

Right: Marchers gather for a rally at the square in historic downtown Watsonville for speeches and a performance by El Teatro Campesino.

Below: Thousands of protesters walk down Main Street chanting and waving flags. Photos by Daniel Zarchy.



Watsonville Marches with Flying Colors

Daniel Zarchy
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WATSONVILLE—The sky filled with red, white, blue, and green, as hundreds of American and Mexican flags billowed from the crowd. Cheers from demonstrators flooded the streets of Watsonville Monday, May 1 as thousands came out in support of immigrant rights, many pushing strollers and leading their children by the hand. The crowd, estimated by organizers between 5,000-10,000, gained energy until 1 p.m. when it took to the streets, beginning a three and a half mile march through downtown Watsonville.

Victor, a 12-year-old boy supporting his father and friends said, “We’re not criminals. We’re here supporting the immigrants.”

But many say the demonstration in Watsonville was just the tip of the iceberg. José Alvarez, a supporter at the protest, said, “We’re here to voice our rights as human beings and to be part of this historical movement. Not only here in Watsonville but all over America and Mexico. We are calling out for equality and immigrant rights.”

Francisco Rodriguez, a community volunteer, cited the highly controversial HR 4437 bill as one of the major factors in the protest. “[The protest] showed a lot of support and solidarity for comprehensive immigration reform, to allow people to stay legal workers and taxpayers,” he said. “I believe that we showed in a peaceful and nonviolent way that certain components of this bill are very draconian. It is backward

legislation.”

Because Watsonville’s population of 46,000 people is 75 percent Latino, this demographic was ubiquitous at the event.

Even Watsonville residents who did not attend the protest showed their support with an almost constant stream of honking from passing cars, often to the beat of the chants during the march. The most recurrent chant, “Sí, se puede,” or “Yes, we can,” dates back to the days of Cesar Chavez and served as an all-purpose rallying cry in the protest.

Jesus Ponse attended the rally with his wife, Esperanza Montañe, and two daughters. “I’m working to get justice. We, as workers, deserve a better tomorrow,” Ponse said in Spanish.

Montañe and her daughters, six and three years old, are all citizens, out supporting Ponse in his fight to attain documentation.

“I’m here to help my dad,” said six year-old Stacy Ponsa.

Many people who came out to fight for workers’ rights skipped work or called in sick in order to attend the rally. In support of the community, a number of businesses were closed for the day or the weekend, prominently displaying signs in support spelled out in both English and Spanish.

Maran Huren, an English as a Second Language teacher in Santa Cruz, said she came to the Watsonville protests to “show [her] white face. There are white people supporting this too,” Huren said. “We’re all immigrants.”