

The working class and the global war on immigrants

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Faced with a firestorm of outrage both within the US and internationally, President Donald Trump signed an executive order Wednesday rescinding his administration's policy of ripping children from the arms of parents seeking refuge in the US as a means of terrorizing migrants and halting their entry into the country.

Audiotapes of interned children sobbing and crying out desperately for their mothers and fathers, only to be mocked by their guards, and reports of infants literally torn from their mothers' breasts—and mothers seeking to hold onto their babies physically restrained and handcuffed—have provoked disgust and horror around the world.

That these scenes of children in cages have been unfolding in what has long been referred to as the “most advanced capitalist country” in the world has immense political significance. No less significant is the defense of these policies by the American president and his aides in language that is borrowed directly from the rhetoric of fascism. Immigrants have been called “animals” seeking to “infest” the United States—words that are all too reminiscent of the speeches of Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler.

Trump's order implies no retreat from his administration's “zero tolerance” policy toward immigrants. Those coming across the border without documents will still be treated as criminals, with families to be imprisoned together in internment camps until they are prosecuted and either jailed or deported.

The Gestapo-style hounding of immigrant workers within the United States is only escalating, with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents raiding a meatpacking plant in Ohio Tuesday, detaining 146 immigrant workers, who were shipped off to detention facilities to face deportation. The number of workers detained in such raids is already quadruple that for all of last year.

The assault on immigrants in the US is part of a global development in which immigration has become the central focus of politics in country after country in Europe and beyond.

Wednesday marked World Refugee Day, observed by the

United Nations annually. The UN published figures showing that the number of people forced to flee war, violence, persecution and oppression had reached 69 million in 2017, setting a record for the fifth straight year. Out of that total, 16.2 million people were displaced last year, forced from their homes at the rate of 44,000 people per day.

These tens of millions of men, women and children are fleeing the mass killing, economic destruction and societal devastation inflicted upon their own countries by the major imperialist powers, with the United States in the lead.

They are met with walls, barbed wire, concentration camps, persecution and scapegoating.

On Wednesday, Hungary's far-right government pushed through a law providing for the imprisonment of anybody offering assistance to undocumented migrants, while enshrining in the country's constitution the declaration that Hungary cannot accept an “alien population.”

Filling the vacuum left by the betrayals and anti-working class policies pursued by previous social democratic governments, right-wing regimes have come to power elsewhere in Europe, such as in Italy, where the Five Star-Lega government refused landing rights to the severely overcrowded rescue boat *Aquarius* and has threatened to round up and deport hundreds of thousands of refugees already in the country.

The German government is wracked by a political crisis centering on immigration and the rise of a right-wing movement that speaks the language of those who carried out the worst atrocities of the 20th century.

Throughout the continent, similar movements have arisen and governments are raising the walls of Fortress Europe.

Like Trump, these right-wing governments promote their racist and xenophobic anti-immigrant policies as a defense of the jobs and wages of native-born workers, casting immigrants as the source of “crime” and social decay.

There is no evidence whatsoever to support these filthy claims. They are meant merely to divide the working class and pit one section against another for the crumbs allotted for wages, benefits and essential social services by an

obscenely wealthy ruling elite.

At the source of the crisis of working class living standards in every country is the vast monopolization of wealth by a tiny financial aristocracy. A report issued Tuesday established that the combined wealth of the world's so-called "high net worth individuals," those with liquid assets of \$1 million or more, had more than doubled since 2008, the year of the global financial meltdown.

Since then, governments all over the world have pursued a two-track policy consisting of draconian austerity measures for the working class and unending subsidies for the wealthy.

The brutal and lawless attacks on immigrants are bound up with the immense growth of social inequality and the uninterrupted escalation of imperialist war.

The fact that the assault on immigrants is a global phenomenon makes clear that it is not simply the product of the fascistic ideology of Trump or his European counterparts. Rather, it is the noxious expression of the objective crisis and historical bankruptcy of the capitalist nation state system, which is coming into increasingly violent conflict with the unprecedented integration of the global economy, producing war and repression.

No section of the ruling elite will carry out a defense of immigrant workers. The Democratic Party, while adapting to the mass outrage over Trump's vicious policies, laid the groundwork for these very policies through decades of anti-immigrant laws. Barack Obama earned the title "deporter in chief" for his record expulsion of 2.5 million people.

Bernie Sanders, the supposed left face of the Democrats, has stated his opposition to open borders, presenting the exclusion of immigrant workers as a means of raising the living standards of native-born workers, thereby boosting the reactionary narrative advanced by the fascistic right.

The only social force capable of carrying out the defense of immigrants and refugees—and the democratic rights of the entire population—is the working class, whose essential interests and rights are inextricably bound up with the fate of these most oppressed layers.

No worker can afford to ignore the ominous implications of the kind of raids that have been carried out in Ohio recently. A militarized police force has been created that is able and empowered to march entire shifts out of factories, interrogate workers and haul away whomever they choose. Today the target is immigrants, but with an entirely foreseeable shift in the political situation, tomorrow it could be those deemed by the government and the employers to be "militants" and "troublemakers."

The defense of immigrants and refugees is an international question. It can be carried out only on the basis of the international mobilization of the working class.

Against the chauvinistic nationalism being promoted by the ruling classes throughout the world, with the support of the trade union bureaucracies, the working class must advance an internationalist and socialist strategy. Workers in the US and every country will be able to wage a successful struggle against globally mobile capitalist corporations only to the extent that they unite their struggles across national boundaries.

On the question of immigration, this means an uncompromising rejection of the entire framework of the official discussion being conducted by the capitalist politicians, parties and institutions. The unity of the international working class can be achieved only through the struggle for the right of workers from every part of the world to live in the country of their choice, with full citizenship rights, including the right to work and travel without fear of repression or deportation.

The Socialist Equality Party calls for the urgent mobilization of workers and young people in the broadest possible movement against the onslaught against immigrants, including demonstrations to force the release of those detained and both neighborhood and job actions to block detentions and deportations.

Together with its comrades around the world in the International Committee of the Fourth International, the Socialist Equality Party in the US is fighting to build the revolutionary leadership required to achieve a socialist and internationalist solution to the crisis facing immigrant workers, based upon the strategic perspective of the international unity of the working class and world socialist revolution.



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