

Trump, appealing to far-right, considers pardon for Joe Arpaio

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In the wake of the fascist violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, Trump is once again offering an olive branch to the neo-Nazis with his public consideration of pardoning Joe Arpaio, the former sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona.

Arpaio was found guilty last week of criminal contempt for defying a judge's 2011 court order to refrain from racially profiling Latinos during patrols and turning them over to federal immigration authorities. He faces up to six months in prison at his sentencing that is scheduled for October 5.

Trump first mentioned his consideration Sunday in an interview with Fox News where he had nothing but praise for the man who proudly bore the nickname "America's toughest sheriff." Trump declared his admiration for Arpaio, noting, "He has done a lot in the fight against illegal immigration. He's a great American patriot and I hate to see what has happened to him."

"Is there anyone in local law enforcement who has done more to crack down on illegal immigration than Sheriff Joe?" Trump asked rhetorically. "He has protected people from crimes and saved lives. He doesn't deserve to be treated this way."

While Arpaio has been convicted of a misdemeanor, a brief examination of his time as sheriff evinces wholesale crimes for which he has never been charged.

His nickname is justly characterized by his attitude towards immigrants and the working class. First elected as sheriff in 1992, Arpaio established a personalized reign of terror that reeks of fascism. During his tenure, his cronies conducted extensive raids in Latino neighborhoods, arresting upwards of 30,000 undocumented workers. His anti-immigrant campaigns drew support from neo-Nazis and the KKK and landed him repeated appearances on the right-wing Fox News

network and interviews on CNN and *The Colbert Report* which featured only the mildest of criticism.

His most egregious crime is the construction and operation of his "Tent City," an outdoor facility consisting of surplus military tents from the Korean War, that housed hundreds of inmates. At the entrance of the jail Arpaio posted a sign that read, "ILLEGAL ALIENS ARE PROHIBITED FROM VISITING ANYONE IN THIS JAIL."

Nearly 2,500 inmates lived under the canvas tarps in the Arizona desert where temperatures would often reach triple digits during the summer. In an interview with *The New Yorker*, he unabashedly described the conditions of the tent city: "I put them up next to the dump, the dog pound, the waste-disposal plant." Providing inmates only two meals per day, Arpaio deprived them of the most basic conditions: hot lunches, ketchup, salt and pepper, movies, coffee, and magazines. He often boasted of saving taxpayers thousands of dollars.

At every turn Arpaio treated inmates with utter contempt. Forced to wear black-and-white striped uniforms, reminiscent of an earlier period, they are also forced to wear pink underwear, pink socks, pink flip-flops, even pink handcuffs, and forced to work in chain-gangs: "I put them out there on the main streets so everybody sees them out there cleaning up trash, and parents say to their kids, 'Look, that's where you're going if you're not good,'" stated Arpaio.

Arpaio bragged of creating the first female chain gangs, and, eventually, juvenile chain gangs. Chain gangs were outlawed across the US in the 1950s, but reintroduced by Arpaio. In addition to picking up trash Arpaio tasked inmates with pulling weeds and burying unclaimed bodies at White Tanks Cemetery in the desert.

His time as sheriff was riddled with lawsuits over police violence, false arrests and illegal conditions of imprisonment. From 1992 to 2009, lawsuits against Arpaio's office cost the county upwards of \$43 million. To date, Arpaio has never admitted any wrongdoing and many of the officers involved in the lawsuits have been promoted.

A federal investigation revealed that deputies had used stun guns on prisoners already strapped into a restraint chair. In another case, a family received \$8.25 million when a surveillance video was discovered showing 14 guards beating, shocking, and suffocating a prisoner who was strapped in a restraint chair. The sheriff's office initially claimed the video had been destroyed.

In 2008, the National Commission on Correctional Health Care withdrew the health accreditation of Maricopa County's jail for failing to meet even the most basic of standards, finding conditions there to be unconstitutional for pre-trial detainees.

Local police targeted journalists who attempted to expose Arpaio; sheriff's deputies staged late-night raids on the homes of Michael Lacey and James Larkin, owners of the *Phoenix New Times*. Both were arrested for "violating grand-jury secrecy," although the county attorney declined to prosecute when it was discovered that the subpoenas to arrest the two were issued unlawfully. At a board of supervisors meeting, four members of the audience were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for clapping.

Politically, Arpaio led the Cold Case Posse, a volunteer group that investigated Barack Obama's birth certificate, part of the right-wing movement known as birthers that promotes the false idea that the former president was not born in the United States. Trump has praised and promoted the birther movement in the past.

Reacting to the president's statement about his consideration for pardoning the fascistic sheriff, ACLU Deputy Legal Director Cecilia Wang noted that Trump "would literally be pardoning Joe Arpaio's flagrant violation of federal court orders that prohibited the illegal detention of Latinos. He would undo a conviction secured by his own career attorneys at the Justice Department. Make no mistake: This would be an official presidential endorsement of racism."

The actions of the president in the past week are a warning to the international working class: in defending

the neo-Nazis' rampage in Charlottesville and openly discussing the pardon of fascistic figures, Trump is seeking to build up a far-right constituency in order to violently suppress any popular opposition to his policies of extreme social reaction.



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