

Workers unite for May Day event, celebrate recent non-passage of right-to-work ordinance

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
Friday, 04 May 2018 07:57



Working class citizens and their supporters gathered at the Gallup Cultural Center to celebrate International Workers Day during the evening hours of May 1.

Community organizer Elsa Lopez of Somos Gallup, the Gallup chapter of a statewide community organization promoting worker and racial justice, led the marchers from the train station to the county courtyard.

A banner that read, “SOMOS GALLUP,” including Aztec designs, was front and center, guiding participants through downtown via Coal and Aztec avenues before ending at the courtyard.

“We have eight affiliate groups all over the state and today, we’re celebrating with at least four affiliate groups to commemorate International Workers Day,” Lopez said.

She said the purpose of the day is to celebrate, honor and recognize the contribution of workers across the globe.

“We’re very excited to be joining thousands of people from all over the world,” she said.

Somos Un Pueblo Unido, the full name of the statewide workers and social justice organization,

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was formed in 1995.

The organization is focused on building a community that does not discriminate against people based on their national origin.

Marching through downtown, the group repeated various chants in Spanish and English, including: "Who's got the power? We got the power! What kind of power? Worker power!"

Mayor Jackie McKinney and the Gallup City Council presented a proclamation to Somos Gallup on April 24 before the start of the regular meeting.

It proclaimed that May 1, 2018 would be recognized by the city as International Workers Day.

According to Somos Gallup, one in four immigrant workers in New Mexico is a victim of wage theft and only one in 10 victims report it. The organization protects the rights of workers.

Earlier that same the day, the McKinley County Commission did not approve the-right-to work initiative that would limit the union role in the workplace.

"Workers are standing up here. Enough is enough. We depend on (living) paycheck-to-paycheck," Lopez said. "When one worker is cheated, all of us are cheated."

Anna Rondon of the New Mexico Social Justice and Equity Institute said she was marching and celebrating solidarity with international workers around the world.

"For us here, we're celebrating the unification of the Latino and Navajo workers that united on issues of wage theft and discrimination," she said.

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The march and rally was for community advocacy and education on available public resources from the McKinley Worker Justice Coalition.

“We’re here and we want people to know that wage theft is an issue in Gallup. People work hard for low pay,” Rondon said.

Three workers expressed the need for decent wages and humane treatment at the workplace so they can provide for their families.

Lucy Martinez arrived at the rally dressed in a maid uniform.

“We’re hardworking families,” Martinez said. “We deserve good treatment from our employers.”

Josephina Morello, another woman at the rally, expressed appreciation for the cause and Somos’ efforts.

“I’m very excited for the proclamation and to be recognized for our hard work,” she said.

One man reported that Indians and Mexicans work equally hard.

Francisco Morello said workers give 110 percent, but employers do not always appreciate the effort.

“They don’t value us,” Morello said of employers. “A lot of us get accused of dumb things like stealing when things are misplaced. We work to enjoy our life and we want to get the respect we deserve.”

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Kathleen Blackgoat of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees was also participating in the march and she commended the county commissioners for not approving the right-to-work ordinance.

“We want to make our voices heard, to make people aware that a lot of us work in workplaces that are not safe or that may be hostile with unfair treatment and low wages,” she said. “There are people who are willing to stand up for that. That’s the importance of today’s rally.”

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