Trump announces plan to halt all immigration to US

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On Monday night, Donald Trump announced via tweet that due to the coronavirus the government would shut all immigration to the United States, a move without precedent in American history.

This shameful police state action is a desperate attempt by the Trump administration to distract from the criminality of the ruling class's own response to the coronavirus.

Every element of the official response—from ignoring the initial warnings to the multi-trillion-dollar corporate handout and the insane efforts to rush workers back to work—has been to protect Wall Street and guarantee corporate profits no matter the human cost. The result has been economic collapse and death on a mass scale. Yesterday was one of the deadliest days on record and the US is approaching 50,000 total deaths, with no end in sight.

Trump's proposal for a 60-day "pause" on immigration would include all legal applications for immigrant visas and permanent residency. It would, however, exclude guest farmworker visas at the request of large agribusinesses.

The social landscape of the country would be drastically altered by such a move, which would effectively establish a permanent underclass of people who have no avenue to ever access social programs, unemployment benefits or decent-paying jobs.

As tens of millions of Americans confront an indefinite future of mass unemployment, food lines and poverty, Trump's announcement is a dangerous and calculated attempt to scapegoat the most oppressed sections of the working class for the devastating social consequences of the ruling class's bipartisan response.

As usual, Trump announced the new policy in a flippant late-night tweet that contained almost as many lies as total words:

"In light of the attack from the Invisible Enemy, as well as the need to protect the jobs of our GREAT American Citizens, I will be signing an Executive Order to temporarily suspend immigration into the United States."

At yesterday's press conference, Trump absurdly claimed that immigrants are responsible for the lack of medical supplies, scapegoating them for the government's inability to provide adequate medical resources, ventilators and protective equipment for health care workers. Banning immigration was necessary to "help to conserve vital medical resources for American citizens," Trump said, implying that non-citizens deserve to die without any medical care.

Trump also blamed immigrants for the fact that 22 million people filed for unemployment benefits in recent weeks, saying his immigration ban was to "help put unemployed Americans first in line for jobs as we reopen."

Trump's reference to "reopening" workplaces betrays an immediate purpose of his announcement: to use racial and national chauvinism as a tool to distract from and suppress social opposition to the ruling class's efforts to open business and workplaces by Trump's proposed goal of May 1.

Several states, including Georgia and South Carolina, have already begun opening non-essential businesses in advance of Trump's proposed date, despite overwhelming medical evidence that such moves will lead to the deaths of countless thousands more.

But Wall Street is demanding the right to exploit the working class with no restrictions and with no attention to how many will die. While millions of laid-off workers are still awaiting their stimulus and unemployment checks, trillions of dollars were transferred to the banks and corporations overnight under the bipartisan CARES Act.

Corporate America is preparing for millions to go back to work by legally protecting itself against any responsibility for the forthcoming surge in deaths.

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During his press conference Monday, Trump said his administration was going to provide blanket protection to corporations from lawsuits filed in behalf of workers who get sick or die on the job: “We are trying to take liability away from these companies,” Trump said. “We just don’t want that because we want the companies to open and to open strong.”

Under conditions where workers are already engaged in strikes and protests *against* non-essential work in the US and internationally, the “back to work” order threatens to trigger a social explosion.

The *Washington Post* worried in an April 19 article, “As more than half the people in the world hunker down under some form of enforced confinement, stirrings of political and social unrest are pointing to a new, potentially turbulent phase in the global effort to stem the coronavirus pandemic. Already, protests spurred by the collapse of economic activity have erupted in scattered locations around the world.”

At the same time, Trump’s panicked announcement on immigration underscores the profound divisions within the ruling class as to how best to suppress social opposition and maintain corporate profits in the midst of the coronavirus crisis.

Trump is engaged in an ongoing fight with a series of Democratic state governors, including Washington Governor Jay Inslee, who said that Trump was “fomenting domestic rebellion” by promoting small right-wing protests demanding an end to stay-at-home regulations.

Last month, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said Trump’s threat to implement a forced quarantine on the whole state would amount to a “federal declaration of war” against the states, calling it “a civil war kind of discussion.” California Governor Gavin Newsom has repeatedly called California a “nation state” in recent weeks and formed the “Western States Pact” with Oregon and Washington, the explicit purpose of which is to promote a “shared vision for reopening their economies.”

The opposition to Trump by governors of these states—home to Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Amazon—does not represent a progressive alternative to Trump. The Democratic Party governors are no less determined to force workers back to work against the advice of medical experts. The Democratic Party has been just as aggressive as Trump in scapegoating China and Chinese people for the spread of the disease.

Trump’s ban on immigration is part of an international process. Across the world, each national bourgeoisie is responding to the crisis by erecting trade barriers and limiting immigration, “protecting himself,” as Leon Trotsky wrote, “behind a customs wall and a hedge of bayonets.”

But the nature of the coronavirus crisis demands an international response, not limited by the framework of the nation-state system, which the disease itself does not respect.

Just across the now-closed US-Mexico border, thousands of Mexican workers at sweatshop factories and warehouses in cities like Tijuana, Matamoros and Ciudad Juárez are protesting to demand a halt to non-essential production and full pay for time off from work. These demands are the same as the demands of their counterparts in the US, Europe and elsewhere. They objectively express the yearnings of billions of people, regardless of national identity or citizenship status, who are not prepared to die of coronavirus to help the corporate bottom line.

The growing mass graves filled with people who should not have died are a monument to the capitalist system and the global ruling class that has used the disease to enrich itself even further. Trump’s xenophobia is an attempt to divide the working class and distract it from the growing death toll, from the food bank and unemployment lines, and the deadly prospect of a return to work. Desperate governments take desperate measures.

The fact that the demands of striking workers appear so patently reasonable to billions of workers but are unacceptable to the financial aristocracy means the demands are impossible to achieve under capitalism. Seizing the productive forces out of the hands of the rich and reorganizing society to meet human need is a matter of life and death.

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