

US immigration authorities expand dragnet raids

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2 March 2017

“As we speak, we are removing gang members, drug dealers and criminals that threaten our communities and prey on our citizens,” declared US President Donald Trump in his speech to Congress Tuesday, adding, “Bad ones are going out as I speak tonight.”

That day, eleven undocumented workers were arrested by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) near Woodburn, Oregon on the morning of February 28 while riding in two vans on their way to work. Neither of ICE’s original two targets—one of whom has never been convicted of a crime—were present. Four of the workers arrested were already in deportation proceedings; all eleven now face deportation.

The Woodburn round-up is only one in a wave of “collateral arrests” carried out since the Trump administration prioritized the deportation of all removable undocumented immigrants regardless of criminal record. Bystanders have been swept up in ICE raids at their homes, workplaces and near schools across the country.

Yerlyn Castro, a legal assistant at Katja Hedding Law Firm in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, recounted to AL.com a raid on an apartment in Birmingham, Alabama on February 22. “ICE officers showed up at the apartment complex and asked for the person’s name,” Castro said. “They said the person they were looking for didn’t live there anymore, so they [ICE] arrested three undocumented people who were living there instead.”

Immigrants rights advocates and attorneys are reporting an increasing frequency in ICE operations and collateral arrests since the Trump administration’s first week-long campaign last month, over the course of which almost 700 people were arrested.

“Before, we used to be told, ‘You can’t arrest those people,’ and we’d be disciplined for being

insubordinate if we did,” a 10-year veteran ICE agent told *The New York Times*. “Now those people are priorities again.”

“It’s blown up over the past two weeks,” Alabama defense attorney Paul Scott told AL.com. “We can’t even attend our phones because so many people are calling with these kinds of detentions. ... Definitely the executive order is mobilizing ICE everywhere...”

In Texas, Travis county officials confronted ICE regional field director Dan Bible on Friday, demanding to know if ICE was targeting the city of Austin in particular. Fifty-one Austin residents were arrested in a two-day sting last month carried out by the agency, Operation Cross Check. “I was interested to know, ‘Are you out doing these crazy roundups trying to snare people?,’” said County Commissioner Gerald Daugherty. Travis county officials suspect the agency is retaliating against a policy that subjects to review some ICE requests to detain arrestees in county jail, instead of granting automatic approval.

The Trump administration’s immigration advisors have proposed that the Department of Homeland Security double the number of people held in immigration detention centers to 80,000 per day. Trump has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from private prison companies—whose stocks are rising as they salivate over the prospect of mass incarcerations.

The recent raids have filled immigrant communities throughout the United States with fear, with teachers reporting that families are afraid to venture outside to get groceries, and children expressing the fear of coming home and discovering that their family members have been arrested by ICE. Parents are scrambling to set up guardianship arrangements and obtain US passports for their children in case of

deportation.

“What we’re seeing is a lot of parents who used to pick up their children from school and now they’re sending them on the bus,” an anonymous teacher told the *Huffington Post*. “The parents are afraid to come to the school.” Teachers have attended workshops on how to answer students’ questions and fear regarding deportation. The Austin Independent School District in Texas sent out a memo to teachers on February 13 warning them to cooperate with ICE and to stop handing out “partisan” leaflets.



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