As public anger grows over childhood detention centers

Thousands participate in San Diego protest against treatment of immigrants

Meenakshi Jagadeesen
25 June 2018

Thousands of people gathered at the Civic Center in downtown San Diego on Saturday to protest the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy. The rally, held under the banner "Families Belong Together," was initially organized to protest the inhumane policy of separating children from their migrant parents upon arrest at the border. Despite the Trump administration's cynical mid-week executive order permitting families to be detained *together*, the rally became a general protest against the vicious brutality of the administration's immigration policy.

The Civic Center rally and accompanying march to the nearby Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office was primarily organized by San Diego Indivisible, which its leaders say is "a grassroots group" that is "dedicated to fighting the Trump agenda." Though proclaiming no official ties to the Democratic Party, the rally featured as speakers Democratic congressional members alongside teachers, immigration lawyers, a pediatric nurse and an Iranian refugee.

Protesters, young and old, many carrying homemade placards, expressed their horror at the mistreatment of the undocumented migrants and their families. A significant number of the marchers had brought along their own children, including infants.

Lara, a nurse practitioner, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that she is "horrified and distraught that this is happening to children. I feel for all who are coming over to escape their dangerous home countries and are being met with such unmerciful treatment. As a nurse practitioner, I have worked with adults who have been detained or been in refugee camps. It's difficult to even state the amount of irreparable long-term harm that impacts society over time. Higher rates of anger, of suicide, of autoimmune diseases and fibromyalgia. This is not something that just an individual suffers from; the entire society pays the price."

Many of the protesters noted that the migrants were fleeing extremely brutal conditions and were themselves victims of gang violence. Given this, criminalizing and branding them as gang members is particularly horrific. The parallels to Nazi Germany were at the forefront of many people's minds, and was the basis of numerous posters that compared ICE to the *Schutzstaffel* (SS).

Carol, Lara's friend and fellow nurse-practitioner, stated: "I empathize as a mother. Also, the two of us are Jewish, and what is happening right now is dehumanization. [President Donald] Trump recently referred to immigrants as an infestation. We have heard this before. The Nazis complained that we were vermin, full off lice, and had infested society. They are setting up camps all over, and that is what happens when you dehumanize people to such an extent. Back then people did not stop genocide early enough, but we are here to say this must stop now!"

Despite attempts by many of the speakers to gloss over the issue, the troubling continuities between the Obama administration's policies and the current state of affairs were not lost on some of the marchers.

Mindy, a garden educator at San Diego schools, spoke about the detention centers and abuses towards immigrants which were expanded under the Obama administration. "These detention centers and attacks on immigrants have been going on a long time. I have many immigrant families in my schools and have children who are part of families experiencing

© World Socialist Web Site

separation and traumatic stress caused by war and social injustices. Many of our children are not only from Latin America, but also from Somalia, Eritrea or Iran. Meanwhile, at many of the schools there are only part-time counselors due to budget cuts for mental health and therapy, so the children facing this trauma only have a counselor maybe one day a week."

While the anger of the protesters was genuine, the aim of the organizers is to channel this opposition behind the Democratic Party.

Wendy Batterson, one of the leaders of Indivisible San Diego, stated in an interview to the *San Diego Union Tribune* that this was "not a political rally, it's a rally about humanity." Indivisible San Diego presents itself as a collection of "grassroots, progressive organizations" not affiliated with any political party. However, even a brief glimpse at its website makes clear that the group, which was founded in the aftermath of the 2016 elections, is an extension of the Democratic Party. Its primary focus is opposing "the Trump agenda," and its primary means to do so is to "pressure members of Congress to support progressive initiatives."

The approved roster of speakers included congressional Democrats like Scott Peters and Juan Vargas, who went out of their way to paint the current crisis as the product solely of the Trump administration's policies and Trump himself.

Representative Vargas was called out by one of the speakers, Mark Lane, an immigration attorney, for accepting money from for-profit prison companies. In response, Vargas demagogically denied this but said if it were true he would return all the money. In any event, Vargas publicly accepts money from Lockheed Martin and weapons contractors as well as Wall Street banks. Organizers ignored Vargas' pro-war positions and presented him as a "progressive" Democrat.

Highlighting the hypocrisy of the event, the two daughters of Rodrigo Duarte spoke just after the Democratic politicians. Duarte was dragged away by ICE as he dropped his daughters off at school, a horrific practice which has continued unchanged from the Obama administration, earning Barack Obama the sobriquet of "deporter-in-chief."

Multiple attempts by Socialist Equality Party members to be placed on the official roster of speakers were unanswered. However, SEP members found a platform as attendants began marching towards the ICE office. Kevin Mitchell, the SEP's US House (51st District) candidate in the June 5 midterm primary elections, exposed the bipartisan roots of the anti-immigrant measures that the Democrats, declared that Obama had overseen a widespread expansion of ICE and border militarization, and reminded protesters of the busloads of Central American mothers, children and unaccompanied minors deported by Obama.

The SEP was the only organization that linked the treatment of immigrants to the crisis of the capitalist system and the efforts of the ruling class to divide workers along xenophobic and nationalistic lines, while preparing war abroad and austerity and repression at home.

The larger purpose of the rally was summed up at the end, when the organizers called on the protesters to "write to their congressmen and women" and put pressure on them to "flip congress," i.e., ensure Democratic Party control after the elections in November. This is a bankrupt perspective that will only guarantee the continued persecution of immigrant workers and youth.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site