

# United States: Faced to Trump's New Immigration Cruelty, Outrage Turns the Tide Against the Kidnappers

Thursday 21 June 2018, by [MAASS Alan](#) (Date first published: 21 June 2018).

**Alan Maass reports on the demonstrations that pressured the Trump White House into a retreat — with accounts of local protests from Hector A. Rivera, Jesse Joseph, Karl Schwartz and Robin Gee.**

PROTESTS ERUPTED in cities, towns and beyond against the Trump administration's inhuman family separation policy, giving expression to even wider outrage — and forcing a president who never backs down to do just that.

On Wednesday morning — one day after Trump told members of Congress that they, not he, had to “fix” the separations, and four days after he insisted that “you can't do it through an executive order” [1] — Trump signed an executive order that the White House claims will keep families detained at the border together.

Immigrants and advocates for social justice immediately raised questions about the order. It calls for families to be detained together indefinitely, even though a court ruling limits the detention of children, whether accompanied or not, to 20 days.

And as Montanans for Immigrant Justice and Missoula Rises pointed out in a statement, the administration says it will continue charging parents with a criminal offense, so they will inevitably be separated from their children when they are taken to court.

The protests can't stop. Trump has been forced to retreat for one of the very first times, but there is much more to fight for.

In announcing that a day of mass mobilizations called for June 30 was still on [2], Anna Galland of MoveOn wrote on Twitter [3]: “Trump's shift — thanks to public outrage — means kids and babies will still be in jail. This isn't a fix; it's making baby jails permanent. Reunite the families. End baby jails. Work for freedom.”

The Trump regime may hope his executive order stems the tide of outrage, but it won't — and not only because no one will trust to the White House to do the right thing.

The images and stories of children ripped away from their families have exposed the cruelty inflicted on migrants of all ages in the name of “law and order” and “American values.”

Masses of people now know, if they didn't already, the barbaric truth about U.S. immigration “policy.” Hopefully, that can open the way to building a bigger and bolder struggle to win justice for all immigrants.

**IN HIS White House photo op** signing the executive order, Trump was flanked by Vice President Mike Pence and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen — which was fitting, because both had been embarrassed by protests.

The night before, Nielsen was driven out of a trendy Washington, D.C., restaurant — specializing in Mexican food, no less — after being confronted by demonstrators [\[4\]](#), including members of the Democratic Socialists of America.

Along with chants of “Shame!” Nielsen was forced to listen to Pro-Publica’s gut-wrenching recordings of terrified children crying in a Texas detention center. When other customers learned what the protest was about, they applauded the demonstrators.

A few hours earlier, Pence was hounded by between 2,000 and 3,000 protesters when he showed up in Philadelphia for a fundraiser for the Republican candidate for governor, Scott Wagner — who has made Trump-like fabrications about “voting by non-citizens” a centerpiece of his campaign [\[5\]](#).

As the crowd swelled, protesters piled dozens of shoes in the square across from the Rittenhouse Hotel to symbolize the more than 2,000 children separated from their parents [\[6\]](#). The protest soon spilled out onto the streets around the square, before turning into an impromptu march that wound its way to City Hall.

That morning, Pence was met by some 300 protesters at a fundraiser in Syracuse, New York [\[7\]](#). Organizers said the number of people promising to attend went from dozens to hundreds in a matter of hours the day before.

Demonstrations surged around the country throughout this week and last, some of which are reported on below. Some were organized by established immigrant rights organizations, but others were initiated on the internet by people who simply felt they had to do something.

Micaela Eller, who lives in Austin, Texas, told the *New York Times* that she responded to a national call to action by organizing a June 14 protest through Facebook [\[8\]](#). After reading the gut-wrenching posts about detainees on social media, Eller said she decided that “I wanted to make sure that my voice was among the loudest voices saying this is not okay, and this is not who we are as a country.”

**AND PROTESTS aren’t the only way** that people outraged by the treatment of immigrants are trying to take a stand.

In a Facebook post that went viral, flight attendant Hunt Palmquist described working two flights on which migrant children between the ages of 4 and 11, accompanied by ICE agents, were being transported to a “relocation” facility [\[9\]](#). Palmquist wrote:

*"As a result of what I witnessed, I have made a decision that if I'm ever assigned to a flight with children who've been separated from their families, I will immediately remove myself from the trip due to the nature of this unconscionable act by my government and my employer's complicity.*

I have told my story to many of my flight attendant colleagues and they have pledged to do the same...I will no longer be complicit and will walk away from any future flight assignments that try to make me a pawn for this disgusting and deplorable cause."

Several airlines have since released statements following the lead of employees like Palmquist and vowing not to fly children separated from their parents by the Trump administration [\[10\]](#).

The same sentiment was heard at Microsoft, where more than 100 employees posted an open letter

on an internal message board calling on the company to cancel contracts and arrangements with ICE [\[11\]](#).

All this is a sign that we may be witnessing a turning point in the character of the opposition to the U.S. government's ugly policies victimizing immigrants.

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## Los Angeles

On June 14, at least 3,000 people — three times the number who had RSVP'd on Facebook — turned out to MacArthur Park for a #FamiliesBelongTogether demonstration called by the citywide coalition March and Rally Los Angeles.

The rally featured speakers from local organizations as well as NGOs. Speakers included Kenneth Mejia, a young Filipino-American running for Congress under the Green Party ticket, as well as a speaker from AF3RM, a transnational feminist organization of women of color, who gave a moving and impassioned speech about her family's experience with migration and deportation.

The speaker from the ACLU got cheers from the crowd when he announced that the organization was suing the Trump administration to stop family separations at the border. A representative of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles emphasized the need to pressure state politicians to stand up to the Trump administration.

One theme from most speakers was to "vote for the right people" in November. None of the speakers criticized the Democrats or their complicit role in enforcing militarization at the border — especially in California, where the Democratic governor complied with the Trump administration and sent the National Guard to the border.

As the march left MacArthur Park, it passed through a Central American neighborhood and was well-received by onlookers and drivers honking their horns in support. Chants of "Say it loud, say it clear, immigrants are welcome here!" and "Trump says go back, we say fight back!" were crowd favorites.

Some of the marchers were teachers from Los Angeles public schools, according to a *New York Times* report [\[12\]](#). Elizabeth Kenoff described seeing the effect of deportations on her special education students: "They can't focus on school or the future if we just take out the welcome mat."

As the march snaked its way toward downtown, it grew to 5,000 people. The demonstration stopped in front of the Metropolitan Detention Center of Los Angeles, an Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility. From the small slivers of windows, cell phones could be seen flashing, and loud bangs on the windows could be heard several stories down on the street.

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## Portland, Oregon

Protesters have kept a regional ICE office in Portland blockaded since the start of the week, and Trump's executive order won't stop activists from taking their stand [\[13\]](#).

The protest, dubbed as Occupy ICE PDX, began outside the building, which is used for temporary detention among other functions, on Sunday and has grown through the week, with hundreds of people jamming the space at times. Dozens spend the night in tents.

The vigil forced ICE to keep the building closed on Wednesday because of “security concerns,” and police were reportedly called the night before to escort employees from the building.

On Monday, according to left-wing journalist Arun Gupta, when cars with darkened windows attempted to drive out of the building’s garage, the growing crowd of protesters formed a line and locked arms. The vehicles were turned back.

Gupta reported that Department of Homeland Security police tried to persuade protesters to allow ICE employees to leave the building — to “go home to their families,” the agents said, apparently not recognizing the irony of their statement — but the activists refused to allow vehicles to leave.

As the week went on, the vigil received deliveries of pizza and groceries, along with more volunteers. Cars passing by honk in support, and a local ice cream truck arrived with free sweets — and blocked the driveway to the ICE facility for good measure.

Portland is supposed to be a sanctuary city, and Mayor Ted Wheeler said at a City Council meeting that ICE shouldn’t expect assistance “from this mayor.” But that doesn’t explain why the city has allowed this facility to go on operating — routinely detaining asylum-seekers, no less.

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## **Elizabeth, New Jersey**

Some 300 people more turned out to the Father’s Day rally outside of the Elizabeth Detention Center — one of several ICE facilities in New Jersey — in by far the largest of a series of actions.

This rally showed how the issue of family separations and child prison camps is hitting at people’s hearts.

Most of those in attendance seemed to be families with young children who wanted to express solidarity for the fathers who could not be with their children. Organizations such as the Democratic Socialists of America, Cosecha and others were a smaller part of the crowd than usual.

A large number of religious leaders and church, temple and mosque organizations were present. Many speakers emphasized the importance of voting for Democrats in November. Most signs and chants focused on the theme of keeping families together, but the slogans “Abolish ICE” and “Shut it down” were popular.

Several faith leaders challenged Jeff Sessions for quoting the Bible to justify child separation and pointed out that this has been a policy in the U.S. going back to the time of slavery and the Indigenous genocide.

The most powerful speeches were from families of undocumented people being held in the facility and from victims of the deportation machine.

A 17-year-old who was the only U.S.-born member of his family talked about moving to Guatemala because his entire family had been deported. As a teenager, he was the victim of attempted murder,

and his parents found someone for him to stay with in the U.S. — but it is now almost impossible for him to see his family.

Several young children attempted to talk, but mostly cried as they shared what it was like to be separated from their families.

There were so many people in front of the entrance to the detention center that the police set up barricades so cars and trucks could enter. We had more than enough people to block the entrance and make it impossible for guards to come in and out. This showed the potential for mass civil disobedience to take place at these concentration camps.

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### **Northern Kentucky/Southern Ohio**

More than 300 people from both sides of the Ohio River joined together with others across the country on June 14 to declare #FamiliesBelongTogether.

Called by Kentucky Indivisible, activists from immigrant rights, social justice and peace groups came from Kentucky and Ohio to meet on the Roebling Bridge for a demonstration during the busy drive time.

Met by enthusiastic honks from motorists headed both ways on the area's busiest connection, this isn't the first time activists have joined hands symbolically across the bridge for human rights issues, but it was one of the largest gatherings on the bridge to date.

Sheila Williams of Florence, Kentucky, said this was her first march, but likely not her last. "I was sick to my stomach over all of this," Williams said. "I've been calling, I've been doing my e-mails and faxes, and I just felt like I had to do more. I'm a mom of six, and I just can't imagine."

For those who have been active in supporting immigrant families in the community, the event helped shine a light on the issue. Sister Joyce Moeller has been organizing in support of immigrants and their families. "The image of our country is how unwelcoming we are, how hard hearted we are, and yet we are a nation of immigrants," Moeller said.

Moeller pointed out that much of the violence and corruption that uproots people and forces them to seek refuge in the U.S. is rooted in the policies and actions of the U.S. government.

"The people coming from Central America are fleeing violent situations, gang violence and poverty, uprising and corrupt governments," she said. "And our government has been complicit in some of that activity. We've supported corrupt regimes in Central America and that helped plant the seeds of the problems we see today."

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**P.S.**

\* Socialist Worker, June 21, 2018:

## Footnotes

- [1] <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/trump-says-he-ll-sign-order-stopping-separation-families-border-n885061>
- [2] <https://www.familiesbelongtogether.org>
- [3] <https://twitter.com/annagalland/status/1009484285437448192>
- [4] <https://nypost.com/2018/06/19/protesters-chase-homeland-security-secretary-from-mexican-restaurant/>
- [5] <http://www.phillyvoice.com/pence-in-philly-hundreds-protest-march-rittenhouse/>
- [6] <https://www.phillymag.com/news/2018/06/20/pence-rittenhouse-protest/>
- [7] [https://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2018/06/hundreds\\_of\\_protesters\\_await\\_vp\\_pences\\_arrival\\_at\\_syracuse\\_fundraiser.html](https://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2018/06/hundreds_of_protesters_await_vp_pences_arrival_at_syracuse_fundraiser.html)
- [8] <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/us/protest-marches-family-separation.html>
- [9] <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/gray-matters/article/Flight-attendant-I-won-t-work-flights-that-13008372.php>
- [10] <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/live/2018/jun/20/tender-age-trump-children-separation-detention-shelters-latest-news-updates-live>
- [11] <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/19/technology/tech-companies-immigration-border.html>
- [12] <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/14/us/protest-marches-family-separation.html>
- [13] <https://www.portlandmercury.com/blogtown/2018/06/20/20732211/trumps-order-to-end-family-separation-wont-end-portland-ice-protest>