

Oppose Texas' ban on ground transport for undocumented immigrants!

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1 August 2021

On Wednesday, Texas Republican Governor Greg Abbott issued an executive order effectively making it illegal for certain undocumented immigrants to travel within the second largest state in the country. Although Abbott's order is perhaps the most sweeping restriction on the right to travel since Japanese internment, it has received scant attention by the Biden administration, whose anti-immigrant policies facilitated Abbott's measure.

The internal travel ban is an attack on the democratic rights of the entire population and must be actively opposed by workers, regardless of immigration status. In recent months, Abbott has begun enforcing his own state immigration policy, deploying the Texas National Guard and 1,000 state troopers to the border to arrest thousands of immigrants as part of "Operation Lone Star." Abbott has also allocated \$250 million in state funding to construct a border wall, all with ex-president Donald Trump's explicit approval.

The latest order applies both to immigrants who are released from immigration detention centers as well as immigrants who have entered the US in roughly the last 18 months since Trump invoked Title 42 provisions effectively barring immigration during the coronavirus pandemic. It declares that private individuals, companies and nonprofit organizations cannot transport undocumented people, and that immigrants can only travel in the custody of federal or state police.

The proclamation marks a major escalation of Trump and the Republican Party's strategy to scapegoat immigrants for the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. It reads: "The admittance and movement of migrants under the Biden Administration is exposing Texas to Covid-19 and creating a public health disaster in Texas...busloads of migrants, an unknown number of whom are infected with COVID-19, are being

transported to communities across the State of Texas, exposing Texans to the spread of Covid-19."

It concludes: "No person, other than a federal state or local law-enforcement official, shall provide ground transportation to a group of migrants who have been detained by CBP [Customs and Border Protection] for crossing the border illegally or who would have been subject to expulsion under the Title 42 order."

The Democratic Party has facilitated these police-state measures. Abbott's order cites the Biden administration as a source of legal authority, stating that "the Biden Administration has kept in place the Title 42 order, and for good reason."

Democratic Congressman from Texas Henry Cuellar has joined Abbott's efforts to scapegoat immigrants for the coronavirus pandemic, demanding the Biden administration "do a pause" of immigration because immigrants "might have COVID-19." The Biden administration filed a lawsuit against Abbott's order, but not because it violates the democratic rights of immigrants. Rather, the Justice Department claimed in its suit that Texas usurped the powers of the federal government to regulate immigration.

Because CBP releases immigrants from detention centers by dropping them at nearby bus stops, the order will effectively create homeless encampments at bus stops in border cities like McAllen, El Paso and Brownsville.

The order also applies to recent arrivals who evaded detection but who would have been turned away under Title 42 had they been captured, meaning thousands of impoverished undocumented people in major cities like Dallas, Houston and San Antonio may now be unable to travel by motorized vehicle, even to drive to work or the grocery store, for fear of being pulled over and deported on the spot.

To enforce the order, Abbott has provided police with powers beyond what even Arizona Republicans attempted to do through the infamous Senate Bill 1070 in 2010. The order allows police to pull over any vehicle that officers have “reasonable suspicion” to believe is transporting undocumented immigrants, a blank check for racial profiling in a state with a plurality of Latinos. Vehicles that have undocumented immigrants in them will be escorted either back to point of origin or to the US-Mexico border. Vehicles that are “illegally” transporting undocumented people will be impounded by the state.

The claim that the measure is a health necessity is nothing but a cynical pretext. Abbott has actively fought all health-based restrictions on business during the pandemic. Twenty-four hours after barring immigrants’ right to travel on health grounds, he issued another executive order prohibiting local authorities from implementing vaccine and mask mandates. As cases surge throughout Texas, the state government promotes vaccine skepticism and appeals to extreme backwardness in order to guarantee corporate profits no matter the human cost.

Abbott’s order is a part of Donald Trump’s ongoing fascist strategy. The Abbott administration has also transformed Texas into the epicenter of Trump and the Republican Party’s efforts to restrict voting rights nationally.

In June, Trump visited Abbott in Texas and declared, “We have an open, really dangerous border. We better go back fast.” In April, Texas Attorney General and Trump ally Ken Paxton sued the Biden administration to demand more rapid expulsion of asylum seekers. Paxton was joined in the lawsuit by the America First Legal Foundation, a legal group founded by Trump’s fascist advisor Stephen Miller.

On Saturday, Trump’s advisor Stephen Miller appeared on Fox News’ “Hannity Show” to discuss his collaboration with Abbott’s administration to create a new axis in the assault on immigrants.

Miller said, “We have unfettered, unrestrained, unchecked illegal immigration from people who are COVID positive being released into Texas, being released in Arizona, being released all across the country at the same time as your kids are suffering from these onerous restrictions... [immigrants are] unscreened, unchecked, unvaccinated and unmasked

and they are spreading COVID and bringing new variants into the country.” Miller also claimed Democrats want immigrants to vote illegally.

In reality, the Biden administration has carried forward the Trump administration’s attacks on immigrants. Last week, it announced it was resuming fast-track deportation flights for immigrant families. The Department of Homeland Security announced, “By placing into expedited removal families who cannot be expelled under Title 42, we are making clear that those who do not qualify to remain in the United States will be promptly removed.” During a June trip to Guatemala, Vice President Kamala Harris warned Central Americans fleeing violence and poverty caused by a century of imperialist exploitation: “Do not come.”

Throughout the Trump presidency, the Democratic Party systematically dismantled protests against Trump’s fascist attack on immigrants. Democratic Socialists of America’s Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez played a critical role in this operation. She traveled to the Texas border during Trump’s presidency and feigned anger over the detention of children but has defended the same policies when carried out by Biden, denouncing left critics of his immigration policy as “privileged” and “bad faith actors.”

Impoverished Central American workers are not to blame for the spread of the coronavirus. Like the Wuhan Lab lie, the ruling class is seeking to deflect blame for the pandemic, which rests on the shoulders of the American ruling class, and has pursued a bipartisan policy of opposing health restrictions and forcing workers on the job to secure corporate profits. Seven months after Trump’s attempted putsch of January 6, the far right is continuing its assault on democratic rights. The Abbott-Trump-Miller attack on immigrants in Texas is an attack on the democratic rights of the working class as a whole and must be opposed.



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