

The Mississippi raid: Trump's attack on immigrants and his Democratic enablers

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Photographs taken at a Mississippi gym on Wednesday night show children of immigrant detainees, some as young as four years old, huddled together, many of them crying or visibly traumatized by the arrest of their father, their mother, or both.

The raids were timed for maximum cruelty to the families of the migrant workers who provide much of the labor force for Mississippi's poultry-processing industry, hot and grueling work for meager pay. According to local officials, school started on Tuesday or Wednesday in five of the six towns targeted for the raids, in which hundreds of heavily armed ICE agents set up cordons around plants and arrested a total of 680 workers.

For countless children, their parents had just dropped them off for their first day of school when they were seized, marched onto buses with their hands tied behind their back, and taken to an Air National Guard hangar outside Jackson for processing. There were scenes of older children weeping outside the factories as they saw their parents hauled away.

Officials of Mississippi State Child Protective Services said they were given no notice of the raids that would suddenly deprive large numbers of children—nearly all US citizens—of their parents and caregivers. CPS currently has 2,400 children in its custody statewide and estimated that the raid could increase its caseload by up to 50 percent, meaning 1,200 new children entering the system.

Apparently in response to official representations about the impending child-care crisis, ICE moved quickly on Wednesday to process and release more than 300 of those arrested, including nearly all the women workers, busing them back to the poultry plants where they had originally been detained.

Most of those released were compelled to wear ICE ankle bracelets and will be monitored to insure they attend upcoming hearings before immigration judges who will decide whether to issue deportation orders. The majority of those detained, about 380 workers, were

transferred Thursday to another ICE facility in Jena, Louisiana, putting them a further three hours' drive away from their families.

The brutality of the raid—at least one young worker was tasered but then not detained when ICE agents discovered he was a US citizen—and the callousness of the subsequent processing are entirely deliberate. US government officials, from Trump and his fascistic immigration point man Stephen Miller on down, are seeking to terrorize not only those seized in this particular raid, but all immigrants and the communities in which they reside.

The region covered by the ICE field office in New Orleans is notorious for its mistreatment of asylum seekers. According to a lawsuit by the Southern Poverty Law Center, the rate of parole approvals for asylum seekers in that four-state area—Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Tennessee—fell from 76 percent in 2016 to only 1.5 percent in 2018. In 2016, ICE held 2,000 immigrants in custody in Louisiana and Mississippi, a figure that has jumped to 10,000 now.

Press reports indicate that the attack on the migrant poultry workers was carefully prepared, with the use of confidential informants employed at several of the plants that were raided. It is quite likely that companies collaborated with ICE to target plants where workers were considered more likely to assert themselves. In one plant raided Wednesday, the Koch Foods facility in Canton, Mississippi, the company was compelled last year to pay out \$3.75 million after a class-action suit charged it with harassment of workers based on sex, race and national origin.

The brutal methods of the Trump administration are in sharp contrast to the display of popular sympathy towards the detained migrants and their children in the small towns around Jackson where the raids took place. The owner of a local gym threw it open for children whose parents had been seized. He told the press that the gym

had “everything we need” because local residents flooded the facility with donations of food, drinks, bedding and offers of transportation to get the kids to school in the morning.

Mississippi Child Protection Services said that its emergency hotline was flooded with calls from people wanting to help on Wednesday night, adding that there was not a single call about children “without shelter,” indicating that every child affected by the raids had been placed with a family member, friend or neighbor.

The Trump administration has become notorious worldwide for the brutality of its treatment of immigrants and for creating the political and moral climate where events like the massacre of Hispanic shoppers at an El Paso Walmart last Saturday are almost inevitable. Several Spanish-speaking countries have issued warnings to their citizens about the dangers posed by travel to the United States.

The official opposition in the Democratic Party has sought to capitalize on the popular revulsion against Trump in the wake of the massacre in El Paso and the raids in Mississippi.

The leader in the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination, former Vice President Joe Biden, linked the two events in a tweet: “On a day when President Trump is supposed to be embracing a grieving community and celebrating our American diversity in El Paso, his administration is instead stoking fear by conducting massive immigration raids in Mississippi.”

One of Biden’s main rivals, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, tweeted, “This is evil. Days after immigrants were gunned down in El Paso, Trump is continuing the attacks on immigrant families. Our job is to reject Trump's racist agenda, end the terror inflicted on immigrant communities and bring families together, not tear them apart.”

This is cynical hogwash. Under the Obama administration, when Biden was vice president and Sanders a Senate loyalist, the US government deported more immigrants than all previous administrations combined, and more, on an annual basis, than Trump has since taking office.

The Obama administration pioneered the policy of family separation after the flood of refugees began arriving from Central America in 2014, with Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson justifying the practice as a “disincentive” for those seeking asylum.

And under Trump, congressional Democrats have collaborated with the stepped-up attacks on

immigrants—spearheaded in many cases by former Obama officials now working in the Republican administration, like acting DHS chief Kevin McAleenan. Most recently, Democrats in the House and Senate gave overwhelming support to a DHS budget that funds both raids like those in Mississippi and concentration camps like those along the US-Mexico border.

Both parties defend and maintain the repressive apparatus of American imperialism, with its military units, surveillance systems, border patrol and internal police forces, with a total combined manpower approaching five million. Two weeks ago, Congress passed the largest military budget in history, some \$738 billion, with hundreds of billions more for DHS and other repressive agencies.

The repressive onslaught against immigrant workers is an attack on the working class as a whole. The same methods use in Mississippi will be employed in the future against workers who challenge the dictates of Corporate America and seek to defend their jobs, living standards and social benefits.

American workers must come to the defense of their immigrant brothers and sisters. This fight cannot be conducted through the Democratic Party and the corporate-controlled two-party system. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program, seeking to unite workers of every country in a common struggle against capitalism.

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