

Trump boasts of Democrats' backing for his assault on immigrants

Bill Van Auken
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With conditions facing immigrants and those seeking asylum in the US becoming increasingly horrific, US President Donald Trump gloated over the weekend that the Democratic Party has bowed to his rabid anti-immigrant policy by voting to approve billions of dollars in new funding for his border wall.

In a speech to a meeting organized by the far-right student group Turning Point USA in West Palm Beach, Florida, Trump boasted of the overwhelming bipartisan approval of the \$738 billion National Defense Authorization Act, which, according to the White House, “enables more than the \$8.6 billion amount included in the budget request to be dedicated for the President’s border wall, including nearly \$1.4 billion in direct funding.”

While dropping opposition to Trump illegally diverting funds from the Pentagon budget for the border wall, the legislation was also stripped of a provision that would have limited the role of military troops in hunting down and imprisoning immigrants at the border. The Pentagon is maintaining a permanent deployment of 5,500 National Guard and active duty soldiers on the US southern border.

“I got that one through as part of the defense bill, because you know what? The Democrats don’t like the issue anymore, because they know we’re right,” Trump told his right-wing audience. “When you see what’s happening over there, they know we’re right. They sort of let that one sail through.”

Indeed, even as it proceeds with its impeachment of Trump based on the narrow and reactionary charge that he has been insufficiently aggressive against Russia by delaying military funding for the right-wing Ukrainian government, the Democratic Party is marching in lock step with the White House on the buildup for war, the attacks on the working class and the brutal treatment of immigrants and refugees.

As the Democrats and Republicans close ranks, conditions on the US-Mexico border and in detention centers for immigrants have become increasingly hellish, constituting a violation of international laws guaranteeing the right to asylum, and a shameful crime against humanity.

Since coming into office in 2017, the Trump administration has attempted to impose what it calls a “zero tolerance” policy on the US southern border by creating conditions for immigrants that are so cruel and punishing that they would deter the arrival of those fleeing violence, political repression and grinding poverty created by a century of US imperialist domination and decades of US-backed dictatorships and civil wars that claimed the lives of

hundreds of thousands in Central America.

The most infamous of these was the separation of children from their families at the border, locking them up in cages. While a federal judge struck down the policy last year, the Trump administration and the Border Patrol are continuing to separate families, using loopholes in the ruling. This includes invoking the false pretense that they are protecting the safety of children by ripping them out of the arms of parents deemed “unfit,” or of other relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles and older siblings, with whom they have arrived at the border.

The most sweeping attack, however, has come in the form of the grotesquely misnamed “Migrant Protection Protocols” (MPP), or Remain in Mexico policy, that was implemented at the beginning of this year. It has turned back more than 60,000 asylum seekers and other migrants trying to enter the US, forcing them to wait across the border in Mexico for their cases to come before a US immigration judge.

Squalid refugee camps have grown up in the border cities of Tijuana, Mexicali, Ciudad Juárez, Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros, with many living in tents, without access to adequate food, safe water and sanitation. For the most part without jobs or other sources of income, they are also prey to criminal gangs.

The group Human Rights First (HRF) issued a report earlier this month documenting at least “636 public reports of rape, kidnapping, torture, and other violent attacks against asylum seekers and migrants returned to Mexico under MPP.” As the report makes clear, this number is only the “tip of the iceberg,” as the vast majority of violent attacks, including kidnappings for ransom, go unreported for fear of reprisals. A recent study by the US Immigration Policy Center at University of California San Diego found that one in four people sent back under MPP to the border cities of Tijuana and Mexicali have been threatened with physical violence.

Among the cases cited by the HRF report are those of asylum seekers attacked and kidnapped while going to and from hearings across the border in the US. These include a disabled nine-year-old girl and her mother who were seized and repeatedly raped over a two-week period. Because they missed a hearing scheduled during their captivity, an immigration judge ordered them deported.

With temperatures in northern Mexico dipping below the freezing mark last week, conditions for those camping out on the border waiting for months for an immigration hearing, many of them young children, have grown increasingly desperate. Helen

Perry, a nurse practitioner and Global Response Management's operations director, told HRF: "Speaking from having seen other humanitarian crises in the world, this is one of the worst situations that I've seen. It's only going to get worse, and it's going to get worse rapidly."

According to data compiled by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University, as of September, fewer than 10,000 of the asylum cases brought by people sent back across the border under MPP had been resolved. Out of this number, 5,085 cases were denied, while another 4,471 cases were dismissed without any decision, largely on procedural grounds.

Out of this process, which consists of interrogations by officers who treat asylum seekers as criminals and sham hearings held in tent courts on the border via video connections with judges based elsewhere, a grand total of 11 cases—or 0.1 percent of those completed—resulted in the granting of asylum. This right has been abolished de facto on the US southern border.

An indispensable accomplice in this crime is the supposedly "leftist" government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who has acquiesced to the Remain in Mexico policy, while imposing his own crackdown on immigrants attempting to cross Mexico's southern border with Guatemala. In the first ten months of this year, Mexican authorities have detained 170,000 Central American migrants, a 50 percent increase over 2018.

In a sinister attempt to tighten the screws even further, the Trump administration has introduced new policies crafted by the US president's fascist domestic adviser, Stephen Miller. One of these is aimed at pursuing for deportation those who come forward to care for unaccompanied children who have crossed the border. Initially, the White House wanted to "embed" Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents within the US refugee agency run by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) so that they could lie in wait for undocumented relatives coming forward to take custody of the children.

While the *Washington Post* reports that senior officials at HHS balked at this Hitlerian proposal, they have nonetheless allowed ICE to obtain fingerprints and biometric data of adults coming to government-run shelters to claim the children. Any adults deemed ineligible to take custody of the children would then be hunted down for deportation. This cruel measure is aimed as a deterrent to immigration by instilling terror among immigrants who would come forward, thereby preventing children from reuniting with their families.

Another immigration rule change introduced by the Trump administration would make minor infractions, including the use of false identification, the receipt of government benefits, and crossing the border after an order of deportation, grounds for denial of the right to asylum.

Meanwhile, conditions within the detention centers, where more than 50,000 people are held behind bars for months, if not years, waiting for immigration court proceedings, are as shocking as those on the US-Mexican border.

An extensive report published Monday by *USA Today* exposes conditions tantamount to torture in a sprawling immigration detention system consisting of some 222 facilities. This system has

become a \$3 billion industry, with 75 percent of all ICE detainees held in lockups run for profit by private prison corporations. Two-thirds of these detainees have no criminal records, and 26 percent of them are locked up solely for requesting asylum.

The report cites ICE's own inspection reports from July 2018 to November 2019, which found 1,818 "deficiencies" at 98 facilities, with issues ranging from "moldy food, filthy bathrooms to high number of sexual assault allegations, attempted suicides and claims of guards using force against detainees."

The report cites an incident in October at the Richwood Correctional Center, a privately-run jail in Louisiana, in which Roylan Hernandez-Diaz, a 43-year-old Cuban inmate, hanged himself after spending five months in detention waiting for his asylum case to be heard. When his death became known, some 20 detainees staged a protest, writing "Justice for Roylan" on their T-shirts and sitting in the cafeteria while refusing to eat. The response was a violent attack by guards that sent one of them to the hospital.

Among the cases cited in the report was that of a disabled mother of two who had immigrated to the US with her family at age two from Jamaica and was a legal permanent resident before being jailed on a minor drug offense and targeted for deportation. A cancer survivor, in July of last year she was sent to a Florida county jail with a contract with ICE, where she was told that the Tamoxifen medication she took to keep the cancer from recurring had run out. Deprived of the medication for three weeks, she was informed in April that her breast cancer had returned and released from custody.

Such atrocities are not merely a matter of negligence, but rather are perpetrated by design as part of a fascistic and vindictive immigration policy that exposes the class hostility of both major US parties to immigrants and the working class as a whole.

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