

After Title 42: Biden steps up deadly violence, repression at southern border

Barry Grey
12 May 2023

At 12:01 am Eastern Daylight Time on Friday, the Biden administration lifted Title 42 and imposed a new ban on refugees seeking to apply for asylum at the southern border. In March of 2020 Donald Trump invoked Title 42, an obscure emergency public health provision, as the pretext, citing the coronavirus, for summarily expelling migrants fleeing poverty, repression and state-sanctioned violence in Central and Latin American countries that have been subjected to more than a century of subversion and exploitation by US imperialism.

Joe Biden continued and expanded the use of Title 42, expelling millions of asylum seekers, as well as his predecessor's policy of mass detention of refugees. He was forced to end the provision when he criminally ended the COVID-19 national emergency in order to terminate all financial support for COVID testing and treatment, cut social spending and further boost corporate profits, despite the continuing toll from COVID in needless deaths and the ravages of Long COVID.

In its place he and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) chief Alejandro Mayorkas are requiring asylum seekers to file their claims in their home country or in "regional processing centers" to be set up in Colombia, Guatemala and other Latin American countries. Of course, this leaves them in peril of attack or murder by the drug cartels, gangs and government assassins they are seeking to escape. Those who try to apply at the US border will be sent back to their home countries. Migrants from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti and Nicaragua—countries where the US is either unable or unwilling to deport directly—will be sent back to Mexico under the terms of an agreement with the Mexican government.

The brutal and anti-democratic policies of both capitalist parties, in defiance of international laws guaranteeing asylum rights, have produced a nightmare scene at the southern border. Amid blazing heat, and lacking food, water, shelter or medical care, some 65,000 desperate emigrants from what Washington calls its "backyard" are gathered along the border. They are confronted from the US side with 24,000 armed Customs and Border Protection (CBP) guards and 1,500 active duty US troops, bolstered by 2,500 Texas National Guard troops deployed unilaterally by the state's fascistic Republican governor, Greg Abbott.

On the Mexican side, Washington's accomplice in its war against refugees, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), has deployed 25,000 Mexican troops to terrorize and suppress migrants who have come not only from Latin America, but also from Asia, Africa and war-devastated parts of the Middle

East and Europe.

Already in the first hours of the post-Title 42 border crisis, the US government acknowledged the death of an unaccompanied migrant child in US custody. The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) confirmed a report from Honduran authorities that 17-year-old Ángel Eduardo Maradiaga Espinoza, who had arrived in the US without a parent or guardian, died in government custody at a shelter west of Tampa, Florida.

As of Wednesday, according to US government figures, there were 8,681 unaccompanied children in HSS detention facilities. Border Patrol officials say they encountered more than 152,000 unaccompanied minors in fiscal year 2022, and have encountered more than 70,000 since October 1, 2022. Desperate parents, barred from applying for asylum at the border themselves, in some cases allow a child to attempt the crossing because, under law, they cannot be sent back to Mexico. The hope is that the child will get a sponsor in the US who will then help bring in the rest of the family.

Many, many more have died as a result of the brutal anti-immigrant policy of the American ruling class and both of its parties, as well as the ruling classes of Europe, and those numbers will only increase without the mass, united and international intervention of the working class. Less than two months ago, on March 27, at least 40 refugees were killed in a fire that broke out in a crowded detention center in the Mexican border town of Ciudad Juarez. The victims were locked in a cell and AMLO's guards refused to let them out.

The US Border Patrol, which claims a capacity to detain 10,000 migrants in its border facilities, says it is already holding over 28,000. The Biden administration says this number could rise to 45,000 by the end of this month. As a stopgap measure to relieve some of the pressure, the DHS this week announced a plan to allow a fraction of those being held to be released into the US prior to receiving a hearing date. A Trump-appointed judge immediately blocked implementation of the order.

The Republicans and the corporate media, echoed by Biden and the Democrats, are whipping up a pogrom atmosphere. Just days after a neo-Nazi shot and killed eight people at a mall in Allen Texas, and a man drove his car into a group of immigrants in the border town of Brownsville, killing eight, CNN extended a national platform for Trump to spew his anti-immigrant filth at its town hall event Wednesday evening.

In Texas, Governor Abbott not only deployed his National Guard

to the border, in what he called “Operation Lone Star,” he denounced Biden’s decision to order 1,500 active-duty troops to the border as a token measure and demanded between 15,000 and 150,000 troops. He is supporting a state bill that would create a “Border Protection Unit” empowering citizens to “arrest, detain, and deter individuals crossing the border illegally, including with the use of non-deadly force.”

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, another Republican fascist, on Wednesday signed a sweeping state law on immigration policy. Its provisions include:

- Banning local governments from issuing identification cards for people who can’t prove citizenship.
- Requiring hospitals that accept Medicaid to include a question on intake forms about the patient’s citizenship status.
- Banning undocumented law school graduates from being admitted to the Florida bar.
- Increasing penalties for human trafficking-related offenses.

On Thursday, House Republicans passed the “Secure the Border” bill, which would allocate millions of dollars to hire thousands more border patrol agents and enlarge Trump’s southern border wall.

The response of Biden and the Democrats is to adapt to the fascist agitation of the Republicans and implement their own barbaric assault on immigrants’ rights. In October of 2020, during his final pre-election debate with Trump, candidate Biden denounced Trump for tearing up the right to asylum. “This is the first president in the history of the United States of America that anybody seeking asylum has to do it in another country,” Biden declared, concisely summing up the policy he is now implementing.

Other Democrats are seeking to attack the GOP from the right. On Thursday, California Governor Gavin Newsom denounced House Speaker Kevin McCarthy’s budget-cutting bill on the grounds that it would slash \$4 billion from Customs and Border Protection and “result in the loss of 2,400-plus officers.”

To this must be added the reactionary role of the Democratic Socialists of America and other pseudo-left organizations of the upper-middle class, which seek to lend the Democratic Party in the US and AMLO’s party in Mexico a “progressive” veneer.

The savage treatment of asylum-seekers, overwhelmingly impoverished and oppressed workers, coincides with US escalation of the war against Russia in Ukraine and the intensification of military preparations against China. This is not an accident. The horrific scenes of mass suffering playing out at the US border completely explode Washington’s pretensions to be threatening nuclear war against Russia in order to defend democratic rights. But such wanton attacks on the rights of immigrants and promotion of chauvinistic and racist sentiments have always accompanied the turn by imperialism to war. They have always been part of a broader assault on the democratic and social rights of the working class in every capitalist nation involved in the struggle over markets, natural resources and sources of cheap labor.

American entry into World War I was accompanied by the Espionage Act, which outlawed anti-war speech and led to the jailing of socialist leader Eugene V. Debs, followed by the

deportation of socialist immigrants in the Palmer Raids of 1919-1920. The entry of the US into World War Two was preceded by the passage of the Smith Act, which Roosevelt used to jail 18 Trotskyists in 1944. The US declaration of war against Japan was followed by the mass incarceration of Japanese-Americans.

The so-called “war on terror” after 9/11 was accompanied by the opening of the Guantanamo gulag and the establishment of the Homeland Security department as well as the Northern Command.

The enforcement of what imperialist leaders are today calling a “war economy” and the conduct of “total war” for control of the Eurasian landmass requires the suppression of the class struggle in the United States as well as across Latin America, under conditions of a growing upsurge of working class opposition and a mounting rank-and-file rebellion against the pro-war, pro-corporate trade union apparatus.

What Leon Trotsky wrote in May of 1940, some 10 months into World War II, could, with minor updating, be used to describe present conditions:

The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a few hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States... Amid the vast expanse of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeoisie has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison.

The brutalization of immigrants is a damning expression of the bankruptcy of the nation state system to which capitalism is tied. The globalization of economic life and the technological integration of the world population have progressed far beyond what existed in Trotsky’s day.

But under capitalism, governments all over the world foment hatred of immigrants to divide the working class and divert attention from the real source of workers’ suffering, the capitalist system.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International reject the entire framework of the official discussion on immigration. We advance a socialist and internationalist solution to the crisis facing immigrant workers and for the establishment of a United Socialist States of the Americas. It is based on the strategic perspective of the international unity of the working class and world socialist revolution.

We stand for the right of workers from every part of the world to live in the country they choose, with full citizenship rights, including the right to work and travel without fear of deportation or repression.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)