

Gestapo-style immigration raids in Ohio: An urgent warning to the working class

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On Tuesday, some 200 agents from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) carried out Gestapo-style raids on two workplaces in northern Ohio. The heavily armed border agents arrested 114 people, including children and US citizens. Shocked and outraged co-workers shouted at the border police to let the arrested workers go, to no avail.

By a single act of mass terror, the US government shattered the lives of hundreds of parents, children, spouses and siblings.

President Donald Trump's militarized border force used undercover agents who posed as inspectors and construction workers and lured immigrant workers out of the Corso's Flower and Garden Center nurseries in Castalia and neighboring Sandusky with offers of a free breakfast. Having secured the perimeters, they descended upon the nurseries with assault rifles, attack dogs and helicopters.

The launching of military-style raids on US workplaces marks a turning point in the ruling class's attack on the rights of immigrants and the working class as a whole. It sets a precedent that will not only be expanded against immigrant workers, but will be employed against native-born workers as well.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, formally apologizing to the surviving victims of the illegal mass detention of 120,000 people of Japanese descent during the Second World War. Thirty years later, a constellation of internment camps has once again sprung up across the United States, with new camps in the planning stages and an ever-expanding population of detainees.

Horror stories like those recounted by survivors of Japanese-American internment in memoirs such as *Farewell to Manzanar* and *Journey to Topaz* are unfolding every day in towns and cities across the country.

Though Japanese victims of President Franklin

Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 were often treated with physical brutality by their jailers, in many ways conditions in the present-day internment centers are worse than the conditions that prevailed three-quarters of a century ago.

Today, families are split up during raids and parents torn from their young children in a criminal policy of intentional cruelty. Detainees are kept in cages or cells, forced to dress in prison garb, and often barred from communicating with the outside world. An American Civil Liberties Union report issued in May revealed that unaccompanied child detainees are systematically abused—sexually, physically and psychologically—by the CBP and ICE. Suicide attempts are commonplace.

The immense danger to the entire working class posed by the Ohio raids is underscored and heightened by the almost total silence with which it has been met by the political and media establishment. A mere sprinkling of articles has appeared on the raids in the national press.

The New York Times, which serves as a semi-official organ of the Democratic Party and its main base among the affluent upper-middle class, has not published a single article on Tuesday's raids. It is preoccupied with promoting the #MeToo witch hunt on behalf of wealthy and self-involved movie stars and professionals who seek to advance their own careers at the expense of democratic principles such as due process and the presumption of innocence.

Aside from a statement from Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, who made a right-wing appeal to reform "our broken immigration system," no national Democratic Party representative or elected official has spoken publicly about the Ohio raids, nor has the AFL-CIO or the nominally "independent" Democrat Bernie Sanders.

Sanders himself has close ties to vicious anti-immigrant elements. Fox News contributor Tezlyn Figaro, who served as a high-level advisor to Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign and worked for his "Our

Revolution” political group until last month, said in 2017, “We are sick and tired of immigrants coming into the country and getting benefits that Americans do not get.”

In 2016, Figaro praised Trump’s proposal to construct a wall between the US and Mexico. “Please! #Buildthewall,” she tweeted.

These xenophobic sentiments are not exceptional deviations from the Democratic Party’s program. They expose the real core of the Democratic Party’s position on immigration. For all its cynical posturing, the Democratic Party is just as responsible for the attack on immigrants as Trump.

The Democrats abandoned any attempt to protect the 1.8 million undocumented youth eligible for protection under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which expired in March. Under the administration of Barack Obama, the government deported 2.7 million immigrants—more than any previous administration, Democratic or Republican—and drastically expanded the immigrant internment camp network.

The trade unions have played a similarly reactionary role, supporting Trump’s anti-Mexican and anti-Chinese trade measures on the basis of American nationalism. They echo the efforts of Trump and other fascistic elements such as Stephen Bannon to divide the working class by blaming foreign workers for the loss of jobs and wages in the US.

Despite such efforts, popular opposition to mass deportations is widespread. Witnesses from the raided nurseries in Ohio told the *World Socialist Web Site* that US citizen workers vocally denounced the immigration agents. In response, agents detained and handcuffed US-born workers to prevent them from warning their immigrant co-workers.

According to a March 2018 Gallup poll, just 12 percent of US workers are concerned about immigrants taking their jobs. Roughly 85 percent support citizenship for immigrants living in the US without documentation. In January and February 2017, spontaneous protests broke out at airports across the country against Trump’s anti-Muslim travel ban, and other demonstrations were held against the administration’s assault on undocumented immigrants from Mexico and other countries.

The Democrats intervened to contain and dissipate the protests and have since concentrated their efforts on channeling opposition to Trump behind their own right-wing program of expanded war abroad and Internet censorship at home.

The working class is the only social force that can halt the onslaught on democratic rights and defend immigrant workers and youth. The starting point for such a struggle is the understanding that the Ohio immigration raids are not merely an “immigration” issue, but a question of the defense of the rights of the working class as a whole.

The US government is already strengthening the dictatorship that is effectively exercised by the corporate owners in factories and work sites across the country. According to a recent Supreme Court decision, workers with arbitration clauses are no longer free even to file class action lawsuits against their employers.

The trade unions not only refuse to defend the rights of workers, they actively support their suppression. As a result of the slave charter contracts under which almost all workers labor, any step workers take to assert their rights can be labeled a violation of the contract subject to punishment up to and including termination.

The first months of 2018 have seen growing strikes and protests in the US and around the world. The ruling classes are attempting to head-off any linking together of these struggles by ratcheting up bigotry and backwardness based on nationality, race and religion. In Italy, Germany and France as well as the United States, governments are scapegoating immigrants for declining wages and living standards imposed by the governments themselves on behalf of the banks and corporations.

Opposition to these police state, divide-and-conquer policies is a life and death question for the working class in the US and internationally. To prepare for the massive class battles that lie ahead, it is urgent that workers stand up and defend their immigrant brothers and sisters.

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