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USA

Million march for immigrants rights in Los Angeles

- News from around the world -

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The Los Angeles Times say half a million. People in the crowd were saying that the police estimate was a million. Whichever it was, and, of course, it wasn't possible to make a count, this was clearly the largest protest of any kind in the history of Los Angeles. It was spectacular and it was inspiring to be present. The L.A. Times captured something very central:

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/LAimm-demo2.jpg>]

"The marchers included both longtime residents and the newly arrived, bound by a desire for a better life and a love for this county."

Thus we saw none of the "anti-patriotism" which we often see at anti-war marches. No one thought to burn the American flag, but rather it was carried, both as a way of expressing a pride, and a hoped-for pride, as well as a way of seeking protection by carrying the flag.

Here are a few notes and personal observations on what I saw at the march.

The composition was overwhelmingly, probably higher than 95% or 98% Latino. I doubt I saw fifty people that I knew during the course of the day, quite different from last weekend's anti-war march of five thousand where there were many familiar faces. These were newly organized, educated, mobilized and motivated people. One look at the closing and the faces and this was obvious, if the raw numbers didn't tell the story. Many people carried Mexican flags. Smaller numbers carried Venezuelan, Colombian, Nicaraguan or Salvadoran flags. But if anything, there were more American (i.s. US) flags than those of any other nationality. There were organized groups which provided excellent printed signs, from ANSWER, IAC, the Latino Movement, USA and various others. Few found their ways to the ground at the end of the march.

People must have kept them for souvenirs and to be used at future marches. This is a population, a community, a people, or more accurately a series of peoples who are being politicalized as they watch the threat to their lives and ability to work from rampant racism, particularly in the media. A truck from FOX NEWS, among the most virulent of these, was surrounded and booed vigorously at one point toward the end of the march, immediately adjacent to city hall where the speeches (which I never heard) were scheduled to have been.

Some of the hand-made signs I saw were ones saying things like: I'm a Mexican, not a terrorist. California needs us to put the vegetables and fruit on its tables. I'm Illegal: Where's my cell (this was carried by a mother pushing her baby in a carriage). Some people carried large crucifixes. The U.S. is made of immigrants. One sign (and there had to have been others) showed dead U.S. soldiers from Iraq, in uniform. One way some undocumented individuals have qualified for citizenship was by volunteering for the military. (They qualify for U.S. citizenship if they are killed in combat.) Participants ranged from the aged and infirm in wheelchairs to babies in their carriages.

Trade unions, churches and other community organizations clearly pulled out the stops for this mobilization. Beyond the local Pacifica affiliate, KPFK, which has daily Spanish programming and which helped bring out the crowd, I was struck by the role of the principal Spanish-language local daily, LA OPINION, the largest Spanish-language newspaper published in the United States. There had been school walkouts the previous day and mass marches in Denver, Colorado and other cities.

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The Saturday edition of LA OPINION featured a lead editorial calling on its readers to come out for the march. It's a shame they don't have a PDF of the front page since you cannot see that online and thus cannot get an idea of how powerful the paper's appeal had to have been. I'll have to describe it to you. LA OPINION is a full-sized six-column daily paper. The banner headline was "A LAS CALLES! (To the streets!) and featured photographs of the school walkouts in Los Angeles, the 20,000 in Phoenix, also in Atlanta, Cleveland and Kansas City. These were smaller photos. Then a photo showing a sea of people took up perhaps a quarter of the entire front page showing the Phoenix march, a sea of humanity. To the left of this was a diagram with the march route and where the buses parked. This was strikingly reminiscent of the way people are mobilized in Cuba where a banner head indicating the purpose and directions for the march are clearly indicated. To the lower right side, under the fold, was a photo of Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez kissing the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice under a headline "Mexican optimism". Above the banner TO THE STREETS! was small and narrow story about the Mexican president Vicente Fox saying he's looking toward an accord with the U.S. about immigration.

I never heard any of the speeches. In Los Angeles the normal mode of transportation, for those who can afford it, is the automobile, but we're learning now to get around using public transportation, which is what I used to get to the march yesterday.