

US detains 77,000 immigrants at border in February, a 10-year high

Norisa Diaz
6 March 2019

The Trump administration announced Tuesday that 77,000 people were detained crossing the border in February, more than any month since 2009.

While the bourgeois press has treated the announcement as though it supports Trump's declaration of a national emergency at the border, in reality the figures testify to the extent of the devastation wreaked by US imperialism on the Central American countries from which these masses of workers and peasants are trying to escape.

The fact that so many people journeyed across the border in one of the coldest months even as Trump was announcing his border crackdown shows the risks these impoverished people are willing to confront in their desperate escape from countries like Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

The Trump administration's fascistic crackdown on immigrants expanded Friday along the southern border in New Mexico, where Customs and Border Protection (CBP) apprehended 180 immigrants early Tuesday.

The group was comprised primarily of Central American families and unaccompanied children near Sunland Park, New Mexico. One pregnant woman in the group had to be rushed to the hospital upon detention after experiencing intense abdominal pain. Last week, a young pregnant woman miscarried in detention.

Compounding the total number of apprehensions at the border are the large scale sweeps and workplace raids which continue to escalate throughout the country.

The number of businesses targeted for worksite investigations has increased by over 300 percent in the last year alone. In 2018, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) opened 6,848 worksite investigations compared to 1,691 in 2017, according to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) news release. *Newsweek* reported that since 2016, there has been a 650 percent surge in workplace arrests by ICE.

Last April, over 100 workers were detained at a

Tennessee meatpacking plant. Earlier this year, in January, ICE arrested over 200 in a North Carolina raid.

The majority of those arrested throughout sweeps were from Mexico. However, arrestees 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.

Throughout the nationwide mass raids, ICE agents have illegally posed as customers, day laborers and painters to deceive and detain workers. Immigrants and advocates have noted that workers and their communities are increasingly utilizing social media to alert each other of enforcement operations, sightings and checkpoints.

In response to recent lawsuits filed against ICE for the April 2018 raid of nearly 100 immigrants at a Tennessee meatpacking plant, an ICE spokesperson told NBC News that "ICE's Homeland Security Investigations division equally focused enforcement efforts on employers who knowingly hire unauthorized workers as well as those employees."

"The Southeastern Provision case was always a federal criminal investigation that also resulted in administrative immigration arrests," the spokesperson said. "To describe the operation as an immigration enforcement action is inaccurate; it was a federal criminal investigation that also resulted in immigration arrests."

This demagoguery does not mask the reality of the workplace raids which target the working class. The increased militarization of workplaces across America takes place amid the resurgence of the class struggle as exemplified by the movement of factory workers in Matamoros, Mexico, and the worldwide teacher rebellions.

Ellen Holmes Brandis, a Spanish teacher at Riverside High School in Durham, North Carolina, created a petition to protest last month's mass raid of over 100.

“This is an extra load on both the school professionals and the families affected,” wrote Brandis.

“Students should be enjoying their childhood, having fun learning new things at school, not suffering extreme duress due to ICE. It’s ripping our community apart in many ways, and it’s not only our immigrant students. It’s all students. Our non-immigrant students are frightened for their friends.”

The day after the April 2018 raid in Tennessee, the largest workplace immigration raid in a decade, NBC reported that 600 children from the district missed school. Jessica Bailiff, a physics teacher, said that when her absent students returned, “There’s just fear and sadness written all over their faces.”

Immigrants are on the front lines of the attack on the democratic rights of the working class. Prison detention centers have been erected where immigrants can be indefinitely detained, the constitutional rights to birthright citizenship are under attack, and ICE functions as a modern day Gestapo force striking fear in the entire population.

Meanwhile the numbers of abuses and deaths by both ICE agents and CBP officials continues to rise. In the past four years at least 10 cases of murder, attempted murder, kidnapping or rape at the hands of CBP agents have come to light primarily in the South Texas region. According to government records reviewed by the *Daily Beast*, the number of women who have suffered miscarriages while in ICE custody nearly doubled from ten in 2016 to eighteen in 2017.

Supporters of immigrants have also been politically targeted. This past month four defendants from No More Deaths in Arizona were convicted by federal authorities for “littering in the desert” by leaving water and life saving aid in the Sonoran Desert.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact