

Santa Cruz Rallies for May Day

Students pound the pavement from the Baytree Quarry Plaza to the Beach Flats in town

Katia Protsenko and Daniel Zarchy
City News Editor and World/National Editor

To the tune of drums, cowbells, car horns, lively chants, and the occasional conch blast, the UC Santa Cruz May Day rally streamed passionately through the streets of Santa Cruz to fight for immigrant and worker rights.

The Movement for Immigrant Rights Alliance (MIRA) Coalition organized the march, which attracted over 100 students who met at Quarry Plaza before walking down Mission Street and congregating by the clock tower at the intersection of Pacific Avenue and Front Street. After uniting with another march that moved along Pacific Avenue, the group finally moved on toward the Beach Flats.

The event began at 1:30 p.m. with student organizers who spoke to the crowd, passed out flyers, and led chants. In an introductory speech, Jason Zepeda, a fourth-year student and member of the MIRA Coalition, rallied the crowd to “continue to build struggles like this.”

Zepeda, whose family immigrated to the United States in the 1970s, stressed the need for UCSC students to be more active in local workers’ rights movements.

“We’re the richest UC, but we’re willing to organize and connect with the local communities,” he said, still energized and breathless from his speech to the protesters.

Following Zepeda, several other students rose and fiercely vocalized their beliefs in response to the excitement of the May Day protest.

Lupe Zamora, a member of the MIRA Coalition, is a third-year student who helped organize the May Day march. Zamora stressed solidarity with correlating social justice and rights movements.

“Santa Cruz is separated,” she said. “There’s everybody else, then the Beach Flats. It’s time to unite in one movement. We have one purpose. One purpose only.”

Among the relatively crowded Quarry Plaza, the UCSC College Republicans’ Treasurer, third-year Jeremy Naves, sat at a table to advertise his organization.

“As long as I don’t get spit on, I’m cool,” Naves remarked, aware of the starkly opposing viewpoints between his organization and the protesters.

Naves was sympathetic to the idea of gathering and protesting, but did not fully agree with what students were fighting for in this instance. The problem is an

“economic and social situation,” across the border, he explained, and people should protest to solve the problems there.

“This seems like a Mexican movement,” Naves commented. “Not an immigration movement.”

As the speakers concluded their rallies for support, the crowd began its descent down the hill. Protestors held up traffic leaving campus, trapping several buses and frustrating drivers.

Students with skulls painted on half their faces served as monitors, keeping marchers out of incoming traffic. The painted side of the face represented the people who lost their lives trying to cross the border—the unpainted side of the face represented those who had survived, and now live to tell their stories.

“I support the movement,” said Steve Stormoen, a fourth-year student and member of Students Against War. “I’m willing to do whatever they think I can do to help.”

As the protestors walked down Bay and onto Mission, they made several stops, yelling chants for social justice, human rights, and freedom in both English and Spanish.

When asked why he was marching, one protestor simply stated, “Because I’m brown.”

Jessica Thrift, carrying a sign citing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo as reminder of broken promises from the American government to Latin Americans, felt that community involvement was the key to immigrant rights.

“I’m in support of better immigration policy,” she said. “I think it’s important for everyone to get involved.”

The crowd stopped on Mission, only yards away from the clock tower, and protested in front of a group of children who gathered at the fences of their school grounds. After quietly observing, many children joined in, jumping and yelling, “Fight the power!”

Mark! Lopez, organizing director of the Student Union Assembly, explained that he was marching because he took issue with conditions leading to immigration, and acknowledged that it was time for a change.

“Shit’s fucked up,” Lopez said. “I don’t agree with a lot of what’s going on, even on the ‘pro-immigration’ side. It’s very ‘pro-America,’ which I don’t agree with.”

He continued, “The way [immigration] existed in this continent pre-European invasion was very different. The way it exists now is because of conditions created by the invasion.”

Union workers march to Veterans Hall for May Day film festival on labor issues

Jose San Mateo
Campus Editor

While thousands of students and Santa Cruz residents rallied for immigrant rights on May Day--marching from the quarry plaza all the way to the beach flats--this group raised glasses of dark lager at The Poet and the Patriot before unfurling their red and black International Workers of the World (IWW) banner and setting out for their own march down Pacific Avenue to the Veterans Hall for the sixth annual Reel Works Film Festival.

Paul Ortiz, a Community Studies Professor at UCSC, an organizer for the event since its inception in 2001. He said that the goal of the event was to give workers a voice.

“In our schools and within the community, we are taught a vision of society where workers pay more and get paid less,” Ortiz said. “We believe that people have the capability to have a voice at the table.”

Ortiz was also excited about the film festival and its relation to the Mayday protests. He said, “People are now stepping up to demand their rights.”

Reel Works, a film festival dedicated to showing films and documentaries that address working class issues, has special significance on May Day, which has become known as an international labor holiday. In recent years, Mayday has become known for nationwide immigration rallies.

This group of 10 to 15 union members was smaller than the one that rolled down Mission Street a couple of hours earlier, but under the late afternoon sun they rallied down the street toward the Veterans Hall, drawing attention with a blend of rally chants and songs accompanied by a guitar.

Sarah Ringler, a member of the Pajaro Valley Teachers Union, enjoyed marching amongst union members and friends on May Day.

“The union has given me the dignity to do my job,” she said. “What I love about this is the community action and getting out.”

Mike Vasser, a retired teacher who served 20 years in union in Scotts Valley, held two picket signs while marching with the group. In 1968, Vasser participated in the Delano Grape strike managed by famous organizers like César Chávez and saw a connection between the union struggle and those of immigrants in the US.

“Unions are pushing for fairness from employers,” Vasser said. “This is about the plight of low wage workers.”

The band of union members brought their small parade to the Veterans Hall in downtown Santa Cruz with the chorus of an industrial workers song written in 1915 called “Solidarity Forever”.

A couple of IWW members hung their banner in the foyer of the Veterans Hall before heading downstairs for the Reel Works Film Festival.

Jeffrey Smedburg, another event organizer, said that the festival was also about educating people on labor history.

“We’ve picked a pretty big goal to teach the general public about workers history,” Smedburg said.

Parts of that labor history are the songs that the IWW members sang on their way to the Veterans Hall. Archie Green, a long time folklorist studying a unique brand of folksongs, which he dubs “laborlore,” spoke about the importance of the IWW songs for the Reel Works film festival.

Green, who is now approaching 90 years, joined the Shipwrights union during World War II and helped build battleships before becoming a scholar and studying the IWW which he refers to as “wobblies”.

Green said that he believes that the songs and workers play a larger role in society.

“Traditions that symbolize worker strength should be treasured,” he said. “Like other folk songs, these ones deal with more philosophical issues.”

Sean Burns, a History of Consciousness PhD candidate, is writing his dissertation about Green and drove him to Santa Cruz for the Reel Works presentation at the Veterans Hall. He said that the songs and the labor lore that Green studies is a form of cultural expression for the working class.

“These songs are a way to allow workers to make sense of their experience,” Burns said. “The contribution that Archie makes is that he highlights how workers make sense of their lives.”

Burns also saw a connection between the May Day immigrant protests and the struggles of the IWW.

“There is a strong link between the wobblies and what was happening with immigrants,” Burns said. “The wobblies shared a vision of dignity for all workers.”

The Reel Works Film Festival is running through May 11, 2007, for a complete schedule of events visit www.reelworks.org