

“We are watching and we are coming”

ICE raids North Texas factory, arrests 160 immigrant workers

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In what is being described as the largest workplace raid conducted in the past decade, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested 160 immigrant workers in a North Texas factory. The raid was conducted as part of an ongoing criminal investigation into Load Trail, a company that makes vehicle trailers. The company began as a family-owned operation in 1996 and has now grown to employ over 500 workers. The arrested migrant workers, allegedly undocumented, were working at the Sumner-based facility, located 100 miles northeast of Dallas.

The raid, carried out jointly by ICE and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), involved a massive display of force with the aid of Air and Marine Operations (an agency within the US Customs and Border Protection) and 300 field agents, who swooped into the factory to carry out the arrests.

Katrina Berger, the special agent in charge, told the *Dallas Morning News* that the raid went smoothly without any serious incidents and that ICE had “taken steps to ensure it’ll be conducted in a humane and safe manner.” Berger also added, ominously, that there was “nothing that necessitated medical attention.”

This version of a smooth, humane operation is in fact quite different from what transpired. Dennis Perry, a 42-year-old worker at the Load Trail factory, described a far more frightening and chaotic scene. Talking to the *Morning News*, Perry said that soon after his break during the first shift, he saw armed agents pouring in from all the entrances: “They just came and raided from every entrance there was ...[and then] they drew their guns and told everyone to hit the ground.”

Another witness told ABC News, “I know I just heard helicopters everywhere and I saw a whole lot of

people running and so I turned to run and the first corner I hit I got guns drawn down on me.” Those who tried to run were tackled to the ground; some who tried hiding were quickly discovered. All the workers were then thoroughly searched for “weapons and drugs.”

Using their criminal warrant, agents questioned the workers and demanded they produce all their employment documents. Berger, the ICE special agent, later claimed that the interrogators were told that the 160 arrested workers were using fraudulent identification documents.

A video posted by the site eParisExtra shows workers lined up, and then separated by immigration status. US citizens were given green wristbands and allowed to leave; those categorized as undocumented immigrants were handcuffed and taken away. The arrested workers have been taken to unspecified detention centers in Texas and Oklahoma for processing, immigration hearings and potential deportation.

ICE has tried to once again present its actions with a humane veneer. Its press release highlights the fact that 5 of the 160 arrested workers were processed at the site and released with notices to appear later before federal authorities, because they were “deemed to be sole caregivers to children.”

Spokespersons also emphasized the fact that federal authorities were providing water and food to workers as the processing was taking place, and that Homeland Security had set up a 24-hour hotline for families to call and find out where their loved ones are being held.

Yareli Mendoza, whose father worked at the Sumner factory, presented a different picture.

She told NBCDFW.com that having heard about the ICE raid she raced to the factory, where she stood

beyond a fence hearing the buzz of helicopters overhead and watching armed men moving about, waiting for news about her father that never came. Mendoza is unaware of where her father is, or what his likely fate will be. She stated, “All the lawyers I’ve been trying to call and reach out to have just told me to sit there. And it is hard to just sit there when my father, when I know my father is not going to be home.”

Explaining the situation to her 8-year-old brother has been even more difficult. She told the NBC News affiliate, “Why isn’t he home yet? And we said, we had to be strong for him, and we told him that his job sent him to Dallas to go work. And he said, ‘OK that’s fine, but when is he coming home? Is he going to be gone for too long?’”

Hiring any worker who is in the US without the proper employment authorization has been a violation of federal law since 1986. Employers are expected to verify the identity and work eligibility of all employees by using what is known as an I-9 form. Those who do not can be subject to criminal investigation, and sentences not limited to fines.

Load Trail, whose factory was raided on Tuesday, had been made to pay a fine of \$445,000 in 2014 for its violation of federal laws in hiring 179 undocumented workers. It should be noted, however, that enforcement of this law is for the most part focused on tracking, arresting and eventually deporting immigrants. The trend has intensified tremendously under the Trump administration. Last year, acting ICE director Thomas Homan made it clear that “worksite enforcement” was a central component of the anti-immigrant regime that was being set up.

Describing the motivation behind the raid, Special Agent Berger claimed in comments to the *Morning News*: “Businesses that knowingly hire illegal aliens create an unfair advantage over their competing businesses. ... they take jobs away from citizens and legal residents [and create] an atmosphere poised for exploiting their illegal workforce.”

These intensified attacks on immigrant workers are part of the ongoing broader attack on the social and democratic rights of the working class as whole. Berger commented ominously on potential raids to come: “We are watching and we are coming.” Though her warning was framed as being directed against businesses that employ undocumented workers, the real targets are

immigrants and their families.



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