

The Topic of Immigration in the first week of October 2013

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Labor Organizer, Al Rojas, Opposes Guest Worker Programs

Opposes Guest Worker Programs as a Part of Immigration Reform from Natalie Rodriguez on Vimeo.

The [International Longshore and Warehouse Union \(ILWU\)](#) local 34 Hall in San Francisco Calif., hosted the panel “Northern California Braceros, Immigration, Labor & Human Rights” with former farm workers and organizers Al Rojas and Juan Martinez. The event took place as part of LaborFest 2013 on Tuesday, July 30. This year the festival commemorates its 20th anniversary with the theme “Solidarity Has No Borders.” The panel focused on the relationship between guest worker programs and the proposed comprehensive immigration reform.

Rojas is a labor organizer with the [Labor Council for Latin American Advancement \(LCLAA\)](#) and former farm worker. He was also a former [organizer of the United Farm Workers \(UFW\)](#) and worked side by side with the historic [Cesar Chavez](#).

According to [laborfest.net](#), “The history of California and the Bracero Program is one of the key issues in the debate in Congress about ‘immigration reform’.” The [Bracero Program](#) was a guest worker program that began in 1942 and ended in the 1964.

[Chavez](#) the labor union organizer of the UFW, [opposed](#) the guest worker program known as the [Bracero Program](#) on the basis that it undermined union efforts for fair pay because, guest workers were paid less than union workers and hired to work when union workers went on strike. Rojas sustains this argument to this

as a Part of Immigration Reform

day. He refers to the proposed immigration reform as “the greatest attack against working people in this county,” referring to guest worker programs as a form of “slavery.”

Martinez has been working on the [Bracero Memorial Highway Project](#) and has put together an exhibit of Bracero memorabilia including tools and newspaper articles of the times. The project is meant to commemorate the lives of Braceros who were killed in two tragic accidents during 1958 and 1963 in the [Salinas Valley](#). Growing up in the valley he says, “the abuse was clear.”

Prof. Alex Saragoza teaches history in the department of comparative Ethnic Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He believes that “the issue is not, for me, the guest worker program, per se, but rather the conditions and the enforcement of the conditions.” Saragoza claims that the problem of wages being suppressed “is a generic problem,” that is “not unique to guest worker programs.”

Currently there is a guest worker program in place that grants seasonal agricultural workers [H-2A Visas](#). The proposed [immigration reform bill](#) includes guest worker programs for agricultural and high skilled workers alike.