

“We refuse to be thrown away like the bakery’s garbage”

Immigrant workers at Queens, New York bakery face firing and deportation threat

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In another example of the Trump administration’s anti-immigrant campaign, roughly 30 Hispanic workers at the Tom Cat Bakery in Long Island City, a section of the New York City borough of Queens, have received letters from their employer informing them that they must produce papers documenting their status to legally work in the US or they will be fired with no severance compensation. The letter to the Tom Cat employees claims the company’s action was prompted by a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) audit targeted to identify undocumented workers.

The letter states that proper documentation must be produced within 10 business days of March 16, placing the deadline at March 30. Many of the workers have been employed at the bakery for a decade or more. The abruptness of the notice and the extremely short time frame for response appear intended to terrorize the workers and their families. Not only would they lose their jobs, but DHS could then notify Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of their undocumented status, exposing the workers to deportation.

On Thursday reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with workers outside of the company’s block-long Long Island City bakery. They had few illusions about Tom Cat’s attitude toward its workers or those of the entire capitalist political establishment.

Martin, an immigrant from Mexico who has lived in the US for 25 years, said, “I’m fairly new and I didn’t know about what was going on. I was speaking with some people who have worked here 20 years and now they are just being told to go.”

Juan, who has worked for Tom Cat for one-and-a-half years, said about the firing, “I know people who have worked here for 15 years, and the company is just

going to let them go without giving them any money. One of my friends has two kids to take care of. What will happen to them? I really feel bad for them. They might end up living in the streets.

“The company just doesn’t want to pay a fine [for employing undocumented workers], and the union just wants to keep the money.”

Asked about his thoughts on the current political situation, he added, “It is crazy, and Trump is crazy. His whole government is full of rich people, and he just signed all these things against immigrants. It is the immigrants who do all these jobs though, and it is going to bring down the country.”

Jorge, a worker originally from Peru, said, “The company just doesn’t want to pay a fine, and they don’t want to fight nobody. It is the government that is asking them to get rid of us, and the government is after everyone now.

“I have been harassed by police. They go up to me and ask me the same questions all the time.

“The kind of the thing that is going on here is going on around the country. I know it is happening in Buffalo, and New Jersey. I heard that three immigrants at another bakery in Brooklyn were fired because they didn’t have papers. The mayor [Bill de Blasio] promised that he would protect us, and that nobody could just touch immigrants. It isn’t true.”

On Wednesday, Tom Cat workers demonstrated outside of the bakery and issued a call for nationwide solidarity protests. One worker, Sabino Milian, told the *LIC Post*, “We work hard, pay taxes and have given so much to make Tom Cat into a hugely successful company. We refuse to be thrown away like the bakery’s garbage, and we will advance forward

together.”

Another worker, Josias D’Avilla, who has worked for Tom Cat for 10 years, explained to the *Village Voice*, “We’ve given so many years to the company, so many sacrifices that made this company go. We picked up this company from the ground as workers, with so many years that we gave to this company with our lives.”

The company, established in 1987, began in a garage. It claims to be the oldest artisan bakery in New York. Since then, it has grown into an industrial-scale enterprise, operating 24 hours a day to supply 900 commercial clients, including retail stores, restaurants and hotels.

In 2008, the original owner sold the company to a pair of private equity companies, Ancor Capital and Merit Capital. The new owners then undertook an attack on workers’ health care and pay, which the workers resisted. Last year, Tom Cat Bakery was bought by Japan-based Yamizaki Baking, one of the largest multi-national baking companies.

The campaign of mass deportations is aimed at intimidating and silencing immigrant workers and forcing them to accept even more brutal conditions of exploitation. It is aimed at driving a wedge between immigrant and native born workers and to attack the entire working class.

Despite Trump’s relentless xenophobic campaign a CNN poll released March 17 shows that 90 percent of Americans believe the government should give immigrants who have lived and worked in the US for a number of years the right to apply for US citizenship, including 84 percent of Trump voters. The total percent opposed to such a proposal has fallen by half since 2014.

Powerful conditions exist for the unity of immigrant and native born workers against these attacks. However, confusion is being sown by the unions and their pseudo-left supporters, such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO), which falsely present the Democratic Party as the bastion of opposition to the Trump administration.

In remarks cited without criticism in the ISO’s socialistworker.org article, Democratic City Council member Mark Levine demagogically told protesters Wednesday, “We reject the racist policies of Donald Trump’s ICE which have targeted decent, hardworking

New Yorkers who have done nothing but contribute to this community, contribute to this economy and made our city a better place. We demand that Tom Cat defend their workers in their time of need and that they offer the sponsorship that they need to remain here without this horrible threat standing over their heads.”

Democrats like Mark Levine and Mayor Bill de Blasio are not allies of immigrant workers but their enemies. More immigrants were deported under former President Obama than all previous presidents. Nor should workers place their confidence in a multi-national corporation and its wealthy investors to protect them.

The defense of immigrant workers can only be advanced by mobilizing the independent strength of the working class against both big business parties and the profit system that both Trump and the Democrats defend. All workers must fight for the basic principle that every worker must have the right to live and work wherever they choose with full citizenship rights.



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