

Massive raids threatened against immigrants in California

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The Trump administration is preparing to launch a massive police-state dragnet against immigrants in California, pouring Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents from all over the country into the state's northern cities with the aim of rounding up at least 1,500 undocumented workers.

The impending mass roundup was first reported Wednesday by the *San Francisco Chronicle* based on an anonymous source familiar with the planning for the operation. Both ICE and the Department of Homeland Security have refused to confirm or deny that the US government is preparing what will likely prove the largest immigration raid in US history.

The threat has created terror and panic in immigrant communities in California's Bay Area, undoubtedly a desired effect on the part of ICE officials. There are reports of residents staying away from work and even leaving the region to escape the clutches of immigration agents.

No specific date has been given for launching the anti-immigrant blitz, with the *Chronicle* reporting only that it is to take place "within weeks." The newspaper's source said that agents will be flown in from across the country, and that both neighborhoods and workplaces will be raided.

The threatened mass roundup follows last week's raids carried out against nearly 100 7-Eleven stores in seventeen states, signaling an escalation in the persecution of undocumented workers at their job sites.

The California operation has apparently been organized in conjunction with the ongoing debate in Washington on a continuing resolution to prevent a government shutdown on Friday. The debate has been bound up with the fate of more than 700,000 "Dreamers," young undocumented immigrants covered by Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA),

rescinded by Trump. A reprieve for the DACA recipients, who grew up in the US and face deportation to countries that they do not even know, is being used as a political bait to push through a bipartisan "compromise" on draconian legislation that would crack down on millions of undocumented immigrants, while severely limiting legal immigration as well.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, made clear Thursday that the fate of the Dreamers is not the Democratic Party's priority in the budget debate, bowing to inevitable right-wing criticism on the immigration issue. "This isn't about Dreamers," Pelosi told Capitol Hill reporters. "Even if not one Dreamer ever existed, we still have a problem on the budget side of this."

The targeting of California is aimed directly at punishing so-called sanctuary cities that have passed legislation limiting the cooperation of local police with immigration enforcement agents. Trump made his hostility to such cities an issue in his presidential campaign, and after taking office attempted to retaliate against them by cutting off federal funds. He has thus far been thwarted in this vindictive effort by the federal courts, which sided with a challenge led by Santa Clara County, California and the city of San Francisco, the areas now being targeted.

Legislation declaring California a sanctuary state was passed last fall and went into effect on January 1. In signing the measure, the state's Democratic Governor, Jerry Brown, stressed the limited character of the so-called sanctuary on offer, insisting that it would "not prevent or prohibit Immigration and Customs Enforcement or the Department of Homeland Security from doing their own work in any way."

Despite these assurances, the measure has drawn the ire of the Trump administration and, in particular, that

of the fascistic acting director of ICE, Thomas Homan. On January 2, the day after the state law went into effect, Homan told Fox News that ICE would “vastly increase our enforcement footprint in the state of California.” He added, menacingly: “California better hold on tight. They’re about to see a lot more special agents, a lot more deportation officers in the state of California. If the politicians of California don’t want to protect their communities, then ICE will.”

Homan threatened to unleash mass anti-immigrant raids against California last October after the sanctuary state bill was passed. He also warned that the limitations placed on cooperation of local police would compel ICE to stage militarized assaults on immigrant neighborhoods—rather than picking up its human prey from local jails and police stations. In the process, he said, agents would make additional “collateral arrests,” i.e., sweep up anyone who comes across their path.

In the same interview, Homan called for the arrest of state and local officials who refuse to collaborate with ICE. “We’ve got to start charging some of these politicians with crimes,” he said.

This position was echoed in testimony before the US Senate judiciary committee Tuesday by Department of Homeland Security Director Kirstjen Nielsen, who said that the Justice Department is “reviewing what avenues might be available” for prosecuting local officials offering sanctuary to undocumented immigrants.

ICE’s Homan renewed his threats Wednesday in response to a unanimous vote by the Oakland, California City Council to instruct the city’s police department not to provide any assistance to ICE raids, including traffic support. The measure came in response to an ICE action last August in which local cops assisted with the diversion of traffic during the arrest of a local resident who now faces deportation. Homan accused the council members of “undermining the rule of law.” Their action, he said, was “unconscionable and poses dangers for local communities and for the brave men and women who carry the badge.”

The threats of retaliation and repression by the Federal government against the largest US state by means of mass immigration raids and potential arrests of state and local officials is a stark expression of the disintegration of democratic structures within the US and an increasing turn toward police state methods.

At the same time, in the vendetta against California and sanctuary cities across the country for failing to offer the full collaboration of local police in hunting down undocumented immigrants there is an unmistakable historical echo of the intense conflicts generated by the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, a federal law that sought to compel local officials to act as enforcers for the southern slave owners by arresting accused runaway slaves.

That law, which was imposed to override legislation that some states passed to absolve local authorities of collaborating with the slave hunters, generated immense opposition in the north, leading to riots and armed confrontations over the detention of runaway slaves. The law played a major role in galvanizing the determination to put an end to slavery, ultimately accomplished through the Civil War.

Similar sentiments of mass solidarity with immigrant workers who are being subjected to persecution and deportation must be mobilized to stop the ICE raids. The fate of millions of immigrants cannot be left in the hands of the Democratic Party, which under the Obama administration oversaw record deportations and the militarization of the US-Mexican border. The working class must advance its own solution to the so-called “immigration problem,” based upon a socialist policy of open borders and the right of every worker to live in the country that they choose, without fear of harassment or deportation.

The author also recommends: Trump’s anti-immigrant orders and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 [14 March, 2017]



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