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Summer Report: People Rise to Fight Against Mass Detention & Deportations

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Why Immigrant Detainees Are Turning to Civil Disobedience

Reform legislation has stalled, and the private-prison industry is making obscene profits from a captive population

Max Blumenthal - May 23, 2014 The Nation

On a cool autumn night eight months ago, Ramon Mendoza Pascual ambled out of a bar in a blue-collar suburb outside Tacoma, Washington, and slumped into the passenger's seat of his car. He had had a few beers and was not about to risk it all. So Mendoza Pascual did what he thought was the right thing: He called his wife to ask for a ride, then waited around as revelers poured out of the bar and carried their banter into the street.

Mendoza Pascual was an accomplished builder who had just remodeled his family's new home to perfection. When he was not on the job site, he volunteered his skills to Rampathon, a local charitable program that constructs wheelchair ramps for low-income disabled residents. His three children were born and raised around Tacoma and knew the United States as their only home. For his years of hard work and dedication to his community, Mendoza Pascual had a lot to show for himself. However, his status as an undocumented immigrant cast a shadow over his future.

When Mendoza Pascual's wife, Veronica Noriega, pulled up to the bar in the family minivan, the sidewalk was eerily empty. Her husband had vanished without a trace. A half-hour later, she was informed that he had been arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol. Some neighbors had called the police to complain about the ruckus outside the bar, the cop swept loiterers up in arbitrary, over-aggressive fashion and now her husband was in a jail cell. And his nightmare had only begun.

As soon as she appeared at the court to pay her husband's \$1,000 bail, Noriega was told that he would not be leaving prison anytime soon. Though a judge had cleared him of driving under the influence of alcohol, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) placed an immigration hold on his case. That meant that Mendoza Pascual would be immediately

transferred to the Northwest Detention Center, a vast immigration detention facility in Tacoma operated by a private prison firm called GEO Group.

Eight months later, Mendoza Pascual still languishes in the jail. He has not been charged with any crime, yet he has no idea when he will be released. He has been indefinitely detained for living in the United States without documentation, and deportation to Mexico is a looming possibility.

“We have no other relatives here, we’re by ourselves,” Veronica Noriega told me, “so I’m left all alone with the kids. There’s no reason for my husband to be [in Northwest Detention Center]; he wasn’t even charged. But the hardest part for me is seeing him in a situation where he hasn’t been eating for so many days.”

Mendoza Pascual’s plight is anything but unique in the Tacoma immigration jail. Having endured indefinite detention and inhumane conditions in the prison, from barely edible food to isolation and soul-crushing boredom to janitorial work for one dollar a day, he and hundreds of his cellmates recently resorted to the only means of protest available to them: refusing to eat.

Starting in early March, undocumented migrants locked in the Northwest Detention Center battled back against their jailers with empty stomachs, launching a hunger strike that spread across the prison in a peripatetic but increasingly strategic fashion. The strikes spread to the GEO Group’s Joe Corley Detention Facility in Conroe, Texas, another privatized vessel of cruelty, where detainees have endured reprisals including solitary confinement and being shackled to steel beds.

At the Northwest Detention Center, GEO Group and ICE stand accused of attempting to suppress the protests through a draconian regime of intimidation, locking strikers in solitary and even threatening them with Guantánamo Bay–style force-feeding sessions if they refuse to relent. Those confined to solitary have been relegated to cells for twenty-three hours a day with no reading material, television, radio or other diversions that might stave off the borderline insanity that accompanies sustained deprivation.

In April, a group of immigrant rights activists staked out a patch of grass across the street from the White House. For weeks, they beseeched President Barack Obama to take executive action to slow the wheels of the deportation machine that has sent some 2 million immigrants away since his inauguration, including members of their families. Among the demonstrators was Ernestina Hernandez, the wife of a hunger-striking detainee at the Corley detention center. “Breaking up a family isn’t going to stop us from fighting. It’s going to make us stronger, and we’re not going to stop until the president takes action,” Hernandez told The Nation’s Zoë Carpenter.

The hunger strikes finally ceased in early May, but not without substantial results. After visiting strikers inside the Northwest Detention Center, Washington State Representative Adam Smith introduced legislation that would answer many of their key demands. Called the Accountability in Immigration Detention Act of 2014, the bill would establish new mechanisms for oversight of prison conditions, limit the use of solitary confinement and completely eliminate a quota requiring ICE to keep at least 34,000 immigrants in detention.

Angélica Cházaro, a University of Washington professor and immigration attorney representing several of the leaders of the hunger strikes in Tacoma, sees the legislation as a historic milestone in activism. “This is the most direct example I’ve seen of people directly affected by imprisonment possibly having a say in the laws that govern their confinement,” Cházaro told me.

“The language of immigration reform is being abandoned in favor of more radical demands that are coming from the bottom up,” she added. “The hunger strikers are saying it shouldn’t matter whether you were born here or not—it’s a demand to change the way people without documentation are treated.”

Cházaro pointed to National Council of La Raza president Janet Murguía’s labeling of Obama as “the deporter-in-chief” as further evidence of the impact of bottom-up organizing.

“The fact we’re seeing people taking these risks even though they’re going to be deported—this is not something that ICE can put back in the bag,” Cházaro explained. “It’s a transformative moment where the Obama administration can no longer pretend it’s the fault of Congress for blocking immigration reform. This is a great period of unmasking.”

“This Is the Only Power We Have”

With most immigrants held in the Northwest Detention Center unable to afford legal representation, they have turned to a coalition of legal activists like Cházaro to keep the pressure on ICE. Detainees’ families and former cellmates have assumed a frontline role in the activism, mounting boisterous demonstrations outside the jail that often transform into acts of full-scale civil disobedience.

In a windswept parking lot next to a busy highway in Tukwila, Washington, I met a few of those who are leading efforts to support the hunger strikers. They had just wrapped up a demonstration outside the nearby Department of Homeland Security's Seattle Field Office, the home of ICE's bureaucratic parent. Among them was Maru Mora Villalpando, an undocumented immigrant and a leading member of the ad hoc #Not1More deportation coalition that coordinated the frequent demonstrations.

On February 24, Mora Villalpando chained herself to other activists, blocking the road leading to the prison and obstructing the path of buses filled with shackled migrants. By her side was the wife of a detainee who was being held at the detention center. The woman threw her body in front of the bus while protesters advanced, forcing the vehicle to retreat back into the prison. It was a powerful symbolic victory that galvanized the protesters, both inside the jail and out.

Just over a week later, the hunger strikes began. "We began getting calls inside the prison telling us, 'This is the only power we have to make ICE negotiate with us,'" Mora Villalpando recalled. "We noticed that ICE and GEO [Group] thought the whole thing would end right away, but it had only begun."

By March 21, the number of hunger strikers exceeded 750. As the national media focused in on Tacoma, Mora Villalpando and two local immigration lawyers attempted to initiate negotiations with ICE. Their demands were drawn up by the hunger strikers: an end to the indefinite waits for hearings, the solitary confinement regime, the medical deprivation and the callous and arbitrary separation of families. Instead of negotiations, they were met with an iron-fisted crackdown.

During the height of the hunger strikes in March, prison guards burst into a wing of Northwest Detention Center where a despondent young detainee had just attempted suicide. The guards asked if any detainees wanted to discuss jail conditions with an assistant warden. When twenty men raised their hands, Mora Villalpando recalled, the guards immediately cuffed them and dragged them into solitary confinement, where they would spend twenty-three hours in near-total isolation.

Mora Villalpando and her allies immediately contacted the ACLU of Washington and Columbia Legal Services, who slapped ICE with a lawsuit demanding a restraining order against the intimidation tactics. Within days, the detainees were let out of solitary, but the recriminations continued. Commenting on background, an ICE official told me the agency could not discuss the use of solitary confinement and other punitive practices in its prisons due to "pending litigation."

When five female detainees joined the hunger strike in late March, according to Mora Villalpando, they were locked in solitary for a week and barred from meeting with their lawyers. One of three original strikers, Jesus Cipriano Ríos Alegría, was placed in medical isolation, a practice applied to any detainee who refuses as many as nine meals. The longest-enduring hunger striker, Jesus Gaspar Navarro, lasted twenty-five days without food. As soon as he terminated his protest, he was locked in solitary confinement. Then the feeding tubes came out.

Jose Moreno, a 25-year-old undocumented immigrant from Mexico who helped coordinate hunger strikes when he was detained at Northwest Detention Center, told me that guards attempted to intimidate hunger strikers into accepting food. They presented the detainees with stiff rubber feeding tubes, Moreno said, describing in explicit detail the process of jamming the long hoses through the esophagus and toward the gastro-intestinal organs. The numbers of strikers began to drop as detainees recoiled at the prospect of being subjected to such a violent practice.

Yet the strikes continued, prompting further recriminations. According to Cházaro, GEO Group guards have barred hunger strikers from congregating in groups larger than two or three, and have transferred two leaders of the protests to other facilities. Detainees who have complained about doing janitorial work for only a dollar a day are now being given a single candy bar or a bag of chips for volunteer work, she told me. "It's becoming clearer that the demands [the hunger strikers] made are only scratching the surface of the abuses," said Cházaro.

Despite attempts to sever lines of communication between detainees, they managed to coordinate the strikes through carefully timed calls to a local Spanish-language radio station, El Rey 1360 AM, using the airwaves to broadcast their situation to allies on the outside and offer directives to those fellow prisoners able to tune in. With each passing week, the strikes grew more sophisticated, with a new wing of the detention center joining the protest in staggered fashion as another group of detainees broke its fast.

As the pressure mounted, ICE refused to budge. Instead of agreeing to negotiate with the strikers' legal advocates, the agency relied on community roundtables initiated by activists. There, ICE representatives were able to project a sense of receptivity to grievances without assuming any obligation to act.

At one such event on March 21, Mora Villalpando said ICE officials refused to allow the wife of a detainee to bring her daughter into the meeting, claiming the child would present "an unnecessary emotional distraction." Claiming to be unaware

of the detainees' complaints, ICE representatives boasted throughout the meeting that the Northwest Detention Center was one of its premier facilities.

GEO Group vice president of corporate relations Pablo Paez echoed the ICE officials in an e-mailed response to my interview request. "During their most recent [American Correctional Association] accreditation audits," Paez wrote, "the Northwest Detention Center and the Joe Corley Detention Facility received scores of 99.2% and 97.9% respectively."

That month, Representative Smith visited the detention center to test ICE's public relations against the reality he witnessed. According to Mora Villalpando, ICE officials attempted to lead Smith on a propaganda tour that was closed to the press, initially rebuking his demands for meetings with the detainees. Once Smith was able to speak with some of the prisoners, he reeled at the "shocking" and "very, very tough" conditions he said they described to him. Calling prison food rations "wildly inconsistent and sometimes inedible," Smith told the Seattle-based alt weekly *The Stranger*, "It is really problematic having a private company running this. So I can imagine that the less they pay for food, the more money they make."

What Smith witnessed at the prison moved him to introduce his Accountability in Immigration Detention Act. The bill would impose a rigorous regime of oversight on privately maintained ICE prisons and immediately shutter those that fail two consecutive inspections.

In an e-mailed response to questions about allegations of abuses at Northwest Detention Center, ICE public affairs officer Andrew Munoz insisted to me, "We take very seriously the health, safety and welfare of our employees, detention facility staff and the individuals in our care. To that end, ICE has been responsive to Northwest Detention Center detainee suggestions, including reducing commissary prices, increasing the variety of items on the commissary list and implementing menu changes."

However, according to legal advocates for the detainees, ICE officials offered them only a single concession.

"After telling us that everything was fine, that there's nothing they can do," Mora Villalpando told me, "[ICE] offered to serve the prisoners chicken on the bone on Mondays. We had to remind them that this is not about chicken, it's about treating people like human beings."

Moreno, the ex-detainee, interjected, "They literally tried to throw us a bone!"

While the hunger strikers persevered throughout April against an intensifying regime of punishment and intimidation, GEO Group marshaled all the resources at its disposal to protect a growing enterprise.

A Captive Market

The abuses unfolding behind the razor wire-topped fences and pre-cast concrete walls of Northwest Detention Center are the inevitable byproduct of decades of anti-immigrant lawmaking, lobbying and corporate profiteering.

Private prison corporations like GEO Group have yielded whopping gains during the Obama era, leveraging record levels of deportations overseen by the administration to win new contracts across the country. With hundreds of millions in taxpayer money channeled into company coffers each year, GEO Group has ratcheted up its lobbying efforts in Washington, joining with other members of the private prison industry to guard against financially damaging reforms. This year, the company shelled out at least \$100,000 in lobbying fees, while donating even more to candidates in both parties.

The 9/11 attacks were the turning point for the private prison industry. Two years after that fateful day, the newly created Department of Homeland Security introduced Operation Endgame. The DHS document was essentially a blueprint for total deportation, urging the federal government to "increase its overall number of removals annually in order to thwart and deter continued growth in the illegal alien population. Moving toward a 100% rate for removal of all removable aliens is critical..."

The year after DHS introduced this startling proposal, the Northwest Detention Center opened on a badly contaminated Superfund site in Tacoma's Tideflats area. Over vehement public opposition, the Tacoma City Council approved the jail on the grounds that it would create "hundreds of family-wage job opportunities." It was to be operated by the Florida-based Correctional Services Corporation (CSC), a private prison contractor eager to offset construction costs through public funding.

An in-depth joint investigation by the Tacoma-based *News Tribune* and the nonprofit *InvestigateWest* found that CSC collaborated with local lawmakers to ensure that city taxpayers covered the bulk of costs associated with building the jail. In the end, only forty-five jobs arose from the prison's construction—far less than the hundreds initially projected.

For decades, GEO Group had operated under the banner of Wackenhut Corrections Corporation, a scandal-scarred private security and prison firm with a lengthy and well-documented record of human rights abuses. Following scores of abuse

claims by prisoners and harsh condemnation by the Department of Justice for “excessive abuse and neglect,” Wackenhut was acquired by the European prison corporation G4S in 2002. (G4S holds contracts to operate Israeli prisons in the occupied Palestinian territories, where human rights advocates have documented widespread abuses.)

Formerly a subsidiary of Wackenhut/G4S, GEO Group established itself as a fully independent corporate entity in 2003. In 2005, GEO Group acquired CSC, taking direct control over the Northwest Detention Center. Within five years, GEO Group had secured contracts to administer nearly 100 prisons across the country with room for at least 77,000 beds.

Private prison industry profits have skyrocketed since 2007, when a bipartisan vote in Congress authorized a peculiar law known as the bed quota. The provision required the Department of Homeland Security to detain at least 34,000 people a day in federal immigrant prisons, imposing an incarceration mandate that remains unchanged despite declining levels of illegal immigration.

According to Mora Villalpando of the #Not1More coalition, policies like the bed quota inspired ICE to classify any contact between undocumented migrants and law enforcement as “criminal activity.” And thanks to Secure Communities, a controversial program linking local police to the ICE database, beat cops have been transformed into de facto immigration agents. For the undocumented, an arrest for even the most minor offense could mean deportation, or least several months inside a prison like the Northwest Detention Center.

In privatized jails, every body has a monetary value. Indeed, GEO Group bills the federal government \$164 per day for each immigrant it holds. As a direct result of the bed quota, the cost of detaining undocumented immigrants to US taxpayers has spiked to \$2.8 billion a year, over double what it was in 2006. The federal money flows straight into the coffers of GEO Group executives; their team of lobbyists at Navigators Global, a DC firm; and to Lionel Aguirre, another GEO Group lobbyist with a wealth of connections on both sides of the political aisle in Austin.

In 2012, following three decades of skyrocketing incarceration rates and almost 2 million deportations since Obama’s inauguration, GEO Group announced a record \$1.4 billion in profits. The company’s CEO, George Zoley, became the wealthiest correctional officer in America, raking in a whopping \$22 million between 2008 and 2012 while his employees’ incomes stagnated and conditions worsened in his jails.

In 2013, after spending over \$1 million to lobby members of Congress, GEO Group announced it would not pressure lawmakers in any way over the immigration reform efforts proposed that year. However, as reporter Lee Fang revealed in *The Nation*, the corporation had already renewed its contract with Navigators Global in DC.

Asked about GEO Group’s lobbying efforts, Paez insisted to me that his company hired Navigators Global to push for alternatives to detention like ankle-bracelet monitoring, a reform proposed by some members of Congress opposed to the bed quota. Paez freely conceded that GEO Group’s interest in detention alternatives stemmed not from humanitarian concerns, but from more profiteering. As he explained to me, GEO Group owns BI Incorporated, the firm that won a hefty contract from ICE to administer the high-tech surveillance program. “Our company’s discussions have been entirely focused on educating lawmakers on the benefits and successes of the Alternatives to Detention program since our company’s subsidiary is in fact the main provider of community supervision alternatives to detention,” Paez stated.

Following on the heels of the private prison industry, companies like Talton Communications have moved in to exploit a literally captive market. A tech firm contracted by ICE to maintain for-profit telephone services at the Northwest Detention Center, Talton routinely absorbs telephone credit from immigrants who had been deported. According to Mora Villalpando, the company may have seized hundreds of thousands of dollars for deported former detainees. Other telecommunications firms like Global Tel*Link have been accused of charging \$17 or more for each fifteen-minute long-distance call placed by detainees from immigration prisons.

In January, after a lawsuit by telecommunications firms, the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit blocked substantial portions of an FCC order that would have limited the telecom industry’s price-gouging of prisoners.

In 2013, the year after ICE detained almost half a million undocumented immigrants, federal spending on immigration enforcement reached a record high—over \$3 billion more per year than it spent on all other criminal law enforcement activities. Even conservatives in Congress had begun to bristle at the Obama administration’s approach. “It looks to me like maybe there’s an overuse of detention by this administration,” GOP Representative Spencer Bachus complained during a House Judiciary Committee hearing. Months later, sixty-five House Democrats issued a letter to Obama demanding the repeal of the bed quota.

The White House has staunchly refused to issue an executive order halting the mass deportations, with Obama deferring responsibility onto Congress for any reforms to the immigration system. One of the few reforms proposed by the administration arrived in a bloated 2015 Department of Homeland Security budget in the form of alternatives to mass

detention—the kind that represent a cash cow to GEO Group subsidiaries. Buried in the budget request was perhaps the most significant clause: \$1.3 billion to fund 30,539 prison beds, only a few thousand lower than the established bed quota.

“These tepid changes aren’t going to change anything,” Chárázo maintained. “A lid has been taken off, and ICE won’t be able to put this lid back on.”

At his April 10 keynote address at the Texas summit commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Obama paid tribute to the political courage of President Lyndon Johnson. “He liked the feel of [power], the wielding of it,” Obama said of LBJ. “But that hunger was harnessed and redeemed by a deeper understanding of the human condition, by a sympathy for the underdog, for the downtrodden, for the outcast.”

While Obama spoke, three immigrant rights protesters were arrested outside. Another protester, Isaac Chavez, wondered, “How can you really say you’re fighting for civil rights when so many people are being denied their basic civil rights of being with their family?”

An Endless Cycle

While Congress awaits a vote on Representative Smith’s prison reform legislation, the deportation machine’s blades spin with increasing ferocity. In Tacoma’s mostly Latino immigrant community, it seems that few families can escape the threshers.

Wendy Pantoja Castillo is a recently naturalized American citizen from Mexico who has kept an unrelenting vigil at the Northwest Detention Center, joining the protests and visiting detainees whenever she can. She rattled off an almost endless litany of horror stories she gathered from her trips inside the jail. “Seeing the family separation is the hardest part of it all,” Castillo told me.

Two years ago, Castillo rushed to Northwest Detention Center to search for a single mother who had just been detained by ICE. Having not been told that their mother was arrested and jailed, her despondent children were forced to wonder whether their mother had been involved in some kind of accident or abduction. When Castillo arrived at the jail, she said she had to help the woman arrange for a neighbor to adopt her children, who were born in the United States. In the end, the woman was deported, forced to leave her children behind for good.

Others have not been so lucky. According to Castillo, children are routinely placed into foster care and put up for adoption when their undocumented parents fall into the hands of ICE. “Just imagine if someone takes you away from your kids and you can’t tell them where you are and they wind up in the hands of the state,” Castillo remarked. “The fact that this is happening in the USA shows there is a huge hole in the law.”

More recently, in February, Castillo escorted a family from the nearby town of Salem to visit their father in Northwest Detention Center. The detainee’s four children were American citizens, as was his wife. Separated behind a wall of blast-resistant glass, one of the detainee’s children, an autistic boy, began to sob uncontrollably. “He just wanted to touch his father,” Castillo said. “But the visits are noncontact. He could only cry behind the glass.” Several weeks later, the man was deported, prompting his family to give up on life in the United States to reunite with him in Mexico.

Castillo has met detainees from around the world: from Africa, the Middle East, East Asia and Eastern Europe. She said some have been held in the Northwest Detention Center for several years without receiving a hearing. “They work all day out here for nothing,” she said. “A lot of them don’t speak any English, don’t know anyone and no one knows where they go. They just disappear.”

Mora Villalpando described the Northwest Detention Center as a dark abyss from which some never emerge. “One family we have spoken to had a son inside who was mentally ill,” she said. “He disappeared after going into the jail and they have not heard from him since. Another woman who contacted us said her first husband died in the desert after being deported. And her second husband was just taken by ICE. We have entire families out here that have been devastated by ICE.”

During one of the protests in support of the hunger strikers, a young man who had just emerged from the jail approached Mora Villalpando. He explained that he had just visited his brother inside and that he had been detained there two years before him. Several years before that, he said, he was among the undocumented immigrants who were hired to build the prison.

With congressionally mandated reforms on the distant horizon, a sense of siege has engulfed immigrant communities around Tacoma. Jose Moreno, the former prisoner in Northwest Detention Center, is among the swelling ranks of the undocumented trapped in a legal gauntlet. Initially arrested for driving under the influence, his detention by ICE prevented him from completing the intoxicated-driver classes he was sentenced to attend. As a result, a warrant was issued for his arrest. When he appears before a judge in the coming weeks to explain his extenuating circumstances, Moreno must prepare for the worst.

“If they put me in jail, ICE could put another immigration hold on me,” he worried. “Then they could transfer me to Tacoma [to the Northwest Detention Center]. And it will never end. The cycle never ends.”

President Obama's Backhanded Maneuver Targets Anti-Deportation Movement

The Political Committee of Solidarity - May 29, 2014

Earlier this week, a number of organizations claiming to support immigration reform—including SEIU (Service Employees International Union), National Immigration Forum, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Sojourners, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—signed a letter to President Obama asking him to delay executive action against deportations until at least the end of summer, arguing that Congress needs one last chance to pass reform. Within hours, the administration publicly agreed to delay action as “requested.” This is an outrageous and transparent attempt to undo the gains of the powerful movement against deportations.

This maneuver by the White House comes at a time when grassroots organizations have turned up the heat on President Obama to use his executive power to stop deportations.

The Democratic Party strategy on immigration has always been to focus the debate on Congressional legislation and paint the Republicans as the real obstacle, thereby winning a political battle without taking any meaningful action. But we know and Obama knows that the President has always had the power to prevent deportations and end programs like Secure Communities without Congressional action, and the administration has already proven their ability to act under pressure by granting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and putting an end to new 287(g) agreements. Earlier this year, mounting pressure from the militant and growing anti-deportation movement forced President Obama to agree to a review of deportation practices and to promise changes by early summer. Even after the announcement, pressure has continued to grow with many Congressional Democrats publicly stating that the administration needs to take executive action to significantly change deportation policies.

This recent development is clearly an attempt to reverse some of that pressure, buying time for the administration and putting the focus back on Congress and the Republicans. Not long after the story broke, an anonymous staffer for a DC immigration advocacy group told activists that their organization had been approached by a White House adviser and asked to sign this letter in order to give the administration cover. The President, who has deported a record two million people during his time in office, is making a desperate last attempt to avoid action and to shift blame back onto the Republicans just in time for the mid term elections.

It is also an attempt to divide a movement. The militant youth who have built and led the contemporary movement against deportations have only recently been finding support from more mainstream and well-resourced organizations, including labor unions. A united movement poses a serious threat to the administration and to ruling class interests. This backhanded maneuver can be read as an attempt to drive a wedge between undocumented youth activists and the broader forces that might support them, thereby weakening a powerful movement and keeping much of that movement under the influence of the Democratic Party.

It remains to be seen how well the strategy will work. There is certainly a fight back: organizers have loudly called out SEIU and the other groups who decided to sell out the 90,000 or more people who will be deported during the window granted to the administration. Some mainstream immigrant rights groups that have long supported reform have released statements denouncing the administration's decision. Even the New York Times published a strongly worded statement from its editorial board that identified the real political dynamics and called the President's bluff.

A more accurate rendering of the strategy advanced by organizations like the National Immigration Forum.

At the same time, Reform Immigration for America, one of the largest and most influential immigration, NGOs has released a strongly worded statement pushing for a renewed fight for legislative reform: “starting today, this country will see activism around immigration reform on a massive scale,” their latest E-mail states. Other large and powerful groups are sure to follow. These groups will attempt to reorient grassroots forces toward reform, while saying nothing about the decision to delay administrative action. SEIU and other groups whose reputation in the movement matters little can take the heat for selling out tens of thousands of people, and RIFA and their like can complete the job.

We must resist and fight back against this two-faced strategy. We need a united movement demanding an end to deportations, an end to programs like Secure Communities, and legalization for all. SEIU and their allies have willingly acted as the administration's lapdogs in an attempt to divide this movement and grant cover to politicians who want to avoid action yet again. And so we call on everyone who believes in justice to see this move for what it is, to support the activists who are tirelessly fighting against the deportation regime, and to fight to ensure that no progressive organizations take the bait by backing down from the demands for executive action and returning to yet another round of futile lobbying for reform. We must ensure that immigrant organizers have the active support of other working class movements and that the ruling class attempt to divide us fails.

The Political Committee is a leadership body of Solidarity, composed of members elected at the biyearly National Convention.

Judge Rules to Limit Mandatory Detention of Immigrants in California Immigration judge grants motion for preliminary injunction requiring the government to give certain immigrants a bond hearing in CA

ACLU of Northern California – May 16, 2014

On Thursday May 15, United States District Court Judge for the Northern District of California, Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers granted a motion for a preliminary injunction and motion for class certification in *Preap v. Holder*, a class action lawsuit in which Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus and the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, with lead counsel Keeker Van Nest, LLP, challenged the federal government's practice in California of detaining certain immigrants without bond, often for many months, while they face deportation proceedings.

By refusing these detainees bond hearings at which they can demonstrate their fitness for release because they are neither a flight risk nor a public safety risk, the government was effectively tearing immigrants away from their families, their communities, and their livelihoods and compromising their access to representation. Many immigrants caught in the mandatory detention dragnet are longtime residents of the United States who have rehabilitated themselves, raised families and they will now have the opportunity to make an individualized case against their detention.

"This case has the power to stop the federal government's outrageous process of holding people without bond. We are now one step closer to ensuring those who aspire to be citizens are treated fairly before the law," said lead counsel and Keeker & Van Nest Partner Jon Streeter.

"Fair process is at the core of our country's system of justice. The Court rightly acknowledged that not even the government is above the law, and cannot deny bond hearings to individuals who are plainly entitled to them," said Keeker & Van Nest attorney Stacy Chen.

"The decision places some necessary limits on the federal government's expansive use of mandatory detention, a practice that has been devastating immigrant families for nearly two decades," said Alison Pennington of Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus.

"This is an important victory that pushes back against our inhumane and abusive immigration detention system," said Julia Harumi Mass, Senior Staff Attorney with the ACLU of Northern California. "In addition to monitoring the compliance with this injunction, the ACLU will continue to seek reforms that respect our fundamental sense of fairness for immigration detainees."

TFWP Moratorium: Mass deportation, racism Canadian-style

No One Is Illegal (Canada) – May 1, 2014

Last Thursday, Jason Kenney announced a moratorium on new and pending permits of migrant workers in the fast food and restaurant sector. This is a mass deportation order.

Though exact numbers are as yet unknown, there were 44,000 Labour Market Opinions in the food and accommodation sector issued in 2012. Thus, approximately that many migrants will be shut out this year. Migrants abroad with pending applications have also likely paid recruiters thousands of dollars to come to Canada. To do so, many have gone into immense debt that they will not be able to get out of. Workers already here will be unable to change jobs and apply for new LMOs in the sector, leaving them tied to potentially abusive employers.

The ex-Immigration Minister and now Employment Minister Jason Kenney has been on a war path since 2008, systematically shutting out refugees, spouses, permanent residents and citizens. To do so, he has fanned the flames of xenophobia and racism coining terms such as 'bogus refugees', 'marriages fraud', 'birth tourism', 'human smugglers' and 'foreign criminals'. In 2012, the Conservative government cancelled over 250,000 permanent residency applications without processing them. New refugee laws passed at the end of 2012 have halved the total number of refugee applicants in the country - in essence excluding 10,000 people. Laws passed in 2011 will mean that migrant workers who have been here for four years or more will face deportation in January 2015. Add to that the nearly 90,000 people deported under Harper's regime - we are witnessing an enormous wave of mass deportations and exclusion.

Challenges to these have been posed, but have never become a unified social justice concern. That must change.

Though the current story broke in newspapers and media outlets after a CBC Go Public report on April 14th, which focused on "Canadian" McDonalds workers feeling sidelined by migrants, the roots of this disaster have been growing for a long time. This time last year, two other reports on RBC and coal mining in British Columbia, respectively, received national attention with a very similar refrain: 'Foreigners are taking our jobs'.

Mainstream media, and people across the political spectrum have perversely used examples of migrants speaking out against their abuse and exploitation as the excuse to call for migrant worker exclusion (See statements from Alberta Federation of Labour, Canadian Labour Congress, BC Federation of Labour, and the NDP).

Canadian style racisms are institutionalized and subtler – implicit in Canada's immigration laws and policies. Though we see vulgar and vicious anti-immigrant flyers handed out in Brampton, and the rise of white power groups in BC - there hasn't been a similar rise of fascist groups and political parties as in Europe here. But the widespread exclusion of migrants, supported by organizations from across the political spectrum is the same.

While most migrants are only able to come in as temporary foreign workers now, the response has not been solidarity with them but rather calls for their removal. All across the political spectrum, we see protectionist nationalist measures demanding an end to temporary foreign worker, rather than seeking full immigration status on landing, full labour protections and clear pathways to residency.

Calling for a moratorium on migrant workers first, and then paying partial lipservice to some permanent immigration system is a de facto call for mass exclusion of people of colour. If we truly believed in equal access for people irrespective of their racialization and impoverishment, we would first ensure full immigration status for all before shutting down the program that gives a toe-hold to some.

Absent in the wave of press statement and media drumming is Canada's role in global displacement, the long history of exclusion of poor people of colour, and the participation of unions, churches, and other charities in that exclusion. What we do hear loud and clear are the decontextualized stories of a few people being laid off. There is no mention of the entrenchment of temporariness in the immigration system and the lack of access to permanent immigration for most poor migrants. Little voice in the current debate is given to migrant workers, who have been organizing for decades. There is an overall non-recognition of care, service and domestic work usually carried out by women and racialized people.

Austerity-era economics, which have resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs in Canada, aren't factored into the equation. Instead, unemployed workers and migrants have been pitted against each other.

This is unconscionable. It allows similar patterns of oppression to unfold time and time again - hence the rise in anti-immigrant policy and sentiment in every economic downturn. It is imperative that we recognize that the Temporary Foreign Workers Program furthers capitalist exploitation of workers. But in the fight between capitalist desire and racist uproar, at least in this latest round, racism has won. Migrant workers are being excluded because they are "foreign". Thus anti-racist work, particularly within workers' movements, must escalate. We must strive to organize all workers, with or without jobs, with or without status. It is only in naming white supremacy, patriarchy, ableism and capitalism for what they are and how they determine our economy and our society that we can actually transform the structures within they flourish.

As we strive towards that world where the movement of people is unlinked from the displacement of others, we must ensure that those marginalized, silenced and illegalized in our community are not the ones most harassed, first excluded. It is imperative that we build solidarities with all workers, around the world. We must truly believe that an injury to one is an injury to all, and act accordingly. We must strive to organize all workers, with or without jobs, with or without status. This May Day, lets us resolve to organize, to support, and not deport.

Texas Releases Hundreds of Immigrants Due to Lack of Space in Detention Centers

Hispanically Speaking News - May 30, 2014

Hundreds of undocumented immigrants detained in Texas are being freed under supervision in Arizona because the detention centers in the Lone Star State do not have enough space for them due to an avalanche of immigrants entering illegally from Mexico. The immigrants are arriving in federal government vehicles at a bus station in downtown Tucson and are being released under the condition that they contact Immigration and Customs Enforcement to fix a date to begin their deportation procedures, although there are serious doubts about whether any of them will actually do that.

“We have seen how each day between 50 and 70 people are arriving in buses from Texas,” Daniel Wilson, a volunteer with the Casa Mariposa organization, told Efe. “We have heard that the ICE and Border Patrol substations are completely filled and there’s no place to take all these people. We’ve spoken with people who went to Texas and they’ve brought them to Arizona, and now their families must buy them the return ticket to Texas,” he said. In some cases, immigrants cannot contact their families to ask them to purchase a ticket back home for them and Casa Mariposa is offering people in this situation shelter while they make the arrangements to continue their trips.

A report by the Border Patrol in Texas to which Efe gained access shows that immigration movement has shifted from other zones along the southern border to this state, where in just one day authorities detain almost the number of people detained in a month in Arizona.

Since the beginning of the 2014 fiscal year, which began last October 1, more than 100,000 people have been detained in Texas. “Over the Memorial Day weekend more than 400 people were released,” ICE spokesperson Amber Cargile told Efe on Thursday.

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About National Immigrant Solidarity Network

NISN is a coalition of community, immigrant, labor, human rights and student activist groups, founded in 2002 in response to the urgent needs for the national coalition to fight immigrant bashing, support immigrant rights, no to the sweatshops exploitation and end to the racism on the community. Please visit our website: <http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

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