

US arrests 370 immigrants in Midwest raids

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A large-scale police operation resulted in the arrest of 370 immigrants in ten Midwestern states last week. The US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) coordinated with other federal authorities in conducting the operation, dubbed “Cross Check.”

Arrests of immigrants from 56 different nations were made over a three-day period in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin. The authorities and the media made much of the fact that the majority of those arrested were reportedly guilty of “prior criminal convictions,” including “nine gang members and 16 convicted sex offenders.”

Such sensationalist reporting aims to obscure the danger to democratic and constitutional principles posed by the police dragnet. The mass arrest, imprisonment and deportation of immigrants—the vast majority of whom are not criminals—has been intensified under the Obama administration, marking a new stage in the growing police powers of the state.

So far this year, ICE has removed a record 142,526 “criminal aliens” from the US, but according to Department of Homeland Security data, it is likely that a sizable majority of these so-called criminals had never been convicted of a crime. Most were arrested by local police agencies and turned over to immigration authorities under the Criminal Alien Program.

By the end of September, it is anticipated that the Obama administration will have deported a record 400,000 immigrants this fiscal year. Another 369,000 immigrants—men, women, and children—are in jail in the US for no other crime than entering the country, and about 250,000 immigrants are awaiting hearings in the nation’s clogged immigration court system, according to statistics compiled by Syracuse University.

On August 13, Obama signed into law the Southwest Border Security Bill, which allocates \$600 million to

the further militarization of the US-Mexico border, including the ramped-up use of unmanned Predator drones—the same planes used to terrorize the populations on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. (See “Obama signs law to militarize US-Mexico border”)

Behind Obama’s stepped-up anti-immigrant measures are the most cynical and reactionary calculations. In advance of the midterm elections, Obama and the Democrats are determined not to be outflanked by the Republicans’ racist anti-immigrant demagoguery. The Democrats will make a virtue of the fact that Obama has deported more immigrants than Bush, and will tout high-profile raids like those that took place in the Midwest last week.

The politicians’ efforts to scapegoat immigrants for mass joblessness aim to obscure the real culprits in the US financial aristocracy—the better to divide and further exploit the entire working class. Meanwhile, the police-state measures developed to deal with immigrants will inevitably be used against political opponents and the working class as a whole.

For tens of millions of immigrants, whether undocumented or not, life in the US is already a hellish ordeal of extreme exploitation by employers and harassment by state authorities. This was highlighted in a Monday *New York Times* report revealing that Border Patrol agents in northern US states are straying farther from the border in order to question and detain immigrants.

Border Patrol agents routinely board trains and buses that do not enter or even come close to Canada, according to the report. The agents ask travelers whether or not they are US citizens or legal residents, and then demand evidence to prove it.

Those who cannot supply the required documents—passports, “green card” resident alien permits, and visas—are subject to arbitrary arrest and

detention. In this way, “hundreds of passengers [are] taken to detention each year from domestic trains and buses along the nation’s northern border,” according to the article.

The Border Patrol presence aboard trains and buses in places like upstate New York illustrates the means by which immigration is being used to gut constitutional protections and basic conceptions of liberty. Immigration police are allowed extraordinary powers on the border and at a “reasonable distance,” and the definition of “reasonable distance” is being stretched as never before to include public transportation dozens of miles from the border.

Nor are US citizens spared late at night from being “startled by an agent’s flashlight in their eyes,” the article notes. The Border Patrol does not even inform travelers that they have the right to not answer questions.

“It’s turned into a police state on the northern border,” Cary M. Jensen, director of the University of Rochester’s international student services office, told the *Times*. International students at the upstate New York college have been jailed, as have their parents, based on mistakes made by the Border Patrol, Jensen said.

Critics of the Border Patrol have compared its questioning of travelers to the attempt by the state of Arizona to implement broad police powers to stop and search anyone. In fact, the routine practice of the Border Patrol is in some ways more arbitrary.

“At least in Arizona, you have to be doing something wrong to be stopped,” said a Chinese-American woman who, along with her Mexican boyfriend, was interrogated by agents on a train in New York. “Here, you’re sitting on the train asleep and if you don’t look like a US citizen, it’s ‘Wake up!’”

Many of those arrested did not have immigration papers with them at the time of their questioning, but were nevertheless legally residing in the US. Among these was a Pakistani college student who was detained for two weeks because he did not have his student visa with him.

The roving “border” searches are one of the many anti-democratic measures put in place after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington D.C. “Our mission is to defend the homeland, primarily against terrorists and terrorist

weapons,” said Thomas Pocorobba, Jr., who heads the Rochester, New York Border Patrol station.

In fact, in keeping with the “war on terror,” the purpose of the Border Patrol presence on Amtrak trains and Greyhound buses is to terrorize immigrant workers, while inuring the population against the growing police presence in daily life.



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