

In defiance of US federal order

Arizona sheriff carries out immigrant raid

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Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County in Arizona has publicly defied an order from the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) limiting his office's ability to enforce immigration laws the day after it was handed down, leading deputies on an October 17 sweep that resulted in 66 arrests and the handing over of 19 alleged undocumented immigrants to federal authorities.

Maricopa County contains Phoenix, the nation's fifth most populous city. Nearly four million people live in the county. About one third of the state's population are identified as Latino or Hispanic, and about a half a million people in the state may be defined as "illegal immigrants," according to data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The powers stripped from the Maricopa County Sheriff's office were first granted in February 2007 under section 287(g) of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA). The act allowed certain local police agencies "to perform immigration law enforcement functions...provided that the local law enforcement officers receive appropriate training and function under the supervision of sworn US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers."

During two years of participation, Sheriff Arpaio has ordered numerous sweeps of Hispanic neighborhoods in the Phoenix area, recording 33,000 arrests of undocumented immigrants—nearly 25 percent of the nationwide total carried out under the 287(g) program.

Arpaio's methods are brutal. The Maricopa County Sheriff's office has been the target of thousands of

lawsuits ranging from prisoner abuse to racial profiling. There are reports of women arrested by the sheriff's office suffering broken bones and jaws. In March the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division launched an investigation into the racial profiling charges. Arpaio chalks the allegations up to "politics."

Arpaio and his deputies have publicly campaigned against efforts to limit their police powers. "I think on the federal side they took a step backwards, but I think the Sheriff has made it clear we don't look at it as a step backwards for this office," Lt. Joe Sousa told a recent press conference, all but declaring the immigration sweeps would continue. Later in the press conference Sousa repeatedly stated that "the feds screwed us."

A statement on the Maricopa County Sheriff's website was more explicit, announcing that officers will not be deterred by the decision, and that "deputies have authority to enforce all state laws, which includes [sic] the Arizona class-four-felony Human Smuggling Law, and Employer Sanctions Law."

The Obama administration's suspension of the 287(g) agreement with the Maricopa Sheriff's office has nothing to do with concerns over abuse of citizens and legal immigrants, much less the plight of illegal immigrants.

On October 16, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano, formerly the governor of Arizona, renewed 287(g) agreements with 67 local and state agencies, in spite of complaints from immigrants' rights groups, human rights groups and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus that the program

encourages racial profiling and discrimination.

Obama has attempted to rein in Arpaio as a means of providing political cover for the larger 287(g) program. Arpaio's was by far the most controversial of all agencies participating in the 287(g) program.

Obama's appointment of Napolitano as DHS Secretary signaled that the new administration aimed to ramp up immigration enforcement. As a Democratic governor of Arizona, Napolitano gave tacit approval to the criminal actions of Arpaio for years. She also is credited with signing into law the most stringent law against employers who hire undocumented workers.

In an interview with National Public Radio shortly after her appointment, Napolitano was asked about her feelings towards workplace raids. She answered by supporting the raids and calling for tougher enforcement. "What we are going to do is really focus on the employers and make sure that they are subject to criminal penalties for violating the law," she said. These raids have been heavily criticized for the police-state manner in which they are executed.

Following the weekend raid, Arizona state Senator Russell Pearce held a press conference with Arpaio at his side, urging Governor Jan Brewer to call for a special legislative session where he could introduce legislation aimed at tougher immigration law. This past summer, Pearce introduced a bill that would have criminalized the presence of undocumented immigrants in the state. Though the bill did not pass, he announced plans to introduce a similar bill in the next legislative session along with a separate bill increasing employer penalties who hire undocumented workers.

Arizona politicians are attempting to divert mounting social anger in the working class over the economic crisis that has devastated the state. The official unemployment rate stands at 9.3 percent, and the government is experiencing massive budget shortfalls that have been translated into deep cuts in social programs, public education, and sharp increases in college tuition. The deficits continue, the Associated Press recently reporting that the midyear budget gap may be as much as \$2 billion. Undocumented

immigrants, the politicians argue, are largely responsible for the economic problems facing workers and the state and the cuts to social spending.

In fact, the state's fiscal crisis is the product of the recession, which was triggered by the rampant financial speculation of the biggest American banks. Arizona has been further impoverished by the Obama administration's refusal to offer adequate assistance to the states. While Obama repeatedly declared he would do "whatever it takes" for Wall Street, he has advised the states that they must get used to making "hard choices."

Whatever their superficial differences, Obama and Napolitano fully share the anti-immigrant policies of Arpaio and his ilk, including the militarization of the border, the regularization of large-scale police operations, and the gutting of democratic rights. The central aim of these policies is in fact to divide the working class between Americans on one side and those the government declares "illegal" on the other—the better to exploit both.

Workers must reject the effort to blame the economic crisis on immigrants. The *World Socialist Web Site* supports the right of workers to live and work wherever they please regardless of immigration status or national origin.



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