

Arizona legislature passes police-state measures against immigrants

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On Monday, April 19, the Arizona state legislature passed new immigration legislation that severely restricts the rights of both documented and undocumented workers. Senate Bill 1070, which provides a legal mandate for racial profiling, awaits a decision by Republican Governor Jan Brewer by Saturday.

The bill gives local and state authorities power to enforce federal immigration law by making it a misdemeanor to walk in public without necessary immigration paperwork. Under the legislation, local and state authorities will be empowered to stop any individual to “determine the immigration status” where “reasonable suspicion” exists that the person “is an alien who is unlawfully present in the United States.”

Essentially, police may stop anyone, for any reason or no reason, and throw them in jail if they do not produce a visa, passport, or green card. The bill is designed to terrorize and criminalize undocumented immigrants.

At present, Arizona police and law enforcement can only inquire about an individual’s immigration status if the latter is suspected of being a participant in a crime. And while violations of the new law are classified as misdemeanor rather than felony crimes, such violations will result in fines ranging between \$500 and \$2,500 or up to six months in prison prior to being transferred to federal authorities who can then deport the immigrants.

Additionally, SB 1070 seeks to prohibit the creation of so-called sanctuary cities by making it illegal for any locality to “adopt a policy that limits or restricts the enforcement of federal immigration laws to less than the full extent permitted by federal law.” Private citizens are also given license by the new legislation to bring civil action against any political official or agency that implements such policies.

SB 1070 also severely restricts the activities of day

laborers by making illegal their most common method of soliciting work. It will now be against the law for a person to stop their vehicle and attempt to hire and pick up passengers, or conversely to enter such a vehicle in an attempt to be hired for work “if [in either case] the motor vehicle blocks or impedes the normal movement of traffic.”

The legislation makes it illegal for undocumented persons to apply for or solicit work in a public place or to perform work so obtained. The bill also makes significant modifications to already stringent laws regarding the employment, transportation and harboring of undocumented workers.

The bill has been promoted under the pretext that undocumented immigrants bear the lion’s share of blame for the state’s economic crisis by using public services and allegedly not paying taxes. Thus they should be jailed, deported or otherwise severely punished. Such appeals conceal the real source of the crisis—the looting of the national treasury by the Wall Street bankers whose speculation brought the US and world economy to the brink of collapse. Immigrants are being used as scapegoats for the crisis, while Democrats and Republicans slash funding for public education and other vital services to pay for the multitrillion-dollar bailout.

The new legislation passed by the Arizona state legislature, which restricts access to education, social services and health care, is a brutal attack on the democratic rights of immigrant workers, which will be used to undermine the rights and living conditions of all workers. Such measures are used to intimidate undocumented workers and maintain their pariah status so they can be used as a source of cheap labor and drive down wages for all workers.

Opponents of the new legislation have pointed out

that it will significantly increase instances of racial profiling, especially against persons of Latino origin, and will result in immigrants from all backgrounds being subjected to more arbitrary police harassment. Census figures estimate that over 30 percent of Arizona's 6.5 million people are of Latino origin. More immigrants currently pass through the Arizona border each year than through any other state in the country.

The legislation's sponsor, right-wing Republican State Senator Russell Pearce, responded to concerns about racial profiling by saying, "Illegal is not a race, it's a crime."

On Tuesday, nine university students were arrested at the capitol building after they chained themselves to the doors in protest of the bill. Another group served Governor Brewer's office with boxes full of statements of opposition to the bill and 83,000 signatures. Hundreds of other protestors vowed to remain at the capital until the governor makes her decision.

Several organizations, including the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, have promised legal challenges to the new legislation if it becomes law. The two groups are also planning a press conference in Washington, DC, to request that the Obama administration intervene, *AZcentral.com* reports. The White House has issued no comment on the current legislation being passed in Arizona.

Appeals to the administration are fruitless and self-defeating. Obama—who promised during his campaign to enact "immigration reform" that would provide citizenship for undocumented workers living in the US for many years with no criminal record—has expanded programs to criminalize non-citizens, militarize the borders and empower local police agencies with federal enforcement powers. At the same time, the administration has spearheaded massive attacks on social services that serve undocumented workers and their children.

In keeping with the policies of the Bush administration, Obama has overseen enormous Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids against undocumented workers throughout the country and deported hundreds of thousands since 2008. Since Obama's inauguration, there has been a 45 percent increase in the number of people jailed for immigration-related charges. Non-citizens now constitute a

staggering 30 percent of all inmates in federal prisons.

Significantly, on April 15, ICE staged its largest sweep ever, mainly in Arizona's urban centers. Dubbed "Operation In Plain Sight," more than 800 federal and local agents stormed numerous businesses and buses in Phoenix, Tucson, Nogales, and Rio Rico. Some four-dozen people were arrested, accused of taking part in a sophisticated network that provided transportation to undocumented immigrants from Mexico.

According to the Associated Press, a spokesperson for ICE would only tell the media the raids were part of an "ongoing investigation into allegations of human smuggling." The AP noted that agents dressed in black and wore hoods over their faces.

The raids are a provocation and part of a systematic effort to terrify, vilify, and silence the large immigrant population. The sweep caused considerable panic and fear among Phoenix residents in particular, coming a day after Maricopa County sheriff Joe Arpaio announced that his agency was to launch a "crime suppression sweep" on the city.

Arpaio is notorious for brutal, xenophobic and anti-democratic practices, including feeding county jail inmates only two meals a day and forcing prisoners to live in tents in extreme temperatures. The inhumane treatment and racial profiling practices of the Maricopa County police force that have triggered thousands of lawsuits will be largely legalized by SB 1070.



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