

PROFILE of The Week

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The US Deportation Industry

Families are separated without any pity. The parents are in Texas while the children are in New York, or elsewhere. Deportation is a million-dollar industry in the United States. A number of private contractors are rubbing their hands with anticipation at Donald Trump's immigration policy. The deporting of 12 million undocumented immigrants, and splitting of families, will make a number of businesses rich.

Obama said recently, 'It is the imagery of Trump's proposals that will hurt. The sight of children being wrenched away from parents is most troubling. It is un-American.' It is definitely contrary to the values of America and indeed to any decent society. But this 'wrenching' is exactly what is happening under Trump; people are deported for trivial reasons and families are split with little hope of being reunited.

Maria took her child to an immigration office in downtown Manhattan. She wanted to find out the progress of her application for naturalization. She was told to sit in a waiting room. In a few minutes the security guards appeared with guns drawn. Maria wondered what all the fuss was about. She was in for a shock as her child was taken from her. She was led in handcuffs to a waiting van that drove her to New Jersey. Her child was handed over to social workers and later that night Maria was led in chains to a plane bound for Ecuador. She soon found that she was not alone. The plane was packed to capacity with people that were also being deported. This occurred in 2012 under the watch of Barack Obama.

Maria is just one person in a statistic that has grown to 34,000 a day. This is the detention quota that the US has to meet by law. What this means is that persons with minor offences could be detained and deported. The United States spends over \$2 billion annually to detain the undocumented. A

2006 Federal Law states that the US 'must detain a minimum of 34,000 undocumented immigrants every single day.' In the last five years the number of persons that have been detained has doubled. The figure stands at about 400,000 a year and in the 2016 fiscal year this number could be greater.

As can be expected these detentions have caused great stress. The separation of families has continued unabated despite the rhetoric of the Obama administration. The Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has defended the detentions as being 'selective' and taken out of context. What it does not say is the detention facilities are in remote areas and families have to travel far distances to meet their loved ones. Once they arrive at these centers relatives could be in for a shock.

They quickly find out that the centers operate like jails. The detainees are put in cells that have hardened criminals and their hands and feet are chained. There is nothing humane about the treatment and there are many stories of woe and hardships that were experienced by those that simply overstayed their visas.

If detention and deportation is an industry who benefits and how? One example of profit at the expense of suffering occurs at the borders. The beneficiary of the surveillance systems is Israel who has manufactured 'Elbit' to provide the technology along the divide with Mexico. The cost of the Elbit technology is around \$145 million but this could be increased to \$1 billion if legislation 'to rewrite US immigration laws passes Congress and helps fund the project's expansion in the Southwest.'

Those that are involved in the business of

detention argue that the numbers have to be seen in context. A spokesperson for ICE says that only 1.7 per cent of its caseload is in detention centers so this is a relatively small number and that it comprises 'a select group of people.' There is no doubt that this select group of people will have harrowing stories to tell the world.

Here is an example that shows how the 'select group' is affecting the lo-



A Border Patrol officer watches illegal immigrants in a holding facility.

cal community: The BBC in one of its investigative reports shows the disparity of the detention system and the hardships that ICE has placed on families.

The neighborhood of Lumpkin in Georgia has a population of 1,097 but the undocumented population held in detention by ICE is 1,365. There are more persons in detention than there are residents in the neighborhood.

Families from faraway as New York, and elsewhere, have to travel to Lumpkin, and other remote areas, to visit their loved ones in detention. These long journeys are not only expensive but can cause great inconvenience. When one considers that most of the families are in dire financial circumstances ICE is doing no one any favors. Since the conditions are prison-like many fami-

lies choose not to take the children to the detention centers.

The hardships on families and the detainees are woven into the economics of detention. For example, about 66 percent of those that are detained are held in private centers that are in contract with the government. In addition, the government pays the contractors involved \$120 per night for every detainee. This means that the government pays over \$4 million each night to private companies. This amounts to hundreds of millions each year. Detention then is big business. The more people are detained the greater the profits and local districts are known to lobby their elected representatives to have inmates located in their jurisdictions.

struction, manufacturing, toiling in sweatshops and in agriculture. Those who argue in favor of deportation say that the condition of the locals would get better since employers would be forced to hire from a pool of legal residents. But those that oppose this argument say that the loss of the undocumented would prevent the economy from growing since they do many of the jobs that no one else wants.

Is there a big impact on wages due to illegal immigration? Although it depends on the work that one does it is argued that overall, 'illegal immigrants don't have a big impact on US wage rates. Americans would notice little difference in their paychecks if illegal immigrants suddenly dis-

reduces wages and not their legal status.' The study further states that on an average, 'America's wealth is increased by 1 per cent because of illegal immigration.'

The White House says that by 2023 the US economy will lose \$80 billion if there is no pathway to citizenship. There will be a loss of around \$50 billion to the Social Security Trust Fund. The Center for American Progress says that if the undocumented were provided legal status 'the 10-year cumulative increase in the GDP would be \$832 billion while the cumulative increase in the personal income of all Americans would be \$470 billion.' There is economic value in regularizing the status of the undocumented whether it is in picking tomatoes or working in high-tech industries.

Donald Trump has stated that he would like to deport 'every single immigrant.' Is this realistic? It will cost around \$10,000 to deport each migrant and this would amount to \$114 billion and rounding up all migrants would take 20 years. In the meantime the economy will shrink by \$1.6 trillion. Americans will have to get accustomed to busloads crossing into Mexico each day. This does not take into account the extensive roots that migrants have established in America. But would Americans turn a blind eye to these mass deportations? There would be demonstrations and civil unrest could follow in this age of social media.

A sensible strategy would be to regularize the status of the law-abiding illegals. This may involve paying a fine and waiting in line.

The legalization industry stands to gain more than in deporting people that brought their labor and innovation to America.

According to one official the detainees provide jobs to the local community. In Ocilia, Georgia the detainee population has provided over 200 jobs to the local community. A restaurant owner says, 'I feed a lot of people from all over the county. Those that visit their relatives spend about five to six hundred dollars a week in my little store.' Clearly, there is money to be made in the plight of the detainees. In 2003, President Obama wanted Congress to reduce the number of detainees to 30, 500 but he was unsuccessful.

Any discussion of the deportation industry ought to take into account illegal immigration and its relationship to the economy.

The 12 million undocumented people are employed in a number of jobs that range from con-

appeared from the United States.' The reason is that most Americans do not compete directly with illegal immigrants for jobs. However, the dropouts from high school would be competing for low skilled jobs with illegal immigrants and they stand to gain by about \$25 per week if there were no job competition.

It is a fact that illegals are used in many industries but economists argue that earnings by illegals have a minimal impact on overall wages. One reason for this is that people are not willing to move to the big cities where there are large numbers of immigrants. A Harvard study concludes that, 'the reduction in earnings occurs regardless of whether the immigrants are legal or illegal, permanent or temporary as it the presence of additional workers that