

160 immigrant workers arrested in raid on Ohio poultry plant

Barry Grey
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Early Tuesday morning, 300 federal immigration agents, aided by local police and sheriff's deputies, descended on a poultry processing plant outside of Cincinnati, Ohio and arrested 160 immigrant workers. The workers were charged with immigration violations and imprisoned, pending deportation to their home countries.

The mass raid, carried out by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE), a branch of the Department of Homeland Security, occurred at the Koch Foods plant in Fairfield, a Cincinnati suburb. Search warrants were also served at the company's Chicago headquarters.

Most of the workers will remain in jail until they are deported. According to an ICE spokesman, only those with family or children in the area who rely on them for care "may" be released pending deportation proceedings. He said most of the immigrants were believed to be from Mexico, Latin America and Africa.

According to an August 29 Reuters report, some of the terrified workers hid in the plant's freezers in an attempt to escape the dragnet. As of Wednesday, relatives had no idea where their spouses, sons, daughters or parents were being held.

One restaurant worker from Mexico told the news agency, "Everyone saw the raid on television. There is widespread fear, and now nobody wants to go out onto the street." He said his eldest daughter, 20, had been swept up in the raid, leaving him to care for her six-month-old son. "We are frantic with worry," he said. "We don't know where she's being held, or if we'll get access to her."

Last year, the ICE deported 183,431 undocumented workers. In December, hundreds of workers were seized in raids at Swift & Co. meat plants in six states.

The number will likely rise substantially this year, as

the Bush administration moves to intensify its attacks on so-called "illegal" immigrants and threaten employers who hire them. Next week the administration intends to begin writing to 140,000 employers regarding allegedly suspect Social Security numbers used by an estimated 8.7 million workers.

Under new rules set to take effect on September 14, part of a 26-point enforcement program announced by President Bush three weeks ago, employers who receive "no-match" letters will have 90 days to resolve discrepancies. If they fail to do so, the Department of Homeland Security may conclude that the employers knowingly violated the law by employing "illegal" workers, opening them up to fines and possible criminal charges.

The inevitable, and intended, effect will be mass firings of immigrant workers.

In carrying out Tuesday's raid, the Bush administration and the Homeland Security Department gave a boost to Butler County, Ohio Sheriff Richard K. Jones, who has been leading a racist vendetta against immigrant workers. Jones issued a statement following the raid in which he announced that his office had filed separate state charges against 20 of the detained workers.

"Twelve males and eight females," he wrote, "listing various 'Origins of Birth' of Guatemala, Peru and Mexico, have been charged with Ohio crimes such as forgery and theft of identity. This means that these individuals, in addition to being in this country illegally (as determined and charged by ICE) are charged with committing additional serious criminal offenses while here."

In other words, Jones is piling on additional criminal charges against immigrants whose only "crime" is seeking to support themselves and their families.

In his statement, Jones boasted that he has “taken a very tough stance against illegal immigration and criminal aliens for years,” including taking out newspaper ads and renting billboards “in that educational effort.”

“I have warned employers that we would be coming,” he said, adding, “To any other employer in Butler County that has hired illegals or has not taken steps to ensure they have not hired illegals, beware. I don’t believe our job is finished. I expect more of these operations will come.”

Speaking to local television news reporters, Jones said, “We’ve been telling you and other elected officials, we are in a problem here, not only in this community, but the entire country is dealing with people coming here, stealing IDs, stealing identities. They are basically robbing the community.”

The federal government is directly promoting this type of fascistic hysteria. The Bush administration is doing so in part to repair relations with its far-right Republican base, following the defeat earlier this summer of its immigration bill due to opposition from Republican legislators.

More fundamentally, it is seeking to whip up racist and chauvinist sentiment, using immigrants as scapegoats, in order to divert popular anger over the war in Iraq, job cuts, falling living standards and ever-growing social inequality into reactionary channels.

Immigrants are not responsible for the worsening plight of native-born workers—the result of government policies aimed at the further enrichment of a wealthy elite and an economic system that breeds ever greater inequality. All workers must have the right to live and work in the country of their choice, with full rights and benefits, and all attempts to pit American workers against their brothers and sisters of other countries must be answered with a socialist policy to unite workers internationally.



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