

“Why separate people with walls—we’re all brothers and sisters”

May Day marchers speak out in defense of immigrant rights

Our reporters

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Tens of thousands of immigrant and native-born workers and young people marched across the United States to mark May Day, the holiday of the international working class, and oppose the Trump administrations’ scapegoating of immigrant workers.

The largest protest was in Los Angeles, where an estimated 20,000 participated. Other significant demonstrations took place in Washington, DC., Chicago, Philadelphia, Houston, Milwaukee, Las Vegas, New York and dozens of other large cities. They also took place in smaller communities, such as Grand Rapids, Michigan and Homestead, Florida, where thousands of migrant agricultural workers and their supporters protested.

In some cases, workers defied employer threats and walked off their jobs to join the protests. In Philadelphia, where teachers’ strikes are prohibited by state law, an estimated 1,000 educators who have been working without a contract for four years called in sick. In Chicago, teachers and furloughed Illinois state workers joined protests. A delegation of TV and film writers who are locked in a fight with Hollywood producers joined the protest in Los Angeles.

The protests expressed growing opposition to Trump and solidarity with immigrant workers facing mass arrests and deportations. However, the organizers of the rallies—which included the Service Employees International Union, the hotel worker union UNITE HERE! and various organizations with close ties to the unions—sought to channel this opposition behind the Democratic Party. They were silent on the open support the AFL-CIO and several industrial unions have given Trump based on his economic nationalist program.

In Los Angeles, New York City and other locations, Democratic mayors postured as friends of immigrant workers while concealing the role of the Obama administration, which oversaw record numbers of mass deportations and launched wars that produced the worst refugee crisis since World War II.

Many of the workers and youth who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* expressed their opposition to both big business parties and their policies of austerity, war and attacks on democratic rights.

In Los Angeles, Maria, a Mexican immigrant, said, “We are all here to fight for immigrant rights, for the future of students. Obama deported so many of us. And now I don’t know what else to say, since Trump is increasing deportations. The two parties, Democrats and Republicans, are responsible for everything that is

happening. They’ve done nothing for an amnesty. We can’t even walk on the street with our kids without fearing deportation. Often, we see kids crying because their parents are being taken away. It’s so sad.”

“I’ve seen so much in 40 years here. We’ve all signed petitions, sent them to congressmen to stop it, and nothing happened. We live in a limbo, without knowing what’s going to happen next. One could write a book on the abuses we’ve seen. Living conditions are difficult. Salaries are so low, rent so high. Imagine the situation for us. But we keep on fighting.”

Dulce, a University of Southern California (USC) employee, said, “Immigrant status doesn’t define who people are. Everyone should have full citizen rights. Immigrants haven’t had much say in their immigration status. People should have the basic right to choose where they want to live. People come from countries where they don’t feel safe. I’m thinking of Muslim countries that have been banned by Trump. It’s ridiculous that our politicians are not allowing them to come into this country.”

Dulce pointed to the impact of war on migration. “I think the US influence in Central America has created a lot of tensions. The US didn’t allow them to have the presidents they chose. This eventually caused violence and civil wars that impoverished those countries, which is a big factor why people want to immigrate to the US. The US goes into war for big corporate benefits, financial gains, colonizing other countries. This doesn’t represent the people’s will.”

Eduardo, a Mexican worker, added, “We are going backwards here, like in Mexico. Instead of uniting, so we can be strong, we are pitted against each other. We workers support each other, but we need immigrant rights. Just like Obama, Trump is now deporting *en masse*. The only difference is that with Obama deportations were not discussed so much as now. But they are the same. The people with power conceal the truth from us and end up destroying our families.”

“I can’t prefer one candidate over another when they are all lying to us. We are all clear about Trump. In fact, in a way he is pushing us to unite and fight for our rights. The Mexican government is no different when it comes to hiding the truth: look at the Peña Nieto record, look at the state’s role in the case of the 43 *desaparecidos* (disappeared teaching college students) in Ayotzinapa—they all lie.”

As for the endless wars, Eduardo added, “Wars are worthless. Instead of helping others, they kill children and innocent people who have nothing to do with anything.”

“This city was built with immigrant hands,” Crystal said. “We are all immigrants to this country. I’m very opposed to the policies of the Trump administration. Just like we built this country together, we must unite and work together as one. I’m here for all those people who work and pay taxes, and I think we are not supposed to be deporting them.”

“Our country is very broken, we are quite divided, and the big budgets used for the military should be used against poverty, against starvation. We have kids living on the streets, yet we are paying for a war we don’t even know where or how it’s happening.”

Ana is a young woman born in the US of Salvadoran parents who is now studying medical radiology in a two-year program at Prince George’s Community College. She spoke to the WSWS at the protest in Washington, D.C. She came to the demonstration with her four-year-old daughter Ava. “I’m here for the people who are affected by what Trump is doing, and I have family who could be involved,” she said. “The raids and the fear are breaking up my family and friends.”

Simon, a construction worker from Mexico, has lived and worked in the United States for 22 years. He marched with his two US-born sons, Alexis, who is in high school, and Simon Jr., in middle school. Alexis said, “Immigrants make up this country. Like my father, they build everything. We need to support our community.” Alexis said there had been a student walkout at his high school over bad conditions, including not enough textbooks.

Maria and Andres are immigrants from Colombia who met in the United States and married earlier this year. Both have worked as Spanish teachers. “We are here standing against all this politics of Donald Trump against immigration,” Maria said. “It’s all the politicians, Democrats and Republicans, and we all are affected.”

Andres added, “It’s not just immigration that brings us here. We’re also here about the war that is coming with North Korea or Syria.”

In Detroit, Michigan, Giselle, a student at Lincoln Park High School, said, “We shouldn’t let Trump divide us. They are not only deporting immigrants, they are oppressing us at work. For a long time, I was too young to see what was happening. I knew my parents were struggling. Now I see everyone who is poor—Latinos, blacks and whites—are struggling. If money was used for us, not the rich, you wouldn’t have people on the freeways begging for food.”

“These problems were here before Trump, and they are getting worse now. Obama deported 2.5 million immigrants. Both parties are for war, not the people.”

Juan Garza, a tax preparer, said, “Why separate people with walls. We’re all brothers and sisters all over the world. Everybody is working to support and feed their families. Everybody needs work, but the corporations want cheap labor. They want workers fighting each other for jobs. They blame immigrant workers to divert attention from what they’re doing.”

In Chicago, several young people spoke to the WSWS. David, a high school student from the southwest side, said, “There’s a lot

of things said about immigrants that are not true, and we want to fight back on that. We’re fighting for our rights to be equal to all, to be citizens and to be treated equally. Discrimination isn’t just here, it’s in other countries too. Being part of this fight is like being involved in a family for me. It’s the most important thing I can do.”

Luis, a Gage Park High School student, said, “We’re here because changes to immigration law would make a huge difference for us Mexicans. We have undocumented parents, and we are going to be helping them become citizens.”

“There’s a lot of discrimination. I believe people should know the truth about the US—the real truth—because the US puts out an image, but I think people should know that it’s really worse over here than it is in other countries.”

Daniel, also from Gage Park, added, “What he said, that the US has this image of people being free, freedom of speech and things, it’s true. In reality, they don’t give those rights to everyone—definitely not to immigrants.”

An older worker added, “We need funding for schools, for the homeless, for health care, but it goes to war. Both parties are the same in funding it.”

At the rally in New York City, Luisina said, “I am very against any kind of deportation. Undocumented workers are people too. The US economic system is very happy to exploit them with cheap wages. There are friends of mine who work at fancy coffee shops. They work four hours extra every day, and they get paid no overtime. This just benefits the businesses. I am from Argentina, and I dislike the way money dominates everything in the US. We have to defend workers from other countries.”

Two Italian tourists, Andrea and Paola, were also at the rally. Paola said, “We don’t like the economic problems, the war.” Andrea added, “We have the same problems in Italy. There are refugees from Syria but we have no wall. What we would like to see happen is to end the power of the big banks.”

In Boston, Vita, whose family immigrated from the Dominican Republic, said, “Workers should be able to prosper, no matter what. But things are moving in the wrong direction, and that’s why we’re out here.”

A noontime protest was also held in front of the Massachusetts state house. In the working class city of Chelsea, adjacent to Boston, an estimated 50 businesses closed during the day Monday because workers walked off the job to join protests. Nearly 50 percent of the Chelsea’s population is Latin American.



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