

A crime against humanity on America's border

Bill Van Auken
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*Goodbye to my Juan, goodbye, Rosalita,
Adios mis amigos, Jesus y Maria;
You won't have your names when you ride the big
airplane,
All they will call you will be "deportees."*

So wrote Woody Guthrie in an angry song responding to the 1948 Los Gatos Canyon disaster, in which a planeload of immigrant workers being deported to Mexico crashed, killing all aboard.

The gross inhumanity toward immigrants condemned by Guthrie 65 years ago has only taken a more grotesque and criminal form with the US government's treatment of the 57,000 unaccompanied children who have turned up on America's border over the past nine months, seeking refuge from the violence and oppression in their Central American homelands.

Monday's return of the first planeload of child and family deportees—17 mothers and 21 children ranging in age from 18 months to 15—to Honduras, the country with the highest murder rate in the world, was celebrated by the Obama administration as the first step in a crackdown against the child refugees.

The deportations sent a "clear signal" that Central American children managing to reach the US border "will not be welcomed to this country with open arms," Obama spokesman Josh Earnest told White House reporters Tuesday.

Earnest dodged reporters' questions about whether Obama had been personally involved in organizing the deportation flight—presumably as he involves himself personally in the selection of targets for drone assassinations—allowing only that the president was responsible for the "surge" of Border Patrol agents and judges to the southwestern border and the opening of a growing number of makeshift detention centers in which thousands of children and mothers are

imprisoned.

The "clear signal" being sent by the Obama administration is that Washington has as much contempt for international law at home as it does abroad. A government that regularly invokes "human rights" as a pretext for military interventions all over the world is carrying out a crime against humanity directed against vulnerable child migrants on its doorstep.

According to a survey by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, a clear majority of the tens of thousands of children who have made it to the US border are entitled to asylum, treatment as refugees, or other protective status within the United States.

Under international law, a refugee is defined as "a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country... or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Those fleeing Central America clearly fall into this category. The region's so-called Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—constitutes one of the most violent areas on the planet. According to recent UN statistics, it was more likely for a civilian to be murdered in one of these countries over the past several years than to be killed in Iraq during the bloodiest fighting in 2007.

The catastrophic conditions in the region are the direct product of US imperialist intervention, which took the form of Washington's backing a succession of coups and brutal dictatorships, and sponsoring decades of murderous counterinsurgency wars, whose victims numbered in the hundreds of thousands. These

interventions, combined with capitalist economic policies dictated by Washington, have left societies in tatters, riven by social inequality and terrorized by gang violence and death squad atrocities.

Among the most basic tenets of international law is that no state “shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened...” (1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees).

And the Convention on the Child—ratified by every country in the world save the US and Somalia—demands that governments “ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status ... whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance.”

Yet the Obama administration and both Democrats and Republicans in Congress, while mouthing hypocritical concern for “the children” and speaking of a “humanitarian crisis,” are determined to lock up the Central American minors and deport them as rapidly as humanly possible.

Efforts are underway to override a legal impediment to these efforts, a 2008 law drafted to protect victims of human trafficking that provides undocumented child immigrants from countries that do not share a border with the US greater due process rights. A bipartisan bill was introduced in Congress this week to gut the protections in this law, while the Obama administration has indicated that it will seek “flexibility” and “leeway” in essentially ignoring these protections. The aim is to allow Border Patrol agents to summarily expel the Central American children just as they do those arriving from Mexico.

Both major parties and the media have portrayed the arrival of Central American children on the Rio Grande as the manifestation of an “immigration crisis.” This is a deliberate falsification designed to foment anti-immigrant chauvinism and mask the violations of international law by the US government in seeking mass deportations of the child refugees.

In reality, the entry of undocumented immigrants into the US has fallen dramatically in recent years, even as the Obama administration has deported an unprecedented 2 million people, more than the Bush administration and four times the number under

Clinton. As a result of the wiping out of millions of jobs after the financial crash of 2008, many Mexican immigrants returned to their homeland, yielding what many believe to be a “net negative” immigration rate in the intervening years.

Now the country is portrayed as being “overrun” by the arrival of some tens of thousands of child refugees on its border. This is asserted under conditions where the US war in Iraq and Washington’s proxy war for regime-change in Syria have sent millions of refugees into small and relatively poor countries such as Jordan and Lebanon.

The aim of the propaganda about an immigration and border crisis is to scapegoat immigrants, among the most oppressed layers of the working class, for the rise in unemployment, decline in living standards and attacks on social conditions that are the result of the capitalist crisis and the attempt to place its full burden on the backs of the entire working population.

American workers must reject this anti-immigrant agitation with the contempt it deserves. Ample resources exist in the US to provide for those fleeing the results of US imperialism’s crimes and provide a decent life for all workers, native-born and immigrant alike. The problem is that they are monopolized by a corporate and financial oligarchy that defends its rule by means of the old “divide and rule” strategy, pitting one section of workers against another.

The demand must be raised for an end to deportations, asylum for refugee families and children, and full citizenship rights for every worker in the US, whatever his or her immigration status. Only in this way can the American working class mobilize its independent strength in unity with workers throughout the hemisphere to confront the common enemy, US imperialism and the capitalist profit system.



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