

# Trump's Threat to Farmworkers

The Age of Trump is an unsettling time for undocumented farmworkers whose labor has helped make California's "wine country" rich but are now facing threats of draconian arrests and deportations, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

There is a growing grassroots movement for humane immigration reform. And now those forces that had organized to pressure Barack Obama over the last eight years are turning their attentions to Donald Trump.

I spoke with Jesus Guzman, the Director of the Graton Day Labor Center, one of the original dreamers who went to Washington and stood by Obama when the President signed an executive order giving temporary protections to undocumented students. The program is now in grave danger of being dropped by Trump, who has promised to be tough on the undocumented.

I spoke to Guzman, an honor student at the University of California at Berkeley, at the Graton Day Labor Center, about 60 miles north of San Francisco. Some call the region wine country because the lands are rolling with colorful and scenic vineyards. But others call it farmworker country because undocumented farmworkers – who do the bulk of the work, the hardest kind of work and get paid the least for it – are the secret to the agricultural industry that is making the City of Santa Rosa and the surrounding area rich.

Dennis Bernstein: Why don't you begin by just saying a little bit about your thoughts as we move into the age of Trump? What's going on in your mind, in your family? How is it... just in the macro, how is it affecting your life?

Jesus Guzman: Hi Dennis, thank you for having me on again. I think my reaction, and the reaction that a lot of the workers have been sharing—and really an opportunity that we had [on January 10th] to share—was that very question, of what are we expecting in a Trump administration? And I think we've really had some very sobering discussions over the last few weeks since the election, about what's possible. And there's a real difference between what's possible, and probable.

But, I think many of the workers—day laborers, domestic workers, farm workers, my family included—are looking at this incoming administration and realizing there's a lot to draw on from Arizona with SB 1070, with California Prop. 187... And that is to say that ... we've been fighting anti-immigrant policies for a long time.

There's some very real threats that we face, and so I think our reaction has been to draw on our experiences of the past, on those battles that we've had, and looking at some opportunities for us to be better organized, and better prepared to weather the storm that is to come.

DB: And let me just ask you something about the confirmation hearings [that] have begun for Jefferson Beauregard Sessions III, to be the next attorney general, the highest law enforcement officer in the land. This man has never found a civil right that he loves. He has spent a lifetime persecuting black people, as a U.S. attorney in Alabama.

[Black] people would have their churches burned down, and his people would show up and be there to "investigate" one, why they burned down their own churches, and were they in a conspiracy for voter fraud. So, I'm wondering if you're thinking about this at that level.

JG: Yeah. Absolutely. It seems very apropos that [on January 10th] the workers made their statement of intent, in terms of how we'll be organizing and what are some of the different strategies that we'll be deploying in the days to come. That it comes on the same day as the confirmation hearings of Senator Jeff Sessions... some of the concerns that we have about him ... as attorney general, really come down in terms of enforcement of day labor centers, worker centers, immigrant rights organizations. But specifically workers centers and day laborers centers have really been targeted by anti-immigrant groups. One example, again in Arizona SB 1070, the fifth section of that bill explicitly calls out day laborers, and makes it illegal the hiring of workers on the corner, out on street corners.

So, we've, for a long time, had a target on our back by various immigrant groups. Day laborers are some of the most visible immigrants, and we can't... as Pablo Alvarado, Executive Director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, has said, day laborers are in public, by definition. We can't hide in the shadow. You can't hide. We're in the public, standing, looking for work. And so ...because of that, we're very concerned about what an Attorney General Jeff Sessions might do... to come down on workers centers, on street corners... and that type of enforcement.

DB: Now, you had a meeting [at Graton Day Labor Center on January 10th], a very important meeting. Tell us a little bit about who was at the meeting, and some of the highlights, what did you find moving?

JG: Well, the workers have been having these internal discussions since the election, to really get a sense of... well, several things. One, to have a chance to air their concerns, their fears, and what's to come in a Trump

administration, but also a chance to get our bearings, to organize. So then for today [to] have a chance to put out a statement on some different areas that the workers are wanting to mobilize and organize around and use that as an opportunity to invite allies, and community members and local elected officials to join us in those efforts.

And some of those [concerns] that the workers shared were around ... whether it's sanctuary policies locally, that make sure that there isn't cooperation between ICE [Immigration and Custom Enforcement] and the use of any city services or resources, towards that end. And really looking, on a state level, at something like the Values Act [SB54, California Values Act] that ... Kevin de León [Senate President Pro-Tempore of California] is moving. I think there are some real opportunities, both locally and statewide, to make sure that our government here, state and locally, that there's no resources, no services that go towards the end of persecuting our own communities.

And, beyond that, as well, I think the workers are organizing through neighborhood defense committees, to move legal funds... whether it's from foundations or from public financing, to make sure that the very tax payer money that our membership, and the immigrant community, puts into the local economy, also comes back in these funds to help defend the very people that support these city services.

So, there's a number of different areas that we want to focus on. And we've put that invitation out to the rest of the community, to join us, towards those ends.

DB: And here is where California leads the way, if you will, lives on the cutting edge, sets the example, for the rest of the country. Wouldn't you say that the movement, what happened [on January 10th], in Graton at the Day Labor Center there, is a part of a statewide movement, essentially to face off with Trump and the Washington crew, and to take them on, set the standard?

JG: Yeah, so California for a number of years has looked very different from what Pete Wilson's California looked like in the early 90's. We look back at California, Prop. 187 in '94, and that California looked very different from the California we've really helped shift and shape, in these last few years. Things like the Trust Act, and recently the Truth Act, really have gone a long way to making sure that we curb the cooperation between the local law enforcement and immigration officials.

We don't want our local law enforcement to be deputized and do the work of immigration officials. We don't want to facilitate that in any way. And, instead, what we're ... trying to make sure is that our local law enforcement has

in no way any type of cooperation, that city services don't go... that there isn't a sharing of information towards helping immigration officials.

And that's a far cry from where California used to be. And California is really leading the way in the immigrants' rights struggle, but there's still a lot of work to do. And that's what the workers here at the Graton Day Labor Center, and workers really across the state, are hoping to move forward.

DB: Now, there's a lot of fear here, though, based on the declarations of Trump and the fact that we have such an extreme right-winger who will probably be confirmed as Attorney General, who continues to repeat the biggest lie of all, that [immigrants] take American's jobs. So the battle continues.

... [Sessions] said that again [on January 10th] at the hearings, with all the smart senators, and all the intelligent people, and all their aides [present]. And there wasn't one scintilla of opposition essentially to that big lie, that you're taking all the jobs. Can you hit that for a moment?

JG: Dennis, I think that's been regularly debunked. The administration continues to put forward comments, and ideas and suggestions that are pretty far on the margins. But they continue to try to bring them forward. The workers here at the labor center and right across the state, know that they contribute to the economy.

But beyond just what they contribute to the economy, we don't want to just frame immigrants as being good for the economy. We know that immigrants are already a significant and important part of our economy, but they're not just economically important. I mean, just on a human level, on a ... basic human decency and dignity level, some of these policies that we're concerned about from the administration really violates just basic human decency, in the way that they propose to treat people.

Beyond just the economic impact the workers have—that's important, we should always acknowledge it, and we know that immigrants do work that is important to the state and to the country—but beyond that alone, it really is a matter of treating people with decency and dignity and fairly. So, that's really at the heart of what we're trying to drive forward, is that narrative of really having those values at the forefront.

DB: And ... Jeff Sessions, was the former attorney general, U.S. attorney in Alabama, he's a senator from Alabama. How have immigrants, undocumented workers done in Alabama? How have they been treated there?

JG: Well, Alabama is a state that really looked at Arizona to copycat SB 1070. And, it's also a state where there are immigrants that are, and have been,

standing up to these anti-immigrant policies. NDLO, the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, has been organizing there. Other immigrants' rights groups have been organizing there. So there is an active resistance happening in Alabama.

Some folks maybe in the country may not be aware that there is a strong immigrant community in communities across that state. It's important to acknowledge their work. And that we're all really trying to do what we can within our own communities and in solidarity across the country. But Alabama is a state that has some very strong anti-immigrant policies that have looked to Arizona to duplicate. And we're in solidarity with the workers and the immigrant communities that are in Alabama, in that resistance against those policies.

[...]

DB: I see. Alright, and finally, again, at the meeting it was, I guess, a strategy session, a declaration of resistance. There's a lot to be thinking about. Are you worried? Are there strategies for people to protect themselves? ... We know that Obama earned the title of Deporter-in-Chief. Are there strategies in place? Are you all preparing for what could be a very, very difficult time?

JG: Yeah, so beyond just policies that can be enacted, I mean, a lot of what we'll be doing is organizing in such a way that we're flexible, as an organization. That we're responsive to actions that come from the administration, and that means really having, kind of, contingency plans so that if something were to come down, we can mobilize quickly, we can respond, we can be flexible.

And starting to prepare individually. Now this isn't to be an alarmist but when there's a storm coming we have to do what we can to make sure that we sandbag and that we really create plans so that we're ready for those. And what that means to a large extent is individually preparing with families about what kind of... who their attorney would be, saving the [money] ... just all the measures that families would need in case of a worst case scenario. If somebody is detained, what happens? So these are really difficult questions to ask but, again, we've had to start taking a very sobering look at this new reality, and what's to come.

And these are really important questions we have to ask ourselves and prepare our families for those situations. And really wanting to have all the resources available that a community can afford, to make sure that we have the maximum protection that we can, for our families.

DB: ... It's flooding where you are in Graton, in the area, in Santa Rosa. There's

all kinds of river floods. I imagine there's been some hiring going on for people who need help?

JG: Yeah. I guess metaphorically and literally speaking. ... We have actually been experiencing pretty heavy rain and storms have been coming in these last few days. And then metaphorically speaking, just the Trump administration as a storm itself. There's a lot of preparation in trying to weather some of these hard times.

DB: I want to thank you so much, Jesus Guzman. [...]

**Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.**

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