

New Jersey Democrats unleash police riot against anti-ICE protesters outside Delaney Hall

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Over the weekend, New Jersey state police, under the direct authority of Democratic officials, violently rioted against protesters and press outside the Delaney Hall for-profit concentration camp in Newark.

On Friday and again on Saturday night, state police attacked protesters and press where hundreds of immigrants have been engaged in a hunger and labor strike against filthy conditions, medical neglect, lack of access to counsel and pressure to sign deportation documents. By Sunday, at least nine people had been arrested over two nights.

The crackdown was ordered by Democratic Governor Mikie Sherrill, a former Navy helicopter pilot and federal prosecutor, whose rise has been bound up with the Democratic Party's promotion of candidates drawn from the military-intelligence apparatus.

In a press conference Saturday, Sherrill claimed that the state police were establishing a "peaceful, protected protest zone" and that the state response was necessary to prevent an expanded ICE presence. In reality, the effect of the deployment was to relieve ICE agents of the burden of directly confronting protesters, placing the state police at the disposal of the Trump's mass deportation operation, which serves as a spearhead for the attack on the democratic rights of everyone.

This was made clear Saturday night, when police dramatically expanded the perimeter around Delaney Hall, forcing protesters and journalists far down Doremus Avenue, away from the facility and out of sight of those detained inside. MS NOW host Ali Velshi, reporting live from the scene, said police were preventing journalists from bearing "witness" to what was taking place. As he and others were forced down the road, flashbang grenades could be heard exploding behind them near the facility.

Multiple journalists and observers reported that police used rubber bullets, pepper balls, pepper spray, flashbangs and other crowd-control munitions at close range against protesters and members of the press. Such weapons can cause severe bruising, broken bones, eye injuries and death. Their use outside Delaney Hall was aimed at terrorizing protesters and preventing the

public from seeing the violence being carried out in defense of the detention center.

Associated Press photojournalist Angelina Katsanis was among those injured Saturday night. Katsanis suffered a severe injury to her knee and was eventually placed in a wheelchair. Video showed journalists attempting to negotiate with police to allow her through the riot line for medical attention. Although the journalists had their hands raised and posed no threat, police initially refused to let her pass.

Katsanis later reported that after returning to her vehicle, she discovered "my beloved think tank camera bag containing a lot of gear and my car/house keys was stolen by the police and they ditched the AirTag deep in New Jersey when they realized it was being tracked." A GoFundMe has since been established by relatives to help cover medical costs and replace the stolen equipment.

The contrast between the police response to anti-ICE protesters and to fascist provocateurs could not have been starker. On Saturday, a contingent of Proud Boys appeared outside Delaney Hall. The same police who attacked peaceful protesters and journalists did not launch a comparable assault on the far-right group. The message was unmistakable: Opposition to ICE and the defense of immigrants will be met with riot police, while fascistic elements are tolerated as auxiliary forces against the left.

Early Sunday morning, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka, a Democrat, imposed an overnight curfew from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. along Doremus Avenue. The order bars pedestrians from the area and threatens "enforcement actions" against anyone found in violation. Journalists are required to present credentials to remain in the area, a measure that gives police broad discretion to exclude independent, left-wing and oppositional media.

Baraka's statement made no mention of the violence carried out by ICE agents, state police or local police against protesters and journalists. Nor did it condemn the use of chemical weapons and impact munitions against people protesting the detention of immigrants. Instead, the Democratic mayor used the language of "public safety" to suppress opposition to the Trump administration's mass deportation regime.

Sherrill adopted the same framework in her own public statements. She blamed “people from outside the state” for escalating the protests, declaring that five of the six people arrested Friday night were not from New Jersey. In fact, four of the six were reportedly from New York, whose largest city is roughly 13 miles (21 km) from Newark. The attempt to portray protesters as “outside agitators” recalls the stock language used by segregationist politicians in the 1950s and 1960s to discredit civil rights protests, as well as the language used by Democrats during the 2020 George Floyd protests against police violence.

Speaking to protesters, not to the masked ICE agents and police attacking them, Sherrill urged people to “bring the temperature down” and “comply with lawful orders.” She called on the Department of Homeland Security to restore visitation, provide medical care and stop pressuring detainees into signing deportation documents.

The events outside Delaney Hall expose the role of the Democratic Party as a collaborator in Trump’s assault on immigrants and democratic rights. In New Jersey, as in Minneapolis and Broadview, Illinois, Democratic officials have responded to legitimate protests against ICE kidnappings and abuse by deploying police, enforcing curfews and clearing the streets so the federal deportation apparatus can continue operating.

This is being done to protect not only the Trump administration’s mass deportation campaign, but the immense profits of private prison contractors such as GEO Group, which operates Delaney Hall under contract with ICE.

Reporters for the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke Sunday with protesters and workers outside Delaney Hall. Union workers staged a demonstration several blocks from the facility, while many people carried signs demanding the closure of the detention center and the release of all those held inside.

One young protester told the WSWs he came out because “there is a literal concentration camp in New Jersey and many other states. The conditions are abhorrent. The hostages inside are being fed poisonous, infected meals with bugs, and they’re being attacked by the guards inside with chemical weapons.

“It’s crucial that we get more and more people out here to support the hostages inside,” he said. “What’s going on is genuine fascism.”

He added, “We need some real class solidarity in this country, some real class consciousness. We need people to understand that an immigrant who makes five dollars an hour is not your enemy. The enemy is the boss, the one making billions or millions of dollars while you make pennies and your wage has not increased since the 1990s.”

Asked about the Democrats, he replied: “We cannot put our faith in a Democratic Party or a Republican Party. The Democrats are the ones deploying the state police onto us. In the past couple of days, countless people have been arrested and assaulted by these state officers, not just the federal ICE officers but our state police. ... We cannot see a distinction

between the two groups. They both are fighting to protect the same thing.”

He said he would support a general strike to abolish ICE.

A New Jersey native who now lives in Pennsylvania told the WSWs she came to the protest because the detainees “are people’s families, people’s friends, people’s loved ones.”

“If my family was in there,” she said, “I’d want people out here to be there for my family. I know it’s so cliché, but that quote that’s like, they came for this group, and they came for that group, and then there was nobody left when they came for me. I feel like that’s what’s happening. It’s only a matter of time before the next group of people is attacked.”

Another protester said, “We need a major change. I do agree that making a change to a socialist democracy would benefit our country vastly. We need to unite as people. We are all working people. There is no divide between us.”

She recalled ICE raids during the first Trump administration. A friend, she related, was seized at a job site just before the workday ended. “ICE took all of their lunchboxes, threw them to the ground, called them all sorts of things. She was detained for 72 hours. We really couldn’t get to her. She has a daughter who is autistic, and needless to say it was a very traumatizing experience for both of them. She chose to self-deport.”

She also recalled that one of her cousins was detained by ICE after reporting to an immigration hearing. “They set traps for people like this,” she said. “They’re just trying to abide by the rules that we’re enforcing here after they’ve come, and we’re using it against them. He eventually was transferred over to Mississippi and then sent back home to Ecuador. He’s thankfully fine.”

Another young protester described the Democrats as the “controlled opposition.”

“They keep everything in position, keep the capitalist system moving,” he said. “The Republican Party obviously accelerates it. But all in all, they’re still also sure of capital. Anything that harms capital, they will come to the defense.” He added, “All ICE agents should be imprisoned.”

The violence outside Delaney Hall demonstrates that the defense of immigrants and democratic rights cannot be entrusted to any section of the capitalist political establishment. The same Democratic officials who posture as opponents of Trump are deploying police against those protesting his policies. The fight to shut down Delaney Hall, abolish ICE and free all detainees must be taken up by the working class independently of both capitalist parties, through the building of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods.



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