

Thousands participate in nation-wide “A day without immigrants” protest

By Genevieve Leigh
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Thousands of workers, students and youth across the United States participated in protests yesterday under the banner of “A day without immigrants,” or “Un día sin inmigrantes.”

The protests, which consisted of one-day work stoppages, keeping kids out of school and boycotting shopping and dining, drew substantial participation in New York City, Atlanta, Detroit, D.C., Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Austin and elsewhere. The aim of the events was to protest the Trump administration’s recent executive orders by showing the massive impact that immigrant workers have on the economy.

The day’s events seem to have been largely spontaneous, picking up steam mainly through social media with the hashtag #DayWithoutImmigrants being used about 200,000 times on Twitter within the 24-hour period of the scheduled protests.

The wave of resistance comes on the heels of a massive protest held in Milwaukee on Wednesday premised on the very similar slogan, “A day without Latinos,” in which thousands marched to defend immigrant rights.

The spontaneous character of the events resulted in varying participation in each city. In New York, many restaurants and parts of the construction industry were shut down. In New Mexico, the state with the largest percentage of Hispanic residents in the nation, state officials worried that hundreds of students may stay home and took measures to prevent any massive student absences in advance, sending a letter home to parents which read: “We respectfully ask all parents to acknowledge that students need to be in class every day to benefit from the education they are guaranteed and to avoid falling behind in school and life.”

Spurred on by the increasingly active role that youth and students have been playing in protests throughout the country, many other city school districts and universities took similar measures.

Alma Pena-Sanchez, chief of staff of the Los Angeles Unified School District, which is 74% Latino, left a recorded voicemail for parents and employees Wednesday night asking that everyone show up in the morning, saying, “While we respect everyone’s right to have their voices heard and to participate in civic action such as protest, all students and staff are encouraged and expected to come to school.” The students, many of whom were among the thousands of LAUSD students who walked out of class in protest the week after Trump’s inauguration, were also asked not to partake in any walkouts for the day. A similar message was sent by officials in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Grand Rapids, Michigan and Washington, D.C. school districts.

Figures for most of these school districts were not available at the time of this writing aside from Grand Rapids, Michigan which reported a dip in attendance so severe that the day will likely not count as a school day—instead it will count as a snow day. In order to count, 75 percent of the student body must be in school. Many schools have reported below a 50 percent attendance for the day including Buchanan Elementary, Cesar E. Chavez Elementary, Westwood Middle, Harrison Park School, Burton Elementary and Middle, Union High, Innovation Central High and SWCC.

Another prominent feature of yesterday’s protests was the active participation of many restaurant establishments. Scores of restaurants in major cities from Los Angeles to New York closed in solidarity with the protest with over 50 restaurants participating in the nation’s capital alone. The restaurant industry employs 7.1 million immigrants, according to the most recent report from the Bureau of Labor statistics, 1.2 million of whom are undocumented workers according to Pew Research center. This industry is also the second largest and the fastest growing market in the US economy.

Many well-known restaurant owners and chefs have

spoken out against the Trump administration and in support of the wave of protests, including Washington's José Andrés, the famed Spanish-born chef whose public duels with Trump have attracted much attention; Chef Silvana Salcido Esparza in Phoenix; famed Oaxacan restaurant Guelaguetza in Los Angeles, as well as hundreds of other smaller restaurants throughout the country, including an impressive number in the Chicago area.

The effect of the strike on the restaurant industry even reached within the walls of the political establishment, forcing the food service in the US Senate to operate on reduced hours.

Many cities participating in the strike organized marches in conjunction with the business closings including New York, Atlanta, Chicago, D.C. and Detroit. One of the largest turnouts was in Southwest Detroit where over 1,000 people participated.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to several families at the Detroit protest who participated in the strike to take a stand against the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies which are widely despised by both immigrant and native-born working people alike.

Flavio and his wife Kimberlynn said they were upset with the charge by Trump that Mexican immigrants are criminals. "We support the rights of all immigrants and Latinos," stated Flavio, "Everyone wants to get a better future."

"We want better opportunities," added Kimberlynn, "We want to be able to go to college, to school. People want a safe place for their children."

When asked why they thought Trump was whipping up anti-immigrant chauvinism, Kimberlynn said she thought it was to keep the people fighting each other. "It's to push for a bigger war. I believe there is a danger of bigger wars."

Flavio spoke on the widespread character of Trump's attacks, noting, "This is not only against Latinos, they are also targeting Muslims."

"We are all citizens who were born here," added Kimberlynn, referring to herself, Flavio and their child. "But my parents came here 30 years ago. Everyone is scared. No one has seen it like this before."

While discussing the fact that Obama deported more immigrants than any other president, Flavio replied, "I don't want to call it a setup, but people put a lot of trust in Obama and he let them down. A lot of people voted for Trump," noting that Trump received about one in three Hispanic votes in the election. "But I don't like Trump,"

he added. Both said they did not like Hillary Clinton and had voted for Bernie Sanders.

Melissa Guile, who was at the protest with her four children, told WSWWS reporters why she attended the protest. "My husband was deported three years ago. Me and my children are all US citizens, but we are trying to get him back legally.

"My father was deported too," she added. "It has taken a real toll on all of us."

Melissa said the challenge of taking care of four kids without her husband is enormous. She works at night to make sure the kids are taken care of during the day. "There are a lot of problems. My kids have a hard time in school," citing the difficulties that come with trying to make ends meet. Noting the millions of deportations that took place under Obama, she said "the government is supposed to be helping people, not hurting them."

Amid these protests of workers, youth and students across the country, Trump spoke Thursday afternoon at a White House news conference where he boasted of his border security measures and appalling ICE raids which have resulted in hundreds of arrests in the past week, saying, "We are saving lives every single day."

The genuine opposition expressed by the thousands of people who have protested relentlessly since Trump's inauguration less than 30 days ago finds no expression in the political establishment.

Bernie Sanders, who is seen as the only establishment figure who can ensure that the brewing anger of the masses be "properly contained" and channeled behind the Democratic Party, preventing any independent political movement of the working class, is busy in Washington calling for the Senate Intelligence Committee to "thoroughly investigate if Russia coordinated with Trump and his campaign."

In order for the working class to carry out a sustained battle with the Trump administration it must definitively break with the Democratic Party and all of its representatives. It must take a politically conscious form and be guided by a genuine socialist perspective.

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