

Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan: some basic information

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Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (SDK) was a leading national-democratic (nat-dem) youth and student activist mass organization that played a prominent role in the upsurge of activism in the Philippines during the early 1970s and its regrouping during the early years of martial law. Together with the bigger and more prominent Kabataang Makabayan (KM), SDK was at the forefront of such signal activist events as the First Quarter Storm (FQS) of January-March 1970 and the Diliman Commune of February 1971, the 35th anniversary of which is commemorated this year. SDK was characterized by a certain style of activism which included giving full play to initiative and the premium it put on education work among its members. It was also known for its more than fair share of writers among its leading members.

A good number of established writers were among those who founded SDK on 30 January 1968 after breaking away from KM on the main issue of organizational democracy, and thus the emphasis on this in its name. Among the SDK founders and early writers were Perfecto Tera Jr., Vivencio Jose, Ricardo Ferrer, Sixto Carlos Jr., Ramon Sanchez, Maximo Lim, Ellecer Cortes, William Padolina, Ninotchka Rosca, Rolando Pena, Mariquit Rivera, Rogelio Arcilla, Efren Abueg, Leni Lontok, Antonio Hilario, Annie Andrada, Fidel Garcia, Antonio Pangilinan and Max Pulan. SDK was also instrumental in the founding of the Katipunan ng mga Manunulat ng Pilipinas (KAMPI) in April 1968. This brought together more than 100 writers in seven different languages and foreshadowed the triumph in the 1990s of a multilingual Filipino literature as the accepted canon of national culture.

By the time of the FQS of 1970, SDK, then under the leadership of Sixto Carlos Jr. and Antonio Hilario, returned to the nat-dem mainstream and would coordinate with KM and other nat-dem mass organizations mainly for various kinds of mass actions. This coordination would be facilitated later by the formation of the nat-dem multisectoral Movement for a Democratic Philippines (MDP). In these various mass actions and in MDP, SDK made its fair share of contributions in terms of warm bodies, rally speakers and even victims of police brutality. The most prominent SDK-MDP spokesperson at that time was Gary Olivar. But it was SDK Secretary-General Antonio Hilario who is credited with the spectacular growth of SDK in the early 1970s. This continued with the passing on of the SDK Chairmanship from Sixto Carlos Jr. to Reynaldo Vea in the summer of 1972.

SDK's sectoral and territorial expansion nationwide from North to South largely originated from university bases, reflecting another dimension of "Student Power" of those times. On the basis of this practice, SDK contributed theoretical papers like "The University as a Base of the Cultural Revolution" and "The Orientation of the Filipino Youth Movement." SDK also spun off a number of sectoral organizations, most notable of which were Gintong Silahis for performing artists, Sining Bayan for visual artists, and Progresibong Samahan sa Pangangalakal (PSP) for nationalist businessmen. Leading members of the SDK Women's Organizing Committee (WOC) helped form the Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA). SDK did not have its own labor formation but worked closely with Felixberto Olalia's National Federation of Labor Unions (NAFLU).

In the writ suspension following the Plaza Miranda bombing in August 1971, and which was the prelude to martial law, it was no wonder that SDK leaders like Gary Olivar were among those

arrested and detained. When martial law was declared by President Marcos in September 1972, he singled out both KM and SDK in Proclamation No. 1081, describing SDK as “another militant and outspoken front organization of the radical left, has also increased the number of its chapters from an insignificant number at the end of 1970 to 159 as of the end of July, 1972, and has now a membership of some 1,495 highly indoctrinated, intensely committed and almost fanatically devoted individuals.” Many SDK activists were arrested and detained during the early years of martial law.

With SDK, KM and other nat-dem mass organizations illegalized under conditions of fascist dictatorship, many mass activists had to work underground in the city or went to the countryside to join the New People’s Army (NPA). While contributing there to the growth of the NPA as the most consistent armed opposition force against the Marcos dictatorship, many of these mass activists were eventually killed in the course of the armed conflict. Among them were former SDK activists like Antonio Hilario, Ma. Lorena Barros, Jose Ramos Calderon Jr., Eugenio Flores, Lourdes Garduce, Boy de Guzman, Cesar Hicaro, Lorenzo Lansang, Mariano Lopez, Salvador Panganiban, Jacinto Pena, Jose Ramirez, Cecilio Reyes, Lazaro Silva, Alex Torres, and Marcelino Villanueva. But former SDK activists who went to the countryside and survived have risen in the ranks there. The most prominent of these now is Benito Tiamzon, believed to be the in-country leader of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

SDK itself was still around during the early years of martial law. SDK activists who stayed in the cities regrouped and grappled with the problem of mass work under the new political situation. This led to the last important theoretical contribution of SDK: a martial law paper entitled *Hinggil sa Legal na Pakikibaka*. It posited that, under the new situation, the center of gravity was no longer the nat-dem mass organizations like SDK, which were illegalized, but the legal organizations in schools, communities, factories, offices, barrios and so on. A shift in the center of gravity, by focusing on forming secret core groups within legal organizations, would enable the progressive forces to adjust to the new situation. This was based on and borne out by concrete experiences such as with academic societies and fraternities during the early years of martial law. This contributed to the eventual revival of the mass movement against the Marcos dictatorship, culminating ultimately in the EDSA “People Power” Revolution of February 1986.

Ironically, the said important theoretical contribution of SDK may have contributed to its dissolution. The nat-dem movement decided to dissolve SDK, KM and other nat-dem mass organizations in mid-1975 on the ground that the new situation required new tactics; i.e., new forms of struggle and new forms of organization. So, SDK was in existence only from 1968 to 1975. But its impact goes beyond those years. Its surviving former members in the main cherish their SDK experience for what it has taught and made them. They are now all over the place, in various levels in government, NGOs, academe, media, business, the private sector, and the countryside - presumably still serving the people in one way or another.

S.M.S.
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SOME PROMINENT MEMBERS OF SAMAHANG DEMOKRATIKO NG KABATAAN

Academe

Reynaldo Vea (Mapua IT President)

Emmanuel de Dios (UP School of Economics 11)

Ricardo Ferrer (UPSE)
Vivencio Jose (UP English Dept.)

Writers

Ninotchka Rosca
Efren Abueg
Jose Dalisay, Jr.

Artists (Performing & Visual)

Behn Cervantes
Jerry Araos
Lorenzo "Mike" Reyes
Don Pagusara (in Davao/Mindanao)

Media

Noel Cabrera (now a diplomat)
Luis Teodoro
Joy de los Reyes (MALAYA)
Jonathan dela Cruz
Chito Sta. Romana (in China)

Government or Ex-Government

William Padolina (ex-DOST Sec.)
Bibeth Gozun (ex-DENR Sec.)
Andrea Domingo (ex-Immigration Commissioner)
Maximo Lim (DOLE Regional Director)
Mario Taguiwalo (ex-DOH Usec.)

NGOs

Isagani Serrano (PRRM)
Roberto Verzola
Manuel "Steve" Quiambao
Jimmy Regalario (Kilusang Makabayang Ekonomista)

Business

Ramon Isberto (SMART)
Gary Olivar (formerly BAYANTEL)
Aloysius Colayco (Jardine Davis)

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