

Statement on the “Swine Flu” Crisis from the May 1st Coalition for Worker & Immigrant Rights

“NAFTA FLU” Another Result of U.S. Policies

May 1st Rally at Union Square, 4pm to Declare “No Immigrant or Mexican Bashing as outcome of Swine Flu Crisis “

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Without a doubt, millions of people around the world are anxious about the news of a possible pandemic of the swine flu virus. The threat of a worldwide pandemic is real. For many health officials, the question has always been not “if” but “when.”

But the swine flu crisis must not become a basis to bash Mexican immigrants or Mexican people in the U.S. or lash out at the country of Mexico. No Latino should be the target of a Fox-news-inspired backlash. Such a backlash will inevitably spill over to all immigrants of color.

Nor should these developments divert attention from the great mobilizations on May 1st for worker and immigrant rights. Surely the powers that be would be happy if people stayed home on May Day instead of marching for our rights. The greater danger however is staying at home and not fighting back.

Nor should this crisis be used to further repress or terrorize the Mexican people by the Felipe Calderon government. The Mexican people have for decades carried out a heroic struggle against their governments, one that exploits and oppresses the Mexican people and gives a free hand to U.S. corporations to plunder their country.

Already in the U.S. some right-wing commentators on the Fox TV network have tried to blame Mexican immigrants for bringing the virus across the border. Anti-immigrant Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who has made a career out of terrorizing immigrants and maliciously feeds prisoners green bologna and forces inmates to wear pink underwear, has already begun his anti-Mexican tirade.

Today, the Washington Independent headlines, promoting a call for immigrant bashing, published: Arizona’s Sheriff Joe Arpaio Instructs Deputies to Protect Themselves from Illegal Immigrant-Borne Swine Flu.”

The blame for any health care crisis should be placed squarely on the governments and corporations that are responsible for creating the conditions that led to such a crisis. Furthermore over 100 children die every day in Mexico as a result of malnutrition due to neoliberal policies. That is the real epidemic.

This potential crisis above all exposes the failure of most of the world’s health care system to take care of its people. With an exception here and there, few countries have mustered the political will to establish the kind of health care system that can address such a crisis.

In the continent of the Americas only Cuba has used the state’s resources to thoroughly organize a health care system that benefits its entire people. The Cuban government is committed to taking care of

its population in a responsible and thoughtful way and its health care system stands head and shoulders above that of the U.S.

Venezuela is on the road to providing genuine health care for its people but its progress to social equality is only just beginning.

A swine flu crisis can be prevented. Information about the likely origin of the outbreak is starting to surface. The possible culprit? None other than the U.S. corporate giant in the South that for years brutally, and unsuccessfully, attempted to suppress a union drive: the Smithfield Corporation.

Smithfield runs several huge factory-farm hog operations. The workers and community around the factory in Tar Heel, North Carolina, face an environmental crisis as a result of conditions at the local Smithfield plant that read like a horror novel.

The outbreak of the current swine flu may have originated in a Smithfield plant operated by its Mexican subsidiary, Granjas Carroll de Mexico.

Local residents from the towns of La Gloria and Perote in the Mexican state of Veracruz have been fighting the pork-breeding giant for years. Similar to North Carolina, the corporation produces close to a million hogs annually in Veracruz. The company maintains huge lagoons of hog manure as well as open-air dumps for rotting remains of hogs that die before being slaughtered. Fumes from the hog waste foul the air for miles and residents believe that their ground water may have also been contaminated.

Swarms of flies that feed on the manure are in close reach of the towns.

The Mexican community's demands for justice have been ignored or repressed.

None of the news about the current swine flu crisis says anything about the fact that the fight against this crisis is really a fight for a health care system that benefits all the people, people with documents or without.

As long as the health care system is run for profit and not for the people, as long as corporations are allowed to run amuck polluting the environment and exploiting workers, health care crises like these are inevitable.

Contrary to the beliefs of Sherriff Joe Arpaio, immigrants cannot be blamed for the ills of society.

On May 1st at 4 p.m. in Union Square in New York City, the demand to document the undocumented will resonate throughout the country. In addition, May Day demonstrations here and around the U.S. will call for equal rights and jobs, etc for all workers. During this deepening economic crisis, only the unity and solidarity of all workers can we organize for our rights.

The real crisis is not the swine flu but the system that puts the corporations before the needs of the people.