

Motel 6 sued for passing on guest information to ICE immigration officials

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Last week Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed suit against the budget chain Motel 6 for the systematic and daily practice of employees handing over guests' personal information to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) authorities.

Ferguson told reporters that there were widespread practices at multiple Motel 6 locations where employees handed over the names, birthdates, driver's license numbers, license-plate numbers and room numbers of at least 9,000 guests to immigration officials, without warrants. The lawsuit, which was filed in King County Superior Court, claims the hotel chain violated state and federal laws that protect consumers and those that guard against discrimination, as well as the state constitution.

The lawsuit follows an investigation which began last September when Antonia Farzan, a reporter for the Phoenix News Times, found a pattern of arrests of at least 20 people by ICE at Motel 6 locations in the Phoenix area, revealing that motel employees were passing along guests' information following a nightly audit.

When the story broke in September, Raiza Rehkoff, a spokesperson from G6 Hospitality, the Texas-based parent company of Motel 6, announced that the practices was "implemented at the local level without the knowledge of senior management... When we became aware of it ... it was discontinued."

The company then issued a directive to each of their 1,400 locations nationwide, "making it clear that they are prohibited from voluntarily providing daily guest lists" to ICE.

Washington State contests this. "Motel 6 implied this was a local problem...We have found that is not true," said Attorney General Ferguson. "It was not isolated to two motels in Phoenix, not by a long shot. The

company's actions were methodical. They trained their new employees on how to do this," Ferguson said.

The lawsuit states that ICE agents would visit reception desks to obtain guest lists. The attendant would print out the list and pass it to the agent along with a "law enforcement acknowledgment form" for the agent to sign, confirming receipt of the information. This practice would sometimes occur daily. The suit notes that the south Everett location in Washington alone gave out the personal information 228 times in a 225-day period.

A front desk clerk told the *New York Times*, "We send a report every morning to ICE—all the names of everybody that comes in. Every morning at about 5 o'clock, we do the audit and we push a button and it sends it to ICE." ICE officials then engage in what's referred to as a "knock and talk," where agents knock on doors to speak to certain guests after they've run background checks. All of this takes place without warrants.

Additionally, Ferguson stated that Motel 6 staffers told investigators that "the ICE agents circled any Latino or Latina-sounding names on the guest registry, and returned to their vehicles" to run background checks.

While details are still emerging of the degree to which the motel chain engaged in a systematic practice to support ICE agents, it is of note that G6 Hospitality is owned by The Blackstone Group L.P., one of the world's largest private equity investment firms. Its founder, chairman, and CEO is Stephen Schwarzman, who chaired President Trump's short-lived Strategic and Policy Forum (February- August 2017), a business forum created to "accelerate US economic growth and job creation in the United States," according to Trump. It cannot be ruled out that one of the initiatives of this

group, in line with Trump's economic nationalism, was to assist authorities with deportations.

Seattle is among the so-called "sanctuary cities" that limit somewhat the degree to which local agencies comply with ICE agents. The designation of a "sanctuary city" is usually made by Democratic city officials who face a great amount of public pressure stemming from sizable immigrant populations to offer protections for the undocumented.

Last September, the Trump administration targeted "sanctuary cities" such as Seattle, New York, Denver, and Los Angeles and arrested nearly 500 undocumented immigrants over one weekend to send a message that there is no sanctuary for immigrants anywhere, referring to the raids as "Operation Safe City."

In line with attempts to paint immigrants as criminals and to soften the public to violation of privacy, ICE spokeswoman Yasmeen Pitts O'Keefe told the *Wall Street Journal* that the agency receives "viable enforcement tips from a host of sources," while also mentioning that motels were frequently "exploited by criminal organizations engaged in highly dangerous illegal enterprises, including human trafficking and human smuggling."

It is important to note that ICE is not a defendant in the Washington lawsuit and its actions with Motel 6 are proceeding undisputed. The gestapo-like agency acts with complete impunity. 2017 saw a brutal attack on immigrants with the rescinding of DACA, the issuance of a new Travel Ban, and the pardon of Sheriff Joe Arpaio. The Trump administration is seeking to cultivate authoritarian sentiments within the far-right base of his support, as well as to embolden the fascistic agents and operatives within ICE itself.

Further escalating the clampdown on immigration, legislation is expected early this year that will represent some of the most reactionary anti-immigrant measures since Japanese Internment during World War II.

Cloaked in the language of a "DACA Deal," the legislation will be a wolf in sheep's clothing. While the specifics of the deal are still being discussed, Democrats will agree to measures which may include increased militarization at the border, caps on the numbers of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as well as tightened limits for family members to petition their relatives for status in the US.

The clampdown on immigrants will not occur without significant backlash by the working class, students, and youth who overwhelmingly support immigrants. Indeed, this past week, UC Berkeley pre-law student Luis Mora was arrested by ICE officials in San Diego County. Within days, a page dedicated to raising funds for his release has been shared by 1,400 people and has raised thousands of dollars.

Public outrage over the disappearances of undocumented immigrants is a healthy sentiment, but it is not enough to protect the lives of millions of immigrants. The fight against deportations requires that this outrage be given political direction. It must be elevated to the fight to abolish the nation-state system and reorganize the world economy on a socialist basis, to meet human need and ensure the rights of all workers to move about the planet as they please.



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