

# Atlanta, Georgia rally opposes anti-immigrant bill

**Kranti Kumara**  
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A May Day rally in Atlanta drew a boisterous crowd of about 300 workers and students of Hispanic heritage, who demonstrated in front of the state capitol to expose recent attempts by Georgia's legislature to persecute undocumented workers and students.

The rally was organized by the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights. A portion of the crowd was comprised of grandmothers and mothers with their young children in strollers. The May Day rally also attracted many high school and college students, who are the sons and daughters of undocumented parents. Most of these youngsters have resided in the state since they were brought to this country as young children.

On April 14, both houses of Georgia's legislature passed bill HB 87, the "Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011." HB 87 criminalizes undocumented workers and makes them subject to arrest, long-term incarceration and eventual deportation. The bill is awaiting the signature of Republican Governor Nathan Deal, who has previously advocated passage of such a bill but is under pressure to veto the legislation because of opposition from the tourism industry. This section of big business is anxious that the enactment of HB 87 will provoke a political boycott of the state by Hispanic people, with potentially significant consequences for tourism.

Spearheaded by reactionary Republican legislators, the Georgia bill duplicates the provisions of the notorious anti-immigrant law passed in Arizona in 2010.

HB 87 empowers the state and local police to arrest and transport undocumented people to state and federal penitentiaries, even when they have simply been detained for a routine traffic violation or involved in an accident.

It severely penalizes people who knowingly transport

or harbor illegal immigrants, or encourage them to come to Georgia. First-time offenders face a 12-month imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1,000.

While the bill calls for the formation of an "Immigration Review Board," the purpose of this body is not to address complaints made by people either wrongfully arrested or otherwise harassed by the authorities. Rather, it is charged with investigating complaints that state and local officials are not implementing the bill's punitive provisions forcefully enough.

The political establishment in Georgia is not only taking aim at adult, undocumented workers, but also at their children, many of whom have grown up and have received all of their schooling in the US.

Various bills in circulation are geared towards making the lives of this layer of youth unbearable. HB 59, for example, which has already been approved by a legislative panel, would prevent the children of undocumented workers from gaining admission to the public university system.

Already, the Board of Regents of Georgia's university system has enacted a rule that bars the state's top five public universities from granting admission to an undocumented student, even if the applicant is otherwise qualified.

These young undocumented students, barely out of high school, are already experiencing discrimination solely because they are the children of undocumented immigrants. Despite the fact that they have lived in Georgia all their lives, they are made to pay out-of-state tuition at public universities, an amount that is about three times as much as that charged to officially recognized residents.

One of the principal aims of all of these maneuvers is to scapegoat undocumented immigrants and their

children for the crisis in Georgia's public education system. In so doing, state authorities seek to cover up the fact that the inability of the region's campuses to meet the needs of students and educators is the result of budget cuts, and the protection of the interests of the wealthy over those of ordinary people.

On May Day, the WSWS spoke to some young people who have begun to mobilize against the efforts of state authorities to persecute undocumented immigrants and students.

Georgina Perez, who participated in an April 5 protest in downtown Atlanta under the banner "Undocumented and Unafraid," explained to this reporter that she was brought to the US at the age of three by her parents, who made great sacrifices in an effort to ensure that their children could have a better life. Georgina grew up in the state, attending school throughout her life in the area. She is now a student at Georgia State University.

Georgina condemned the attempts by the Georgia Board of Regents to bar undocumented students from attending the top five public universities in the state. "We have a right to attend these schools as we are as human as anyone else," she said.



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