

“They say they’re worried about crime? Look in a mirror!”

Chicago area immigrant support worker speaks on first days of Trump administration

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In the first days of the Trump administration, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), supported by a number of other federal agencies, has begun arresting immigrants purported to be involved in “violent crime.” Democratic leaders, including billionaire Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, have supported these actions, worrying only that they could go too far.

Last week, the number of arrests escalated after Trump was reportedly disappointed with the number of arrests and deportations, many of which have been conducted illegally and brutally. Trump administration officials demanded quotas for ICE arrests be raised from a few hundred to 1,200-1,500 per day. At the same time, sweeping federal funding freezes have been announced, throwing the continuation of what remains of social services into question.

In Elgin, a town just northwest of Chicago, an undocumented worker who has been in Illinois for more than two decades was arrested by ICE after officers initiated a violent raid that pulled his family from their home in the early hours of the morning. The man for whom ICE claimed to be looking did not live at that address. Family members reported that when the daughter of the man who was arrested demanded to know “Why him?” an ICE official said, “We have to take someone,” before hauling him away.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed an immigrant and refugee support worker in the Chicago area about the first days of the Trump administration.

WSWS: Can you tell us about your role?

Immigrant support worker: “I teach English and a variety of other subjects at a non-profit serving recent arrivals to the US, mostly refugees, in the Chicago area. Most have refugee status, so they’re not being directly targeted by immigration raids at this point, but there is still a lot of nervousness and tension.

“For example, students are asking to do classes online, remotely, so that they don’t have to come to a physical location and potentially be targeted by immigration.”

WSWS: Are there other ways your work has been affected?

Worker: “Oh sure. First, we have had a number of additional trainings on ICE raids, basics of immigrants’ rights, how to prepare and protect our clients. This is obviously very stressful.

“Then, there’s a great deal of concern over the cuts to the budgets, which affect the populations we serve and our own jobs as well. The threats to rip funding away are extremely destructive.

“The organization also assists immigrants and refugees with very basic needs like rent and food. The apartments they’re living in are already substandard. There are a lot of problems they have to deal with in the buildings, including vermin. It’s so angering.

“So daily life is a struggle. The cutting off of funding by the Trump administration, based on the way grants are funded and disbursed, could definitely result in refugees getting kicked out and being left without any roof over their head. I actually have one client who is

currently in a shelter, and we've been working very hard to get her into housing.

"We've been told that we may have to be furloughed due to the budget cuts. Of course, we could all apply for unemployment. Many, if not most of us, just went through that in 2020. But it's not simple or straightforward. It can actually be very challenging, and what if those funds are slashed too?

"Every day at work you can just feel the tensions. We want to help and support each other. Everyone is just trying to live their lives. There's this anger you just have to swallow..."

WSWS: There's enormous social outrage over what is happening. There was a raid last week in Elgin where ICE knowingly and intentionally took the wrong man from his home and said, "We have to take someone."

Worker: "I see it outside of work too. I have friends who are Spanish-speaking citizens. The family all have gotten their birth certificates ready now, prepared in case of, "Papers please," Gestapo style. This is unbelievable.

"And the irony of it! It's the cops and these politicians that are actually the ones committing the biggest crimes, and they're never held accountable. Both parties funded a genocide and they say they're worried about crime? Look in a mirror."



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