



BUILDING A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD

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We Are All Workers. Todos Somos Trabajadores

by Colette Cosner

This May Day we are asked to contemplate these words anew through the lens of hope-- a hope that calls us into action at a crucial moment in the history of human rights. The first [100 days](#) of the Obama administration will soon be up, signifying an examination of promises made and a mobilization upon promises broken. Of all ethnic groups, Latinos represented the greatest shift for Obama with more than 2 out of 3 voting for him, in large part because of his stated support for [immigration reform](#). The hope of May Day this year is that the administration not only recognizes this fact, but is also moved into action by the united platform presented by this constituency. Every day the labor movement gradually internalizes more profoundly how immigrant rights affect all workers' rights. We have only raised the quality of life for working people in the U.S. by organizing across ethnic, racial, and gender lines.

On May 1st in every major U.S. city, hundreds of thousands will take to the streets to demand immigration reform, a moratorium on raids and detentions, the [Employee Free Choice Act](#), [health care for all](#), and an end to all wars. In the past the corporate media has used the broadness of the May Day demands to present a fractured movement. It may be fair to say their depiction was not entirely inaccurate. So, what has changed about the labor movement in recent years to transcend these divides? What exactly is this united platform?

One change is that [work-place raids](#) are being preceded by union drives. Traditional labor groups are recognizing that these raids hinder their organizing capabilities. So too do the immigrant rights activists now see the unions as an integral part their work-place security. I was deeply moved, for instance, by the display of solidarity shown by union folks at the Republican National Convention protests. I was marching with an immigrant

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rights contingent at the time and the labor groups formed a human barricade around us in case of arrests or even a raid. The united platform is spun from our collective desire to live lives free of fear. This fundamental concept is the backbone of each of the May Day demands.

What is the fear? Is it foreign? Christine Neumann-Ortiz, founding Executive Director of [Voces de la Frontera](#), an immigrant rights organization in Wisconsin, described this fear in a recent interview: "Fear that at any moment you can be picked up and be separated from your family; the sense that everything you have worked for is fragile. Having to live with the fear of traveling within the U.S. and being stopped by police and questioned about your status, fear of not having identification, which is so necessary in everyday life, the fear of crossing the border to be reunited with your family because of the danger if you try to come back. Fear of approaching the police if you are the victim of a crime. Fear of jail. Fear of hunger. The anguish of having to make the choice between seeing your family, in many cases your children and aging parents, or sending them money to help them survive." Especially as we plunge deeper into troubling economic times, the fears of immigrant workers become less foreign to working families of all backgrounds. The crisis is showing our true colors, colors that aren't that different from one another.

The current immigration system attempts to frame immigration issues as a political debate instead of a humanitarian crisis. The marches and rallies of May 1st are an opportunity to say no to the [dehumanization](#) of workers and the monopolization of American identity; to create a solidarity movement with workers that addresses the internal politics of globalization that have negatively affected people's ability to stay in their countries and earn a living; to define a [pro-worker legalization process](#) that benefits low-income working class families over business interests and provides a simple and affordable pathway to citizenship; to expose the abuses behind the private, for-profit detention centers. In essence, International Worker's Day is an opportunity to take a bold stance against a government-sanctioned culture of fear.

Over 1.5 million people took to the streets on May Day 2006, culminating in the largest immigrant rights protest in US history to date. This year under the new administration, our actions are more important than ever; the combination of urgency and hope is unparalleled. The window of opportunity we are forcing open right now, however, lies not in what happens on May Day, but what happens after, in our communities and in our own hearts.

For More information or to find a march and rally near you please

visit www.anewdayforimmigration.org

Labels: [100 days](#), [Immigrant Rights](#), [immigration reform](#), [International Workers' Day](#), [May 1st](#), [unions](#)

posted by Colette Cosner @ 1:43 PM

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3 Comments:

At [3:17 AM](#),  [JobSearchNinja](#) said...

"Success is almost totally dependent upon drive and persistence. The extra energy required to make another effort or try another approach is the secret of winning."

At [4:26 PM](#),  Anonymous said...

such a thoughtful and clearly defined post . i can feel your passion and appreciate your powerful commitment towards improving the lives of all the workers. Jane

At [8:16 PM](#),  Anonymous said...

Thank you for connecting the dots between labor and the immigrant rights movement and reminding us all about the importance of labor unions. Before the raid in Postville there was a labor movement, a union about to be formed. A coincidence? Don't think so. Again, thanks for the blog.

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