

# The Biden administration's war on refugees

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Behind the backs of the population, the Biden administration is implementing a dangerous and reactionary shift in immigration policy and enforcing it through dictatorial expansions of presidential power.

The aim of the shift is to dramatically reduce physical border crossings on a scale not seen in decades, as well as to block asylum seekers from reaching US soil where the US Constitution applies. This right-wing shift exposes as lies the claim that US imperialism is a beacon for “democracy” and that its war against Russia has anything to do with “human rights.”

On October 30, NBC News reported that the Biden administration has drafted a policy document granting the executive branch the power to detain Haitian immigrants at Guantánamo Bay, adjacent to the military prison where the government has imprisoned and tortured hundreds under the auspices of the “war on terror.”

Now the Biden administration says it may use Guantánamo as a “lily pad” for immigrants, though the correct term would be “internment camp.” Under the initial proposal, 400 Haitian immigrants would be held in cells and bunk rows in a constitutional no man’s land where they have no right to challenge their treatment or deportations as they would have if they had arrived on US soil.

Days earlier, the Biden administration pulled out of mediation talks with lawyers representing over 300,000 recipients of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) who sued the Trump administration for rescinding TPS for 240,000 Salvadorans, 77,000 Hondurans, 14,000 Nepalese and 4,000 Nicaraguans in 2018. The Biden administration has continued to oppose the immigrants’ challenge, essentially backing Trump’s revocation of TPS status and threatening to deport hundreds of thousands of people.

Earlier in October, data published by the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) documented that the Biden administration removed 2.8 million immigrants from the United States in Fiscal Year 2021, more than any year in American history.

Most significantly, the data revealed that over one million were removed under “Title 42,” the antidemocratic provision by which the government bans immigration due to

a “public health” emergency. Trump initially invoked Title 42 citing the COVID-19 pandemic as a pseudo-legal justification, and courts have maintained it under Biden. Those banned from entering the US under Title 42 also do not have constitutional rights and cannot apply for asylum.

On October 12, the Biden administration signed a new rotten deal with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) banning tens of thousands of immigrants from Venezuela from crossing into the United States, also under Title 42. AMLO has agreed to allow the Venezuelans to live in tent cities, where immigrants escaping societies ravaged by imperialist war and capitalist exploitation live in squalor and disease.

With a blend of cynicism and hypocrisy that the Democratic Party has perfected over the last 200 years, Biden and the Democrats continue to posture as defenders of immigrants.

At a recent event for new US citizens, Biden repeated the hackneyed Democratic Party appeal: “It’s the dreams of immigrants like you that built America.” But on Monday, when a group of asylum seekers tried to march across the Rio Grande near El Paso carrying a flag that said, “We, the migrants, built America,” Biden’s CBP fired pepper balls down at their heads, as they scrambled across the river back to their tarp houses in Mexico.

The attack on immigrants comes as poverty and scarcity devastate the working class of Latin America and the Caribbean. The pandemic and the prolongation of the US/NATO war against Russia in Ukraine have had a devastating impact on hundreds of millions of people in countries who have suffered over a century of US imperialist domination.

In Haiti, society is in a state of collapse, as cholera spreads, food and gas are running out, and gangs take control of broad portions of the country. Nevertheless, the Biden administration has deported refugees back to Haiti, even after family members reported that the Haitian government was detaining deportees in a penitentiary in exchange for ransom money.

Those who make it to the US are treated with extreme brutality. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with a young

Haitian mother who was detained by the Biden administration at the border last year:

It is painful to talk about what happened to me in Texas. When I talk about it, it feels like someone is putting a fork in my heart. When I was detained, it was horrible. First, I was forced to sleep under a bridge with my baby. Some of the guards were beating us under that bridge, like you used to be able to see on the news. When we were moved to a prison, I thought things would get better, but they didn't. In prison they took my child's medicine even though he was bleeding. I was there four days, they didn't give us food, we were only eating crackers. We couldn't bathe, brush our teeth, we had to sleep on the floor. The babies were dehydrated, their eyes looked like they were going to faint. One doesn't know what to do as a mother when your child says, "Mom, I'm hungry, I'm hungry," but you can't do anything. My baby was vomiting, he had diarrhea, he was bleeding in his feet. And when we left the guards mocked us for smelling bad.

The policy pivot currently being carried out by the Biden administration is a massive concession to the fascistic political right.

The Republican Party's midterm strategy has gone farther than the usual right-wing chauvinistic language. The Republican governors of Texas and Florida (Greg Abbott and Ron DeSantis) have spent the last several months bussing and flying over 11,000 immigrants to large cities run by Democrats in a series of stunts aimed at portraying immigrant workers as criminals.

The Democratic political strategy has been to adapt to this narrative. In a Pennsylvania Senate debate with Trump-backed Republican candidate Mehmet Oz, for example, the Democrat John Fetterman denounced "illegal immigrants" and called for "secure borders."

Amid this right-wing climate encouraged by the political establishment, incidents of violence against immigrants are growing. In late September, Michael Sheppard, the warden at an immigration detention center in Sierra Blanca, Texas, fired on a group of migrants who had stopped for a drink in the desert, killing 22-year-old Mexican immigrant Jesús Iván Sepúlveda Martínez and critically wounding 31-year-old Brenda Berenice Casias Carrillo.

The ongoing attack on immigrant workers is an international process and a warning to the entire working class. On Monday, British Tory Home Secretary Suella

Braverman denounced immigration as "out of control" and an "invasion." The same day, a right-wing individual threw firebombs at a center for immigrant refugees in the coastal town of Dover, where the government detains refugees in crowded internment camps, where they sleep on floors and catch diseases like diphtheria.

The same applies in the "democratic" European Union, where thousands of immigrants fleeing North Africa and the Middle East drown attempting to enter every year.

Just yesterday, a boat carrying 68 refugees sank off the Greek island of Evia. Earlier in October, 92 immigrants from Morocco, Iran, Bangladesh and Pakistan were discovered in Greece after having been "abandoned" and stripped "completely naked" by authorities. In Italy on Tuesday, fascist Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni appointed a man who has been photographed wearing a Nazi armband as a minister in her government.

The attack on immigrant workers is driven by the logic of the escalating war against Russia. In wartime, the most ruthless attacks on democratic rights are always bound up with restrictions on immigration and the shoring up of the repressive apparatus of the nation-state.

As US imperialism entered the First World War, the Wilson administration signed the Espionage Act, which restricted both anti-war speech and immigration and now serves as the basis for the prosecution of Julian Assange. As the US prepared to enter the Second World War, the Roosevelt administration signed the Smith Act, also known as the Alien Registration Act, which banned anti-war speech, blocked immigration and enabled Japanese internment.

The fight to defend the rights of immigrants must be based on a fight to mobilize the working class against imperialist war, social inequality and their source: the capitalist system. The Socialist Equality Party (US) demands the lifting of Title 42 restrictions, the granting of legal status to all immigrants who wish to enter the US, the guaranteed right to travel to all regardless of nationality, and the dismantling of CBP, ICE, DHS and the national security complex.



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