

Thousands demonstrate in defense of immigrants as White House vows more deportations

Tom Eley
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Demonstrations in the US continued over the weekend against last week's mass roundup of immigrants, the first "surge" in deportations since President Donald Trump signed a January 25 executive order dramatically expanding the purview of anti-immigrant police actions.

An annual march for civil rights in Raleigh, North Carolina, held Saturday, drew a record crowd of over 20,000. The turnout was fueled by opposition to Trump's brutal policies against both Hispanic and Muslim immigrants.

In Minneapolis on Saturday, a crowd estimated at 2,000 marched through the downtown area, blocking streets in the central business district and at the University of Minnesota.

In New York City, protests took place on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Yesterday's protest, called by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, drew several thousand to Battery Park.

In Chicago on Saturday, hundreds rallied at Rogers Park and outside of Trump Tower. Hundreds also demonstrated outside of the White House on Saturday, chanting "Undocumented, Unafraid!"

In northern Virginia, walkouts involving hundreds of students hit several high schools on Friday. Protests have continued in cities targeted in last week's raids, including Los Angeles and Austin, Texas.

On Thursday night, several hundred protesters took to the streets in Los Angeles in response to the crackdown, temporarily blocking Highway 101. There were chants of "Shut down ICE! [Immigration and Customs Enforcement]."

In Mexico City, thousands marched down the capital city's central boulevard, the Paseo de la Reforma, in opposition to Trump's plan to build a wall along the US-Mexico border.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) spokesmen asserted last week that the raids were "routine" and had been planned under the Obama administration. But the Trump

administration on Sunday hailed the roundups and linked them to the new president's campaign pledge to deport millions of undocumented immigrants. Trump himself boasted on Twitter that he ordered the raids as a "crackdown on illegal criminals."

His senior political adviser, Stephen Miller, appeared on all of the major Sunday news interview programs and categorically defended both the crackdown on Hispanic immigrants and the anti-Muslim travel ban currently held up by the federal courts. Miller is the former chief of staff of Jeff Sessions when the far-right, anti-immigrant Republican was a member of the US Senate. Last week, Sessions was confirmed by the Senate as US attorney general and sworn into office on Thursday.

Miller denounced the courts for temporarily blocking Trump's anti-Muslim travel ban, asserting that the president has unreviewable, i.e., dictatorial, powers to take any measures he pleases in the name of national security. He stressed that the immigrant roundups last week were part of Trump's new policy, which builds on and dramatically expands the reactionary, antidemocratic immigration policies of President Obama, who deported more people than all previous presidents combined. Miller defended the targeting of all undocumented immigrants on the basis of an open appeal to chauvinism and nativism.

Asked on NBC News' "Meet the Press" program whether he was in favor of *legal* immigration, Miller refused to answer, insisting instead that "we should have a program in which American workers are given jobs first."

The crackdown on Thursday came on the heels of protests against the deportation of Guadalupe García de Rayos from Phoenix on Wednesday night. Hundreds of protesters sought to physically prevent the worker and mother of two from being deported. Pictures of her in an armored car, waiting to be taken to Mexico, spread quickly on social media. She had lived in the US for over twenty years before her deportation.

It is not yet clear how many immigrants were swept up in

the unannounced ICE dragnet, dubbed Operation Cross Check. Adding up figures presented in various media reports, it appears that the number arrested for deportation surpassed 600 in several days of raids that concluded Friday.

The raids, which came to light Thursday when disparate immigration advocacy groups and lawyers noticed that they were getting many more calls than usual, used police state tactics, with heavily armed officers barging into homes, often in broad daylight, and marching off alleged “criminal aliens” without even the pretense of due process. There were also reports of random ICE traffic checkpoints, immigrants being intercepted on their way to work, and agents going door-to-door in largely Hispanic neighborhoods demanding of surprised residents that they produce papers.

Over 200 were arrested in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, leaving area immigration attorneys “scrambling” to “put the pieces together,” according to a local news report. Chicago’s ICE headquarters admitted carrying out over 200 arrests in an area that included Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin and Indiana.

In California, ICE reported that it had arrested 161 immigrants, most of whom were evidently taken from the Los Angeles area. At least 50 were detained in Austin, according to the Mexican consulate, in addition to an unknown number seized elsewhere in Texas. There are also reports of raids in northern Virginia, the Hudson Valley in New York and Plant City, Florida.

The raids were a carefully designed provocation, “a really concerted effort to instill fear and terrorize” immigrants, in the words of David Abud, an organizer with the National Day Labor Organizing Network. A number of the raids appear to have targeted so-called “sanctuary cities,” where local government officials, responding to popular pressure, have extended limited social services to undocumented immigrants.

Trump’s January 25 executive order expands deportation enforcement priorities to include potentially all undocumented immigrants, and especially those with outstanding deportation orders. It also mandates a major enlargement of the border police and the expansion of immigrant detention centers near the US-Mexican border.

There are millions of immigrants in the US with outstanding deportation orders. Up to now, they have generally been allowed to continue living in the US, their home addresses and work locations often known to the authorities. These people are easy targets for the Trump administration because under current practice they have no right to judicial review.

While previously it was standard practice for ICE to pursue only those with serious criminal charges, last week’s roundups were broader and included people who were

accused of no crimes. They were guilty only of failing to produce documentation when it was demanded of them.

This was very nearly the fate of Manuel Mosqueda, a 50-year-old house painter who was arrested and put on a bus for deportation to Tijuana, Mexico. ICE agents barged into his Los Angeles area apartment at 5 a.m. looking for someone else, but instead sent off Mosqueda, who has no criminal record and has lived in the US for 22 years.

“I never committed any crime,” Mosqueda told Spanish-language media. “I’ve worked my whole life in this country. I’m a good person.” Mosqueda’s lawyers were able to intervene to secure his release.

The Trump administration intends to make massive anti-immigrant raids a permanent feature of daily life, leading to the militarization of cities across the US and preparing the way for mass repression against the entire working class. “Big cities tend to have a lot of illegal immigrants,” an unnamed administration official told the *Washington Post*. “They’re going to a target-rich environment.”

In his confirmation hearings last week, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly testified that ICE police, who will serve under him, will now feel unconstrained in carrying out such inhumane actions. Officers were “kind of hobbled or, you know, hands tied behind their back, that kind of thing,” Kelly told the House Homeland Security Committee. “And now they feel more positive about things. I bet if you watch the morale issue, you’ll...be surprised going forward.”

The Democratic Party is complicit in the anti-immigrant crackdown. Obama deported 2.7 million people, earning the epithet “Deporter-in-Chief.” He expanded the police state infrastructure that now falls into the hands of Trump.

Appearing on “Meet the Press” immediately following Stephen Miller, Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders offered not a word of criticism of the roundup and deportation of undocumented workers. Asked directly by moderator Chuck Todd about the anti-immigrant measures and the anti-Muslim travel ban, Sanders replied, “Well, I think that the vetting mechanisms we have now are very, very strong. If anybody has an idea as to how we can make them stronger, let’s go forward.”



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