

Immigrant organizer demands

'Fair legalization and worker protection'

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Christine Neumann-Ortiz, director of the Milwaukee-based Voces de la Frontera, spoke with Workers World reporter Bryan G. Pfeifer at the "A Day Without Latinos" Statewide Civil Rights March and Boycott, May 1, in Milwaukee, Wis.

Voces de la Frontera, a member of the Wisconsin Legalization Coalition, was the main organizer of the march and rally of over 80,000, one of the largest progressive events in state history and one of the largest actions in the U.S. for May Day 2007. May Day 2006 in Milwaukee drew 70,000.



Christine Neumann-Ortiz

Workers World: Why are you marching today?

Christine Neumann-Ortiz: We're marching as part as a national day of action for more comprehensive immigration reform.

WW: What has been the response in the Latin@ community, labor and other community organizations to this march and rally?

CNO: It's been phenomenal. It's very comparable to May 1 last year. So it's again one of the largest marches in Wisconsin's history.

WW: What are the demands of this march and rally and where are you going from here?

CNO: The most fundamental demand is fair legalization, by which we mean fixing our immigration system in a way that is going to lead to a path of earned citizenship for people who are already in this country. And something that is going to maintain strong workers' rights protections for people within the country or for any immigrant in this country regardless of immigration status.

We want strong worker protections and benefits for all workers. And we want increased visas to address the tremendous backlog in family visas, so families can be united and not have to be concerned about whether they're not going to see their husbands or wives or children again. And then of course an end to the dastardly policy of just militarizing more and more of the border which is causing more people to die.

And an end to the raids because I think the whole agenda behind the raids is an attempt to disorganize and intimidate. It's also been part of the agenda and effort to really disintegrate the Latino family structure, which has been a source of strength for these families. ... And the raids tear families apart. They're [the government] doing this in very violent ways: sending in automatic weapons, coming into peoples homes, coming into their workplace, treating them as if they were mass murderers. ... So I think people are making a statement today that we're not going to be intimidated. We're not going to be driven into the shadows. We expect respect.

WW: What do you see as a connection between the immigrant rights movement and the anti-war movement and why does Voces de la Frontera work to unite these two struggles?

CNO: Because you see the same companies benefiting off militarization abroad that are benefiting from the criminalization of the immigrant community and the militarization of the border. Boeing, GE, Halliburton. The very same companies who've been exposed for corporate corruption in the war that now 70 percent of the American public recognizes as an illegitimate war are the very same companies that stand to gain and are gaining from this attack on immigrants. And it really serves this function.

And part of the other reason we felt it was important [to unite the immigrant and anti-war movement] was because these issues were being pitted against each other when we were talking to elected officials. ... When you consider that \$467 billion has been spent on the Iraq war this year alone and then immigrants are being used as the scapegoat for all of the economic problems.

The other critical point that I think is never really talked about enough is the fact that the undocumented workers, young men 18 to 25, are required, like U.S. citizens, to enroll in the Selective Service for an emergency draft. So you have to wonder if the whole justification for denying them citizenship is that they're a national security threat yet that same government forces, requires legally with a threat of incarceration, undocumented young men to enroll in an emergency draft to fight and die for this country. So that's the kind of hypocrisy in the system.

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