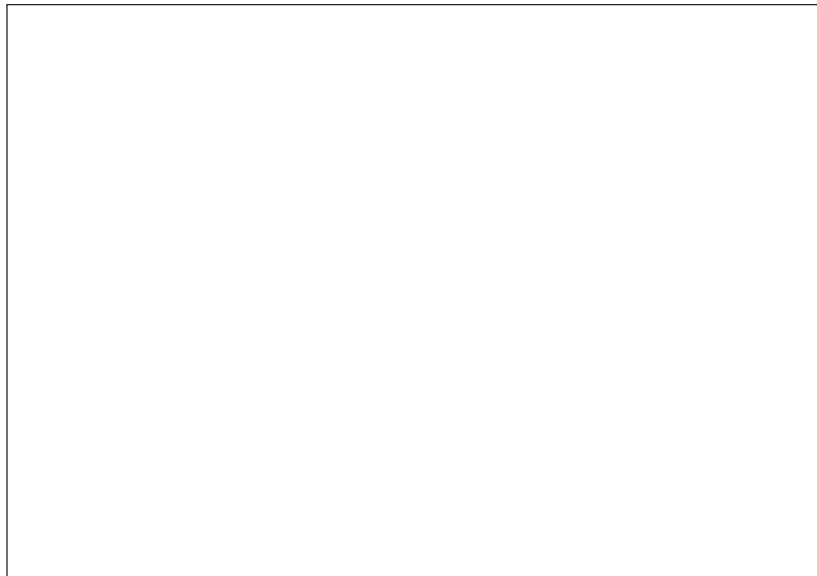




LABOR DAY 2002

FFW slams rising prices, WTO; demands 'decent work' for all



WORKERS MARCH! FFW members express their dismay over the rising cost of electricity. The culprit: Power Purchase Adjustment.

Around 2,500 trade unionists and members of basic sectoral organizations within the fold of the Federation of Free Workers marched along EDSA, stretching from the People Power Monument to the grounds of the Araneta Coliseum to commemorate Labor Day and celebrate the centennial of the workers movement in the Philippines.

Bearing placards and wide streamers, rallying unionists called for a slash in prices of basic commodities such as electricity, petroleum products and water and opposed moves to increase social security contributions.

They also lambasted the World Trade Organization and the unabated liberalization, deregulation and privatization of industries, which

have led to the loss of jobs and the deterioration of conditions at work. The Federation's battle cry was "decent work for all!"

The FFW marched with thousands of other workers from organizations within the Labor Advisory Consultative Council and the Labor Solidarity Movement.

The march, held in the morning

FFW takes center stage in Iloilo

Commemoration of Labor Day in Iloilo got the media mileage FFW sought in Manila and Davao. A well-attended press conference, an early morning talk show feature, a motorcade covered by national television and a successful symposium.

"FFW Lang eh!" was how FFW VP for Visayas Grace Savella described Labor Day in Iloilo. Indeed from the eve of Labor Day, FFW hugged the limelight. She related that three TV stations covered their press conference and the FFW statement was published in full in two local papers; FFW Board Member Allen Aquino was interviewed early Labor Day morning in a talk show of ABS-CBN; and, in the afternoon, the same network and GMA-7 covered the motorcade from Plaza Libertad, around the city, to Ninoy Aquino Highway.

"Since our motorcade was very orderly, other transports/ vehicles did not break it. They were on the sides while our motorcade went on smoothly," recounts Ms. Savella. "We had around 12 cars, with motorcycle-riding PECO-FFW members heading the motorcade. It was a sight to behold." There were also FFW members on mountain bikes.

The motorcade was followed by a symposium at the Residence Hotel on the impact of globalization on

was a prelude to the joint Labor Day celebration graced by Pres. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo at the Big Dome, organized by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on Special Concerns.

Drawbacks

The affair, dubbed “Sentenaryo ng Pambansang Kilusang Paggawa: Sandaan, Isang Daan”, however, began on the wrong foot and was tainted with controversy throughout, starting with President Arroyo’s foiled attempt at moving the date of Labor Day to April 29 to adapt to the Administration’s holiday economics.

FFW National President Ramon Jabar vehemently objected to this move saying that such is “demeaning Labor Day which has been observed in the Philippines and universally on May 1 every year since time immemorial.”

The decision was finally overturned after a dialogue with labor leaders. But soon confusion arose when different venues were announced for the celebration, with organizers waiting up to the last minute to finalize its holding at Araneta.

Government affair

Labor groups had little say on the conduct of the program as workers at the Big Dome were

literally “entertained” by showbiz personalities while agonizingly waiting for the President to arrive. She was a few hours late. Within that span, leaders of the FFW and other labor groups were not given the opportunity to address their respective contingents and the crowd gathered at the Coliseum.

Security was so tight that cameras, video cams, tape recorders and banners of unions were disallowed by the Presidential Security Group, “proving that the affair was for and by government,” said some



SAVING GRACE The only bright spot in the Labor Day Celebration was the ‘Parangal’ awarded to FFW President Emeritus Johnny Tan by President GMA. (Photo courtesy of the Philippine Star)

FFW leaders. FFW Trade Federation IV Chair Orly Marcos narrated that they were prohibited from taking along their banners even as bigger banners of groups aligned with local government officials scattered inside



OUTSIDE ARANETA Their placards say it all!

the coliseum. Authorized photographers of the Federation were also barred from bringing in their cameras, depriving them the opportunity to document the proceedings, most especially the awarding of a “Parangal” to FFW President Emeritus Juan C. Tan.

The awarding turned out to be the

saving grace and sole highlight of the program as President GMA “did not announce anything new or significant during her speech,” assessed FFW National Vice President Allan Montaña. (see main points of speech)

Other leaders felt unionists were exploited. “Parang ginamit ang TU,” exclaimed FFW National Treasurer Joe Cayobit. “It was as if the government used the workers gathered at the Araneta to neutralize the loud protests around Malacañang,” he explained.

During her speech, the President alluded to groups opposed to policies of her regime saying, “I am grateful for the enormous support of the legitimate and responsible labor movement to my Administration.”

Not with Gloria

Perhaps anticipating the wait and the inattention towards trade unions, the contingent of TAPIEU-FFW did not even bother to enter the Big Dome. Union President Oliver Mondigo said “they cannot stomach co-celebrating with GMA, who as a senator was one of the architects of globalization in the country without safety nets in place for workers,” in reference to her stand on the Uruguay Round of the General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade in 1994. He also said that, “benefits to be given by the Administration must be for workers as a whole, not to a few favored groups.”

Labor Day Davao

The feeling towards the government-sponsored celebration in Davao, President Arroyo’s first stop on Labor Day, is similar. “The celebration was something artificial if

not political because issues of local and overseas Filipino workers e.g. contractualization, economic benefits, welfare and protection, etc. were not addressed,” said FFW Board Member Ging Camus.

Ms. Camus related that the Regional Tripartite Industrial Peace Council XI had already set a joint tripartite celebration before President Arroyo moved Labor Day. When it was restored to May 1 and she decided to visit Mindanao and Visayas, things changed. “Malacañang no longer invited management,” she said. In its place were NGOs, urban poor and Tri People (Tribal). “Malacañang and DOLE became the lead agencies of the program.”

Around 500 unionists from FFW Davao joined the march from Sandawa Road to the University of Mindanao Gym, site of the celebration keyed by the President. FFW took part in the program with Davao

Branch Coordinator Fred Olvida delivering a message. The Federation chaired the venue preparation. Some members of the FFW were also present for the pre-Labor Day Press Conference.

Labor Day in Iloilo was different. FFW had a successful commemoration of the event on its own. (*see related article*)

In preparation for the Labor Day Celebration in Luzon, the Substantial Democracy Project conducted a symposium on the centennial of the workers movement in the country. Two Local Presidents Meetings followed it. Through the SDP Coordinator Ephraim Guerrero, Labor Relations Officers Rod Catindig and Pat Caisip and Mr. Jabar, FFW coordinated preparations for the celebration with other labor groups and government. The SDP also published the FFW Labor Day Statement distributed in Davao, Iloilo and Metro Manila. (JHC)

FFW takes ... (from page 8)

workers. Among the speakers were Mr. Christopher Montano of the Commission on Human Rights, Reg. VI and Atty. Claudio Sigaya, Med-Arbitrator, DOLE Reg. VI. Local chapters of FFW took part in the activities.

Asked by a mediaman how they view the GMA Administration, Mr. Aquino recognized that different workers organizations have different calls. He said, “we do not want to be added to the problems of Gloria,” referring to moves to oust Gloria. “In accordance with the law, and by virtue of the Constitution she must assume the Presidency. Maybe if we want her out, we can do it through elections or through impeachment, so as not to add to the instability,” he continued.

He noted that FFW affiliates address problems by taking them to the proper forum and acting with responsibility. He noticed that the media people reacted positively to this.

Contributing to the success of the celebration in Iloilo was acting independent of government. The government had its own separate celebration featuring job fairs. A highlight was the awarding of WODP funding to FFW amounting to P88,000, the highest given that day. They shall be using it to conduct leadership training seminars.

The GMA-7 news team commented that, “this is the first Labor Day celebration we really appreciated and it is also the first time that we were able to come in the Labor Day Celebration of the FFW.” Before Labor Day, only the local media knew of the FFW. Iloilo affiliates were only too happy to decide to come out in the open.

Ms. Savella lamented that none of the national officers of the FFW were able to come. She believes it could have added glamour to their celebration. Prior commitments prevented the officers from flying to Iloilo. (JHC, *interview with Ms. Savella and Mr. Aquino*)

MOTORCADE Local Chapters of FFW in Iloilo take to the streets, in style.

Kolonisasyon Noon ←
**Surviving 100 years of threat
to the labor movement**
→ *Globalisasyon Ngayon*

To commemorate the Centennial of the Labor Movement in the Philippines, the FFW-Substantial Democracy Project turned back the hands of time and foretold what lies ahead for trade unions.

Workers reflected on the past and the future during the Workers Symposium Series that delved on the history of trade unionism in the Philippines and its prospects in the globalized world, held at the Asian Social Institute, Manila in March.

Speaking were Rev. Fr. Dionito Cabillas of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI) and UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations Prof. Jorge Sibal.

While both speakers gave their insights about the future, it was the symposium participants themselves who set goals for the future of trade unions, particularly the FFW.

FFW, 50 years hence

In an on-the-spot survey, participants resolved to strengthen and consolidate the Federation. They responded to the question, “What direction should the FFW take in the labor movement in the next 50 years?” with the following: Continue educating workers on rights, laws, leadership and entrepreneurship; Expand by organizing; and, Establish a political party. They also believe FFW will play a major role in unifying all labor organizations; advocating and addressing workers’ issues; and allying with the informal sector.

Asked about what they think are the Federation’s contributions to the labor movement in, they mentioned: Rational and reasonable trade unionism; Development of leaders in the local and international arena; Workers education; Skills development; Policy and legislative advocacy; and, Labor solidarity.

UOD, IFI roles in the labor movement, independence

Fr. Cabillas noted that “in the history of struggle of the Filipino people

for national liberation and democracy, the Union Obrero Democratico (UOD) and IFI have played a significant and fundamental role in our society, especially in carrying out the unfinished revolution of 1896 and the Filipino-American War of 1899.” (see related story)

He maintained that, “UOD and IFI are both big formations that challenged the new colonizers – United States.

UOD established IFI and had close ties with each other even after the former changed names and leaders. The nationalist church continues to link with labor.

Union’s tasks for the future

In the piece he delivered, Prof. Sibal suggested continuous organizing. He partly blamed the relative concentration of union organizing efforts in industries, where only 28 per cent of the work force is found. He observed that organizing workers from small enterprises seem insignificant and lamented that unions are hard pressed forming workers organizations in that sector.

He shared that UP Solair has ongoing efforts to unite the divided trade union movement in the Philippines. He said they organized a “Labor Summit” in the hope of making a “unified labor stand that may weld us together.”

Prof. Sibal also proposed that unions help displaced workers who go into business. He said that organized labor entrepreneurs should study demands for services and products through contacts; and, put up training centers to produce appropriate skills to form enterprises. He also noted the importance of surveying skills of workers and matching these with the labor market.

**R O O T E D
from a social movement**

DON BELONG DELOS REYES

Being a trade union-social movement is not a new concept after all. Trade unionism in the Philippines was a social movement right from the very start. So asserts Fr. Dionito Cabillas of the Iglesia Filipina Independiente (IFI).

From its inception, he relates, the Union Obrero Democratico (UOD), the first labor federation, was closely linked to the struggle for Philippine independence. It was associated with the remnants of the Katipunan and urban radicals who urged the people to continue the struggle for immediate independence.

Fr. Cabillas says that while the United States intensified its suppression campaign against revolutionaries in the countryside, workers in Manila started to transform the *gremios* into modern trade unions. In June 1901, printers at the American-owned Manila Times newspaper formed an industrial union, the Union de Impresores (UI). Similar unions were established leading to the founding of

Decent Work for All!

3.4 million workers—women and men—do not have work. 4.7 million are still looking for more work. Just about one out of three workers has been contractualized. Recently, more than 80,000 workers have been separated due to closures. And more is expected.

One out of every two workers has fallen into the unprotected informal sector. 7 million Filipinos are migrant workers, politically disenfranchised and socially excluded.

Each worker now is working longer, yet becomes poorer. From 46.8 hours a week on average in 1998, workers worked 48.4 hours in 2000. Yet Filipinos who fell into poverty comprised 37 percent of all households in year 2000, up two percent from two years ago.

So it is reported that the economy is getting back on track. But why is progress so slow to come for us workers? If there are no jobs or if jobs are insecure and indecent, social breakdown is just around the corner!

WHY should we, workers, work more hours only to receive less? And why are we asked to pay more: for electricity, for gas, for water? Why the indecent proposal to pay more contributions to SSS when our money has not been used prudently? Why should we pay more taxes on cheap communication services when so much taxes from the rich remain uncollected?

And why should we, workers, lose our jobs because the WTO says so? Why should we open up our cement, automotive, steel and metal industries when countries that export the same products to us protect theirs?

THE answers are as obvious as the political muckraking going on. There is no way the country can survive globalization without social cooperation, born out of true social partnership that is forged by mutual trust and respect among the social partners.

We call for more genuine social dialogues at all levels and in all fronts. And common action right after. The National Socio-Economic Pact of 2001 is a good beginning. But it needs to be pursued with more vigorous action, especially its social commitments.

There is much discord about our commitments to WTO and AFTA. And about liberalization, deregulation and privatization. The least that can be done is to review these commitments and policies to align these to decent work. In the meantime, protect the industries and the jobs until an **adequate social protection** has been put in place for both firms and workers.

Good governance is a must. And good governance is not only about efficiency and honesty. It is equally about participation and the empowerment of grassroots organizations. **Protect and promote unions and all other forms of workers' organizations** who represent the voice of labor. Get their nominees appointed to policy-making bodies to represent their sectoral interests.

100 years of unionism is worth much more if we strengthen unionism and all other forms of grassroots organizations for another 100 years of struggle to build a free, democratic and just Filipino society!

DECENT WORK FOR ALL!!!

1 May 2002

Federation of Free Workers



RISE of Trade Unionism in Visayas, Mindanao

Prensa Libre editor-publisher Jose Ma. Nava got involved with the labor movement by accident when a worker, Alejandro Chavez sought his help.

Chavez was blinded in one eye from an accident while working in the dockyard of Visayan Stevedoring Co. He went to Nava to help him claim compensation, as no lawyer in Iloilo City would handle his case.

Nava helped by exposing Chavez' case in his newspaper. Through the prodding of the work-related accident victim, Nava filed a petition before the then Bureau of Labor. After a yearlong legal battle, Chavez was awarded P1,700.

He offered P400 to Nava as payment for his services, but the journalist refused as he did not want to be involved in labor issues. But news of Chavez' victory and Nava's help spread among workers.

On July 31, 1928 as Nava was celebrating his birthday, about 50 workers came to his house with a resolution signed by 470 more workers, calling for the organization of a labor union.

In January 1929, workers meeting at Barangay Lapuz Norte in Lapaz, founded the Federacion Obrera de Filipinas (FOF) with Nava as Supreme General President.

At the height of FOF's labor struggle, at least 18 provincial chapters were formed, mostly in the Visayas and Mindanao, with almost a million members. Thousands of gremios (local unions) were formed in sugar centrals, banks, commercial stores, ports and sugra plantations.

Successful strikes pushed for better working conditions, higher wages and recognition of rights—among which are the right to eat on tables with plates, drinking glasses, spoons and forks.

The FOF was so victorious, capitalists and big landowners sent the Philippine Constabulary to quell its protest actions. Nava and his fellow leaders were branded as communists and jailed several times. (Sources: *PDI*, May 2, 2002; *Daily Informer*, Iloilo, April 30, 2002)

Main points of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's speech on Labor Day at the Araneta Coliseum:

- Tossed to Congress “as priority legislation” the task of passing a law reducing the controversial power purchase adjustment (PPA) which accounts for the high cost of Meralco's billing.
- Ordered Energy Secretary Vincent Perez Jr. to work with Congress for the passage of bill reducing the PPA through a refinancing scheme.
- Urged the Energy Regulatory Commission to audit the PPA collections of Meralco.
- Any adjustment in wages can be done either through the tripartite regional wage boards or by Congress which can legislate a new minimum wage. She noted that last year the wage boards passed 11 wage increase orders.
- Ordered Interior Secretary Jose Lina to intensify the manhunt for Roger de la Torre, suspected killer of labor leader Filemon Lagman last year.
- Announced the appointment of former Sen. Ernesto “Boy” Herrera as presidential adviser for safety nets. He will be in charge of ensuring that safety nets are in place to cushion the adverse effects on the economy caused by globalization.
- Pledged support for the early passage of a bill granting dual citizenship to overseas Filipino workers.
- To dispatch social workers and doctors to foreign countries to provide counseling and medical services to Filipino overseas workers.
- Ordered a study on the feasibility of forming “joint inspection teams” composed of labor officials and worker-representatives to ensure that companies are following labor laws.
- To increase the number of rolling stores by the National Food Authority and Metro Manila Development Authority so the poor can have more access to cheaply priced commodities like rice and medicines.
- To increase the number of government hospitals and health care centers offering essential medicines at a 50-percent discount.
- To put up 20,000 affordable housing units for workers by using properties foreclosed by government financial institutions.
- Ordered the Department of Labor to set up “Quick Reaction Teams” to help laid off workers find new jobs. (*Philippine Star*, May 2, 2002)

COMMENTARY

Keeping the Faith: making democracy work

As the first ever Summit of Political Parties in May started, former University of the Philippines President Jose Abueva released the results of a nationwide survey in November on what Filipinos nationwide think of the country's political system.

He described as a "monumental challenge" to transform our "electoral or procedural democracy" into "substantive democracy" which delivers to most people its promised social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual blessings.

Here are the key results:

To the statement "On the whole, I am satisfied with the way democracy works in our country," 42 percent disagreed and 34 percent agreed (minus 8 percent). In the National Capital Region, 57 percent disagreed and 25 percent agreed (minus 32 percent).

To the statement "I am proud of the system of government of the Philippines," 43 percent disagreed and 32 percent agreed (minus 11 percent). In the NCR, almost 60 percent disagreed, while only 21 percent agreed (minus 39 percent).

While 72 percent of survey respondents still affirm that "Democracy is the best political system in all circumstances," 72 percent also agree on "the possibility that Filipinos will completely lose faith in peaceful means of promoting democracy."

According to Abueva, Filipinos are becoming disenchanted with our kind of democracy and system of government. "They tell us so, quietly but clearly," he said.

Myopic interpretation

Participants to the Political Summit interpreted the results the way they see fit. Instead of reforming the way most politicians govern in a democracy, they used it as leverage to revive moves to change the charter to quench their thirst to stay in power. *Cha Cha* after 2004 bannered the Declaration of the Summit of Po-

litical Parties.

"Losing faith in peaceful means of promoting democracy" as termed by the Abueva survey may be misconstrued as abetting armed uprisings, violent takeovers or establishing a military junta or its variation proposed by the *Freedom Force*.

If the survey proved anything, it is that most politicians continue to perpetuate themselves in power and engage in activities that fatten their pockets at the expense of the citizenry they vowed to serve and safeguard.

The survey, taken ten months after People Power 2, a statement against corruption; and half a year past People Power 3, an outrage of the poor for being ignored, demonstrates that people in power have yet to empower the marginalized sectors that have grown tired of traditional politics, but continue to have faith in democracy.

The rare commendable achievements of the Summit were the move to computerize elections in 2004 to put an end to election cheating and absentee balloting to enable seven million overseas Filipinos to vote in national elections—advocacies of the Federation of Free Workers.

State financing for political parties to reduce political corruption, one of the main points of the 42-paragraph Declaration of the political parties that participated in the Summit, may ironically pave the way for its institutionalization.

Reversing the trend?

In his closing remarks, Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. said the conference "initiates us into a new culture of cooperation among political par-

ties and party leaders. I hope we can sustain this culture so we can reverse the Filipino people's deepening frustration with politics, politicians and political parties." Based on their output, it seems a long shot.

Prof. Abueva lays the responsibility of "leading the process of fundamental reform and transformation in this critical juncture of our history and development" to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

But thus far, it seems she has been more concerned with transforming her image from GMA, the Nora Aunor look-alike to Ate Glo, to 'Ina ng Bayan', to the girl-next-door in slippers visiting wet markets, urban poor communities and rural areas. She has changed spokespersons and press secretaries in the wink of an eye, and even hired a foreign public relations firm. In preparation for 2004 perhaps?

Substantive or *substantial* Democracy will only be realized if workers and other marginalized sectors are accorded their right to be heard in policy and decision making, especially in matters that directly affect them.

The SDP reaffirms its belief that if labor, socio-economic and political issues can be resolved through the exercise of political rights and freedoms in a democratic society, the result will be 'decent work' and the advancement of the worker. This is also envisioned in the core values of the Federation. (JHC)

Sources: Jose Abueva, *Filipinos Losing Faith in Democracy*, Philippine Daily Inquirer, May 3, 2002; Editorial, *Democracy on Trial*, PDI, May 6, 2002; Christine Avendaño, *Summit OKs Charter Change After 2004*, PDI, May 6, 2002

ROOTED... from page 4

the Union de Impresores de Filipinas (UIF) in December 30, 1901. It was the base from which the UOD was born in February 2, 1902.

UOD's birth

The UOD was composed of 200 official delegates and 300 others from the UIF and 14 gremios, including gremios of tobacco workers, carpenters, cooks, tailors, shoemakers, mariners and laborers.

UOD's goals were to improve working conditions through protective labor legislation; locate work for the unemployed and assist their families; provide education for workers' children; and, emancipate workers through savings and related projects. Its Constitution mentioned plans to establish cooperatives, mutual aid assistance to members and recreational and educational centers.

Crackdown

On August 2, 1902, UOD conducted its first successful general strike that rattled the colonial government. In reaction, the American conquerors launched a crackdown on labor leaders, including UOD founder Isabelo Delos Reyes, and charged them of sedition.

The following day UOD members passed a resolution establishing the IFI. Nationalist priests and clergymen formally disaffiliated from the Vatican as IFI became the bastion of nationalist workers and other sectors in the country. "UOD became the core organization within the IFI while the IFI became a unit-

ALLEN AQUINO, Board member

'We were able to come up with a Labor Code... It could not easily be amended, like the prohibition on labor-only-contracting that is attached to the Constitution. Labor Leaders have sacrificed their lives...(but they) are hardly recognized. The fruits of the struggle of unionists must be felt by the younger generation.'

ing institution that strengthened the unity of workers, peasantry and middle sectors of our society," says Fr. Cabillas.

It was at the IFI where Delos Reyes devoted his time after he had to resign from UOD amid harassment from the government.

Dr. Dominador Gomez took over UOD President and changed the name of the Federation to Union Obrero Democratico de Filipinas (UODF) to cater to "workers of the world, without distinction of nationalities. But it had to "exclude from its program all political and religious issues because its members had different political and religious orientation," says Fr. Cabillas.

'New' unions

By 1908, Lope K. Santos espoused unionism that focused solely on gaining economic benefits for

workers. He established the Union del Trabajo de Filipinas (UTF) with the support of the American Federation of Labor.


Through the years, unions with varying orientations sprouted. These include communist tendencies that flourished in the 30's, anti-communist crusades, gangsters and government and company-controlled unions after the war. By 1950, FFW was established by Johnny Tan and Fr. Walter Hogan as an alternative labor group with Christian social principles.

Social movement again

Now, 100 years into the labor movement and the onslaught of globalization, the social movement in trade unionism is experiencing a renaissance. Unions are going beyond "purely workers' concerns" again.

GING CAMUS, Board member

'100 years of Trade Unionism has given Filipino workers very, very little... because of farcical unionism. Real unionists, workers' organizations did not even reach 50 per cent of Filipino workers, just a mere 12 per cent. 100 years marks the labor movement as diagnosed with cancer-stage 4, considering that contractualization is rampant.'



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