Amid anti-immigrant protests in California

Obama announces increased border security and stepped-up deportations

By Norisa Diaz
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The Obama administration announced last week that it will begin taking executive action to speed up deportations and increase security on the US border with Mexico. These measures are being implemented in the midst of right-wing protests, heavily promoted in the media, targeting the transport to Southern California of recent child immigrants from Central America.

The US government has detained tens of thousand of children and parents with children since last October, many fleeing poverty and violence in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala.

Obama vowed last Monday to bypass Congress to pursue immigration "reform" measures, starting with $2 billion for policing and deportations. He said he was directing "the secretary of homeland security and the attorney general to move available and appropriate resources from our interior to the border."

Blaming the Republicans for the collapse of bipartisan immigration legislation and accusing them of refusing to "fix our broken immigration system," Obama said his administration would redouble efforts to convince workers in Southern and Central America that they had no hope of finding refuge in the US. "Many migrants now coming misunderstand the rules and believe they will receive leniency from US authorities," Obama said.

Over the weekend, Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson reiterated this position. While avoiding an explicit statement that all child immigrants will be immediately deported, Johnson said on NBC's "Meet the Press," "There's deportation proceeding pending against everybody coming illegally across the border." He added, "Our border is not open for illegal immigration, and we will stem the tide."

The administration's moves come amidst criticism from some Republicans that Obama is being too "soft" on immigrants. The administration's main concern has been to emphasize its right-wing, anti-immigrant credentials.

Media attention over the past week has focused on anti-immigrant protests organized in the Southern California city of Murrieta. Overcrowded Texas facilities began the transport of immigrants to Murietta and other cities for processing and supervised release by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents until a future trial.

Early last week, about 200 protesters blocked buses transporting immigrants from entering the US Border Patrol Station in Murrieta. This was followed by a smaller demonstration on the July 4 Independence Day holiday, although no buses with immigrants entered the town that day.

At the initial protest, demonstrators waved US flags, wielded signs with xenophobic slogans and chanted anti-immigrant phrases at buses carrying some 140 people, mostly children accompanied by parents. The buses were forced to head south to another border patrol facility in San Diego.

Larger numbers of pro-immigrant supporters joined the protests, expressing sympathy and support for the families seeking to enter the US. A meeting at a local high school on Wednesday was attended by more than 1,000 people, many of them supporters of the immigrants.

"Even though you're seeing on TV so much outburst of anti-immigrant feelings, I think there are a lot of people that want to respond and have compassionate

hearts… My husband and I were just so saddened." said Tina Nicholas, a resident of Murrieta for 25 years. Nicholas works at a local church and has been coordinating relief efforts for the migrants, including collecting diapers, groceries and personal hygiene products.

A local center that provides services to migrants reported overwhelming support from residents, who are offering shelter, food and transportation. The Obama administration and the entire political establishment are fully responsible for stoking up a toxic social atmosphere in which the most backward and xenophobic sentiments find expression. While both Republicans and Democrats are seeking to utilize the immigration issue for political purposes, the two parties agree on a brutal policy based on repression and the criminalization of undocumented workers. The immigration "reform" measure promoted by the Obama administration, which has now been shelved, included a massive increase in border security, along with a punitive "pathway to citizenship" for a minority of the undocumented immigrants currently in the country. In 2012, the Obama administration spent $18 billion on immigration enforcement, a sum greater than the budget for all other federal law enforcement agencies combined. Obama has overseen more deportations than any other president in US history.

The Mexico-US border is the most frequently crossed border in the world, with nearly 350 million annual crossings. The number of arrests and deaths have increased significantly over the past several years.

According to the US Border Patrol, 420,789 undocumented immigrants were apprehended in 2013, following a total of 364,768 in 2011. In 2013, there were 21,391 Border Patrol officials, a 500 percent increase from 1992. Appalling conditions have been documented within the ICE facilities throughout the Southwest where those who have recently arrived, mostly children, are processed and held. For up to nine days, families are packed into warehouse-like holding centers surrounded by razor-wire fences. Mothers are separated from their children, brothers from their sisters. Immigrants are kept in crowded pens and allowed outside only 45 minutes a day.

Many of the Central American immigrants are fleeing violence and extortion from gangs as a result of drug trafficking and the US-backed "war on drugs."

Decades of US imperialist intervention in Central and Latin American countries, along with austerity policies demanded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, have created the horrific conditions that make the thousand-mile-long, potentially deadly crossing a desirable alternative to trying to survive at home.