

Mass Strike Ferment Hits U.S. In Pro-Immigration Rallies

by Nancy Spannaus

There is something reminiscent of the East German peaceful revolution in the Fall of 1989, about the ongoing series of mass rallies being carried out by mostly Hispanic immigrants across the United States. All of a sudden, people who not only had never taken to the streets before, but who had been deathly afraid that the authorities might haul them to jail, or carry out other reprisals, began to pour into the streets, in opposition to proposed Republican Congressional legislation (H.R. 4437) that threatened to deport millions, and build a 700-mile-long wall along the U.S.-Mexican border.

“This is bigger than the civil rights movement. . . . This is huge!” commented New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, himself an Hispanic American, on CBS-TV on the day after the April 10 National Day of Action for Immigrant Justice. In fact, Richardson was right, since the huge demonstrations called by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1963 had pulled out “only” 250,000 to the nation’s capital.

But April 10, which saw rallies bringing out millions of people in an estimated 142 cities across the United States, was only one step in a process which has seen a growing ferment throughout the country. The first major demonstration, called by an ad hoc coalition called together in mid-February in Los Angeles, brought out 100,000 people in Chicago, Illinois. Two weeks later, on March 25, between 300,000 and 500,000 people, mostly high school youth, took over the City of Los Angeles, in a massive demonstration and high-school boycott in favor of treating immigrants like human beings, not criminals.

In the wake of that major event, the National Capital Immigration Coalition (NCIC), a group including business, faith, labor, and community organizations, called for the nationwide demonstration on April 10, for which they targeted 65 cities. As the preceding week came to an end, expectations were that the demonstrations would be celebrating a compromise which had been reached in the U.S. Senate, which would have taken much of the sting out of the House Republicans’ draconian law. When that compromise was destroyed, by divisions in the Republican Party, the mobilization shifted course, to opposition to H.R. 4437.

The Scope

Not surprisingly, the U.S. mass media have carried out a broad coverage of the turnout on April 9-10, as well as the

way in which this outpouring was organized. Indeed, in many instances, the numbers shocked the organizers.

The shock began on Sunday, April 9, when an estimated *half a million* people turned out in Dallas, Texas to call for justice for immigrants. This could have been as much as a *third* of the population of the city. Similar record-breaking crowds were seen around the country on April 10, including over 300,000 people in Phoenix, Arizona; 20,000 in Indianapolis, Indiana; 25,000 in Seattle, Washington; 75,000 in Fort Myers, Florida; 100,000 in San Diego, California; and 10,000 in Omaha, Nebraska. Demonstrations occurred in many cities which had not been targeted by organizers, as the number of cities hosting demonstrations was over *twice* the number officially participating.

The NCIC reports that surprises were everywhere. For example, in tiny Schuyler, Nebraska, 3,000 people out of a total population of 5,300 were mobilized.

Both New York City and Washington, D.C., not surprisingly, attracted in the range of 500,000 people, including many families, as well as labor unions and more traditional protesters. Participating in, and building for, the events very prominently was the Roman Catholic Church, which mobilized in its parishes, and provided leading officials, including Archbishop of Washington Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, and Archbishop Cardinal Roger Mahoney of Los Angeles. Parish priests in Florida and Texas had been told to give homilies in favor of attendance at the rallies, and to urge Catholics “to pray for and support increased wages for migrant workers.”

Labor’s Role

There was also a very prominent role played in organizing the rallies by the labor movement. In Los Angeles, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) was particularly prominent, aided by organizers from the Food Workers, the Needle Trades, AFSCME, and health-care workers.

Clearly, there is a large complement of Hispanic immigrants in these low-wage service industries, and many are ripe to join unions. The Los Angeles County AFL-CIO has grown rapidly in the last five years.

While the United Farmworkers Union (UFW) did not play a major role in the rallies, they did garner some immediate benefit from the mobilization. On April 11, the UFW and



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The April 10 rallies brought out larger crowds, and in more cities, than was anticipated. But the fight for immigrant rights, and better-paying jobs, will only develop into a broader political movement, if U.S. economic policy is changed, so that huge development projects, such as NAWAPA (above) can be implemented.

Global Horizons, Inc., a major broker for migrant workers, signed an agreement giving union representation and protections to agricultural H-2a guest workers, including a wage increase, paid work breaks, seniority status, bereavement leave, grievance procedures, and a requirement that the agribusinesses serviced by Global Horizons pay medical-care costs for these workers.

It seems clear that the mass mobilization among immigrant workers had an effect on Global Horizons, and there is likely more of this impact to come. Interestingly, most of the workers coming in through this company are from Asia and South Africa—not South America. Indeed, immigrants from many groups were seen attending demonstrations in places like D.C. and Los Angeles.

Where Is the Leadership?

Despite the spectacular turnouts, there is no guarantee that the fight for immigrant rights, and better-paying jobs, will feed into a broader, more permanent political movement. An organizer of the Los Angeles demonstrations, for example, reported that attempts to expand the focus of the rallies beyond immigration per se were voted down, in the hopes of repeating the spectacular success of the March 25 event. When the April 10 demonstration in Los Angeles only brought out about 30,000 people, many of the organizers, especially the younger ones, were demoralized.

One glaring failure of leadership is apparent in the Democratic Party, which, *EIR*'s sources indicate, has very little capability on the ground in the immigrant communities. One source pointed out the contrast between the Dallas rally, and the fact that, the week before, only 2% of the registered voters in the county turned out to vote in the runoff in the Texas Primary, in which Democrats determined who would be their

candidates for U.S. Senate and Lieutenant Governor. People are ready to move, he said, but the Democratic Party is not inspiring them to act effectively in the political arena.

The obvious exception to this disconnect, is the role which the LaRouche Youth Movement, which itself is closely integrated with the Democratic Party in places like California, played in the demonstrations. The following report from a member of the LYM who participated in the March 25 demonstration in Los Angeles, gives a flavor of the response and potential:

“LaRouche’s infrastructure policies are the flank to the proposed fascist border wall, and the population is ready for Lyn’s ideas. One organizer described the organizing precisely as the Monge principle out on the streets, where literally newly met contacts were taken through how the proposed NAWAPA water-infrastructure project would work, and then would turn to the people next to them, begin organizing them, and answering their questions. There were several occasions where LYM members were organizing, and a volunteer would break in with a simultaneous translation to assist in the organizing. It should be noted that many of the people at the rally had the proposed border wall on their minds, so when they saw the huge NAWAPA map, they were immediately drawn in to the idea of how bringing water to the area was the perfect flank.”

Indeed, LYM members from all around the country reported an eager fascination by those attending with the plan for economic development on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border, which is encapsulated in the huge, but never developed, 1950s water project called NAWAPA.

If the pro-immigrant sentiment is going to bring about a real, positive change in policy, a movement around the LaRouche economic program is the only hope.