

Arrest of family in Geneseo, New York by US Border Patrol draws protest

Our reporters
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Border Patrol officers arrested an extended family of mixed citizenship status Thursday, March 23 in Geneseo, New York. The family was on their way to church when a Geneseo Police Department (GPD) officer pulled them over for a traffic violation on the campus of the State University of New York College at Geneseo (SUNY Geneseo). Much of the evening's proceedings were captured on video.

According to the Rochester-based *Democrat & Chronicle*, the minivan contained two adults, both sisters from Guatemala, and six children. Reports indicate that five of the children are US citizens, including an infant born in the United States in January.

Although the Village of Geneseo does not require that their officers call Border Patrol if they suspect an immigration violation, the officer who initiated the traffic stop did so, supposedly "to confirm the identity of the person driving," according to Geneseo Police Chief Eric Osganian, after the driver could not produce a valid driver's license.

New York state does not permit undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, although twelve states do, including California and Vermont.

Mary Rutigliano, a village trustee and SUNY Geneseo student, confirmed to the World Socialist Web Site that GPD officers are not required to call immigration authorities. "The village does not have a specific policy against it, but ICE is a federal obligation, the village does not have an obligation to complete their work for them, or even start it for that matter."

Over the course of the three-hour traffic stop, a crowd of approximately 100 people gathered despite sub-freezing temperatures, overwhelmingly opposed to the anti-democratic proceedings. WSWs reporters heard the word "outrage" used by many people in the crowd,

which included students and Geneseo residents.

A person familiar with the farmworker family said that they were "well regarded" by their coworkers. They have "never been in trouble" and have been in the area for four years.

The proceedings Thursday night were Kafkaesque. WSWs reporters observed that the officer who called Border Patrol refused to give his name, noting that it was on his vest, but refused to allow people to get close enough to read it.

The Border Patrol officer who had kept a two-month-old infant from their mother for hours during the roadside detention cynically told the assembled crowd that "the family would be taken care of" and that "they would not be split up," but refused to say where the family would be taken. The family requested that the US citizen children be released to the care of a family friend, but Border Patrol took the entire family to be processed in Rochester anyway.

Protesters chanted in English and Spanish, including "*Estamos con ustedes*" ("We are with you"), expressing support for the family during the hours they were forced to remain in an unheated vehicle awaiting transport by CBP officers.

After the family was taken to the US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) office in Irondequoit, New York, a suburb of Rochester, approximately 75 people gathered to protest the detention. Border Patrol is the mobile law enforcement arm of CBP, which, along with US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), operates under the aegis of the Department of Homeland Security.

The protest was peaceful for several hours, with chants demanding that the family be let free. Protesters noted the irony of law enforcement using "crime scene" tape to cordon off the CBP office, as it was

Border Patrol that had committed the crime of kidnapping US citizen children for several hours. As the protest wound down there was a brief confrontation and police arrested two protesters.

The CBP office was the site of a protest earlier this month against the detention of José Coyote Pérez, an immigrant dairy worker and activist who works in the Geneseo area.

Late Thursday night the US citizen children were released to family friends, and the adults have since been released pending further immigration proceedings.

Immigration agents have been emboldened by President Donald Trump's xenophobic executive orders; enforcement guidelines from the Obama administration, including the limited protections for children brought to the US at a very young age, are a dead letter. At the same time, the Trump administration is putting pressure on municipalities and local law enforcement agencies to assist federal agents in their brutal anti-immigrant crackdown.

Jennifer Guzmán, a faculty member at SUNY Geneseo, noted that it was unnecessary for police to call the Border Patrol on Thursday: "Sometimes when the police pull over someone without a driver's license then they'll just make sure the person doesn't continue driving, they'll get someone a safe driver to get them home and they'll impound the car, so I was hoping that I'll get here and find that situation, but the Border Patrol was already here.

"This is a dairy farm working family. This is a family where the dads all work on a local dairy here. They're members of the community; the dads have been working here in the local area for years."

"I think that this is a travesty, and this is a violation of people's civil liberty. There's absolutely no reason why Border Patrol, ICE needs to be called for traffic situations," Guzmán continued. "The police are here to protect our community and taking away our neighbors is not a form of protection.

"I feel that these are contributing members to our community and legal status is a political issue and there has not been a thorough review of our immigration policies in years and so we continue to have workers who make contributions to our society and economy and they are not granted the right of legal status."

Caroline, a SUNY Geneseo student, told the WSWS that she is teaching migrant workers English. When

asked if she thought workers have the right to live where they choose, she said: "I think that migrant workers and immigrants whether legal or not legal benefit our country a lot more than most people like to believe. They lower the rates of our produce and do a lot of jobs most people don't want to do and I think they should be respected and treated well."

Metro Justice and the Worker Justice Center of New York had already planned a protest Friday evening at the Federal Building in Rochester, where over 200 people opposed the recent arrest of immigrant farmworkers in Albion, New York as well as the previous evening's detention of the extended family.

These protests and other protests nationally express popular hostility to the Trump administration's xenophobic measures. Despite negative portrayals of immigrant workers by politicians and the media, a recent CNN poll showed that the vast majority of Americans, some 90 percent, support a path to citizenship for many immigrant workers who have lived in the US for a number of years.

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