

The Racist War on Immigrants

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Emma Lazarus' memorable words on Lady Liberty's pedestal once had meaning as a new nation grew. No longer in a country hostile to the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, the wretched refuse, the homeless and many others not making the grade in a white supremacist Judeo-Christian state worshiping wealth and privilege. No welcome sign is out for the unwanted poor and desperate. At best, they're ignored to subsist on their own. At worst, they're scorned and abused, exploited and discarded like trash or labeled "terrorists" in a post-9/11 world of mass witch-hunt roundups aimed at Muslims because of their faith or country of origin and Latinos coming north to survive the fallout from NAFTA's destructive effects on their lives.

Immigrants of color, the wrong faith or from the wrong parts of the world are never greeted warmly in "America the Beautiful" that's only for the privileged and no one else. They're not wanted except to harvest our crops or do the hard, low-pay, no-benefit labor few others will do. The ground rules to come were set straight away in our original Nationalization Act of 1790 establishing the first path to citizenship. It wasn't friendly to the wrong types as permanent status was limited to foreign-born "free white persons" of "good moral character," meaning people like most of us - our culture, countries of origin, religion and skin color.

Left out were indentured servants, slaves, free blacks, native Americans being exterminated, and later Asians and Latinos whose "appearance" wasn't as acceptable as the whiteness of English-speaking European Christian settlers and the mix of others from Western European countries like Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. The law scarcely changed for 162 years until the 1870 15th amendment loosened it enough to include blacks by 1875, no longer slaves but hardly free and in 1940 gave Latin Americans the same right. After the war in 1945 it extended it further to Filipinos and Asian Indians. Original native Americans, whose land this was for thousands of years, only were enfranchised and given the right of citizenship in their own land when Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 after most of them were exterminated in a genocidal process still ongoing, never mentioned in the mainstream, and for which no redress was ever made or likely will be.

The 1952 Immigration and Nationality (McCarran-Walter) Act (INA) only grudgingly did what no law before it allowed. For the first time it made individuals of all races eligible for citizenship but imposed strict quotas for those from the Eastern Hemisphere with different

standards for caucasians from the West. But nothing is ever simple and straightforward in "America the Beautiful." In the early Cold War atmosphere of Joe McCarthy's communist witch-hunts, anyone accused of leftist sympathies could be targeted, and any alien so-tagged could be deported, and like today no evidence was needed.

From the INA to the present, immigration laws kept changing for better or worse, but one thing was constant. White Christian Western Europeans are welcomed. Others, especially people of color or the wrong religion, get in grudgingly in lesser numbers and receive unequal or harsh treatment when they arrive. The 1996 Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) and Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) proved it showing Democrat presidents can be as mean and nasty as Republicans, especially with help from a Republican-controlled Congress.

The 1996 acts were ugly and repressive ignoring the rights of due process and judicial fairness. They allowed Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents to detain legal immigrants without bond, deport them without discretionary relief, restrict their access to counsel, bar them from appealing to the courts, and can be applied for even minor offenses little more than youthful indiscretions. These laws under a Democrat president "feel(ing) our pain" showed no more compassion or equity than later ones under George Bush in force today. They allow no second chances and deny targeted legal immigrants their day in court. Their harshness tears apart families unjustly made to suffer by a nation hardening its stance to the wrong kinds of immigrants. They're sent an unwelcome message now much worse in the age of George Bush with his permanent wars on the world and homeland "terrorists" meaning anyone called that on his say alone.

It started post-9/11 with the 2001 USA Patriot Act even harsher in its updated Patriot Act II version. Enacted to combat "terrorism," it's done on the border with more guards to spot, detain, arrest and incarcerate Latinos entering the country for a way to survive. For being undocumented and on the pretext of being suspected "terrorists," they may be indefinitely detained or deported the way it works under any despotic national security police state. It's even worse for Muslims, 5000 of whom were rounded up and held early on with only three of them ever being charged with an offense. And it got far worse for them after that still ongoing.

Today, federal immigration courts can hold secret hearings for anyone here illegally or charged with a law violation, no matter how minor. Those convicted can then be incarcerated or deported to their country of origin often to face arrest and torture. It's now open season on anyone targeted with legal protection no longer shielding innocent victims Justice Department (DOJ) or Department of Homeland Security (DHS) go after. They includes poor and desperate mostly undocumented Latinos from Mexico and Central America coming el norte because NAFTA, CAFTA and other neoliberal unfair trade agreements called "free" destroyed their ability to earn a living at home leaving them no other choice but come north or perish.

It shouldn't be that way, and promises were made early on that "free trade" lifted all boats with higher wages and more jobs. Instead millions of jobs were lost while real wages fell under the effects of a globalized market system crafted for investor elites to profit at the expense of ordinary working people paying the price. They've been devastated since by a sustained massive wealth transfer to the top of the economic pyramid that in the US alone has been a generational process of well over \$1 trillion annually to corporations and the richest 1%.

For the past 13 years, NAFTA and the rest of globalized trade provided cover for imperialism on the march for power and profit. It prospers from economic and shooting wars of conquest with an engineered race to the bottom driven by giant predatory corporations allied with friendly governments in their service at the expense of ordinary working people paying the price. The result – mass and growing poverty, human misery, and ecological destruction great enough to threaten the ability of the planet to sustain life.

Blame it on the globalized market system. It's the main reason millions around the world are on the move each year as reported by the International Labor Organization. In 2005, the number reached an estimated 200 million fleeing poverty and conflicts, often leaving families behind, heading for developed countries for jobs and safety unavailable at home.

The toll South of the Border alone after 10 years of NAFTA was devastating on Mexico's poor and getting progressively worse.

- Real wages down 20% and the wealth disparity between rich and poor far greater than in 1994 (NAFTA's first year).

- Two – three million small farms now gone with Research Director Raul Hinojosa of the North American Integration and Development Center at UCLA predicting 10 million small farmers will eventually be forced off the land, many heading north in desperation.

- Mexico's banks, railroads, airlines, mines and other industry sold off to foreign investors, mainly US ones with possible plans under the new Calderon government to sell off the country's crown jewel – Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), the state-owned national oil company up to now kept free from Big Oil predators itching to get their hands on the company and now may have their chance.

- Two million hectares of tropical forest turned over to private developers displacing many thousands of people to make way for "development" and clear-cutting forests.

- Crushed homegrown industries unable to compete against subsidized US giants like behemoth Wal-Mart (Wal-Mex) now the country's largest private employer and biggest retailer in Latin America.

The Message to Immigrants On Our Southern Border – No Vacancy, or Enter As Indentured Servants with No Rights

Post 9/11, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 was passed establishing the repressive Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and in March, 2003 its largest investigative and enforcement arm – the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) charged with protecting the public safety by identifying and targeting "criminal" and "terrorist" threats to the country, most of whom, in fact, are just desperate people whose NAFTA-ruined lives at home force them el norte to survive.

ICE was established to head them off at the border or hunt them down ruthlessly once here. It's comprised of four integrated divisions with responsibilities over the nation's infrastructure, economic security, transportation system and the subject of this essay – policing our southern border with Mexico going after people the color of the earth victims suffering for what we did to them by our made-in-Washington trade and other unfair economic policies. So the gloves are off, anything goes, and ICE is free to rampage with its large share of DHS's total budget now up to \$43 billion, heading for \$46.5 in the president's

submitted FY 2008 budget.

On the Homeland Security web site, ICE openly boasts about what it should be condemned for. At FY-end 2006 on October 30, it listed what it called “historic results (and) new records for enforcement activity” including:

- Total work site arrests sevenfold greater than in FY 2002.
- Ended the former practice of “catch and release” ICE called “the greatest impediment to border control.” It substituted the harsher practice of catch and incarcerate or catch and deport – or hound, threaten, catch, brutalize, incarcerate, then deport victimized people who’ll try again to survive.
- Removed a record high number of 186,000 “illegal aliens” and increased its detention bed space by 6300 to a FY-end total of 27,500 with an average daily number of incarcerated or detained immigrants up to 26,000 since July and rising.
- Increased the number of “fugitive operations teams” nationwide from 18 to 50 charged with locating, apprehending and removing “criminal aliens” meaning alien victims called criminals. Through its Operation Return to Sender, ICE arrested 14,356 aliens and deported 4716 of them from May 26 to September 30, 2006. ICE intends having 75 teams operating by end of FY 2007 to up the numbers considerably which they’ll do.
- Created a national center operating at all ICE detention facilities to deport “criminal aliens” when released from incarceration. Most will be back.
- Completed a record high number of “arms and strategic technology” investigations by doubling the number of personnel assigned to do them and by implementing new electronic data entry procedures to track immigration “violators” and “fugitives.”
- Claimed it dismantled the large Colombia Cali drug cartel to stem illegal narcotics trafficking while failing to acknowledge other US agencies, most notably CIA, have a long sordid history of drugs trafficking worldwide as an important revenue source with CIA now partnered with Northern Alliance warlords in Afghanistan (among others around the world) having turned the country into a narco-state, according to a UN report, supplying 92% of the world’s opium used for heroin.
- Conducted financial investigations of human smuggling and other immigration related cases resulting in asset seizures of \$42 million or double the amount gotten in FY 2004.
- Through its Operation Community Shield arrested 3700 since February, 2005 including 2290 suspected “gang members.”
- From worksites, arrested 716 workers (and a few employers getting mere wrist slaps) on “criminal” charges and 3667 individuals on “administrative” charges – a sevenfold increase in total arrests from FY 2002.
- Worked with Department of Justice (DOJ) in document and immigration benefits fraud cases resulting in 235 investigations, 189 arrests and 80 convictions.
- Expanded its partnership with state and local authorities training 40 state and county law enforcement officers as part of the 287(g) program of immigration enforcement with

additional partnerships to come.

ICE listed a disturbing array of other FY-end 2006 “achievements” involving enhanced intelligence gathering and analysis; targeting “national security threats;” detecting, tracking and arresting visa violators; “enhancing border security;” targeting transnational gangs, human smugglers and sexual predators; targeting money launderers and others committing financial crimes while granting de facto immunity to large US banks, including major international money center ones, known to launder drug money as one of their major profit centers; and much more.

DHS/ICE Billions for the Border

With a budget increased by 50% over five years ago, DHS/ICE has billions to use guarding our borders from “dangerous” poor people. Ignored is that those working here pay billions more in federal, state and local taxes for performing services (in jobs others don’t want) than they get back in meager benefits like sub-standard education for their children in inner city or other public schools and inadequate health care when they’re sick.

Still they come from need, not choice in a risky, dangerous journey starting with what it costs for help getting here. It’s plenty extorted by Coyote smugglers and other predatory intermediaries treating them like pollos (chickens) once on their way north. They get crammed in trucks and cars, travel after dark, and aren’t prepared for the hazards they’ll face including 115 degree or higher summer temperatures crossing an unforgiving desert that end up killing hundreds each year from exposure who when found are just anonymous John Does leaving families behind never knowing what happened or what to do next.

And handling those risks depends on getting past heavy DHS/ICE border security in place post-9/11. They’re ready and waiting with video cameras, state of the art motion sensors, infrared goggles, other security electronics and helicopters with forward-looking infrared (FLIR) scopes plus an unforgiving thuggish army of 6000 or more National Guard troops as part of Operation Jumpstart. They supplement the Border Patrol agent staff of 12,349 heading for 17,819 proposed for FY 2008, double the number it had in FY 2001.

Add to this army an extremist well-funded volunteer force in place called the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps (MCDCC) or “Minutemen” for short. Their name comes from those “ready in a minute men” dating back to the mid-1600s when volunteers were trained to be first on the scene to defend their communities in case of conflict. Today’s Minutemen on our southern border are for offense, not defense. All they defend is white supremacy and racial hatred against poor, desperate people unable to survive at home. Left no other choice, they come north, but doing it pits them against these ultra-hard right volunteer paramilitary thugs licensed to kill. They man the southern border by the thousands hunting down and terrorizing anyone caught entering the country without visas.

They’re supported by other anti-immigrant hate groups and organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR, not to be confused with the noted media watch group using the same acronym standing for Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting). The racist FAIR is lobbying Congress for repressive immigration legislation that will deny Latinos and others coming here basic civil and human rights by stepping up harsh border security, increasing Gestapo-like crackdowns against those already here, and giving predatory corporations the right to exploit the ones allowed in or manage to come anyway. The fate of millions of honest, hard-working immigrant families depends on exposing and stopping the

kind of work these groups do and what they stand for.

In spite of them and all the other hazards they face, and word gets back about them, the courageous poor keep coming for a better life to support their families usually left behind desperate for whatever aid their loved ones can send back. No amount of manpower, security and technology in place can stop them. Those caught and sent back try again, eventually circumventing the obstacles against them on a near-2000 mile long border, all of which can't be patrolled. But that takes them into the harshest stretches of desert many each year never leave. And still they come, risking everything, tens of thousands each year, their numbers growing as NAFTA and neoliberal market-imposed rules leave them no choice – head north or perish.

Congressional Reform or Deform in 2007

Things could change if trade was fair, not unfair, under made-in-Washington one-way “free trade” rules legalizing unfairness, especially in areas like agriculture so crucial to millions of small farmers in developing countries like Mexico forced off the land unable to compete against heavily subsidized US agribusiness. But carrots aren't on the legislative docket in Congress, only assorted sticks in the stalled compromise immigration bill providing no relief the way things are progressing so far in both Houses.

So-called “immigration reform” stalled last year after the House passed the repressive HR 4437 Sensenbrenner bill, The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Act of 2005, in December, 2005. It was a law only racists and hatemongers could love. It galled, or embarrassed, enough senators to clean it up some and pass S 2611, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act or Hagel-Martinez bill last May. It was still bad enough to create a permanent underclass of low-paid workers, allow employers the right to exploit them, place restraints on wages and benefits, and create a nightmarish multi-tiered bureaucratic structure for temporary partial legalization leaving out of the mix millions of undocumented workers already here and delaying citizenship for those eligible for almost two decades.

Workers, most unions and others for immigrant rights oppose this bill, but shamefully it's supported by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNITE HERE representing hotel, food service, apparel, textile and gaming industries with both unions sacrificing their members' rights for whatever the leadership gets from collaborating with employers and Washington.

Proposed Immigration Legislation Includes A New Bracero Program

New immigration legislation proposed in Congress leaves in it most of the harsh measures in S 2611 including a new temporary or guest worker plan with shades of the infamous Bracero Program in force from 1942 – 1964. It created a system of indentured servitude ongoing to this day, even after its official end, with an army of serfs with no rights giving employers the legal right to exploit over 4.6 million Mexican migrant farm workers. They were denied basic rights; got only temporary, low-wage jobs; often were cheated out of pay earned; held in virtual captivity by employers seizing their documents; denied the right to change jobs freely; forced to live in squalid conditions; denied medical care or benefits for injuries received; forced to endure severe harassment and oppression from employers knowing they could ship braceros home whenever they complained too much about what they had plenty to complain about. It happened in 1954 when a recession triggered a political backlash

against Mexican communities resulting in the deportation or flight of over one million Mexican migrant workers and their families under Operation Wetback including children born here as US citizens.

Today, 120,000 foreign guest workers receive temporary H-2 visas established under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 for farm and other low-skilled work (H-2A for farm and H-2B for the rest), usually for three to nine months, under conditions similar to the former Bracero Program under which they were mistreated and cheated on entry, while here and on the way out in a cycle of abuse sure to be repeated if a George Bush-style guest worker program becomes law. Even professional workers are harmed under the H-1B program assuring they, like non-professionals, are marginalized and mistreated under a system where employers control everything, and workers are just indentured servants with no choice but to take it or leave it and go home.

Immigrant rights groups oppose the legislation, and the National Alliance for Immigrants' Rights wants full legalization for all immigrant workers in the country and a halt to all raids and deportations – provisions not in the compromise bill and unlikely to be added. Fear of arrest haunts the undocumented at a time when terrorism in the news trumps immigrant worker rights, especially Latinos (and Muslims) getting none.

That came out in a scathing Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) report based on thousands of guest worker interviews and dozens of legal cases documenting appalling abuses of vulnerable immigrants unable to get redress. SPLC's Immigrant Justice Project director, Mary Bauer, said: "Guest workers are usually poor people who are lured here by the promise of decent jobs. But all too often, their dreams are based on lies, their hopes shattered by the reality of a system that treats them as commodities. They're the disposable workers of the global economy." SPLC president Richard Cohen added: "The mistreatment of temporary workers in America today is one of the major civil rights issues of our time."

New Senate and House immigration bills will soon be debated including bipartisan legislation unveiled March 22 in the House by Latino Democrat Luis Gutierrez and Republican Jeff Flake. Sadly, it's little more than the usual "same old, same old." In this case, it's largely a rehash of last year's stalled S 2611 bill that rightfully is sure to mobilize immigrants' rights groups against it. It proposes a repressive guest worker bracero program with provisions allowing those qualified to get three year visas renewable for another three years after which workers would be forced to go home. To be eligible, immigrants would have to learn English, pass criminal and security checks and pay back taxes ignoring the fact that most all undocumented workers already pay taxes, give far more than they get back, and are honest hard-working people.

To get a green card then and be eligible for future legal residency (only for those arriving before June 1, 2006), they'd then have to go home (under the so-called "touch back" provision) and start again. They'd also have to pay a \$2000 fine and prove to authorities they're model material enough to qualify to stay here. More than half the bill is even more repressive. It contains harsh provisions for stepped up DHS/ICE (paramilitary) border security above what's now in place with more manpower and a multi-billion dollar high-tech border surveillance "shield" now under construction. Other provisions include a mandated biometric system employers must use to verify workers have legal status while overall this bill, like the others from both Houses, contains a corporate wish list at the expense of undocumented Latino immigrants it wishes to exploit. In short, it's appalling and will surely be opposed on the streets en masse around the country in the spring and summer.

This proposal and others will be on the docket in both Houses for debate in coming weeks with final resolution planned for late spring or summer unless protest opposition delays it again or defeats it. Neither House version improves much over what stalled legislatively last year, and only mass civil rights protests like the historic ones in dozens of cities last spring have a chance to do it or find a way for real immigration reform benefitting people, not the special interests exploiting them with help from Congress and the administration.

Support for continued exploitation is driving the political process, even from unexpected places showing how long the odds are for legislative justice. It's coming from the National Council of La Raza, "the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States (working) to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans." NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics in and outside the country. It was founded in 1968 by noted labor organizer, community leader and author Ernesto Galarza who wrote about braceros being "indentured aliens" and prototypical "production (men) of the future" stripped of all political and social rights in what he called an "input factor" to suck worth from and discard. He and labor leaders like Cesar Chavez and others all campaigned to end the program.

His organization today, under President Janet Murguia, is now an apologist for corporate America lobbying for braceros at home like the ones they exploit around the world in a global race to the bottom affecting working people everywhere. In a February 11 Washington Post op-ed piece, she wrote her "organization and many (unidentified) Latino leaders (support) a significant new worker visa program as part of comprehensive immigration reform." Incredibly, Ms. Murguia denounced the original bracero program for its abuses while advocating a new version of the same thing now. It's no surprise because NCLR also supported NAFTA before it passed opposing US and Mexican labor and community-based organizations against it at the time for all the damage it would do now apparent.

The new guest worker program NCLR supports, in proposed House and Senate legislation, will embrace all the faults of its bracero predecessor. It will create a large desperate, defenseless immigrant workforce vulnerable here to the same kinds of abusive exploitive practices corporate giants inflict on their overseas workers - denying their right to organize, receive fair wages and benefits or be guaranteed basic civil and human rights everyone should have by law. These rights can only come through legislation guaranteeing all immigrants permanent legal residency, a fairly defined path to citizenship, and provisions for family members to immigrate so they all can be together.

Immigrant and other civil rights groups also need to lobby and protest for repeal of the 2006 Deficit Reduction Act denying immigrants the right to receive Medicaid that's also harming tens of thousands of poor US citizens having trouble complying with new requirements. They include showing passports or a combination of an original or certified copy of a birth certificate and driver's license proving their legal status in the country. This is another example of the Bush administration's racist war on Latinos and the poor with Congress going along in a long-term bipartisan effort to roll back the country's social safety net till nothing in it remains. It's time human, civil rights and other progressive organizations of all stripes mounted a combined effort to fight back, no longer being willing to see the social state destroyed in service to wealth and privilege at the expense of society's most vulnerable that includes the immigrant population giving America back much more than it receives and now getting even less.

They may also have to take on another potential opponent - the nation's oldest and best

known environmental group, the Sierra Club founded in 1892 by noted naturalist writer and wilderness preservationist John Muir, that's up to now been neutral on immigration but no longer. It's leadership split on the issue with one side called Support US Population Stabilization (SUSPS) focusing on population control that includes restricting immigration to preserve the environment. So far, there's no resolution and internal debate continues, but it needs watching as it's a slippery slope from advocating responsible world population growth to one focusing on US immigration that always means those of color, the most vulnerable, and mainly desperate and impoverished Latinos forced here by made-in-the-US predatory trade and other neoliberal policies leaving them no other choice. That should be the Sierra Club's target, not the innocent victims of bad policies coming here to survive them.

In the Meantime – Terror Raids in the Workplace Continue

Workplace assaults targeting immigrants continue as part of a generational war on labor including the right of workers to organize and bargain on equal terms with management. They're also part of the Bush administration's campaign for a government-controlled (exploitative) new bracero guest worker program explained by DHS secretary Michael Chertoff's message (through the media) to Congress for the need for "stronger border security, effective interior enforcement and a temporary-worker program (because) businesses (needing) foreign workers....can't otherwise satisfy their labor needs (so government must help out with) a 'regulated' program." He also told reporters in Mexico City February 16...."total immigration reform (addressing) migrants is actually an enforcement enabler because it lets us focus more on the people that we don't want....criminals and dangerous folks" – racist code language aimed at Latinos. It's meant to sanction DHS/ICE detentions and deportations and allow employers the right to abuse and fire Latino workers on any pretext as part of an endgame strategy, Operation Wetback-style.

The plan is a shocker. It's to mass-remove an estimated 12 million undocumented immigrants by 2012 while allowing others under captive contracts to stay as exploitable guest workers. This was what immigration reform legislation was all about in 2006 to be repeated when debate begins again in both Houses and a final bill emerges showing both parties support corporate interests and will affirm their right to exploit all working people, starting with guest workers. Part of it includes Chertoff and ICE assistant secretary Julie Myers unleashing a paramilitary-style reign of terror against so-called illegals or undocumented immigrants in the workplace aimed at easy-to-target Latinos. Both parties want to assure businesses have a large exploitable documented temporary worker pool they can use as needed, abuse as they wish, underpay, deny benefits and above all use as a wedge to destroy organized labor and the rights of all working people in the country.

This is what the racist war on immigrants is all about. It's to empower employers by creating a workplace of unempowered serfs including US citizens with few or no rights or job security at the mercy of business to hire and fire at will and treat their employees as they wish written into the law of the land. It's to create a "bracero America," corporate America's wet dream.

The Bush administration is using high-profile workplace assaults as a sinister strategy to get it. Complicit with them are the corporate media trumpeting the message that desperate Latinos here for jobs to replace ones NAFTA destroyed are threats to national security. It happened last December 12 in the largest ever workplace raid when ICE storm troops swooped in on Colorado-based Swift & Company targeting six of its plants. Agents rounded up 1282 allegedly undocumented immigrant workers, including 170 accused of identity

theft, detained them at the plants, then bussed them across state lines to be processed with most later released far from home. The raids were vicious and racist as are all others around the country targeting immigrants of color. The Hispanic National Bar Association reported December 18 “non-Latinos and light-skinned employees were provided blue wristbands which exempted them from questioning, while Latinos, persons perceived to be of Hispanic or Latino origin, underwent immigration processing (the notion being that) all persons perceived to be Latinos are illegal.”

Most immigrant workers at Swift and around the country are impoverished-by-NAFTA Mexicans or other Latinos driven North for jobs in desperation resulting from the Global North’s failed neoliberal agenda. They’re helpless victims of savage capitalism forced to leave home, exploited in the workplace, and terrorized by Homeland Security ICE storm troop enforcers earning their keep at the expense of ordinary working people targeted as criminals because they’re less white than other workers passed over in the raids.

But that’s not how DHS and corporate media trumpeting characterized the victims. ICE and its media mouthpiece claimed the raids were a major victory in the war on illegal immigrants, and by implication the so-called “war on terror” (against innocent people they call “terrorists”). The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) representing Swift workers scoffed at the claims as outrageous denouncing them saying they’re “not an effective form of immigration reform (and) They terrorize workers and destroy families.” ICE also trumpeted a (hollow) victory against criminal elements supplying phony IDs that could also be used by “terrorists” or as part of an identity theft scheme victimizing many thousands of US citizens and lawful residents.

It was subterfuge and part of the current political climate with headline-making theatrics more important than defending the homeland against legitimate threats. It showed in the aftermath of this hugely expensive ICE operation amounting to little more than a PR stunt providing red meat for hard liners wanting their kind of immigration reform meaning no rights for workers, especially ones of color. The raid ended up netting 65 “criminal arrests,” many for minor offenses like reentering the country after being deported, a technical violation rarely resulting in prosecution. The others were shipped around the country and likely released except for those voluntarily agreeing to be deported.

The December Swift raid was the largest ever, but immigrant workers everywhere have reason to fear the same threat that was repeated against meatpackers from Smithfield Foods’ processing plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina, the largest hog processing plant in the country. Most of its workers are African-American and Latino, and hundreds of them defied plant management’s refusal to give them the day off by rallying in nearby Fayetteville honoring Martin Luther King Day January 15.

Retaliation came January 24, when ICE agents raided the plant arresting 21 immigrant meatpackers on trumped up “administrative immigration charges” meaning they were poor Latinos vulnerable to ICE assaults made to send a message. DHS supports management rights, not those of working people. The Tar Heel plant’s 5000 workers have been trying to organize within the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) since the early 1990s, but are opposed by management and its policy of retaliatory firings, intimidation, and beatings by plant security. Smithfield like other corporate giants plays hardball. So doesn’t ICE acting like Gestapo ruthlessly assaulting working people with special viciousness reserved for vulnerable Latinos (and Muslims) having no defense.

Still another ICE assault the AP called “the largest immigration bust in the history of southern Massachusetts” happened March 6 against Michael Bianco, Inc. in New Bedford, MA, a manufacturer of high-end leather goods now producing safety vests and backpacks for the military. In this case, conditions for workers were deplorable, according to US Attorney Michael Sullivan, who called them similar to the sweatshops of the early 1900s. He arrested and charged the owner, three managers and another employee but freed them pending a court date for hiring undocumented immigrants. It’s likely outcome will be the way it usually is for corporate offenders – a small wrist slap fine....case dismissed.

Hundreds of workers weren’t so fortunate with as many as 350 of them apprehended and initially detained at Fort Devens for processing. From there, some were jailed in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, others released, and most were flown to jails in Texas and a few to Miami, far from their families and facing deportation or incarceration for those unable to prove they’re in the country legally. Most are poor Latino women from Central America. In the meantime, as in other raids, parents and children are separated and traumatized, their lives disrupted with an estimated 100 children in this instance, including nursing infants, left stranded with babysitters and caregivers. Many will end up at the mercy of strangers in foster care, uncertain of their parents’ fate only here to earn enough to support them. Left unmentioned is that those born here are US citizens entitled to the constitutional rights they’ll never get because they’re less-than-white poor Latinos.

One other example deserves mentioning as well as it’s now in the news. This one is in Pascagoula, Mississippi where hundreds of guest workers from India are protesting job conditions at Signal International’s Gulf coast shipyard they compare to slavery. Signal brought in about 300 Indian workers in December and another 300 to work in Texas as part of the H-2B visa program. Workers got promises of pay and working conditions Signal reneged on plus workers having to pay recruiting contractor Global Industry (sent by Signal to India) up to \$20,000 to come. They were promised \$18 an hour for up to 30 months work but most only got half that amount. They also had to pay Signal \$35 a day to stay in company labor camp barracks inside the yard where workers described conditions as “very bad (with) 24 of us....in a room in a barracks that measures 12 feet by 18 feet, sleeping on bunk beds (with) two toilets for all of us and only 4 sinks.”

Workers began meeting at a local church to discuss how to get Signal to refund their contractor fee, which they said the company promised to do, and to protest their working conditions. They organized a group called Signal H-2B Workers United. When the company learned of it, it responded harshly calling the workers unqualified and cutting their already lower than promised pay. In addition, eight were declared completely incapable and told they were being sent home immediately. Outside the yard, dozens of workers and community supporters protested denouncing the firings and mistreatment. So far, nothing is resolved, but the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance and Southern Poverty Law Center are going to court on behalf of the fired workers to stop their deportations. Other workers still employed are continuing their actions challenging Signal to refund their contractor-paid money they’re entitled to receive with that issue possibly heading for court as well.

Plants like Signal’s involved Indian workers and wasn’t raided because workers in it were legally recruited by the company. Others, however, employing Latino immigrants, are savagely assaulted, and so are communities with programs for day laborers like the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles targeted in January by ICE sweeps in Southern California Latino neighborhoods. Coalition leader Antonio Bernabe told Reuters “The police didn’t just take people with deportation orders, they took anybody-guys who

were just hanging out in the street and even from a Jack in the Box restaurant....and now people are afraid to go out.” The sweep aimed mainly at Latinos, mostly Mexican nationals, sent a message following George Bush’s State of the Union address calling for “comprehensive immigration reform” combining a (mean-spirited) guest worker (bracero) worker program with tougher workplace and border enforcement meaning it’s open season on Latinos and working people overall.

Immigrant Communities and Supportive Organizations Respond

Immigrant communities and organizations are fighting back against ICE rampaging terror raids and are rallying their members and supporters to take a stand. The Immigrant Solidarity Network is promoting May Day 2007 and a National Mobilization to Support Immigrant Workers Rights calling for a “national day of multi-ethnic unity with youth, labor, (and) peace and justice communities with immigrant workers and building (a) new immigrant rights & civil rights movement.”

Proudly and boldly they proclaim “We are all human! No one is illegal! It’s call to action stands for:

- No anti-immigration legislation or criminalization of immigrant communities.
- No militarization of the border with fences or other barriers.
- No more immigration detentions, deportations or funding for immigrant detention centers.
- No oppressive guest worker two-tiered program allowing employers the right to pay visa workers lower wages, provide no labor protections, and offer little or no right to future US citizenship.
- No employer “no-match” Social Security letters to fire immigrants and repeal of employer sanction law.
- Yes to a clear, fair one-tiered path for undocumented workers to gain legal status and an opportunity for citizenship.
- Yes to family reunifications through additional visa numbers and elimination of long family reunification backlog delays.
- Yes to strengthening existing labor law protection to include all immigrant workers including their human and civil rights.
- Yes to the right to organize and bargain collectively on equal terms with management.
- Yes to the Dream Act with provisions for states to aid immigrants with benefits like providing in-state tuition aid and enable students of good moral character to qualify for legal residency.
- Yes to extending benefits to LGBT immigrant families, passing the Uniting American Families Act for same sex and unmarried partners, and lifting the HIV ban on immigration.

Other organizations as well are working for immigrant rights. They include:

- The Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF). It calls itself the most influential Hispanic advocacy group in the country standing for open-borders and for all legal and undocumented immigrants to be entitled to the same rights as US citizens.
- The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF). It calls itself the most important organization for day laborer rights in the Northeast standing for real immigration reform so that millions of the undocumented have a clear path for legalization and citizenship.
- The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR). It's a broad-based organization advocating for immigrants, refugees, community, religious, civil rights, labor and activists. It promotes a just immigration and refugee policy defending and expanding the rights of legal and undocumented immigrants and refugees.
- The American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). It advocates for people of Arabic origin harshly treated post 9/11 and was a co-plaintiff challenging Section 215 of the Patriot Act allowing for government access to medical, educational and library records relating to "terrorism" investigations or others claimed for national security. At least two ADC chapters publicly condemned immigrant apprehensions, detentions, disappearances, the denial of legal representation, and "secret military (or other) tribunals calling these actions chilling "similarities to a police state."
- The Muslim Legal Fund of America (MLFA). It calls itself the most effective legal fund in the country committed to preserving, safeguarding and promoting the civil and legal rights of American-Islamic institutions and Muslim Americans.
- The Coalition for the Human Rights of Immigrants (CHRI) formed in response to increased workplace raids by the INS, now DHS/ICE. It advocates for undocumented immigrants' labor rights (mainly Mexicans) confronting "anti-immigrant policies through grassroots education and action."
- The Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) - an organization involved in training more than 800 nonprofit personnel and attorneys in areas of immigration law including naturalization, deportation defense, ethics, and Delayed Enforced Departure. It condemns the harsh practices now employed against immigrant communities and in the workplace as unconstitutional.

Street Protest Actions with More Planned

Protests for immigrants' rights are beginning in cities around the country like the week of them in the San Francisco Bay Area from February 26 through March 2. Throughout the week, community leaders, people of faith, labor leaders, teachers and youths rallied against ICE raids and guest worker programs speaking out for "yes to legalization for all (undocumented workers)."

Similar actions are planned elsewhere including in Chicago by a group called the March 10 Movement named after the 500,000-strong largest ever protest in the city held on that date in 2006. They'll include rallies for passage of real immigration reform including a path to legalization for all undocumented workers and an end to detentions and deportations. The first of the planned marches was held on March 10 - of course - in the city's downtown area to be repeated each week "until there is a real solution" from Congress, signed into law. If

they follow through, it will mean a long spring and summer of protest marches.

Last year's mass Chicago march inspired millions of immigrants and supporters to rally in cities around the country that helped defeat the worst parts of anti-immigration legislation mostly crafted in the racist House Sensenbrenner bill now a dead letter. Since then, however, no progress for reform has been made and pending action from the compromise House-Senate bill and most recent new House proposal will continue an ongoing war on immigrants only mass opposition street protests have a chance to stop the way last year's actions achieved modest success now stalled and slipping.

That's how things are now in a nation dedicated to permanent war, a bipartisan criminal class in Washington beholden to capital, and workers everywhere losing out in a race to the bottom. Poor Latinos (and all Muslims) face some of the worst of it, and those in Mexico and Central America face a Hobson's choice. With at home under NAFTA and CAFTA or try making it north to suffer abuse and neglect in an uncaring state dedicated to keeping its tired and poor and huddled masses permanently that way. That's the message from Congress in the kind of "immigration reform" being crafted, but Latinos and others on the streets have other ideas.

At over 45 million strong, Latinos are now the largest ethnic group in the country and fastest growing with its Mexican component rising fastest of all. Nowhere is this more apparent than in California where about one-third of all Latinos live and make up over one-third of the state's population of 36 million. It's even more pronounced in Los Angeles where Latinos are now a majority providing a future glimpse of America with this group becoming more dominant than ever but still marginalized, demeaned and denied real equity and justice in a country clinging to its Christian white supremacist roots.

That can only change with mass civil disobedience street protests, employer boycotts and a campaign targeting Congress for justice long delayed and denied and now demanded in the current legislative session. Real change never comes from the top down. It's always from the bottom up that's unstoppable when enough people mobilize in the streets and halls of power for it.

That's where things now are entering spring that promises months of rallies and protests around the country. With enough of them, Congress might start hearing the Immigrant Solidarity Network's message that "We are all humans (and) no one is illegal," and the one from the Mexican American Political Association that Mexican and Hispanic people want and deserve the same constitutional and democratic freedoms all others in America are entitled to. That's what they say and want. Now they're coming out again demanding it. Stay tuned.

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