

“We’re bigger than ICE, all of us together!”

Los Angeles protest against deportation of Rómulo Avelica-González

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Around 100 people protested on the steps of the US Immigration Court in downtown Los Angeles on Monday against the abduction and detention of Romulo Avelica-Gonzalez. Romulo was pulled over and arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in front of his 13-year-old daughter Fatima as he dropped her off for school last week. Fatima captured the arrest on her mobile phone and the video has been viewed more than 600,000 times.

“When I saw the video and the young girl and her father being taken away it broke my heart,” Jung Hee, a mother of two from Romulo’s neighborhood of Highland Park, told WSWs reporters. “I can’t even imagine what it’s like to be that young girl and see one of her parents get taken away,” she said. Jung said she came to the protest because she “wanted to stand up for certain communities that are being targeted right now and say, ‘That’s not right, that’s not the country I want to live in.’”

Jocelyn Avelica, Romulo’s 19-year-old daughter, addressed the demonstration. “We’re not leaving,” she said. “We’re bigger than Trump! We’re bigger than ICE, all of us together!” Protesters chanted, “Fuera Trump! Fuera ICE!” (“Get out Trump! Get out ICE!”)

Monday’s demonstration is only the latest in a wave of protests in opposition to the Trump administration’s attacks on immigrants. A series of executive orders signed by Donald Trump, and a memo from Department of Homeland Security Director John Kelly, place millions of immigrants in imminent danger of detention and deportation. Trump told a press conference last month that the assault on immigrants and refugees was a “military operation” which is “getting bad dudes out of this country.”

In fact, immigrants like Romulo are being targeted as part of a campaign of fear and terror being waged by the Trump administration against the entire working class. Romulo’s criminal history consists entirely of a drunk driving arrest more than 10 years ago and vehicle registration forgery more than two decades ago. A 48-year-old Mexican-born restaurant worker, Romulo has lived in the US for over 25 years and is the father of four daughters, all US citizens. He was the main source of income for his family, sometimes working 60-70 hours per week.

“I work in the fields,” said Ricardo, a farm worker who came to the demonstration from Santa Barbara. “It is bad what they are doing with the immigrants because we immigrants are the ones who contribute to the country. We work hard for a future. We are the ones who work hard in the sun, in the cold. There’s ice and we are still putting our hands in. It is very difficult in the fields and we the workers are the ones who put up with all of it. We don’t deserve the treatment that we are getting.”

Romulo has now spent a week in an ICE detention center in Adelanto, California, and is threatened with deportation if his visa extension is not approved. The facility is under quarantine for a measles outbreak and his family has not been allowed to visit him.

Outside the ICE headquarters, people carried handmade signs that read, “Free Romulo!” “Sanctuary, not Deportation!” “Stop terrorizing my neighbors,” “No ban. No wall” and “Muslims in solidarity with Romulo.” The last two refer to two of President Trump’s executive orders, which call for the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border, as well as banning citizens from six Muslim-majority

countries from entering the United States.

St. Claire Adriaan, the principal of Fatima's school, told the crowd that on the day of Romulo's arrest, "Our eighth graders were going to the Museum of Tolerance because they are reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* ." He continued, "When Fatima came to school that morning, when I had to meet a traumatized 13-year-old crying because she has no idea if she is going to see her father again, I was mad.

"I was mad as an educator that politicians would allow ICE to do this to our children. They are tearing our families apart. But we will stand by our children and our families. Because an injury to one is an injury to all."

Adriaan recalled to the WSWs his childhood growing up in Apartheid South Africa and having to go to segregated restaurants and schools and beaches. "We have the same blood running through our veins," he said. "No human being should make any other human being feel inferior or dehumanized, and what I'm seeing here is exactly the same."

Sara, one of the demonstrators, said, "Everyone is an 'immigrant,' they just don't talk about it that way. My ancestors came over from Eastern Europe, from Russia and Poland, and they came before World War II and I'm Jewish, so who knows what would have happened to my family line if they weren't welcomed here?"

The attack on Romulo Avelica-Gonzalez is part of a pattern of egregious actions by ICE in recent weeks designed to strike fear into the immigrant population.

· On the Friday, 27-year-old Juan Carlos Coronilla-Guerrero was snatched up by ICE at the Travis County courthouse in Austin, Texas.

· On March 1, 22-year-old Daniela Vargas was detained by ICE agents after speaking at a press conference against the detention of her father and brother. She now faces deportation to Argentina, the country she left at age seven.

· On March 2, Juan Carlos Fomperosa Garcia, a father of three US citizens who came to the US 20 years ago, went to his appointment at an ICE office to discuss his request for asylum. He never came home, having been deported to Mexico, leaving his 23-year-old daughter Yennifer as sole guardian of her younger brother and sister.

These unprecedented moves will have the effect of frightening undocumented people from showing up in

court, thus criminalizing them. The list of these horrors is growing daily, and the protests continue.



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