

For a kinder, gentler assault on immigrants

Bernie Sanders unveils immigration plan

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Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders unveiled Thursday the immigration plan that he would enact if he were elected president. While pledging to undo the worst of the Trump administration's anti-immigrant policies, Sanders' proposals essentially continue the bipartisan policy of mass deportations and stringent border controls.

Sanders has proposed on day one of his administration to place a "moratorium" on deportations until an audit is complete. After such an audit takes place, the deportations would presumably continue.

The Vermont senator also calls for an end to the construction of the US-Mexico border wall, calling it "ineffective." Significantly, he doesn't call for dismantling the portions of the wall already built, or those that will be built over the next 13 months.

Private, for-profit immigration jails would also be eliminated, but the vast network of state-run prisons that lock up immigrants and refugees, men, women, and children, would remain untouched.

Sanders also calls for the end of Trump's Muslim ban and the dropping of all litigation against so-called "sanctuary cities." He has pledged to end Trump's "Remain in Mexico" policy and allow asylum seekers to make their claims in the US.

In other words, a Sanders administration would essentially return to the status quo that prevailed under the Obama administration, in which cases dragged on for years in immigration courts, with no actual guarantee of asylum.

Sanders makes reference to "decades of disastrous foreign policy decisions" in regard to US destabilization efforts in the Americas, but he tactfully makes no mention of the US-backed right-wing coup in Honduras, one of the main drivers of the flood of Central American refugees, because that was overseen

by the Obama administration and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

He then calls for a summit of Latin American leaders to address "the root causes" of immigration. The language is telling. Over a century of US imperialism is described as "disastrous" and not criminal. A summit, were it ever convened, would do nothing fundamentally to alter the relationship of the US to its client states abroad and the need of big business to exploit the region and its inhabitants.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) would also be expanded under a Sanders presidency. These Obama-era programs kept a database of its applicants and were designed to ensure that not every immigrant could qualify. DAPA has already been thrown out by the federal courts and DACA could well face the same fate next year.

Sanders goes further, promising that every immigrant who has lived in the US for at least five years can find a way toward citizenship free from fear of deportation. This legislation, along with similar proposals of free Medicare and free college tuition for all, would have to pass a Congress which is dominated by corporate interests and fiercely hostile to all of these policies.

What has received the most media coverage is Sanders' supposed proposal to "abolish ICE and CBP." The platform details no such thing. These agencies, far from being broken up, would have their functions redistributed to the "proper authorities." The Department of Homeland Security would "refocus its mission on keeping our country safe and responding effectively to emergencies."

Thus, a Sanders administration would still jail and deport immigrants en masse only it would be done

under the “proper authorities” using different initials. Changing the signboards on the concentration camps makes not the slightest difference to immigrants facing terror and repression.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is also mentioned by Sanders with his counter-proposal of “fair trade deals and humane foreign policy.” Sanders pledges to renegotiate NAFTA in the interest of workers and not “multinational corporations.” Exactly how Sanders would negotiate a trade deal that was not advantageous to American banks and corporations is not explained.

The sum of Sanders’ proposals would be a return to the Obama-era policies of mass deportations and repression without the overtly racist and cruel practices of the Trump administration. Such tactics, as far as Sanders and other members of the ruling class are concerned, have only served to discredit the capitalist state and offend the democratic sentiments of wider layers of the population.

Both Sanders and Trump agree on the need for borders and their enforcement to preserve the nation-state system and world capitalism. Sanders infamously called open borders a “Koch brothers proposal” and has praised President Obama, the deporter-in-chief, as a model.

Despite Trump’s fascistic denunciations of the Democrats for being “socialist” and for “open borders,” the reality is not one of the Democratic candidates in the 2020 elections has called for open borders or even the dismantling of the existing border wall.



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