

ICE raids in Danbury, Connecticut: City's history exposes Democrats' complicity in immigration crackdown

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In late August 2026, Danbury, Connecticut was the target of a concentrated immigration enforcement operation. Over four days, August 24–27, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents detained nearly 100 people across Connecticut, more than 60 of them in Danbury. Danbury Unites for Immigrants documented at least 65 people detained in the city, based on reports from family members and witnesses.

More than 60 businesses closed their doors in support of the immigrant community. Juliana Soares, lead organizer with Danbury Unites for Immigrants, described streets emptied and children kept home from school and sports practice. On September 2, more than 1,000 people protested against the raids in Danbury. Celina Beatriz Curillo, an attorney with The American Immigrant Legal Clinic, described seeing detainees in Hartford “being brought out in chains—in a chain gang.” Most of those seized have since been shipped to detention facilities in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Colorado, a network of camps in which people are held without charge, denied counsel and severed from family, lawyers and their community.

The tactics were deliberately traumatizing. US Senator Chris Murphy reported that ICE agents arrested parents at school bus stops only after their children had boarded. “ICE waited until the kids were on the bus so when they are dropped off at the end of the day, they are alone, scared to death they can’t find their parents,” he wrote on X. Immigrant advocates reported aggressive detentions at grocery stores, in parking lots and near daycare centers, as well as the use of Tasers and pepper spray. According to Danbury Unites for Immigrants, a construction worker was hospitalized after agents tased him and kicked him in the head, and a legal observer was hospitalized after being pepper-sprayed. US Senator Richard Blumenthal, after hearing accounts from families at a public forum, declared, “Cruelty is the point. Fear and terror are the goal.”

Murphy and Blumenthal are not allies of the immigrant working class. A state that can seize a parent at a bus stop is a state preparing to use the same violence against strikers and demonstrators. The assault on immigrants is the spearhead of the construction of a police state directed against the entire

working class.

For two decades, Danbury has been a focal point of the national assault on immigrant workers. ICE is a paramilitary arm of the capitalist state, directed against the most vulnerable section of the population to arrest immigrant workers, drive down the price of labor and habituate society to state violence that can be turned against the entire working class.

The “Danbury 11”

The friction with federal immigration authorities intensified under the George W. Bush administration in 2006. On September 19 of that year, during ICE’s nationwide Operation Return to Sender, an undercover Danbury police officer posing as a contractor picked up 11 day laborers at Kennedy Park, a gathering spot for workers seeking jobs, with the promise of work and then turned them over to federal immigration agents. The “Danbury 11” became a symbol of the city’s immigration struggles and sparked a long-running lawsuit against the city and its police department.

The sting exposes the class character of the entire apparatus. The 11 men were not criminals being apprehended; they were workers selling their labor power because the only jobs available to them were precarious and unprotected.

The political response came from Republican Mayor Mark Boughton, who served from 2001 to 2020 and is the city’s longest-serving mayor. Boughton had sought to deputize local police as federal immigration agents as early as April 2005, a request the state denied.

In February 2008, as the WSWs reported at the time, Boughton and the Common Council voted 19 to 2 to join ICE ACCESS, a program to train two city police officers in immigration regulations and allow them to check federal databases for the criminal records of any immigrant they detained. Boughton told the *New York Times* that “the intention is to target criminal aliens.” An estimated 4,000 demonstrators,

many of them immigrant workers, professionals, small business owners and their families, protested outside city hall. In 2009, the council approved an agreement with the Department of Homeland Security to join the 287(g) program, which allows local police to take on the duties of federal immigration agents.

Danbury was once known as the “Hatting Capital of the World.” Its hat industry collapsed in the decades after World War II, and the last hat was made in the city in 1987. Immigrants drawn to the city in the 1990s found low-paying service and construction jobs, the only work the deindustrialized economy offered. The social crisis facing Danbury’s working people was not caused by immigrants but by the destruction of industry and the polarization of wealth that followed. Rather than confront the corporations and politicians responsible, Boughton whipped up anti-immigrant hostility to deflect anger onto workers themselves while leaving employers untouched.

During Boughton’s tenure, the city used so-called quality-of-life enforcement to harass immigrant residents. Housing inspection teams were sent out to find the multiple satellite dishes or numerous cars in driveways that indicated subdivided homes, and in the summer of 2005 the city cracked down on backyard volleyball games, a favorite pastime of the Ecuadorian community, on the pretext that they were occasions for illegal activity. Immigrants moved away, immigrant-owned businesses shuttered and sales dropped.

A bipartisan project

The official account presents the recent Danbury raids as a clash between the Trump administration and Connecticut’s Democrats. In fact, the deportation machine Trump now wields was built on a bipartisan basis, and the Democrats who denounce its use are its co-architects.

On September 4, the City Council voted 18–2 to allow noncitizen legal residents and DACA recipients to serve as police officers. Democratic council member Joe Britton said the measure came at the end of “a federal invasion of immigration officials in Danbury.” This measure simply makes immigrants part of the repressive apparatus.

Barack Obama deported 3 million people over his two terms. In six years in office, his administration deported more people than the Bush administration did in eight, including a record 438,421 in 2013. In October 2010, weeks before the midterm elections, his administration boasted of a record 392,000 deportations, all while expanding the detention infrastructure and surveillance systems ICE now employs. Joe Biden maintained the camps and carried out the vast majority of the roughly 3 million summary expulsions conducted under Title 42 between March 2020 and May 2023. Under Biden, ICE

nearly doubled deportations in fiscal year 2023, and in fiscal 2024 deported more than 271,000 people, surpassing the peak of Trump’s first term, which was 267,000 deportations in fiscal 2019. One week before Trump’s second inauguration, the Biden administration deported a DACA recipient, a 24-year-old Miami-Dade middle school science teacher, to Honduras.

The defense of immigrants cannot be left to the Democratic Party, the courts, identity-based advocacy organizations or the trade unions. When mass protests against ICE killings swept the country in early 2026, the trade union apparatus, which had the power to call a general strike to stop the raids, chose not to.

The answer to Danbury, and to the nationwide war on immigrants of which it is a part, is set out in the resolution “For the defense of immigrants and the abolition of the immigration Gestapo,” adopted by the Socialist Equality Party’s Ninth National Congress in August. It calls for:

- the immediate and unconditional abolition of ICE, the Border Patrol and the entire Department of Homeland Security;
- the shutdown of every concentration camp and the immediate and unconditional release of every detainee;
- full citizenship and democratic rights for all workers, regardless of where they were born.

These demands can be realized only through the independent mobilization of the working class, through rank-and-file committees in every workplace and neighborhood, defending immigrant workers as coworkers and neighbors, and through the mobilization of the power of the working class. The defense of immigrants is inseparable from the fight for the overthrow of capitalism and the unity of workers of the Americas in the world socialist revolution.



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