

Police, federal agents assault and arrest peaceful protesters outside Dilley detention camp in south Texas

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On Wednesday afternoon, Texas police, alongside federal immigration agents, violently attacked a large group of protesters outside the Dilley detention center in South Texas. Video from the scene shows heavily armed Texas state trooper riot police aggressively shoving, assaulting and using tear gas against demonstrators who had gathered at the prison camp to demand the release of those detained, roughly a third of whom are children.

The protest began early Wednesday morning, as hundreds of workers and community members gathered outside the detention center. Demonstrators called for the release of those held inside, chanting “Free them all!” and denouncing the police as Nazis and kidnappers. Amid whistles, drums and maracas, protesters called out for “libertad” (freedom) and condemned ICE as “banditos.”

In a message to those held inside the facility—many of whom protested over the weekend against not only the deplorable conditions they face but also the denial of their basic civil liberties and democratic rights—demonstrators chanted, “No están solos,” Spanish for “You are not alone.”

Signs carried by protesters demanded “Liberty and justice for all” and denounced the immigration police with messages such as “History will remember you” and “Would you put your child in a cage?”

Reporters with the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to protesters prior to the police attack. To protect the security and identity of those interviewed, their names have been changed.

Jessie said she came to protest outside the facility “in support of all the people who were being unjustly detained in these detention centers, modern day concentration camps here in Texas. I also came out to march for the people who can’t be here today. I know that as part of the working class, it can be really difficult to show up to these events, even despite our best intentions. We still have bills to pay. We still have mouths to feed. So I’m also doing it for the people who can’t be here.”

She said she supports a general strike. “I hope that this is our breaking point, that children are being detained, that people are being murdered on the streets. I hope that this is enough, and that we call for a strike and just shut everything down. Because

without us workers, society will crumble.

“We are the working class. I know that it’s hard and it can be difficult, and the times that we are living are scary. But we have to overcome that and do something that benefits us all.” She concluded, “It’s all connected. Whatever’s happening in Minneapolis can and will happen down here in Texas. It’s recognizing that the struggle for a few of us is the struggle for all. We have to be able to unite as a people and overcome these injustices.”

Among those detained at the prison camp is 5-year-old Liam Conejo Ramos, a pre-school student kidnapped by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in Minneapolis last week and quickly sent to the facility with his father. Young Liam’s health appears to have deteriorated rapidly since being sent to the prison camp.

In an interview with MPR News on Monday, Erika Ramos, mother of Liam, said the situation “of my husband Adrian and my son Liam inside the detention center is deeply concerning. Liam is getting sick because the food they receive is not of good quality. He has stomach pain, he’s vomiting, he has a fever and he no longer wants to eat.”

Yvette told the WSWS that she came to protest because “I wanted to be a witness to what is happening. So often, we watch things on our phones, and it feels really distant. But my thought always goes back to, one day it could be me, recording somebody or somebody recording something happening to me. And when I saw the photo of Liam, it’s really heartbreaking because to me, growing up as a brown person in Texas, you look at an image like that and see yourself back. You see your cousins, your sisters and brothers. That’s just a little boy.”

Commenting on the protests waged by those detained inside the facility this past Saturday, Yvette said, “It’s really scary that, from inside a facility, you have people actively screaming for help, and you can’t see them and there’s aerial footage of it. It’s almost dehumanizing to hear a voice or hear a scream, and there’s no face behind it.

“When I saw that video, it just sounds like the voices of children, which out of all the like populations in this country, the way we’ve treated our children is heartbreaking in every

aspect and every, in every class and every part of society.”

Immigration attorney Eric Lee first reported on Saturday’s protests from outside the facility after he was rushed out by guards while waiting to visit with his clients. Lee represents a family being held at the camp, Hayam El-Gamal and her five children, ages 5 to 18. The family has been detained for eight months.

Lee revealed a pair of drawings he received from the children following his last visit to the facility. One of the 5-year-old twins drew themselves and other children behind bars with sad faces. The 9-year-old drew a picture of their old home, expressing a desire to return.

Habiba Soliman, 18, shared a letter with Lee detailing the ongoing torture she and the rest of the family are suffering from.

The letter reads in part:

Why is this happening to us? Why would all of our efforts to achieve our dreams be in vain? Why would the [government] insist on detaining us with no evidence? Why is it taking so long for the truth to come out?

...

No sane person would ever stay in this detention facility willingly, not if he didn’t have a big reason forcing him to stay. The conditions here are bad and the rules are made with consideration to the staff’s needs not the residents. All the long lists of harsh rules are taking away the kids’ childhoods. The kids are behind in their development, education, and growth.

The supervisors here just cover up for each other. Somehow every grievance or complaint that we have is unfounded, even if we have evidence and witnesses to support the grievance. They make promises that they don’t keep and change what they say all the time.

We would have never imagined that we would stay here for eight months and what makes it worse is that we don’t even know if or when we will get out. It’s very hard to watch our lives and dreams be destroyed while we are just waiting helplessly. We are stripped of the right to have a say about our lives. The government wants to control and determine how our lives will go, just like they have for the last 8 months....

Me and my family dream of the day that we will get out. Ramadan is coming and we will be fasting. I can’t even imagine spending it in a detention let alone away from my family. When will our punishment end? When will we be free? No family should ever be separated or have to stay detained for months.

Lee reported that in response to the peaceful protests by

detainees on Saturday, and by workers and community members outside the facility on Wednesday, ICE officials decided to punish those inside by placing the facility on lockdown.

“Families are not allowed to leave their dorms today. They are not allowed to go outside, they are not allowed to go to the gym. And that is extremely unusual; I have never heard of that happening here before,” Lee said.

He continued, “They are trying to prohibit the children inside from exercising their free speech right to protest their conditions of detention peacefully.”

In an interview with PBS on Wednesday night, Lee confirmed that prison guards went through detainee rooms and confiscated anything that could be used in a future protest.

“What we have been hearing from many detained families,” Lee said, “is that people are not allowed to leave their rooms. They were escorted to the lunch area for meals and so this is the reaction of the Trump administration to individuals expressing their free speech rights, both inside these facilities and outside these facilities.”

Asked about the protests at the facility this past Saturday, Lee said that he understood detainees “inside saw the size of the general strike and the massive demonstration that took place in Minneapolis on Friday and they wanted to join this growing movement from below, a movement of the American population against the Trump administration’s effort [to establish a presidential dictatorship].”

Amelia, a protester outside of Dilley on Wednesday, told the WSWS she supports a general strike, “100 percent.”

“When you live under a capitalistic society, the true power lies in our ability to either continue to procure goods or not. And in this case, when you have a very small percentage actually holding the massive amounts of wealth, it really attests to the fact the power lies in the hands of the everyday person.

“Minneapolis was the catalyst for socialism as we know it here in this country. I mean, when you talk about people seeing the importance of public goods being in the hands of the public, and who can benefit from that, that was the start. The withholding of labor is effective.

“For the people who previously weren’t aware of the power that strikes hold or just aware of the concept in general, I think many are really opening their eyes, because the question that remains with everybody I meet at these things is, ‘What can we do?’ I can’t think of a better response than a general strike. And I can’t think of a moment that is more perfect for it.”



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