

# Residents defend immigrant workers after ICE raids Indiana restaurants, arrests five

By Michael Walters  
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Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested five workers at three Mexican restaurants in Northern Indiana during coordinated raids on December 13. The action was the latest in the Trump administration's war against immigrant workers. It was the second raid in the region in 2018 after nine people were arrested in Elkhart, Fort Wayne and South Bend in March.

At Mexico Lindo restaurant in Portage, three workers were taken away while an additional two were taken from a second location in Knox. Another raid took place in East Chicago, however no details have been made public. Among the four men and one woman abducted by federal agents was a single mother of three, a father, whose son witnessed the raid, and restaurant owner Jesus Cabrera.

Last week, over 100 people attended a rally in Portage in support of those who had been detained. The father of one worker told the *Chicago Tribune* of the effect this has had on his family and grandchildren, "It has affected my granddaughters. They are asking for their dad. We can't give them answers because of this illegal injustice they have done. All they want is to have their family together. This is not right. We have to stop this."

At least 3,500 workers were arrested in raids in 2018 according to a review of recent ICE press releases. The actual number is higher as this only includes cases the agency felt were worth bragging about. Most notably absent was a raid at an Ohio meatpacking plant in which 146 workers were arrested.

Leslie Esquivel, a DACA recipient who attended the rally in Portage, echoed the fears felt by many immigrants. Speaking to the *NWI Times* she noted, "What I am most afraid of is coming home and my parents will have been deported." Another worker,

Guillermo Marin, defended the arrested workers, noting that they were only trying to provide for their families.

The raids are an attempt to divide the working class and suppress opposition in a region that has seen an uptick in class militancy in the last few months. At Lear Corporation, an auto parts plant in Portage, the workers twice voted down a concessions contract. It wasn't until the third vote that the contract passed by a razor-thin 50.8 percent margin.

Furthermore 30,000 US Steel and ArcelorMittal workers at mills in Portage and East Chicago voted unanimously earlier this year to authorize a strike. In defiance of the workers' militancy, the union, United Steel Workers, refused to call a strike. The union worked to isolate workers by first pushing through a contract with US Steel and then ArcelorMittal.

The Rally Against ICE at Mexico Lindo Restaurant was called by a coalition of activists known as NWI Resistance. NWI Resistance has held protests against the use of Gary, Indiana's airport for Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) flights and receives support from the local chapters of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and the International Socialist Organization (ISO).

In August, CBP opened a new facility at the underutilized Gary airport for the dual purpose of deporting workers and also allowing private charter flights to clear customs without having to go through one of Chicago's more congested airports. About 100,000 people a year are deported on such flights with detainees from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Kentucky being flown from Gary.

Ruth Needleman, co-coordinator of NWI Resist, professor emerita of Labor Studies at Indiana University and a long-time Gary, Indiana resident told WBEZ 91.5 Chicago, "The airport used to only go to

Brownsville, Texas. Then they opened the Customs building staffed on call by only Chicago workers. So, one of our problems with all these deportations is, besides the inhumanity of them, all the jobs are going to people in Illinois and all the heartache is being left in Indiana.”

To argue in one breath for the defense of the rights of non-native born workers and in the next to complain that the airport jobs are going to out of state workers is indicative of the political bankruptcy of the Democratic Party and their pseudo-left apologists such as the ISO and DSA which have also participated in and promoted these rallies.

Whether they were born in Illinois, Indiana, Mexico, or anywhere else, workers have the right to good paying jobs and the right to work and travel without fear of deportation or repression. ICE cannot truly be abolished without mobilizing the entire working class against the capitalist state and its institutions, including the Democratic Party. Absent a genuine socialist program, ICE will simply be rebranded or combined with another agency.

At the rally, a local United Auto Workers (UAW) union official from the nearby Chicago Assembly Plant, Scott Houldieson, spoke to “show solidarity with the people who have been suffering by the hands of this administration.” The UAW, however, engages in the same nationalism that is being whipped up by the Trump administration. In response to General Motors’ announcement of its plans to close factories in Michigan, Ohio, Maryland and Ontario, the UAW and its Canadian counterpart UNIFOR have begged GM to instead close plants in Mexico.

Furthermore, leading “progressive” Democratic party figures such as Bernie Sanders have no problem with President Trump’s economic nationalist policies. The Democrats have frequently offered to work with an administration which dispatched the military to the Mexico border with orders to shoot anyone that throws a rock at them, in order to establish “strong border security.”

In 2018, as part of the Trump administration’s effort to whip up a nationalistic and anti-immigrant fervor, Homeland Security Investigations opened 6,848 worksite investigations compared to 1,691 in 2017; initiated 5,981 I-9 audits compared to 1,360; and made 779 criminal and 1,525 administrative worksite-related

arrests compared to 139 and 172, respectively; all of these categories surged by 300 to 750 percent over the previous fiscal year.

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