

## Book Review

*A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)*, edited by Rene Ciria Cruz, Cindy Domingo, and Bruce Occena. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017. Pp. 368. ISBN 9780295742021.

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We have actually lost count of, and lately have been somewhat surprised with, the increased number of literature on the Ferdinand Marcos era. And it appears more are coming with the latest still to be launched in final print—an account of one important dimension of the Philippine struggle against the Marcos regime—the US-based anti-dictatorship movement of the Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP).

The writing of this arena of struggle among Filipino-Americans is most welcome, a frontier study of the regime of repression under the Marcos dictatorship. The book is an anthology of short, varied accounts of events and circumstances that individual KDP members went through, including very personal, internal conflicts in the resistance movement against the dictatorship. It is a story of the KDP and its network of unionists and allies seen through key members' immersion in migrant communities and workers' unions.

Reading the first chapters of the book is like getting a photographic shutter burst of images—in this instance, quick stories of particular moments of individuals who migrated to the US and lived to shape the dynamic of the anti-dictatorship movement in the American mainland. The central figure is that of a youthful activist leaving the Philippines in a suspenseful, dramatic fashion, amid the regime's clampdown on civil liberties, and then settling in uncertain conditions in the US. It is at once two stories in one person: one set in the bosom of Inang Bayan, as one leaves behind one's roots of

old, familiar surroundings, and another set in the belly of the arch enemy, US imperialism, as one transposes himself into new environs of an unknown future. The dilemma is all etched in the moments of decision, between escaping the brunt of martial law and facing an alien terrain. Of course, there were those whose awakenings were already earlier stirred in conditions of working-class oppression and racial discrimination, growing up in the US as children of earlier Filipino migrants.

All of these are organized in one section called “Beginnings,” a slew of stories that depict awakenings in activism, either in the Philippines or in the US, and transitions in the mainland for those whose activism originated in the motherland, converging in a common effort under the umbrella group of the KDP to oppose the Marcos dictatorship.

One sees then how the KDP, which became the most militant anti-Marcos dictatorship organization in the US, crucially evolved around the lives of many individuals, whose engagement in the struggle intersected with their own daily toil for survival and hopes for a better life in the American dreamland. There were those who left the country before Martial Law came to rule the land but, nonetheless, saw the ills of Marcos rule in the late 1960s when students took protests to the streets in increasing vigor. But some of the storytellers were from the 1970s who, right under the nose of a militarist regime, risked their personal safety and future as they avoided arrest in military crackdowns or nervously went past stringent airport screening. Having arrived in the US, these young Filipinos had to fend for themselves, redefine their national identity in foreign climes, and then somewhere along the way, find themselves in the crossroads of choosing between economic comfort and activism in the service of US-based Filipinos. The attention to this migrant collectivity later shifted to the greater community of the nation when Martial Law was imposed in the motherland. But to be sure, these youthful individuals had long-standing connections with relatives who had resided in the US for some time, belonging to earlier generations who migrated as workers and professionals. The book is about these individuals, their personal rising in their new country, and how these became part of the broader struggle for dignity in the US, and then, later, for the mother country against the dictatorship.

Significantly, the narratives in this section provide a window to the waves of Filipino migration to the US since the American colonization of the Philippines. But in focus was the historic meeting

of the so-called “Third Wave” migrants (of the mid-1960s to the 1970s), and the “baby boomer” Filipino-American generation, offsprings of the “Second Wave” migrants (of the postwar period, mostly military veterans). The Third Wave migrants were mainly professionals, “college graduates deeply frustrated with the deterioration of Philippine society, at a time of ascendant Filipino nationalism and anti-imperialism” (p.7). The baby boomers included the Filipino-American youth who were shaped by the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, critical of parental conservatism and White supremacy, and becoming part of a rising militant non-white sector challenging workplace oppression and discrimination. Coming together in a common cause of social justice and dignity for non-white migrants—loosely called “identity movement radicals”—these individuals connected to groups and events that had roots in the earlier working-class struggles for fair wages and just working conditions (such as in the Seattle and Alaska canneries) and against racism, and then in national (American) movements to fight racial discrimination and US military intervention in “Third World” countries such as in “IndoChina.” The suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in 1971 and eventually the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 galvanized these individuals to act more decisively along revolutionary lines and linked up with the national democratic movement in the Philippines to establish the KDP in 1973. Thus, the KDP was established to support national democracy and resist dictatorship in the Philippines and carry on the historically rooted struggles of migrant Filipinos, this time as part of a socialist vision for the US, what KDP leaders called a “dual-line” program.

From this framework, the KDP carried out its organizing and mobilizing tasks across the US, establishing chapters in key cities. Particular focus was placed on the struggle against the dictatorship, waging the fight in Filipino-American communities against Marcos supporters, especially in the unions where traditions of Filipino-American struggles exist. The articulation of this program is found in the narratives of the succeeding section, “In the Thick of Struggle.” I would like to think that this is the central and most significant section of the book as it goes beyond the little individualized moments of awakenings and transitions of the first section, into the substantive, broader, and deeper work of radical engagement that sought tangible changes in the conditions of Filipino-Americans in the US and contribute to the end of dictatorial rule in the motherland. The storytelling remains intimately personal, yet it provides the sinews and flesh of the narrative of the KDP’s evolution into a potent

organizing force among Filipino-Americans and how it mobilized them against the Marcos dictatorship, even as it fought for minority rights. The narratives in this section detail organizing efforts and tactics, in particular events such as the International Hotel eviction, all articulated in personal encounters. There is no systematic narrative of the KDP's organizing template and its execution in the communities and unions. It is in the storytelling of individual circumstances that the KDP's becoming as a movement and its policies and strategies are revealed. The approach effectively situates organizing efforts in a member's personal context and appreciation of an event and conflicts at hand. Policies, for example, on tasks and transfers of assignment had to reckon with personal plans and limitations, higher studies, or relations with partners and children. Events and conflicts then are seen not only in terms of the movement's objectives in a given situation but also in the way individual KDP members had to deal with challenges in said circumstances. But, somehow in reading these accounts, I wished I could have had a broader view of the KDP's organizational development and strides through the major events it engaged with, in a somewhat linear fashion. This could be something to look forward to in a future publication about the KDP as a movement and the conflicts it faced, as well as its relations with the Philippine revolution and the US progressive movements.

The last sections continue with the personal stories, all of which turned out to be a tough reading from the first chapters, having to take in copious details about individual KDP members' engagements even as I seek out the broad strokes, or threads, of organizational development and practical engagement. Truly, these are not easy to draw out from the vast minutiae of personal experiences and reflections. Incidentally, I was struck by the resemblance of the book's storytelling approach and style with another anthology of short accounts about activists' radical engagement in the 1970s, published in 2012. I wondered if this work, which I edited, partly inspired the way the KDP anthology was framed. Even the titles of both works have an uncanny common use of the word "rise," which is "rising" in our work (see Llanes 2012). I checked the bibliographic notes of "A Time to Rise" and did not find any reference to our book. Even the method of organizing the stories in clusters or themes looked somewhat similar, coming to a climax with the deaths of people's leaders.

Reading the third and fourth sections, "The Test of Fire" and "Looking Back," respectively, the stories turn to a climax in personal accounts related to the murders of two celebrated Filipino-American

labor leaders inside the Seattle premises of the Alaska Cannery Workers Union, Gene Viernes, and Silme Domingo. This was in 1981, the year Marcos, who under international pressure, formally lifted Martial Law. The development of the stories from the first chapters to this section, which recount relations with the labor leaders and circumstances of their involvement with unionism and support for the anti-dictatorship struggle, turns out to be a dramatic and brilliant twist in the presentation of the accounts from the beginning to the end of the book. It presents a gripping, unfolding drama in the struggle. In plot and style, this comes to me as the book's defining feature: the accounts of becoming members of the KDP coming to a head in the dying hours of Viernes and Domingo, who both personified the spirit of struggle of migrant Filipinos, rooted as it were in history and now engaged in important tasks, one of which was resistance to the dictatorship—a dual-line perspective truly set in the broader movement's line of march.

The culprits, proven henchmen of the Marcos regime, were found guilty for the twin murders and jailed in a process where the KDP had done outstanding investigative work to pin down the perpetrators and ably demonstrated in a US court that Marcos was directly responsible.

On a personal note, I realized I was once connected in spirit with the KDP. When one of the book's contributors came to the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) congress in 1982, I was very much present in that gathering, having written many of its resolutions. Let me correct the impression that Rolando Olalia, a labor lawyer and at that time chairman of the KMU, appeared to be distant as a leader. He was one of the most amiable persons in the labor circle then, not quite an ideologue, and was effective in uniting the leaders of the labor movement—something that did not sit well with military elements under the Corazon Aquino administration. Ka Lando, as he was fondly called, and his car driver were brutally assassinated in 1987.

I recall, too, that I used to receive journals of the *Line of March*, including the *Marxist-Leninist Project* manual. It seems then that the KDP's efforts, in theoretical work and transformative politics, reached more people than the narratives in this anthology would indicate. Knowing the KDP's time to rise, I think this book is one fine addition to the valuable literature on that long, dark period of a murderous regime.

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### Reference

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