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Albanian immigrant worker, forced to hide in Detroit church for 10 months, fights deportation

Approximately 50 people took part in a rally and march yesterday in downtown Detroit in support of Ded Rrangburgaj, a 49-year-old service worker and migrant from Albania, who has been forced to seek refuge in a Detroit church for almost 10 months to avoid being deported.

Ded's case is a particularly graphic example of the callous and brutal character of the anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration and its Democratic predecessor under Barack Obama.

He arrived from Albania in 2000, along with his wife Flora, and their seven-year-old son, Lorenc. Ded's initial refugee visa was terminated in 2006. In the meantime, his wife was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, a degenerative autoimmune disease of the central nervous system, which has left her wheelchair-bound and in need of permanent care.



Ded Rranxburgaj

Ded was allowed to remain in the country as the sole caregiver for Flora, but his status was kept in a state of limbo. He was forced to attend twice-yearly meetings with immigration officials, who could, at any time, revoke his right to remain in the country. This situation was maintained under the Obama administration, for Ded as with thousands of others, ensuring that as the Trump administration assumed power Ded's visa could be immediately terminated.

On January 16, Ded was forced to seek asylum in the Central Michigan Methodist Church in downtown Detroit, in order to avoid deportation. He has been confined to church for 10 months, relying partly on the support of church members, local community members, and donations via a GoFundMe page to provide for himself, Flora, Lorenc (now 24) and his younger son Eric. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have not yet carried out any raids on churches across the country.

Ded has made clear that if he leaves the country, his wife will be left without any support. He has no support network in Albania. He also supports his two sons. Before his deportation orders, Ded worked as a low-paid food service worker in Coney Island restaurant, working 60-70 hour weeks and, according to friend and family, never missing a day of work in 18 years.

Yesterday's march coincided with a final legal appeal by Ded at the United States District Court in Detroit. The appeal is the outcome of the nightmarish Catch-22 situation. Because he sought refuge in a church to avoid deportation, he has been branded by ICE officials as a "fugitive," meaning his appeals of his deportation orders have been frozen. If he were to

leave the church and present himself to immigration officials, ending his “fugitive” status, he would face immediate deportation.

In the current appeal Ded is seeking to remove the “fugitive” label so he can proceed with his appeal of the deportation order. He did not attend Tuesday’s hearing, for fear of being abducted by ICE agents. After a brief rally and press conference at the church, a group of family members, friends and supporters marched to the court.



Ded’s wife Flora heading toward the courthouse with sons Eric and Lorenc behind. Accompanied by his wheelchair-bound wife, Ded said, “I’ve done nothing wrong. All I’ve done is paid my taxes. My sons are in school. I can’t understand why they are doing this to me. I’ve been locked in here for almost a year. I have to do what my family needs. My wife has been sick for almost 12 years.”

In January, WSWS reporters spoke with Ded’s sons Eric and Lorenc at a demonstration opposing the orders for his deportation. Eric, who is studying at Southgate High School, commented at the time, “If you’re born with a golden spoon, you get everything you want in life. It’s as simple as that. But if you’re a low-class working family, like my dad is, then it takes a lot of time and apparently you still don’t get what you need.”

He added: “I personally think, instead of a wall, they should make a huge gate, like a big open door to invite people from other places in.”