

Trump's war on immigrants

Nearly 15,000 children held in detention camps across the US

By Niles Niemuth
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Nearly 15,000 immigrant children are being held in a network of detention centers across the United States. Changes implemented by the Trump administration have filled the child jails to near capacity, and the government is considering adding more employees and more beds to make it possible to hold even more adolescents.

The Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the incarceration of immigrant children at more than 100 locations, reported Thursday that the system was 92 percent full. Among the most notorious detention centers is the tent camp on the US-Mexico border in Tornillo, Texas, where approximately 2,800 children are being held in the desert.

Children are being held at Tornillo for an average of 50 days before being released into the custody of sponsors, typically family members already living in the US who will take care of the minor until their status is determined by an immigration judge. New detainees are being brought into the camp faster than they are being released to sponsors.

Conditions that prevail in the detention centers can be traumatic, with reports by children of rapes, sexual abuse and assaults. A significant portion of those being detained are teenage boys from Central America who have crossed into the US without a parent, seeking asylum from poverty and gang violence in their home countries.

The population in the system began to swell after the Trump administration implemented a policy requiring anyone living with potential sponsors for a child to provide their fingerprints and go through a criminal background check.

This has raised fears among potential sponsors that

they would be opening up other family members to potential arrest or deportation. At least 41 family or household members were detained for deportation in 2018 after attempting to sponsor a detained child.

The Trump administration has also dramatically escalated its attack on immigrants through mass workplace arrests by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents. Such arrests have soared by more than 640 percent, from 311 in 2017 to 2,304 in 2018. Homeland Security agents opened 300 percent more workplace investigation in 2018, rising from 1,681 in 2017 to 6,848.

Among the largest raids carried out this year by ICE took place in June across northern Ohio with the arrest of 146 immigrants at Fresh Mark meat processing plants, and another 114 workers detained at Corso's Flower & Garden Center landscaping centers. The raids, which resembled military operations complete with helicopters hovering overhead, shattered immigrant communities and tore loved ones away from their families.

"Reducing illegal employment helps build another layer of border security," Executive Associate Director for Homeland Security Investigations Derek N. Benner boasted in a press release, "and reduces the continuum of crime that illegal labor facilitates, from the human smuggling networks that facilitate illegal border crossings to the associated collateral crimes, like identity theft, document and benefit fraud, and worker exploitation."

Contrary to Benner's claims, the Trump administration's escalation of workplace raids and arrests over the last year is an attack on the entire working class and does nothing to reduce exploitation.

Native-born workers have no interest in tearing immigrant fathers and mothers from the children. Moreover, the Gestapo tactics used against immigrants today will be used against all workers as the class struggle escalates.

Under conditions of deepening political crisis and conflict within the state apparatus, Trump is seeking to utilize the issue of immigration to develop a right-wing, fascist base, including within the military and police forces, by appealing to extreme nationalism and xenophobia.

On Tuesday, Trump threatened to utilize the military to build a “border wall” between the US and Mexico. “If the Democrats do not give us the votes to secure our Country,” he declared in a tweet, “the Military will build the remaining sections of the Wall. They know how important it is!”

Responding to questions about Trump’s proposal, Lt. Col. Jamie Davis told CNN, “To date, there is no plan to build sections of the wall. However, Congress has provided options under Title 10 US Code that could permit the Department of Defense to fund border barrier projects, such as in support of counter drug operations or national emergencies.”

Trump has already deployed thousands of active duty soldiers to the border to assist Customs and Border Protection, including by fortifying border crossings and stringing concertina wire. What was billed as a limited, temporary military operation to counter the caravans of Central American workers seeking asylum is becoming a permanent deployment inside the US. While some troops have begun to return back to their bases, 2,500 to 4,000 troops are expected to remain through January 31, past the initial December 15 deadline announced by Defense Secretary James Mattis.

Far from opposing Trump’s escalating assault on immigrants and the increasing restrictions on those seeking asylum, the Democratic Party has alternated between silence and begging for an agreement with the administration. During the midterm elections, the Democrats sought to avoid even discussing the issue of immigration, claiming it was a distraction. Even those who present themselves as “progressive,” such as New York Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, have dropped the call to “Abolish ICE.” Since her election, Ocasio-Cortez has said virtually nothing on immigration.

The Democrats’ fundamental agreement with Trump on the question of immigration was on full display this week during an open White House meeting between the president and Democratic Congressional leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer. While Trump belligerently insisted that he would shut down the government if he did not get full funding for a wall, Pelosi and Schumer shot back that they were eager to work with Trump in order to fund increased “border security.”

“We have a disagreement about the wall. Whether it’s effective or not. Not on border security, but on the wall,” Schumer told Trump.

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