

Georgia governor signs anti-immigrant bill

Ed Hightower
26 May 2011

On May 13, Georgia became the third US state to pass an “immigration reform” bill when Republican governor Nathan Deal signed HB 87, which authorizes police to investigate the immigration status of criminal suspects, requires employers, prison officials, and providers of social services to verify immigration status, punishes those who provide assistance to illegal immigrants, and makes a felony the use of fake identification to get a job.

The law, dubbed the “Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act of 2011,” is an attack on the most basic rights of immigrant workers and greatly strengthens the police powers of the state. It gives police and state officials power to enforce federal immigration laws, and beefs up protection for law enforcement officers accused of civil rights violations while engaging in such activity.

Arizona was the first state to enact a law of this type in April of 2010. The notorious measure, SB-1070, is now facing constitutional challenge. Utah passed a similar law in March, 2011. A number of states—including Alabama, Indiana, Oklahoma and South Carolina—are in the process of enacting anti-immigrant laws.

On signing the bill, Georgia Governor Deal made the absurd and reactionary claim that the law would protect citizens from the supposed drain that undocumented workers create on Georgia’s law enforcement, prisons, public health, schools, and other social services, effectively equating undocumented workers and their families with criminals and parasites.

The blame for declining living standards, high unemployment, and underfunded public education and social services is not the fault of undocumented workers and their families. These are the direct consequences of the class war policies of the US financial elite and a political system that has become

totally unresponsive to the most basic needs of ordinary people.

The Georgia law is a blow aimed at the entire working class, immigrant and US-born alike. For undocumented workers and their families the consequences will be most severe. Out of fear of being arrested and deported, undocumented workers will be less inclined to seek necessary medical treatment, education, and other services for themselves and their children. In this way, the bill is a major step toward creating a permanent class of workers stripped of even the most rudimentary rights.

As for US-born workers, the impoverishment and criminalization of the undocumented will be used to drive down wages and step up police repression. The law immediately subjects to investigation and criminal penalties groups and individuals who help migrant workers. Ultimately the arbitrary police powers created by the law will be deployed against any and all working class resistance to the policies of the corporations and the two big business parties.

The law will break up families, many of which include both US citizens and undocumented workers. The Associated Press reports that in southeast Georgia, where Vidalia onions are picked out of the ground by hand, there are signs that seasonal farm workers are leaving for nearby states. Shops catering to Spanish-speakers bear fliers advertising work harvesting blueberries in Florida and peppers in the Carolinas.

A 20-year-old woman named Sandra Almanza told the AP she was considering leaving Georgia in order to protect her husband, an undocumented worker from Mexico City. Almanza, who is pregnant, cried at the thought of leaving her mother’s store, La Michoacana, for another state.

Civil rights groups and Hispanic celebrities have condemned the Georgia law. Musician Carlos Santana took the occasion at a recent Major League Baseball

game to call the new law “cruel.” Giving the lie to the claim that immigrant workers do not pull their own weight, he commented, “I would invite all Latin people to do nothing for about two weeks so you can see who really, really is running the economy,” Santana said. “Who cleans the sheets? Who cleans the toilets? Who babysits?”

For his part, President Obama issued a perfunctory statement asserting that “immigration reform” is a national issue, but reaffirming his support for the same anti-democratic sentiments behind the Georgia law.

“The truth of the matter is that we’ve done more on enforcement than any previous administration,” Obama told an Atlanta-based television news station. “We have more border patrols. We have been engaging in serious crackdowns on employers who are hiring undocumented workers.”

Obama has proposed an immigration “reform” that would create a national identification card system and that would require immigrants to admit they broke the law before “going to the end of the line” for citizenship, as Obama puts it. That such a reactionary agenda could be considered “moderate” only testifies to the far-right character of the entire political establishment.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact