

US Homeland Security chief forced out as anti-immigrant crackdown looms

Eric London
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Donald Trump's announcement last night that Kirstjen Nielsen will resign as Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary is part of a major reshuffling of the leadership of the US government's mass deportation apparatus. Trump and his fascist advisor Stephen Miller, with the support of the tens of thousands of police and agents who comprise the American anti-immigrant Gestapo, are preparing for a major escalation of the administration's attack on immigrant workers.

The maneuvers come in the wake of the collapse of the Democratic Party-led investigation by Robert Mueller into baseless allegations of Russian meddling in the US election. Strengthened by the investigation's hollow findings, Trump has launched a renewed attack on immigrants in an effort to build-up his far-right base of support.

The fact that Trump considered Nielsen insufficiently tough on immigration is a dangerous indication of the administration's plans for further mass round-ups and attacks on democratic rights.

As DHS Secretary, Nielsen oversaw the administration's "zero tolerance" policy, whereby thousands of immigrant children were separated from their parents, many permanently. Nielsen told the Senate at the time that the policy was justified because the children's "parents chose to do that."

Nielsen was also in charge of the administration's violent police riot at the border between San Ysidro, California and Tijuana in November 2018, when US officials fired teargas and rubber bullets at immigrant families seeking asylum in the US. At the time, Nielsen said that the military and border patrol "have the ability of force to defend themselves" from the unarmed refugees and that "every possible action...is on the table."

In a similar move three days ago, Trump withdrew his nomination of Ron Vitiello as head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). "Ron's a good man, but we're going in a tougher direction," Trump announced on Friday. Vitiello, who was an ardent supporter of Trump's proposal to build a wall across the US-Mexico border and called the Democrats a "liberalcratic party or NeoKlanist Party" in a 2015 Twitter post, was also deemed too "liberal" to prepare the coming anti-immigrant crackdown.

Because current CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan will now serve as acting DHS Secretary and is expected to be only a temporary placeholder, the reshuffle means the three top spots within the anti-immigrant police apparatus—CBP Commissioner, ICE Director and DHS Secretary—are now open. In addition, AP reported earlier this month that Trump is considering appointing an "Immigration Czar" to coordinate a broad, multi-agency crackdown against immigrants in the coming months.

Trump is reportedly considering former Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach and former Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli to oversee the renewed offensive against immigrants. Both are among the most right-wing individuals to win statewide elected office in the last 50 years.

Kobach recently proposed abolishing the rights of Mexican nationals living in the US to send remittance money to their impoverished family members in Mexico. He also called for the government to indefinitely detain entire families together and to create massive amounts of immigrant detention space by purchasing "thousands of trailers and mobile homes" and "create processing centers where you put a fence around a park or a parking lot, you park a hundred of those trailers there" and deport immigrants en masse.

Behind the resignation of Nielsen and the rescinding of Vitiello's nomination are the machinations of Stephen Miller, who is directing a silent upsurge of brown shirt immigration officers and border patrolmen.

CNN's Kaitlin Collins reported that Miller was personally responsible for Trump's decision to pull Vitiello's nomination. One unnamed administration official told the *Washington Post*: "Stephen wants to put Attila the Hun as Director of ICE."

A protest letter to Trump signed by three leaders of the union representing ICE officials gives a sense of the powerful moods among rank-and-file officers for unleashing the power of state reaction against immigrants.

On March 11, the head of the National ICE Council and the leaders of Local 1210 and Local 1944 of the National Immigration and Customs Enforcement Council, an affiliate of the AFL-CIO, addressed Trump:

"You frequently speak publicly of the great public safety work ICE is doing under your leadership. To be direct Mr. President—the rhetoric doesn't match reality and we hope that this letter shows you the complete and total nonsense that is really taking place under the Trump Administration on the southern border...Political games in Washington, DC have rendered the United States completely incapable of controlling its southern border."

The letter targeted two leading officials: Nielsen and Vitiello, and demanding Trump remove them from office. "ICE resources on the border are being grossly mismanaged by DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen and Acting ICE Director Ronald Vitiello," the letter said. Trump's recent maneuvers indicate that these fascistic forces have won out.

Meanwhile, Trump has made renewed vitriolic denunciations of immigrant workers in recent days. On Friday, Trump mocked asylum seekers during a visit to the US-Mexico border at Calexico, California.

"I look at some of these asylum people, they're gang members," he said. "They're not afraid of anything. They have lawyers greeting them. They read what lawyers tell them to read." Asylum is "a scam. It's a hoax," Trump said. On Saturday, Trump told the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas that asylum seekers housed beneath a highway overpass in El Paso, Texas resembled "UFC fighters" who fight in chain-link cages.

The vast majority of the US population opposes Trump's attacks on immigrants. A higher number of Americans support immigration than ever before, according to a January 2019 Gallup Poll.

Sixty-two percent of Americans say immigrants strengthen the country versus just 28 percent who say immigrants take jobs and reduce living standards for US natives. In 1994, only 31 percent said immigrants had a positive impact, compared with 63 percent who said immigrants are a popular burden. Among young people, three quarters believe immigrants have a positive impact. Immigrants comprise 14 percent of the US population—some 45 million people.

The constituency for fascism upon which Trump relies comes not from the working class, but from within the state apparatus itself as the statements of ICE officials reveal.

The efforts by Trump to whip-up anti-immigrant hysteria are in no small part aimed at diverting attention from the growth of the class struggle on both sides of the US-Mexico border and blocking the growth of a unified movement of workers across the Americas. The fight against the rise of the far right must be based on mobilizing the working class on a revolutionary program in a struggle for social equality.

This month, the Socialist Equality Party (US) is hosting six meetings with renowned German Trotskyist and leading anti-fascist Christoph Vandreier, Deputy National Secretary of the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and author of the book *Why are They Back? Historical Falsification, Political Conspiracy and the Return of Fascism in Germany*.

A central theme of the meetings will be to address the historical lessons that must be learned in order to build a mass working-class movement capable of preventing the worst crimes of German Nazism from taking place again today.



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