

Hundreds of detained immigrants join US national prison strike

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Over 200 immigrants detained at the Northwest Detention Center (NWDC) in Tacoma, Washington began a hunger strike and work stoppage on Tuesday in response to the call for a 19-day national prison strike, spearheaded by the organization Jailhouse Lawyer Speak. The strike has participation from prisoners in at least 17 states who are expected to conduct coordinated sit-ins, hunger strikes, work stoppages and commissary boycotts from today until September 9.

The immigrants' hunger strike, held in solidarity with the prisoners, was initially announced in a Facebook post by NWDC resistance, an advocacy group that formed in 2014 to oppose deportations and poor treatment of immigrant detainees at the detention center. The facility houses immigrants awaiting hearings or deportation after being arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. A letter NWDC Resistance received from the prisoners bravely declared:

“We are taking part in a hunger strike nationwide demanding change and closure of these detention centers, we are acting with solidarity for all those people who are being detained wrongfully, and stand together to help support all those women who have been separated from their children, and to stop all the family separations happening today for a lot of us are also being separated and we have U.S. citizen children.”

Maru Mora Villalpando, lead organizer for the Northwest Detention Center Resistance, said the main demand was the reunification of families. “They mentioned the mothers that have been separated from their children at the border, but also recognizing that themselves and over 40,000 people across the nation right now that are detained have been separated from their loved ones, too,” she said.

The prisoners noted the psychological toll taken on separated families. They stated “it is damaging to our loved ones” to be unable to visit them in prison and demanded ICE allow contact visits. They added, “our family and most detainees are not criminals” and there is “no reason why we can't hold our children.”

A second statement from 27 immigrants, with medical issues, detained at NWDC described negligence on part of the prison's staff.

“We want better COs, they don't do their job right, they see that there are problems and they don't do nothing about it, they just let things get big and that's the reason why everybody gets into fights.”

The statement also demands medical attention and says prisoners are not given adequate food portions. News reports note that in the prison, one immigrant reportedly had an eye injury but did not receive medical attention and is now going blind. The letter concludes with the prisoners stating “we don't want somebody dead beside us” because staff didn't do their jobs right.

The immigrant prisoners have also demanded to be paid Washington State's minimum wage, \$11.00 an hour, and implicitly stated that GEO, the company in charge of NWDC, is a “private corporation and is using slave labor to run its operation...”

Like others incarcerated across the country, immigrant detainees at NWDC receive low wages for work they perform. Prisoners are paid \$1 per day, and their income goes solely to commissary items such as hygiene products, snacks, etc.

Last year, Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson filed a class action lawsuit alleging wage theft against GEO Group, claiming the company makes millions of dollars in profits by illegally exploiting workers and immigrants.

“A multi-billion-dollar corporation is trying to get

away with paying its workers \$1 per day. That shouldn't happen in America, and I will not tolerate it happening in Washington. For-profit companies cannot exploit Washington workers," he declared.

The plight of the detained immigrants has been largely ignored by the media and no genuine opposition can be seen from the Democratic Party. The Democrats only offer empty criticism and are complicit in the regime of terror immigrants are forced to endure.



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