As Trump threatens to revoke legal status of Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, residents continue to rally in support

Shannon Jones
6 October 2024

On the same day Trump issued more threats against Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, threatening to revoke their legal status to open the way for their mass deportation if he is elected, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters visited the city to speak to residents.

Some 18,000 Haitians in Springfield have been living in terror following slanderous statements by Trump and vice presidential candidate JD Vance claiming that Haitians were eating pets and making the city unlivable.

Tens of thousands of Haitian immigrants are currently living and working in the US legally under the Temporary Protected Status program enacted by Congress in 1990. Haitians were granted the special status after the devastating 2010 earthquake that killed over 300,000 people and left millions homeless. In recent years nearly 20,000 Haitian immigrants were invited to live and work in Springfield by state and local officials, to help ease a labor shortage.

A local resident who had come to the Rose Goute Creole restaurant in Springfield to show support for the Haitian community said, “There have been threats, our Walmart was closed. Things are tense, closed down for safety.

“I think people are showing support here. There are tensions and miscommunications, sides are picked. But people are coming here to show support. We are all trying to do the same thing; be safe, be happy.”

At dinner hour the line of customers stretched to the door. The restaurant has seen greatly increased traffic since the campaign started against the Haitian immigrant community.

Another couple passing through the area from out of state said they were saddened and shocked by the racist agitation by the Trump campaign, which has encountered little pushback from the campaign of Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris. They had made a special side trip to stop by the restaurant in a show of solidarity.

Language barriers, fear of victimization and violence have made it difficult for Haitian residents to speak out. There have been reports of random assaults on Haitian residents since the right-wing agitation began, and fascist elements have paraded in the city.

At the Haitian Community Help and Support Center in Springfield, the president, Viles Dorsainvil, and staff members welcomed the WSWS and spoke out about the campaign of intimidation instigated by Trump and Vance against Haitian immigrants in the city.

Dorsainvil said, “We were concerned when [Trump and Vance] made these allegations without fact-checking. The city officials and the mayor rejected all those claims. Since then, we have been experiencing tension, anxiety and bomb threats all over the city. Even the Ohio National Guard has been deployed at the schools. The annual city festival was cancelled this year. It has impacted the mental health of the citizens. It has been chaotic. At times citizens were afraid to come out and buy groceries, or even call an Uber.

“Political leaders should know that words matter. They should make sure what they say is accurate before they speak. It seems like they are taking this one case in Springfield to build up their political agenda. You may want more people to vote for you, but you need to consider people’s mental health.”

Julio, another staff member, said he had been encouraged by the support given by members of the community to Haitian residents. He showed WSWS

© World Socialist Web Site

reporters a video of local residents shouting at pro-Trump fascists who were chanting “America First.” Passing motorists yelled from their cars, “Leave us alone. No hate! Love!”

“The local people have been giving us support,” he said. “They come to see us, visit our church. They look out to see if ‘the enemy’ is coming. Some have been very caring.”

Julio spoke about the terror the community had suffered. He said, “They have beaten some people. But we are keeping solidarity together. We do good work here. We work hard, we pay taxes. People have bought houses. Even the governor said that.

“They accuse of eating pets. We never heard about any Haitians killing pets They are liars. It doesn’t make sense without any confirmation. You have to be informed before saying something. It doesn’t make sense.

“I am a university teacher. I taught psychology in Haiti. I teach Spanish and French. I know some English. I can write, even though I am not a native speaker.

“We cooperate with the community. We teach Creole.”

He described some of the conditions back home that brought immigrants to the United States from Haiti: “Haiti is not a poor country. We have gold, we have uranium, we have gas, a lot of resources. We love freedom.”

He said that the armed forces sent to Haiti by the US and other countries had done nothing to alleviate the conditions faced by ordinary Haitians, who have suffered more than two centuries of oppression at the hands of the colonial powers, and in the last century particularly the United States.

“There are armed gangs,” he said. “There is insecurity; they terrorize the population. They kill and kidnap people. Children need books. They need help going to school. Things are hard. We can’t go back. Life is hard in Haiti, but it is hard here too.

Julio said that Haitians had maintained good relations with co-workers at the many businesses in and around the city where they are employed. “Some work at Amazon. But some work in other cities, but they still live here,” he added.

With the current situation now, many are scared to go to work. He continued, “There are no jobs, no money for food or for rent. Some want to leave.”

He said that lies were being spread about Haitians in order to whip up divisions, such as the claim that Haitians are illegally accessing food stamps: “The government gave Haitians a little money to buy food and some people see that and say, ‘Oh, they are taking our food. They are taking our houses.’

“Life is difficult now. Before it was not like this before; we were free to go wherever we wanted to work. The city was glad to see us here because we were helping the economy because we were working hard.”

We asked Julio about the lack of response by the Democratic Party candidates Kamala Harris and Tim Walz to the attacks on Haitian immigrants.

He replied, “I saw the debate. She [Kamala Harris] was laughing. She said nothing about us. I cannot give any explanation for it, but she knew what she was doing. It was political.

“They should remember that America is an immigrant country. New Mexico and Texas used to belong to Mexico.

“We are not here to be involved in politics. We are here to get jobs and get a better life and to go home, to be back in Haiti.

“We would be wise to live in peace all over the planet. In America, Canada, France, we are all citizens of the world.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site