

Bill Sorro, Presente!

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San Francisco has lost a precious treasure. Not the San Francisco of downtown business interests, or of the dot-com craze, or of the waves of “young urban professionals” moving into the city’s overpriced live-work lofts or condominiums. No, we’re talking of the San Francisco struggling, on a day-to-day basis, to maintain its very existence: of Pilipino families and elderly in South of Market, of African American residents in the Fillmore, of tenants in SRO hotels, and of immigrant Latina/o workers in the Mission. In the early morning hours of Monday, August 27th, this San Francisco lost veteran activist Bill Sorro.

Bill passionately fought for this “other” San Francisco.

Born in 1939, Bill Sorro grew up in San Francisco’s working class and predominantly African American Fillmore District, long before working class folk were pushed out by Justin Herman’s notorious redevelopment schemes. Coming from a family that suffered as a result of anti-miscegenation laws [his Pilipino father was arrested and jailed for marrying a white woman], Bill consistently sought to connect the struggle against class exploitation to that of racial oppression.

Nowadays people in progressive circles often discuss ways to decrease one’s footprint in the world; it can truthfully be said, however, that Bill Sorro left a tremendous footprint in peoples’ lives and in their collective struggles.

Recently, he became an inspirational anchor for a growing housing justice movement in San Francisco, from the Mission Anti-displacement Coalition to the South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN).

Compañero Bill, however, leaves a much deeper and longer legacy: most obviously, for Pilipinos (as a leader of the famed International Hotel struggle, as a member of the Kalayaan Collective and, later, of KDP-the Union of Democratic Pilipinos, as a founder of the Manilatown Heritage Foundation, and as mentor for countless Pilipino youth), but equally for communities of color in general, for the working class in particular (as a long-time union activist and committed socialist), and ultimately for all that suffer and struggle against the indignities of oppression and exploitation...whether it be here in the belly of the beast or across the globe. Standing in solidarity with anyone fighting for justice, Bill embodied the often-quoted, but rarely lived, notion that the essence of any true revolutionary is a profound love for the people! And, man, Bill loved the people! Right on, brother! All Power to the People!

He stands in that long tradition of individuals like Philip Vera Cruz, Paul Robeson, Dolores Huerta, and many others who made enormous contributions to history. But Bill made history by believing in and nurturing the leadership of others, by supporting the insights and wisdom, the creativity and resourcefulness of everyday people. He believed power truly existed in the people

themselves; they need not look outwards for salvation, only into the mirror. Bill made societies most discarded people—the elderly, the homeless, the immigrant, queer and transgendered people, individuals with substance abuse issues, youth of color—count and believe in themselves.

Bill leaves behind a tight knit family—his wife Giuliana, who he met on the 2nd Venceremos Brigade to Cuba and subsequently married at the I-Hotel, and children Desu, Daphne, Danae, Django, Giulio, Joachin, and Jordan—as well as one that expands to include literally hundreds of community activists and friends, all who feel a part of the Sorro family. This broader family—one that includes many who may never have even met him—continue to organize and fight to realize Bill’s dream: a world in which people matter more than profit and property. And we collectively dedicate ourselves to fight for that future described in Bill’s favorite song: Donny Hathaway’s “Someday We’ll All Be Free.”