



◆ SIEMBRA ◆

A Newsletter for Farmworker Friends and Advocates

Spring 2006

¿Qué Queremos? ¡Justicia! History in the Making: Immigrants March in Unity and Struggle for Justice Vanessa Cardinale



On May 1, 2006 in hundreds of towns and cities around the country, millions of immigrants marched in historic numbers in **The Day without an Immigrant**. Immigrants took the day off from work and refused to spend money to demonstrate their contribution to the local and national economy. In Bridgeton, New Jersey, CATA's local committee organized a march with area residents to demonstrate their presence in the community and to demand a just immigrant reform policy. An estimated 1,500 Bridgeton area residents participated in the march.

After the march in Bridgeton, almost 100 participants traveled to May's Landing later in the day to join a rally outside of New Jersey Congressman Frank LoBiondo's office and to also present a letter written and signed by members of the immigrant community in Bridgeton. The letter further explains the sentiment that is motivating a previously invisible population to join together to speak out and demand justice. One section reads: *"Mr. LoBiondo...we are people who value family unity and who strive to work for the well-being of our families and our communities, both in Mexico and here."* The letter goes on to state the mutual need and interconnectedness that immigrants and citizens of the United States have with each other.

(article continues on page 3)

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***CATA is a non-profit,
migrant farmworker
organization governed by
and comprised of
farmworkers who are
actively engaged in the
struggle for better working
and living conditions.***

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Editorial

Vanessa Cardinale

As this edition of *Siembra* goes to print, the United States is in the midst of a national debate over a comprehensive immigration reform bill that will affect the lives of over 11 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the United States. In addition, the economic, social and political situations abroad will force many to decide whether to risk their lives to enter the United States to live and work.

Regionally, a movement has formed to promote just immigration reform, bringing together various immigrant groups representing diverse sectors and interests. Within this movement, CATA has promoted the participation of its leadership to be spokespersons in bringing the interests and concerns of low-income immigrant workers into the discussion.

This current climate is one that presents many challenges to undocumented workers living in the United States. However, these challenges offer opportunities to educate and organize within the immigrant and farmworker community. At the 2005 Annual Assembly, CATA's membership prioritized the need for the organization to develop the their capacity to make informed decisions to speak and act on their own behalf. CATA's approach to this task has been through deepening our long-term commitment to leadership development within the community using the basic steps of Popular Education methodology, "to see, to judge, to act."

In this edition of *Siembra*, you will read about the ways in which CATA members have been mobilizing and organizing to address issues in their local communities. You will read about our leadership and participation at the state and national levels to raise the minimum wage and work for a just immigration reform proposal. Finally, internationally we are involved in the United Nations and Social Justice labeling project to bring immigrant worker's voices into these spaces.



CATA's Board of Directors 2005-2007



Kennett Square residents rally on May 1st in Nixon Park

(Cover article continued from page 1)

Simultaneously, in Kennett Square, PA, CATA members and supporters living in Pennsylvania and Delaware showed their strength and unity by marching with an estimated 400 people in an event that closed part of State Street. This was a higher turnout than expected with workers taking the day off in about half of the mushroom companies in the Kennett area. In addition to marching for immigration reform, participants demonstrated their pride of being workers and contributors for their families, communities, both in the U.S. and Mexico, and to the larger economy.

Such overwhelming turnouts speak to the strong opposition in the immigrant community to the repressive and unjust legislation in the House: H.R. 4437, also known as the Sesenbrenner Bill. Passed in the House of Representatives in December 2005, it would make it an aggravated felony to be an undocumented person in the United States, as well as for anyone who serves or employs undocumented workers. In addition, the Sesenbrenner Bill would dramatically increase spending to further militarize the Mexico – U.S. Border.

Since December 2005, CATA members have been organizing and rallying to promote immigration reform that would create a path to legalization for undocumented workers. Claudio Lopez, resident of Bridgeton and member of the Board or Directors of CATA, explains that the struggle for legalization is about ***“the right to work to provide for your family and travel freely across the border.”***

The events of May 1st are the most recent in a series of events in which CATA has been part of

(article continues on next page)

(continued from page 3)

the planning committee, both in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and mobilized our membership to participate in the Philadelphia event on April 10th, and in Trenton, NJ, on March 20th. In addition, CATA members have been discussing their ideas for immigration reform and developing CATA's position, which advocates a general amnesty for undocumented workers in the United States. This position was shared with the public at the Philadelphia rally on April 10th by members of CATA's Board of Directors. Ana Maria Vasquez, Board treasurer, presented CATA's statement, alongside four other board members.

Prior to the rally, Community Organizing Campaign (CYOC) and CATA organized a march through Chinatown. Over 700 marchers consisting of Asian youth and CATA's membership from Pennsylvania and New Jersey flowed through the streets on their way to Love Park in a show of solidarity for our common immigrant rights struggle.

In the past, rumors of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in the region have paralyzed communities and caused undocumented workers to stay home. But the feeling in the streets of Bridgeton and in Kennett Square on May 1st was not one of fear but of one commitment to a larger struggle of human rights and respect. One of the chants heard often throughout the street in Bridgeton was, "**¡El Pueblo, callado, jamás será escuchado!**" **The people silenced will never be heard!**

We are asking all our supporters to write and call their elected representatives to tell them you support an immigration reform proposal that gives all undocumented workers a path to legalization.



Mariza Ibarra, member of CATA's Board of Directors, congratulates Bridgeton marchers in their arrival to the city park and asks them to voice their concerns and opinions by finishing the statement "I want to be legalized so that..." on a banner to present to New Jersey Congressman Frank LoBlondo.

Community Organizing in New Jersey: CATA Members Act Locally

José Manuel Guzmán and Jessica Culley

As the topic of immigration continues to be discussed in the news and on the streets, CATA has found a growing interest in the immigrant community to organize and take action, both in their local communities and on the national level. In the past few months, CATA has played a key role in forming two local organizing committees in Bridgeton and Penns Grove, New Jersey. Members of CATA's Board of Directors who live in Bridgeton and Penns Grove have been critical in providing leadership within these local committees.



Bridgeton residents meet to discuss issues facing them in the community.

Bridgeton

At the beginning of 2006, local police in Bridgeton conducted vehicle checkpoints during several days to verify drivers' licenses and vehicle registrations and insurance. As a result of these checkpoints, approximately 200 cars were confiscated, largely affecting members of the immigrant community.

In New Jersey, in order to register your car and obtain a drivers' license within the state, you must provide a Social Security card and immigrants must show proof of legal status. In the southern part of the state, public transportation is limited. Therefore, this has meant that many immigrants have bought cars and registered them in other states, mainly Pennsylvania, where they can use their Mexican drivers' license.

The local Bridgeton committee emerges from a general effort in New Jersey to gather signatures for a state proposal that, if approved, would qualify undocumented immigrants for a drivers' certificate. This is an alternative drivers' license that would not serve as identification, but would allow drivers to register their cars in New Jersey, acquire insurance, and be tested in order to drive. CATA members collected more than 1,200 signatures in support of this proposal. From this effort, many workers in the Bridgeton area contacted CATA about the police checkpoints, and came together to meet and discuss the situation. The committee requested a meeting with the local Chief of Police, Jeffrey Wentz. They met on February 18, 2006 and began to establish a relationship and create trust between the immigrant community and the local police department. The committee members felt a sense of achievement by meeting with the police and that the police listened to their concerns. The Chief of Police suggested holding a class to educate the Latino community about New Jersey transit laws, and agreed to meet again with the committee. This was an important first step and CATA continues to work with the local immigrant community on this issue.

(article continues on page 9)



Kaolin Workers Union: A Time of Growth and Transition

Krista Zabor

Union President Efren Diego talks with members of the KWU at a meeting.

This past year has been one of transition and growth for the Kaolin Workers Union (KWU). After signing their second contract with the company in 2004, the Union started to collect dues in order to build their resources and collective power. As a result, they were able to hire a full-time business agent for the Union - Serafina Youndahl Lombardi.

The Union has worked to overcome many challenges as they continue to deal with such issues as pressure to overfill mushroom containers, undocumented workers' fears of participating in union activities, problems with supervisors, an unrealistic quality assurance program, and problems surrounding workers' compensation. In light of these struggles, Union members are working to maintain high energy with an extremely busy workforce. The active participation of the leadership is the glue that keeps the Union functioning.

Along with the challenges there have also been successes. The Union won a discrimination grievance raised from a group that was predominately women. These workers complained that a supervisor was denying them access to pick in a mushroom house because they were women and his crew of male workers was present. In response to this action, all the women (and men) who were denied access signed a grievance. This resulted in a meeting the next day between all the signers and management during which the supervisor apologized and granted the workers access to work in the mushroom house where they had previously been denied. This sent a strong message to the workers, particularly the women, about the power of collective action as a tool for positive change. This is a theme that is stressed in all of CATA's capacity building trainings it provides to its staff, farmworker membership, and Union leaders.

The Union is also in the initial stages of forming a health and safety committee within the Union. It is collaborating with PhilaPOSH (Philadelphia Area Project on Occupational Safety and Health) along with support from CATA and the Farmworker Health and Safety Institute. Workers have identified various health and safety concerns, particularly related to the use of chemicals at the worksite.

These accomplishments during the past year are clear examples of the positive changes that are occurring as the Union continues to grow. The Kaolin Workers Union has been a model for immigrant workers and their struggle has taught all of us about the importance of creating your own union in order to fight for labor rights.

The Struggle to Raise the Minimum Wage in Pennsylvania Continues

Krista Zabor

Over a year ago, CATA joined a statewide coalition of labor and community-based organizations in a campaign to raise the minimum wage in Pennsylvania from \$5.15 to \$7.15/hour. The coalition has planned several rallies to call attention to this issue. There is a dire need to take action at the state level due to the lack of commitment to raise the minimum wage at a federal level. Approximately 850,000 workers from Pennsylvania (17% of workers in the state) would benefit from a raise in the minimum wage. Someone working a full-time minimum wage job would earn \$4,000 more per year as a result. 510,000 workers would benefit directly and another 350,000 workers who are making less than \$8.15 would likely see an increase in their salaries as well. In addition, women, who make up 61% of the workforce, would benefit from this proposal as well as many of CATA's members (statistics from Philadelphia Raise the Minimum Wage Coalition).

An overwhelming majority of the public supports an increase in the minimum wage, yet Pennsylvania has been slow to take action even after a year-long campaign by a statewide coalition. The good news is that House Bill 257 has finally passed in the Pennsylvania House calling for an increase in the minimum wage to \$6.25/hour by this July, and to \$7.15/hour by July 2007. Now the question is when will the Pennsylvania Senate take up the issue. Republican leadership has continued to resist bringing this bill to a vote, but hopefully with increasing public outcry it will become a pressing issue for the Senate.

We need to value our workforce regardless of whether that work requires special skills or education. Every worker deserves more than \$5.15 an hour. With the rising cost of living, the value of the minimum wage is at its lowest in almost forty years. It is outrageous that this country denies paying workers enough to live with dignity. Let's raise the minimum wage!



CATA participates in Harrisburg rally with coalition members to raise the minimum wage.

CATA's Participation in the United Nations:

An Interview with Two Members of the Board of Directors

Richard Mandelbaum



UNITED NATIONS
PLANET EARTH - SOL SYSTEM

For the last two years, CATA has been participating in the United Nations (UN) as a non-governmental organization (NGO). This year, CATA became a member of the CONGO Committee on Human Rights (CONGO is the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations), and more specifically has been participating in the CONGO Sub-Committee on the Human Rights of Immigrants and Refugees. As a part of this group, CATA collaborated in the planning of a workshop, *"Affirming the Human Rights of Women Migrants: Legal and Social Challenges,"* during the Commission on the Status of Women at the end of February 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Although there are various organizations that support migrant workers, CATA is one of the few grassroots organizations that represents migrants within the UN system. For this reason, the organization plays an important role in bringing the voice of migrants to the agencies of the UN and the world's governments.

Two of the most important focal points for our work in 2006 are to participate in the creation of the new Human Rights Council, which will replace the existing Human Rights Commission. We will also participate in the preparation process for the General Assembly in September, which for the first time will focus on the theme of world migration. As part of this work, CATA has been asked to join a Task Force to organize Interactive Hearings with Civil Society leading up to the General Assembly's *High Level Dialogue on Migration*. The Hearings are scheduled for July 2006.

Two members of CATA who have participated at the United Nations are **Carlos Diaz**, President, and **Zenon Perez**, Secretary of the organization's Board of Directors. Recently I spoke with them to ask, **"What do you see as the importance of the work CATA is doing at the United Nations?"**

According to Zenon, one of the principal reasons is to show the world the injustices that occur in this country. **"We would like the United States to acknowledge that injustice does not only occur in poor countries, but that in the United States, which is supposedly a free and democratic country, there is injustice and poverty as well. The migrant community wants the United States to focus on immigration and the rights of migrants."**

For Carlos, one of the greatest benefits of our work at the UN is the relationships we establish with other grassroots organizations in communities around the world. He talked about **"the importance of developing trust with other peoples – to achieve a relationship of trust and respect: me to you, and you to me. If we share with one another and achieve a friendship, talk with each other about our experiences and struggles, we can learn from people from**

(article continues on next page)

(U.N article continued from page 8)

other countries. This is a success for the organization.” Carlos also related his experience in the UN with his experience in the Kaolin Workers’ Union, **“At times, we don’t value what we have at hand. It gives me satisfaction to know that we are not alone.”**

We also talked about CATA’s participation in the *United Nations Forum on Forests*, in which we are bringing to the table the relationship between the destruction of the environment and migration. If people can no longer live from the natural resources of their lands, they become obligated to leave in order to search for work in other places.

Something that has deeply moved both Carlos and Zenon is that the destruction of the environment, such as the unsustainable clear-cutting of the forest, is happening all over the world. **“What has caught my attention,”** said Carlos, **“is that you never hear about the destruction happening in other countries. There is a pyramid of environmental destruction – for example, if there is no vegetation, there will be no rain. Organizing is the key, a platform from which to begin to resolve these problems.”**

“It is a general issue,” according to Zenon, **“and not only in Latin America or North America. Taking care of the forests is a question of conscience for the entire world.”** There are also grave consequences for poor people because of this destruction, **“for example, countries in Asia where recently there have been landslides, because there is no natural control of the earth. We have disregarded it so completely... to be able to achieve a positive change, we have to integrate ourselves into a large-scale campaign such as that of the United Nations.”**

(New Jersey article continued from page 5)

CATA has also channeled this energy and leadership, resulting in the Bridgeton committee playing a more active role in mobilizing community participation for the recent demonstrations and marches around the demand for immigration reform. (see cover article)



Penns Grove

Several of the leaders in Penns Grove had been participating in the Bridgeton meetings and as a result they decided to form their own local committee and involve more people from Penns Grove to address local issues.

The committee first met in March 2006 where the community identified various issues of concern. Poor housing, environmental contamination, discrimination in the local hospital and the schools were concerns the group wanted to address. However, the most pressing issue was problems with the local police. The police had been ticketing and towing parked cars at night for not having New Jersey tags and registration.

On April 8, 2006, the Penns Grove committee met with Mayor John Washington to discuss their concerns. He was unaware that the reason for the Pennsylvania license plates in town was due to the fact that undocumented residents could not register and insure their cars in New Jersey. He was very receptive to investigating how the city could deal with the situation and committed to putting a freeze on the ticketing until a decision could be made.

In both Bridgeton and Penns Grove, CATA has worked to create a space where community members can come together to discuss issues facing them and work together to respond and take action. CATA’s capacity and leadership development work is having concrete results as the immigrant community is becoming active in both local and national matters.

Social Justice Labeling: Connecting Fair Labor and Organic Standards in Agriculture

Richard Mandelbaum

For the past six years, CATA has been developing and promoting social justice standards for inclusion in organic and sustainable agriculture. This year the social justice label project – officially the *Agricultural Justice Project* - is set to enter the implementation stage. CATA along with our project partners - which include Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), Peacework Organic Farm, and Quality Certification Services (QCS, an organic certifying agency) – is piloting the standards on several farms during the 2006 growing season.

All four farms are certified organic operations – one is located in California, one in Wisconsin, and two in Michigan. The crops grown on these farms range from strawberries to cherries to mixed vegetables, and although the farms vary in size, all employ migrant workers (some in addition to the farm family labor). One farm already has a unionized workforce, and the other three have pledged to respect workers' rights, including the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining.

CATA's involvement will ensure that workers are fully participating in the pilot project by helping to draft implementation procedures, conduct site-visits as part of a team to evaluate the reality on the ground on the pilot farms, and convene larger stakeholder meetings of organizations promoting domestic fair trade and social justice in organic agriculture. CATA and its partners have also been participating in the Domestic Fair Trade Working Group – a diverse group including Organic Valley, the nation's largest organic farmers' cooperative and Equal Exchange, a fair trade organization.

Internationally, a successful pilot with documented results would have a major impact on the progress of social justice standards development. For instance, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements will be holding its next World Congress in Italy in 2008, where for the first time the theme of Fair Trade and Organic will be fully addressed, providing an important opportunity for those few projects like ours to share results and influence future steps.



In order to guide its participation in the project, CATA convened a working group in 2005 of some of its most active and interested farmworker members, including three members of CATA's Board of Directors. The purpose of the farmworker working group is to evaluate progress, develop positions on any outstanding or contentious issues, and to guide staff in the implementation of the program.

You can find background information on the project, CATA's social justice standards, and other documents and links at CATA's website, under "Fair Labor Standards and the Organic Industry" at www.cata-farmworkers.org.

Welcome!

CATA wishes to welcome **Vanessa Cardinale** as our newest staff member. Originally from Connecticut and a graduate of St. Joseph's University, Vanessa has a strong desire to work on social justice issues and was hired last winter as a CATA organizer. Prior to this, Vanessa worked for the Farmworker Health and Safety Institute (FHSI) where she worked closely with CATA on several projects. She also lived and worked in El Salvador for two years with CRIPDES, an association of organized rural communities. She is currently the board co-president of U.S. El Salvador Sister Cities. She brings to CATA the experiences and skills developed while in El Salvador and at FHSI, which compliment the organizing work she is currently involved with at CATA. We feel very fortunate to include her as part of CATA's team as the farmworker community struggles for social, economic and environmental justice.



Host a CATA presentation



Would you be interested in hosting a presentation at your church, union or community meeting about issues affecting farm or immigrant workers? CATA staff and members would love to come to show a video ("Los Trabajadores" or "Pesticides: From the Fields to Your Table") and facilitate a time of dialogue.

Los Trabajadores, *The Workers*, was produced in 2001-2003. Planned, filmed, and edited by a team of farmworkers, volunteers, and staff, **Los Trabajadores** tells the story of farmworkers, the reasons and conditions that move them to travel to the U.S.A. and the types of conditions that they confront in the workplace. Lastly, it tells the story of CATA, and the role that workers' organizing efforts play in creating lasting changes in the community.

Pesticides: From the Fields to Your Table was produced in 2004 by the Farmworker Health and Safety Institute. The documentary takes a look at the reality of farmworkers in this country and their exposure to pesticides as they plant, tend to, and harvest the food that we eat. We see an intimate connection between farmworkers' health and safety and the well-being of consumers regarding the use of pesticides in food production.

If you are interested, please call Vanessa Cardinale at 856-881-2507 or by email at catavc@aol.com.



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