

# Trump launches war against immigrant workers

**Bill Van Auken**  
**26 January 2017**

The two executive orders signed by President Donald Trump on Wednesday at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) constitute an assault not only against immigrants, but against the working class as a whole.

The main order called for beginning construction of “the wall” on the Mexican border that was endlessly promoted by Trump in the course of his presidential campaign, and for an escalation of the criminalization of undocumented immigrants.

These measures are aimed at whipping up xenophobia and anti-immigrant chauvinism in order to carry out a wholesale assault on the democratic rights and social conditions of the entire working class, together with an accelerated transfer of wealth to the corporations and financial oligarchy in the name of “America First.”

Delivered to an audience of uniformed Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents, Trump’s speech justifying the further militarization of the US-Mexican border and a redoubled crackdown on immigrant workers had a distinctively fascistic flavor.

Depicting an “out of control” border, Trump addressed himself directly to the border and immigration agencies, declaring that for “too long your officers and agents haven’t been allowed to do their jobs.” That, he said, would now change: “From here on out, I’m asking all of you to enforce the laws of the United States of America. They will be enforced and enforced strongly.”

Trump’s tone echoed that of his spokesman, Sean Spicer, who told White House reporters just before Trump’s appearance at DHS that the administration was going to “return power and responsibility” to the Border Patrol and ICE to enable them to “unapologetically enforce the law, no ifs, ands or buts.”

The administration is telling these agencies, notorious

for their brutality and lawlessness in dealing with immigrants, that now the gloves are truly off. Moreover, Trump’s executive orders call for these militarized police forces to be substantially enlarged. The Border Patrol, already the largest police agency in the country, is to get another 5,000 members, while the number of ICE officers is to be tripled, with the addition of another 10,000, creating the foundations for the “special deportation task force” that Trump promised during his election campaign.

Heading these agencies is Trump’s newly confirmed secretary of homeland security, retired Marine Corps Gen. John Kelly, who formerly headed the US Southern Command, which oversees all of the Pentagon’s operations in Latin America. Kelly’s appointment signals a further militarization of both the border and the hunting down of undocumented immigrant workers in the US itself.

Part of the change in immigration policy advanced by the new president is an end to the practice described by immigration agents as “catch and release,” in which some undocumented immigrants are released from detention while awaiting a court hearing. The ending of such conditional releases will require a vast expansion of the immigration prison system, which already holds some 40,000 people on any given day.

The executive order calls for DHS to set up new detention camps, which will likely be filled with families and unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America, who make up the bulk of those now crossing the border.

To justify this massive escalation of repression on the border, under conditions in which the actual number of border crossings has fallen to its lowest level in 40 years, and more Mexican immigrants are leaving the country than coming in, Trump sought to amplify his

racist campaign rhetoric depicting immigrants in general, and Mexicans in particular, as criminals.

To this end, the extreme anti-immigrant group The Remembrance Project was invited to the DHS to participate in the presentation of the new executive orders. This organization, which is linked to white nationalist and other ultra-right groups, is dedicated to exploiting the small number of American citizens allegedly killed by undocumented immigrants as a means of demonizing all foreign-born workers.

Trump asked relatives of such alleged victims to stand and be applauded by the assembled immigration and border agents. His executive order mandates the creation of a special office dedicated to “supporting victims of illegal immigrant crime” in order to promote this fascistic propaganda narrative.

Trump’s second executive order calls for the US government to retaliate against so-called “sanctuary cities” by cutting off federal grant money. The aim is to coerce local governments into ordering their police departments to join in the crackdown against immigrants.

The cost of the centerpiece of Trump’s policy, the wall that is supposed to be erected between the US and Mexico, is estimated at anywhere between \$10 billion and \$25 billion. The executive order calls for redirecting existing funds to begin building the barrier, while Trump has reiterated his insistence that Mexico will be forced to pay for it.

Trump’s measure ordering the erection of a “large physical barrier on the southern border” is based upon the 2006 Secure Fence Act, passed with the support of Trump’s Democratic presidential opponent, then-Senator Hillary Clinton. Meanwhile, the Obama administration deported some 3 million immigrants, more than all previous US presidents combined.

The executive orders mandating the border wall and escalating the anti-immigrant crackdown were announced on the same day that Mexico’s foreign minister, Luis Videgaray, together with the country’s finance minister arrived in Washington for White House talks aimed at preparing a state visit by President Enrique Peña Nieto next week. This timing, combined with Trump’s continued demand that Mexico pay for the wall, has provoked widespread outrage in Mexico and demands that Peña Nieto call off his trip.

The imposition of a new barrier along the border,

together with Trump’s protectionist threats and demands that US manufacturers stop production in Mexico, will serve only to deepen the economic crisis on both sides of the border, while further inflaming the social unrest that has erupted in response to the recent hike in Mexican gasoline prices.

Further reactionary immigration orders are expected this week, including a refashioning of Trump’s proposed ban on Muslims entering the country that would effectively bar legal entry to people from a number of so-called “terrorism prone” countries, including Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Somalia.

The redoubled crackdown on immigrants is part of a far broader drive to strengthen the dictatorial powers of the state. Even as he was preparing to unveil his anti-immigrant executive orders, Trump expressed to ABC News his support for the resumption of water boarding and other methods of torture in order to “fight fire with fire.” Drafts of other executive orders have reportedly been circulating calling for the reopening of the CIA’s “black sites” as well as a review of the Army Field Manual’s limits on torture methods.

The police state methods that are being unleashed against immigrant workers will ultimately be turned against the working class as a whole. The defense of democratic rights and social conditions can be carried forward only by uniting immigrant and native-born workers within the United States and joining the struggles of US and Mexican workers across the border that divides them against their common enemy, the capitalist system.

Workers in the US and throughout the world must come forward in defense of immigrants and refugees, upholding the right of workers everywhere to live and work in the country of their choice, with full legal and political rights.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:  
**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**