

Immigrant rights protests held across the United States

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19 January 2017

Protests in defense of immigrant rights were held in 50 cities across the United States on Saturday, days before the inauguration of president-elect Donald Trump and leading up to Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Monday, during which other anti-Trump protests were held.

The demonstrations on Saturday were called in opposition to Trump's stated immigration policy aims, including threats to deport some two to three million undocumented immigrants, slashing of federal funding of all so-called "sanctuary cities" that don't comply rigorously with federal immigration policy, and a crackdown on Muslims entering the country.

The protests were generally led by an array of civil rights, immigrant advocacy, religious and other groups, many with close ties to the Democratic Party. One of the rallies convened in Washington DC, titled "We Shall Not Move" by the National Action Network, was led by Democratic Party operative and multimillionaire Al Sharpton.

Figures like Sharpton and his ilk continue their efforts to keep the anger at the forthcoming Trump presidency expressed in these protests firmly within the two-party system, sowing illusions that the Democrats and "moderate" Republicans could be pressured to fight. Sharpton declared, "We come not to appeal to Donald Trump, because he's made it clear what his policies are and what his nominations are. We come to say to the Democrats in the Senate and in the House and to the moderate Republicans to get some backbone. Get some guts. We didn't send you down here to be weak-kneed."

There were undoubtedly broad layers in attendance at the dozens of protests throughout the country, motivated by compassion for one of the more vulnerable segments of the population and repelled by

the xenophobic sentiments whipped up by the Trump administration. However, so long as the basic political perspective remains one of pressuring the two parties of big business for more "humane" immigration reform, opposition to the exploitation of immigrants will continue to be funneled into a dead end.

The recent demonstrations recall, albeit on a smaller scale, the massive immigration reform protests of 2006, which involved millions of demonstrators across the country, including over half a million in Los Angeles alone. Those protests were sparked by proposed legislation which would have made felony crimes of undocumented immigration, as well as providing aid to undocumented immigrants, including charities, clinics and other services offered.

While the bill did not pass in Congress in 2006, the protests prompted the Bush administration to vindictively escalate the scale of ICE raids with the express aim of intimidating the immigrant population and curbing further attempts at organization efforts. Furthermore, the Senate failed to work out even the most modest of reforms to the overall framework of US immigration policy.

That the 2006 mass demonstrations fell under the sway of politicians and figureheads of the Democratic establishment also proved to be a decisive political obstacle. Some leaders of the protests even suggested that native-born workers "have it too good."

The heavily militarized ICE raids continued under the administration of Barack Obama, with the Democratic president overseeing the deportation of more than 2.5 million people, more than any of his predecessors. The incoming Trump administration's targeting two to three million immigrants for rapid deportation would represent a dismal continuity with the outgoing administration.

Amidst the calls at the protests for vigilance against ICE under a Trump administration, there was a glaring incongruity when it came to the silence on the content of Obama's own draconian deportation policies. No serious effort was made to take into account the record of the Democrats, who falsely pose as friends of the foreign-born.

There was also no mention from protest organizers of the fact that the massive database collected on those immigrant youth who had been registered in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program under the Obama administration could now potentially be used to expedite the deportation schemes of a Trump government.

From the outset, in 2012, the WWSWS had warned of the potentially draconian use of the DACA program, stating that, "To receive the two-year relief from the threat of deportation, young undocumented immigrants must register with the Department of Homeland Security, effectively declaring themselves to be 'illegal' and making them easier targets if and when a new directive comes from the White House, either from Obama himself or from his Republican opponent Mitt Romney, should Romney win the November election. Once registered, immigrants still have no path to citizenship and their legal status is only temporary. Even if there is no immediate double-cross, the condition of the newly registered would represent only the regularization of their status as an exploited underclass."

As Trump takes office, the confirmation of this warning points to the increasingly authoritarian character of American politics. To the extent that Trump intends to make good on his plans for mass deportation, there would be no way to realize it except through the erection of what would amount to an immense infrastructure of detention camps.

A check to Trump's anti-immigrant policies will not come through appeals to the Democratic Party, which has proven itself time and again to differ only tactically from the Republicans on the question of immigration.



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