

Military-style immigration raids: Coming to a workplace near you

26 July 2018

The Trump administration is placing thousands of workplaces across the United States under police surveillance and is drastically expanding plans for military-style raids to arrest and deport immigrant workers.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced Tuesday that it conducted 984 workplace arrests of immigrants over the nine months from October 2017 to July 2018, nearly six times more than over the preceding 12 months, during which time the government dragged 172 people off their jobsites for deportation.

ICE also announced it has served 5,200 businesses with audit notices so far this year, including an astounding 2,738 last week alone, in what it called the "second phase" of the operation. This means federal agents are presently scouring payroll lists and checking the citizenship status of tens or hundreds of thousands of workers. ICE states that from October 2017 through July 2018, it has "opened 6,093 worksite investigations" compared to 1,716 in the preceding fiscal year.

If the government conducts raids at even a small fraction of these facilities, the total number of immigrant workers arrested will be in the tens of thousands. Raids like those conducted in Sandusky and Canton, Ohio in June give a sense of what is to come. During these SWAT-style assaults, hundreds of immigration officials with attack dogs, helicopters and assault rifles swept into a plant nursery and a meatpacking plant, arresting roughly 300 workers while their US-born coworkers shouted denunciations at the agents.

The ICE announcement is an open threat to the entire working class. It is a response to the significant increase in strikes and protests by teachers, autoworkers, telecommunications workers, UPS

workers, and other key sections of the working class over the first months of 2018.

When teachers in Oklahoma and Arizona put forward wage demands of \$10,000 to \$20,000 this spring, they received widespread support from millions of workers who watched and learned as teachers sought to defy the state governments and the trade unions to advance grievances and demand higher pay.

The corporations are terrified that more workers are beginning to raise similar claims. The attack on immigrant workers is the spearhead of efforts to break the growth of the class struggle and intimidate the workforce into submission.

First, the ruling class hopes to poison the development of working class militancy and class solidarity by dividing workers based on race and nationality, scapegoating immigrant workers for deteriorating social conditions.

Derek Benner, ICE's Acting Executive Associate Director for Homeland Security Investigations, portrayed immigrant workers as criminals who are taking advantage of US citizen workers in a statement accompanying the ICE announcement:

"This is not a victimless crime. Unauthorized workers often use stolen identities of legal US workers, which can significantly impact the identity theft victim's credit, medical records and other aspects of their every day life."

Benner continued:

"Worksite enforcement protects jobs for U.S. citizens and others who are lawfully employed" and "helps combat worker exploitation, illegal wages, child labor and other illegal practices."

What lies! It is not immigrant workers who are to blame for unsafe conditions, underpayment of wages and "worker exploitation," but the corporations themselves!

The two wealthiest men in the US—Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates—possess nearly the same amount of wealth as the poorest 160 million people in the US. In Bezos's case, his \$150 billion has been amassed from the exploitation of 500,000 Amazon workers across the world who labor under among the most dangerous working conditions for measly wages and little to no benefits.

Across all industries, stagnant or declining wages have fueled a massive growth of wealth among the corporate oligarchy. From 2016 to 2017 alone, the wealth of the world's billionaires (2,754 people) increased by 24 percent to \$9.2 trillion, or 12 percent of the world's gross domestic product.

Second, fearing the prospect of social opposition to the hyper-exploitation of the working class, the superrich are establishing a police-military infrastructure to spy on and physically crush the working class.

The threat of military raids is intended to intimidate workers from opposing speed-ups, unsafe conditions, wage theft and other forms of exploitation that fuel rising corporate profits. At the same time, the government and the employers are preparing for more drastic measures. Workers must be warned: if the government can raid a workplace and drag a worker away for being an "illegal" immigrant, it can do the same to workers for participating in "illegal" strikes or protests or for distributing "illegal" leaflets or online articles.

Third, the threats of mass raids and efforts to blame immigrants for the plight of "US citizen workers" are also aimed at whipping up a fascist base that Trump can rely on for political support and that the corporations and employers can deploy to terrorize and police workers engaged in strikes and protests.

Trump's escalation of vicious attacks on immigrants coincided with the growth of strikes earlier this spring.

It was in early May, as the teachers strikes and protests spread to North Carolina, Virginia and Colorado, that Trump implemented his "zero tolerance" policy to separate immigrant children from their parents and detain them in separate facilities. Since then, Trump has flouted a court order requiring he release the children and faces a deadline today to reunite them with their parents. Nearly 500 parents have already been deported, many of whom will likely

never see their children again.

The trade unions will serve as a willing partner in helping to militarize American workplaces. In recent decades, the government has deported 5 million people, most of whom were workers and many of whom belonged to trade unions. The unions have refused to call a single significant strike, instead poisoning workers with American nationalism by blaming workers in China and Mexico for corporate outsourcing and declining wages.

The Democrats have said nothing about Trump's workplace immigration raids. Even as the White House announced Wednesday that it has deported over 460 parents of separated families, the Democrats have focused all of their efforts on their right-wing campaign to condemn Trump as a traitor for failing to militarily confront Russia. The campaign, far from uniting workers against the Trump Administration, aims only to promote nationalism and anti-Russian jingoism.

Workers must reject the bipartisan strategy to attack the democratic rights and social position of the working class through divide and conquer tactics. In preparation for the fight against the government and the corporations, the unity of the working class, regardless of citizenship or national origin, is a life-or-death question.

Eric London

To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>