

Trump's border Gestapo target striking workers in Chicago

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On Tuesday, Customs and Border Patrol agents deployed to Chicago harassed striking workers on a picket line in front of Mauser Packaging. The provocation by Trump's fascist CBP Commander Gregory Bovino was a test to see if the police state measures against immigrants could be deployed against broader sections of the working class. This underscores the fact that the attack on immigrants is an attack on all workers, which must be opposed by the whole working class.

The heavily armed agents pulled their caravan of SUVs over the curb and onto the sidewalk directly in front of the picket line before pouring out to intimidate a group of strikers. Videos taken by the workers depict Bovino and dozens of masked agents equipped with military style vests and combat fatigues, and armed with handguns, rifle magazines and gas grenades.

In the videos, the agents are seen confronting picketers and asking questions before returning to their vehicles and driving off. In one clip, Bovino can be seen laughing at the striking workers.

According to a press release by the Teamster Union Local 705, the agents had attempted to interrogate the striking workers. Workers however refused to provide the agents with any information. "Fortunately, none of our members were detained," the Teamsters' post states.

The action by Bovino was not accidental. The defense of the majority Hispanic and immigrant workers at the Mauser plant has been a key issue raised by workers in the strike, including contractual language barring federal agents from coming onto company property without a warrant. The company has refused these demands, hoping to keep the threat of deportation as a weapon against the workers. During the contract negotiations in Seattle, Mauser had also threatened to call ICE to have striking workers deported to break up and weaken the strike.

Department of Homeland Security officials tried to deny Bovino was targeting the striking workers. In an email to the *Huffington Post*, a DHS spokesperson said, "During immigration enforcement operations in Cicero, U.S. Border Patrol drove past a local Teamsters Union protesting [for] higher wages. Chief Bovino engaged in a cordial conversation with them, explaining how illegal aliens actually lower American wages. Nobody was interrogated or laughed at. In fact no arrests were made."

The provocation was launched the same week Bovino returned to Chicago after leaving in November amid growing spontaneous actions by city residents to defend their immigrant neighbors and co-workers. Bovino's return coincided with the resumption of aggressive harassment and kidnapping operations. Another video from this week shows agents blocking a teenage girl on her way to school into a corner and demanding she provide proof of citizenship.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reported that over 1,500 people have been arrested in raids in Chicago since the "Midway Blitz" operation began in September. According to information released by the Department of Justice as a result of lawsuits against DHS, 97 percent of those abducted by federal agents had no criminal record.

Bovino fled Chicago in November to terrorize immigrants in North Carolina and New Orleans. While immigration detentions continued in Chicago in Bovino's absence, his presence had become synonymous with the most inflammatory abductions and assaults against protestors. Bovino is currently under investigation by federal courts for excessive use of force violations.

If the CBP commander felt confident enough to return it is only because the city's Democratic Party establishment and the Chicago Federation of Labor union have done everything they could to prevent a unified movement of the working class that would make it impossible for his fascist thugs to operate in the city's neighborhoods.

Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson have repeatedly warned the Trump administration that its actions are "inflaming" the situation, underscoring the fact that the Democrats fear an explosive movement of the working class far more than the danger of fascism.

Despite verbal complaints about the raids, Johnson—a former lobbyist for the Chicago Teachers Union—has aided Bovino in his deportation raids. The Chicago Police Department has repeatedly been mobilized to defend federal agents from popular resistance. In Little Village, the immigrant neighborhood most victimized by the raids, Chicago cops have been deployed in advance of raids to shield ICE agents from crowds of people attempting to stop the kidnappings. Earlier this week, it was reported that CPD intervened to block a

citizen from following Bovino's caravan and reporting on its whereabouts.

Johnson also worked with the Chicago Teachers Union to block a strike by 25,000 educators in April that had the potential of becoming a catalyst for a broader movement of the working class throughout the city and across the US against Trump's attacks on immigrants, public education and democratic rights. The Democratic mayor—a darling of the Democratic Socialists of America and the entire pseudo-left—has also allowed Bovino and ICE thugs to terrorize the schools and has done nothing to protect students and teachers.

As for the Teamsters union, they have left the 168 Mauser workers—who have been on strike for six months—out to dry. What began as a strike against the packaging company for improvements to wages, benefits and safety conditions has descended into prolonged negotiations for severance packages after the company closed the facility in November.

Teamsters Local 705 officials claimed that the closure of the plant was “unexpected.” However Mauser deployed the same tactic by closing a facility in Seattle in July, after a contract dispute.

The Teamsters have more than 30,000 members in the Chicago area with 17,000 in Local 705 alone, including at the massive UPS Chicago Area Consolidation Hub (CACH).

But the Teamsters bureaucracy has done nothing to defend the Mauser workers or immigrant workers more broadly who are being targeted for attack. This is not surprising since Teamster General President Sean O'Brien is a close ally of Trump who supports his nationalist “America First” trade war policies.

In January, O'Brien appeared on the podcast of the fascist US Senator Josh Hawley and parroted the anti-immigrant language of the far right saying, “I think the biggest problem is people are trying to protect illegal aliens that come here and commit crimes and that's unacceptable.” He added, “Social issues are all well and good, but protecting illegal immigrants that come into our country to commit crimes and steal jobs, that's a tough pill to swallow.”

This demonstrates that the attacks on immigrant workers can only be fought and halted if rank-and-file workers organize the struggle independently of the corporatist and nationalist union bureaucracy.

That means building rank-and-file committees in every workplace, neighborhood and school, linking up the fight to defend immigrants and democratic rights with the fight to defend jobs, oppose school cuts and secure a livable income and skyrocketing expenses.

These committees, including at Mauser, must link up workers at CACH, the rail yards and other major logistic hubs in Chicago, Chicago Public Schools and other workplaces, to prepare for a city-wide general strike. Their demands must include the immediate release of all those detained in immigration raids, the banning of all federal immigration

agents from the city and for across the board pay increases to meet the massive inflation of recent years.

In the class struggle in the United States there is a long history of anti-immigrant rhetoric being used in an attempt to break the unity of workers and to justify the use of armed forces to crush strikes. Chicago has been the site of some of the most intense examples of these battles.

During the Haymarket battle in 1886 many of the leading workers and organizers—including August Spies, Adolph Fischer and Louis Lingg—were German immigrants who commanded great respect for their knowledge of and participation in the great upheavals of the 1848 revolutions in Europe.

As the movement for the eight-hour day gather momentum across the country with strikes planned for May 1, the *New York Times* on April 28, 1886, declared the movement “un-American,” adding that “labor disturbances are brought about by foreigners.” Spies, Fischer and Lingg alongside the other Haymarket leaders were hunted down, arrested and frame up and ultimately executed.

The ruling class used the same anti-immigrant and anti-socialist agitation during the 1894 Pullman strike led by Eugene Debs, the meatpacking struggles depicted in *The Jungle* and the 1937 Memorial Day Massacre of ten workers at Republic Steel and many other battles.

It was only through the unified struggle of workers of every nationality, consciously fought for by socialists and left-wing militants, that workers were able to break the resistance of the capitalist class and achieve anything. This is what Trump, Bovino and the billionaires they represent fear most of all: a unified movement of all workers that breaks down the artificial divisions of race and nationality.

The only way to fight back and win a decisive victory is for the working class to organize its own opposition. To form independent committees in all the schools, factories, railyards and other workplaces, and to organize a powerful strike that targets the very source of the anti-immigrant attacks—the capitalist system and the oligarchy.



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