

Protesters in Rochester, New York oppose detention of José Coyote Pérez

By our reporters
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Around 100 people protested outside the Summerville Presbyterian Church in Irondequoit, New York, a suburb of Rochester, on March 9 in support of José Coyote Pérez, an immigrant dairy worker and activist. Coyote Pérez was detained in Livingston County on February 24 and had spoken at a protest in Rochester on February 3—only three weeks before his detention.

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has held Coyote Pérez at the Buffalo Federal Detention Facility in Batavia, New York since then.

The event was publicized as an “emergency rally to free José Coyote and end Trump’s raids.” Several immigrants’ rights activists spoke to the assembled crowd, which then marched to a field across from Rochester’s US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) office before returning to the church.

CBP and ICE both operate under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security, which enforces the Trump administration’s brutal anti-immigrant policies.

Despite the cold weather and recent storm that left much of Irondequoit and the Rochester area, including the area around the protest, without power, many people attended, including families with small children. Students and at least one professor from the State University of New York College at Geneseo, about an hour south of Rochester, also attended.

The signs at the rally included “Free Jose,” “When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty” and “*Somos inmigrantes, no criminales*” (“We are immigrants, not criminals”). The crowd chanted slogans demanding “money for jobs and education, not for mass deportation” and expressed opposition to attacks on democratic rights, immigrants and refugees. Many motorists driving past the protest honked their support.

Local police observed the protest but did not intervene.

One of the highlights of the protest was when Coyote Pérez himself was able to speak via telephone from the detention center where he has been for the past two weeks. With the assistance of a translator, he addressed the crowd in Spanish and English.

“I’m here in the Batavia detention center, incarcerated unjustly. They told me to report here to Batavia to my deportation officer, and they deceived me. When I reported to my deportation officer they told me they were going to arrest me. They told me they were arresting me because they got anonymous phone calls about me. ...

“The system is hurting this country and many people because here inside of Batavia [detention center] there are so many people who only came just to work. I had to leave behind my family, I had to leave behind my work, I had to leave behind all of these protests that I was starting to do to fight. I have so much faith in the people who are in front of you, I have so much faith in the churches, in the students, in the faith community. The students are so important, [it is important that they] do something to confront this, they are the future of our country. I hope that this all works out for me, I send you all greetings. Thank you.”

After Coyote Pérez spoke, another immigrant threatened with deportation, Dolores Bustamante, spoke to the crowd about her impending immigration hearing. Like Coyote Pérez, Bustamante is a member of the Workers’ Center of Central New York. She is also on the board of Alianza de Mujeres Campasinas.

The fact that both Coyote Pérez and Bustamante, along with 22-year-old Daniela Vargas, face deportation indicates that ICE may be targeting activists for daring to speak out against xenophobic

measures and attempting to improve their conditions of life. The terror this is spreading in immigrant communities appears to be deliberate.

Since Trump was inaugurated on January 20, hundreds of immigrants, including many who have been in the United States for decades, have been detained or deported. On March 5, 130 people were deported to Senegal—more than six times the total number of deportations to the West African country in all of 2016.

In addition to the ordinary people horrified by the anti-immigrant actions of the Trump administration, there were small contingents from pseudo-left groups, including the Democratic Socialists of America and the Workers World Party. Representatives from the Fight for 15 campaign attended as well. These groups are seeking to redirect social opposition to Trump's reactionary policies back in to the dead end of the Democratic Party.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with Crystal one of the many who participated in the protest. She said that she was “really concerned about the direction the country is taking ... it's a scary situation. They're taking the leaders and trying to remove them first.

“That's what the fascists do. It affects all of us.”

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