

Obama heckled during speech on immigration

Jake Dean
28 November 2013

A protester interrupted President Obama's speech on immigration at the Betty Ann Ong Chinese Recreation Center in San Francisco on Monday. The man, identified as Ju Hong, shouted that his family has been separated for 19 months and declared that Obama has the "power to stop deportation for all undocumented immigrants in this country." Other members of the audience briefly joined Hong's protest by chanting, "Stop deportations!"

The president's speech was in support of a bill that has already been passed in the Senate, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Act of 2013. The thoroughly right-wing measure appropriates \$46 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement to further militarize the entire US-Mexico border zone. It provides funds to employ 20,000 new border patrol agents, doubling the total to 40,000, to create 700 miles of new fencing, and to employ drones.

Conservatives in the House are blocking the bill based on its "pathway to citizenship" component. Though presented by the Democrats as a progressive measure, this aspect of the bill is also reactionary and undemocratic. The "pathway" establishes a 10-year process during which prospective citizens are subjected to a registration, forced to pay multiple fines, and are prevented from having access to any federal or welfare benefits. In essence, the bill would create a separate caste of workers with severely limited legal rights to the benefit of potential employers. The bill is to be brought back up to the House floor at the beginning of next year.

Although the president has been heckled multiple times in the past, the outburst of opposition from a group of handpicked supporters is an indication of how deep going is the erosion of support for the administration.

According to a poll done by Quinnipiac University, released November 12, Obama's job approval rates are

at the lowest point since the start of his presidency. The poll finds that 54 percent of Americans disapprove of the president's job, and that 52 percent say that he is untrustworthy.

The president responded to the heckler with characteristic duplicity. He feigned empathy, "magnanimously" interceded to ask the secret service not to forcefully remove the protester from the premises (as routinely happens in such occasions), and stated that he is powerless to stop the mass deportations: "If in fact I could solve all these problems without passing laws in Congress then I would do so. But we're also a nation of laws. That's part of our tradition."

The claim that deportations are somehow being carried out outside of any presidential influence is a fraud. In fact, the Obama administration has displayed unprecedented zeal and enthusiasm in carrying out deportations. By the end of his first term, Obama had already deported a record 1.5 million people from the country—more than any other president in US history. The current rate of deportation is estimated at about 1,000 people per day.

Obama continued, "It is not simply a matter of us just saying we're going to violate the law. That's not our tradition. But the great thing about this country is we have this wonderful process of democracy, and sometimes it is messy, and sometimes it is hard, but ultimately justice and truth win out."

These invocations of democracy, the rule of law, and high-sounding moral principles are politically obscene, coming from a president who has displayed singular contempt for democratic and constitutional rights. His administration has carried out and justified extrajudicial assassinations, and it has expanded and defended the largest surveillance apparatus in the world, which today systematically spies on the entire world's population.

The author recommends:

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border

[29 June 2013]



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