

Activist detained and 18 arrested at Manhattan immigrant rights protest

By Isaac Finn
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Following the detention of prominent immigrant rights activist Ravi Ragbir by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, 18 peaceful protesters were arrested by police at a demonstration in lower Manhattan yesterday morning.

Ragbir, who is the executive director of the of the interfaith immigrants' rights group New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC, legally immigrated from Trinidad and Tobago more than 25 years ago. After serving five years in prison for a wire fraud conviction, a judge ordered his deportation in 2006, but Ragbir received a stay of removal in 2011 and his case is reevaluated annually.

According to *Common Dreams*, he had a “stay of removal,” which would prevent him from being deported, that was supposed to be in effect until next week. However, he was detained by ICE during one of his regularly scheduled check-ins.

His detention coincided with a “Solidarity Vigil Against Deportation” that was called by a variety of religious, legal and immigrants' rights organizations—including the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), Faith in New York, Immigrant Defense Project and Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights. The vigil, which included over 200 protesters, gathered in Foley Square in Manhattan across the street from 26 Federal Plaza, where immigrants must check in with ICE officers.

After it was announced that Ragbir had been detained, many protesters moved into the nearby street and attempted to block an ambulance in which he was being transported. A spokesperson from the Immigrant Defense Project later confirmed that Ragbir was placed in an ambulance because he had fainted while being detained by ICE.

Videos that have surfaced on social media also show

a heavy police presence, with NYPD officers forcibly pushing demonstrators out of the way of the ambulance and grabbing others to arrest them with zip-tie handcuffs. The 18 arrested protesters were then forced to sit on the road as the police attempted to disperse the demonstration. Democratic City Council members Ydanis Rodriguez and Jumaane Williams were among those arrested.

The decision to detain Ragbir, who has been called a “fixture in the immigrants' rights movement,” and immediately clamp down on a protest in support of him reflects the attempts to intimidate large numbers of workers and youth who are opposed to the attack on immigrants. These supporters of immigrant rights are also hostile to the ongoing negotiations between Democrats and the Trump administration over the potential elimination of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) policy, which defers the deportation of individuals who came to America as minors.

Ragbir's detention comes only a few days after Jean Montrevil, a founding member of the New Sanctuary Coalition, was also taken into custody by ICE.

A WSWs reporting team spoke with demonstrators at the vigil for Ragbir:

Mahfuzur Rahman, a student at City College of New York, said, “We know with Ravi, their entire accusation is based on a conviction from 20 years ago, which he served and since then he's been an excellent citizen—he's a better citizen than me! So why should his rights and all he's done for his community be stripped away just because of this lunatic in the [White] House? And seeing how he's even married to a US citizen, so he *is* a citizen, but they want to strip him of every single thing that the naturalization process allowed him. So, it makes no sense to send him back to

Trinidad, and I'm here today with my fellow people just to do what is necessary.

"I support most immigrant organizations here in NYC, and again, an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us. He was just going for a check-in, that's the only thing."

Brittany Ramos DeBarros, a veteran, said, "I think this goes against the ethics and values that our nation is supposed to stand for, and as a person who cares about the moral integrity of our country, I think that it's important that we stand up, especially given the long history of federal agents targeting leaders of resistance and liberation movements to dismantle the momentum of those movements.

"I don't think it's a mistake that Ravi is such an engaged leader at a time when supporting immigrants' rights is so unpopular with a certain few. So, I want them to know that even though they have the power of federal sanction sometimes, that we won't take that lying down and that we know what this is really about."

Julia, another protester, noted, "Honestly, [Ragbir's arrest] appears to be because of collaboration between the NYPD and ICE. He has been instrumental in advocating for rights of immigrants, especially undocumented immigrants, and perhaps it's supposed to send a message to those of us who are in the movement, sort of a scare tactic and an attempt to damage the movement.

"The NYPD is definitely not required to collaborate with ICE, and [New York City Mayor Bill] de Blasio has said previously that he would prevent it, as part of being a so-called Sanctuary City.

"When undocumented people are arrested by the NYPD, their information is vulnerable to being shared with a federal database that ICE can access. That isn't to say that that's what happened here, but just to say that we know there are some ways in which the NYPD enables ICE to continue raids and targeting undocumented folks. I know that they're not legally required to share the information with ICE, and that they're not legally required to abet ICE raids, but I know that's what's happening here."

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