

Opposition mounts to Trump administration's persecution of immigrants

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A wave of protests began Thursday over the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy that has resulted in the separation of over 2,000 immigrant children from their families. The demonstrations across the country foreshadow the national day of action in defense of immigrants scheduled today.

More than 1,000 demonstrated in Brownsville, Texas, a city located on the border with Mexico. Brownsville emerged as a major focal point of popular anger due to the existence of a mass child detention center within the city. The facility, located in a converted Wal-Mart shopping center, currently holds around 1,500 immigrant boys in hellish conditions. Organizers of the protest played a widely shared audio clip of detained immigrant children crying for their parents. The clip evoked a deep emotional response from the crowd, with many in attendance bursting into tears themselves.

Hundreds of women staged a sit-in occupation of the Senate's Hart Office Building in Washington, D.C., following a morning of protests and marches in D.C. from Freedom Plaza to the Department of Justice as well as Congress. D.C. police responded to the action with mass arrests, taking 575 women into custody—more than twice the number arrested during protests surrounding Donald Trump's inauguration.

The Washington protest was organized by groups close to the Democratic Party, and at least one congresswoman, Representative Pramila Jayapal, was among those arrested, along with actress Susan Sarandon and other prominent liberals. Its purpose was to associate the Democrats with the mass opposition to the Trump administration's policy, although in substance, if not rhetoric, the Trump policy is a continuation of the mass deportations and abusive treatment of immigrants under Barack Obama.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers set up a barricade in front of the agency's headquarters in Washington, D.C. a day ahead of the Saturday protests. The agency sealed off the building, claiming protesters planned to occupy it. Officers erected temporary fencing outside the building and set up a perimeter patrol blocking the entrance.

ICE facilities in a number of cities have seen operations disrupted or blocked outright by protesters. The longest blockade has been in Portland, Oregon, where a tent city has been erected, cutting off access to an ICE office, halting the operation of immigration courts. Federal Protective Service officers moved in on Thursday, clearing the part of the encampment that was on property leased by the federal government.

Similar encampments have been erected outside of ICE buildings in larger cities like Los Angeles and New York, and there have been widespread smaller protests.

Protesters in Grand Rapids, Michigan occupied a Board of Commissioners meeting concerning Kent County's contract with ICE. After the meeting was suspended, around 100 protesters marched on a major intersection chanting "ICE out of Kent County." Police arrested seven protesters who walked into the intersection and began blocking traffic.

Trump has been quick to react to the wave of protests, urging the police to use violence and intimidation to suppress the growing discontent. "Leftwing Activists are trying to block ICE officers from doing their jobs and publicly posting their home addresses - putting these selfless public servants in harm's way," he tweeted. "These radical protesters want ANARCHY - but the only response they will find from our government is LAW AND ORDER!"

Though Trump signed an executive order on June 20 that ended the official separation of children from their

parents, thousands of children still remain in detention facilities with no outside contact. So far, only five have been reunited with their families. The vast majority of children remain in the bureaucratic legal quagmire of the deportation machine, while parents have little to no way to locate and contact them. Because detainees may frequently await processing for years or even go “missing,” it is likely some families will never be reunited.

On June 26, a federal judge in San Diego issued a court order with nationwide effect, requiring the Trump administration to reunite all children younger than five with their detained parents by July 10, and all children five and older by July 26. This was widely interpreted in the media and in legal circles as effectively requiring the imminent release of the detained parents, since under terms of a consent decree entered into by the federal government some 20 years ago, known as the Flores agreement, children may not be detained in federal immigration facilities for more than 20 days.

However, the *Washington Post* reported late Friday that the Trump administration is proposing instead to modify the Flores agreement so that parents and children can be detained together indefinitely.

According to papers filed with the San Diego federal court, the Justice Department gave the following notice to the judge who issued the June 26 order, Dana Sabraw: “The government will not separate families but detain families together during the pendency of immigration proceedings when they are apprehended at or between ports of entry.”

As the *Post* explained, “The new filing does not explicitly say the Trump administration plans to hold families in custody beyond the 20-day limit, but by saying officials plan to detain them ‘during the pendency’ of immigration proceedings, which in many cases can last months, they imply that families will spend that time in detention.”

In other words, the Trump “solution” to the cruelty of family separation is the provocation of family imprisonment, jailing teenagers, younger children, even babies along with their parents. Once this new posture becomes more widely known, it is bound to inflame popular hostility to the vicious anti-immigrant bigotry and repression unleashed by the White House.

A Pew Reports poll issued this week found broad and growing sympathy for immigrants, both “legal” and

“illegal,” and widespread rejection of the lying propaganda of Trump, such as his claims that immigrants are responsible for crime or that they take the jobs of American workers. Trump’s efforts to whip up anti-immigrant hysteria appeal to only a small minority of the population, but he relies on the cowardice and complicity of both the Democratic Party and the corporate media.

The Democratic Party is posturing as the ally of the growing movement in defense of immigrants partly for its immediate electoral purposes, but mainly to block any wider challenge to the repressive anti-immigrant policies that both corporate-controlled parties support.

Many prominent Democratic politicians, such as New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, the newly nominated Democratic candidate for Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her defeated rival Representative Joseph Crowley (D-New York), have embraced the call to “abolish ICE.”

All are opposed, however, to any policy of “open borders” that would allow immigrants to come and go freely and live and work in the country of their choice. Instead, the Democratic Party merely seeks to rebrand ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CPB). “You need some kind of agency to deal with immigration, but ICE is not that,” de Blasio said on The Brian Lehrer Show on WYNC. Ocasio-Cortez recently said in a CNN interview that ICE would have to be replaced with “a humane agency,” because, “We do need to make sure that our borders are secure.”

In fact, Trump’s policy of separating children is an intensification of the immigration policy begun by the Obama administration. During his presidency, Obama sped up the deportations process while integrating ICE into federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, resulting in the deportation of over 3 million immigrants and the separation of hundreds of thousands of children from their families. Due to his efforts, he came to be known in immigrant communities as the “deporter-in-chief.”



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