

## **Bigger than Ever? May Day Protests in WA**

### **Local News**

Posted by:

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May Day marches and rallies are being held around the state on Tuesday, and Washington's largest event is always in Seattle. Labor, immigrant and faith communities are promising a large and vocal turnout, as this year's annual May Day commemoration underscores their concerns about issues ranging from corporate greed to immigrants' rights and the need for better working conditions.

May Day protests started in the 1880s as general strikes for an eight-hour workday. More than a century later, they have ballooned into a broader call for social justice.

Maribel Peralez, a board member with Washington Community Action Network (Washington CAN), says the "Occupy" movement is spotlighting some of the same issues, but she thinks more than the economy will bring people out to join the crowd.

We're marching for the struggle for human dignity and respect. We're not anticipating any form of violence at all during the march; it is completely peaceful. We're trying to address workers' rights and human rights. - Maribel Peralez  
Puget Sound SAGE has been studying workers' concerns, most recently the behind-the-scenes jobs in [Seattle's top tourist hotels](#). The organization says short-staffing, low wages, no benefits and tough working conditions are the norm for a workforce made up mostly of immigrants.

The group's research and policy director, Howard Greenwich, says May Day is a rare opportunity to make their voices heard.

"I think most workers have a really difficult time seeing a bigger picture they're part of, and how the work they do and their jobs are not some kind of natural result of economic forces, but are choices made by people with lots of money and influence."

Greenwich predicts this year's protests will swell across the country, as people in high-paying jobs realize that they have more in common with low-wage workers than they might have guessed.

"What's different is that the great recession revealed that the middle class was in the same boat - but hidden behind this speculative real estate bubble. I have hope that we're entering into a period where there's more and broader shared understanding of what's really happening."

The Seattle event is being called the "March for Immigrant and Workers' Rights." Two separate groups will rally in Judkins and Westlake parks, and merge in downtown.

And, although it is a controversial strategy, the Occupy movement is suggesting that people who do not march send their own protest messages - by skipping school or work, and by not shopping or banking on May 1.

- Chris Thomas