

ICE raids terrorize immigrants across the US Southwest

Norisa Diaz
18 February 2019

The Trump administration's fascistic crackdown on immigrants is expanding. On Friday, the government announced that a five-day sweep in Southern California targeting 122 businesses for employing undocumented workers had led to the arrest of 212 people.

In one of the larger sweeps, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained 26 Asian and Hispanic workers in a February 13 raid on Zion Market, a popular Korean grocery store in a mostly Asian neighborhood in San Diego, California.

ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) unit presented a federal search warrant as it began the raid. David Shaw, the special agent in charge of HSI in San Diego, told reporters that "San Diego special agents are focused on bringing to justice those employers who knowingly break the law and hire an illegal workforce, causing unfair disadvantages to those companies that do comply."

Echoing Donald Trump's fraudulent attempt to present the persecution of immigrants as a defense of American workers, Shaw added, "Honestly, if we didn't encounter any employees, it wouldn't make a difference for our case. Our case is based on the employer. One of the things we're trying to do, obviously, is protect US jobs, but it's also a national security issue."

ICE and its Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) unit, which is known for brutally dragging workers off the shop floor and tearing mothers and fathers from their children, routinely attempts to focus attention on coyote smugglers and "traffickers," never acknowledging their own role in deporting millions of desperate people who will attempt a dangerous journey to reunite with their families.

The agency has been ramping up its audits of workplace authorization, or I-9 forms—documents that verify the eligibility of employment to work in the US. The number of businesses targeted for worksite investigations has

increased by over 300 percent in the last year alone. In 2018, HSI opened 6,848 worksite investigations compared to 1,691 in 2017, according to an ICE news release.

Newsweek reported that since 2016, there has been a 650 percent surge in workplace arrests by ICE. The agency made five times more workplace arrests in 2018 than in 2017, according to BuzzFeed News.

James Schwab, spokesman for ICE's San Francisco office, said that approximately 77 businesses were served with I-9 audit notices from January 29 to January 31 across the office's jurisdiction, which includes Northern California, Hawaii, Guam and Saipan.

In addition to the recent sweeps in Southern California, ICE raids have expanded throughout the region and the entire country this past year. Some of the mass raids include:

- A three-day sweep in San Diego last March that detained 115 people
- The arrest of 162 workers in Los Angeles, Orange County, San Bernardino, Riverside, Santa Barbara and Ventura in a three-day sweep of Southern California in June of 2018
- A five-day sweep that netted 53 arrests in San Diego in September 2018
- The arrest of 150 people in a September 2018 operation in Los Angeles
- A two-week sweep in San Diego last October in which 84 people were detained.

Farms in the San Joaquin Valley, one of the largest agricultural production regions in the nation, have been targeted in the past month with audits by federal immigration authorities. Pitman Family Farms, Poindexter Nut Company and Fresh Select LLC have all been notified by ICE that their employee hiring records will soon be audited, according to Faith in the Valley, a humanitarian organization that works with undocumented

immigrants.

Faith in the Valley's offices have been inundated with calls from concerned workers and farmers in the last few weeks. The group reported that within a 48-hour period last week, it received more than 100 calls from worried workers.

In addition to California, sweeps have continued throughout the country. During a five-day period from January 14 to January 18, ICE detained 18 people in New York City, Long Island and the Hudson Valley. Earlier this month, ICE arrested over 200 in a massive North Carolina operation.

The majority of those arrested in these sweeps were from Mexico. However, those detained also included citizens of Honduras, Venezuela, the Czech Republic, Kazakhstan, Peru, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Iran, Nigeria, Korea, the Philippines, Romania and the United Kingdom.

The agency has attempted to blame increased raids on local law enforcement, claiming that these police departments have limited their interaction with immigration officers. Speaking of the mass raids in North Carolina, one ICE spokesperson said that the sweeps were in response to a new sheriff's "lack of cooperation" with the US government.

At a press conference this past Friday, Atlanta Field Office Director Sean Gallagher said, "I think the uptick you've seen is the direct result of some of the dangerous policies that some of our county sheriffs have put into place, and it really forces my officers to go out on the street and conduct more operations out in the community, at courthouses, at residences, doing traffic stops... This is a direct correlation between the sheriffs' dangerous policies of not cooperating with ICE and the fact that we have to continue executing our important law enforcement mission."

In fact, for the most part, police departments are more closely integrated with the Gestapo-like activities of the immigration authorities than ever before. The Obama administration's Secure Communities Act (2009) introduced new mechanisms for the hunting down of immigrants through the use of biometric data, combining local law enforcement databases with immigration databases.

In conducting the raids, ICE agents have posed as day laborers, painters and customers to deceive and detain workers. Immigrant advocates note that workers are increasingly utilizing social media to alert each other of enforcement operations, sightings and checkpoints in their

area.

Immigrant advocates and humanitarian aid groups have been politically targeted for supporting migrants. This past month, four defendants from "No More Deaths in Arizona" were convicted by federal authorities of "littering in the desert" for leaving water and life-saving aid in the Sonoran Desert.

A man who recorded and posted live video of a North Carolina raid has been charged with threatening sheriff's deputies. Immigration advocates claim that Christian Enrique Canales, 27, was arrested "in retaliation" for bringing attention to the raid. "Christian has taken an active role advocating for the immigrants arrested and has publicly spoken to reporters about the raids that took place in Sanford," the group Alerta Migratoria said.

According to a California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC) study, last conducted in 2014, California's labor force contains around 1.85 million undocumented immigrants, or one in ten workers in the state. That report noted that immigrant employment, both documented and undocumented, dominates large sectors of industry throughout the state.

It found that "in terms of occupations, immigrants make up the majority of those involved in farming, fishing, and forestry (80 percent), grounds cleaning and maintenance (62 percent), production (57 percent), construction (42 percent), food preparation and serving (42 percent), transportation (42 percent), and personal care and service (37 percent) jobs." Undocumented immigrants are disproportionately represented in the farming (38 percent), construction (14 percent), production, service and transportation industries.

The prevalence of immigrants in various industries in the state underscores the fact that the entire working population is being terrorized and threatened by the immigration police.

Workplace employer audits and raids are part of a policy that is supported by fake "socialists" and "lefts" such as Bernie Sanders, who has remained silent on deportations and insisted that ICE pursue businesses that employ the undocumented, while presenting his support for anti-immigrant policies as opposition to "employer abuse."



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