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Trump administration steps up anti-immigrant campaign

ICE raids and push to build border wall

By Genevieve Leigh

30 March 2017

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids continue to escalate throughout the country, from major cities such as Fort Worth, Texas, and Chicago, Illinois, to suburbs like Rockville, Maryland and rural towns like Geneseo, New York. These efforts involve mass arrests, the detention of entire families, including many with members who are US citizens, and an increased collaboration between ICE and local police officials.

These raids, carried out under the Orwellian banner of “securing the community” and “public safety,” are aimed at achieving the exact opposite: the spread of fear and intimidation within working class communities. These attacks are a manifestation of the ruthless elements of Trump’s “law and order” campaign against the most vulnerable layers of the working class.

The raids are combined with the first steps to carry out Trump’s notorious campaign pledge to build a wall across the entire southwest border of the United States. The White House sent a message to Congress Tuesday requesting \$1 billion in funds to carry out construction, mainly in two key areas: a 28-mile segment of levee wall near McAllen, Texas, in the Rio Grande Valley;

and two segments near San Diego, California, the most heavily used crossing between the US and Mexico, also totaling 28 miles. There are another six miles of wall in smaller projects.

At the rate of \$1 billion for a total of 62 miles of wall, the total bill for Trump's proposed wall along the entire US-Mexico border, 1,945 miles in all, would come to \$31.4 billion—although the topography of much of the border, including desert, mountains and the Rio Grande River, would make the wall even more challenging and expensive to build than the first instalments.

The specifications of the wall, revealed in the official request for bids sent out earlier this month, with responses due April 4, underscore the delusional, even megalomaniacal character of the border proposal. The Department of Homeland Security demands reinforced concrete that is “physically imposing in height,” between 18 and 30 feet high, with “anti-climb topping features,” a foundation that prevents digging or tunneling for at least six feet underground, and a surface able to withstand assault by people armed with primitive tools—sledgehammer, pickaxe, etc.—for one to four hours. All that, and the side facing the United States (but not the side facing Mexico!) “shall be aesthetically pleasing in color.”

The stupidity of the wall is matched only by the callousness and brutality of the arrest and mistreatment of immigrants in the recent raids.

Fort Worth, Texas

On Sunday Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials in Fort Worth, Texas rounded up 26 parolees who were reporting for court-ordered community service, in what was one of the largest such sweeps in North Texas in recent memory.

Those who were present described a scene in which an ICE bus and two vans pulled up to the Tarrant County Work Release site on Cold Springs Road and began to round up the 26 individuals on their list. This is perhaps the first instance of undocumented immigrants being detained while reporting for community service, picking up trash along highways.

Tarrant County Sheriff Bill Waybour told KXAS-TV that his officers participated in the operation at the request of ICE, stating, “This was totally initiated by ICE ...They came to us and said, ‘Listen, we reviewed the list (of names) and we suspect some of them are illegal aliens.’ So we said, ‘Whatever you need to do.’”

One of the parolees who was not detained, Hector Rivera, described the panic experienced by those who were taken: “They were really nervous, ‘oh my God,’ ‘oh my kid’ and everything ... Some were saying ‘oh we got to run.’”

Rivera explained that the men were most concerned about informing their families of the events: “One of the guys has a pen and we started writing phone numbers, ‘hey call my wife,’ ‘call my dad.’ I said ‘OK, don’t worry, I’ll do it.’ That’s the least I can do.”

After being frisked and escorted to a bus, the detainees were transported to an ICE facility in Dallas, where they were expected to be processed for deportation. According to another ICE statement released Sunday, of the 26 apprehended, 23 are from Mexico and three are from Honduras.

Dallas area ICE spokesman Carl Rusnok said in an emailed statement, “ICE routinely conducts immigration enforcement operations locally and nationwide which help improve overall public safety by removing criminal aliens from our communities, and ultimately from our country.”

The claim that this raid contributes to the public safety of the community is false, as is the depiction of these individuals as “criminal aliens.” The only “crime” committed by the vast majority of these men, 23 of the 26, is a misdemeanor charge of driving while intoxicated. The other three charges are also DUI-related.

Chicago, Illinois

Early Monday morning in the Belmont Cragin community in Northwest Chicago an ICE agent shot and critically wounded 53-year-old Felix Torres, Sr. in a home raid.

ICE has reported that the man they shot was in fact not the same person they had come to arrest. The ostensible reason for the home invasion was a weapons charge against Torres’ son, Felix Torres, Jr., stemming from a traffic stop several weeks ago. The family’s lawyer, Thomas Hallock, said that the younger man was stopped in a car with several other passengers where a handgun was found. After none of the passengers would lay claim to ownership of the gun, Torres and another passenger were charged.

In an almost unfathomable scenario, armed ICE agents entered the family’s home at 6:20 am. Inside the home at the time of the raid were at least eight family members, many sleeping, including two children, 9 years old and 5 months old. The officers claim that Felix Torres, Sr. had a gun which he pointed at the officers, causing them to shoot the man in his left arm. Torres and his family deny that he had a gun.

Torres’ daughter Carmen described the chilling scene to a local news outlet: “They didn’t say anything. They just came in and pointed pistols in our faces and dragged us out ...We didn’t even have time to dress or grab milk for the baby.”

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this event is that all members of the family involved are in fact lawful US residents, most of them citizens. The ICE had no jurisdiction over any of them.

Rockville, Maryland

In Rockville, Maryland last Friday, Adolfo Sanchez-Reyes was detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after it was discovered through an investigation of his son that the father was in the country illegally from Guatemala.

Sanchez-Reyes' son, Henry Sanchez-Milian, is one of two students facing rape charges of a 14-year-old student at Rockville High School. Neither the son nor the father has been convicted of a crime, and no criminal record of any kind has been reported for the latter.

Very few details of the family's history have been released. Sanchez-Milian is said to have entered the US illegally in August, when he was caught in Texas by a Border Patrol agent, according to federal immigration officials. He was eventually released to live with his father in Maryland.

The youth, who only months ago traveled to the US from Guatemala without his family, has undoubtedly come from an extremely unstable background. It is unclear how long the father has resided within the country but it can be assumed that the family is facing difficult circumstances. Both Sanchez-Reyes and his son are facing possible deportation.

ICE officials are conducting raids such as these on a near daily basis. There are numerous other instances equally or even more extreme taking place throughout the country, including the arrest of an entire family, in which five of the children are US citizens, in Geneseo, New York last Thursday.

Local police departments and ICE agents have been emboldened by the "law and order" rhetoric of the Trump administration and the executive actions on immigration signed in January. Attorney General Jeff Sessions raised the stakes on Monday when he threatened to strip some "sanctuary cities" of Justice Department grants for state and local law enforcement, saying that cities which do not comply with federal law on immigration will not be eligible for the more than \$4.1 billion in grants awarded annually.

Elements within the Democratic Party, such as local governments in Seattle and San Francisco, have opposed the attack on "sanctuary cities," posing as defendants of immigrant rights. Their opposition to these ruthless policies is political posturing rather than a genuine struggle in defense of democratic rights or the protection of this vulnerable layer. All these Democrats supported the Obama administration, which deported more immigrants than all previous US administrations combined.

The accelerated detentions and deportations, including those reported above, which have led to violence, the separation of families, and the breakup of communities, have been largely ignored

by the congressional Democrats, who instead have focused their opposition to Trump on the question of the administration's alleged ties to Russia.

The only viable opposition to the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration will come from the international working class. It is these issues which have provided the impetus for thousands of workers to take to the streets in protest. Immigrant and native workers must unite in a common struggle to protect immigrants from deportations in their communities. The right to live and work with full citizenship rights must be available to all workers, regardless of immigration status.