

Alabama adopts extreme anti-immigrant legislation

Daniel Sharp
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Last week, Alabama became the fourth US state to pass a bill modeled after an Arizona law that provoked mass opposition last year. The measure, signed into law by Alabama Governor Robert Bentley on Thursday, goes even further in its racist attack on immigrants and its violation of the most basic of democratic rights.

Arizona's legislation ordered immigrants to carry their registration documents at all times and requires police to question anyone they may suspect of being undocumented. It also targets those who hire undocumented immigrant workers or knowingly transport them. Georgia and Utah have passed similar legislation, while Indiana, Oklahoma and South Carolina are in the process of doing so.

Alabama's version, which is scheduled to take effect September 1, is the toughest yet. Like the Arizona law, the measure requires local police to check the immigration status and arrest people who they believe may be undocumented. It will also be illegal to transport, harbor or rent property to undocumented immigrants.

A particularly vindictive provision will require schools to check the immigration status of all students and their parents, with this information reported to the state legislature. This attacks a core democratic principle that everyone should have access to public education.

While the law's supporters claim that no one will be denied access to schools, it will clearly have a chilling effect on undocumented workers who will fear arrest if they try to have their children educated. Undocumented immigrants will also be banned from attending state colleges.

Several lawsuits against the bill have been planned, including by the American Civil Liberties Union and

the Southern Poverty Law Center. Parts of the Arizona law have been declared unconstitutional by a federal judge, and the issue will likely go before the US Supreme Court.

The Alabama law "is clearly unconstitutional," Mary Bauer, the legal director for the Southern Poverty Law Center, noted. Cecillia Wang, director of the immigrants' rights project of the American Civil Liberties Union, remarked, "This bill invites discrimination into every aspect of the lives of people in Alabama."

Aware that the legislation will face legal challenges, the crafters of the bill inserted language that will keep the measure as a whole in effect, even if parts of it are declared unconstitutional.

As a result of this law, and the others like it, racial profiling will become effectively legal. Anyone a police officer thinks might look undocumented will be subject to arrest and detention. Anyone who attempts to help an "illegal immigrant" will be guilty of a punishable crime.

It will worsen conditions of poverty and discrimination against a class of people that already have an ample helping of both. There are an estimated 120,000 undocumented immigrants in Alabama. The aim is to establish a permanent class of workers with absolutely no rights, who are therefore completely at the mercy of the corporations.

At the same time, the Alabama law immensely strengthens police-state measures that will be used not only against immigrants, but against the working class as a whole. As always, the attack on immigrants is presented as a "jobs" measure for non-immigrants. This is a fraud. The same political and social forces pushing the anti-immigrant campaign are responsible for an all-out assault on every social gain and program that

benefits the working class. It is the corporations and their political representatives, not immigrants, who are responsible for the attack on wages and jobs, health care, and schools.

None of the media commentary in Alabama or nationally has noted the brutal exploitation of undocumented immigrants. That men or women may be forced to leave their homes and cross a border into another country in search of the most basic right, namely, a job, to support themselves on poverty-level wages has not been a point of focus.

While it has been the Republican Party that has pushed hardest for legislation like that passed in Alabama, the attack on immigration is bipartisan. The Obama administration has sharply increased raids and deportations of undocumented immigrants and expanded the militarization of the borders.

The administration's response to the passage of legislation by the states has been to insist not on the rights of immigrants, but on the power of the federal government to determine immigration policy. Obama has proposed immigration "reform" that would include a national identification card system and a draconian procedure for anyone currently in the country without documentation.



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