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U.S. prepares for 'A Day Without an Immigrant'

Organizers plan massive boycott on Monday to stop business as usual

By Brad Lendon
CNN.com

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(CNN) -- Meatpacking plants will shut down. Markets won't open. Trucks won't roll. Students will walk out of school. Millions of people will take to America's streets in possibly unprecedented numbers.

If all goes as organizers plan, major American cities will be disrupted Monday by what's being called "The Great May 1st Boycott," or "A Day Without an Immigrant."

"Millions of workers, men and women without documents and their supporters who are, in fact, legal United States citizens will heed the call to not go to work," said Juan Jose Gutierrez, national coordinator of Latino Movement USA and one of the lead organizers of Monday's planned boycott.

"Many hundreds of thousands of students, perhaps millions, will stay away from school and people will not shop and will not sell anything," Gutierrez said. ([Immigration by the numbers](#))

Boycott organizers are demanding amnesty and the chance for the estimated 11 million to 12 million illegal immigrants in the United States to earn citizenship. Gutierrez compares their struggle with that of American colonists against British rule more than 200 years ago.

"The great slogan of the American Revolution was 'No Taxation Without



Immigrant activists listen to speakers during a press conference in Chicago on Thursday.

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Representation," he said. "Millions of human beings today and for many years are being taxed, and they have absolutely no representation. In fact, they are being bashed every day and humiliated."

Monday's proposed boycott and marches are finding support in the streets, in the churches, in the boardrooms and even in some corridors of government.

Jorge Reyes, 49, came to this country as an illegal immigrant from Vera Cruz, Mexico. He's now a citizen with his own printing business in Pomona, California. He has put up \$3,000 of his own money to promote Monday's marches, he told CNN's Thelma Gutierrez.

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago is urging parishioners to participate in Monday's events, providing links to a Grant Park rally on its Web site.

"On March 10, in Chicago, 100,000 people marched for justice; on May 1, we want to double or triple that number. We will march for human dignity, for new laws that recognize the valuable contribution of immigrants to our nation and communities," the Rev. Charles Dahm wrote in an article posted on the Web site.

Smithfield Foods of Virginia said Thursday it will take time Monday to help employees write to U.S. senators and representatives with demands for changes in immigration law, including "a path to citizenship for those who are willing to work," according to a company press release.

Tyson Foods will shut meatpacking plants on Monday, citing market conditions and a possible shortage of workers. Meatpacker Cargill Meat Solutions will give 15,000 workers the day off so they can participate, The Associated Press reported.

In Los Angeles, the 7th Street produce market, which supplies thousands of Southern California restaurants and markets, will not do business on Monday. "We will not work on May 1st. We will not sell any vegetables or fruits," said Pedro Astorga of the 7th Street Market Merchants Association. ([Watch how workers, employers plan shutdowns -- 1:39](#))

In California's capital of Sacramento, state senators voted Thursday in favor of a resolution supporting Monday's marches and boycott. Passage was strictly partisan, with Democrats prevailing 24-13.

Monday rallies are planned for Poughkeepsie, New York, to Portland, Oregon, and from Stamford, Connecticut, to the San Diego-Tijuana border crossing, according to the Web site, www.infoshop.org.

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Although some are saying Monday could be the largest day of protest since the Vietnam War, support for "A Day Without an Immigrant" is far from universal.

Cardinal Roger Mahony of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Los Angeles doesn't support any walkouts or work stoppages on Monday, though he is an ardent supporter of immigration reform.

"I believe that we can make May 1 a 'win-win' day here in Southern California," Mahony wrote in a statement. "Go to work, go to school, and then join thousands of us at a major rally afterwards."

Some in the immigrant community worry walkouts could give the wrong impression. If students miss school, it "just adds fuel to the argument that we don't care about our children's education," Jose Lagos of Honduran Unity in Miami, Florida, told AP.

The Minuteman Project -- which has organized citizens' patrols along the Mexican border to monitor illegal immigration -- says illegal immigrants cost Americans jobs, and that blacks in the inner cities are hurt most. It plans rallies across the country, beginning Wednesday in Los Angeles, to highlight its view.

Still, more than three-quarters of Americans favor allowing illegal immigrants who have spent many years in the United States to apply for citizenship, according to a poll conducted for CNN by Opinion Research Corp. ([Watch how Americans line up on amnesty -- 3:22](#))

In the poll, released Tuesday, 77 percent of those responding favored allowing illegal immigrants who have been in United States for more than five years to stay and apply for citizenship if they have a job, and pay a fine and back taxes. Twenty percent said they opposed such a measure.

Washington, meanwhile, is struggling with immigration legislation. On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist of Tennessee and Minority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada met with President Bush and said afterward they were confident immigration legislation could pass their chamber by Memorial Day.

The Senate bill would include provisions for improved border security, a guest-worker program and options for citizenship. If a Senate compromise is reached, it would still need to make it through the House, where the going could be more difficult.

Boycott supporters won't be waiting.

"Let's show the government, corporations and racist politicians that a powerful, united people's movement has the power to win civil rights, workers' rights and make history," ANSWER, a coalition civil rights groups says on its Web site. "No business as usual on May 1!"

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