OPPOSE THE DEPORTATION OF UAW MEMBER KENNEDY ORWA!



BY WILL LEHMAN
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As a candidate for UAW president, I condemn the deportation of University of Washington graduate student worker and UAW member Kennedy Orwa and his 13-year-old son through Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. I call on all UAW members—in auto plants, parts plants, and on campuses—to mobilize in opposition to this assault on immigrant workers and democratic rights.

According to UAW 4121, Orwa, who is a PhD student in the University of Washington's Information School, was detained at the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Tuesday night. Union officials said his student visa was rescinded without explanation and that by the next day he was being deported, prompting an emergency protest at the airport in an effort to stop it. Protesters held signs demanding his return and were met with a police dispersal order and threats of arrest.

Customs and Border Protection later claimed Orwa and his son arrived on April 7, applied for admission, then "withdrew their application" after Orwa disclosed information about "previously working without work authorization," and that they departed on April 8. When a government can detain a worker at an airport, revoke a visa, deport a parent and child within hours, and disperse protests with threats of force, it is sending a message: immigrants live at the mercy of the state, and any attempt to resist will be met with repression.

The UAW International and President Shawn Fain have issued not a word to defend Orwa, oppose the deportation, or mobilize the membership against this assault on immigrant workers. Their refusal to speak out is bound up with their accommodation to Trump and his economic nationalist agenda, an agenda that scapegoats immigrants and pits worker against worker to serve the corporations.

Federal agents in Washington state have made at least 745 immigration arrests so far in 2026. This escalation is part of Trump's broader assault on immigrants nationwide, including raids, detentions, visa cancellations and deportations, bound up with the turn toward dictatorship and the expansion of executive power, the criminalization of dissent, and the whipping up of xenophobia to justify state violence.

In Minneapolis, this has taken an especially brutal form, including paramilitary-style operations and murders of Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, a nurse and member of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Local 3669. The apparatus of the AFL-CIO sabotaged a movement for a general strike, and the UAW has blocked any organized opposition to the ICE rampage.

Immigrant workers are not our enemies. They are our coworkers, neighbors, and fellow workers. They are people driven across borders by war, exploitation, and social devastation, all of it produced under both Democrat and Republican administrations. The persecution of immigrants is a warning to every worker: the same state powers being tested against the most vulnerable will be used against all workers as the class struggle intensifies.

The defense of immigrant workers is inseparable from the fight for the social rights of the entire working class: the right to a job, to healthcare, to housing, to education, and to live free from fear of

state violence. The ruling class insists there is “no money” for these necessities, while pouring trillions into war and repression.

The answer is international working-class unity. The corporations operate globally. They shift production across borders and rely on nationalist poison to pit American workers against workers in Mexico, Canada, Asia, Africa and Europe. Workers must adopt the opposite standpoint: the unity of the working class across all borders. An injury to one is an injury to all!

I call on workers, students and educators at the University of Washington, and all workers in the UAW and beyond, to oppose the deportation of Kennedy Orwa and his son. My campaign calls for the formation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces and campuses to cut across the isolation imposed by the bureaucracy, linking immigrants and U.S.-born workers and united action against raids, deportations and all forms of repression.

JOIN THE FIGHT FOR WORKERS’ POWER!

Get involved with the rank-and-file campaign in the UAW elections.

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