

US: anti-immigrant dragnet in advance of Super Bowl

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The US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is rounding up immigrant workers in the San Diego area in advance of this Sunday's Super Bowl football game. Dubbed "Operation Game Day" by INS officials, the ongoing sweeps have received virtually no publicity outside of one Reuters story and reports in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*.

The INS confirmed the operation last Wednesday after several arrests had already been made. According to INS spokesperson Lauren Mack, "We do have an ongoing operation in San Diego aimed at providing security for the Super Bowl." Mack refused to provide the names of people being detained, the reasons for the detentions, or the numbers targeted. She did make clear, however, that none of the people detained have any known link to a terrorist organization.

The *Union-Tribune* learned from unnamed INS officials, who apparently did not identify themselves for fear of being punished for speaking to the media, that as of Wednesday about 40 of 80 people on a list had been taken into custody. Most are security guards, concession stand workers and taxi drivers with access to Qualcomm Stadium and other Super Bowl venues. About half are from Latin America, the others from the Middle East and Africa. At least one is a Nigerian-born British citizen who is working as a security guard, is married to a US citizen and has an application for permanent residency pending.

The sweeps constitute yet another gross violation of democratic rights by the Bush administration, which is using hyped-up security concerns over Super Bowl XXXVII as a pretext for secret arrests unrelated to any specific terrorist threat. The sweeps are intended to further condition public opinion to accept the government's seizures of broad categories of human beings without any attempt to respect the rights of the

people incarcerated or keep the general public informed about what it is doing.

Jordan Budd, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego, told Reuters, "It is just another example of the government engaging in a broad, suspicion-less profile based on nothing more than immigration status and national origin."

Typically, the week before the Super Bowl game features a media frenzy. Newspapers and television news outlets report endless minutiae regarding the teams, players and venue involved in the game. That such a significant operation could take place within the glare of the media spotlight without being widely reported demonstrates once again the complicity of the big business media in the Bush administration's assault on democratic rights.

The political party supposedly in opposition to Bush has maintained a deafening silence. Although California's governor and both its senators are Democrats, no party official is quoted in the media as criticizing the roundups.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Sam Hamod, who has been monitoring immigration sweeps in San Diego on behalf of the American Islamic Institute. "We had problems last December when the INS arrested people during the mandatory alien registrations," Hamod said. "Ashcroft is ordering the INS to step up its enforcement of visa law violations, but the INS does not have the resources to do so accurately. INS officials are shorthanded, and are using incorrect and out-of-date databases, and as a result they are arresting many people who should not be arrested. In fact, some people are in the database only because they came forward as witnesses and provided the government with useful information."

Hamod explained that many individuals identified as

being in the US illegally have visa applications pending, but because of a backlog in INS paperwork, they have not received their final clearance. Traditionally, such people have not been targets of INS enforcement. Hamod said that his organization and other community groups met with INS officials last month, who promised not to carry out future sweeps targeting these people. “The recent sweeps are a direct violation of that promise,” he said.

Hamod continued, “The INS has been stonewalling the media and our people. We can’t confirm what is going on. We know that people who are here under visas, who have been working as taxi drivers and security guards for years—for years!—are being arrested and held without any court adjudications or access to attorneys.”

Hamod concluded, “What we have here in our country is the beginning of ethnic cleansing. The Japanese and Native Americans know very well what this is all about because they’ve already experienced it.”



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