

# More details of immigration raid in Mississippi, US

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The number of those arrested in Monday's US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid on a Laurel, Mississippi manufacturing plant is significantly larger than previous reports had indicated. Approximately 595 arrests have now been confirmed, making this the largest immigration raid on a workplace in US history.

The raid, which saw workers from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, Brazil, El Salvador and Germany taken into custody, has terrorized the immigrant population of Laurel. Fabiola Pena, a 21-year-old mother, told the press about the moment the ICE agents stormed the Howard Industries factory: "I was crying the whole time. I didn't know what to do. We didn't know what was happening because everyone started running. Some people thought it was a bomb, but then we figured out it was immigration."

The aftermath of the raid has left the workers and their families traumatized and confused. Bill Chandler, the executive director of the Mississippi Immigrants' Rights Alliance (MIRA), told Reuters, "People are very, very fearful. People in the Latino community are afraid to go out of their homes. In many cases they are afraid to go to work." Families have been separated, in some cases with both parents of a child held in custody, leaving children suddenly without care. "If you have young children going to school, and they come home and find their parents gone, that is a major crisis," said Chandler.

The superintendent of schools in Jones County, where Laurel is located, says half of the 160 Hispanic students did not attend school on Tuesday.

The ACLU has begun to investigate the treatment of those arrested, sending staff from its Immigrants' Rights Project to Mississippi. Attorney Mónica Ramírez, part of the team sent by the ACLU, released a

statement saying, "We are deeply concerned by reports that workers at the factory where the raid occurred were segregated by race or ethnicity and interrogated, the factory was locked down for several hours, workers were denied access to counsel, and ICE failed to inform family members and lawyers following the raid where the workers were being jailed."

Of the hundreds arrested in the raid, roughly 475 are now being held at an ICE facility in Jena, Louisiana, some 200 miles away from their homes and families in Mississippi. The prison system of the ICE, the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, is notorious for its record of abuse and neglect. More than 60 immigrant detainees have died in ICE custody since 2004.

More than a hundred of those arrested in Monday's raid are said to have qualified for an "alternative" to detention because of "humanitarian reasons." Most are under house arrest or have been given ankle bracelets for tracking purposes. They will still have to face a federal judge and almost certainly be deported.

Eight workers arrested during the raid have been charged with federal aggravated identity theft and could face up to two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine if convicted. The defendants, six men and two women, appeared before Federal Magistrate Judge Michael J. Parker in a Hattiesburg, Mississippi courtroom on Tuesday in shackles and handcuffs. They told the court, with the aid of an interpreter, that they could not afford their own attorneys and were each assigned Assistant Federal Defenders.

Appearing before the court again on Wednesday, all eight defendants were ordered to be held without bond. When public defender Abby Brumley sought to have her client Paula Gomez released on bond to care for her 5-year-old son who was sick, Assistant US Attorney

Gaines Cleveland argued against her with the customary coldness, saying, “She has been charged with a serious crime. We need to keep this defendant until the charges are resolved.”

Information is also coming to light that reveals the considerable damage done by the nationalist orientation of the trade union bureaucracies in the area. There have been reports of tension between union workers and immigrant workers at the raided factory and that some of these workers applauded as the immigrants were being arrested. The Associated Press spoke with union and immigrant workers who described resentments over the amount of overtime immigrant workers received—sometimes up to 40 hours per week—while union workers were discouraged from working overtime. A union member is said to have given the tip to authorities that initiated the investigation of the plant.

Robert Schaffer of the Mississippi AFL-CIO responded to the raid in the way one might have expected: “Jackson, Hattiesburg, Laurel and all areas along the coast, it’s a little Mexico. I’m not against people trying to make living. I have a compassion for those folks. But at the same time, the taxpayers of Mississippi shouldn’t be subsidizing a plant that won’t even hire their own workers.”

The anti-immigrant positions of the trade unions have only aided the efforts and cleared the way of the US Government to terrorize large sections of the working class with raids like those in Mississippi and Pottsville, Iowa earlier this year.



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