

Venezuelan man disappeared to El Salvador by US immigration Gestapo after making wrong turn on bridge

Jacob Crosse
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Ricardo Prada Vásquez, a 32-year-old Venezuelan immigrant legally residing in the United States, has apparently been disappeared to El Salvador’s notorious Center for the Confinement of Terrorism (CECOT) after mistakenly turning onto the Ambassador Bridge in Detroit, Michigan.

The bridge, one of North America’s busiest international crossings, links Detroit with Windsor, Ontario. Due to the complexity of nearby highways, even local residents occasionally take the wrong ramp. For Prada, this innocent mistake led to arrest, imprisonment and deportation—culminating in his disappearance into a foreign prison.

On Tuesday morning, the *New York Times* reported on Prada’s deportation and noted that his current location was unknown. For more than 10 hours, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) refused to disclose his whereabouts. It wasn’t until nearly 4:00 p.m. that DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin issued a statement on X (Twitter), declaring that Prada had been “removed to El Salvador” on March 15.

McLaughlin claimed, without evidence, that Prada was a “TDA [Tren de Aragua] gang member” and “public safety threat.” She asserted that an immigration judge had ordered his removal on February 27.

Prada’s immigration status had been clearly established. As first reported by the *Times*, in November 2024 Prada entered the US legally after scheduling an appointment using the CBP One app. Under the Trump administration, the app was transformed from an asylum platform into a tool for coerced “self-deportation,” rebranded as CBP Home.

After arriving in the US, Prada settled in Detroit and worked as a delivery driver. On January 15, while

picking up an order from McDonald’s, he accidentally made a turn that forced him to cross the Ambassador Bridge into Canada. Rather than allowing him to turn around, immigration authorities arrested him for allegedly attempting to “re-enter” the United States—despite his lawful status.

While imprisoned in a Texas detention center, Prada called a friend in Chicago, Javier, on March 15. In that call—his last known contact—Prada said he believed he was being sent back to Venezuela. That same night, the Trump administration began secretive flights deporting immigrants, the majority with no criminal record, to El Salvador’s CECOT prison.

These deportations occurred in direct violation of an order by Judge James E. Boasberg of the US District Court for D.C., who instructed that flights be halted or turned back if they were already in the air.

Prada has not been heard from since. His name does not appear on the partial list compiled by lawyers and civil rights groups documenting the 288 men from Venezuela and El Salvador who were illegally transferred to CECOT in March. To say these men have been disappeared is not an exaggeration: the US government has refused to provide a comprehensive list, much less explanations, for all those detained in the prison.

Independent investigations confirm that the overwhelming majority of those imprisoned at CECOT have not been charged with any crimes. Among those detained: Andry Hernandez Romero, a gay makeup artist; Arturo Suárez Trejo, a musician; Jerce Reyes Barrios, a professional soccer player and coach; and Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a long-time Maryland resident, married to a US citizen, and father to three US citizen

children.

At an April 4 court hearing, veteran DOJ attorney Erez Reuveni admitted that Abrego Garcia had been wrongly deported due to an “administrative error.” For this admission, Reuveni was placed on leave and then fired on April 15 for allegedly failing to “zealously advocate” the administration’s position—that the government has unchecked authority to deport anyone, even US citizens, without due process or judicial review.

Trump’s assertion of the power to disappear individuals under the label of “terrorist” is a grave threat to democracy. This government is trampling on the Constitution and democratic rights with virtually no opposition from the Democrats or official institutions.

While mass protests occurred nationwide on April 5 and April 19 in opposition to Trump’s authoritarian policies, including his attacks on immigrants and international students, Democratic officials have downplayed or echoed his justifications. At an April 18 press conference, California Governor Gavin Newsom—a likely 2028 presidential contender—dismissed the Abrego Garcia case as the “distraction of the day.” He even echoed Trump’s rhetoric, saying Democrats were making themselves vulnerable to the question, “Are they defending MS-13?”

Similarly, *Axios* reported that a House Democrat questioned whether deportations “should be a big issue for Democrats,” and another dismissed public outrage as merely the “soup du jour,” claiming Trump was “setting a trap.”

The Democratic Party, far from resisting, is helping to implement Trump’s fascistic agenda—funneling wealth to the financial elite while preparing for global war. Workers cannot rely on the courts, which Trump is already defying. If a wrong turn can land an innocent man in a foreign dungeon, what protects any worker—regardless of citizenship—who dares to resist the fascist policies of the Trump regime?

Forced disappearances without due process are not the actions of a democracy. They echo the darkest chapters of US imperialist foreign policy, such as support for the reign of terror in South America known as Operation Condor, Chile’s Pinochet regime, Argentina’s “Dirty War,” and Brazil’s military dictatorship.

Workers must act independently to halt this lawless regime. Waiting for the “next election” is folly. Trump is openly pursuing an unconstitutional third term while promising to deport “homegrown,” that is, US citizens.

Workers cannot rely on the nationalist trade unions either. Shawn Fain of the United Auto Workers and Sean O’Brien of the Teamsters are aligning with Trump’s trade war nationalism. As preparations for World War III escalate, they offer themselves as “labor police” for the would-be dictator while backing his attacks on immigrants.

To defend democratic rights, workers must form independent rank-and-file committees in every workplace—factories, schools, hospitals. The fight against fascism is a class struggle. The tools used today against immigrants will be turned against all who resist.



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