

ICE at airports: A dress rehearsal for police state dictatorship

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Five days after President Donald Trump deployed hundreds of armed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers to airports across the US, not a single Democratic leader in the House or Senate has called for their removal. The same goes for Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Instead, one day before millions prepare to take the streets in the “No Kings” protests, the Democratic Party effectively dropped its phony charade of reining in the ICE and Border Patrol killers. This was the significance of the bill unanimously passed by the Senate early Friday morning to fund the Department of Homeland Security, with the exception of ICE and Border Patrol.

The Democrats cynically called the bill a “victory” and backed it in the House, despite the fact that it included none of the minor reforms to the immigration enforcement agencies they were calling for just days before. The bill would have restored funding for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), a component of DHS, enabling TSA agents to be paid and ending mass sickouts and long lines at airport check-ins.

“This agreement funds TSA, the Coast Guard, FEMA, CISA, strengthens security at the border and ports of entry, and keeps America safe,” Democratic Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Friday.

Later on Friday, House Republicans rejected the Senate bill and passed their own stop-gap measure that would fund the entire DHS, including ICE and Border Patrol, until May 22. This came after Trump signed an emergency order to pay TSA agents using part of the massive DHS appropriation contained in last year’s tax and spending measure dubbed Trump’s “Big Beautiful Bill.”

As the Democrats well know, the Republicans, who

narrowly control both houses of Congress, plan to push through a DHS funding bill with no restraints on ICE or Border Patrol and Trump’s voter suppression provisions by using the budget reconciliation process. This maneuver bypasses the 60-vote Senate filibuster and requires only a majority to pass.

Meanwhile, Trump’s ICE officers remain at the airports. Their presence has done nothing to ease the chaos there. It was never meant to. It is, rather, a further step in normalizing the use of armed federal agents and the military in civilian settings to intimidate and terrorize the population. It is a core element in the drive by Trump, and the corporate oligarchy that he represents, to dictatorship.

ICE at the airports is particularly sinister. It will be used to block not only immigrants from leaving the country but also political opponents of the government. It is the physical prefiguration of a police state.

This danger was underscored Monday by Trump co-conspirator Steve Bannon, who declared on his War Room podcast that the airport deployment was a “test run” for the 2026 midterm elections. *Democracy Docket* reported Bannon as saying, “We can use this as a test run, as a test case, to really perfect ICE’s involvement in the 2026 midterms,” before going further and insisting that “ICE is going to be there in the fall of ’26, just like they’re in airports today.”

ICE and Border Patrol have earned the contempt and hatred of the vast majority of Americans. They are the spearhead of a pogrom against immigrants that has put tens of thousands into concentration camps and deported tens of thousands more. In “Operation Metro Surge” in Minneapolis, masked ICE and Border Patrol thugs occupied neighborhoods and brutally attacked immigrants and protesters, citizen and immigrant alike, executing Renée Nicole Good and Alex Pretti in cold

blood. None of the killers have been prosecuted.

Millions have demonstrated against ICE and in defense of immigrant workers, including 50,000 in Minneapolis on January 23. The response of the Trump administration was the murder of Pretti the following day.

The lessons of Minneapolis must be drawn. The maneuver relating to a partial draw-down of immigration Gestapo in Minnesota in February was not, as pseudo-left groups around the Democratic Party such as *Left Voice* maintain, a “victory,” proving that mass protest alone can end government repression. Rather, it was a redeployment to other cities and now to the airports. And it was facilitated by Democratic Governor Tim Walz and Democratic Mayor Jacob Frey, who made a deal with border tsar Tom Homan to allow ICE into the prisons and have state and local police suppress demonstrations.

The escalating war drive abroad, seen in the illegal and quasi-genocidal war in Iran, and the turn to dictatorship at home are inseparably connected. They are both expressions of the existential crisis of American and world capitalism.

The cost of the war drive, reaching untold billions, is to be paid for by the working class, whose sons and daughters will be ordered to fight and die for Big Oil and the banks. The staggering rise in gas and food prices intensifies popular opposition to Trump and the entire political system. As mass protests and strikes spread, the ruling class and both of its parties turn to state repression. Trump does so openly and crudely, but he is enabled by the Democrats as well as the pro-capitalist trade union bureaucracy.

The union bureaucrats devote all of their efforts to suppressing the class struggle. They seek to block strikes where they can and isolate and betray them where they cannot. They take no action against the deployment of ICE to airports and the more general militarization of American society.

The greatest fear of the Democrats and the union tops is that mass social discontent and opposition will escape the confines of the capitalist political set-up, with its two parties of imperialism and oligarchic rule, and assume an independent working class and socialist form. This they fear far more than they fear fascist dictatorship.

This, however, is the only means of defeating the

ruling class drive to world war and fascism. Democratic rights cannot be defended through appeals to Congress or the Democratic Party. The drive to dictatorship and world war is rooted in the capitalist system. It can be stopped only by putting an end to that system.

The crisis is driving a massive eruption of the class struggle. But this must be infused with a conscious internationalist, anti-capitalist and socialist perspective.

The way forward is the building of independent, democratic organs of working class struggle—rank-and-file committees in workplaces, campuses and neighborhoods—to unite workers and youth in the United States and internationally against dictatorship and war. The *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party call for the expansion of these committees as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), to mobilize the immense social power of the working class against repression at home and imperialist violence abroad.

This must be connected to the building of a political leadership in the working class to fight for socialism—the only basis for ending war, defending democratic rights and putting society’s resources under democratic control to serve human need, not profit.



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