

Statement by the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)  
at the Memorial for Kasasamg Silme Domingo.



Silme Domingo's life was cut short at 29 years when he was gunned down in cold blood by hoodlum elements. He died as he had lived, courageously struggling against the enemies of Filipinos and all working people. In death Silme, along with his comrade Gene Viernes, have become transformed into popular heroes to be remembered and emulated by all progressive forces in the Filipino community and the broader worker's movement. In striving to emulate and learn from the qualities of these two comrades, we recommit ourselves more firmly to advancing the people's movement and accomplishing the unfinished work they left behind. It is our firm intention to cement the revolutionary movement stronger with the blood of our slain comrades.

Silme was born in Texas on January 25, 1952. His father had come to the U.S. from the Philippines as part of the first wave of Filipino immigration. When World War II broke out his father enlisted in the U.S. Army and returned to the Philippines to fight against the Japanese occupation. There he married Silme's mother after the war and returned to the U.S. to raise a family. Silme was the third of 5 children born to the Domingo family. While growing up he spent part of his childhood in Germany and different parts of the U.S. because of his father's military career. The family eventually settled in Seattle where Silme attended Ballard High School and graduated from the University of Washington.

Silme initially became politicized in the midst of the 1960's with the civil rights and anti-war movements. He soon found himself in the mainstream of the Asian student movement in Seattle. Silme became a leader of the Asian movement, helping initiate the *Kapisanan* newsletter, the *Asian Family Affair* newspaper, and the International District Youth Council, among numerous other projects. This movement targetted the injustice and pervasiveness of racism throughout U.S. society as well as the brutality of U.S. imperialist aggression in Vietnam. This political awakening fueled Silme's interest in his own Filipino heritage as well as the problems facing the Filipino community – a concern that increasingly came to frame much of Silme's political development.



From his high school days Silme, along with his father and brother, spent many summers working as an "Alaskero" in the salmon canning industry. He joined ILWU Local 37 at an early age, and soon took up the struggle for better working and living conditions in the canneries, particularly the blatant racial discrimination against Filipino and Native peoples. These experiences led Silme, along with his brother Nemecio Jr. and other progressive cannery workers like Gene Viernes, to form the Alaska Cannery Workers Association in 1972. The ACWA filed and eventually won two major discrimination lawsuits against the Alaska salmon industry, representing a major step forward for improving the conditions of all workers, white and minority, as well as opening up more skilled job categories to Filipinos and other minorities. The names of Domingo and Viernes became notorious to the capitalists and management who own and operate the Alaska Salmon industry – they were blacklisted, yet persisted in the struggle.

By 1978, Gene, Silme and other progressives in Local 37 established the Rank and File Committee to demand reforms within the Union. The Union had been seriously weakened over the years by such corrupt practices as bribery, vote-buying, violence and intimidation. The Union had to be reformed in order to strengthen it as a weapon of the workers against the industry. This call for reform was long-overdue within the Union and struck a responsive chord among the membership. It was a difficult task requiring patience and determination – a task which was far from finished at the time of the slayings. However, by the 1980 Union election, Silme and Gene had been elected officers along with many other Rank and File Committee members who were elected onto the Executive Board in a sweeping mandate for change within the Union.

Implementing the Reform movement within the Union also proved to be a dangerous task. Yet neither Silme nor Gene nor other members of the Rank and File Committee flinched from doing what had to be done. The enemies of the reforms within the Union finally had to resort to cold-blooded murder in a vain attempt to stop the changes from being carried out.

Silme was more than just a trade union militant, like Gene, he was a revolutionary first and foremost. Silme was a founding member of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP) in 1973 and held national and regional leadership posts in KDP until his murder. He was prominent in organizing the Seattle Chapter of KDP which has contributed in building a strong progressive movement within Seattle's Filipino community. Silme and the KDP played a leading role in initiating in 1976 the Philippine Annual National Day Celebration as well as hosting, in that same year, the Filipino People's Far West Convention. This Convention, held annually in the West Coast Filipino communities, is a major forum for educating and organizing U.S. Filipinos to more effectively oppose racial and national discrimination in the U.S. and to support the struggles for freedom and democracy in the Philippines. Silme was centrally involved in planning the 1981 FWC in Seattle up until he was gunned down.

From the beginning, Silme fought against the brutal Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. He struggled to reverse the atmosphere of fear and intimidation in the Seattle Filipino community. He was instrumental in organizing a strong anti-dictatorship movement within the community. Silme recently took this struggle up within the ILWU by leading, along with Gene, a successful drive at the recent International Convention for a resolution to send a Union team to the Philippines to report back to the membership their findings on the economic and political conditions facing the workers' movement there. For this courageous activity, Silme and Gene surely gained the special hatred of the Marcos dictatorship, but more importantly they earned the lasting respect of the Philippine workers' movement.

Silme's entire life, like that of Gene, was filled with a courageous commitment to the revolutionary struggle. His tremendous courage is nowhere better demonstrated than his actions in response to the armed attack against himself and Gene. (Gene was killed instantly.) Unarmed and shot four times, Silme managed to chase his assailants out of the Union Hall, point them out to passers-by, and give their names to the authorities. Mortally wounded, he heroically struggled for his life for over 24 hours, displaying the utmost determination to live. Unlike his hoodlum assailants, Silme realized his life was worth much because of the way he chose to live it – worth much to himself, to his friends and comrades, to the struggle of the working class.

The KDP calls upon all progressive people to draw strength from the lives of our comrades Silme and Gene. We must emulate their courage to face squarely the risks which go along with revolutionary activity, the risks inherent in confronting the reactionary forces defending the capitalist system. We must turn our anguish into anger, our sorrow into courage and build a more powerful people's movement that can turn the intimidation around on the people's enemies, whether they be hoodlum elements from the lumpen-proletariat, the Marcos dictatorship, or the powerful capitalist class in this country.

Far from deterring us from the struggle against injustice and exploitation, the death of our comrades has made us more determined than ever to move forward. Silme and Gene's lives were cut short – but the injustice they fought and the cause they embraced lives on . . . it remains for us to pick up the heavy responsibilities and tasks they shouldered and carry on!

*Silme is survived by his wife Terri, who herself is an active member of the KDP and the Rank and File Committee. Silme and Terri have two daughters, Ligaya age 3, and Kalyaan age 1.*

*Donations to the Silme Domingo Memorial Fund can be made to Terri Mast in care of Local 37, ILWU, 213 South Main, Seattle, Wa. 98104.*