

US anti-immigrant campaign spreads beyond Arizona

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In the wake of the passage of Senate Bill 1070 in Arizona, politicians at all levels of government and their mouthpieces in the press continue the campaign to demonize undocumented immigrants. Both political parties continue to promote the lie that undocumented immigrants are to blame for state budget problems as well as continuing high unemployment and the destruction of workers' living standards.

As of June 30, similar bills had been introduced in five other states, according to the National Council of State Legislatures—South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Michigan.

On June 21, in the small city of Fremont, Nebraska, 35 miles northwest of Omaha, citizens voted 57 to 43 percent to restrict undocumented immigrants' ability to work and rent housing. Voter turnout was only 45 percent.

The ordinance would require all residents looking to rent housing to apply for an "occupancy license" from the city. Applicants found to be undocumented will be refused a license and turned over to immigration authorities. The legislation would also require employers in the city to use the federal government's E-Verify database to check the status of potential employees.

Similar legislation has been proposed in at least forty different municipalities. In two cities, Hazleton, Pennsylvania and Farmers Branch, Texas, the legislation was passed, but has been tied up in the courts for four years.

Many of Fremont's 25,000 residents work in nearby Fremont Beef and Hormel meatpacking plants. The city has seen a growth in its immigrant population from an estimated 165 in 1990 to 2,060 in 2009, due in large part to the demand for cheap labor in the meatpacking industry. Meatpacking plants are widely known for

excessive hours and inhumane working conditions.

In a similar plant in Postville, Iowa, workers have reported losing fingers and hands while chopping away at carcasses. All too often, such workers are silenced by management's threats of "calling immigration."

In 2006 and 2008, US immigration authorities staged workplace raids on meatpacking plants throughout the Midwest, including Grand Island, Nebraska, only two hours from the city of Fremont. (See "US immigration agents arrest 1,282 in raids at six meatpacking plants")

The state of Nebraska is expecting a \$679 million deficit in its upcoming budget. As in states across the country, politicians are set to cover this gap by cutting services to those most in need, the poor and the elderly. Politicians in Nebraska have also followed the trend of stirring up anti-immigrant hostility to divert popular anger from themselves and justify attacks on civil liberties and democratic rights.

Many studies have proven that blaming undocumented immigrants for the social and economic problems facing workers is nothing more than scapegoating.

An extensive 1997 report by the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences concluded that over their lifetimes, immigrants contribute more to public revenue, with an average of \$80,000 in taxes, than all combined benefits received. Additionally, immigrants are far less likely than citizens to use their eligible benefits, such as medical services and food stamps.

In addition, a 2007 report to the Executive Office of the President by the Council of Economic Advisers concluded that "the long-run impact of immigration on public budgets is likely to be positive."

A more extensive January 2008 report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) entitled

“Immigration Myths and Facts” cites numerous studies that dispel many of the myths perpetuated about undocumented immigrants, such as: “Immigrants are a drain on our social services,” “Immigrants have a negative impact on the economy and the wages of citizens and take jobs away from citizens,” “Immigrants don’t pay taxes,” and “Immigrants bring crime to our cities and towns.”

While the most vicious measures are for the most part promoted by the Republican right, the slanders against undocumented immigrants are perpetuated as well by the Democratic Party and the Obama administration to pave the way for immigration “reform” and deflect attention from their own role in the destruction of working class living standards.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported on Obama’s recent speech on immigration by emphasizing its remarkable similarities to a 2004 speech by then-President Bush. The *Times* quoted former Bush speechwriter Matt Latimer as saying that “this speech could almost word for word have been delivered by George W. Bush on the exact same subject. Do they just copy our old speeches?”

In the first year of Obama’s presidency, over 400,000 undocumented immigrants were deported; a 5 percent increase from the last year of the Bush presidency.



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