

US government revives McCarthyite bans on socialism, imposes ideological litmus test on immigrants

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On August 19, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued new “policy manual” guidance that vastly expands the grounds for denying immigration applications and naturalization. The measure deepens the ideological policing of immigrants, reviving Cold War era exclusions and extending them to any who oppose US imperialism and its crimes.

The guidance instructs immigration officers to conduct a “discretionary analysis” that includes not only an immigrant’s family ties, immigration history and humanitarian concerns but also their political views.

Among the factors that may weigh against immigrants are whether they have “endorsed, promoted, supported or otherwise espoused” the views of a “terrorist organization,” those engaged in “anti-American ideologies or activities” or groups and individuals associated with “antisemitic terrorism” or “antisemitic ideologies.”

The deliberately vague phrasing in the new policy update is not accidental. It opens the door for the state to brand opposition to US wars abroad, opposition to Zionism and the genocide in Gaza, or socialist advocacy of equality and revolution as “anti-American.” Anyone accused of such beliefs can be denied entry, permanent residence or citizenship.

The footnotes to the guidance point to 8 U.S.C. § 1424, a statute first codified in the depths of the Cold War. That provision bars naturalization to anyone who advocates “opposition to all organized government” or is affiliated with the Communist Party, the Communist Political Association or any “totalitarian party.” It prohibits membership in any organization that

advocates the “economic, international, and governmental doctrines of world communism” or “the establishment in the United States of a totalitarian dictatorship.”

In practice, these clauses were crafted to exclude and deport revolutionary socialists. The US government, terrified by the revolutionary upsurges of the 20th century, sought to criminalize Marxism itself. It outlawed not criminal actions but political doctrines—above all, the program of international socialist revolution.

The new USCIS guidance does not rescind these anti-communist prohibitions but builds directly upon them. By adding “anti-American ideologies” to the list, the government effectively declares that any opposition to capitalism, imperialism or the state itself is foreign, dangerous and prohibited.

Immigration attorney Eric Lee noted that under the new guidance, Trump “probably would deny Thomas Jefferson citizenship under the new USCIS policy for this letter he wrote to William Stephens Smith on Nov. 13, 1787.” In the letter, Jefferson famously wrote, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.”

Using the cudgel of “antisemitism,” the guidance provides sufficient ambiguity to allow the US government to ban entry to all those who oppose the ongoing US-backed genocide in Gaza.

The specter of Trotskyism haunts Washington

The guidance is aimed squarely at those who advance the perspective advanced by Leon Trotsky, co-leader of the Russian Revolution: that the emancipation of the working class requires international socialist revolution.

In *The Permanent Revolution* (1930), Trotsky wrote:

“The fundamental task of the proletarian party in each country is to connect the struggle of the workers with the struggle of the workers of the entire world.”

In the *Transitional Program* (1938), he warned:

“Without a socialist revolution ... a catastrophe threatens the whole culture of mankind.”

Trotsky also insisted on workers’ right to migrate freely, declaring in 1932:

“The workers must demand the abolition of all immigration laws. ... The working class must defend its own interests by demanding full freedom of movement for the workers.”

Each of these principles—internationalism, opposition to the capitalist state, the abolition of borders—falls directly into the categories of “anti-American” thought that the USCIS now polices. To advocate for Trotsky’s program of Permanent Revolution is, in the eyes of US law, to be disqualified from entry or citizenship.

The meaning of these changes is clear. Immigrants are not merely required to obey US laws; they must profess loyalty to US imperialism. Those who oppose the genocide in Gaza, those who advocate socialism, those who call for the unity of workers across borders are all suspect. Unable to rule democratically, the American ruling class demands ideological conformity at the border, turning immigration officers into political commissars of the capitalist state.

This policy update has nothing to do with keeping people “safe.” Its sole purpose is to suppress the spread of socialist consciousness within the working class, at a time when mass opposition to inequality, attacks on immigrants, dictatorship and war is growing internationally. A government that is jailing immigrant workers, persecuting students for writing op-eds, deporting families and supporting genocidal wars abroad now arrogates to itself the right to decide what thoughts are sufficiently “American” to be permitted in the country.

The working class must reject this ideological purge. The struggle for immigrants’ rights, for the freedom of movement and the right of workers to live and labor

wherever they choose is inseparable from the fight against imperialism, capitalism and the threat of world war.

The fact that the US government is seeking to outlaw the perspective advanced by Trotsky and the *World Socialist Web Site* is proof of not only its power but its truth.



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