

ICE brutalizes protesters at detention center in New Jersey as detainees go on hunger strike

Erik Schreiber
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Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers pepper-sprayed dozens of protesters, including Senator Andy Kim, a Democrat from New Jersey, during a protest at the Delaney Hall prison in Newark, New Jersey, on Monday. ICE agents manhandled, tackled, restrained, or physically pinned to the ground other protesters in the immediate vicinity as they sought to push ICE vehicles through a crowd.

The protest, which had begun during the weekend, was a show of support for 300 immigrant detainees who are waging a hunger and labor strike. Monday's attack marked a sharp escalation in ICE's response and reflected President Donald Trump's refusal to tolerate opposition to his fascistic program.

Kim and Governor Mikie Sherrill, also a Democrat, visited Delaney Hall on Monday morning amid the protests. Sherrill previously had contacted the federal government to demand access to the prison but was refused entry when she arrived. She spoke to at least one detainee through a video call before leaving the site.

Kim briefly addressed a crowd of protesters outside the prison. "Right now, I'm trying to have them not point guns at us," he said, referring to the ICE agents. A confrontation between the protesters and the ICE agents soon developed, and Kim attempted to broker a compromise. He asked ICE to withdraw some of its tactical teams and allow immigrant advocates to inspect cars that were leaving the facility to see whether detainees were being transported.

But ICE agents soon began pushing the crowd backward, firing pepper balls and arresting protesters. When Kim inserted himself between the armed thugs and the protesters, he was struck by an unknown object and caught in a cloud of pepper spray. He soon had trouble breathing and reported that his lungs were burning. He received medical attention on the spot. After the incident, he said feebly, "It's sad, it's a sad day."

In contrast, federal officials unleashed an extraordinary torrent of bile. Federal officials slandered the protesters as "agitators" and claimed that detainees were receiving food,

water and medical care and being allowed to communicate with family and lawyers. The agency denied that a hunger strike was taking place.

Lauren Bis, acting assistant secretary of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS), denounced "sanctuary politicians" for staging a "political stunt." She referred to the immigrants as "murderers, rapists, pedophiles and drug traffickers" and called the protesters "dangerous rioters."

"Hunger strikes never work," said Trump's border czar Tom Homan on Fox News. "We're not going to change what we do because someone goes on a hunger strike. As a matter of fact, if it gets bad enough and the physicians feel like they're putting themselves in extreme medical danger, then we'll force-feed them. We'll get a court order and force-feed them."

The hunger and labor strike of 300 immigrant detainees at Delaney Hall began on May 22 in opposition to torture and inhumane treatment. The immigrants are demanding that prisoners not facing charges for violent crimes should be released and asserting that immigration judges are ignoring their cases. They deny having committed such crimes and say that dangerous conditions in their home countries drove them to enter the United States.

In phone calls to protesters outside the prison, the immigrants described finding live worms in their food, being kept in crowded rooms without air conditioning, receiving poor medical care and being denied bond. They assert that these measures are attempts to coerce them to "self-deport."

"We deal with racism, with bad conditions, with guards that do not help us," said Martin Alonso Soto Hernandez through an interpreter, on a phone call to protesters. "It gets worse all the time, and they don't treat us like people." Soto is married to immigration advocate Gabriela Soto.

The 300 strikers are prepared to go without food "for however long it takes," Jordi Albardo, another detainee, told immigrant advocates on a video chat. "We don't know the consequences exactly, maybe solitary confinement, we won't know. But they are taking our freedom of speech, and

our physical health is in danger.” Shortly after these calls, guards cut the immigrants’ access to phones and tablets.

About 125 protesters gathered at Delaney Hall during the weekend, according to DHS. The scene resembled a war zone. Concertina wire runs along the top of the fence that surrounds the prison. ICE agents surveyed the scene from the prison roof, and a masked soldier in a hulking armored vehicle aimed a rifle at protesters.

Kim and Representative Rob Menendez (son of the convicted former Senator Bob Menendez) toured Delaney Hall on Saturday evening. On the following day, several New Jersey Democrats called for the prison to be closed.

The protest intensified on Sunday when ICE agents prepared to transfer Soto, whose wife was a leader of the protests, to another jail in Elizabeth. Protesters blocked the car and threw objects at it. They also formed a human chain and erected makeshift barricades to block cars carrying prison personnel from entering or leaving the jail. ICE ultimately dispersed 70 protesters. At about 1:25 am on Monday, ICE agents blocked off part of the street and pepper sprayed protesters.

Delaney Hall is a 1,000-bed private immigration detention center that opened little more than a year ago. The GEO Group, which has a documented history of abuses, operates it on behalf of the US government. One immigrant died at Delaney Hall after being held for about one day.

Kim is not the first federal lawmaker or Democrat to be attacked by ICE while visiting the prison. Newark Mayor Ras Baraka was arrested at the jail last year, and Representative LaMonica McIver, who tried to prevent the arrest, was later charged with two felony counts and one misdemeanor count of assaulting, resisting, impeding and interfering with a federal officer.

The kidnapping, torture and summary deportation of immigrants are part of a broader attack on the fundamental rights of the entire working class. The foreign policy counterpart to this attack includes the criminal war against Iran, which could resume at any moment, and the preparations for a confrontation with China, which is the prime economic rival of US imperialism. This violence is necessitated by the severe crisis of the global capitalist economy, which threatens the dominance of the American ruling class.

Kim, Sherrill, Menendez and other Democrats have criticized the inhumane conditions at Delaney Hall while taking no effective action to stop it. Near the beginning of her term, Sherrill banned ICE agents from using state property as a staging area and signed a law prohibiting ICE agents from wearing masks in public. These measures have no bearing on the squalor in which immigrants are detained, and the Trump administration sued New Jersey in federal

court to block their implementation. If the administration loses its case, it will simply defy the court’s decision, as it does routinely.

Moreover, these Democrats’ own histories demonstrate that they and their party are incapable of defending democratic rights or fighting fascism. Kim and Sherrill are among those the *World Socialist Web Site* has exposed as CIA Democrats: representatives of the military-intelligence apparatus who have migrated into the top ranks of the Democratic Party. Both were first elected to Congress from New Jersey in 2018, with Kim winning a Senate seat in 2024 and Sherrill elected governor in 2025.

Kim served as a US State Department adviser to General David Petraeus and General John R. Allen in Afghanistan. He later advised President Barack Obama on national security and was complicit in the latter’s illegal wars in Syria and Libya. In Congress, Kim has supported the NATO proxy war against Russia and refused to call Israel’s systematic mass murder of Palestinians a genocide.

Sherrill served as a helicopter pilot and Russian policy officer during her nine-year career in the US Navy. In the House of Representatives, she supported the war in Ukraine and met and was photographed with members of the Ukrainian neo-Nazi Azov Battalion in her home district.

Kim and Sherrill have spent their careers facilitating the bloody, decades-long rampage of US imperialism. Like their colleagues in both parties, they fully support Trump’s war on the working class and war crimes abroad. Their intervention at Delaney Hall was an attempt to contain mass public anger and to urge that the interests of American finance capital be defended through less inflammatory methods. The Trump administration’s response was a blast of pepper spray.



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