

Immigrant families living in Tennessee mobile home park denied aid, threatened with deportation by property managers

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Residents of a mobile home park in southeastern Tennessee say they have been threatened with eviction and deportation in a scheme to extort money from workers living there. The Auburn Hills Mobile Home Park in Ooltewah, a suburb of Chattanooga, is home to mostly Hispanic immigrant families.

Police are investigating the families' complaints after the mobile home park's operators, identified by the *Chattanooga Times Free Press* as Steven and Kim West, were arrested and charged with hoarding \$60,000 in supplies donated for the park residences.

Donations were made after an EF-3 tornado moved through the area hitting the park on Easter Sunday and destroying or damaging many homes and killing one man, 46-year-old Jose Arzate.

Sheriff's deputies seized donated items including 54 American Red Cross totes, diapers, masks, cases of bottled water and an unopened generator, the *Times Free Press* reported. Also reported was that many of the donations, according to the Sheriff's department, were stored in a trailer that had been "screwed shut."

Residents told police that the Wests never seemed to lack a reason to charge them fees, sometimes asking for additional rent payments even though it had been paid. To balk at paying again would prompt threats of eviction and deportation.

The managers also imposed fines ranging from \$25 to \$50 for menial property rule infractions and late payment fees on rent that was paid on time. "Each charge was backed up by the threat of deportation or eviction made by the Wests," the newspaper reported.

"They threaten you no matter what," Joel Trujillo, who has lived in the park with his wife and three children for 10 years, told the *Times Free Press*. "I mean, they just do it for no reason. And every time they threaten you, it's

\$25. Every time you get a letter, 25 bucks ... and we don't, I mean most of us don't, have anywhere we can go or anyone we can go to about this."

Such cruel behavior does not just happen because some people are "bad" and cruel. Acts like this, if proven true, occur in a social context. The building of Trump's border wall, the raids on immigrant workers at their jobs, the separation of immigrant families, confining of immigrant children in cages and the constant nationalist drone that "they are stealing our jobs" help create a noxious atmosphere which inflates fear and hatred of immigrants, in an effort to pit workers against each other.

"As in the past, today's anti-immigration campaign has intensified in tandem with the capitalist crisis. Xenophobia and racism have been relentlessly promoted in the period since the 2008 financial crash," the World Socialist Web Site wrote earlier this year in reviewing *The Guarded Gate*, a book on the history of US immigration policy. "Trump's vicious scapegoating of immigrants exceeds even that of the anti-immigration forces of the past. The Democrats, as shown by the massive deportations of undocumented immigrants under Obama, share responsibility for whipping up xenophobia, even as they pretend otherwise. Moreover, their promotion of identity politics serves to divide the working class, complementing and encouraging the racists."

Immigrant workers and their families in Tennessee have been subjected to abuse and harassment from the highest levels of the state.

The *New York Times* reported on a 2018 Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) raid at a meatpacking plant in Morristown, Tennessee, a town of about 30,000 northeast of Knoxville.

"Dozens of panicked workers fled in every direction, some wedging themselves between beef carcasses or

crouching under bloody butcher tables. About 100 workers, including at least one American citizen, were rounded up—every Latino employee at the plant, it turned out, save a man who had hidden in a freezer,” the *Times* reported.

The raid did not go unnoticed by the working class or the friends of the children who saw their fathers and mothers snatched away from them. Despite the best efforts of the Trump administration, there remains deep sympathy and support among native-born workers for their immigrant brothers and sisters.

“Two non-Hispanic kids on the bus were having a conversation about how they were worried about their friends,” Angela Kanipe, a Morristown third grade teacher who also works as a school bus driver, told the *Times*. “And they were talking about how God was going to be mad because he doesn’t want you to be mean to people. Why would someone take away someone’s parents? When I think about it, it just breaks my heart. It’s hard not to cry.”

Last year when an immigrant father and son took refuge in their van to avoid being seized by ICE agent at their home in Nashville, neighbors came to their aid, providing them with gas to keep their vehicle running as well as food and water. After several hours, the ICE agents were compelled to leave the premises without arresting the pair.

“What I saw was an injustice from the government in a country that basically was built on the backs and sweat of immigrants. Even our forefathers were immigrants. We all started as immigrants is what I’m saying,” neighbor Rosheda Martin told the WSW. “There’s a lot of us out here thinking this is just what it is, it’s just going to be this way, it’s not going to change.

“But we can change it. We can come together as a force. It says ‘We the People’ of the United States, not we the government. We have got to come together and help one another and educate one another.”



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