

ICE carries out mass immigration raids across US Midwest

George Gallanis
29 May 2018

US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have detained nearly 250 undocumented immigrant workers in May as part of escalating operations across the Midwest.

At the start of the month, ICE launched a six-day operation and arrested 78 people throughout the Midwest: 25 were arrested in Iowa, 25 in Nebraska, 15 in Minnesota, 10 in South Dakota and three in North Dakota.

The workers, whose ages range from 20 to 64 years, are originally from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Ivory Coast and Sudan.

This was followed by a six-day operation last week which resulted in the arrest of 156 workers aged 19 to 64 in Chicago, Illinois, and its surrounding suburbs. The detainees came to the US from Mexico, Guatemala, Poland, El Salvador, Honduras, the Philippines, Ecuador, Jamaica, Jordan, Lithuania and New Zealand.

ICE agents reportedly had a list of workers whom they pursued, with some visiting their workplaces without warrants, according to *Hoy*, the Spanish-language newspaper based in Chicago and California.

Erick Diaz, a worker at a restaurant in St. Charles, a suburb of Chicago, told local news station Fox 32, “Well, I was working at my restaurant, typical day, normal day. And we just start seeing undercover cars come in.” ICE agents walked in with a photo of a man and demanded to speak to the kitchen staff.

“They didn’t have no warrant. We told them they can’t go in, because obviously no warrant,” said Diaz. “My restaurant actually closed early because, like I said, all our kitchen guys were afraid to come in cause the ICE guys were coming around. Obviously, you don’t want to risk it.”

An estimated 511,000 undocumented workers live in Illinois, with a majority of them, 307,000, living in Cook County, which includes Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. Chicago, the third largest city in the country, is estimated to be home to 183,000 undocumented workers.

On May 19, ICE agents conducted raids and arrests in Joliet, Illinois, 45 miles southwest of Chicago. Residents quickly took to Facebook to warn others of their presence.

One resident posted to Facebook: “Just heard on the radio that there are ICE agents in the area of Joliet. These agents are in unknown vehicles, they are pulling over drivers and asking for proof of legal status. Share if needed. If u have nothing nice to say then keep it to yourself. This may not affect you directly just keep in mind this could be someone’s mother, father, son, daughter, sister or brother.”

Reporting on the incident, Organized Communities Against Deportations, a Chicago-based immigrant rights organization, noted, “We know that in some instances, agents entered people’s homes without a court-issued warrant and stopped people while driving, eventually taking individuals into custody for ‘speeding,’ blatantly acting outside of their own jurisdiction.”

One worker from the Joliet area told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the presence of ICE has become so common that the school he works for has established protocols for communicating to immigrant students when they should not go outside for fear of them being apprehended by ICE.

Many undocumented workers and immigrants fled their countries to escape from conditions which could have meant their deaths and those of their loved ones. US-backed or -led wars have ravaged countries like

Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala in the 20th century and most recently countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Millions have fled their homes for a better life. But now they now confront a new nightmare. For many, deportation is a death sentence.

Yesterday, the *Washington Post* reported Prince Gbohoutou, a 26-year-old tattoo artist from Maryland, refused to board a flight back to his home country of Central African Republic where his mother was killed. Gbohoutou and his wife were detained by ICE on April 19 and ordered to be deported.

After the young immigrant refused to leave the van that took him to the airport, an ICE agent beat one of Gbohoutou's legs with a baton while other agents tried to pull him out of the van. ICE agents cut his seat belt with a knife, cutting Gbohoutou's hand, and handcuffed him to a wheelchair to take him to his flight. However, the airline refused to take him because he was an unwilling passenger.

"I'll be killed if I go back," he told the *Washington Post* from an ICE detention center. Gbohoutou arrived in the United States as a child with his father. His family, including his mother who had remained in the Central African Republic, were denied asylum by the United States, but both his father and Gbohoutou remained.

Soon after being denied asylum, Gbhoutou's mother was kidnapped by a rival political group in an attempt to force the return of his father, who worked for the country's ambassador in the United States. "I guess they wanted my dad to go back," Gbohoutou said. "They tortured her. And they beat her to death."

The attacks on immigrant workers are escalating. In a statement released on its website, ICE officials reported a doubling of worksite raids across the country in the first six months of the current fiscal year, which began in October 2017, compared to all of the previous year.

So far this fiscal year, ICE has initiated 3,510 worksite investigations nationwide, requested 2,282 I-9 audits of work authorizations for workers, and tallied 594 criminal and 610 administrative workplace-related arrests. From October 2016 to September 2017, the agency initiated 1,716 worksite investigations, requested 1,360 I-9 audits and completed 139 criminal arrests and 172 administrative worksite-related arrests.

As part of the Trump administration's effort to whip

up a nationalistic and anti-immigrant fervor in the United States, ICE agents have focused attention on the arrest of immigrant workers, documented or undocumented, with some kind of criminal record. This tactic, with its undeniable fascistic undertones, is aimed at dividing the working class by pitting native-born workers against foreign-born by portraying immigrants as savages, liars, thieves and "animals," as President Trump has repeatedly asserted.

The Pew Research Center reported in February that immigrant workers with past criminal convictions accounted for 74 percent of all arrests made by ICE in the 2017 fiscal year. However, the majority of the criminal convictions consist of petty crimes, with the most common conviction consisting of driving under the influence of alcohol, which amounted to 59,985 convictions, or 16 percent of the total. This was followed by possessing and/or selling illegal drugs, totaling 57,438 convictions, or 15 percent of the total. The third most common were immigration offenses, which include illegal entry or false claim to US citizenship, equaling 52,128 convictions, or 14 percent of the total.

At the same time, ICE has drastically increased the arrest of undocumented workers without any criminal record. For example, in the Dallas, Texas region, which had 16,520 arrests last year, the most overall, non-criminal arrests rose by 156 percent. The Atlanta region, which covers Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina, saw a 323 percent increase in non-criminal arrests. Half of ICE enforcement regions saw non-criminal arrests rise by 200 percent or more last year.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact