

April 28, 2010

Greetings!

WE ARE ALL ARIZONA!!

The Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) stands shoulder to shoulder with our Sisters and Brothers of the Coalicion de Derechos Humanos, Tonatierra, the National Day Labor Organizing Network, and the thousands of students, workers, people of faith, and Americans all who oppose the passage of SB1070 in the state of Arizona. The organizations and people of Arizona, not just Mexicans and Latinos, but Native Americans, African Americans and others of color, and working people generally, are truly the real victims on the front-lines of such a backward and racist law signed by Governor Jan Brewer, but approved by the predominant Republican Party state legislature. While the law targets people of color, all Arizonans will be adversely damaged. It is no accident that the country, but particularly Arizona, finds itself mired in the worst economic downturn since the 1930s manifested in high unemployment, massive home foreclosures, budget deficits and program reductions and public employee lay-offs, spiraling national debt, and almost unprecedented repression directed at immigrants and their families by a Democratic administration.

The proverbial question that we must ask ourselves is why now SB1070 and who stands to benefit and who stands to lose? Who stands to benefit that immigrants would be scapegoated during these economic times? Who stands to benefit that white Arizonans and the native-born are pitted against immigrants and people of color, even though we constitute the same social class? Who stands to benefit from the public people of color who will lose confidence in the local and state police, and therefore, cause a break-down in public order? Who stands to benefit from an increased state-police mind-set and experiment with such order in Arizona? What are the implications of this for other states and for the country as a whole?

The Coalition for Human Rights, based in Tucson, attempts to answer some of these questions for us in their newsletter below. MAPA and

Hermanidad Mexicana Latinoamericana will continue to weigh in on the Arizona situation with a series of newsletters to speak to the issue and definitively answer the questions we pose above.

MAPA and Hermanidad Mexicana Latinoamericana join the call for a national economic boycott directed at the state of Arizona. The list of organizations, media outlets, local governmental entities, and most importantly, the common working people of Arizona continues to grow in organizing the national boycott. WE ARE ALL ARIZONA!!

Nativo Vigil Lopez National President

Something to Prove: How Democrats and Activists Enabled Immigrant Crackdowns

Posted: April 18, 2010 12:45 PM

Immigrants' rights activists say dual crackdowns in Arizona this past week by immigration police and by state legislators are generating a climate of fear there. But stepped up immigration enforcement has not come out of the blue. In some respects it has even been enabled by the very people many immigrants counted as allies--Democrats and advocacy groups.

On Tuesday, Arizona's House of Representatives approved a bill requiring police to investigate anyone they have "reasonable suspicion" may be in the country illegally. On Thursday, in a massive show of force, more than 800 federal agents and local police arrested 49 people in raids that targeted shuttle van operations allegedly involved in human smuggling.

"The situation for our communities, of course, is really acute," lawyer Isabel Garcia, co-chair of the Tucson-based Coalicion de Derechos Humanos ("The Human Rights Coalition") said on Democracy Now! on Friday, the day after the arrests. "People yesterday were scrambling, didn't send people to school, didn't go to work."

Arizona has become an epicenter for tough immigration law enforcement. To understand why, trace a straight line from the Clinton administration through well-meaning advocacy groups whose political strategy seems to have backfired.

In reaction to mounting political pressure, President Clinton presided over an unprecedented immigration crackdown, launching Operation Blockade and Operation Hold the Line (1993) in Texas. In 1994, as illegal immigration increased in California, Republicans hammered the Clinton administration and Democrats in general for being too soft on immigration. In response, Democrats made every effort to show they were just tough as Republicans, and the Clinton administration intensified the militarization of the border with Operation Gatekeeper (1994) in San Diego, followed by Operation Safeguard (1994) in southern Arizona.

"We have increased spending on the states to deal with the immigration problems by 32 percent since I've been President," boasted Clinton in 1994. "We've increased border guards by 30 percent. We put 1,000 more border guards on. We have doubled the border guards in San Diego."

Despite the buildup, since no effort was made to address the root causes of immigration, the main effect of the military-style operations was simply to shift the crossing routes. Arizona, with its more hazardous terrain, became the passageway of choice.

"Arizona is, in fact, the doorway. Over 50 percent of all crossings occur through Arizona," said attorney Garcia. "As a result, we have created Arizona to be the place where traffickers come, smugglers come."

Pushed out by trade policies which put Mexican farmers at a disadvantage, and lured by jobs, migrants funneled into Arizona. The immigrant population increased, making for a toxic political brew in the conservative Grand Canyon state, and immigration became a hot political football.

Similarly, in Washington, D.C., lawmakers came under growing pressure to address immigration--as illegal immigrants spread throughout the country. With a growing population of people living in the shadows, proponents of reform repeatedly proposed package deals (hence the world "comprehensive"), that included forms of legalization, provisions for temporary worker programs, and, to satisfy critics, stringent enforcement measures.

Thwarted time and again, reformers took on the get-tough rhetoric of their opponents in the hopes that they could sell legalization if tough enforcement were included in the deal. The Democratic Party adopted a stern immigration policy as part of its platform: "We need to secure our borders, and support additional personnel, infrastructure, and technology

on the border and at our ports of entry. We need additional Customs and Border Protection agents equipped with better technology and real-time intelligence."

"As the immigration debate has shifted to the right, liberal groups like the National Immigration Forum, America's Voice, Center for American Progress, NDN [a progressive think tank], and National Council of La Raza have also been calling for an immigration reform that 'secures the border' and 'restores the rule of law,'" Tom Barry of the Center for International Policy wrote last year in an excellent analysis of the trend. Barry showed how polling apparently influenced positions taken by Democrats, immigration activists, the Obama campaign, and eventually, the Obama administration.

"Improved interior and worksite enforcement is a critical part of comprehensive immigration reform," said Janet Napolitano, the former Arizona governor, now Homeland Security secretary, in November. "We've demonstrated that when it comes to that issue, this Administration is committed to action." More recently, Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, echoed the same theme: "I think we have to make sure the border is secure, the interior is secure, and we have a functioning immigration system," he told PBS NewsHour correspondent Ray Suarez.

Supporters of comprehensive immigration reform support the "three-legged stool" strategy articulated by Napolitano--a pathway to legalization, temporary worker programs, and stepped up enforcement. But with the long-running Washington stalemate over this comprehensive approach, the default immigration policy rests on just one of those legs, enforcement. With the implicit blessing of advocates, Democrats, with something to prove, are showing they can out-toughen Republicans, at least at the federal level.

Back in Arizona, Democrats have also gone along with immigrant crackdowns, although legislators opposed the latest and nastiest bill, SB 1070, which would give police unprecedented powers to stop and question people if they suspect "the person is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States." Proponents deny the law would lead to racial profiling, but it is doubtful that cops will spend any time looking for Canadians on expired visas. In the case of SB 1070, enough was enough. Perhaps it's time for Democrats and their allies to re-think their national strategy as well.

Jeffrey Kaye is a veteran journalist and author. He is the author of Moving Millions: How Coyote Capitalism Fuels Global Immigration (Wiley).
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Join us in this prolonged campaign for driver's licenses and visas for our families. The first step in making change is to join an organization that pursues the change we desire. We welcome you to our ranks.

Other organizations leading this movement include: Hermandad Mexicana Latinoamericana, Mexican American Political Association (MAPA), MAPA Youth Leadership, Southern California Immigration Coalition, Liberty and Justice for Immigrants Movement, National Alliance for Immigrant's Rights, and immigrant's rights coalitions throughout the U.S..

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