

Obama rejects pleas to halt deportations

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The Obama White House will not be swayed by protests against the renewed deportations of Central American women and children. So said Obama spokesman Josh Earnest in an arrogant proclamation from the podium of the White House briefing room.

“The enforcement strategy and priorities that the administration has articulated are not going to change,” Earnest said Friday. “We have focused those enforcement efforts on high priority issues we’ve identified. That primarily is criminals as you might expect... The other area of priority that is important is to ensure that we are maintaining security at the border. That means individuals who recently crossed the border are priorities for removal.”

So much for Obama’s supposed compassion for children, which was on display only last Tuesday when, announcing measures to curb gun violence, Obama shed tears for the TV cameras over the 2012 death of first-graders at Sandy Hook Elementary School!

Far from being “criminals,” those targeted by the raids are mothers and children fleeing drug gangs and right-wing military death squads in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, all countries ruled by US-backed regimes that uphold the economic and political interests of local oligarchies.

Agents of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) unit of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began raiding the homes of Central American immigrants in Texas, Georgia and North Carolina after New Year’s Day, detaining a total of 121 mothers and children. Of these, 77 have already been transported to Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala, officials said. The rest are detained at DHS facilities in Texas awaiting deportation or further adjudication of their cases.

The 121 detentions are only the tip of the iceberg. Press reports said some 10,000 women and children are to be targeted in the first round of sweeps this winter, while as many as 100,000—all those who have entered

the country since early 2014 and who have not been granted official refugee status—could ultimately fall victim to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The raids have been deliberately staged to produce widespread fear. In several instances in Georgia, for example, mothers have been taken from their homes in the middle of the night, having been given five minutes to pack their children’s belongings.

The widespread publicity given the new US government policy has contributed to panic in Central American immigrant communities all across the country. Press reports cite meetings of hundreds in New York, Boston, Baltimore and other cities where no raids have yet taken place, with people turning out to hear from lawyers and immigration rights advocates. School attendance and turnout at work sites is down, and some are even skipping doctor’s appointments for fear of leaving their homes and being detained en route.

The comments of the White House spokesman Friday came in response to pleas by congressional Democrats, including party leaders and Latino representatives, for an immediate halt to the raids. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton, among others, have all condemned the actions of the DHS as “inhumane.”

What these representatives of big business really mean is that the raids and deportations are politically inexpedient at the onset of an election year in which the Democratic Party seeks to posture as more sympathetic to immigrants and Hispanics than the Republicans, despite the atrocious record of Obama, once dubbed the “deporter-in-chief” by immigrants’ rights activists.

A letter sent by the co-chairs of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Representatives Raúl M. Grijalva (Democrat of Arizona) and Keith Ellison (Democrat of Minnesota), reads: “Countless reports have documented how many of these women and children are fleeing

extreme violence and poverty in their home countries... It is inhumane for Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials to disregard these threats and cause fear and anguish for immigrant families.”

In comments to the press, Grijalva noted the obvious—that the deportation campaign was an olive branch to the fascistic anti-immigrant demagoguery of billionaire Donald Trump, now echoed by virtually the entire Republican Party presidential field. “I hope that the administration is not considering these women and children as collateral damage in... an election year discussion about immigration,” he said.

Other protests noted the contrast between Obama’s supposed support for refugees fleeing violence in Syria and the brutality towards refugees fleeing similar violence in Central America.

The new round of repression comes in response to a new upsurge in immigration from Central America, which peaked in November and December, and the anti-immigrant demagoguery of the Republican presidential campaign, spearheaded by Trump. Far from representing a genuine alternative to the Republicans, the Obama administration is demonstrating the real character of the Democratic Party, which carries out the same reactionary policies, albeit with slightly different rhetoric.

The Socialist Equality Party condemns the anti-immigrant posture of both capitalist parties. We call on workers in the United States and throughout the world to defend immigrants and refugees, among the most vulnerable sections of the population, and to uphold the right of free movement of people to live and work in the country of their choice, with full legal and political rights.



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