

Military-style raids sweep up 114 immigrant workers in Ohio

By Eric London
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Two hundred immigration agents dressed in military gear descended upon two garden nurseries in the Ohio cities of Sandusky and Castalia yesterday, arresting 114 immigrants in the largest single immigration raid of the Trump era.

It was a workday that began like any other for the workers of Corso's Flower and Garden Center in the former industrial hub near Lake Erie. However, before noon more than half of them were headed for immigration internment camps where they face months or even years of detention.

Images depict a brutal crackdown of police-state proportions. Armed agents surrounded the facilities, swarmed the workers, lined them up against the walls, cuffed them and frog-marched them into the backs of unmarked buses.

Lynn Tramonte, the director of the immigrant rights group America's Voice Ohio, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "These raids are significant for many reasons. One, our government is using SWAT-team style tactics to arrest ordinary workers who pose no threat to anyone. It's an outrageous misuse of tax dollars. Two, our government is doing this without any regard at all for the consequences of their actions. What happens when Mom or Dad doesn't come home tonight? Who picks up the children from school? Who makes them dinner and helps them with their homework?"

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents set up full perimeters around the premises, preventing workers from trying to escape. Agents with guns strapped to their bodies tied up women, took their personal belongings, and forced them off the facilities.

The military-style raid is a warning to the working class. It sends a message that the Trump administration is preparing an ever-greater use of armed force to carry

out its anti-immigrant program. The Associated Press reported that the raid was a "heavy show of force that involved aircraft surveillance."

As word spread, the working class immigrant population flew into panic as family and friends tried to reach loved ones. Emily, an immigrant in Sandusky, told Univision: "In the morning I got a message from a work friend who was asking me about my mom, because she works there. My mom is fine, thank god, she had an appointment and wasn't at work. I was told it was really ugly. They came in big cars, some wearing civilian clothes, throughout the whole building. They took them by surprise and tried to take everyone. My understanding is that yes, there were children working there" who were also arrested.

Although Donald Trump won 51 percent of the 2016 presidential vote in Erie County, which encompasses Sandusky and Castalia, commenters on local news articles were largely hostile to the raids.

"They have families to feed just like the rest of us," one resident wrote on the Facebook page of the Sandusky Register. A nursing student wrote, "How many kids are going to be without their family now, how many are going to starve and be homeless, die or be picked up and sold?" A grocery store cashier added, "One of my co-workers, who just graduated last week, was caught up in all this."

Work at Corso's—like most agricultural and nursery jobs—is backbreaking and low-paid. An employment advertisement for Corso's on Glassdoor.com requires workers be able to "stand, walk, climb, bend, squat, stoop and twist for extended periods of time;" to "lift 5-50 pounds frequently throughout the assigned workday;" and have an "extremely flexible scheduling"—all with a "positive upbeat attitude with a smile." According to data from the Bureau of Labor

Statistics, nursery workers make an average of \$23,380 per year.

The Gestapo-style raid against Sandusky and Castalia nursery workers is an attack on the entire working class. Is there a single class-conscious worker in the world who believes they stand to benefit by giving their government the power to drag their immigrant co-workers off the job and haul them off to jail?

The Democratic Party has maintained its silence in the wake of the raid. The Twitter account and official press page of Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown is silent on the issue, as are those belonging to Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and the Democratic Party. At time of writing, the *New York Times* is yet to publish anything on these events. Democratic President Barack Obama earned the title “deporter-in-chief” for deporting more immigrants than any previous administration.

The Trump administration’s massive show of force to arrest immigrant workers, which likely cost several million dollars, is the most attention the government has ever paid to Sandusky, a town which has been devastated by deindustrialization. While millions of dollars are spent tearing children from their parents, there is supposedly no money to deal with the region’s opioid crisis. Thirty-nine people died from drug overdoses in Erie County in 2016—one for every 1,900 people, and twice the number killed in 2014.

Health care premiums for Ohio workers were expected to rise by between 17 and 32 percent in 2018, according to insurer rate requests under the Obama administration’s Affordable Care Act. Census data shows that few workers can afford such increases, as per capita income in Erie County is just \$28,684. The official poverty rate increased by 51 percent between the 2000 and 2010 censuses.

Workers in Ohio and across the world must reject the attempts by the ruling elite to divide the working class based on immigration status. In recent months, the Trump administration has:

- * Expanded the size of immigration detention centers.
- * Deployed the National Guard to the border with the help of Republican and Democratic governors.
- * Denied the right of immigrant women to pre-terminate pregnancies at immigration detention centers.
- * Enacted a policy of splitting family members apart in blatant violation of international law.

* Enacted policies to drastically curtail the rights of asylum applicants.

Immigrant workers are in grave danger. The network of immigrant internment camps are staffed by fascist guards and officials who systematically abuse, beat and rape detainees, and withhold food and water. There are those within the Trump administration who advocate for even more drastic measures.

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