

California Arrested Nearly 800 in Racist Immigration Raids

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Nearly 800 arrested in racist immigration raids in California By: Enrique Vasquez

What kind of "comprehensive immigration reform"?

Over the past year, the U.S. government has stepped-up attacks against undocumented workers with mass arrests and deportations.

In California, racist immigration raids have torn apart hundreds of families. More than 750 undocumented immigrants have been arrested and deported since Jan. 17 of this year. Federal immigration officials proudly announced the number of deported in a Jan. 23 press conference in Los Angeles. At the press event, the authorities said that 338 immigrants were arrested in their homes in Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Los Angeles counties alone.

Another 423 were taken into federal custody at county jails, said Virginia Kice, spokeswoman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The raids were part of Homeland Security's "Operation Return to Sender," a repressive attack on the immigrant community that has resulted in 13,000 arrests nationwide since June 2006. Immigration officials also have identified 3,000 inmates in state and local jails who will be deported.

"Foreign nationals who flout our laws and commit crimes against our citizens should be on notice that there are consequences," said Julie L. Myers, an ICE assistant secretary. "ICE will use all of the tools at its disposal to find you and send you home." (AP, Jan. 23)

Although President George Bush championed the need for "comprehensive immigration reform" in his State of the Union address, immigrants can expect more repression at the hands of the government, at least in the short term.

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The raids are one component of the repressive state machinery used against undocumented workers in the United States. Racist detention centers are another.

According to a recent government report, federal immigration authorities failed to maintain adequate health and safety standards at five detention centers where many undocumented workers and their families are being held for indefinite periods of time.

The report said ICE officials failed to provide non-emergency medical care for some detainees in a timely matter.

Also, a Mexican immigrant was shot and killed recently by a Border Patrol agent in Arizona. Francisco Dominguez Rivera, 22, was killed as he and six others were taken into custody by a U.S. Border Patrol agent. This happened shortly after Rivera and the others crossed the border into Cochise County, Ariz.

The government's message is clear—it wants to keep the immigrant population in check. It wants to scare immigrants into submission so they will not struggle for even the most basic workers' rights.

But immigrant rights and progressive, anti-racist groups are fighting back. In Los Angeles, an emergency protest to condemn the raids was called by Latino Movement USA, Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, and the ANSWER Coalition (Act Now to Stop War and End Racism) on Jan. 25. The protest and press conference drew dozens of activists and much English- and Spanish-language media.

Carlos Alvarez of the ANSWER Coalition told the crowd, "These inhuman and racist immigration raids have nothing to do with the safety of people in the United States and everything to do with terrorizing and punishing undocumented immigrants. The raids are attempts to increase the insecurity of the labor force and keep all working people's wages as low as possible."