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Brandworkers

Immigrant Food Factory Workers Threatened with Mass Termination Choose Resistance

'Not One Step Back' - 'Ni Uno Paso Atras'

Dozens at Tom Cat Bakery in Queens given 10 days' notice of dismissal following investigation by Trump's Department of Homeland Security

Longtime employees demand company stand up to federal government's probe

WASHINGTON - Workers, elected officials and community supporters rallied outside Tom Cat Bakery Wednesday to protest the threatened mass firing of dozens of immigrant workers following a Department of Homeland Security investigation. As members of a non-profit organization called Brandworkers, the workers decided to stand united and call for resistance from around the country.

The workers, many of whom have a decade of experience or more at the city's oldest artisanal bakery, carried signs that read, "Ni un paso atrás!" ("Not One Step Back"), "Luchamos para Nuestros Families" ("We Fight for Our Families") and "#May1Strike." Tom Cat Bakery is an arm of one of the world's largest multi-national baking companies, Yamazaki Baking.

"We work hard, pay taxes and have given so much to make Tom Cat into a hugely successful company," said Sabino Milian, a worker at the factory and member of Brandworkers. "We refuse to be thrown away like the bakery's garbage, and we will advance forward together."

Tom Cat officials told workers late last week that the Department of Homeland Security had been investigating the company; almost 30 workers have been told they would be fired within 10 business days if they do not provide new employment documents.

At Tuesday's protest, workers demanded the company stick up for its employees rather than cower to the Trump administration's bullying. Workers called on management to cooperate with them to explore challenges to the Department of Homeland Security investigation. More broadly, Tom Cat employees called on fellow workers around the country, particularly immigrants, indigenous peoples, African Americans and other marginalized communities to rise with them, culminating in a General Strike on May 1.

"We risked a lot to come to this country in order to make a better life for our kids," said Librada Antigua. "The Trump administration may want us to disappear, but I'm not leaving my children for anything. Our unity is our strength, and our commitment is to victory."

Elected officials, including Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer (D-Long Island City) and Councilman Carlos Menchaca (D-Sunset Park) vowed to support the workers in the face of the Trump administration clampdown on the Queens bakery, which provides bread to Citarella, Darden Restaurants and the Grand Hyatt, among other companies.

Since 2011, workers at Tom Cat have been organizing with Brandworkers, a non-profit organization that brings food manufacturing workers together to fight for good jobs and a sustainable food system. By joining together and taking direct action, the workers ousted an abusive executive, ended a system where they were paid less through a sham company, fought off cuts to their benefits and won a settlement against retaliation. The

workers are represented by attorneys with Catholic Migration Services and Urban Justice Center – Community Development Project.

Workers said their protest Wednesday was just the beginning of a sustained fight against the Trump administration’s crackdown on immigrant workers and other communities under attack.

"Tom Cat has a golden opportunity to act responsibly and stand up to the President Trump's harsh immigration policies," said Haeyoung Yoon, director of strategic partnerships for the National Employment Law Project. "The company can and should be a leader by doing all it within the bounds of the law to protect its workers who have baked and delivered their bread and built their company."

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Brandworkers is a non-profit organization bringing local food production workers together for good jobs and a sustainable food system.

Organization Links

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