

The American Gulag: US Navy Planning to Build Military Camps to Jail 120,000 Immigrants

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A draft memo leaked to Time magazine Friday reveals preparations by the United States Navy to build sprawling internment camps to house over 120,000 undocumented immigrants. Massive camps housing nearly 50,000 each are being proposed in Northern and Southern California, close to the country's largest immigration populations, with an initial 25,000 to be housed on military bases in Alabama.

The capacity of the new facilities would match the total number of Japanese and Japanese-Americans detained during World War Two. This follows a separate Department of Defense announcement Thursday that the military will erect detention camps on four Army bases in Texas and Arkansas that will hold another 20,000 migrant children.

The establishment of military prison camps on American soil marks an ominous milestone in US history. These are being erected to detain not only immigrants, but also striking workers, protesters against police violence, and all who resist conditions of deepening exploitation, war and dictatorship. This police state policy is aimed at the entire working class.

Indicative of the complicity of the corporate media in these dictatorial moves, neither NBC, ABC nor CBS mentioned the proposal for the Navy to set up concentration camps on their Friday evening news broadcasts.

The internal memo details plans to construct “temporary and austere” tent camps to house 25,000 undocumented migrants immediately, with massive facilities to come later. Under the proposal, 25,000 beds would be built within weeks at two Navy airfields near Mobile, Alabama—Navy Outlying Field Wolf in Orange Beach and Navy Outlying Field Silverhill—at an estimated cost of \$233 million for six months of operation.

Navy officials suggest a timeline of 60 days to complete the first stage of tent construction, which would hold 5,000 detainees. After that, capacity could be expanded at a rate of 10,000 beds per month.

The document also proposes construction of two internment camps in California that would each house up to 47,000 detained immigrants. One would be located on the former site of Naval Weapons Station Concord, near San Francisco, and the other would be built at Camp Pendleton, the nation's largest Marine Corps base on the coast of California between San Diego and Los Angeles.

The memo also calls for further study of a proposal to detain an unspecified number of undocumented workers at the Marine Corps Air Station outside of Yuma, Arizona.

The document, drafted by Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy, Installations and Environment Phyllis Bayer for signature by Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer, was circulated in anticipation of the influx of detained migrant families under the Trump administration's "zero-tolerance" policy.

Under this policy, announced in April, all undocumented migrants captured by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will be detained and tried for the so-called crime of "illegal entry."

These revelations underscore the fact that Trump's reversal on separating families does not signify a shift away from his drive to criminalize immigrants and arrest, detain and deport them in the hundreds of thousands. The executive order Trump signed Wednesday calls for indefinite detention of immigrants, including children.

The release of detailed plans for the construction of military detention centers throughout the western and southern states, with the capacity to detain massive numbers of undocumented workers fleeing the violence and economic devastation that American imperialism has produced in Central America, represents a new stage in the ruling class's turn toward authoritarian rule.

This confirms the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* at the time of the 9/11 attacks and launching of the "war on terror" that the concentration camp at Guantanamo was a prelude to similar facilities and mass repression within the borders of the United States itself.

Such plans have ample precedent in the recent history of the United States. At the height of the 1986-1987 Iran-Contra affair, which was itself an illegal and unconstitutional conspiracy of the Reagan White House and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), a secret plan, known as Operation Rex 84, was exposed. Rex 84 was a program to suspend the Constitution, declare martial law, establish a parallel government comprised of military-intelligence officials, and round up political opponents in the event of a US war on Nicaragua.

At a July 13, 1987 hearing of a joint congressional committee investigating the Iran-Contra affair, Texas Democratic Congressman Jack Brooks sought to question Oliver North, who was at the center of the conspiracy, about Rex 84, which North had been involved in drafting. The exchange that followed is a telling illustration of the Democratic Party's role in covering up the secret preparations of the US government and its military-intelligence apparatus for mass repression and dictatorship.

BROOKS: Colonel North, in your work at the NSC [National Security Council], were you not assigned, at one time, to work on plans for the continuity of government in the event of a major disaster?

BRENDAN V. SULLIVAN, counsel for Colonel North: Mr. Chairman?

SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE, Democrat of Hawaii: I believe that question touches upon a highly sensitive and classified area, so may I request that you not touch upon that.

BROOKS: I was particularly concerned, Mr. Chairman, because I read in Miami papers, and several others, that there had been a plan developed, by that same agency, a contingency plan in the event of emergency, that would suspend the American Constitution. And I was

deeply concerned about it and wondered if that was the area in which he had worked. I believe that it was and I wanted to get his confirmation.

INOUYE: May I most respectfully request that that matter not be touched upon, at this stage. If we wish to get into this, I'm certain arrangements can be made for an executive session.

The administration's escalation of repression against immigrant workers in recent days has been accompanied by a series of fascistic rants by Trump seeking to whip up the most backward and reactionary social and political layers in order to justify even broader attacks on democratic rights.

At a Wednesday rally in Minnesota, Trump blustered that the United States faced being "overrun" by immigrants and that his administration was "sending them the hell back."

In a Friday morning tweet, Trump wrote:

"We must maintain a Strong Southern Border. We cannot allow our Country to be overrun by illegal immigrants as the Democrats tell their phony stories of sadness and grief, hoping it will help them in the elections."

The Democrats have offered no opposition to the construction of military prison camps for immigrant families. On the contrary, they have consistently supported raising funding for "border security" and increasing the number of ICE and CBP agents, while peddling the false and reactionary narrative that immigrant workers endanger the jobs and depress the wages of the native-born work force.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer noted the report of the plan to detain 20,000 immigrants on Army bases, but merely expressed concerns over whether the plan was "feasible". On Twitter Thursday, Schumer denounced the notion that Democrats were for open borders.

"The bipartisan immigration bill I authored had \$40 billion for border security," he boasted.

At a press conference Thursday, Democratic House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi declared,

"The Democrats have taken full responsibility for securing our borders. We know that is a responsibility that we have."

The pro-war, anti-immigrant Democratic Party will do nothing to stop the establishment of military prison camps and the imposition of police state conditions in the US. That task falls to the working class, which must mobilize to demand the abolition of ICE and CBP, the liberation of all imprisoned immigrants, and the right of all workers to live and work with full citizenship rights in the country of their choice.

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