

Defend the rights of immigrant workers and youth!

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The Obama administration, the Republican Party, the corporate media and the entire political establishment have treated the recent increase in the number of immigrant families and unaccompanied minors arriving on the southern border of the US as a criminal matter to be resolved with stepped-up enforcement and repression. They approach these thousands of workers and children with all of the hostility they evince against the American working class as a whole.

More than 50,000 unaccompanied children have been detained by the Border Patrol while crossing the southwestern border of the US over the last nine months. During roughly the same period, some 39,000 adults and children traveling together have also been seized by border agents.

The White House has called the arrival of these immigrants a “humanitarian crisis,” but its response has been that of a jailer and policeman.

At the end of last month, President Obama announced he was prepared to act by executive fiat in the face of the refusal of the Republican-led House of Representatives to pass even the most reactionary version of “immigration reform.” Obama is proposing to employ unilateral presidential powers not to ameliorate the plight of the impoverished children who have managed to reach the American border, but to jail and deport them en masse.

Thousands have been placed in inhumane detention centers, in some cases crammed like sardines in windowless warehouses without adequate sanitation, medical care or recreation. Many of them have been separated from their mothers and siblings, making their imprisonment all the more traumatic.

The measures Obama proposes to take include a surge of border patrol agents and immigration judges to the southwestern border to speed up the deportation

process. He has asked Congress for \$2 billion to fund “an aggressive deterrence strategy focused on the removal and repatriation of recent border crossers.” This is to include the creation of even more detention centers for imprisoning children.

Obama is also seeking the repeal of a law signed by George W. Bush that was ostensibly aimed at protecting child victims of human trafficking. He wants to strip immigrant children arriving from Central America of due process rights, placing them in the same category as Mexican immigrant children, who can be unceremoniously thrown back across the border.

On Monday, White House spokesman Josh Earnest announced that most of the children who recently entered the country “will not have a legal basis for remaining in this country and will be returned.” An immigration judge is supposed to make that determination, but the White House is clearly signaling that any hearings will be used to rubber-stamp deportations.

Most immigration experts believe that the majority of these people are entitled to refugee status or political asylum under both international and US law. Based on interviews with several hundred of the children, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated that some 60 percent would qualify for such status.

The greatest share of the immigrant children have come from Honduras, a country whose social fabric has been ripped to shreds by decades of US intervention, culminating in the 2009 US-backed coup that toppled its elected president. Honduras has the highest murder rate in the world—the murder rate for females has risen 65 percent since the coup. Many of those arriving in the US have faced direct threats and have reason to fear being killed by criminal gangs or government-

sanctioned death squads.

The other countries that account for the largest number of child immigrants are Guatemala and El Salvador, both of which were ravaged by decades of US-backed dictatorships and dirty wars, whose victims number in the hundreds of thousands.

While Democrats like Obama and Hillary Clinton, as well as leading Republicans, demand that the children be sent “home,” an estimated 80 percent have crossed the border to reunite with their fathers, mothers or other close relatives who are living in the US. In this sense, the supposed crisis created by children trying to reunite with their parents is really only a byproduct of the real crisis that a draconian immigration policy has created for millions of families, which have been split up with no concern for the impact on defenseless children.

Since coming to office, the Obama administration has deported over 2 million people—more than any other president and more than George W. Bush had deported during his full eight years in office. The administration has widely employed the unconstitutional method of immigration “holds,” asking local police and jails to hold people without warrants based on suspected civil immigration violations.

Since 2008, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has conducted more than 12,000 so-called “silent raids”—with I-9 forms affirming the right of employees to work being seized from employers—resulting in more than 300,000 people losing jobs. No previous period has seen such a massive workplace crackdown.

Even with this ignominious record, the Republican Party attacks the Obama administration from the right on immigration, seeking to whip up xenophobic fears and exploit concerns over disappearing jobs and falling wages by scapegoating immigrants, one of the most oppressed sections of the working class.

This campaign found expression in last week’s demonstrations in California, in which flag-waving protesters chanting “go back” sought to turn back Border Patrol buses ferrying women and children to a jail-like detention center. The media worked to magnify and legitimize such sentiments with its coverage, even as far larger numbers have turned out in support of those who have recently crossed the border. Poll after poll has shown rising support for undocumented immigrants, who are the family members, loved ones and co-workers of an ever-growing number of

Americans.

The anti-immigrant propaganda of the big business politicians and media is as false as it is contemptible. It is not immigrants, but rather the capitalist profit system that is responsible for the destruction of jobs and the driving down of living standards. There are ample resources to provide for all—native-born and immigrant alike—but they are monopolized by a super-rich financial and corporate layer that has presided over the greatest growth of social inequality in history.

The right to immigrate is a democratic right that must be defended by the entire working class. The police-state measures and super-exploitation employed against immigrant workers will be used against the working class as a whole.

Working people must have the right to work and live in the country of their choice. Under conditions in which transnational corporate and financial capital freely flows across national boundaries in search of the cheapest labor and biggest profits, the working class can defend itself only by upholding this right and fighting for the unity of the workers of North, Central and South America in a common struggle for the socialist transformation of society.



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