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What Would It Take to Stop the Raids?

Responding Effectively to the ICE Attacks

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“And how we burned in the camps later, thinking: What would things have been like if every Security operative, when he went out at night to make an arrest, had been uncertain whether he would return alive and had to say good-bye to his family? Or if, during periods of mass arrests, as for example in Leningrad, when they arrested a quarter of the entire city, people had not simply sat there in their lairs, paling with terror at every bang of the downstairs door and at every step on the staircase, but had understood they had nothing left to lose and had boldly set up in the downstairs hall an ambush of half a dozen people with axes, hammers, pokers, or whatever else was at hand?... The Organs would quickly have suffered a shortage of officers and transport and, notwithstanding all of Stalin’s thirst, the cursed machine would have ground to a halt! If... if... We didn’t love freedom enough. And even more—we had no awareness of the real situation... We purely and simply deserved everything that happened afterward.”

– Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

Over the past week, nearly 700 people have been rounded up in a wave of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sweeps across the US. In response, people have blockaded roads and ICE vans and organized massive demonstrations. But what would it take to stop the raids altogether?

The Assault

In some parts of the US, the ICE assault involved brutal militarized raids in which officers smashed windows and set off flash-bang grenades inside residential homes. In other places, everything happened so quietly as to go virtually unnoticed: here a bureaucratic change in the status of a prisoner, there the transfer into indefinite detention of an arrestee who was about to be released.

The raids come on the heels of a set of executive orders from the Trump administration threatening millions of people across the United States. These orders aim to deputize police as immigration officials, to build up massive prison infrastructure, and to target entire communities for harassment, detention, and deportation. The idea is clearly to give police and government officials sweeping powers to terrorize an entire community.

Debate has centered on whether these raids represent Trump’s new program or the continuation of ICE policy under Obama. Obama’s administration deported 2.7 million people, more than the US deported throughout the entire 20th century. David Ward, the Director of the National Association of Former Border Patrol Agents, has stated that the current wave of raids were “probably planned at least three or four months ago, under the Obama administration, and finally launched under the Trump administration.”

Yet the Trump administration intends to open a new chapter in the criminalization of immigrants. Trump has appointed a white nationalist from the anti-immigrant group FAIR to head US Customs

and Border Protection. The white nationalist wing of the regime, represented by Steve Bannon, intends to follow through on Trump's campaign promises to build a billion-dollar wall along the Mexican border and carry out mass deportations.

The Obama administration took a neoliberal approach to mass deportations, using them to disrupt immigrant labor organizing while leaving enough undocumented people in the country to provide a cheap labor force to boost corporate profits. The Trump administration is taking a nationalist approach, gambling that it is more important for white people and US citizens to preserve their comparative status relative to people of color and non-citizens than it is to preserve the functioning of the economy. An administration that is prepared to risk economic collapse to carry out its scapegoating is prepared to put up with a little outcry and protest as well.

The Response

Ever since the election, people have been organizing emergency hotlines, rapid response networks, and know-your-rights trainings. As soon as the raids took place, tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Baltimore and Milwaukee, while confrontational protesters blocked a freeway onramp in Los Angeles. In Austin and Phoenix, people shut down streets and blocked ICE vans. On Thursday, February 16, thousands of people participated in massive school walkouts, marches, and demonstrations against the raids under the banner #DayWithoutImmigrants.

All of these actions are important. Together, they create an atmosphere of opposition to Trump's agenda and a space in which his opponents can find each other. Yet a largely symbolic reprise of the demonstrations of May Day 2006 will not suffice to halt the raids and deportations. The Trump administration is not concerned about expressions of disapproval; protests only make him more

popular with his support base. It is necessary to move from protest to resistance.

Likewise, reactive and piecemeal efforts such as blocking ICE vans might interrupt a deportation or two, but they are not going to stop the regime. Certainly, these efforts are disruptive and set a precedent for responding immediately; they demonstrate considerable courage, and they inspire courage as well. But in most cases, they will not be quick enough or forceful enough to save the people who are being wrested from their families.

Applying the logic that made the protests against the Muslim Ban so effective, we see that what is lacking is a widely accessible point of intervention that provides direct leverage on the infrastructure with which these raids are being carried out. People need a pressure point, a place that they can converge to go on the offensive.

But what might that pressure point be? There are several possibilities. ICE maintains offices all around the United States. It is similarly easy to find the detention facilities they utilize. If word got out that protesters were massing around these and interfering with their operations, a great number of people around the country would likely follow suit. If this spread far enough, it could create a political crisis within the state.

Mind you, this is not an endorsement of any particular strategy. Many people surely consider it perfectly legitimate to sit on their hands while millions are rounded up and deported or imprisoned. That likely includes many good liberals who did not object to this under Obama but will be pleased with themselves for having registered their dissent under Trump. "First they came for the immigrants..."

The point is simply that—to paraphrase Utah Phillips—our neighbors and coworkers are not vanishing, they are being disappeared, and the institutions responsible for this have names and addresses.