

US war on immigrants continues

# Trump using separated children to force “voluntary” deportations

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A new Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) document released by NBC News Monday has exposed the cynical effort by the Trump administration to use a court-ordered “family reunification” process to force immigrant parents with separated children into signing a document agreeing to deportation back to their country of origin.

The new policy comes in response to a court order handed down last week compelling the Department of Homeland Security and its anti-immigrant apparatus to reunite the more than 2,300 children separated from their parents under Trump’s “zero-tolerance” policy to detain and prosecute all people caught crossing into the United States without official documents.

The document, titled “Separated Parent’s Removal Form,” states that it is intended for “detained alien parents with administratively final orders of removal who are class members in the *Ms. L. v. I.C.E.* lawsuit,” referring to a class action lawsuit brought on behalf of separated parents in the US District Court for the Southern District of California.

On June 26, the judge in that case granted a temporary injunction ordering the reunification of all separated children with their parents within 14 days for the youngest children or 30 days for children five years or older.

The “Separated Parent’s Removal Form” represents the Trump administration’s response to that order. Under the guise of a “voluntary agreement,” ICE presents immigrant parents with an ultimatum: they may reunite with their children, who would then be deported along with the parents; or alternatively, parents may agree to waive their right to reunification and their children may be allowed to stay behind,

ostensibly to exhaust any remaining avenues for the child to obtain legal status in the US.

The form reads: “Class members are entitled to be reunited with their child(ren) and may choose for their child(ren) to accompany them on their removal or may choose to be removed without their child(ren). Any such decision must be made affirmatively, knowingly, and voluntarily.”

It is readily apparent that there is nothing “voluntary” about this reactionary and punitive policy, which resembles nothing so much as a kidnapping for ransom. Having forcibly removed, detained and in many cases abused these children, ICE then informs the parents of the price to be paid for their reunification--namely, agreeing to return to the poverty and violence that prompted the family’s flight in the first place.

ICE spokesperson Jennifer Elzea told NBC News that the form is intended only for those with separated children and who are subject to a final removal order, meaning that their capacity to argue their case for legal status within the US administrative immigration bureaucracy has been exhausted. She said, “An individual who has received a final order of removal has already been given the opportunity to make a claim of fear about returning to his or her country of origin.”

However, Elzea would not answer whether these claims had reached a conclusion, a process that can often take several years, before the form was given to parents.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union and the Southern Poverty Law Center, the use of these forms has been far more widespread than ICE claims, with some immigrants being given the forms to sign before they had even gone before a judge for the first

time.

Meanwhile, hundreds of children remain languishing in cruel conditions in the 100 or so immigrant concentration camps spanning 17 states, and the Trump administration has made no good faith effort to carry out the reunification order. Immigrant families detained at the border since June 20, when the policy of separation was halted, are now being detained together.

In a separate ruling Monday, a federal judge in the US District Court for the District of Columbia ordered an end to the indefinite detention of all asylum seekers who enter the country without proper documentation or at locations other than official border crossings. That policy is in direct contravention of international law as well as federal rules. It was reported last Friday that Attorney General Jeff Sessions is crafting a policy that will automatically deny asylum to anyone who crosses into the United States in such a manner.

Trump's attacks on immigrants and the working class more broadly have provoked widespread outrage among workers and youth throughout the US and the world, resulting in large crowds at rallies across the US and internationally in defense of immigrants over the weekend. Tens of thousands turned out at hundreds of rallies on Saturday to demand the reunification of immigrant families and the dismantling of ICE.

On Wednesday, the Fourth of July holiday, a woman climbed the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York City to protest the Trump administration's immigration policies. Therese Patricia Okoumou told police that she had planned to occupy the statue until "all the children are released." After several hours on the statue, which bears a plaque on its base inscribed with the famous appeal, "Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," Okoumou was arrested by police. Seven other protestors were arrested near the statue after they unfurled a banner reading "Abolish ICE!"

These expressions of popular outrage stand in stark contrast to the silent complicity of the Democratic Party, which has made no effort to mobilize their resources or the widespread popular support for immigrants in a campaign for the end of deportations and detentions.

While prominent Democrats such as New York Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and candidate for Congress Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have called for the abolition

of ICE and more "rational" immigration policies, they are all opposed to a policy of open borders, which would allow for the movement of immigrant workers free from the threat of harassment, detention or deportation.

The Democrats hope to reform or rebrand ICE while suppressing and channeling popular outrage back into the dead end of capitalist electoral politics, calling for the election of more Democrats to Congress in the November midterms.



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