

Auto parts workers fired after “Day Without Immigrants” protest

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Over 20 immigrant workers have filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) against their former employer, EZ Industrial Solutions, after being fired for participating in the “Day Without Immigrants” protest on February 16.

EZ Industrial Solutions, based in Chesterfield Township, in suburban Detroit, Michigan, is a small secondary auto parts supplier specializing in automotive fasteners: primarily sorting and packaging/kitting and some light assembly.

The workers fired from EZ for taking part in the protest are all immigrants from Mexico and Central America. All but one are female. Some are “legal” immigrants while others are undocumented. These are some of the most exploited workers in the auto industry. Most make \$9 per hour with others earning only up to \$12 per hour.

When supervisors at EZ heard that the workers planned to participate in the protest they questioned them aggressively and threatened them with a one-week suspension. Most of the workers chose to participate in the demonstration despite the threat. They were then fired, supposedly for failure to produce a doctor’s note saying they were sick. Later, after finding out about pending legal action, a supervisor went to one worker’s home and threatened to get US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) involved.

The company had a loose work schedule and an informal attendance policy where workers could come by and work after missing a few days.

The unfair labor practice charge was filed with the NLRB’s Detroit office by Tony Paris, lead attorney for the Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice. Paris told the WSWS, “We represent a lot of workers facing the same circumstances where intimidation by the employers denies workers the ability to exercise

their legal rights.”

“Whether workers are documented or undocumented they have the right to be paid,” he said, adding that when undocumented, “your compensation rights are limited to wage replacement. They know who they are hiring and they chose undocumented workers because of their vulnerability.”

Paris explained that in the case involving the 20 workers who were fired, the company did not have a written attendance policy. “If they had called in for any other reason they would not have been fired,” he said. “They did not require a doctor’s excuse or advance notice. The company told the workers that they would be suspended but not fired.” Most of the women told the supervisor that they would accept that, he said. However, the punishment went from suspension to dismissal.

“It is a civil rights issue when you are discriminated against in the workplace,” Paris added.

Speaking about the auto parts industry in general Paris said, “It is slipping into a lower wage industry. Even in places where there is a union there are two-tier wage systems that were instated at the time of the 2008 crash.”

In an email to the *Detroit Free Press*, Jordan Yoder, operations manager at EZ, said, “The law is quite clear that employees can’t just not show up to work when they are expected, and also that they are not free to participate in political, non-work related protests during their work day without consequences. We therefore deny any wrongdoing and are confident that the charge will be dismissed.”

The charge has since been forwarded to the NLRB’s Washington D.C. office for review.

This case is by no means unique. There are numerous reports of workers being fired across the country for

their participation in the Day Without Immigrants protest, with reports of workers fired in Oklahoma, New York and Tennessee. According to an NBC News report, 20 workers at a commercial painting company were fired in Nolensville, Tennessee for missing work to take part in the protest. There were also firings at restaurants and day care centers and at least one school.

Meanwhile, in the Detroit area, ICE raids are continuing. Earlier this week ICE agents seized three workers at an Ann Arbor restaurant claiming they did not have the proper documentation. They were later released after their employer produced the required papers.

These victimizations, encouraged by the extremely nationalistic and xenophobic policies of the Trump administration, should be viewed as an attack on all sections of the working class. Likewise the unions, including the United Auto Workers, have been largely silent on the attacks on immigrant workers. The UAW, which promotes America First nationalism, has for decades colluded with the Detroit-based automakers to lower costs in the auto parts industry in the name of increasing “competitiveness.” This has helped create conditions of brutal exploitation, low wages and increased risk of death or serious injury.

The case of the workers at EZ highlights the precarious position of immigrants as the most vulnerable section of the working class. As most states recognize “At-will employment,” the vast majority of workers in the US can be fired at any time for any or no reason.

As stated in the program of the Socialist Equality Party, “Industrial democracy means real control by working people over their working lives. What is democratic about a system in which the place where people spend the bulk of their time—the work place—is run as a dictatorship?”

Despite the limitations of the “Day Without Immigrants” protest, it was another indication of the growing mood of resistance in the working class internationally. The victimized workers deserve the widest support.

However, no confidence should be placed in the anti-worker National Labor Relations Board. Packed with pro-company presidential appointees, the NLRB acts not as an independent arbiter, but represents the interest of the ruling elites. The social right to a secure and

good paying job in any country one chooses—with full citizenship rights—can be advanced only through the independent political struggle of the working class.



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