-American community drew attacks from the Philippine government and from within the Pilipino-American community who "branded all of KDP's activities as 'communistic.'" (Villapando) During its existence, the organization was brought under heavy surveillance from U.S. and Philippine government agencies. Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act showed the "FBI alone had 1,3000 pages on the KDP," and that "...U.S. intelligence agencies spied heavily on the Union of Democratic Pilipinos (KDP) and its leading members since its formation in 1973." (Villapando) Muckracking *Washington Post* writer Jack Anderson revealed in his August 11, 1979 column that since Marcos declared Martial Law in September 1972, "his agents have spied on and harassed anti-Marcos dissidents who sought refuge in this country." (*Ang Katipunan*) Anderson gained access to a top secret Senate Committee on Government Operation report entitled "Activities of Certain Foreign Intelligence Agencies in the U.S." (Villapando) The report detailed the Philippine government's overt and covert operations in the U.S. against the anti-Marcos movement. Anderson reported "that as early as May of 1973, Philippine intelligence agents began arriving in the U.S. to monitor, infiltrate, and neutralize anti-Marcos groups here and...added ominously that U.S. intelligence agencies did not rule out the possibility of violence by Philippine agents." (*Ang Katipunan*)

This "possibility of violence" was realized in the brutal execution murders of two KDP activists, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, on June 1, 1981 in Seattle. Both were active leaders in the anti-Marcos movement and the reform movement within the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, Local 37. It was their anti-Marcos work within their union and linkages with the Philippine labor movement and reform effort to clean up the corruption-racked union that may have sealed their murders. Justice was won for these two activists with the convictions of their murderers and an out-of-court settlement with Imelda Marcos.<sup>3</sup>

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## KDP's Decline

On the July 4th weekend of 1987, the KDP officially came to an end in a conference reminiscent of its founding. What brought about its end as a national organization? A number of complex factors can be linked to its end. Overall, the ebb of American social movements (civil rights, anti-war, women's rights) coupled with a decline in the Philippine movement by the late 1970's, worked against the KDP and other left organizations. Added upon these developments was the rise of reaction headed by the Reagan and Bush administrations--attacks on civil rights laws and enforcement, the Bakke decision (1976 U.S. Supreme Court decision which ruled in favor of Bakke, stating that he was rejected from admission into U.C. Davis medical school on the grounds of reverse discrimination), and affirmative action, Proposition 13 (which slashed funding of social services and education and lowered the property tax), and the U.S. attack on Grenada. Fewer individuals were stepping forward to join the KDP, coupled with a decline in membership as individuals made career decisions to try to stabilize their lives and settle down.

From July 1973 to July 1987, the KDP was a nationwide force within the Filipino American community. The contributions it made were many. Cruz offers one view of the KDP legacy. "Throughout the 70's, the community was drawn into a sustained flow of political activity. Publications like the now defunct *Ningas Cogon* and the *Philippine News* called the '70's ' a decade of awakening and action' and begrudgingly recognized the KDP's role in the unexpected eruption of grassroots activism."

Former national leader Maritess acknowledged the political contributions, but felt that the legacy of the KDP was that it trained some of the best political organizers who are still active today. Former KDP activist Myrna said that the KDP experience was invaluable to her continuing work for the indigenous Hawaiian people's struggle. She felt the KDP gave her important skills in organizing and writing. Another legacy was the cultural work, in which the KDP produced plays like *Ti Mangyuna* and *Mindanao* that reached thousands of Pilipinos and non-Pilipinos educating them on the historical contributions and conditions of Pilipinos in America and the Philippines. And many other former KDP members still continue their activism through unions and community--and issue-based organizations. The organization may be gone, but the spirit of commitment to working for the peace and justice remains.

*We are the children of the sugar cane cutters  
Forced from our land under foreign rule  
Sons and daughters of the Philippine busboys  
Who will leave their stamp on America.*

*We are the cousins of the freedom fighters  
Brothers and sisters all around the world  
We are part of the Third World people  
Who will leave their stamp on America.*

--Chirs Iijima and Joanne Miyamoto, "We Are The Children."

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