

The 2016 US Election and the Scapegoating of Immigrants

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New Jersey Governor and Republican presidential hopeful Chris Christie proposed over the weekend that Washington institute a system of control over foreigners entering the country akin to the methods used by the express shipping company Fedex to track its packages. This Orwellian scheme, evoking the branding and police-state hounding of everyone visiting the US, is one more contribution to a 2016 US presidential debate that expresses complete contempt for democratic rights and a seething hatred within ruling circles for workers of every nationality.

Christie's appeal to anti-immigrant chauvinism and xenophobia came in the same week that his rival for the Republican presidential nomination, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, raised the need for not only sealing off the US southern border with Mexico, but constructing a wall along the 5,525-mile-long border with Canada to the north.

Meanwhile, a phony furor has been whipped up over the use by both Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton and Jeb Bush, a candidate for the Republican nomination, of the word "boxcar" in referring to proposals for the mass deportation of over 11 million undocumented immigrants who live and work in the US. Clinton's press aide was compelled to issue a statement affirming that she did not intend any allusion to the trains the Nazis used to send Jews to Auschwitz and other death camps.

This strained disavowal only draws attention to the fact that campaign stump speeches in the US in 2015 are echoing the rhetoric of 1930s-style fascism.

Donald Trump, the bloated, bullying billionaire and current Republican front-runner, has set the tone for this rabid scapegoating of immigrant workers. Slandering immigrants, who do the most grinding and ill-paid work, from the agricultural fields to the slaughterhouses, as "rapists" and "murderers," Trump has demanded that they be rounded up and deported en masse.

He also advocates the building of a wall along the US-Mexican border—paid for by seizing the remittances sent by immigrants working in the US to support their families—and the revocation of citizenship for immigrants' children born on US soil.

This last measure has either been endorsed or sidestepped by virtually the entire Republican pack. Jeb Bush, who has attacked Trump's plan based on its cost rather than its gross inhumanity, vowed that his own plan would effectively seal the border "so that you don't have these, you know, 'anchor babies', as they're described, coming into the country."

With all of the arrogance, raw prejudice and stupidity that he brings to every subject, Trump has described the citizenship of these children as “illegal.”

In reality, citizenship rights for everyone born in the US, no matter what the status of their parents, has stood as a foundation of American bourgeois democracy for nearly a century and a half. Enshrined in the 14th Amendment, this right was a product of the Civil War and the overturning of the Supreme Court’s hated Dred Scott decision of 1857, which found that African-Americans were “so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.”

The first sentence of the first section of this article of the US Constitution, establishing the bedrock for the assertion of equal rights, reads: “ All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”

The determination of citizenship based on “soil,” or place of birth, rather than “blood,” or the nationality of one’s parents, was rooted in the principles of the American and French Revolutions and was what distinguished the US from Europe’s old monarchies and empires.

Attempts by the Democratic presidential candidates to exploit the Republicans’ anti-immigrant tirade for their own electoral purposes are as hollow as they are hypocritical.

In her speech last week to the Democratic National Committee, Hillary Clinton denounced the Republicans for saying “hateful things about immigrants and their babies,” while her contender for the presidential nomination, former Maryland Governor Martin O’Malley, insisted that the symbol of the US must be “the Statue of Liberty, not a barbed wire fence.”

In the real world, however, both support the current Democratic administration, which has driven deportations to record levels, expelling close to 3 million undocumented immigrants since Obama came to office promising immigration reform within 100 days. This deportation rate is nine times higher than 20 years ago.

Over the course of the past month, the administration has sent its lawyers into federal court to defend an illegal and inhuman system of jailing behind barbed wire fences thousands of children and their mothers who fled to the US to escape rampant violence in Central America.

The White House and Department of Homeland Security want to maintain this system, which reproduces the methods of Guantanamo and is described by some who worked in it as tantamount to torture. It is a means of deterring others from attempting to flee the horrific conditions created by decades of US-backed dictatorships, dirty wars and military coups, and of denying those who reach the US border their right to asylum.

The rhetoric of the Republicans and the deeds of the Democratic administration are of a piece with the attempts by governments across the Atlantic to erect a “Fortress Europe” to repel by force the hundreds of thousands of defenseless refugees fleeing for their lives from the devastation and bloodshed wrought by the succession of US-led wars of aggression in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. On both continents, the mistreatment and witch-hunting of immigrants is one of the rawest and most tragic expressions of the incompatibility of world economy with the outmoded and reactionary capitalist nation-state system.

Capitalism can provide no answer to the reality of mass global migration outside of violent

repression, detention camps and mass deportations. The big-business politicians and media attempt to generate support for these odious methods by scapegoating immigrants for the loss of jobs, wages and vital social services that are produced by the crisis of the profit system.

These claims, made by candidates ranging from Trump to the Democratic “socialist” Bernie Sanders, are deserving only of contempt. There are resources to provide for all—native born and immigrant alike—but they are monopolized by a financial oligarchy that has enriched itself off of the destruction of the living standards of working people.

The defense of the democratic right of immigration and opposition to the police-state measures advocated by Trump and employed by Obama is a vital task of the working class as a whole, which is the ultimate target of the methods being honed in the crusade against immigrant workers.

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