

# Continuing the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in 2010

## Year One of the New Administration Saw Change but not Progress



One year ago Chicanos, Mexicanos and Central Americans celebrated the end of the eight years of Bush administration. In addition to launching two wars and ushering in the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression, the Bush administration stepped up repression against immigrants. Raids and deportations of workers by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) doubled, redoubled and then doubled again under Bush. The Bush administration implemented the notorious 287(g) program, where ICE teamed up with local police and sheriffs allowed racists such as Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio to harass Chicanos, Mexicanos and Central Americans. The October 2006 "Secure Fence Act" stepped up the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, contributing to the deaths of more and more immigrants trying to enter the United States.

In December of 2005, the House of Representatives passed the Republican-backed HR 4437 that would have further criminalized the undocumented. In response, the Chicano, Mexicano and Central American communities erupted in massive protests in March of 2006, another example of their aspirations for equality. These street protests swelled into the millions on May 1, 2006 in Los Angeles, San José, San Diego, Chicago, Milwaukee and in almost every major city and in many smaller cities across the country. These protests demanded legalization for the undocumented, an end to raids and deportations, stopping the militarization of the border and opposition to any guest worker program. Chicanos, Mexicanos and Central Americans made up the vast majority of protestors, as the struggle for legalization is part of the Chicano people's long struggle for equality and self-determination. They were joined by significant numbers of other Latinos and labor unions, as well as African, Arab and Asian Americans and others whose communities had large numbers of immigrants.



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The politicians responded to these protests in two ways. In the House of Representatives, Illinois Democrat Luis Gutierrez and Arizona Republican Jeff Flake teamed up to submit the STRIVE act. STRIVE was a combination of good (expanding legal immigration) and bad (more criminalization of the undocumented) policy and on the key issue of legalization had too many barriers. The Senate Immigration Reform Act, largely written by Massachusetts Democrat Ted Kennedy and Arizona Republicans John McCain and John Kyl and backed by President Bush, was even worse. The Immigration Reform Act would have eliminated family reunification visas and, instead of legalizing the undocumented, would have made them and their families into guest workers. Neither bill passed, as they were opposed from both the left and the right.

Since 2006 the protests on May 1 have gotten much smaller and have taken place in fewer cities, but continue, along with protests of the injustices that undocumented and other immigrants face. Thousands of workers have marched in Southern California to protest their firing under the new ICE audits, which target businesses that hire the undocumented.

Protests have erupted at events featuring Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano (who oversees ICE and the Border Patrol), with more than a thousand turning out in Santa Clara, California October 2009. College students have protested racist and anti-immigrant speakers and are continuing to organize support for efforts to legalize and provide equal access for undocumented students.

**"We support reform that genuinely improves the lives of poor and working people."**

A year ago the new Obama administration promised action on immigration reform in its first year. But bogged down by the escalation of the war in Afghanistan and the bailout of Wall Street, the only other issue really tackled was health care reform. Facing growing impatience from the community and obvious neglect by the administration, Congressperson Gutierrez introduced a "Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security And Prosperity" or CIR-ASAP last December. This bill was backed by the Congressional Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, Black and Progressive caucuses, and is much better than the old STRIVE act. It expands legal immigration, offers legalization of the undocumented with fewer hoops, rolls back some of the worst ICE policies (such as the 287(g) program), and doesn't have a guest worker program.

The editors of Fight Back! think that support for the CIR-ASAP can help to rebuild the mass movement that is key to meaningful immigration reform. We support reform that genuinely improves the lives of poor and working people. While the bill is not perfect, it would benefit millions of undocumented and their families, as well as help the millions of Mexicans, Filipinos and others who are forced to wait up to 20 years to reunite their families. One problem with the bill is that it would expand the government e-verify screening of workers. The biggest danger, though, is not the bill itself (which is relatively good), but having people fall into the 'something is better than nothing' and 'we have to follow what the Democratic politicians tell us to do' attitudes. This will only lead to immigration reform that is more support for big corporations and filled with right-wing attacks on immigrants. One can only look at what happened to health care reform, where big health insurance corporations fought to make the law benefit them more than working people.

The key is to continue to organize and mobilize the grassroots among Chicanos, Mexicanos and Central Americans for legalization, stopping the firings and deportation of undocumented workers, increasing legal immigration and opposing a guest worker program. We must continue efforts to build a broad united front including allies such as labor and other oppressed nationalities. The struggle for legislation needs to be combined with militant protests and continued mass mobilizations for May 1.

**All out for May 1, 2010! Stop the workplace firings and deportations! Support the CIR-ASAP!**