

Asian activists rally behind immigrant and workers rights

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A rally in front of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building on N.W. Broadway brought together a number of community members and activists of Asian descent, who spoke on behalf of organizations that promote the rights of immigrants and workers.

On June 12, more than 160 workers from the Fresh Del Monte plant were detained for not having proper documentation to work in the United States. The workers, employed by the staffing agency American Staffing Resources, Inc., were using Social Security numbers that belonged to someone else or were made up, according to a press release issued by ICE.

An undercover operation at American Staffing Resources, Inc. and Del Monte began in January. The ICE undercover informant reportedly openly told managers at both Del Monte and American Staffing Resources that he was not legally in the United States and did not have proper identification to work. In an affidavit, he stated that an employee of American Staffing Resources provided him a counterfeit Social Security card, and later provided him with counterfeit Social Security cards and counterfeit resident alien cards for others.

ICE and Social Security agents obtained search warrants to look for evidence of hiring, harboring, and encouraging undocumented workers to live in the United States. Officials also searched for evidence of identity theft, immigration documents fraud, and Social Security fraud.

While a majority of those arrested were of Latino descent, two Filipinos were among the workers arrested during the raids, said Claire Oliveros of the Portland Committee for Human Rights in the



SOLIDARITY. Claire Oliveros (left) of the Portland Committee for Human Rights in the Philippines (PCHRP) spoke at a recent rally in front of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building on N.W. Broadway in Portland. The event brought together a number of community members and activists of Asian descent, who spoke on behalf of organizations that promote the rights of immigrants and workers. At right is Leslie Byster, part of the PCHRP collective. (AR Photo/Maileen Hamto)

Philippines. Filipinos are the third-largest immigrant group in the U.S., with more than 60,000 entering the workforce annually. During the rally, she called upon Filipinos to join a widening coalition seeking comprehensive immigration reform.

"As Filipinos, we come from one of the largest labor-sending countries in the world. We know that the forces that push out the Filipinos from the Philippines are greater than the legislation that is

practically sending Filipinos underground," she said.

Oliveros stated that failure of the federal government to act upon comprehensive immigration reform is creating an "underclass" of workers with no guarantees of "basic" human rights.

Shizuko Hashimoto, a volunteer from the Portland Central American Solidarity Committee of the Immigrant Rights Coalition, remarked that the "raids weren't a coincidence" against the

backdrop of wrangling over immigration reform. "The fight over immigration is all about workers' rights," Hashimoto said.

Portland Mayor Tom Potter's office was represented by Carmen Rubio, community affairs director, who elaborated on the mayor's controversial stand against the raids. On the day of the ICE arrests, Potter issued a statement that declared his anger.

"I certainly understand why federal officials executed criminal warrants against three individuals who stole and sold Social Security numbers. But to go after local workers who are here to support their families while filling the demands of local businesses for their labor is bad policy," the statement read. "In this morning's raid, no Portland police officers participated, and our Crisis Response Team was activated to help families affected."

According to Rubio, the mayor continues to be frustrated by the lack of leadership on the immigration issue at the national level. "These incidents and aftermath have direct and obvious impact on our community, because these people are part of our community," she said.

"The raids have disrupted the equilibrium of our schools and our neighborhoods. The raids have prevented our most vulnerable families from seeking services and help — particularly, reporting crime — for fear of being turned in."

Last week, the U.S. Senate voted to strike down a bill that sought to create a path to a legal status for some 12 million undocumented immigrants.

A number of community and faith-based groups have combined efforts to help families affected by the raids. Information about workers' rights is available on the VOZ website at <www.portlandvoz.org>.