

# To stop the ICE raids in Chicago: Mobilize the working class through rank-and-file committees

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In Chicago and across the United States, the most flagrant violations of constitutional rights are being carried out by armed teams under Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). More than 3,000 people have been abducted from Chicago this year, overwhelmingly with no criminal background. Chicago Public Schools has reported a sharp drop in attendance since federal agents surged into the city in September, as families pull children from class out of fear of kidnappings at school entrances.

Although CBP “roving commander” Gregory Bovino has shifted more forces toward North Carolina and New Orleans, agents continue daily raids and harassment across the Chicago metro area. The Trump administration has announced further deployments after the New Year and even plans to target Spanish-speaking churches during the Christmas holidays.

Raids across the country have provoked significant and spontaneous opposition. Over the weekend, protesters in Manhattan confronted federal agents with signs demanding “ICE out of New York.” In Charlotte and the Raleigh-Durham region in North Carolina, an estimated 56,000 high school students walked out or did not go to school after agents arrested 400 people in mass sweeps that drove thousands into hiding. In Oregon, hundreds walked out of McMinnville High School after Christian Jimenez, a 17-year-old US citizen, was seized by ICE during his lunch break.

## Protests and patrols

In Chicago, spontaneous resistance has developed rapidly. In working class and middle class neighborhoods, residents have formed rapid-response teams to warn families of approaching ICE or CBP vehicles. Teachers, school staff and parents have organized informal patrols during drop-off and pick-up hours, intervening when agents appear. On the Southwest Side, small businesses have prepared thousands of meals for families too afraid to leave home. Volunteers deliver groceries, medicine and other necessities and aid street vendors most likely to be targeted.

This active resistance stands in stark contrast to the posturing of local Democratic officials—Governor JB Pritzker, Mayor Brandon Johnson and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle—who rush before cameras to associate themselves with popular anger while insisting that the only remedies lie in court challenges or electing more Democrats in 2026. This performance of helplessness is not confusion or timidity. It expresses their fear—and hostility—toward any movement of workers and youth that might slip out of their control, unify broad layers of the

working class and challenge the corporate and financial interests they defend. Their appeals to the courts, which Trump openly disregards, and to an electoral cycle that could occur under martial law are aimed at diverting and demobilizing real opposition.

A growing section of the population refuses to recognize ICE or CBP as legitimate authorities, chanting “There is no law” during a protest in the Chicago neighborhood of Little Village. Their sentiment recalls an earlier turning point in American history: In the years before the Civil War, millions in the North concluded that the Supreme Court, Congress and the principal institutions of government had fallen under the control of the Slave Power and that moral appeals or legal arguments would do nothing to halt its expansion.

Today, millions are drawing a similar conclusion about Trump—that the United States government is headed by a lawless gangster, who treats lawsuits, court rulings and constitutional restraints with open contempt. What is emerging is an initial break from the political framework that enabled these conditions in the first place and a recognition that genuine rights can only be defended through mass, organized struggle.

The central question posed by this emerging struggle is how to transform spontaneous resistance—walkouts, neighborhood patrols, school-based defense efforts—into a conscious, organized movement of the working class. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees in every neighborhood, school and workplace—-independent organizations of workers, parents, students and community members that not only defend targeted families but mobilize the immense social power of the working class across the Chicago region to demand the immediate removal of ICE and CBP, an end to all raids and deportations, and the liberation of all detainees.

The major task of these committees is to connect the fight to protect immigrant workers with the broader struggle of the entire working class, uniting workers across industries and communities into an active, offensive movement capable of confronting the Trump administration and halting its lawless repression.

Yet unless the movement acquires this conscious political direction and organizational form, it will be subordinated once again to the Democratic Party and the organizations tied to it. The essential task is to arm the opposition with a perspective rooted in the independent mobilization of the working class, organized through committees directly controlled by workers, youth and community members themselves.

## Democrats, labor bureaucracies try to strangle opposition

Democratic officials, union leaders and the Democratic Socialists of America are working to channel mass anger into safe, non-threatening avenues. Johnson, Preckwinkle, Pritzker, along with Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez and Mamdani, promote the illusion that some accommodation with Trump is possible. They warn repeatedly against “inflaming” the population.

Johnson’s September 8 *New York Times* column agreed with Trump that “crime” is a major problem and merely debated the method of deploying federal and state forces. Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and California Governor Gavin Newsom made identical arguments as they deployed state troopers and LAPD against protesters.

Senate Democrats ended the longest government shutdown in US history on Trump’s terms, enabling massive insurance premium hikes and stabilizing an administration staggering under mass opposition. Their fear is not Trump but mass resistance from below.

Johnson, a former Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) lobbyist, worked with the CTU bureaucracy earlier this year to conceal a \$1.2 billion schools deficit and push through a contract to prevent a strike that could have become a focal point of opposition to Trump. Immediately after ratification, Johnson reversed course and declared sweeping cuts necessary. Pritzker continues to rule out even minimal taxation of the wealthy and corporations.

Meanwhile, the union bureaucracies—from the UAW to the CTU—work hand in glove with both parties as tens of thousands of jobs are slashed each quarter. They enforce “labor peace” while immigrant communities are raided and all workers lose income, healthcare and essential services.

UAW President Shawn Fain has embraced Trump’s economic nationalism, championing tariffs and promoting the reactionary lie that destroying the jobs of workers in Mexico, Canada and other countries is somehow a boon for American workers. Senator Bernie Sanders, for his part, has echoed Trump’s anti-immigrant program by calling for stronger borders and tougher enforcement, declaring that “Trump did a better job” than Biden and insisting, “You need a border.”

## The social and historic weight of the working class

The assault on immigrants is aimed at the working class as a whole. It is aimed at silencing, intimidating and dividing the working class and blocking collective resistance to the bipartisan drive toward imperialist war, job destruction, the dismantling of social programs and the erosion of democratic rights.

The key question is developing the fighting program, organizational means and leadership to unite the entire working class and link up the fight to defend immigrants and all democratic rights with the struggle for the social rights of the working class: for secure, good-paying and safe jobs, affordable housing and living expenses, and free and high-quality healthcare, public and college education for all.

Chicago’s entire history of class struggle demonstrates that the working class has never achieved anything without a politically conscious struggle against the ruling class’s use of race, nationality and anti-immigrant hysteria to divide them. The Haymarket affair, the Pullman strike, the meatpacking struggles depicted in *The Jungle* and the Memorial Day Massacre of 1937 were all battles in which the ruling class accused workers of being foreigners, agitators, anarchists or communists, weaponizing nativism to weaken resistance. Workers prevailed only when they overcame these divisions and united across ethnic, racial and linguistic lines.

Today’s witch-hunt against immigrants is a continuation of the strategy of divide-and-conquer. It must be countered consciously, through the

unification of US-born and immigrant workers in a common struggle against exploitation, repression and war.

The spontaneous unity emerging in Chicago—students protecting undocumented classmates, neighborhood teams defending families, workers refusing to collaborate with ICE—points to this historic trajectory. But it must be organized and expanded through rank-and-file committees established in every school, workplace and neighborhood, committees that consciously fight every attempt to divide workers along racial or national lines.

The social power of the working class is immense. The Chicago region is home to nearly 10 million people, with roughly half in the labor force. World Business Chicago reports the region’s GDP at \$886 billion. It employs the nation’s second-largest manufacturing workforce, including major concentrations in food production, fabricated metals and transportation equipment.

Trade, Transport and Utilities employs about 986,000 workers, including more than 271,000 in transportation and warehousing. Professional and Business Services employ 817,000. Health and Education Services employ 790,000. Government employs 556,000. Hospitality, 462,000. Manufacturing, 420,000. Finance, 316,000. A quarter of all US freight trains and half of all intermodal trains pass through the region. UPS’s largest hub processes more than 3 million packages per day.

These facts demonstrate the enormous capacity of the working class to defeat the raids, confront the Trump administration and defend democratic rights.

## A socialist alternative to capitalist barbarism

The fight against the raids must be tied to the development of a socialist alternative to a capitalist system descending into dictatorship, fascism and war. Across the world, oligarchic rule is proving incompatible with democracy. The concentration of wealth and power in a tiny elite makes democratic rights intolerable to the ruling class. The defense and vast expansion of genuine democracy require the expropriation of this oligarchy, a massive redistribution of wealth and workers’ control over the productive forces they create.

Rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods must link the immediate demands—expel ICE, release detainees and end deportations—to a broader fight for jobs, safe working conditions, affordable housing, free and high-quality healthcare, public education and college education. Every neighborhood, every school and every major workplace must have committees armed with a clear program, coordinating defense efforts, organizing walkouts and demonstrations and forming real systems of protection for targeted families.

To succeed, these committees must coordinate nationally and internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC). They must forge links with workers in logistics, transportation, education, healthcare, energy and manufacturing; and build independent networks of communication and collective struggle.

The development of rank-and-file committees must be connected to the building of a conscious political leadership in the working class. The spontaneous resistance across the country—from New York to North Carolina to Chicago—shows the immense potential for a unified movement to end the raids, drive Trump from power and fight for genuine democracy and socialism.

But to realize this potential, workers and youth must make a decisive political break with the Democratic Party and the trade union apparatus, which have enabled Trump’s rise and now stand paralyzed—or openly

complicit—in the face of dictatorship. Any subordination of the growing movement against Trump to the Democratic Party is fatal.

This has been made abundantly clear by the recent visit of New York City Mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), to the White House, where he stood shoulder to shoulder with Trump and pledged a “partnership” as the administration carries out mass raids throughout the country. Mamdani’s embrace of Trump is an expression of the broader role of the DSA, which is being integrated ever more fully into the political establishment, including in Chicago.

We urge all those who want to fight against dictatorship, war and capitalism to join and build the Socialist Equality Party and its student and youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality.



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