

California immigration bills expose the fraud of Democratic opposition to Trump

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In a carefully choreographed ceremony in Sacramento on September 20, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a package of immigration bills—SB 98, AB 49, and SB 81—proclaiming California’s defiance of President Donald Trump’s escalating campaign of mass raids and deportations.

Praised by the Democratic Party and liberal press as a “bold defense” of immigrants and a “model for national resistance,” these measures have been hailed as a demonstration of the state’s autonomy and values.

Such claims are a fraud. Far from constituting a genuine obstacle to the fascist program emanating from Washington, the bills are empty gestures designed to project opposition while leaving the repressive machinery of the federal state untouched.

They accept the deportation system itself, the existence of ICE and its power to arrest and deport millions as permanent and legitimate, treating mass expulsions not as an intolerable assault on democratic rights but as an inevitable feature of American life.

Each of the new measures is carefully crafted to appear combative, while, in fact, conceding the fundamental ground to the Trump administration.

SB 98, the most publicized of the three, requires K-12 schools and higher education institutions in California to notify students, staff and campus communities when immigration enforcement officers are present on campus. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, “it is a reactionary maneuver designed to pacify social opposition while it normalizes immigration raids and channels growing anger over Trump’s escalating mass deportation campaign into controlled and politically harmless outlets.”

AB 49 restricts immigration enforcement activities at school and childcare sites and prohibits the collection of immigration or citizenship status information from students or their families by school officials. It also requires school officials to report requests for immigration enforcement access while maintaining privacy and confidentiality. Similar provisions already existed for hospitals and schools, defined as “sensitive locations,” until Trump took power last

January.

SB 81 prohibits immigration authorities from accessing nonpublic areas of healthcare facilities without a valid judicial warrant or court order. Again, this amounts to a state attempt to reintroduce protections that have been dismantled by Trump, not to challenge the existence of ICE or its powers, but to manage public anger and deflect demands for genuine resistance.

In short, these measures change nothing. They do not restrict the federal government’s ability to raid homes, break up families, fill detention centers and deport millions.

The cynicism of this charade is underscored by the role of Newsom himself. Among leading Democrats, he has been the most vocal in warning of Trump’s authoritarian trajectory. In recent months, he has publicly accused the former president of seeking to undermine American democracy.

Yet this rhetoric only exposes the depth of Newsom’s hypocrisy and the fraud of California’s so-called “sanctuary” status. He fully supported Obama and Biden’s brutal deportation policies and now passes toothless measures that cannot halt a single federal raid, while simultaneously deepening the assault on immigrants through his own policies.

Crucially, he makes no appeal to the immense power of the working class, no call for demonstrations, strikes, or independent mass mobilization, precisely because the Democrats fear that such a movement would escape their control and threaten capitalist rule itself. Newsom’s most recent state budget slashed more than \$5 billion in social programs, impacting undocumented workers and families by stripping away healthcare, housing and social services.

The hollowness of California’s legislative posturing was already exposed by the firing of Michele Beckwith, the acting US attorney in Sacramento. In mid-July, Beckwith warned Border Patrol Chief Gregory Bovino that agents could not conduct indiscriminate raids in the Eastern District of California due to a federal injunction requiring reasonable suspicion for detentions. Hours later, she was summarily

dismissed by the Trump administration.

Bovino's response to the injunction and Beckwith's warning was to proceed with the operation anyway. "There is no sanctuary anywhere," he declared, before agents arrested eight people in a Sacramento Home Depot parking lot. The message was unmistakable: federal forces will operate wherever they wish, regardless of state laws or court orders.

Judicial resistance is likewise being neutralized. A Los Angeles federal judge who in July issued an order limiting immigration raids in Southern California saw her decision overturned by the Supreme Court this month. The high court's ruling once again affirmed the vast and unchecked powers of federal immigration authorities.

These developments underscore a basic legal reality: under the Constitution's Supremacy Clause, federal law overrides any conflicting state statutes. States may refuse to cooperate with federal actions under the anti-commandeering principle (they cannot be compelled to deploy their own resources), but they cannot stop federal agents from acting.

Moreover, any state official who attempts to obstruct a federal operation risks criminal prosecution. In recent weeks, several local officials have been indicted or threatened with charges for what federal authorities described as "interference." The Trump administration has made clear that it intends to use this power aggressively.

The increasingly authoritarian character of the federal government is evident not only in the deportation campaign but also in the rhetoric and actions of its leading officials. After Newsom signed the immigration bills, acting US Attorney Bill Essayli publicly accused the governor of threatening the federal government.

"We have zero tolerance for direct or implicit threats against government officials," Essayli wrote on X, announcing that he had requested a "full threat assessment" by the US Secret Service.

The Democratic Party's role in this process is doubly reactionary. First, it has collaborated for decades in building the legal and institutional apparatus of repression. The Obama administration deported more people than any previous presidency, vastly expanded ICE's powers, and militarized the border. Congressional Democrats have repeatedly voted to increase funding for immigration enforcement and detention.

Second, the Democrats now use symbolic gestures like SB 98, AB 49, and SB 81 to maintain the illusion that the state apparatus can be pressured to protect democratic rights. In reality, these measures are not intended to stop Trump's fascistic policies, but to contain and demobilize mass opposition to them. This fraud is reinforced by the trade union bureaucracy, which functions as an appendage of the

two big business parties and the capitalist state.

Major unions, including the California Nurses Association and SEIU, cynically hailed the bills as historic victories for immigrant workers and patients, presenting Newsom as a champion of the oppressed. In fact, such endorsements sow dangerous illusions and disorient workers in the face of escalating attacks.

False hopes are also being planted in the 2026 elections, assuming that they will even be held. The aim is to convince workers that salvation lies in the courts, in the legislature, or at the ballot box, even as those very institutions are being transformed into instruments of dictatorship.

The lesson of recent months is unmistakable. No state law, judicial ruling or Democratic politician will halt the drive toward authoritarian rule. Trump's deportation machine, like his broader program of political persecution and social reaction, is rooted in the capitalist state itself, a state that serves the interests of the ruling class and will trample every democratic right to defend those interests.

The structures of bourgeois democracy are collapsing under the weight of capitalist crisis, imperialist war, genocide and escalating social inequality.

The only force capable of stopping the descent into dictatorship is the independent political mobilization of the working class, immigrant and native-born alike, against the entire capitalist system.

This requires a break from the Democratic Party, rejecting the false promises of "sanctuary," and the building of a socialist movement dedicated to dismantling the machinery of repression by abolishing the profit system and establishing genuine democratic control over society.



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