



*The*  
**IMMIGRANT RIGHTS MOVEMENT**  
*and the*  
**STRUGGLE FOR FULL EQUALITY**

**FREEDOM ROAD**  
**Socialist Organization**



More than one million Chicano and Mexicano protesters marched for their families and full equality in Los Angeles.



In 2006 there was a huge upsurge in the Immigrant Rights movement, peaking on May 1, when some two million people marched across the country. At the core of this movement is the struggle of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans for self-determination and full equality. This paper presents the views of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO) on the current immigrant rights movement and the struggle for Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American liberation.

## 1. Immigration, Imperialism, and National Oppression

In our “Statement on National Oppression, National Liberation and Socialist Revolution” (FRSO, 2004), we say that “It is imperialism that still dominates the countries of the Third World, forcing more immigrants to come to the United States to escape poverty and repression.” This is certainly true for immigrants from Mexico and Central America. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has opened up the Mexican economy to even greater penetration by U.S. multinational corporation and agribusiness, driving millions from their hometowns to seek work in the cities and the United States. U.S.-backed governments and counter-revolutionaries in Central American have violently attacked popular movements and governments, leaving economic devastation in their wake, driving hundreds of thousands more to the United States.

Once here in the United States, immigrants from Mexico and Central America face intense national oppression, rooted in the U.S. conquest and seizure of Northern Mexico. Mexicans in the this territory, which today make up the states of California, Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas, were dispossessed of their lands, their language suppressed in schools, and the culture denigrated, and forced to work in the mines, fields, and homes of the capitalists. Thus the Mexican people of the southwest were forged into an oppressed nation, the Chicano Nation, with a common territory, economy, and culture and the right to self-determination, up to and including secession from the United States.

Generations of immigrants from Mexico who have settled in the southwest have been assimilated into the Chicano Nation. Mexican immigrants and their children are changing the demographics of the southwest, as more and more majority Chicano counties emerge, strengthening the demand

for self-determination. This so-called “Browning of America” is striking fear into the racist monopoly capitalist class that rules America, but is welcomed by revolutionaries and communists who seek to weaken and ultimately overthrow this class.

Mexican immigrants who settle outside the southwest, as well as Central Americans who live both inside and outside the Chicano Nation, share common chains of national oppression with the Chicano people. In addition more and more Mexicans of indigenous descent (such as Mixtecos) are immigrating to the United States. While often forming distinct communities with their own cultural traditions and some differences in class structure (for example the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie among Chicanos is more developed), they are mainly in lower and middle-strata working class jobs. All suffer from inferior schools and barriers to getting a college education, as well as residential segregation and discrimination in renting and buying homes. Police brutality, a racist “injustice” system, and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) plague Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans of both mestizo and indigenous descent.

Today the anti-immigrant movement is trying to copy California’s Proposition 187, passed in 1994, which tried to deny government benefits to Latinos, in localities around the country. HR4437, which passed the House of Representatives in 2005, tried to criminalize the undocumented and militarize the border. These attacks are targeting Mexican and Central American immigrants. This attack also affects many Chicanos who are neighbors and relatives of immigrants, and who are still seen as “foreigners” no matter how many generations they have lived in the United States. Many Chicanos know of the mass deportations of the 1930s, where people of Mexican descent, whether immigrant or American-born, were driven out of their homes and communities and sent to Mexico. The attack on Mexican and Central American immigrants has also led to an attempt to eliminate family reunification, which is also an attack on immigrants from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and South America who mainly come through family ties, and who can be allies in the struggle for immigrant rights.

The anti-immigrant movement is also promoted the revival of a Bracero or guest worker program. This would cement into law a second-class status for Mexican and Central American immigrants, stripping them of their rights to residency, family, education, and economic opportunities. A guest worker program would also undermine the labor movement and promote lower wages, and brought many unions into the struggle for immigrant rights. This is a concrete example of the need for a strategic alliance between the working class and the national movements, and how the struggle against national oppression advances the struggle of the class as a whole.



## 2. Immediate Demands of the Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American Masses

The struggles of the Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American peoples in the United States are struggles for full equality and self-determination. As a part of this struggle, we are putting forward some immediate demands of the people in the struggle for immigrant rights.\*1\*

**(A) LEGALIZATION FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED:** More than twelve million undocumented live, work, and go to schools in the United States. Almost three-quarters are from Mexico and Central America. There are three million U.S. citizen children of the undocumented, and millions more are part of extended families combining citizens, legal residents, and undocumented. The undocumented are our family, our neighbors, and our co-workers. They have the right to come out of the shadows, to fight for better jobs, better schools, and better neighborhoods.

**(B) STOP THE RAIDS AND DEPORTATIONS:** Under the Bush Administration, raids and deportations by the ICE have soared. While the ICE claims to be targeting criminals, in fact they are doing wide sweeps of workplaces and communities. These raids often separate families and spread terror in our communities. These raids do not deter the undocumented; they only drive them further underground, making them more subject to exploitation and victims of criminals.

**(C) STOP THE CRIMINALIZATION OF THE UNDOCUMENTED:** The undocumented only want to live, to work, and raise their families – basic human rights. Yet they are treated as criminals and slandered as “illegals”. Many of the so-called “immigration reform” bills act to further criminalize the undocumented by making crimes out of rights that others have.

**(D) STOP THE MILITARIZATION OF THE BORDER:** The United States is trying to build a wall on the U.S. Mexico border, placing military forces, and using the latest military technology. This has led to the deaths of hundreds of Mexicans and others trying to cross the border as the undocumented go to more and more remote, desolate, and dangerous

crossing points. Ironically, the militarization of the border started under the Clinton administration has actually increased the undocumented population in the United States, as workers fearful of not being able to go back and forth from Mexico now try to bring their families here. Militarization is also increasing the role of drug smugglers who are using migrants as drug-runners in exchange for passage to the United States.

**(E) MAINTAIN AND EXPAND LEGAL IMMIGRATION THROUGH FAMILY REUNIFICATION:** The vast majority of legal immigrants from Mexico and Central America come through family reunification. Almost half of legal immigrants from Mexico were undocumented immigrants at some point. The proposal to end family reunification and admit legal immigrants on the basis of education and English-speaking ability would hurt Mexicans and Central Americans the most, and is an attempt to force these countries to accept a guest worker program. What is needed is an expansion of legal immigration through family reunification to clear away the backlog that can be longer than twenty years!

**(F) FULL EQUALITY OF LANGUAGES:** Anti-immigrant forces are promoting “English-Only” policies, attacking bilingual education, and the rights of workers to speak their own languages on the job. While claiming to target the undocumented, these proposals are an attack on all immigrants and all Latinos whether immigrant or native-born.

**(G) NO GUEST WORKER PROGRAM:** From World War II to the mid-1960s the United States ran a “Bracero” or guest worker program. This program exploited and cheated many of the workers who worked for low wages and were denied benefits promised them. The program ended because of the Civil Rights Movement, since it was a clear example of second-class status given to a racial minority. A new guest worker program would institutionalize the second-class status of Mexican workers, prevent them from having a normal family life, and keep them from becoming legal immigrants. It would also undermine the labor movement and hurt other immigrants the most whose wages would be driven down to compete with the guest workers.



### 3. Class Forces and the Chicano/Latino Movement for Immigrant Rights

The goal of FRSO in the immigrant rights movement is to root ourselves in the working class, to build the leadership of the class, and to help Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American workers make allies among other nationalities and form a broad, multi-class united front. Our grassroots work has two key tasks at this time: first is our central task of party-building, by both winning the advanced to Marxism-Leninism and recruiting them to our organization, and through the popularization of a socialist perspective through distribution of Fight Back!, red flags, etc. The other task is to develop mass organizations that can unite the Chicano and Latino advanced and intermediate workers and progressive petty-bourgeoisie, and can carry on consistent day-to-day organizing in the community. These two tasks help each other: recruitment will provide a core to build a mass organization, while mass organizations will help to bring forward the advanced that we can recruit. In addition a stronger grass-roots force will help to build a broader united front.



**(A) MONOPOLY CAPITALISTS:** The monopoly capitalists rule the United States through their two parties (Democrat and Republican). The monopoly capitalists are the enemy of the Chicano and Latino struggles for self-determination and full equality, as their corporations are the ones that profit from the low wages paid to workers, their tax cuts take moneys from our schools, and their homes are gardened, cleaned, and cared for by domestic workers. At the same time the monopoly capitalists are deeply divided about what to do about immigrants.

One sector sees the growing population of Chicanos and Latinos as a threat to their rule. They fear that immigrants are bringing in traditions of class struggle and openness to socialist ideas that could revitalize the labor movement and hurt their profits. They also fear Latino culture and the Spanish language will undermine their dreams of Anglo-American domination of the United States and indeed the world. This sector, represented by supporters of HR3347 nationally and anti-immigrant bills locally, whips up racist and anti-foreign sentiment to portray the undocumented as criminals and terrorists, supports more raids and deportations, and is based in the right-wing of the Republican Party. They and their policies must be opposed.

The other sector of the monopoly capitalists is concerned with maintaining a stable supply of cheap labor, especially for agriculture, and seeks to gain from the growing Chicano and Latino markets (for example NBC and Hollywood moguls have recently bought the two main Spanish language media, Telemundo and Univision, respectively). This “reform” sector also seeks to co-opt the immigrant rights movement through laws such as the Immigration Reform Act (IRA) of 2007, which was supported by liberals such as Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts as well as conservatives such as Senator McCain of Arizona and even President Bush. Under the guise of immigration reform, the 2007 IRA would have eliminated family reunification and offered the undocumented guest worker visas, since their residence would be based on continued employment. The 2007 IRA included an expanded guest worker program and further militarization of the border and criminalization of the undocumented in compromise with the other sector. We must expose this sector of the monopoly capitalists as false friends of the immigrant rights movement.\*2\*

**(B) CHICANO BOURGEOISIE:** The Chicano bourgeoisie have a dual character. On one hand, they are a part of the capitalist class and support

capitalism. On the other hand, they have ties with the national movement, and often their economic and/or social base is among the masses of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans, and thus they are most responsive to the needs and demands of the people. Economically, the Chicano bourgeoisie are under pressure from the U.S. monopoly capitalists, and to a lesser degree, the Mexican big bourgeoisie, who are taking over much of their market.

Politically, they are represented by state and national Chicano politicians and are mainly in the Democratic Party. Their dual character can be seen in the Chicano congress peoples' sponsorship of the STRIVE Act, which had both positive and negative characteristics. It continued the militarization of the border and criminalization of the undocumented, in order to try to appease the anti-immigrant sector of the monopoly capitalists. It also maintained and expanded family reunification, which would benefit Chicano, Latino, and other immigrants. While it had a guest worker program, reflecting the interests of the cheap labor sector of the monopoly capitalists, it would allow these workers to become legal residents as with other temporary worker visas (such as the H-1B for high-tech workers), which is very different from the 2007 IRA. Also differing from the 2007 IRA, it did not mandate continued employment as a condition for undocumented to get legal residency, although it did put up a number of hoops that would have been barriers for many undocumented trying to legalize their status.

Our attitude towards the Chicano bourgeoisie is that we want to maintain the independence and initiative of the working class, and in no way subordinate the mass movement to legal maneuvers in Congress. At the same time, we have to recognize that only the Chicano bourgeoisie and their national representatives (mainly Democrats in Congress) are the ones that are going to have to carry any legalization bill through Congress and the Senate, so we want to pressure them, but do not want to make them the target of the immigrant rights movement. The most important factor is the actual strength of the mass movement – the stronger the movement, the greater in influence of the masses on the Chicano bourgeoisie, the weaker the movement, the stronger will be the influence of the monopoly capitalists.

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**(C) PETTY-BOURGEOISIE:** The Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American petty-bourgeoisie are made up of professionals, managers, and small business people. The petty-bourgeoisie, especially from the national

movements, is constantly ground down and hemmed-in by monopoly capitalism. Many from the petty-bourgeoisie joined the mass movement for immigrant rights. Many Chicano and Latino owned-business closed in support of the economic boycott of May 1, and a few distributed free water and other supplies to the marchers. The small business sector often saw the immigrant rights movement as a way for Mexicano and Latino immigrants to achieve the American Dream (home and business ownership).

Some of the Catholic clergy spoke out for immigrant rights, while others brought students from their schools to the marches. Journalists and DJs in the Latino and Spanish-language media played a large role in mobilizing the masses for May 1. They have a relatively large impact given the unorganized nature of the working class. They are connected with the masses, but owe their jobs to the Chicano bourgeoisie and monopoly capitalists, so they may promote reformist ideas such as flying the American flag.

Many of the political activists in the immigrant rights movement represent the petty-bourgeoisie who are professionals and managers associated with non-profit organizations (NPOs). They see themselves as part of the movement for social change and are former student activists. They can spend many hours working to build the mass movement and providing services to the masses in terms of health care, immigration law, etc. Some are connected to leftists or former leftists in the non-profit sector, and may be influenced by radical scholars since most have been to college. There is a strong Alinskyist (organizing for practical ends but downplaying political education) tendency in this sector. The NPO activists also tend to have ties with many of the labor union staff people, and there is some overlap in that unions have been trying to recruit student activists as labor organizers.

At the same time, those in the NPOs owe their jobs to government and monopoly capitalist foundation funding, which channels them towards reformism, including electoral politics and the Democratic Party. They often try to limit the participation of the masses so that the college-educated (including themselves) can lead and use the mass movement for their own ends. At times they will put themselves at the head of the mass movement by focusing on the program, speakers, etc. even as they do little or nothing to organize the masses. In some cities they have split from the more grassroots, working-class activists to hold their own events, which often ended up being much smaller. This shows that their actual mass base can be quite small.

There is also a “left” tendency among the petty-bourgeoisie that does not want to recognize differences among the monopoly capitalists, and some who want to attack Chicano and Latino Democrats instead of struggling to form a united front with them. Both of these “left” views give more play to the pro-Democratic party petty-bourgeoisie, which can exploit their ties with the Chicano/Latino bourgeoisie and monopoly capitalists to influence the movement.

Our attitude towards the petty-bourgeoisie is that we want to unite with them to bring their skills to serve the mass movement, but at the same time we have to struggle with them over the direction of the mass movement, the need for mass participation, etc. While we maintain our class analysis of this sector, we also have to deal with them practically as individuals, where personal ties can matter a lot.

**(D) WORKING CLASS:** The Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American working class made up the vast majority of the masses mobilized for immigrant rights. It was the working class that stayed away from work, walked out of schools, and filled the streets on May Day. Mexicano and Central American immigrants are much more likely to be part of the lower strata of the working class that feels the full exploitation of capitalism and fury of national oppression, and is the most militant in their demands for full equality. Many have been exposed to and educated about Yankee imperialism and its crushing grip on Mexico and much of Latin America.

At the same time the working class of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans is relatively unorganized. Some came out with labor unions or working-class community groups, others with Mexican regional and social organizations, but most just came. There is no single dominant ideology, as seen in strong patriotic sentiments shown by the Mexican flag, identification with America (and reformist influences) in the American flag, while others with labor or socialist influences were glad to carry the red flag of the working class. This lack of organization and mixed ideology reflects the spontaneous character of the movement.

Our goal is to organize Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American workers and strengthen working-class oriented immigrant rights groups so that they can play a more leading role in the immigrants’ rights movement.



## 4. Allies in the struggle for immigrant rights

**(A) OTHER LATINOS:** The relationship of other Latinos to the current immigrant rights struggle differs from Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans. All of the other Latino nationalities tend to enter the United States through the East Coast and then spread west, so lack the connections to the Chicano nation that Mexicanos and Central Americans have. Puerto Ricans are U.S. nationals who face no immigration restrictions, and there are no undocumented Cubans since any Cubans who reach U.S. soil is automatically granted legal status.

At the same time, immigrants from the Caribbean and South America are affected by proposals to alter or do away with family reunification, and are feeling more discrimination from growing anti immigrant sentiment. Also, other Latinos face similar national oppression as Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans, and many are more supportive of the immigrant rights struggle than other oppressed nationalities. Thus we see the bourgeoisie of other Latino nationalities, such as Congressman Luis Gutierrez of Chi-

cago, who is Puerto Rican, as one of the two main sponsors of the STRIVE act. At the same time, reflecting his bourgeoisie status, he supported anti-Cuba forces and their ban on travel to Cuba.

Our task among Latinos from South America and the Caribbean is to point out the common chains of national oppression that they share with Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans, and how the anti-immigrant forces are trying to end family reunification and whip up anti-immigrant, anti-Latino sentiments.

**(B) LABOR MOVEMENT:** the labor movement is a natural ally of the immigrant rights movement. A growing proportion of the working class is made up of immigrants, and they are the fastest growing population of organized labor outside of government workers. Guest worker programs that would serve to undermine wages and benefits, and the strength of unions also threaten organized labor. These forces have brought about a change in the stance of labor union leadership, which used to have (in the 1960s) anti-immigrant tendencies.

At the same time the top leadership of unions aligns itself with the monopoly capitalist class on a number of issues, including immigration. One example of this was the support of the Change To Win Coalition for the 2007 Immigration Reform Act, which would have created a huge de facto guest worker population from the “legalized” undocumented.

On another level, many of the more progressive union staffers ally themselves with staffers from the nonprofit sector, and objectively promote the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie. Many share the same student activist background, and they can go from union to non-profit and back again.

Part of our task in building class-struggle unions is to fight for unions to ally themselves with the masses of Chicano, Mexicano, and Central Americans in the immigrant rights movement. This means organizing Latino workers, empowering Latino workers within the unions, and having the unions participate and mobilize for the immigrant rights struggle.

**(C) ARAB AND ASIAN AMERICANS:** Asians make up the second largest group of immigrants after Latinos. There are more than a million undocumented Asian immigrants, and most Asian American nationalities are a majority foreign born. In addition there is a rapidly growing Arab American population numbering in the millions, many of whom are immi-

grants or their children. Both Arab and Asian Americans would have been hit hard by the proposal to end family reunification immigration, which is the basis for most immigration from the Middle East and Asia. In addition Arabs and Asian Americans are the targets of racial profiling and harassment in the aftermath of September 11, when tens of thousands of Arabs and Muslims were made to undergo special registration and more than 16,000 forced into deportation proceedings. Many anti-immigrant forces try to appeal to “national security” and fear of terrorists to justify attacks on Mexicanos and Central American immigrants.

However, the participation of Arab and Asian Americans in the immigrant rights movement has been limited given the importance of these issues. Many Arab and Asian Americans do not make the connection between the their immigration issues and those of Mexicanos and Central Americans.

Our task within Arab and Asian American communities to begin to mobilize the masses and to organize an independent, working class motion that can unite with the masses of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans in the immigrant rights movement.

**(D) AFRICAN AMERICANS:** A relatively small part of the African American population is first or second generation, but this sector is growing rapidly with immigrants coming from the Caribbean and Africa. Many prominent African Americans have been immigrants or children of immigrants (such as Marcus Garvey, Louis Farrakhan, and Colin Powell) and there is widespread opposition to the racist treatment of Haitian refugees among African Americans.

African Americans see that national oppression is at the core of the immigration debate, and know that Chicanos and Latinos share many of the same problems (police brutality, poor schools, etc.) Polls show that African Americans are very supportive of immigration reform, and more progressive members of the Congressional Black Caucus (representing the African American bourgeoisie) have been supportive of immigration reform, and even introduced a bill in 2004 before the mass upsurge.

However there is also a strong vocal anti-immigrant minority that plays to widespread concerns among African Americans about growing immigration. There is a view among African Americans that immigrants are either in direct competition with African Americans, or that indirectly their issues

detract from the struggle of African Americans for equality. This anti-immigrant sentiment is fanned by anti-immigrant forces, which promote the idea that African Americans are suffering from immigration. There are also contradictions between African American and Chicano/Latino politicians, such as in the 2001 Los Angeles mayoral election.

In reality the two forces undermining the economic status of African Americans the most, the deindustrialization of the Midwest as factory jobs move overseas and to mainly white rural areas, especially in the south, and the cutbacks in government services, are not the fault of immigrants, but of the monopoly capitalists and the politicians that serve them.

In our work among African Americans, we need to build up working class forces that can unite with the masses of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans in support for immigrant rights as part of the larger struggle against national oppression. The slogan of “black-brown unity” can help in this effort to build unity of action among oppressed nationalities.



## 5. Partial Demands of Chicano, Mexicano, and Central American masses

In addition to the immediate demands of the masses, there are also more limited, partial reforms that can advance the interests of the masses. We include here only a few:

**(A) STATE DRIVERS LICENSES AND PHOTO ID'S FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED:** at the state and local levels, we will fight for the right of the undocumented to get state drivers licenses and local photo IDs that will aid the undocumented in their day-to-day lives.

**(B) DOUBLE FAMILY REUNIFICATION VISAS:** increasing family reunification will help the undocumented become permanent legal residency, as almost half the current family reunification visas for Mexicans go to undocumented immigrants who are already in the United States. Increasing family reunification will also gain allies among Asian and other immigrant groups, as it would help clear away the waiting list, which can be longer than twenty years.

**(C) RESIDENT PARENTS OF U.S. CITIZEN CHILDREN SHOULD BE LEGALIZED AS NON-QUOTA CATEGORY:** right now U.S. citizen parents can bring in their foreign-born children over and above any national quota. There should be a new category of resident parents of U.S. citizen children who can become legal permanent residents, again without a quota.



Carlos Montes (below, middle), a co-founder of the Brown Berets and fighter for Chicano self-determination, speaks at Los Angeles rally for immigrant rights.



# Notes

**\*1\*** The struggles of Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans is much broader than just the issues around immigration, and include equality of schools, housing, and employment, land rights, local voting rights for immigrants, an end to police brutality and a racist justice system, and of course, the right to self-determination for the Chicano Nation, up to and including secession. See the FRSO “Statement on National Oppression, National Liberation, and Socialist Revolution (2004) and the immediate demands for Oppressed Nationalities of the FRSO draft program (2007) online at <[www.frso.org](http://www.frso.org)>.

**\*2\*** In general the interests of the Mexican bourgeoisie, which control the major political parties in Mexico, are in line with the reform-minded sector of the U.S. monopoly capitalist class. Some big Mexican capitalists see Chicanos, Mexicanos, and Central Americans in the United States as a natural market for them. They also want to maintain the flow of labor as a “safety valve,” providing jobs and income that the U.S.-dominated Mexican economy cannot.

There are a number of immigrant rights activists have ties with Mexican political parties (the PAN, PRD, and PRI). There has also been a Parliament of Mexican Immigrant Leaders set up by the Mexican Congress. However our experience is that the stands and politics of these activists in the immigrant rights movement do not necessarily reflect the relative politics of the parties in Mexico.

**\*3\*** The FRSO stance towards any immigration reform bill depends on the balance of forces and the sentiments of the masses at the time. The STRIVE act was introduced during the period of the mass mobilization, and lagged behind the masses demands. FRSO did not support the STRIVE act, although we did not attack those forces in the immigrant rights movement who did.



# **FREEDOM ROAD Socialist Organization**

[www.frso.org](http://www.frso.org)