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For first time in 37 years: No cops, ICE or military in large MLK Caravan for Social Justice in Los Angeles

written by Struggle-La Lucha Los Angeles bureau
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Los Angeles, Jan. 17 — More than a hundred cars and floats joined the MLK Day Caravan for Social Justice down Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, decorated with anti-racist, anti-imperialist, pro-people slogans reflecting today's struggles.

Organizations, including the Southern Christian Leadership conference; the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice; African American Writers & Artists Inc.; Friends of Malcolm X Library; Harvard Blvd Block Club; Africa Town Coalition; Black Pact; Union del Barrio; Al-Awda - LA; Veterans for Peace; Topanga Peace Alliance; Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS); Socialist Unity Party; Health Care for All - LA;

BAYAN USA and more raised the messages of Dr. King today and the various social justice issues that he championed.

One of the primary focuses of the day was voting rights, demanding that the Biden administration stop surrendering to white supremacists. The day before the caravan in Los Angeles, Dr. King's son — Martin Luther King III — Andrea Waters King and their daughter Yolanda Renee King, who is 13, led a march in Arizona, demanding Biden do more than talk to stop the further disenfranchisement of Black people.

"This MLK Day we are finally able to be true to Dr. King's vision of social justice and honor the wishes of his family today," Jefferson Azevedo declared at the Los Angeles MLK Day event. "That is only because of the unity that over 25 organizations had in fighting to take this King Day back from those who would have the police, ICE and the military and corporate sponsors like insurance companies and fast food parasites in our community, for the past 37 years, stomping on the legacy of Dr. King with messages enabling capitalist exploitation and police terror in our communities."

This indeed was an unprecedented event. In Los Angeles for the past 37 years the "Kingdom Day Parade," led by the California branch of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE - CA), was a corporate-driven event, charging \$500 for each grassroots, community organization to participate. Many felt this cost to the community was unnecessary, since corporate sponsors already paid thousands of dollars to attend. This year, however, there was no cost to participants since the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice filed for the permit last July on behalf of the Ad Hoc Coalition for the MLK Day March, and successfully fought the police to keep the permit.

"We tried to respectfully negotiate with CORE and were willing to share the permit," said John Parker, coordinator of the Harriet Tubman Center. "Our only condition — which was also insisted upon by the many Black organizations leading this effort

along with other community organizations in the coalition — was to keep the police, military and ICE out of the parade. Unfortunately, the CEO of CORE, Dr. Adrian Dove, insisted the police be included.”

Parker continued: “Given the history of terror by the LAPD and Sheriffs and especially considering the recent killing of a child by the LAPD, that was a non-starter. But our control over the permit, which we had to fight with the LAPD to keep, even threatening legal action, allowed not only greater access for the community to the King Day activities, it also banned the police, ICE and the military from having contingents or any representatives in the procession for the first time in 37 years.”

Ron Gochez of Union del Barrio said, “We’re proud to be here today standing shoulder to shoulder with our Black community and our African sisters and brothers taking the righteous step to say that the LAPD, Sheriffs, ICE and the military have no place in an event to honor Dr. Martin Luther King. We all know that Dr. King was against police brutality, against imperialism and all types of oppression of any kind of people. So, for us today as Latin American people it’s our duty and responsibility to be in solidarity.”

Gochez’ words reflected the tremendous multinational, multi-gender, multi-age participation and especially Black and Brown unity at this event with Latin American, Indigenous, Filipino grassroots organizations helping to organize this event, including the day-of livestreaming courtesy of the Filipino organization BAYAN-USA.

The livestream over Zoom was emceed by Andrew Mayton of the Peoples Power Assembly in Baltimore and Beto Rios of Union del Barrio, allowing those who couldn’t attend the large car caravan to get a bird’s-eye view of the demonstration and commemoration of King.

All of the organizers said this was the beginning of the end for the corporate-sponsored event and that they would work together and gather more grassroots and community and progressive organizations, united in solidarity with each other's struggles, to make this a yearly event.

Billion Godson of the Africa Town Coalition said: "Having no law enforcement, military or big corporations involved set a new precedent for how King Day events should be. Even though this first one was a little bit smaller than the traditional parade, a number of people shared that the overall energy was better. We will expand on this and grow next year."

There were many hurdles to overcome, including the omicron variant and multiple broadcasts by the major corporate media that the King activities for the day were canceled, even though they were sent numerous press releases saying otherwise. In spite of that, the caravan was the largest event in Los Angeles County on MLK Day, and the safest — turning the first proposed march into a caravan with plenty of masks and sanitizer for each float and participating cars. And defying the false news about cancellations, at least a hundred cars and floats participated, and organizers estimate that already thousands of people have seen the livestream of the event.

Rebecka Jackson, a member of the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice and the executive director of "Resist This Pac: Give Us The Ballot," an initiative of Martin Luther King III, said: "For the sake of 14-yr-old Valentina Orellana-Peralta, murdered by the recklessness of the LAPD, we're not going back. For the sake of George Floyd and Eric Garner and Breonna Taylor and all the victims here in LA of police violence and terror, we're not going back. This is our day, this is our legacy, not the corporate sponsors, but our united us."

Photos: Tira Denise Jones-Parker









