

At least 1 worker kidnapped at Hyundai plant and facing deportation despite possessing legal visa

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Nearly a week after almost 500 workers were kidnapped by the federal immigration agents at the joint Hyundai-LG factory and battery plant in Georgia, the *Guardian* reported that at least one of the workers was legally living and working in the United States. Citing an internal federal document, the *Guardian* reported Wednesday that one of the workers was legally in the US yet was still forced to sign documentation agreeing to a “voluntary departure.”

So far, the *Guardian* has only obtained documentation proving at least one worker was “legally” in the country, but there is every reason to believe many of the 475 workers kidnapped on September 4 were not “criminals” in any sense of the word and had done everything in their power to comply with US immigration law.

As of this writing, over 300 Korean workers remain in the United States. A chartered flight orchestrated between the governments of South Korea and the United States to send the workers back to Seoul was cancelled on Wednesday. Another 175 workers, from several other countries, are still detained in an ICE concentration camp.

The documentation obtained by the *Guardian* refutes the initial statement advanced by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) which claimed that all those kidnapped were in the country “illegally.” In its September 4 press release Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wrote that “individuals arrested during the operation were found to be working illegally, in violation of the terms of their visas and/or status.”

Yet the document, written by an ICE agent, according to the *Guardian*, confirms that at least one worker “entered into the United States ... with a valid B1/B2 visa and [redacted] was employed at HL-GA Battery Company LLC as a contractor from the South Korean company SFA

From statements made and queries in law enforcement databases, [redacted] has not violated his visa...”

Even though the worker was legally allowed to labor and live in the United States, the document continues: “however, the Atlanta Field Office Director has mandated [redacted] be presented as a Voluntary Departure. [Redacted] has accepted voluntary departure despite not violating his B1/B2 visa requirements.”

In other words, despite this worker having their “papers in order,” he has been kidnapped, held in ICE custody for the last week and will be forced to leave the country.

Charles Kuck, an Atlanta immigration attorney who represents some of the detained South Korean workers, said in an interview with the Associated Press Monday that many of the workers were engaged in authorized activities under the B-1 business visitor visa program. He said that their intended stay in the United States was limited to a few weeks and “never more than 75 days.”

Kuck explained that no US company manufactures the machines used at the Georgia battery plant, so the machines and specially trained workers had to be brought in from overseas for installation and on-site repairs. He noted that training someone in the US to carry out this type of work would take approximately three to five years.

He continued, “This is not a new practice. We have done this for a long time, and it continues—when we export products, we send our own personnel abroad to manage them.”

Speaking to the *Guardian* on Wednesday on the ICE document, Kuck said the file describes an “actual crime” committed by the government. He called the arrest “illegal” and “outrageous.”

“This is a clear violation of the law in detaining somebody who is not lawfully detainable,” Kuck said.

“That’s a crime—that’s unlawful imprisonment in the United States. This isn’t an accident. People go to prison for stuff like this,” he told the paper.

In a statement to the *Guardian*, a DHS spokesperson defended the arrest of the worker with a blatant lie, “This individual admitted to unauthorized work on a B1/B2 visa. He was offered voluntary departure and accepted it.”

DHS thugs are repeating the same lies as the fascist in the White House. Over the weekend, Trump stated categorically that the workers kidnapped “were in the U.S. illegally.”

In a gangster threat to non-US-controlled corporations, Trump added that if they want access to the US market, they must both comply with his immigration regime and agree to train and hire “American workers” on his terms.

Trump’s threats and the raid in Georgia are not aimed at “empowering” American workers or “enforcing immigration law” but are an assault on the rights of every worker and an attempt by the aspiring dictator to set labor and hiring practices across the board. Corporations that hire immigrants, or “un-American” workers, run the risk of militarized raids, detention and deportation.

The mass arrest of workers last week has caused outrage in the US and internationally. On Saturday, protesters gathered outside the plant in Ellabell, Georgia to denounce the attacks on immigrants and the mass deportation operation.

The brutal treatment of the workers, forced to march onto buses shackled in chains, has also provoked outrage in South Korea. On Tuesday, protesters gathered outside the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, South Korea carrying signs that read, “A tariff bomb and workers confinement.”

Notably, while workers in the United States and internationally are disgusted and angered at the ongoing mass deportation operation, much of the trade union bureaucracy is openly aligning itself with the immigration Gestapo.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Christi Hulme, president of the AFL-CIO’s Savannah Regional Central Labor Council, alleged that the detained South Korean workers were taking jobs “reserved” for certain affiliated unions. “Basically our labor was being given to illegal immigrants,” Hulme declared.

This statement expresses not the interests of the working class but the reactionary nationalism of the union bureaucracy. For decades, the AFL-CIO has collaborated

with the corporations and the state in suppressing strikes, enforcing concessions and pitting workers against one another along racial and national lines.

In echoing the propaganda of the Trump administration, the unions make clear that they stand not with workers facing persecution but with the state apparatus of raids, deportations and mass incarceration. Far from defending “our” jobs, the bureaucracy seeks to protect its own privileged position as labor police, enforcing the demands of the capitalist class while dividing American workers from their brothers and sisters internationally.

The path forward lies not in the AFL-CIO and their adjuncts. As Will Lehman, socialist autoworker, wrote earlier this week:

Workers cannot rely on the union bureaucracy, the Democratic Party or any section of the ruling class to defend our rights. The defense of immigrant workers must be taken into our own hands.

I call for the formation of rank-and-file defense committees in every workplace and neighborhood, composed of workers themselves and independent of the union apparatus. These committees must demand the immediate release of the workers arrested at Hyundai and an end to the campaign of terror against immigrant workers, organize mass demonstrations, prepare solidarity strike actions and link up with workers across industries and borders.



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