

United States: A Week of Mass Actions Challenge Trump

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In the nine days from April 22 to May 1 inclusive, there were three important national mobilizations against aspects of the Trump administration's policies.

The March for Science

The first of these, on April 22, was called by scientists and their supporters following Trump's election to counter his attacks on scientific facts and on science itself. Scientists as a group are not known for organizing protests, and their entry into the fray is another example of Trump's "success" in mobilizing many different sectors against him.

In addition to hundreds of scientific, professional and environmental groups, there were some labor unions and non-profits endorsing what organizers hope will be a start to scientists' own resistance.

April 22 is Earth Day, which was begun in 1970 to fight against pollution, and has been observed yearly since, although in recent years these actions were small. The organizers of the March choose this day for their demonstration, which turned it into a massive event.

There were some 100,000 at the March in Washington, D.C. and tens of thousands more in sympathy marches in cities and towns across the country.

Two key aspects that motivated the marchers were the administration's denial of climate change due to greenhouse gasses, and its drastic cuts to scientific research.

There is consensus among 97 percent of scientists who do research in the field that global warming is caused by greenhouse gases, foremost gasses resulting from burning fossil fuels, mainly carbon dioxide, augmented by others such as methane, produced by fracking for that gas and released by melting tundra due to global warming. The other three percent are stooges for big oil, gas and coal.

The administration is making big cuts (billions) to the budgets of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Institutes for Health (NIH). The National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA)'s budget is to be slashed and its research into climate change abandoned.

The EPA itself is now headed by a climate-change denier, whose new policy is to stop all research into climate change and who has expunged all references to it on its web page. The EPA has become the EDA, the Environmental Destruction Agency.

The NIH does basic research on health key to new treatments. Private companies do not like to do much research unless there is guaranteed profit to be made as a result. The government, through NIH, has to step in to fill the gap. One area of NIH research is to develop new drugs. If they are costly enough to be profitable, such discoveries are then patented by drug companies and sold. The NIH is also on the front line in developing vaccines in epidemic emergencies, like Ebola, Zika, and others.

Besides climate change denial, it is useful to look at some other views of President Trump and Vice President Pence. In one of his debates during the primaries, Trump linked vaccines to autism, which has been roundly disproven. Trump proposed a travel ban to and from areas that were affected by Ebola, which public health experts said would make the epidemic worse by hampering relief efforts. He denied that aerosol sprays affect the ozone layer. Pence is a right-wing evangelical Christian who doesn't believe in evolution.

At the rallies scientists countered these and many many more ways scientific facts are being denied and science itself undermined with the explicit or implicit support of the administration.

Peoples Climate March

The issue of climate change, important in the March for Science, was the explicit target of this demonstration a week later, on April 29. This march was called before Trump's election, following climate actions in previous years. But Trump's election transformed it, and the organizers chose this date to coincide with Trump's much-touted 100th day in office.

In the nation's capital that day, which was the hottest day for April 29 on record for Washington, up to 200,000 gathered. There were sister actions in hundreds of U.S. cities, from New York City, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, Miami and Denver, to Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

Like what happened with the March for Science, there were marches and rallies in solidarity around the world. Hundreds of thousands, up to a million, took part, including in Japan, Uganda, Sweden, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Kenya, Zambia, Germany, Greece, Brazil, Australia, Mexico, Costa Rica and many more.

One of the main groups organizing the actions in the U.S. was 350.org., so named for 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – an upper limit beyond which the target of a 1.5 degree Celsius increase over the average world temperature since the industrial revolution could not be met. This was the target set by the Paris accords, which Trump threatens to withdraw from or just ignore.

In any case, his canceling of most restrictions on fossil fuel drilling, fracking, and mining, withdrawing the EPA from monitoring climate change, the changes at NASA, etc. portend a dangerous increase in greenhouse gasses for at least the next four years.

The target of 350 parts per million was set by a consensus of climate scientists as a limit beyond which severe climate damage could occur. Already, an observatory in Hawaii has recorded levels there over 400 parts per million.

May Boeve, is the head of 350.org, and was interviewed on Democracy Now! at the march. She said that in the hundred days of the Trump administration “we have seen nothing but bad news for people and the planet. What's wonderful about today is that this is a truly coming together of labor,

health groups, faith groups, environmentalists, community groups. Over 900 groups are making this happen.

A rally began at the Capitol building, and then there was a march to the White House, where there was a moment of silence and then a united shout out to the occupant so he would know the demonstration was surrounding him.

International Workers' Day - May Day

The theme of this year's May Day was to defend immigrant workers, above all Latinos, from Trump's massive deportation campaign. Speakers linked this struggle to the struggle of all workers. For the first time I can remember, the mainstream media referred to May Day as the International Workers' Day.

Trump has given the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency carte blanche to massively increase raids and deportations of undocumented workers. His stated aim is to intensify this campaign so that all or most of those without papers will eventually be deported, and ICE has only gotten started.

International Workers' Day originated in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century as part of the struggle for the eight-hour day. (I might add that we have to once again take up this fight, as the bosses and their government have found ways to increase the working day.)

It got picked up by the Socialist International and then the Communist International, and became a worldwide celebration of workers and workers' struggles. Earlier in the U.S. a growing trade union movement in the later 1880s sought to establish a day for workers, on the first Monday in September, Labor Day, which became a federal holiday. It grew out of labor struggles, e.g. the 1877 general strike.

The capitalists and their governments opposed May Day's association with socialists and communists, and pressed to eclipse it in favor of Labor Day. They were aided in this by the labor bureaucracy. This was intensified during the anti-communist witchhunt after World War Two. The result was that May Day was mainly forgotten, and Labor Day tamed.

This changed in 2006, when there were massive demonstrations and strikes on May 1, by undocumented immigrants who were under fire by a proposed law. Many of these undocumented immigrants came from Mexico and Central American countries which still had May Day as the International Workers' Day and brought this consciousness to the U.S. with them. Over a million participated, and the proposed law was dropped.

As Alan Maass in the U.S. Socialist Worker said, "Given this history - and the urgency of confronting the Trump onslaught - hopes were high earlier this year for large turnouts at the May Day protests and a similar wave of strikes and workplace actions.

"These didn't materialize. The biggest protests in any U.S. city numbered in the tens of thousands at most - a significant mobilization, but far smaller than 2006 - and the numbers of people who stayed away from work, while impossible to calculate exactly, were not nearly as large....

"One major factor is the raw fear of the Trump offensive. 'A lot of people are afraid of the deportations - and the fact that home raids are happening,' said Antonio Gutierrez of [the Chicago] Organized Communities Against Deportations." Millions of people are terrified that their family,

friends, circles and communities could be ripped apart at any moment.

One example was the mushroom farms in Pennsylvania, where most of the nation's crop are grown, and where the work force is largely undocumented. Only 40 came out to the rally. One of the farms was recently raided by ICE.

This fear "sets a challenge for supporters of immigrant rights, said Elsa Lopez, an activist with the Casa Michoacan community organization," Socialist Worker reported. "The most important thing," Lopez said, "is to be able to convince people not to fear coming out so things can change."

In the marches and rallies that did occur there were not just immigrant Latinos and their supporters, but others targeted by Trump's anti-immigrant campaign, including Arabs and Muslims.

The rallies and marches were spirited and defiant. "No Borders, no nations! Stop deportations!" was heard. Many other struggles were raised. Immigrants are directly affected by the fight for union rights, for a \$15 minimum wage, and more.

The Los Angeles Times, reporting on the largest march of 20,000, said the gathering "looked like a mash-up of recent protests across the country" - with shirts from the January 21 Women's March, pink signs defending Planned Parenthood and others about climate change.

The April 22, April 29 and May 1 actions taken together reflect that mobilization against Trump's agenda will continue. Unions must play a larger role, including by bringing into these struggles the majority of unorganized workers, not only against Trump's attacks on workers and unions, but on all his targets. The working class is a mighty power, but only when it is organized to struggle. Socialists have a role to play on this front, too.

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