

# The class issues in the fight to defend immigrants and the trap of the “Detroit People’s Assembly”

Phyllis Steele, Jerry White  
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In just over a month, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents have abducted at least five teenagers in the Detroit area, most of them high school students with pending asylum cases. The coordinated raids—often triggered by minor police stops or predawn home invasions—are part of a broader campaign to criminalize and terrorize immigrant youth.

The most recent case, reported December 7, involved 17-year-old Santiago Jesus Zamora Perez, an 11th grader at Western International High School. He and his mother were detained after Fraser police stopped him for allegedly driving too slowly and alerted ICE. Less than two weeks earlier, Mor Ba, a 19-year-old recent graduate from Senegal, was detained by police in unmarked vehicles and transferred to the North Lake Correctional Facility. He had arrived in the US alone in April and was applying to college the night before his arrest.

On November 20, ICE agents raided a home on Detroit’s east side, seizing 16-year-old cousins Kerly Mariangel Sosa Rivero and Antony Janier Peña Sosa—also Western students—and two adult relatives. All were quickly transferred to Texas to block access to local legal defense. Days earlier, 19-year-old Sebastian Herrera, a student at Ecorse High School, was abducted at an ATM and denied critical medication for weeks, according to his lawyer.

According to the Michigan Immigrant Rights Center, at least four of the youths had active asylum cases. These arrests follow the deportation of Maykol Bogoya-Duarte, a Western senior expelled to Colombia in June after being stopped by police on his way to a school field trip.

The kidnapping of children is part of a nationwide dragnet by the Trump administration, which has led to an average of 2,600 “at large” arrests every week. Heavily armed and often masked federal agents fan out daily into neighborhoods, workplaces, schools and homes in Detroit, New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Charlotte and other cities.

There is enormous popular opposition to the witch-hunting of immigrants, expressed in spontaneous resistance such as neighborhood and school networks warning of ICE activity and high school walkouts. But Trump relies on the Democratic Party, which has done nothing beyond issuing impotent complaints and lawsuits, while mayors like Democratic Socialists of America-backed Brandon Johnson, a former Chicago Teachers Union official, dispatch police to suppress protests against ICE and CBP raids and detentions.

Equally complicit has been the trade union bureaucracy, from the American Federation of Teachers and their state and local affiliates, which have blocked strike action in Chicago and other cities, to the United Auto Workers and Teamsters, which have openly promoted Trump’s tariffs and hostility to immigrant workers.

Under these conditions, it is necessary to examine the role of various pseudo-left organizations which claim to oppose the attack on immigrants,

but seek to subordinate the growing resistance of workers, youth and other defenders of immigrant rights to the Democrats and labor apparatus.

A case in point is the People’s Assembly/*Asamblea Popular* founded in Detroit in late January 2025. It has been heavily promoted by *Left Voice*, the publication affiliated with the Morenoite Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS, Socialist Workers Party) in Argentina; the Party for Socialism and Liberation; the Stalinist Communist Party USA; By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) and other pseudo-left tendencies.

The de facto alliance of the People’s Assembly with the Democratic Party was demonstrated by the November 25 rally the organization held at Clark Park, across from Western International High School. The event featured left-talking Democrats, including US Congresswoman and DSA member Rashida Tlaib and Michigan Senator Stephanie Chang.

A February 7 *Left Voice* article, announcing the formation of the People’s Assembly, described it as a “united front assembly” and a “model” to oppose ICE and the Trump administration in other cities. The activists who came together to found People’s Assembly, the publication states, “not only understand the power of uniting the different tendencies of the Left, the union movement, and community forces but understand that if this power is to continue, it has to be controlled by the movement itself.”

Having called for the unity of “left” political tendencies expressly aligned with the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy, *Left Voice* adds this advice:

We should be wary of and push back against the co-optive tactics of the Democrats and the bureaucracies of the institutional nonprofits and unions who are subordinated to the Democrats.

It further declares:

Only through self-organized bodies that fight for class independence can we strengthen the movement and guard it against co-optation.

How an organization that proudly unites Stalinists, social democrats, union bureaucrats and Democratic Party politicians can fight for “class independence,” *Left Voice* does not say.

All these people—whose only principle is to have no principles—regularly denounce the Socialist Equality Party for “sectarianism.” By this, they mean our refusal to subordinate the struggles of the working class to the

parties and trade union apparatuses of the ruling class. Organizations like the People's Assembly, they claim, are doing the actual practical work of organizing resistance to ICE.

But what have they achieved with their opportunist politics?

This is summed up in the December 21 *Left Voice* article that hails their success in getting the Detroit Federation of Teachers to pass a toothless resolution against the student deportations and the Democratic Party-dominated school board to write a letter of protest to ICE!

"Passing the resolution was an important advance won by bottom up organizing by teachers, students, and their community, including a strong public awareness campaign about what happened to these kids," *Left Voice* reporter Brian Silverstein enthuses. "The media blitz and public outcry led by the teachers made sure enough people knew about what was happening that DFT and the school board felt they had to respond."

*Left Voice* approvingly quotes the DFT resolution, which is a lying and crass promotion of Democratic mayors and local police departments, which have been used in Chicago and other cities to stamp out anti-ICE protests. This included the DFT calling "on our new mayor elect Mary Sheffield to reiterate that as a welcoming city, Detroit Police Department should not cooperate with ICE and Border Patrol. We have seen this done successfully by the Minneapolis, Chicago and New York City mayors."

These empty declarations do not advance the struggle against Trump's war on immigrants by one iota. Instead, there is a quid pro quo between the Democrats, the union bureaucracy and the pseudo-left organizations. The latter provide cover for the Democratic Party, which is broadly hated for its anti-immigrant and pro-war policies, along with its capitulation and collusion with the Trump administration. At the same time, the Democrats adopt meaningless resolutions to create the appearance that mass anger can influence capitalist institutions.

There are sincere teachers, students and young people who have been drawn into the People's Assembly out of genuine outrage over the abduction and deportation of students and a desire to fight these crimes. Their anger is entirely justified. But this sincerity is systematically exploited by the organization's leadership to steer it back toward the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy.

In its article, *Left Voice* is forced to acknowledge that the school board's gesture will do nothing. "While the School Board agreed to write a public letter to ICE, the teachers' demands for concrete policy changes went ignored," Silverstein writes, adding, "Detroit's youth and their families need more than strongly worded letters." After boasting about the DFT resolution, Silverstein also admits, "It's easier for the union leadership to simply let the resolution quietly slip away."

But, the publication insists, the last thing workers and young people should conclude is that such appeals are a waste of time. It is precisely because the school board and DFT have no intention of taking any serious measures to oppose ICE or protect students that "teachers, students, and the community will once again have to take matters into their own hands to enforce the resolution," *Left Voice* declares.

The phrase "taking matters into their own hands" is totally misleading. *Left Voice* is not talking about workers mobilizing their independent strength in workplaces, neighborhoods and schools to oppose Trump and his enablers in the Democratic Party and trade union bureaucracy. Instead, they insist that workers and young people concentrate their energy on futile appeals to the Democratic Party and union bureaucracy.

The political orientation of *Left Voice* flows directly from its Morenoite heritage. The tradition associated with the Pabloite Nahuel Moreno has long rejected Trotskyism and the revolutionary independence of the working class in favor of opportunist alliances, electoral blocs and "fronts" aimed at securing influence within bourgeois politics. In Argentina and internationally, Morenoism has repeatedly subordinated workers to nationalist and social-democratic forces, from Juan Perón to various "left" capitalist parties in Latin America and Europe.

The People's Assembly is not modeled on the united front tactics developed by Leon Trotsky in the struggle against fascism in Germany in the early 1930s. Instead, it reflects the logic of Popular Front politics, pioneered by the Stalinists, which subordinated the working class to bourgeois parties in the name of "unity" and paved the way for historic defeats in France, Spain, Chile and elsewhere.

Far from mobilizing popular opposition to Trump's dictatorial measures, its politics undermine political consciousness and hold back the development of a powerful movement of the working class against fascism and dictatorship.

In opposition to this, the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) are fighting for the broadest mobilization of the working class to demand the immediate release of the five Detroit teenagers and their family members and a halt to all arrests and deportations.

We call for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighborhood to defend immigrant workers and youth, and fight for collective action by educators, industrial and logistic workers to prevent the ICE gestapo from operating in Detroit or anywhere else.

The only social force that has the power to halt the ICE raids and drive Trump and his fascist cabal from power is the working class. In Detroit, those opposing the war on immigrants must fight to mobilize the broad mass of workers facing job losses at GM's Factory Zero and other locations, teachers and students opposed to Trump's destruction of public education, low-income residents being evicted and all those opposed to dictatorship and imperialist war.

Rank-and-file committees can prepare collective action, including a political general strike, to demand the removal of all ICE and CBP agents and the return of Santiago Jesus Zamora Perez, Mor Ba, Kerly Mariangel Sosa Rivero, Antony Janier Peña Sosa, Sebastian Herrera and their family members.

The prerequisite for the development of such a mass movement is the complete organizational and political independence of workers and youth from the Democratic Party and the trade union bureaucracy.



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