

US deports a record 400,000 immigrants

Tom Eley
20 October 2011

For the third straight year, the Obama administration has set a record in the number of undocumented immigrants deported, expelling nearly 400,000 from the US during the fiscal year ending in September.

The number of immigrants deported in 2011 (396,906) is equivalent to the populations of such major US cities as Miami and Cleveland. More than 1 million immigrants have been deported since Obama became president. This is despite the fact that three years of economic crisis have sharply curtailed immigration.

“These record-breaking deportation numbers come at a time when illegal immigration rates have plummeted, the undocumented population has decreased substantially and violent crime rates are at their lowest levels in 40 years,” said Joanne Lin, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, in a statement.

Behind this forced human exodus, surely one of the largest such operations in history, are countless broken families and communities—fathers and mothers separated from children, husbands from wives, sisters from brothers. As Lin notes, the Obama administration’s deportation campaign has left a “wake of devastation in Latino communities across the nation.”

The agency responsible, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a unit of the Department of Homeland Security, claims that more than half of those deported in 2011 were “criminals.” In an attempt to demonize the immigrants, ICE emphasizes that 80,000 of the deportees had been convicted of drug-related crimes, 1,000 had been convicted of murder, and 5,800 had been convicted of some form of sexual offense.

ICE has not revealed the number of cases where the deported immigrant’s only crime was having been apprehended in the US without proper documentation, but immigrant rights activists believe this to be the vast majority.

The massive deportation campaign bespeaks the enormous growth of the American police apparatus. It involves new police-state measures, including the Secure Communities Program, which requires that the fingerprints of any individual processed at a county or local jail be submitted to a Homeland Security database.

Those found to be in the country without proper documentation, whether or not they have committed a serious crime, are subject to deportation, typically without any notice to family members or communication with attorneys. These immigrants are sent off to a gulag archipelago of some 250 detention centers, some of which are privately run. Many hold thousands of immigrants in overcrowded conditions. At these prisons, immigrants are denied access to legal advice and are subject to well-documented sexual and physical abuse. The majority of the inmates are eventually deported.

The Obama administration is utilizing the Secure Communities Program to attain an annual deportation quota, currently pegged at 400,000. The program will be fully implemented in all 50 states by 2013, after Obama ordered states that had resisted, including his home state of Illinois, to fall into line.

Many of the so-called criminals deported through Secure Communities have similar stories to that of Blanca Perez, who was taken to a local jail for operating an ice cream stand without a permit. She is

now being processed for deportation.

“Every day I live the nightmare of this program,” Perez, 38, told a reporter this summer. “Now I am facing deportation for the simple act of selling ice cream in the street.”

Another “crime” frequently used to justify deportation through Secure Communities is driving with an expired driver’s license—a document now difficult, or even impossible, for immigrants to attain due to anti-immigrant legislation at the state level. Other crimes that have resulted in deportation include driving with broken tail lights, and there are reportedly cases of victims of domestic abuse being removed from local precincts where they had sought protection.

This week, the PBS television news program “Frontline” featured a chilling program called “Lost in Detention,” which examined Obama’s intensification of the Bush administration’s immigration crackdown. The show highlighted the stories of two immigrant mothers in Illinois who were booked for minor traffic violations—a broken tail light in one case and an illegal lane change in the other. After being processed at local police stations for lack of driver’s licenses, the women were “disappeared” from their families, which included in both cases small children.

Such arrests are the stated policy of the Obama administration, the report revealed. An internal ICE document from 2010 warned the agency to increase its “non-criminal removals” in order to meet its quota of 400,000 deportations.

ICE Assistant Secretary Kumar Kibble, quoted in the documentary, promised that the number of deportations will increase in coming years. “You’ll see that number continue to go up and up,” he said.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact