Trump visits border wall prototypes in California to “pick the right one”

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Donald Trump’s first visit to California as president Tuesday highlighted all of the administration’s priorities—a survey of border wall prototypes in San Diego, a speech at the Marine Corps Air station at Miramar, and a fundraiser at Beverly Hills.

Trump’s visit comes in the context of the intensification of the anti-immigrant drive spearheaded by his administration. Many of the horrifying immigrant enforcement actions reported in recent months—including roundups at workplaces, the separation of parents from their children, and the targeting of “sanctuary cities”—have taken place in California, the state with the largest Latino population in the country.

Trump’s anti-immigration platform centers on plans for building a border wall across the nearly 2,000-mile long US-Mexico border. In March 2017, Trump called for design proposals to create “physically imposing and aesthetically pleasing” prototypes for the wall. Soon after, six private contractors were awarded grants of $300,000 to $500,000 to build the prototypes. As of now, eight prototypes (18 to 30 feet tall, half made of concrete, and the other half from “non-concrete” materials) sit on federally-owned land in San Diego.

In his first stop of the day, Trump visited the prototypes in order to, as he put it, “pick the right one.” Trump sent out a tweet just prior to his visit citing a study which claimed that “the $18 billion wall will pay for itself by curbing the importation of crime, drugs and illegal immigrants who tend to go on the federal dole...”

The Trump administration and its various immigration enforcement agencies have also worked overtime to criminalize immigrants. As part of this drive, the Justice Department filed a suit against the state of California last week targeting its immigration laws.

These laws, adopted just last year by the state legislature, are largely cosmetic and do not block raids and deportations from taking place. Trump and his administration, however, are seeking to punish the state for placing even minor restrictions on the actions of federal immigration officials.

The Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) recently claimed that its operations in Oakland targeting immigrants failed primarily because Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf issued a warning about the impending four-day operation. Trump waded into the issue with typical alacrity calling the mayor “a disgrace.” Attorney General Jeff Sessions added, “ICE failed to make 800 arrests that they would have made if the mayor had not acted as she did.”

On his way to California, Trump tweeted: “California’s sanctuary policies are illegal and unconstitutional and put the safety and security of our entire nation at risk. Thousands of dangerous & violent criminal aliens are released as a result of sanctuary policies, set free to prey on innocent Americans. THIS MUST STOP!”

Protests were called in San Diego and Los Angeles Monday and Tuesday.

In San Diego, Andrea, a trans-border student who spends a lot of time crossing the border daily to attend school at San Diego City College, told WSWS reporters that she is against the border wall and the criminalization of immigrants. “I don’t want to have to cross to go to school, but what is there for me in Mexico? Transnational capital is hooked on immigrant labor, and the media makes it look like everything is the fault of immigrants.”

When discussing the strike by West Virginia teachers and the movement of workers who have been charged

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with having “white privilege,” Andrea agreed that this is not the fundamental division in society. “First off it will be a class war,” and trying to put more Latinos as ICE agents or diversify the police force “is still capitalism with a different face.”

Estela, 47, a sociology student in City College, who earns a living as a housekeeper, spoke to our reporter at rally in the San Ysidro border crossing today.

“The building of the wall is something really significant that we can not permit. We [immigrants] end up as scapegoats, and it doesn’t look like we have anyone really to turn to in the political establishment.

“We want to get involved politically, but both sides are united in carrying out neo-liberal policies that affect all, not just in the US, but across Latin America and the world. I see it as a much bigger problem, a global problem. It’s difficult because we find ourselves disillusioned by the kind of policies that are being carried out here in the US. It’s clear the corporations have power over everything.

“Trump has deported fewer [than Obama], but the problem is that he’s more active in generating divisions here in the US, it fragments the struggle, it fragments people. I think that the wall just pours more salt into the wound. Obama deports us, and on top of that Trump wants to put in an even bigger wall. I do see it as a retrogression, and it does actually frighten me. Without wanting to overstate things, it’s looking more and more like Germany back then, with more and more militarization.

“Trump is just a symptom. It’s capitalism, it’s the corporations that have all the power in our politics. Trying to have a party that represented the working class would be the ideal. As long as we have this two-party system, you can’t have a genuine democracy. Democracy doesn’t really exist for us, it does feel like something of a game at times.”

There is a danger that opposition to Trump will be channeled into the arms of the Democratic Party. California Democrats, including Governor Jerry Brown and Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, have postured as defenders of immigrant rights.

However, many of the policies that are being enforced under the Trump administration were in fact put in place by Democratic legislatures. Dianne Feinstein voted for an immigration enforcement law in 1996 that granted officers the authority they are now using.

The Obama administration has the record of carrying out the greatest number of deportations in US history.

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