

## ***US Immigration Policy:***

### **The Political Economy of State Terrorism**

### **Why Obama continues the policy of State Terrorism directed at Raza and why “Immigration Reform” won’t come in 2010**

Unión del Barrio

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*Editor’s Note: The following is the English translation of an article that appeared in the June 2009-January 2010 issue of ¡La Verdad!. We provide this piece to summarize the level of state terror and money involved in maintaining the current repressive policies in tact. We offer this piece as a political understanding on what needs to be done on the question of U.S. immigration policy, Unión del Barrio offers this article with the intent of orientating our efforts, those of our allies, and progressive forces toward the building of activities around May 1, 2010, with the goal of creating unity with the various progressive forces within the political borders of the United States to denounce the current assault on Raza as State Terror; and to build a popular movement in defense of the interests and rights of the working class.*

### **The Promises and False Hopes of Barack Obama**

#### **THE PROMISES**

During the Barack Obama presidential campaign there was no real talk about immigration reform. It was surprising that both parties, Democrats and Republicans, were able to exclude this issue completely in during presidential debates.

The impression given was that the 12 million undocumented workers and their families were not a top priority for either of the candidate despite the important role that Mexican/Raza workers and all migrants and immigrants contribute to ensure the capitalist system afloat. It was as if the mass marches of the spring of 2006 never even happened. However, in order to secure the “Latino Vote,” Obama took his campaign to the major mainstream Spanish language U.S. media outlets (Univision) and to the “Hispanic” organizations. In particular, he took his message to the National Council of La Raza’s Annual Conference, July 13, 2008 in San Diego, proclaiming that he would make immigration reform a top priority in his first year in office as president (See, Barack Obama at Annual NCLR Conference [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6LuA\\_S5sP4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M6LuA_S5sP4)).

No longer a candidate, now President, Obama continued to reiterate his commitment to the “immigrant” community and on April 8, 2009 the director of Internal Affairs—Cecilia Muñoz, the ex-chair of the National Council of La Raza—declared to the New York Times that “[Obama] intends to initiate the debate” with a legislative proposal. (See: Obama to Push Immigration Bill as One Priority, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/09/us/politics/09immig.html>).

Mrs. Muñoz declared that by May of 2009, President Obama would have more details. The month of May began as it had in the recent years; Mexican/Raza communities poured out on the streets to commemorate International Workers' Day, and we came out to demand: An End to the Raids, End to the Separation of Families, Full Legalization for all Workers. The month of May came and went and there were no details of the long awaited announcement from President Obama.

After more than eight months in power, the Mexican/Raza working class asked itself, "When will Immigration Reform arrive, when will the raids and arbitrary detentions end, when will the deportations and separation of families end; when will the state-terrorism cease?"

The response to the first question was given by Obama himself last spring, simply stating, "It will have to wait until 2010." This he stated after meeting with the usurping neo-colonial president of Mexico, Felipe Calderon (Fecal) and the president of Canada, Stephen Harper in Guadalajara, Jalisco, during the summit of "North American Leaders" on August 11, 2009.

With regard to the other questions...

### **ONLY FALSE HOPES**

Since Barack Obama's taking of power, the so-called "change" that was implemented by his administration has differed from what he promised in his campaign. As a matter of fact, immigration laws have expanded and related enforcement actions have been further consolidated. Specifically, we are referencing the expansion of the identification, detention, criminalization and deportation of migrant workers. Under Obama we have witnessed the expansion of E-Verify, which is a verification system provided to employers to identify which workers are "authorized" to work in the United States; the 287(g) policy which converts local police into immigration agents; the expansion of "Safe Communities," which is a prison data-base used to identify Raza; and the development of an entire economic industry that generates profits for businesses that provide infrastructure, technology and personnel necessary to the federal government to incarcerate and deport Raza workers from the country. To understand the reasoning of this position, one only has to observe the business and profits that are generated by each program.

**E-Verify-** During the tenure of Democratic President Bill Clinton, this initiative of employee identity verification was implemented as part of the Immigration and Responsibility Law of 1996. It was expanded under President George W. Bush in 2003, to ensure the collaboration between the Social Security Department and immigration agencies. On July 8, 2009, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, under Obama's direction, announced that this program would be the preferred tool to create a "disincentive for workers to migrate to the US." According to the latest official figures, a total of 145,000 employers have opted to use this verification system and a total of 7.6 million jobs have been processed since October of 2008, and more than 1,000 companies will be investigated by the government for allegedly hiring "undocumented" workers. The most notable cases were that of American Apparel and Overhill Farms in Los Angeles, where 2,000-2,500 workers were fired.

The funds dedicated to the verification system enjoyed an increase of more than 100 million dollars in fiscal year of 2009. The impact of this "change" in real terms for workers that do not have the proper documents has been devastating, signaling who has or does not have the "privilege" to work and criminalizing those determined to work by any means necessary. It is important to recognize that the Obama administration's objective in utilizing this strategy is to individualize the attacks against workers

in order to strangle worker solidarity and to prevent collective protest.

**287(g)** - This Department of Homeland Security(DHS) policy will train the different police agencies (local and state) to detect undocumented workers. These agencies can be the police department, prison employees and guards, and sheriff departments. In exchange for collaborating with the DHS, these agencies receive considerable funding from the federal government.

On July 10, 2009, Napolitano announced that her department would expand the 287(g) program, converting local police into immigration agents. According to the latest national reports, a total of 66 different police and prison guard bodies participated in this program since 2003. She concluded her statement by informing the press that 11 new police bodies and prison guards had joined the program (See: [http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1247246453625.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1247246453625.shtm) ).

**Safe Communities-** A month after the expansion of the 287(g), Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) announced on August 13, the formal expansion of the program “Safe Communities” at a national level. In March 2008, ICE initiated the Safe Communities program to retrieve information from the prison system and the Federal Bureau of Investigations’ (FBI) data bases in order to identify, detain, jail and remove the “undocumented,” who they perceive as a “threat to the community.” There are three levels used to classify those they intend to deport. The first level are those that have been convicted for committing drug related or violent offenses; the second level targets those who have committed minor drug or violent offenses, fraud or theft, including the use of another person’s social security number or name; and, the third level includes those who have been convicted of any other offense including minor offenses.

Today, ICE has a total of 17,200 employees and an annual funding of 5 billion dollars. Each agent makes an annual salary ranging from \$80,000 to \$120,000, plus benefits. The functions of the ICE agency, initiated under the George W. Bush administration, have continued and expanded under the Obama administration. While we have not seen the massive raids at worksite centers that were popular under the Bush administration, it is important to note that the raids and deportations continue and have increased. According to official figures provided by ICE themselves, between October 2008 and June 2009, nearly 271,000 individuals were processed and deported (see: ICE announces increases in FY 2009 3rd quarter SW border criminal arrests <http://www.ice.gov/pi/nr/0907/090714washington.htm>). The truth of the matter is, that we are currently witnessing ICE as they follow through with the goals outlined in their strategic plan known as Operation Endgame, which is designed to, “create the infrastructure necessary to identify and deport all undocumented persons from the country.” (See: Operation End Game, [http://www.thenyc.org/images/uploads/ICE\\_Endgame\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.thenyc.org/images/uploads/ICE_Endgame_Strategic_Plan.pdf)).

### **A Vicious and Genocidal Prison Industry**

On February 26, 2009 the Obama administration allocated 7.4 billion dollars for the detention and imprisonment of undocumented people by the Justice Department (see, Supports Federal detention and incarceration programs [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fy2010\\_department\\_justice/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fy2010_department_justice/)). Additionally, DHS-ICE received an unprecedented amount of 1.7 billion dollars to detain migrant workers. According to the Detention Watch Network, more than 440,000 people found themselves in a detention center were there for immigration reasons at the end of 2009. Currently, the detention center industry consists of 400 installations and more than 30,000 persons detained for immigration reasons.

This industry, headed by the private sector company, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), has

enriched itself at the expense of those who do not have the imperialists' documentation to be within its borders. It is important to highlight that the majority of people who find themselves in detention centers are from those who have opted to present their case in front of an immigration judge and not necessarily because they were imprisoned for having committed a crime.

These "for-profit" detention centers have increasingly been sued for the lack of medical attention and for keeping detainees in deplorable and inhumane conditions. In August of 2009, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit against various detention centers that failed to report at least 10 deaths, adding to the total of 94 deaths that had occurred within these detention centers since 2003. This brutal reality shows how the detention center private industry, supported by the current Obama administration can totally ignore and cover-up the deaths of men and women without facing any consequences whatsoever.

Even worse, is to witness the crude manner in which entire families are detained in these concentration camps. The level of degradation and humiliation for families in addition to the psychological impact on the children that live under these conditions is simply a crime against humanity.

### **Beyond Immigration Reform: This is Our Land and This is Our Struggle!**

On December 15th, Congressman Luis Gutiérrez of Illinois and his counterpart, Congressman Solomon Ortiz of Texas, along with 92 endorsers, presented a legislative proposal entitled H.R. 4321- Comprehensive Immigration Reform for America's Security and Prosperity Act of 2009 (CIR ASAP 2009) which claims to reform immigration policy within the United States. Although, in comparison with the variety of proposals in recent history, this proposal is the least worse of the proposals, yet it does not represent the interests of working class Raza as it proposes to continue to militarize the border and obligates those seeking to regularize their status to accept a conviction for committing a crime (criminalizes workers). This proposal ultimately continues to promote the use of repression as a solution to the flow of immigration. This initiative proposes more border walls, more agents of repression, more detention centers, and more resources to continue harassing and profiting off the misery of migrant and immigrant workers.

We cannot expect any proposal (from either the Democrats or Republicans) to solve the problems of discrimination and social exclusion facing our people. Any reform proposed by either of these two parties will be for the benefit of the capitalist employers who rely on exploiting our labor in order to enrich themselves. That is why the government under the direction of Obama and the Democratic party have not only not moved on immigration reform, but have recently laid out a "Blue Print" that would implement an apartheid state that seeks to create a biometrics, National ID card; similar to that of apartheid South Africa (Azania), increased border militarization, hefty fines and impossible waits to regularize.

We recognize that the debate over Immigration Reform will continue to polarize North-American society, in which each party will use the issue of immigration to ensure their re-election during their campaigns for the 2010 electoral cycle. If the debate for Healthcare Reform is an indicator of the challenges of promoting a policy that recognizes the rights of Mexicans/Raza to obtain equal and inalienable rights, then, time has expired for Immigration Reform in 2010, and won't be a priority for any party. Even if the Democratic Party maintains a super-majority in Congress and in the White House, the issue will not turn out beneficial for Raza.

Our task, beyond convincing politicians allied with the financial oligarchy to agree to immigration reform, is to build a social movement capable of unifying progressive organizations, human-rights groups, labor

unions, non-profits, etc. to influence and push the debate to the political left and towards a class struggle for the full right to the basic needs our community deserve.

For the past 28 years, we have taken up the defensive battle for migrant/immigrant rights as a significant part of struggle against imperialism. This struggle for migrant/immigrant rights is a unifying issue for the Mexican/Raza communities across the United States (Occupied Territories of Mexico and Nuestra America); it is the struggle for our human right to exist and is in defense of the most elemental rights necessary to live a dignified life (housing, work, nutrition, health, education).

We do not expect imperialist forces to recognize our rights, knowing that it was the ideology of Manifest Destiny—that must justify itself through deception, lies and defamation and that labels the Mexican/Raza as illegals, foreigners, and immigrants—and which provoked the invasion of our lands and its usurpation.

It is precisely for this reason that our goal is to advance an independent struggle and channel it beyond immigration reform and toward one centered on class struggle. This, however, does not mean that we will stay out or step aside from the immigration reform debates. On the contrary, it means that in every step, we will be more fervent in the defense of our rights, and that we will expose whatever legislation which limits or negates the full enjoyment of our Human and Democratic rights as indigenous people to live with justice, equality, and dignity on our own land.

**Toward Working Class, Anti-Imperialist Unity!**

**We didn't Cross the Border, The Border Crossed Us!**