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<https://jungle.world/artikel/2018/26/when-there-detention-facility-babies-then-there-something-wrong-your-country>

Robert Jay, Occupy ICE Detroit

»When there is detention facility for babies then there is something wrong with your country«

Interview Von **Carl Melchers**

Als Reaktion auf die brutale neue Einwanderungspolitik der Trump-Regierung haben Anfang der Woche mehr als ein Dutzend Demonstranten vor dem Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Detroit, Michigan, ein Protestcamp errichtet. Robert Jay erzählt im Gespräch, was gerade dort passiert und welche Ziele der Protest hat. Das Interview ist in englischer Sprache verfasst.

As a reaction to the brutal new immigration policies of the Trump administration, more than a dozen protesters have set up camp outside of the field office of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Detroit, in the US state of Michigan.

Jay, when did "Occupy ICE" start in Detroit?

ICE has been something that many people have been railing against in activist circles. Even before Trump, during the Bush and Obama administrations. There has always been a level of resentment against an organization that seems to do all it can to persecute people seeking asylum or just looking for a better life in America. But it really came to a head, when we learned about the full extent of Trump's family separation policy. We were involved in the national Families Belong Together Movement, which kicked off June 14 and which will be continuing again June 30 in local communities as well as an action in Washington D.C. on the June 28. The Occupy ICE movement was inspired specifically by what happened in Portland that forced ICE to temporarily shut down its office there. As of Saturday, Occupy protests were also being held in New York, L.A., and Washington state. As organizers, we feel this is the exact moment for direct action, where we attempt to blockade and prevent any kind of genocidal actions from occurring in ICE field offices – and hopefully soon against detention centers, too. The place that we are trying to block off

and prevent access to is the Detroit ICE Field Office, which is actually one of the places where the fate of immigrants is decided. Many people will come in for an appointment check in and they won't check out. They will be taken away. It will be the last time that they will put foot on American soil.

What difference do you see between US immigration under Trump and under Obama?

When comparing the activities of ICE and Border Patrol under Obama and under Trump, there is a certain revelry they take in cruelty. Now there was cruelty perpetrated under Obama, but under the Trump regime, instead of just holding unaccompanied children in detention centers, you would have a zero tolerance policy of families coming together being forcefully separated at the border. When there is detention facility for babies then there is something wrong with your country.

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Just what is the role of the field office in Detroit and how does it act towards local communities in the city?

Detroit is classified as a sanctuary city, which makes it Mayor Mike Duggan's constitutional duty to refuse to cooperate and to refuse to take direction from ICE. We are supposed to be a city that is friendly trying to come to this country. Currently our mayor, and also representatives in the state of Michigan are going right along with this very blatant racial policy being carried out by branches of our government.

Is the Detroit field office for all of the state of Michigan?

That is the nerve center for all ICE operations in Michigan. The ICE regional director works there along with a number of special agents and support staff.

Does ICE particularly target Detroit for being a sanctuary city?

Trump, his cronies, ICE, and Border Patrol have nothing but contempt for sanctuary city status. They are a federal entity, which gives them the ability to trump local entities like the Detroit police department. However with the status as sanctuary city, which is one of those checks against federal power, it allows local municipalities to refuse to have these kinds of actions where you are separating children from their families. Your locking them in dog kennels, you are feeding them substandard food. There may be physical or psychological torture. It is not something you would consider any moral, ethical or reasonable society to tolerate. For some reason Mike Duggan doesn't seem to think that's important.

So what kind of direct action have you been doing?

The location that we are protesting is on Jefferson Avenue and Mt. Elliot Street on the East Side of Detroit. We made our first attempt at a blockade Monday morning. Intelligence has given us reports that ICE officers are on sort of a flexible schedule where they can come in and leave at their leisure. We found that the earliest time people would come in was roughly 5 a.m. We knew we had an early start ahead of us.

What happened then?

We blockaded each of the gates that ICE personnel and vehicles could go to. There are three gates, two on Mt. Elliot, one on Jefferson. We had people there, worked in teams, and had a communications strategy to make sure that we were always on top of their movement. From 5 a.m. to 11 a.m., we successfully blockaded any ICE agent from entering the building. We also noticed that we were shutting down immigration check-ins where people can be deported immediately. Because of our actions they had to cancel all those appointments. We were speaking with a family, and the mother was in danger of being deported.

Had she gone into that appointment, it might have been the last time she would have been in the United States with her family. We also found that there was a sheriff's office in a town roughly an hour's drive from Detroit, and this office decided to drive someone all the way down to Detroit to get processed by ICE. Thanks to our efforts at blockading they had to turn around and go back.

Is your blockade still ongoing?

Unfortunately after 11 a.m. a Detroit police department captain had ordered the protesters to get rid of their camp and then he brought in dump trucks along side Jefferson so that all of our possessions would be taken and thrown into those dump trucks unless we strike camp and leave, because we were on private property.

Are you planning on renewing your blockade?

Absolutely. There's lots of tactical experience that we've taken out of our first attempt of a blockade. We are going to modify our plan, but this is absolutely not the last day of the movement.

What are your political demands?

The short-term goal is to cut off the head of ICE operations in Michigan and remove the agents' ability to conduct their affairs outside of that building. We want to effectively shut that building down. For six hours today we were very successful, and we hope to continue that throughout the week. But we have more long term goals: The most important one is that we want to make sure that all families that were separated as a result of Trump's policy – and Trump's executive order still very much separates families – we want them to be reunited. But more than that we want some sort of reparations paid to them for suffering a human rights atrocity. Something like full citizenship, something that shows that this country recognizes what a horrific misdeed was done to these people. We also want to make sure that there are consequences for horrific actions. Ultimately, ICE must be abolished.

What feedback have you received so far?

Lets just look at the community level, the East Side of Detroit. I cannot say that I have ever felt more welcomed by a community than during our protest. Jefferson is a major road in Detroit with six and sometimes even seven lanes. It's ridiculously wide. We had everyone honking their car horns, shouting support for us, and shouting vulgar insults against Trump or ICE. We get to interact with community members directly because we have an encampment alongside a major road with sidewalk access, so we get to talk to

the people that live in the East Side. We get understand their concerns and their fears in addition to being in an action that can reduce the harm created by ICE.