

Trump administration threatens further clampdown on refugees

Bill Van Auken
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Having already capped the number of refugees to be admitted to the United States at 50,000—less than half the previous quota—the Trump administration is preparing to slash the number even further as part of its “America First” program promoting right-wing nationalism and xenophobia.

With an October 1 deadline looming for the administration’s declaration to Congress on the number of refugees it is prepared to accept, Trump’s fascistic senior political adviser and the chief architect of his virulently anti-immigrant policies, Stephen Miller, has, according to the *New York Times*, proposed that the number be reduced as low as 15,000.

While the process of deciding the cap on refugees is “typically led by the State Department and coordinated by the National Security Council,” this year it has been taken over by the Domestic Policy Council, which reports to Miller, and the Department of Homeland Security, the *Times* reports. This shift reflects the administration’s decision to exploit a hardline policy of criminalizing refugees and immigrants in general in order to appeal to Trump’s narrow hard-right political base.

Under conditions in which the world is confronting the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War, with some 66 million forcibly displaced people, in large measure as a result of the unending wars waged by US imperialism over the past 16 years, Washington is effectively slamming the door in the face of men, women and children fleeing for their lives.

The refugee cap already imposed by Trump was the lowest since the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, which required the US president to set a ceiling for admissions. Only once during the last 37 years has this ceiling fallen below 70,000, when it was cut to 67,000 in 1986, under the Reagan administration.

The report on this planned escalation of the Trump administration’s war on refugees came in the immediate wake of another reactionary decision by the US Supreme Court Tuesday, further lifting restrictions on the anti-Muslim “travel ban” first imposed by the White House last January, blocking the entry into the United States of refugees and citizens from six majority-Muslim countries.

The one-paragraph statement issued by the court granted the administration’s request to stay a federal appeals court ruling that would have allowed 24,000 refugees formally assigned to and accepted by resettlement agencies to enter the country.

The appeals court ruling stemmed from a Supreme Court decision in June—supported unanimously, including by the so-called “liberal” wing that includes Obama appointees Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan—that overrode actions by lower federal court judges blocking Trump’s flagrantly discriminatory executive orders from being enforced. While allowing the resumption of the anti-Muslim ban, the high court provided an exception for those who could prove a “bona fide connection” to the United States.

A panel of the US Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit this summer had interpreted the Supreme Court’s category of “bona fide connection” to include not only people with families in the US, job offers or admissions to a US university, but also refugees with assurances of support from US sponsors.

Tuesday’s high court order overturns this interpretation, placing another roadblock in the path of persecuted refugees.

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments on the merits of Trump’s anti-Muslim ban on October 10. The 90-day ban directed against citizens from the Muslim-majority nations will expire in late September,

before the court hears the case, while the 120-day refugee ban will lapse one month later, before it renders a decision.

The stay of the 9th Circuit ruling, which was hailed by Breitbart News and other far-right media, may well be an indication of the direction that the Supreme Court will take when it considers the constitutionality of the ban. If so, it will be taking a dramatic step in legitimizing a deeply reactionary and anti-democratic measure that not only persecutes Muslims and refugees, but sets the stage for broader attacks on the working class as a whole.

The report of the planned escalation of the crackdown on refugees comes just one week after Trump announced the rescinding of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), the government program that offered limited protection from deportation to nearly 800,000 immigrants brought to the US as children. The action imposed a six-month deadline for Congress to act before the program would be phased out, paving the way for mass deportations of children to countries to which they have few if any ties.

Trump scheduled a White House dinner Wednesday night with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, where DACA was to be discussed along with other legislative issues.

Pelosi indicated that she and the Democratic leadership were prepared to reach a deal with the Trump White House that would provide some form of protection for those covered by DACA in exchange for an even more draconian crackdown on immigrants and the US-Mexican border.

“We always want border stuff, so that’s not a problem,” Pelosi told reporters Wednesday.

Schumer made a similar statement on Tuesday, indicating that while Democrats did not support funding for Trump’s “wall,” this was purely a matter of its practicality. “We’d certainly look at border security that makes sense, border security that’s effective,” he said.

While concentrating their political opposition to the Trump administration almost entirely on the issue of alleged Russian government meddling in the 2016 US election and Trump’s supposedly insufficient hostility to Moscow—a line of attack entirely in sync with the aims of the US military-intelligence apparatus—the Democrats are fully prepared to collaborate in the

assault on immigrants, corporate tax cuts and military aggression abroad.

Trump’s virulent anti-immigrant rhetoric notwithstanding, thus far his administration has carried out, on average, less deportations than that of Barack Obama, who became known as “deporter-in-chief” for expelling nearly 3 million immigrant workers during his eight years in office.

According to figures issued by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) last month, a total of 84,473 people were deported between February 1 and June 30 of this year, or, on average, about 16,900 a month. Under Obama, the average number of people deported each month was 20,000 in 2016, and roughly 34,000 in 2012.

The Democrats under Obama have laid the groundwork for a massive escalation of the anti-immigrant crackdown. During the first six months of this year, the number of deportation orders has increased 31 percent compared to the same period last year.

Moreover, according to a leaked Homeland Security Department memo, ICE had been set to launch this month “Operation Mega,” a massive nationwide dragnet described as “historic” in scope, targeting up to 10,000 undocumented immigrants across the US.

Late last week, ICE issued a statement saying that the operation had been canceled due to the hurricanes that struck Texas and Florida: “Due to the current weather situation in Florida and other potentially impacted areas, along with the ongoing recovery in Texas, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had already reviewed all upcoming operations and has adjusted accordingly. There is currently no coordinated nationwide operation planned at this time.”

The clear implication is that once the administration judges the recovery—in which undocumented immigrant workers are playing no small role—to be adequate, the massive crackdown will be resumed.



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