Trump administration turns away immigrant caravan requesting asylum at US-Mexico border

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On Sunday, US immigration authorities turned away some 200 Central American immigrants seeking to apply for asylum at the US-Mexico border. As the workers and youth fleeing murderous repression in countries long dominated by US imperialism chanted, “Why do they kill us, why do they punish us for seeking a better life?” US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents announced they had reached capacity and would not process the applications. They said the refugees’ applications for asylum would be considered in the coming days.

The immigrants sought to turn themselves in at the border near San Diego to escape war, violence and poverty in their home countries. A total of 400 immigrants, mostly from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, arrived at the border on Friday after participating in a weeks-long trek through Mexico as part of the “People Without Borders” caravan.

The caravan takes place each year to protect those seeking asylum from the widespread sexual assault, kidnapping and violence that immigrants face when traveling alone or in small groups. President Donald Trump has used this year’s caravan to portray the US as overrun by immigrants in order to whip up xenophobic sentiments and escalate his assault on immigrant workers.

On April 23, Trump tweeted: “I have instructed the Secretary of Homeland Security not to let these large Caravans of people into our country. It is a disgrace. We are the only Country in the World so naïve! WALL.”

The administration responded to the arrival of the asylum seekers with threats of prosecution and indefinite detention. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen issued a statement declaring, “If you enter our country illegally, you have broken the law and will be referred for prosecution.”

Her statement went on to threaten asylum seekers, their lawyers and non-profit advocates with federal incarceration on the pretext that immigrants might lie on their asylum applications. “If you make a false immigration claim,” the statement reads, “you have broken the law and will be referred to prosecution. If you assist or coach an individual in making a false immigration claim, you have broken the law and will be referred for prosecution.”

Immigration officials have also announced that they will separate mothers and fathers from their children, potentially sending them to locations hundreds of miles from one another. Following a Supreme Court ruling in March that immigrants have no right to bail, those applying for asylum face the possibility of being detained for years while their asylum applications play out in court.

Over the past 30 years, representatives of both the Democratic and Republican parties have voted overwhelmingly for restricting the ability of immigrants to gain asylum. As a result of these bipartisan efforts, 90 percent of Mexican applicants are denied asylum. The denial rate for Salvadorans is 83 percent, for Hondurans it is 80 percent, and for Guatemalans 78 percent.

Over the course of the past 15 years, the number of asylum seekers from these countries has grown by 408 percent for Mexicans, 150 percent for Hondurans, 50 percent for Salvadorans and 20 percent for Guatemalans. Between 25 percent and 40 percent of asylum seekers from these countries are not represented by attorneys in their immigration proceedings. There is no Sixth Amendment right to legal counsel in the American immigration system.

The increasing flow of desperate immigrants from Central America is the result of more than a century of imperialist oppression at the hands of the United States, which has devastated these societies. Latin America is the

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most unequal region of the world as a result of repeated US military interventions, mass murder by CIA-backed death squads, and state violence by dictators installed to quell dissent and protect the ability of American corporations to exploit the region's labor and resources.

The crimes of the immigration authorities extend to the interior of the country. According to a *Los Angeles Times* report last week, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has jailed more than 1,480 US citizens since 2012 alone. The *Times* report notes that ICE jailed a 10-year-old boy from the San Francisco Bay Area who was detained in Texas for two months. The report explains:

"Victims include a landscaper snatched in a Home Depot parking lot in Rialto and held for days despite his son's attempts to show agents the man's US passport; a New York resident locked up for more than three years fighting deportation efforts after a federal agent mistook his father for someone who wasn't a US citizen; and a Rhode Island housekeeper mistakenly targeted twice, resulting in her spending a night in prison the second time even though her husband had brought her US passport to a court hearing."

The bulk of these detentions took place under the Obama administration, which also deported 2.7 million immigrants.

The Democratic Party has abandoned the immigration issue. As a result, it has placed 1.8 million people brought to the US as children and eligible for temporary protection under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program at risk of deportation, following Trump's cancellation of the program in March. That same month, the Democrats supported a budget deal that increased funding for ICE by over $600 million and provided Trump with billions to militarize the border area.

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