

Pulse of a protest

At Occupy ICE PDX,
"blood is thicker than water"

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With microphone at the ready, Antonio Zamora stands at the front of a growing crowd of protestors amassing at the Hollywood Transit Center. It's Sunday July 8, the 21st day of Occupy ICE PDX, and the afternoon light gives a pastel glow to the colorful new mural at the station, while inviting tubs of ice cream melt in the heat. Looking on from above station mural are two Portland police officers, watching over the evening vigil. As more protestors arrive and curious Trimet commuters wander over, Zamora a day-laborer's advocate who works with Voz Workers Rights Education Project, begins the vigil for the children and families separated by the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" policy.

"Abolish ICE!" Zamora calls out. Next to him, a sign language interpreter repeats the chant.

Abolish ICE! the crowd responds.
"Chinga la migra!" Zamora shouts.
Chinga la migra!

The call-and-response echoes the reverberations of Occupy ICE PDX. This vigil, the first to take place away from the encampment outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices on Southwest Macadam Avenue, is just one example of the ripple effect this protest has had, throughout Portland and beyond.

Occupy ICE PDX is causing national waves, grabbing headlines in both The New York Times and The Washington Post. Individuals have traveled from California, Utah, Texas and Louisiana to learn from the occupation in Portland. Zamora and other organizers have made plans to travel to the East Coast to support and grow occupations in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Similar occupations also have been reported in San Francisco and San Diego.

Protestor Nicholas Knight related Occupy ICE PDX to a battery that supplies the charge to the national movement.

"In the beginning of the occupation we were in front of the front gates, we were stopping the processing of the ICE building – since they forced us out of that position now, we are kind of in a stalemate," Knight said. "I think the tactic changes in that scenario to providing energy, resources and inspiration for not only the people here to act, but also the people of the city and the nation to act. You need to show now, because there may not be another time like



PHOTOS BY ABBIE WILLIAMS

Above, people assemble at the Hollywood MAX station for a protest against ICE activities in Portland and along the Mexican border. Below, Occupy ICE protester Antonio Zamora, who works with day laborers at Voz, addresses the crowd.

Strike to revoke ICE permit

On Monday, July 9, three "ICE Breakers" at Portland's Occupy ICE encampment next to the ICE facility on 4310 SW Macadam Ave. started a hunger strike in opposition to ICE and in solidarity with immigrants and children.

The strikers demand that Portland City Council must revoke the conditional use permit granted to ICE, and actively uphold Portland's sanctuary status by prohibiting any further granting of permits to ICE.

The permit allows ICE to operate the building's holding/processing at that location. The protestors contend that, until Portland City Council revokes the permit, Portland will not be a true sanctuary city because the ICE facility aids the deportation of immigrants.

this, that you are willing to put yourself on the line for people who need it."

The pulse of Occupy ICE PDX comes in part from a rotating cast, including Zamora and Knight, sustaining the occupation. The camp hosts a surprising diversity and vibrancy of protestors, including professionals who quit their day job to support the cause, Raging Grannies, law and medical school students, artists, Buddhists, mothers with little children that run and toddle around the camp, and self-described anarchists and antifascists. And at the forefront of the protest are people of color, queer people, and people with other marginalized identities. The camp emphasizes community and respect for all people.

"I feel such acceptance I have never felt before," organizer Reina Delajusticia told the audience during a recent vigil. "I feel like a lot of you experience that too. That drive to create a community for ourselves and each other is so strong that we can be out here and feel comfortable. We have to remind ourselves why we are here. We have to remind our officials why we are here. We have power in direct action. We have power in humanity. We have power in community. The people have power."

The spirit of community can be felt throughout the Occupy camp; protestors



cook and eat meals together and gather twice a day for a general assembly and an evening vigil. The main entrance of the camp, facing Southwest Bancroft Street, is protected by fortified barriers made of wooden pallets and fencing covered almost entirely with art, signage and flags. The colors of the flags and art, and the liveliness of the camp are in stark contrast to the sterile and imposing exterior of the neighboring ICE building. The somewhat haphazardly constructed pallet wall of the camp borders the tall metal barriers constructed by ICE officials – the tension between the two opposing neighbors is palpable. Since the Department of Homeland Security raid last Thursday, the camp has been monitored almost 24/7 by a security committee.

The camp has grown from a few tents to approximately 100 tents that line the bike path that stretches between the two buildings. In addition to "residential tents," there is a medical tent, an information tent, a kid's tent, an art tent, an engineering tent, a communications tent, showers and a stocked kitchen with a fully functional freezer, propane stoves and three coffee makers which are treated with reverence. One protestor jokes that "the revolution runs on caffeine."

Many protestors serve on organizational

committees, some form the kitchen crew, others with carpentry experience – or willingness to learn – to fortify the camp infrastructure. The communications committee controls social media and handles interactions with the press. The leadership of the camp is described as horizontal – all internal affairs are brought to a daily general assembly where members of the camp come to decisions based on consensus. There is a People of Color Committee which oversees many camp decisions, and occupiers said that instead of tasks being assigned by a top-down hierarchy of leadership, protestors identify needs to be filled and step up to the plate to fill them.

ICE officials and DHS have taken several actions to clear the occupation and temper the spirit of the protest. On Thursday, June 28, ICE officials and DHS in full riot gear conducted an early morning sweep and cleared protestors from the ICE building driveway, making eight arrests. Most recently, Monday July 9, DHS officers arrested three protestors.

On Wednesday, July 11, a group of protestors while blocking the ICE building driveway refused to make way for ICE vehicles and were shot with pepper balls and pepper spray, taken to the ground, then had their hands tied behind their back. Eight were arrested, bringing the total to 19 arrests. Amid the chaos, onlookers shouted obscenities at police as the situation escalated, illustrating that no matter the forethought and planning, emotions run high, and confrontations between protestors and ICE officials can escalate out of control.

In addition to arrests and sweeps, ICE officials have taken to some unconventional tactics to intimidate protestors. These include blaring metal music, setting off car alarms early in the morning, and back-lighting cardboard cutouts of Hulk Hogan and "Twilight" vampire Edward Cullen in the ICE office, so at night upon first glance, it looks like an ICE officer is staring down the camp.

"They do these things to get a rise out of us and that is text book school-yard bully behavior," said protestor, Bobby McMahon, who is also involved in staging an ongoing hunger strike. "It's really strange to see these authority figures who hold so much power act like school-yard bullies."

The strength of the Occupy ICE community stands out to protestor Rondlyn Failey, who had been at the camp for three days when we spoke. "Blood is thicker than water" Failey said. "There is something bigger that we are fighting for."

Stephanie Mendosa, one of the few fluent Spanish speakers at the camp and a daughter of immigrant parents, related a moving experience she had on Monday when she told a mother exiting the ICE building, "Te quiero mucho," which means "I care about you so much," and the mother responded "muchas gracias por lo que están haciendo," which means "thank you so much for what you are doing."

"That" Mendosa said, "is the reason I am here."

If you are interested in getting involved with Occupy ICE PDX, they encourage attending a vigil held at 7:30 p.m. every night at the camp on 4310 Southwest Macadam Street, or the vigil held every Sunday at the Hollywood Transit Center at 6 p.m.