

Arizona immigration bill: A frontal assault on democratic rights

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The new anti-immigrant law passed in Arizona last week and signed by Governor Jan Brewer is a blatantly racist and anti-democratic measure authorizing police-state methods against the Hispanic population of the state. Under the provisions of this law, local and state police officers will have the authority to stop anyone and demand identification, without a warrant, if they have a “reasonable suspicion” that the individual is an “illegal immigrant.”

Arizona becomes the first state to make residence without legal papers a criminal offense, defined as misdemeanor trespassing. Other provisions of SB 1070 make it a crime for undocumented immigrants to work or seek work, for anyone to impede vehicular traffic by picking up a day laborer offering himself for work, or for anyone to “harbor” an undocumented immigrant.

Local police are required to enforce federal immigration laws, and state residents can sue any state official or agency charging failure to enforce. It is also illegal for any community in the state to declare itself a sanctuary for undocumented workers.

The required identification consists of an Arizona driver’s license, a passport or an official immigration document like a green card. Since few people carry their passports or immigration documents, this means that anyone without an Arizona driver’s license—young people under 16, elderly people who don’t drive, or anyone visiting from out of state—could be subject to arrest and turned over to the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) without any legal recourse.

The requirement of “reasonable suspicion” is vaguely defined, opening the door to mass arrests of people of Hispanic descent, as well as anyone who “looks foreign,” including Arab, African, Asian and other immigrants. Even before the adoption of the law, there have been many reported cases of US citizens being

grabbed by immigration agents, jailed and deported simply because they “appeared” to be undocumented immigrants.

The Arizona legislation was promoted by ultra-right elements in the leadership of the state Republican Party. The bill’s prime sponsor, state Senator Russell Pearce, has a long association with white supremacist and anti-immigrant groups and has introduced previous bills against immigrants which are now facing constitutional challenges in the federal courts.

The bill passed both houses of the Republican-controlled state legislature in party-line votes. Governor Brewer signed the bill, and the top state Republican, Senator John McCain, endorsed it as well, in part because they face ultra-right challenges in the state’s Republican primary in August.

While the Republican right is driving the legislation in Arizona, the attack on the democratic rights of immigrants, and of all working people, is a bipartisan affair. The Obama administration publicly criticized the bill, but this stance is political posturing. Obama and the Democrats would prefer anti-immigrant legislation that was less blatantly racist and which did not usurp federal authority.

Several Senate Democrats attacked the Arizona bill on Sunday morning television interview programs along those lines. Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut told NBC’s “Meet the Press,” “The idea that state by state would start developing its own immigration laws in the country—imagine what a patchwork that might look like.”

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said that immigration would be the next major legislation considered by the Senate after the financial reform bill being debated this week.

A principal feature of such legislation, as proposed by Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York

and Republican Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina in a joint column last month in the *Washington Post*, would be “requiring biometric Social Security cards to ensure that illegal workers cannot get jobs... Prospective employers would be responsible for swiping the cards through a machine to confirm a person's identity and immigration status.”

This would be a giant step towards an Orwellian future in which the federal government maintains files on every American citizen, a database that would inevitably grow to include information about political beliefs, activities and affiliations.

Immigration is a pretext used by the US ruling elite, among whom there is a growing consensus for the creation of a national identification card for the purpose of expanding the repressive powers of the government in advance of social explosions that the representatives of big business, Democratic and Republican, expect sooner rather than later.

The Obama administration’s pretended outrage over the Arizona bill should fool no one. Obama named the previous governor of Arizona, Democrat Janet Napolitano, to head the Department of Homeland Security precisely because of her hard-line record on border security and immigration. Under her leadership, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has seized record numbers of “illegals” in the past 15 months and has greatly expanded the network of prisons used to house immigrants prior to deportation.

Obama has continued and expanded the anti-democratic policies of the Bush administration, defending indefinite detention, executive imprisonment of so-called “enemy combatants,” rendition of alleged terrorists to torture regimes around the world and warrantless domestic spying. His administration has sanctioned the assassination of US citizens suspected of terrorist activities.

Thousands of demonstrators rallied outside the state capitol in Phoenix Sunday to oppose the new legislation. High school students walked out in protest Friday as Brewer was signing the bill. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party encourage such protests and urge all youth and workers to come to the defense of their immigrant brothers and sisters.

The struggle against racist and repressive laws requires a rejection of the entire framework of the

official debate on immigration. There are no “illegal” workers, only workers whose immigration status and lack of official documents make them more vulnerable to ruthless exploitation by corporate America. Workers should demand the abolition of the ICE and the whole police-state apparatus of border enforcement, and the adoption of the principle that workers have the right to live and work in whatever country they choose.

The use of national chauvinism to pit American workers against those of Mexican descent—and against immigrant workers from throughout the world—is one of the oldest tactics of the American ruling elite. For a century and a half, the capitalists have sought to pit American-born workers against their class brothers and sisters born elsewhere. First German and Irish workers were the target, then workers of Italian, Slavic and Jewish origins, then workers from Mexico, China or Japan.

Every advance made in the struggle by the American working class has required a conscious rejection of anti-immigrant poison and the adoption of a perspective based on uniting working people of all racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds. This principle holds even greater force in today’s globalized world, when capital can move to any country to exploit low-tax, low-wage regimes, but workers are imprisoned within the boundaries of the historically outmoded nation-state system.

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