Hundreds of US citizens arrested in joint immigration-police roundup

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While the Democratic Party and mainstream media obsess over allegations of Russian hacking of the 2016 election, the Trump administration is implementing its ruthless war on immigrants with little public notice and no significant opposition from the Democrats.

Agents with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), working with a host of federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, concluded a six-week operation last weekend in which they arrested 1,378 people, of whom 993 were US citizens. Major raids were carried out in Houston, New York City, Atlanta and Newark, New Jersey.

Although agents with ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations do not have the legal authority to arrest US citizens, the operation was overseen by the Homeland Security Investigations Unit, which claims much broader authority to enforce federal laws.

Gang activity in the United States, including drug and sex trafficking, has been used as a justification for the broad expansion of the powers of ICE agents over the last decade, bloating the size of the police apparatus responsible for arresting and deporting undocumented immigrants.

The arrests were part of ICE's Operation Community Shield, raids coordinated with state and local law enforcement agencies initiated during the administration of Republican president George W. Bush in 2005 and continued under Democratic president Barack Obama. In 2016, Obama's last year in office, ICE agents arrested more than 1,100 people, mostly US citizens, on suspicion of gang activity.

Many of those targeted in the raids have been identified as "gang members" or "gang affiliates" without any due process. ICE determines that someone they have arrested is a gang member or affiliate if they have a prior conviction for gang related activity, declare themselves to be a member of a gang, have tattoos which ICE declares to be gang related, or are fingered as a gang member by a "reliable source."

ICE claimed that 1,095 of those arrested were confirmed as members or affiliates of a number of transnational gangs including the Bloods (137), the Sureños (118), the Crips (104) and MS-13 (104).

The Bloods and Crips are predominantly African-American gangs which have their roots in the impoverished working class neighborhoods of Los Angeles. MS-13, which also has its origins in Los Angeles, developed as a result of the wars stoked by US imperialism in El Salvador from 1979 to 1992, which devastated the small country and caused massive human flight, particularly to Southern California.

Among the 280 immigrants arrested in this latest round up, three had been granted deferred action status under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program implemented in 2012. Ten of those arrested had crossed the border into the United States as unaccompanied minors.

President Donald Trump has scapegoated immigrants for the United States' social and economic problems, painting Mexican immigrants in particular as criminals, drug traffickers and rapists. He kicked off his campaign for the presidency in 2015 by calling for a crackdown on immigrants and the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border. Trump's administration, with retired general John Kelly as the director of the Department of Homeland Security, has initiated a raft of measures targeting immigrants.

Trump signed executive orders in January calling for the construction of the wall and expedited arrests and deportations, measures that could ultimately directly impact the lives of tens of millions of people living in the United States. The administration's effort to

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implement a ban on travelers and immigrants from a number of Muslim-majority countries has so far been blocked by the courts.

ICE has carried out widespread roundups, arresting people in their homes, as they drop their children off at school, while they apply for legal status, and during once-routine check-ins with federal authorities. DACA is being targeted so that thousands of people who were brought to the US as children can be deported.

In an echo of the Nazi press, which published the pictures of Jewish criminal defendants to whip up anti-Semitism, ICE has established the Office of Victims of Crimes Committed by Removable Aliens [VOICE] in order to publicly denounce immigrants accused of crimes. The anti-gang and immigrant round-up is intended to bolster the administration's false claims that immigrants are largely "criminals," as the president said in 2016. In fact, immigrants have a lower crime commission rate than US citizens.

Trump's xenophobic initiatives have emboldened the most reactionary, fascistic elements of American society.

Republican Oklahoma state representative Mike Ritze and the 21 other members of the Republican Platform Caucus recently proposed rounding up the state's 82,000 non-English speaking students and turning them over to ICE as a "cost-cutting measure." While states cannot legally deny an education to a child based on their immigration status, they could save money by having all those without proper papers deported.

"Identify them and then turn them over to ICE to see if they truly are citizens, and do we really have to educate non-citizens?" Ritze asked, claiming that tearing children out of school and away from their families would have the benefit of saving the state of Oklahoma $60 million.

If the Democrats have nothing critical to say about all of this, it is because they fully supported a slew of federal laws making it more difficult for immigrants to obtain legal status in the United States. Trump has cited these laws, passed with bipartisan support, in his reactionary executive orders.

Under Obama, just under 3 million people were officially deported, more than under any other president in US history. Most Democrats, including Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, have voted for greater legal restrictions on immigration. Clinton, as well as Senator Charles Schumer and former Senators Obama and Biden, voted to construct more barriers and fencing along the southern border with Mexico.

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