

Seventy-five years after FDR's Japanese internment order, Trump prepares mass immigrant roundup

Eric London
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On February 19, 1942, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 mandating the indefinite detention of all persons of Japanese descent living on the US mainland for the duration of the war with Japan. In the weeks that followed, the government removed over 120,000 Japanese-Americans from their homes, including 70,000 US citizens, and detained them for three to four years in a network of remote prison camps.

For decades, even mainstream bourgeois commentators viewed the Japanese internment as a humiliating scar on American history. Tom C. Clark, who defended the relocation program as a Department of Justice lawyer before joining the Supreme Court, wrote later that the internment program was “deplorable” and illegal. The Supreme Court’s 1944 ruling in *Korematsu v. US* upholding the program is broadly viewed by legal scholars as part of the “anti-canon” of unconstitutional rulings.

Seventy-five years later, the Trump administration has ordered the rounding up of hundreds of thousands if not millions of migrants and the construction of a new network of prisons to house them.

Two memos signed by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary John Kelly on February 17 and made public on the anniversary of Executive Order 9066 lay out a drastic expansion of deportation and detention of immigrants in the US.

Under the DHS memos, migrants captured without being admitted into the US by a border official face immediate removal with virtually no due process rights. Many thousands of people will now be subject to “expedited removal proceedings” in which they lose the right to appear before a judge.

The government is expanding the list of immigrants

who are priorities for removal to include up to two million people, and the administration is claiming the power to remove or imprison undocumented parents who pay to help their children cross the border to join them in the United States.

The memos also mandate an expanded network of internment facilities to house those slated to be deported. They direct Customs and Border Patrol (CPB) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to “take all necessary action and allocate all available resources to expand their detention capabilities and capacities at or near the border with Mexico to the greatest extent possible.”

As well as measures for building a border wall, hiring more ICE officials and deputizing local police, the memos establish procedures for publishing the names and criminal records of immigrants released by state and local officials despite a removal or deportation order. DHS hopes to whip up a fascistic tough-on-crime hysteria against immigrants and local governments that refuse or fail to hand them over to federal authorities for deportation. This recalls the tactics of the Nazi press, which published photographs of Jewish people alongside a list of crimes they allegedly committed.

Trump’s plan to establish a network of internment camps has been prepared by both the Democratic and Republican parties, which have jointly cultivated a climate of nationalism and anti-immigrant xenophobia to advance their policies of war and social counterrevolution.

The attack on immigrants in the US takes place in the context of a global wave of xenophobia. Across the world, the ruling classes are seeking to whip up nationalist sentiment in order to scapegoat migrants for the social disaster caused by capitalism. In Europe, the promotion of

anti-immigrant chauvinism recalls the 1930s and the lead-up to the bloodbath of World War II.

Anti-immigrant hysteria has long been a key part of the American ruling class's efforts to advance its imperialist strategy and suppress opposition to war. Within weeks of the US entry into World War I, the Democratic Wilson administration advanced a series of anti-immigrant and anti-socialist measures—the Sedition, Espionage, and Immigration Acts of 1917—that were used to label socialism a “foreign idea” and arrest and deport hundreds of left-wing radicals and socialists in the Palmer Raids of 1919–20.

The Roosevelt administration justified the internment of Japanese-Americans by citing the Alien Registration Act, known as the Smith Act, which criminalized attempts to expose the class character of the imperialist war. In 1941, Roosevelt prosecuted the Trotskyist movement under this act, jailing 18 members of the Socialist Workers Party on the charge of “sedition.” Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 with the claim that “the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against espionage and against sabotage to national defense.”

The attacks on immigrants are a key component of the ruling class's nationalist poison. By directing social discontent outward at foreigners or immigrants, the financial aristocracy seeks to facilitate the exploitation of the working class, pitting workers against one another and diverting them from a struggle against their own exploiters.

This policy has been intensified over the past quarter-century, culminating in the extreme nationalism of Donald Trump and his fascist aides. Under the auspices of the “war on terror,” the ruling class has used “national security” as a blanket excuse for illegal war, torture, mass surveillance and deportation. Obama oversaw the deportation of 2.5 million immigrants and the launching or expansion of wars in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. It is these wars and their catastrophic consequences that have forced tens of millions to leave their homes in search of safety abroad.

Trump's anti-immigrant program is bound up with an attack on the social conditions of the entire working class, citizen and non-citizen alike. As he prepares to deport millions, he is assembling a cabinet of Wall Street billionaires determined to lift business regulations and slash corporate taxes on the one side, and destroy social services—including public education, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security—on the other.

The implementation of Trump's anti-immigrant policies will require unprecedented attacks on the democratic rights of the entire working class. Police state measures are being plotted by the administration, as evidenced by John Kelly's draft memorandum calling for the mobilization of 100,000 National Guard troops to deport immigrants.

The only social force capable of defending immigrant workers is the working class. Workers are objectively united across all national borders in a globally integrated network of production and supply chains, supplemented by family ties and the reality of instantaneous communication. The needs and interests of any one section of workers, national or ethnic, are indissolubly bound up with those of their class brothers and sisters all over the world. Never before in history have the words of the founding program of the revolutionary socialist movement—“Workers of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains!”—been more relevant.

The rights of immigrants are incompatible with the capitalist system, which is incapable of overcoming the contradiction between the international organization of the economy and the outdated nation-state system. Along with imperialist war, the most noxious expression of this contradiction is the militarization of borders to condemn hundreds of thousands people fleeing the horrors of war and destitution to drown in the Mediterranean or die of heatstroke in the desert separating the US and Mexico.

Workers must reject the entire framework of the official debate on immigration. The Democrats' hypocritical criticisms of Trump's immigration policies proceed from the same reactionary premise: that so-called “illegal” immigrants are criminals and should be punished, exploited and humiliated.

The only democratic and humane policy is a socialist and internationalist policy: for open borders and full rights for all workers, including the right of workers of all countries to live and work wherever they choose, with full citizenship rights, free from fear of repression or deportation.



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