

“I saw officers with assault rifles, dogs and helicopters everywhere”

Mass immigration raids shatter Ohio communities

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Family and co-workers of the immigrants arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) described Tuesday’s raids in northern Ohio, the largest so far of the Trump era, as “military-style,” “SWAT-like” and “a nightmare.”

The coordinated raids targeted workers at the Corso’s Flower and Garden Center nurseries in Castalia and neighboring Sandusky. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke yesterday with children whose parents were arrested, co-workers whose close friends are gone, and young husbands who were separated from their wives.

Witnesses described a scene of total criminality. “They came with donuts,” said Mercedes, a Corso’s worker. “They got all of us into the same area telling us they were officials doing a routine inspection. When we all gathered, they encircled us and took the badges out. They had dogs, helicopters, assault rifles and helmets. We were all crying.” Another source told the WSWs that some agents were disguised as construction workers.

Nearby residents said they could hear the raid from their homes. Other witnesses said workers who are US citizens denounced immigration agents at the scene, yelling at them and imploring them to stop. Workers said immigration officials detained several US citizen workers to prevent them from calling co-workers and warning them about the raid. Agents also reportedly ordered documented immigrant workers to bring their passports to work from now on. The workers said they would do no such thing.

Last night, dozens of devastated family members gathered at a church in nearby Norwalk. For many, it was the first time they had seen each other since the

raid. The room was full of people fighting against time and desperate for information, and most had not even spoken to their detained relatives who were shipped to facilities hours away. Not only do family and friends fear separation by deportation, they are also aware of the deadly possibility of being loaded onto unmarked airplanes destined for violent Central American countries devastated by more than a century of US imperialist exploitation, dictatorship and war.

An untold number of children are now parentless. Jerry, an 18-year-old US citizen whose mother was taken in the raid, is now responsible for his younger sister and brother, aged 9 and 12.

“When I received that call I rushed over [to Corso’s] to see my mom,” he said. “I couldn’t. I was detained.... An agent told me to pull over. He handcuffed me and wouldn’t let me see my mom. I saw the bus she was in. It was 20 feet away, but it had tinted windows and I couldn’t see in. I’m thinking that my mom saw me but I couldn’t see her.

“It was a horrible experience that no one should experience. Just because my mom is an illegal immigrant trying to support her family in this country, it’s horrible. They treated them like they’re worthless. I saw officers with assault rifles, dogs and helicopters everywhere.”

Jerry said he had been saving money to go to college by working in construction from a young age. “But now this has happened I’m going to use some of that money to support my brother and sister.”

Flor, a high school student whose mother was also arrested Tuesday, said, “I was at work. I was getting phone calls and messages from her. I felt bad because I couldn’t answer the phone because I was too busy

working. I finally called her back and she was yelling and screaming: ‘They took me! They took me! Immigration got me!’”

Corso’s workers also denounced the raids. One worker, Jerome, told the WSWS, “These are good, hardworking people. They are my friends. I knew these people. I go over to their houses and we have parties together. You can’t fault them for trying to better their lives, for coming here. People are starving where they come from. I’d risk my life to come here too.”

Another worker said, “It was chaos. It was horrible what happened because people have children and they didn’t know what to do with them. These are hardworking people and it’s not fair. The women were all crying because they have kids too. I’ve known them for years, they’re hardworking and they’re just trying to better their lives.”

A third worker said, “Some kids will now be put into foster care. They had dogs here. There was no way for anyone to hide. They don’t deserve it. They work hard for their families. They were good workers, if they saw you needed help they would offer it to you.” Many Corso’s workers reported that they often worked 80 to 90 hours a week.

Ohio ACLU representative J. Bennett Guess gave a statement to the WSWS: “It was abhorrent the way they were detained, especially without regard for the children. Children were left at daycare centers. These are extremely hard working, low-wage workers who are highly exploited. What happened is a travesty of justice. What we are witnessing is the systematic dismantling of due process by every administration, Democratic and Republican alike.”

He added that this was of extreme concern for all, regardless of immigration status: “How you treat your non-citizens is how you will treat your citizens.”

Many workers have stories of close calls. Some, including a family of five, have moved out of their home for fear they will be hunted down by ICE. Others reported having family who are too afraid to leave their homes.

As these horrific scenes play out, both the Democratic and Republican parties are calling for added “border security”—a term which means more ICE and CBP agents patrolling the country and terrorizing immigrants. Earlier this year, the Democrats supported a Trump-backed bill to hand hundreds of millions of

dollars in additional funding to ICE. Some present at yesterday’s Norwalk meeting said they had family and friends who had previously been deported by the Obama administration.

Tuesday’s Gestapo-style raid is a warning to the entire working class. The US government is asserting the “right” to launch military raids on workplaces, dragging workers off the job and shipping them away from their families.

What is to stop the government from using the same tactic against striking teachers, hauling them off to detention centers when their strikes are made “illegal” by the corporate-controlled courts? If autoworkers protest workplace injuries or line speed, why wouldn’t the government send police in to arrest the “troublemakers” and try to make the problem disappear?

The trade unions have done nothing to oppose the establishment of dictatorial conditions in America’s workplaces. Instead, they pit workers against each other based on poisonous nationalism, telling workers in the US that their enemies are not the corporations and the government but workers in Mexico or China.

New, rank-and-file committees must be built to protect even the most basic workplace rights of all workers, immigrant and non-immigrant alike.



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