

US - "We, the Immigrant People", On May 1st Demonstration

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Saturday 6 May 2006, posted by [Amando Basurto](#)

As a consequence of the rapid expansion of economic globalization in the past few decades, many people, often marginalized in their own societies, have been incessantly moving to developed countries in search of better economic opportunities. Unfortunately, they come to face another fate of marginalization in the destination countries; they become illegal immigrant workers.

The fundamental fate of the illegal in a society where people live with the rule of law, is that it has to be invisible because the authority of legality can be maintained only by the exclusion of illegality. For the illegal, the moment of showing itself in front of public authority means to face the moment of danger to be excluded from the society to which it belongs. This invisibility of the illegal drives the fate of illegal immigrant laborers to a tragic situation, no protection of their lives from anyone. Although they are in charge of all the dirty work, which capitalist society requires with the minimum wage, anyone who enjoys the fruit of their sweat does not appreciate their work because they have to be invisible. In New York, you can see so many illegal immigrant workers at every corner of city, but the eye of law pretends not to recognize their existence because it knows that they are providing the cheap labor to support this city, the flower of capitalism. The eye of law can clearly see only the fact: they do not have the right to make their voices heard as well as to act. Among illegal immigrant laborers, the fact that they do not have any right to do speak and act extends to the pessimism that they are not able to mobilize by themselves and in their own interests. They simply deserve indifference and disrespect from the society, which they support from the bottom, bearing a heavy legal burden of invisibility that has depoliticized them.

However, the multitude that congregated, demonstrated and took over the New York streets today, on Mayday, just as they did last April 10th, has been an expression of a social and political energy that deserves our attention in different respects. First, it has shown that it is not true that the people are not able to organize and mobilize by themselves and in their own interest. If that were true, something has been missing in these demonstrations: a unitary leadership that would function as the charismatic impulse of the movement. But the lack of charismatic leadership has actually made this movement even stronger because there is not a person or elite with whom the government can negotiate and compromise. Any compromise, under these circumstances, has to respond to the claims of the public, the real public. The really paradoxical fact is that the massive organization and mobilization were actually provoked by Bill HR4437, which was not actually intended to generate the manifestation of a multitude of annoyed immigrants in the main cities of the USA (annoyed, it is important to make clear, not only by the bill but by the conditions in which they live and work every day in this country).

Second, the representative-ness in liberal political systems, such as the USA, has been challenged, because whereas the citizens assume that they are represented in the House of Representatives and the Senate, those who have entered this country without legal permission have remained politically and legally unseen, dis-appeared. With these demonstrations on the streets they show themselves as a true part of the public of this country; they show that the public is not constrained to the elective citizens but to all those who have somehow benefited or have been harmed by the legal measures and decision that representatives make. This other public, of illegal immigrants, pays taxes without being entitled to political rights, which was actually the main claim the 13 original colonies made to Great Britain at the end of the 18th century and that ended up in the Declaration of Independence of the United States. The public, in a more general sense, emerges with the appearance of those who manifest their agreement or

disagreement with policies enacted by a government that not only does not represent them but also attempts to repress it. In New York we will see, however, on one side, Mayor Michael Bloomberg (R), Governor George Pataki (R), and Senator Hilary Clinton (D), and, on the other side, the worker's central organization AFL-CIO, efforts to make these demonstrations part of their own political discourses and resources. This will entail trying to align the interests of this other public with their own electoral interests.

Finally, but probably more important and certainly the more exciting was to see people of different national origins, all ages, and all economic backgrounds, not just taking over the streets as a united multitude, but also conscious of the objective of being there, in the streets, making themselves seen and heard. Everybody there seemed to recognize the cause and the desired effect that was the source of the gathering mobilization. The written expressions in large signs of all kind indicated the solidarity of everyone with one cause and goal. Although I remember listening francophone expressions as "we want papiers," it melted, at the end, under the majoritary shouts in Spanish: "si se puede" ("it can be done"), "El pueblo unido, jamas sera vencido" ("the people together, will never be defeated"), the "Escucha Bush, el pueblo esta en la lucha" ("Listen Bush, the people is in the fight"), and "se ve, se siente, el pueblo esta presente" ("you can see, and feel, the people is present"). Mexicans were the majority Hispanic group, but there were also important numbers of Ecuadorians, Salvadorians, Nicaraguans, Argentineans, and Dominicans among others, showing, by carrying their own flags along with the American one, that the government of this country has to assume its responsibility towards the people who have been a vital organ in the economy and have been kept under the legal and political rug. That was the great moment people showed their aspiration for the self-constitution of their rights.

The great spirit of the US constitution is "We, the People". The people on the street today were shouting the same great spirit, "We, the People". "We, the people" working at and for this country. On the same street, many US citizens, also descendents of immigrants, were welcoming them by shouting and applauding together. These citizens were shouting that all the immigrants are not 'them' but 'us.' That was the moment that people included the 'other' as 'us.' Thus "We, the Immigrant People."

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