Repeal the Anti-Immigration Laws, Change the National Debate

Katie

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> "We demand the repeal of all laws—federal, state, and local—that degrade and discriminate against undocumented individuals and that deny U.S. citizens their lawful rights. We demand that all human beings—with papers or without—be guaranteed access to work, housing, health care, education, legal protection, and other public benefits, as well as the right to organize" *–from the Repeal Resolution*

The Coalition to Repeal Arizona's Anti-Immigrant Legislation, better known as The Repeal Coalition, is a small group of community members and students committed to repealing the over 55 laws that have been passed or considered by the Arizona State Legislature in the past few years, and to building a social movement that can change the terms of the national debate on immigration and expand the freedom of all people—documented and undocumented.

The Repeal Coalition is seeking to get city councils throughout the state to pass a Repeal Resolution. The resolution calls for city councils to urge the repeal of all anti-immigrant legislation at the local, state and national levels, as well as to refuse to pass ordinances that are inherently discriminatory, deny even the most basic rights to migrants, leave the Latino community in constant fear, and challenge the civil rights of all U.S. citizens by threatening to eliminate birthright citizenship, and by forcing citizens to snitch on their neighbors, co-workers, and friends who might be "illegal aliens."

The first repeal campaign has launched in Flagstaff, a small town in the northern part of the state. The Flagstaff Repeal Coalition believes this campaign can build a network of supporters, who can help make the passage of the resolution happen, as well as go to action for their communities. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is steadily moving north, and Flagstaff is the next logical target. The Coalition wants to counter nativist sentiment by presenting a different vision, in which people are able to live, love, and work where they please.

The Repeal Coalition is hoping to develop a third pole in the immigration debate that is raging in Arizona and throughout the country. The two camps that have a stronghold in Arizona are the white nativists—who use patriotism and security to mask their blatant racial oppression, and xenophobic goals—and the business class—who simply want to exploit migrant labor. This is unacceptable. The Repeal Coalition is hoping to shift the terms of the debate toward a third

option: The state of Arizona welcomes humans of all nations, and pledges to respect their dignity and their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We see the Repeal Resolution as a tool to help build a working class constituency that can organize itself against the state, nativists, and all others who ignore the reality and necessity of crossing borders in a global economy. We are committed to building a community movement that will not just react to attacks, but will develop an alternative vision and fight for it. While all the details of the campaign are not yet worked out, what is clear is that building a movement in Arizona right now is undeniably important. The nation is watching, and without a solid movement we will watch state after state succumb to either a white nativist vision that wants to kick anyone without documentation out or a big business vision, that wants to exploit migrant labor at the expense of individual liberties and civil rights.

The Repeal Coalition had its coming out party with an April 2 protest against Maricopa County District Attorney Andrew Thomas (a leading voice in the immigration debate, and Sheriff Joe Arpaio lackey) while he was speaking on immigration at a forum held at Northern Arizona University. The protest was successful on several fronts; it connected The Repeal Coalition with several Chicano/Latino student groups, it garnered mostly positive press attention, and it introduced the coalition to the community. After the protest the coalition followed up with a Know Your Rights forum, organized with local high school students, that was well attended by people directly affected by the immigration debate. We've also marched in several local parades, one that garnered press attention after we were forcibly removed by parade officials and local police simply for marching in defense of freedom to "Live, Love, and Work Anywhere You Please."

All of these events have helped us familiarize ourselves with our enemies as well as those directly affected by Arizona's anti-immigrant legislation and their allies, but what we are presently planning is our most ambitious and important project to date. Currently the Repeal Coalition is engaged in the planning of a petition drive to collect signatures to accompany the resolution to city council. Beyond demonstrating community support and pressuring local politicians, this drive has two purposes: 1) to build a working class base among communities directly affected by anti-immigrant sentiment, including identifying community leaders, and 2) to change the terms of the immigration debate in Arizona and therefore the nation. The drive is to be culminated by a large event to introduce the resolution and petition to the general public, and to develop community-led strategies to implement it.

This project is time-consuming and costly for our small group. We need support. We are currently trying to raise money to bring out an experienced organizer to train us in door-to-door petition work, and to develop effective strategies for building a community base. We believe that our movement, if successful, has the ability to play a major role in immigration politics in Arizona, and eventually nationwide. If you or any you know is interested in supporting the Repeal Coalition and our campaign to repeal all anti-immigrant legislation in the state of Arizona, please contact us.

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