

# Democratic Socialists of America

## Breathing While Brown

### Call for a DSA Response to Arizona's Anti-Latino Crusade

**S**B 1070, the recently passed Arizona law that requires police to demand an individual show immigration papers if there is a “reasonable suspicion” that he or she may be an undocumented immigrant, brings to mind the famous quip by the writer Anatole France: “the law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.”

Theoretically, SB 1070 applies equally to everyone in Arizona, and its defenders insist that it will not result in racial profiling. But we all know which people will be the only ones subject to the “reasonable suspicion” of law enforcement - all Latinos present in Arizona, regardless of their immigration status (and many first nations people who live far from Arizona have already been pulled over for being brown, in places like Minnesota). The law not only criminalizes undocumented immigrants found living in the state, but also legal non-citizens and even tourists who may be unable to produce a green card or passport if asked by the police. Anyone in Arizona who has brown skin and dark hair or speaks accented or imperfect English is now a suspect in the eyes of the law, creating a legal regime hauntingly similar to the Pass Laws of South African apartheid or the Black Codes of the old South. Arizona is now the only state in the U.S. where one could be hauled off to jail simply for the crime of Breathing While Brown – but other states may soon join on.

Any claim that SB 1070 is not explicitly targeted at Latinos was further undermined by the passage less than a month later of another state law that aims to ban the teaching of ethnic studies in the state's public schools. Under the law, any school district that offered classes promoting “ethnic chauvinism” would lose ten percent of its state funding. The primary target of the law is the Tucson school system,

where over half of the students are Latino and which offers courses in Mexican-American history and literature. According to the law's proponents, these courses promote hostility toward whites and the U.S. generally. This law is yet another indication of the level of anti-Latino sentiment in the state – and may

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soon be followed by yet another, more misogynist one, which would violate the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment and deny citizenship to babies born to migrant women on U.S. soil. Some cry “I don't want my tax dollars paying for illegal aliens” but we remind the reader that with the U.S.'s aging population, now is not the time to be turning back young people who could become productive citizen workers contributing to our social security.

Another claim is that the law is merely a response to Federal inaction in the face of the “immigration problem”, but we contend that there is no such thing as an immigration problem. To quote DSA member Steve Max,

“There is a labor problem, a worker problem, a jobs and wages problem. There is nothing that is being said about immigrant workers today that wasn't being said about native-born American workers until only a few decades ago. ‘Black people coming up from the South will take your job.’ ‘Okies will take your job.’ ‘Hillbillies will come to Cincinnati and take your job.’ Does anyone remember, ‘Women will take your job’? That was what the right-wing said.”

The reality is that there are two very powerful forces at work that are seldom talked about. One is the pull

of employers who prefer easily exploitable workers to militant ones who fight for unionization. Our low wage, low skilled economy allows bosses to undercut conditions for American workers and the solution is not a guest worker program that will make workers yet more dependent on their employer, nor is it more workplace enforcement from Immigration (ICE) officials that make it easier to threaten workers with deportation. Given that Obama has increased the rate of deportations since he took office, this is a powerful motivator for workers to stay silent. The other factor is the push of unbearable economic conditions in migrants' home countries, very often the direct result of U.S. free trade policies like NAFTA. These policies allow US corporations, whether industrial agriculture or service or retail like Wal-Mart, to push down working conditions and drive small scale farmers and producers out of business. Mexican peasants call NAFTA their "death warrant" and are forced to migrate for survival. Once here, they face hostile American workers who are rightfully concerned about their own economic conditions.

How can Democratic Socialists of America and Young Democratic Socialists respond to these pernicious developments? Many cities, including Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Denver, St. Paul, and Boston have implemented economic boycotts of Arizona and have banned their employees from

traveling there on business. The All Star Game is scheduled to be in Arizona next year and activists are already petitioning and protesting in many cities to pressure Major League Baseball to relocate. In Arizona, city councils in Tucson and Flagstaff have voted to sue the state over SB 1070. And protests in solidarity with Arizona's Latinos have sprung up spontaneously in towns and cities across the country, often tied to other immigrant rights demands such as passage of the DREAM Act and a moratorium on ICE raids and deportations. These kinds of actions offer the best opportunity for forcing Arizona to repeal these measures and Congress and President Obama to move in the direction of more humane immigration laws. DSA locals and YDS chapters can work in their own communities to expand these struggles to the point where decision makers will have no choice but to respond.

We must have a strong response to this moral and political outrage. National polls seem to indicate that the Arizona law is popular, but with education about the structural, economic problems which are pressuring both American and migrant workers, we can make progress. We should not let Arizona's actions pass without a principled and strategic response that will grow our membership and build relationships with Latino and immigrant rights activists around the country.

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