

Defending migrants and refugees: from protest to resistance

written by Greg Butterfield
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Community patrol in San Diego.



John Parker speaks at Comités de Resistencia news conference July 8. Photo: Ron Gochez

In its latest attempt to sow terror among migrants and refugees, the Trump administration has announced plans to arrest thousands of family members in a series of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids starting on the weekend of July 13-14.

“The raids, which will be conducted by ICE over multiple days, will include

‘collateral’ deportations,” reported the [New York Times](#) when it broke the story on July 11, citing government officials who spoke on condition of anonymity. “In those deportations, the authorities might detain immigrants who happened to be on the scene, even though they were not targets of the raids.”

The Times continued: “The officials said ICE agents were targeting at least 2,000 immigrants who have been ordered deported – some as a result of their failure to appear in court – but who remain in the country illegally. The operation is expected to take place in at least 10 major cities.”

President Donald Trump originally planned the raids in June, then pulled back at the last minute, saying he would wait to see if congressional Democrats would back his “border security” bill, despite mass outrage over torturous conditions of children caged in detention centers and the deaths of desperate asylum seekers trying to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

Democratic Party leaders [did support the \\$4.6 billion bill](#). Rep. Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, who came to the U.S. as a refugee from Somalia, denounced their cave-in, saying “What we did today is continue to allow the atrocity to take place.”

Now the raids are to go ahead anyway. This is typical of Trump’s gangster-capitalist negotiating style – in other words, blatantly lying to get his way.

But the Democratic leadership, like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority leader Chuck Schumer – who like to call themselves “The Resistance” when it suits them – don’t really oppose Trump’s war on migrants any more than they oppose his warmongering threats to Iran, Venezuela, Korea and other countries.

They all serve the same masters – the ruling class of bosses, bankers and landlords, from Wall Street and Big Oil to Amazon, Walmart and the prison profiteers.

Shut down concentration camps!

Racist outrage piled upon racist outrage, especially targeting families and children, has stoked a new wave of solidarity. Protests led by the Japanese American and Jewish communities have denounced the detention centers run by ICE and the Department of Homeland Security for what they really are: concentration camps.

On June 22, Japanese Americans travelled to Fort Sill, Okla., to protest Trump's plan to have at least 1,400 children imprisoned on the military base.

Fort Sill was the site of one of the World War II concentration camps for detained Japanese Americans, and before that, people from Indigenous nations. Some of those who protested had been detained at Fort Sill as children themselves in the 1940s.

"Met by uniformed military police, the protesters, some in their 80s, were told they did not have permission to congregate and might face arrest," the [Los Angeles Times](#) reported. "'You need to move right now!' one of the officers shouted. 'What don't you understand? It's English: Get out.'"

"But the survivors, carrying thousands of origami cranes as a symbol of solidarity, refused to leave until police from adjacent Lawton, Okla., arrived and let them speak. They then moved to a park where a crowd of about 200 was waiting."

On June 30, 36 [Jewish activists were arrested](#) blocking the ICE detention center in Elizabeth, N.J. They chanted, "Never again is now!"

"As Jews, we've been taught to never let anything like the Holocaust happen again," said a statement from the organizers. "Now, with children detained in unacceptable conditions, ICE raids targeting our communities, and people dying at the border while seeking safety in the U.S., we are seeing the signs of a mass atrocity. We refuse to wait and see what happens next."

And then there was the [historic political strike](#) at online furniture seller Wayfair on June 26, when hundreds of workers walked off the job and were joined by thousands

of supporters in Boston's Copley Square, to protest the company's \$200,000 sale of beds and other furniture to detention centers.

"The United States government and its contractors are responsible for the detention and mistreatment of hundreds of thousands of migrants seeking asylum in our country — we want that to end," the employees said in their letter protesting the company's profiteering on torture. "We also want to be sure that Wayfair has no part in enabling, supporting or profiting from this practice."

These powerful expressions of working-class and human solidarity have been echoed in cities and towns across the U.S. in protests and direct actions targeting ICE and DHS facilities, as well as Amazon and other companies aiding and abetting the Trump regime.

[Hundreds of actions are planned](#) as part of a national and worldwide day of action against the concentration camps on July 12.

From protest to resistance

Now the struggle to defend our migrant class siblings must move from protest to resistance – genuine workers' resistance, not the phony "Resistance" epitomized by the Democratic Party, which will try to divert the people's struggle into support for its 2020 electoral ambitions.

Los Angeles news conference announcing Comités de Resistencia

<https://www.facebook.com/udblosangeles/videos/873952002962852/>

Another important development has taken place recently in San Diego, where Unión del Barrio, a revolutionary organization based in the Chicano community, has established community patrols to protect migrant communities from ICE raids.

These people's self-defense patrols, staffed by volunteers, drive vehicles with large decals declaring, "Protecting Communities. No ICE & Police Terror."

When they spot a likely ICE vehicle and verify that it belongs to an immigration agent, the volunteers livestream on social media and send out teams to alert local residents about their presence. "The goal is to keep undocumented immigrants whom ICE may be targeting away from the area," the [San Diego Union Tribune](#) reported.

"We have to defend our families because the nucleus of our society is being destroyed systematically by state policy," volunteer Benjamin Prado explained.

Unión del Barrio's initiative is taking a further step forward with the establishment of Comités de Resistencia (Resistance Committees) in Los Angeles. "Protests and marches are important," says the group's call for a [July 13 organizing meeting](#), "but they are not enough. We must organize ourselves and be ready to defend our people!

"We will discuss how we can organize in our schools, churches, apartment buildings or anywhere else to defend ourselves. The goal is to set up these Comités in different areas of our city and beyond."

Unión del Barrio and allies [held a news conference](#) about the initiative on July 8. Speaking there, Struggle-La Lucha's John Parker said, "The only way we're going to get out of this stormy sea is with a compass. What we're talking about with these Comités de Resistencia is exactly the direction we need to be going in.

"It reminds me of how the Black Panthers inspired people to say, 'We can protect ourselves,'" Parker said. "We know that the LAPD, ICE, DHS and all these white supremacist and fascist organizations don't care. But we care about each other. Actions like this unify our communities - Latinx communities, Black communities, poor white communities and all working-class communities.

“There’s another compass we can look to: the Wayfair workers. Those workers took the bold step of deciding that they were not going to let this company sell furniture to detention centers. They risked their livelihoods and showed the power of labor. It’s a big company but our power as workers is even greater.”

