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Why Our Union Members Will Be Out in the Streets on May 1st

By Olga Miranda and Tim Paulson

Union members and immigrant rights activists will be marching and rallying in the streets of San Francisco on May 1st – a Day Without Immigrants – because we refuse to be pushed back into the darkness. We refuse to accept the threats to our immigrant children, including those who qualified for Deferred Action, or DACA.

We want to show this country what it would be like if there weren't any immigrants left: Who's going to take care of their children, or pick their vegetables, or take out their trash in the office buildings where they work, or make the beautiful beds in their hotel rooms?

We want them to know what it would be like if those hands that serve them on a daily basis were no longer there.

We want to celebrate immigrants on May 1st, also known as International Workers Day, or May Day. We want to make sure that our immigrant union members, and our immigrant community as a whole, know they need to stand tall. We're workers, we're mothers and fathers, sons and daughters. We want to be able to show our children the example that our parents gave to us to stand tall and proud.

That is why we will be marching at 12 noon from the Embarcadero to Civic Center, where we will have all our marchers break through a symbolic Wall – because at least for San Francisco, we have no wall; we have a Sanctuary City.

Having said that, our city has been under threat from Trump, even before he was elected.

It is important for people to understand that whatever their opinions may be of Mayor Ed Lee, or City Attorney Dennis Herrera, or the Board of Supervisors, when it comes to the issue of immigration and the protection of our Sanctuary City, these elected officials have not wavered in their protection of immigrants in San Francisco.

The tenacity of the pro-immigrant rights organizations has held this mayor, this city attorney, and this Board of Supervisors accountable on this issue. It's what's steeled the Board to pass resolutions ensuring the continued existence of our Sanctuary City.

We also have to explain to people across the country, many of whom have been critical of San Francisco for protecting its immigrant community, that you cannot judge everyone on the basis of one person's mistakes, however serious and tragic.

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Without a doubt, San Francisco has been a beacon. It has set the standard for other cities across the country. We're fortunate to live in a city with an active immigrant rights movement, with trade unions willing to mobilize their members to defend their immigrant sisters and brothers, and with elected officials who have made it possible for immigrant families not to live in fear.

When our Muslim sisters and brothers came under attack from Trump's Executive Order on the travel ban, hundreds of thousands of people across the country understood and readily heeded their cry for help. United, labor and community, took to the streets and to our airports to protest the ban. And we succeeded in pushing back the forces of darkness.

Some of our unions -- such as SEIU Local 87 -- will be taking a May Day Solidarity Action Vote. They will be insisting that none of their employers retaliate against janitors who decide not to go to work on that day. ILWU Local 10 will be shutting down the Bay Area ports on May Day. Dozens of other San Francisco Labor Council affiliates, from SEIU-USWW, to Teamsters Locals 856 and 265, to IFPTE 21, to UESF and AFT 2121, among others, will be mobilizing in the main march and in other actions held throughout the day.

Unite Here Local 2, the hotel and restaurant workers' union, sent a letter to hotel general managers asking them to be flexible with any worker who may want to leave their jobs on May 1st to join the protests. The union also warned that if any hotel were to make the unfortunate choice to discipline its members, the union would absolutely defend them against any such action. Likewise, the San Francisco Labor Council adopted a statement urging "No Retaliation" against any worker -- union or non-union -- who chooses to exercise his/her civil rights on May 1st.

But the best defense of our immigrant sisters and brothers, and of those union members who are putting their jobs on the line to ensure that San Francisco remains a Sanctuary City, is a huge turnout on Monday, May 1st. We call on all citizens of good will to join us in the streets of San Francisco on May Day to demand: Defend our Sanctuary City, Not One More Deportation, No Bans, No Wall!

(Olga Miranda is the president of SEIU Local 87, which represents janitors in San Francisco's downtown office buildings. Tim Paulson is the executive director of the San Francisco Labor Council.)