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KMU, by Scipes

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it. In the same way, it is the good or the chivalrous nature of this point of view that makes men adore women, pamper women, protect them from danger, fight for them against their attackers, and love them wholeheartedly. I believe this is what the book fails to note.

Be that as it may, this is a book worth reading especially by men who (still) think a woman should not have a room—or a writing table—of her own.

Florge Sy, S.J.
Loyola House of Studies
Ateneo de Manila

KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980–1994. By Kim Scipes. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1996. (Available in North America from Sulu Arts and Books in San Francisco).

Kim Scipes begins his important new book by saying that although “Third World” workers and peasants have been depicted in the media as being largely impoverished and powerless, what is seldom conveyed to us is that these same people take extraordinary risks to improve the quality of their lives and societies. The *KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980–1994* is a ground-breaking achievement in the direction of writing this largely unwritten history of the struggle of the Filipino laboring classes to obtain decent working conditions and wages.

The Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU—May First Movement) takes on a new and creative approach to organizing labor that differs substantially from prevailing Western labor-union models that are limited solely to the business sector. First, the KMU has developed from an indigenous perspective of the working classes in relation to the larger struggle for national liberation from colonial and neocolonial domination by Spain (1565–1898), by the United States (1898–1946), and subsequently by collaborating Filipino elites. Second, the organizational structure of the KMU begins from the point of production in the physical setting of the workplace (e.g., a sugar plantation, department store, or factory). Accordingly, the methodological and theoretical approaches to local liberation differs from movements outside the workplace. Third, the kind of social-movement unionism espoused and practiced by the KMU diverges sharply from other working-class movements (e.g., reformist-type trade unions, or classical Marxist labor unions around the world) that target the working classes, rather than all exploited classes, as the chief agents of social and economic change. In effect, the KMU stands out as a seemingly unprecedented example of a new kind of revolutionary labor union that joins hands with all other groups that struggle against domination and exploitation.

The KMU's power comes from its ability to mobilize factory workers, miners, service workers, and jeepney drivers to help attain its goals. It was instrumental in overthrowing Ferdinand Marcos. The number of days lost due to strike activities increased from 581,291 in 1983 to 1,907,762 in 1984 and 2,440,000 in 1985; and of the 405 strikes in 1985, 70 percent were led by the KMU. Under Corazon Aquino's regime—during which, unknown to most people, the human-rights abuses against workers were allegedly worse than under Marcos—the KMU led two national workers' strikes and played a key role in two national people's strikes. It was poised to play a major role in a strike in 1989 that was called off in reaction to a right-wing military coup attempt. The KMU also led strikes on island and province-wide issues, as well as in the export processing zone in Bataan.

Scipes also helps us understand how the KMU is genuinely concerned with women's issues in the workplace, a subject often missed in the literature on labor unions, by focusing specifically on the Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan (KMK), the women workers' alliance. In the late 1980s, the KMK had up to 20,000 members, making it one of the largest women workers' organizations in the world. Women have long played a key role in the Filipino struggle for national liberation, and both women and men are in charge of political meetings and rallies, even if women still suffer from many gender-specific problems in the workplace. For example, women make up 85 percent of the workforce in the Bataan export processing zone, but all key leadership positions above the local union level are held by men. Even so, the KMK is working to institutionalize women's leadership. This movement to promote women to positions of leadership in the workplace is going on nationwide. However, companies often retaliate specifically against women organizing for their well-being on the shop floor by retrenchments or even factory closures.

From the critical perspective of labor-movement unionism in the Philippines, one of the most serious problems with unions in developed countries (where the headquarters of large multinational corporations are based) is that the "home" unions fail to recognize that workers in developing countries are their allies, not competitors, for their jobs. What is needed precisely is for workers in developed countries to join forces in solidarity with the brave efforts of workers in developing countries. The KMU is a constructive example of the powerful force for the commonweal that a call for unity can bring.

No serious labor organizer, NGO worker, or scholar interested in new social movements for change from the perspective of the working classes can afford to miss this delightful and courageous book.

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