

Obama Administration boasts of increased repression of immigrants

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On October 6, US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Janet Napolitano held a press conference to announce that the Obama Administration had once again deported a record number of undocumented immigrants in fiscal year 2010. The number expelled from the country, 392,000, surpasses the previous year's 389,000, but still falls short of the administration's "goal" of 400,000.

The press conference, held by Napolitano and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Director John Morton, occurred less than a month before November's mid-term elections. It served as an opportunity for the Obama Administration to encourage the anti-immigrant sentiment that the Democrats, along with the Republicans, have created.

The White House has continually sought to portray its attacks on immigrants as a "public safety" measure and part of a broader "national security" campaign. At the same time, the government has sought to blame immigrants for the crisis facing American workers.

This announcement by Napolitano and the ICE was no different. Napolitano told reporters at the press conference, "This administration has focused on enforcing our immigration laws in a smart, effective manner that prioritizes public safety and national security and holds employers accountable who knowingly and repeatedly break the law."

She continued to portray immigrants as criminals and a danger to society stating, "Our approach has yielded historic results, removing more convicted criminal aliens than ever before."

Napolitano touted the expansion and "success" of the Secure Communities Initiative (SCI), a program that "uses biometric information and services to identify and remove criminal aliens in state prisons and local jails."

The SCI is a multi-billion dollar program that allows local law enforcement agencies to submit biometric information, such as fingerprint data, to FBI and DHS databases, and receive detailed criminal and immigration status records.

Napolitano boasted that 195,000 of those deported during fiscal year 2010 were "convicted criminals," attributing this to the SCI. However, among those "convicted criminals," less than one-third had been convicted of "serious crimes," while the remainder had committed minor infractions.

These tactics remain consistent with the policies outlined in an ICE internal memo that the *Washington Post* made public in February. The memo stated that the administration could increase deportation numbers by "increasing detention space to hold more illegal immigrants while they await deportation proceedings; by sweeping prisons and jails to find more candidates for deportation and offering early release to those willing to go quickly; and ... with a 'surge' in efforts to catch illegal immigrants whose only violation was lying on immigration or visa applications or reentering the United States after being deported."

Critics fear that in localities where the authorities use SCI, they will have more incentive to detain and run the information of suspected undocumented immigrants for little or no reason at all, resulting in widespread harassment.

The Obama Administration is trying to use the statistics showing record-level deportations of "convicted criminals" to claim that its repressive policies are solely targeting those elements within immigrant communities who pose a "threat." In reality, Obama's immigration policies have mainly focused on increasing workplace raids and neighborhood sweeps, as well as further militarizing the border. The latest

ramping up of SCI is consistent with this approach.

In the past month, 1,200 National Guard troops have begun deploying to the US' southwestern border, with nearly half of those in the state of Arizona. The troops are patrolling the region fully armed with M-16s and battle gear. Additionally, the Obama Administration has recently earmarked an additional \$600 million dollars for technology and infrastructure along the border.

On October 8, the Obama Administration invited the press to Arizona to view the latest example of the president's "unprecedented commitment of manpower, technology and infrastructure to the Arizona border over the past 19 months."

The increasingly repressive measures taken by the Obama administration have not only resulted in increased deportations, but also increased fear in immigrant communities and deaths along the US-Mexico border (See: "Over 60 migrants die in July in Arizona border crossings").

By targeting immigrant workers, the Obama administration is attempting to scapegoat them for the social and economic catastrophe confronting millions of ordinary people today. All the talk of the "national security threat" posed by immigrants is nothing but an effort to divide the working class and divert workers' attention from the real source of their growing misery—the capitalist system and its representatives in Washington. The police measures employed by the Obama administration against immigrant workers should be taken as a warning of the measures the White House is prepared to use against all sections of working people as social discontent and political opposition mounts.



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