

US denies right to asylum

Eric London
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Under direct orders from President Donald Trump, US immigration officials have refused to accept the asylum applications of nearly 200 immigrants escaping violence, war and poverty in Central America, forcing them to set up an impromptu encampment on the San Diego-Tijuana border.

The caravan of asylum seekers comprises Hondurans, El Salvadorans and Guatemalans who began their perilous 3,000-mile trek on March 25.

The Trump administration has employed fascistic language in an effort to scapegoat and threaten the caravan, an annual pilgrimage carried out to highlight the desperate plight of Central American refugees. On April 4, after claiming that “our country is being stolen” because asylum seekers “take advantage of” the US, Trump ordered states to deploy the National Guard. The caravan “had better be stopped,” he threatened. To date, the Trump administration has allowed only a small fraction of the group to file asylum applications.

By denying immigrants the right to asylum, the US is acting in flagrant violation of international law. Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.”

In 1951, the United Nations passed the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which “provides that no one shall expel or return a refugee against his or her will, in any manner whatsoever, to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom.”

The US government’s repudiation of these principles marks a historical turning point in the attack on democratic rights. Passed in the aftermath of the Second World War, the UN protections were intended to shield the millions of people expelled from their homes by the war. Survivors of the Holocaust implored the documents’ drafters to strengthen language related to the right to asylum, citing the fact that the governments of the allied countries had closed their doors to Jewish and other refugees, leaving them trapped to die at the hands of the Nazis.

In 1939, for example, Captain Gustav Schröder took nearly 1,000 German Jewish refugees aboard the MS St. Louis across the Atlantic to apply for asylum in the United States. Officials from the Franklin Roosevelt administration, led by Secretary of State Cordell Hull, barred the ship from landing, first in Cuba and then in the United States.

The Canadian government also denied the ship access to Canada, forcing it to turn back to Europe. British officials agreed to accept fewer than a third of the ship’s passengers, and the rest were sent back to mainland Europe. Nearly half those who returned were killed in the Holocaust.

Reports indicate that dozens of immigrants denied the right to stay in the United States are killed in their home countries every year. A 2015 report in the *Guardian* found that over the previous year, 83 deportees were murdered upon their return to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras—the three main countries represented in the asylum caravan.

US imperialism has transformed these countries into social disaster zones.

In El Salvador, the US government trained and armed the military dictatorship that massacred tens of thousands of peasants and workers throughout the 1980s.

In Guatemala, the US trained and armed the military government of Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, which perpetrated the Mayan genocide, killing tens of thousands of indigenous Mayans in the 1980s. The US-backed regime ethnically cleansed villages and filled the country’s rivers with corpses.

The US staged its “contra” forces in Honduras and used them to carry out death squad terror both within the country and in neighboring Nicaragua. More recently, in 2009, the Obama administration and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton backed a coup against elected Honduran President Manuel Zelaya, leading to massive state repression.

The entire American political establishment is to blame for the abrogation of the right to asylum. The Democratic

Party is no less culpable than the Republicans.

To give just one example, the Democratic Bill Clinton administration pushed through the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA), which barred all immigrants from applying for asylum more than one year after arriving in the US, among other added restrictions. The AEDPA passed in the Senate by a vote of 91-8 with the support of nearly all Senate Democrats, including Joe Biden, Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein, John Kerry, Ron Wyden, Paul Wellstone and Harry Reid. In the House of Representatives, most Democrats voted for the bill, including Dick Durbin, Charles Schumer, Steny Hoyer and James Clyburn.

The Democratic Party is complicit in Trump's fascistic attack on the Central American migrant caravan. California's Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, agreed to Trump's request for National Guard soldiers and deployed 400 troops to the border. Brown's move has freed up immigration officials to man the San Diego-Tijuana crossing where the immigrants are presently camped.

No leading Democrat has made a public statement on the caravan. Aside from a single tweet by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on April 5, the Twitter accounts of Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Charles Schumer and Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez have been silent on the matter. Nor have the self-absorbed millionaire spokespersons of the #MeToo movement mentioned the fact that 80 percent of women are sexually assaulted or raped while crossing to the US.

At border crossings around the world, encampments of asylum seekers are swelling as tens of millions flee their homelands. The bulk of these dispossessed people come from countries devastated by US invasions and bombing campaigns.

On April 20, the Syriza government in Greece refused to abide by a court order demanding that it allow refugees to leave the islands where they are being held in deplorable conditions.

On April 22, the French government passed a bill dramatically restricting asylum applications.

In the United Kingdom, the exposure of systematic mistreatment of Caribbean immigrants has forced the resignation of Home Secretary Amber Rudd.

The Israeli government has arrested African immigrants and is threatening to deport thousands more.

All over the world, police-state methods tested against immigrants are being prepared or already employed against the entire working class.

The transformation of millions of people into stateless refugees is inevitable under capitalism, where money and products can travel freely across borders but human beings cannot. Especially under conditions where rival imperialist ruling classes are preparing to re-divide the globe by means of world war, they stoke up anti-immigrant racism and xenophobia to divide the working class and justify dictatorial methods of rule.

In May 1940, Leon Trotsky wrote:

The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a few hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States. In an era of aviation, telegraph, telephone, radio and television, travel from country to country is paralyzed by passports and visas. The period of the wasting away of foreign trade and the decline of domestic trade is at the same time the period of the monstrous intensification of chauvinism, and especially of anti-Semitism. ... Amid the vast expanse of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeoisie has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison.

The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers to defend the immigrants at the US-Mexico border and demand that they be granted political asylum. We oppose all attacks on immigrants, documented or undocumented, and insist on the democratic right of all workers to live and work in the country of their choice, without restrictions and with full political and civil rights. In opposition to the division of the world into competing nation states and all forms of nationalism, the poisonous ideology of the outmoded capitalist system, we fight for the international unity of the working class in the struggle for socialism.



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