

THE KMU CORRESPONDENCE



The Official International Newsletter of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement)

MAY 2025



2

#TooHotToWork

3

Retrospect and Prospect

4

Filipino Workers Rise

6

On the Road and in the Struggle

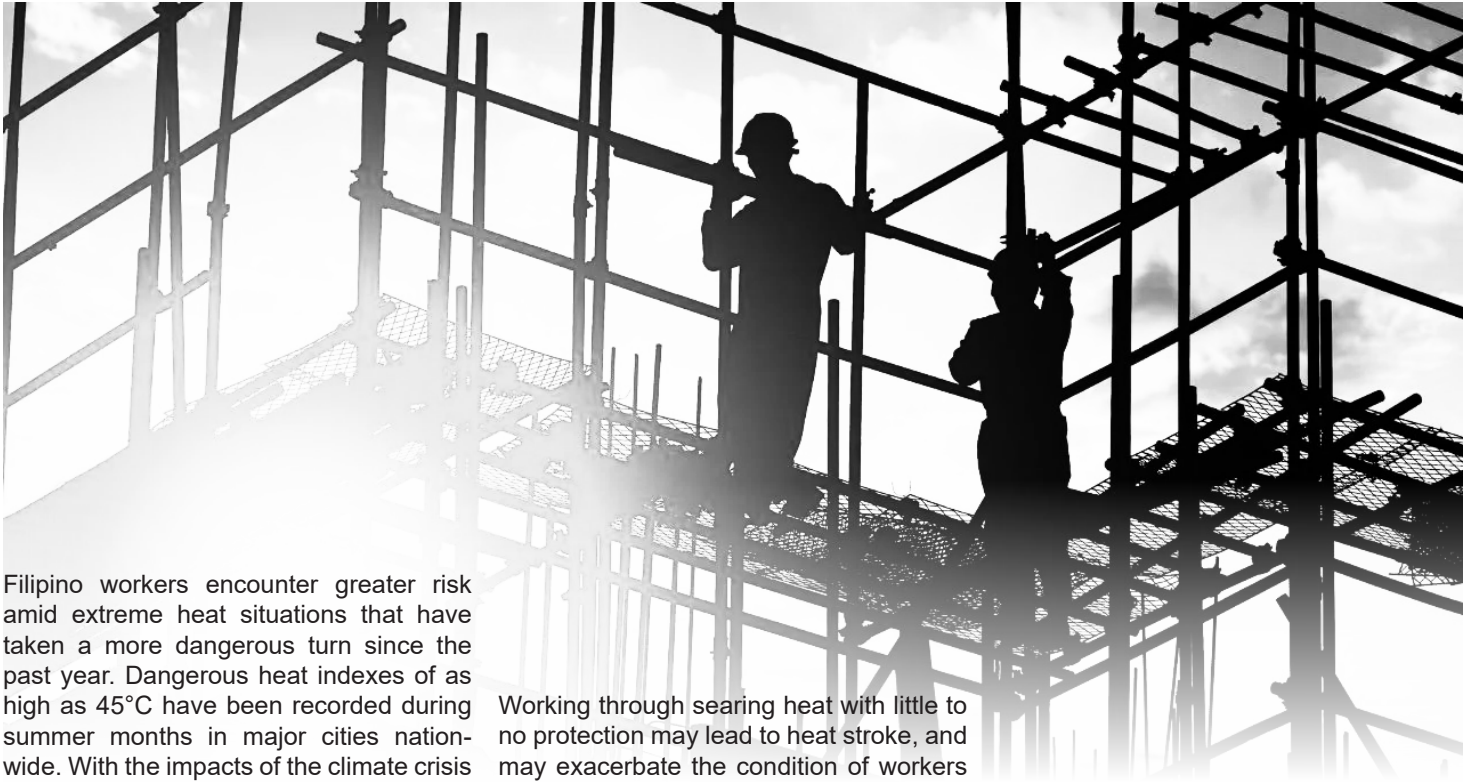
7

The Dark Side of Green strike

8

KMU at 45

#TooHotToWork: Filipino workers demand responsive heat safety measures



Filipino workers encounter greater risk amid extreme heat situations that have taken a more dangerous turn since the past year. Dangerous heat indexes of as high as 45°C have been recorded during summer months in major cities nationwide. With the impacts of the climate crisis accelerating, workers in outdoor settings and in the informal sector are notably one of the most vulnerable.

While the KMU, along with other labor groups, have long warned of these dangers, protections remain inadequate. The struggle for heat safety measures goes way beyond cooler workplaces, but the realization of safe, humane and dignified workplaces.

Protection recommended, but not mandated

In 2023, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) released Labor Advisory No. 8, Series of 2023 outlining heat safety precautions like free water, rest breaks, and flexible hours. Labor advisories, however, are only recommendatory as opposed to the strict enforcement of measures through Department Orders.

Some of the major criticisms aside from its enforceability is the scope of coverage. Definition of terms and standardization of what constitutes “unsafe” also remains vague. Workers in the construction industry, agricultural plantations, along with platform riders, vendors and those engaged in the informal economy are some of those who were left out.

Working through searing heat with little to no protection may lead to heat stroke, and may exacerbate the condition of workers with existing comorbidities such as diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, and the like.

In a 2024 workshop, workers shared their particular experiences in dealing with extreme heat situations. Construction workers shared the added layers of hazards and risks such as electrocution and tetanus infections due to accidents from dizziness. Dehydration, mental health problems, skin diseases and colds are also commonly experienced by outdoor workers including delivery riders.

Heat safety protocols urgent and just

The provision of responsive and adequate heat safety measures is an urgent matter anchored on dignity of work and social justice. Labor groups and occupational health advocates held consultations with various working sectors and have raised a set clear, actionable demands.

To help prevent heat-related illnesses and ensure workers’ health and safety, the KMU collaborated with the Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Development (IOHSAD) to outline the following demands under the banner of the People United for Safety and Health (PUSH) Network.

Heat breaks that are paid and compensable during peak temperature hours

Education on heat stress prevention through mandatory workplace training

Aadjusted work hours to avoid the hottest periods of the day

Assessment of health conditions and medical check-ups for workers

Temperature-appropriate and free personal protective equipment (PPE)

Shaded and accessible rest areas for workers, especially those who are working outdoors.

Beyond advisories: Structural changes a must

In the short term, workers demand the strict enforcement of these measures through a Department Order with which employers will be required by law to comply.

Heat safety should be a standard right, not a seasonal concern. Viewing things strategically, labor groups and institutions have also begun to conduct more extensive consultations to formulate a comprehensive and progressive legislative framework to address the impacts of the climate crisis, including the welfare and safety of workers.

While pressing on with this fight, workers are also striving to gain wins at the enterprise level through memoranda of understanding, and proposals to include heat safety provisions in their collective bargaining agreements. They maximize every opportunity available to effect immediate changes.

In the context of the heat crisis that is projected to worsen in the coming years, workers' power to assert and win victories must continuously be strengthened. No one should be forced to choose between a paycheck and their health.

The fight for safety and health at work continues, with workers at the helm from the workplace to the arena of policymaking.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT:

Resistance and Hope for Workers after the Midterm Elections

The 2025 Philippine midterm elections have wrapped up. Winning senatoriables and party-list representatives have been proclaimed. The Filipino people have sounded the alarm on questions surrounding the credibility of the polls as the vox populi. For labor organizer Julie Ann Gutierrez, the work is far from over and the fight rages on.

At 42, Julie's life is a portrait of the working Filipina. She has swept beauty salon floors, waited tables, cleaned homes, and worked overseas in the Middle East.

"I came home for my family," she shares. "But it meant going back to a country where decent jobs are hard to find." Her husband works in construction, and like many, they scrape by in a country where prices rise faster than wages.

That struggle led Julie to organizing. Now, as spokesperson of KILOS NA Manggagawa, a grassroots group of contractual workers, she fights for job security, fair wages and the right to organize. In 2022, she volunteered for the senatorial campaign of labor leader and KMU chairperson Elmer 'Ka Bong' Labog. This election, she campaigned for progressive bets under the Makabayan Coalition, including KMU secretary general Jerome Adonis.



"I supported Makabayan's senatoriables because I saw that they represented us — the workers, the poor, the ordinary folk," Julie says. "We've had enough of a Senate filled with the rich and powerful."

Julie recounts that the campaign trail wasn't easy and required a great deal of sacrifice from her and the whole team.

"Of course, we get tired. There are days when you feel like giving up," she admits. "But each assembly, each house visit reminds me why the fight matters. The demands we present are warmly welcomed by the workers. Some of them even volunteer to help us put up posters and spread the word."

"We were able to reach more workers, and stirred a lively discussion on our daily concerns and our aspirations of a better country. I think that's the best thing we have achieved. To present an alternative, to let them know that they have a choice."

Julie knew how elections in the Philippines go and expected that it will be mired with dirty tactics. She was ready for the result and she saw far beyond. "I told myself that if we win, we would work hard to fight for the laws that protect us. If we lose, it would only further expose how rigged the system is against the poor," she says. "But win or lose, we keep going."

The Makabayan Coalition failed to win any senatorial seats and the progressive representation in the Philippine House of Representatives was once again decreased due to the loss of a number of progressive parties that had been subject to red-tagging, harassment and electoral fraud. To Julie, the end of the electoral campaign was a bittersweet moment. Despite losing, she knew that the progressives fought the good fight.

Now that the elections are over, Julie is back to what she does best—organizing, educating, and mobilizing workers. "The campaign never really ends," she reflects. "One day, we'll win the fight for wages, jobs, and rights. And when that day comes, I'll tell myself — this is what we struggled for, together."



ATTACKS TO FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION (2016 - 2025)

105 extrajudicial killings

7 abductions involving 11 persons

122 victims of trumped-up charges

23 currently detained labor organizers, unionists

341 cases of THIs (threats, harassments, and intimidations), red/terrorist-tagging

118 violations of the right to assembly

156 anti-union activities (union busting, forced disaffiliation, etc.)

Amid mounting attacks on labor rights, Filipino workers are rising up for just wages, job security, and the fundamental right to organize. As the government continues to side with corporate interests, workers are reclaiming their power—most notably through the strike, their most potent weapon against exploitation and repression.

In 2024, the Philippines once again came under international scrutiny for labor rights abuses. The International Labour Organization (ILO) flagged the country for persistent violations of Convention 87, which protects freedom of association. The International Trade Union Confederation also included the Philippines in its Top 10 Worst Countries for Workers—for the eighth consecutive year.

Despite international pressure, the Marcos Jr. administration has shown little political will to address these issues. Reports of union-busting, harassment, and illegal dismissals have only increased. Crucial ILO recommendations from its 2023 High-Level Tripartite Mission remain unimplemented, and labor laws are still weaponized to stifle dissent and shield state and corporate actors.

Upsurge of a thousand militant workers

Amid this hostile environment, workers are fighting back.

Last March 5 employees of Nexperia Philippines Inc. launched a strike, defying an Assumption of Jurisdiction (AJ) order from Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma—a legal mechanism used to suppress strikes, force workers to return to work, and allow the police and military to violently disperse picket lines.

After exhausting all legal remedies and facing continued union-busting, workers demanded fair wages and the reinstatement of four illegally dismissed union leaders.

The strike was a decisive blow against the forces that seek to divide and exploit workers for corporate gain. It cost Nexperia an estimated ₱1.89 billion (US\$33.88 million). It shattered the “no union, no strike” policy imposed in industrial enclaves, demonstrating the limitless power of workers’ collective action against capitalist oppression.

FILIPINO WORKERS Organize, Strike



The strike delivered: the workers secured an initial wage increase far exceeding management’s initial offer of ₱17 (US\$0.31). The union overcame all attempts to destroy it, and won the reinstatement of two officials, including the union president, and protected themselves from retaliation.

The fight of Nexperia workers for living wages and job security continues amid looming threats of cost-optimization and automation.

Nexperia is bound to face a stronger, more determined workforce—hardened by past struggles and shaped through collective resistance.

A Ripple Effect of Resistance

The momentum is spreading.

On May 21, 2025, Kawasaki Motors Philippines workers in Muntinlupa launched their own strike, demanding a 12% wage increase against management’s 5% offer.

WORKERS RISE: Strike, Win!



The workers found inspiration from the Nexperia strike and broke the 57-year silence in their factory.

Earlier, on March 3, around 100 delivery riders at J&T Express in Manila staged a strike over contractualization, union-busting, and labor violations. Though a settlement was reached, over 100 riders were suspended afterward in retaliation.

Solidarity spread quickly. On March 26, J&T workers in Pampanga launched a parallel strike over CBA violations and the dismissal of six union officials.

On April 4, tollway workers at South Luzon Expressway (SLEX) walked off the job, demanding overdue wage hikes and reinstatement of dismissed employees. Their protest targeted a firm under billionaire Ramon Ang, even as the expressway reported ₱3.96 billion (US\$71.4 million) in profits in just the first half of 2024.

Academic institutions were not exempt. Faculty at the University of Santo Tomas (UST) filed a Notice of Strike on March 25 following a bargaining deadlock. The next day, Lyceum of the Philippines faculty filed their own Notice of Strike. By April 24, their campaign had amended a decades-old retirement policy and secured an estimated ₱4 million (US\$72,000) in economic gains.

Rank-and-file transportation workers at FOC Transportation Corporation have also walked out over unfair labor practices, and erected their picketline at Infanta, Quezon.

Workers across various industries are also mobilizing against exploitation and insecurity.

In the film and entertainment sector, the Eyes on Set Network is organizing against long hours and unsafe conditions. In Cebu, 200 contractual Coca-Cola workers began organizing in response to looming mass layoffs. Meanwhile, ride-hailing drivers under Movelt are protesting LTFRB regulations that threaten to cut 14,000 jobs.

A Living Movement for Workers' Rights

What's unfolding in the Philippines today is a living movement. In the face of repression, workers are proving that collective action can beat back even the most entrenched corporate and political powers.

As the International Labor Conference convenes, labor groups are demanding that the Philippines be shortlisted again for scrutiny by the ILO's Committee on the Application of Standards.

We urge our international allies to support our demands for the urgent implementation of ILO recommendations and the passage of long-delayed legislation such as the Anti-Union Interference Bill and the Union Formation Bill.

The fight for labor rights in the Philippines is far from over. But one thing is clear: the right to organize, strike, and demand justice is not just a principle written in law—it is a living movement, built and defended every day by the workers themselves.

In the busy streets of the Philippines' major urban hubs, thousands of platform-based delivery riders weave through the daily traffic to deliver meals, groceries and parcels. Their role became more visible at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring supplies to communities under strict lockdowns. As restrictions eased, the reality of precarious work behind the "essential worker" label as proof of exploitative practices and exclusion from basic labor protections surfaced - a familiar sight for platform workers worldwide.

Essential, but expendable

Classified as "independent contractors," most delivery riders in the Philippines work without job security, social protections, or standard employment benefits. In 2024, KMU spearheaded a consultation campaign to gain a fuller understanding of the riders' situation. We employed surveys, group consultations and kapihan (coffee sessions) to encourage the riders to share their plight.

By talking with them, we discovered that riders themselves cover expenses for their own fuel, vehicle maintenance, and health costs. All these while platform operators dictate delivery rates, with riders' daily earnings steadily declining as fuel prices and the cost of living soar.

Occupational health and safety is a major concern. A huge number of them work for as long as 18 to 24 hours to make up for the decrease in earnings.

Riders typically earn PHP 1200-1500 (€19-25 / \$21-26) daily, but only if they choose to go overtime. The long hours make riders prone to accidents, and presupposed to cardiovascular, respiratory and orthopedic injuries and illnesses among others.

Some of the riders we consulted also complained about penalties and arbitrary account deactivations that they have incurred that were often dealt without due process. Attempts to organize and speak up on these concerns have also been met with repressive measures by platform giants such as Grab and FoodPanda.

In recent years, the absence of clear regulatory protections for platform labor has left riders vulnerable to mass layoffs and income instability — trends that became even more pronounced post-pandemic.

Struggles and victories

In May this year, the situation of Move It riders drew national attention. The government's Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) ordered the platform to reduce its active riders from over 14,000 to just 6,836, citing regulatory compliance. The decision left thousands of riders in Metro Manila, Cebu, and Cagayan de Oro abruptly displaced, exposing the fragility of gig work under the control of digital platforms.

Yet, riders are not without victories. In Davao City, the United Davao Delivery Riders Association (UDDRA), through persistent organizing and negotiations, successfully lobbied for the passage of a local ordinance reducing riders' annual local fees from PHP 2,700-4,000 (around €42-63 / \$46-68) to a flat occupational fee of PHP 125 (about €2 / \$2.30). Crucially, the new ordinance scrapped the requirement for a business permit, formally recognising delivery riders as service workers, not business owners — a hard-won acknowledgement of their status.

Riders' major demands

Ultimately, a national level recognition of the employer-employee relationship between riders and their platform app employers would be a significant stride in ensuring their rights and welfare, and provide them a platform to legally bargain.

While this recognition is being sought, Philippine delivery riders, through grass-roots associations and advocacy, continue to press for immediate measures to protect their rights of welfare in accordance with prevailing labor standards.

The major demands that platform riders and labor groups assert include:

Fair pay and livelihood protection

- A living daily income consistent with living wage standards (PHP 1200/ €19/ \$21).
- Lower app commissions to increase riders' take-home pay.
- A standard fare system across all platforms.
- 100% of customer tips to riders. Discounts to be shouldered by platform companies.

Safe and decent work

- Government-mandated benefits and social pension with corresponding employer contributions.
- Safe work with free, quality protective gear.
- Right to refuse unsafe work without penalty.
- Accessible and responsive accident and death insurance.
- Performance-based booking systems. Bookings should depend on location and distance.
- Improved top-up credit policies. Benefits as rights, not incentives.

Right to organize and speak out

- A fair grievance system for riders' concerns.
- End to arbitrary suspensions and bans, especially for those raising legitimate issues or refusing unsafe jobs.
- Inclusion riders in decision-making on policies and app updates.
- Recognition and support to the riders' right to organize and form unions as part of the broader workforce.

Decent work, fair pay, safety, and respect are basic workers' rights that should extend to platform riders. The campaign for the realization of these demands is expected to grow stronger as more platform riders decide on the path of a common, shared struggle for the betterment of all.

ON THE ROAD AND IN THE STRUGGLE

—
Delivery riders assert rights and recognition

THE DARK SIDE OF GREEN

How the jeepney phaseout and electric vehicle transition drive old engines of inequalities

Philip Burata, a jeepney operator from Bacolod City, Philippines, is facing 38 counts of carnapping after a fallout with the transport corporation he joined under the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (now called Public Transport Modernization Program or PTMP). The dispute centers on the ownership of the “modern” minibuses he personally financed in replacement for his jeepneys.

Burata said he was led to believe he and other operators were legitimate members of the corporation. But checks with the Securities and Exchange Commission revealed they were neither incorporators nor official members. The officers of the corporation now claim Burata and his peers are merely employees, denying their ownership of the vehicles.

When Burata and the others challenged this, the corporation filed criminal charges in December 2023. The basis? The thirty-eight minibuses remained parked in a garage owned by Burata’s group.

“We paid for those units. We transferred our franchises and even invested in garages to comply. But our names don’t appear in the corporation,” Burata testified at a House of Representatives hearing.

The Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB), which implements the PTMP, dismissed the issue as an internal dispute. But for operators like Burata, the stakes are high. Their franchises are their livelihood. Without them, they can’t legally operate and feed their families.

“We had no choice.”

Burata said. “If we didn’t join the corporation, we’d lose our work. Driving is how I support my family.”

Launched in 2017, the PTMP aimed to modernize Philippine public transport by phasing out traditional jeepneys in favor of “newer, eco-friendly vehicles.” It also requires operators to consolidate into cooperatives or corporations. The program was part of the Philippines’ climate commitments under the Paris Agreement.

But small operators struggled with costs. Modern units cost over PhP 2 million (USD 36,000) each — an impossible burden for many. Financing options existed, but most operators remained deep in debt or shut out completely. For them, the program wasn’t modernization — it was economic displacement.

Jeepney drivers, led by transport workers’ federation PISTON, a member of Kilusang Mayo Uno, have fought back with strikes, protests, and legal action. From 2023 to early 2024, they launched ten strikes and petitioned the Supreme Court to block the program. The Senate responded by urging a suspension through Senate Resolution No. 1096 but was unfortunately ignored by Philippine President Bongbong Marcos Jr.

Meanwhile, President Marcos Jr. continues to push for full electrification as the next phase of the modernization program.

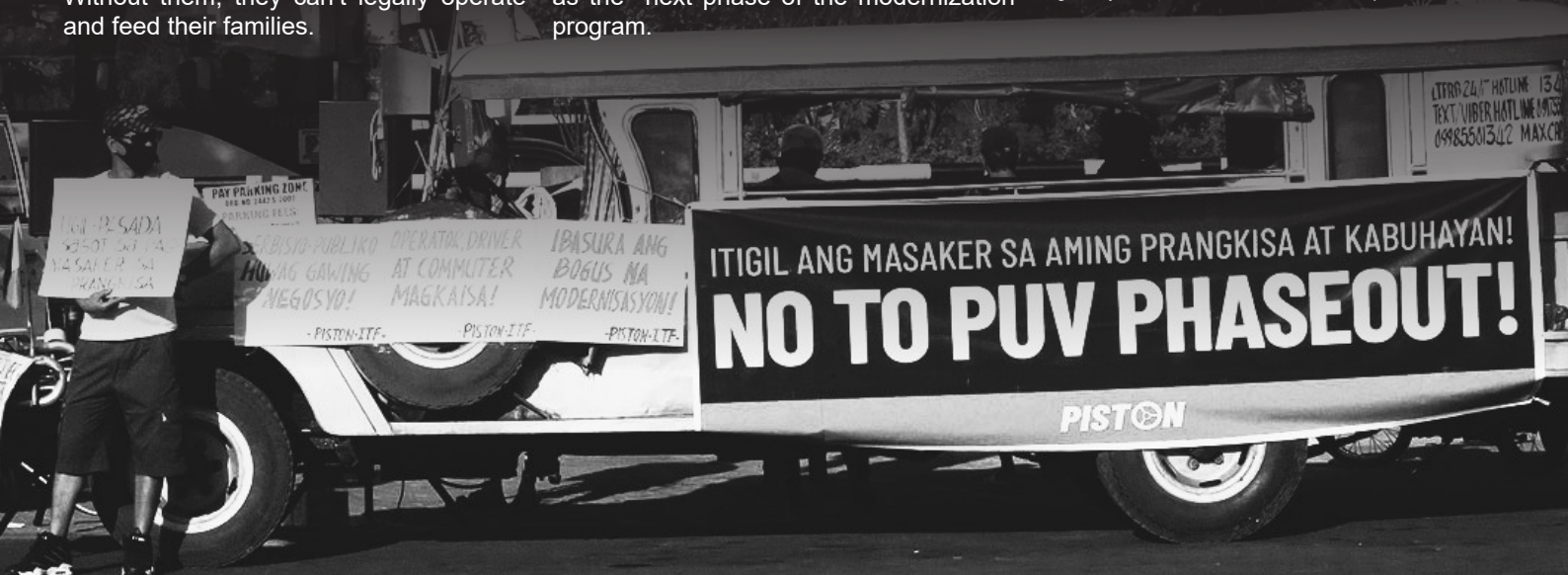
His administration backs plans to make EVs 50% of the vehicle fleet by 2040. But this “green” shift comes with costs: nickel mining for EV batteries is devastating local communities in provinces like Zambales and Palawan, where deforestation, militarization, and displacement have become rampant.

While PISTON agrees that there is a need to immediately address the climate crisis, the group argues genuine sustainability cannot be achieved through technological quick fixes or market-driven solutions. Instead, it requires building stronger and more powerful transport workers’ organizations and unions to empower them in asserting their rights to decent work, social justice, and overall economic welfare. It demands a radical reimagining of our political, economic, and social structures, centering the experiences of those most impacted by environmental and economic injustices.

This so-called transition merely repackages extractive capitalism. Corporations profit while poor communities pay the price. Local transport workers, pushed to consolidate or be phased out, are caught in a system that erases their autonomy.

Burata, still fighting charges, summed it up: “We invested everything—money, time, energy—into this modernization. Now they want to erase us.”

(This article is an abridged version to an essay of the same title published in the anthology *Remember, Resisting: Realities of people’s struggles under the second Marcos regime* by Ibon International on March 2025)





KMU at 45

45 Years of Resistance, 45 Years of Strength

This year, we proudly mark the 45th anniversary of Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) — 45 years of building the organized power of the Filipino working class and standing strong against exploitation, fascism, and imperialism.

Our anniversary theme, “Mangahas! (Dare!)”, honors those who came before us—those who dared to envision and secure better conditions for Filipino workers. It challenges us today to dare: to organize and fight for a brighter future for all workers.

Founded on May 1, 1980, during the darkest days of the US-Marcos dictatorship, KMU emerged in defiance of state repression, yellow unionism, and foreign domination. Over 50,000 workers united under the red banner of genuine, militant, and anti-imperialist unionism, boldly declaring their determination to fight for systemic change.

Since its inception, KMU has empowered workers to go beyond economic demands and assert their role in the broader struggle against oppression.

It has organized workers in factories, farms, transport, the informal sector, and migrant laborers, educating generations of workers that their fight is part of a larger battle against capitalist and imperialist exploitation.

KMU has never fought alone. It stood shoulder to shoulder with peasants demanding genuine land reform, students fighting for quality education, the urban poor resisting demolitions, and other sectors seeking genuine social transformation. Together, we have built a united people's movement grounded in the shared truth that the oppressed face a common enemy and must unite their strength to win a just future.

Across six administrations, KMU has led general strikes, mass actions, and campaigns against anti-worker laws, neoliberal policies, and foreign intervention. Its militant collective action has repeatedly shown that workers can confront and overcome entrenched forces of state repression and capitalist exploitation.

Today, the struggle continues amid poverty wages, contractualization, union-busting, militarization, red-tagging, and political killings. Neoliberal attacks relentlessly dismantle workers' hard-won rights. Yet KMU endures—and fights on.

We thank our international allies—your solidarity fuels our resolve. In a world divided by greed and oppression, our unity is a beacon for those who seek to break free from the vicious cycle of poverty and violence that imperialism has imposed. Together, we have a world to win.

As we mark 45 years of militant struggle, we renew our commitment to secure dignity for the working class and all oppressed peoples, to resist imperialism and neoliberal exploitation, and to advance the fight for genuine freedom and national democracy.

LONG LIVE KMU!
LONG LIVE THE WORKING CLASS!
ONWARD TO VICTORY!

The Philippine Labor Movement is steadfast in upholding our right to freedom of association. Amid state-sponsored attacks, we campaign to educate and we engage with different avenues to highlight our situation and garner victories. However, doing such requires finances and resources.

In this light, we request support from our brothers and sisters from the international community to make our campaigns successful. You may donate to our legal defense and campaign fund through the following channels:

EASTWEST BANK
Peso Account
200056974139
KILUSANG MAYO UNO (KMU)

Dollar Account
300001854007
KILUSANG MAYO UNO (KMU)

PAYPAL

THE KMU
CORRESPONDENCE
The Official International Newsletter of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement)

EDITORIAL STAFF
David Perez
Jan Atienza
Norwin Gonzales
Ruth Manglalan
Kim Louise Gonzales

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS
Elmer Labog
Lito Ustarez
Jerome Adonis