

US to Deport 262,000 Salvadoran Immigrants

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The US Department of Homeland Security announced Monday that it is terminating Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for more than a quarter-million immigrants from El Salvador. The immigrants, a large majority of them poorer workers, have 18 months, until September 9, 2019, to leave the US or be arrested and deported.

Including the roughly 190,000 children of the 262,000 Salvadoran TPS recipients, the total population immediately affected is larger than the population of a city the size of Toledo, Ohio or New Orleans, Louisiana. Rounding up the TPS recipients for deportation will require Gestapo-type operations in the Washington DC metropolitan area, where 50,000 Salvadoran TPS recipients live; Los Angeles, where 40,000 live; and Houston and New York City, where a combined 50,000 reside.

The Salvadorans are the largest single group covered by the TPS program, under which the DHS secretary may allow people fleeing natural disasters or civil wars to stay in the United States for more extended periods of time than under traditional refugee status.

The Salvadoran TPS recipients constitute a significant section of the working class in the US, where most have put down deep roots. The average Salvadoran covered by TPS has been living in the US for 21 years. Those now facing deportation are primarily of middle age and have lived here for most of their adult lives. By one estimate, removing these workers will slash the US gross domestic product by nearly \$110 billion over the next 10 years.

Some 190,000 were admitted before 1994 and all 262,000 entered the country before 2001, when several major earthquakes devastated El Salvador. Tens of thousands escaped the civil war that ravaged the country from 1980 to 1992, during which US-backed death squads razed villages and massacred the population, including the estimated 1,200 peasants murdered in the village of El Mozote 37 years ago last month in what is known as El Salvador's My Lai.

The move is a death sentence for hundreds or even thousands of those who will be sent back to a country with one of the highest murder rates in the world, dominated by criminal drug gangs that operate with impunity, protected by a corrupt military that rakes in money from both narcotics trafficking and US military aid. According to a 2015 report in the *Guardian*, dozens of deported Salvadorans were murdered after being deported by Obama in 2014-2015 alone.

The decision to terminate TPS for Salvadorans signals the Trump administration's determination to put an end to the program entirely. Previously, DHS Acting Secretary Elaine Duke terminated TPS for 2,500 immigrants from Nicaragua, giving them until January 5, 2019 to leave the United States, and for 57,000 immigrants from Haiti, whose TPS status

is set to expire July 22, 2019.

But equal responsibility for the move lies with the Democratic Party, which paved the way for Trump's mass deportation program during the Obama administration. President Obama deported 2.7 million immigrants, including hundreds of thousands when the Democratic Party controlled Congress in the first years of his administration.

This makes the phony statements of support for immigrants by leading Democrats all the more cynical. Barack Obama jailed tens of thousands of Salvadoran children and their mothers who crossed into the US during a flare-up of Central American violence in 2014.

As for Trump's request and for \$15 billion more in funding for border "security," the Democratic Party has long embraced the militarization of the border and has made clear it will back the allocation of additional billions to increase what is already a small army of border police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

The Democrats' opposition to Trump's demand for \$18 billion to build a physical wall along the US-Mexico border is a political maneuver to divert attention from their basic agreement on stepping up the war against undocumented workers.

When the precursor to Trump's wall was first proposed in the 2006 Secure Fence Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush, top Senate Democrats backed it, including then-senators Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and Joseph Biden, as well as Charles Schumer, now the Senate Democratic leader. As a result of this and other bipartisan border militarization measures, up to 27,000 immigrants have died crossing the desert in the last 20 years.

In 2013, the Democrats agreed to spend \$40 billion on border security, doubling the number of Border Patrol agents to 40,000 and expanding the use of high-tech surveillance equipment, including sensors and drones. The Democrats also agreed to eliminate the visa lottery, exclude siblings of US citizens from family reunification visas, and expand visa offerings based on education levels and work expertise, along the lines demanded by US corporations seeking highly skilled labor. The bill was voted down by the Republicans.

Today, they are proposing to go above and beyond their previous anti-immigrant pledges. The move to deport TPS recipients comes as the Democratic Party and Trump are engaged in Kabuki theater negotiations over the fate of 800,000 young people brought to the US as children who are enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program enacted during the Obama administration. Trump rescinded the DACA order, effective March 5, at which point mass roundups of former DACA recipients could begin, using the information they supplied to the government as part of their applications for DACA.

The White House is also demanding cuts in legal immigration as part of a "compromise" on DACA, including the elimination of the visa lottery program and so-called "chain migration," which allows US citizens and legal residents to sponsor family relations for entry.

Last week, Senator Schumer made clear in advance of talks on DACA that he supported further measures to militarize the US-Mexican border. Senator Bernie Sanders reiterated his support for stepped-up attacks on undocumented workers in an appearance Sunday on the ABC program "This Week." Sanders declared that while he opposed Trump's border wall, "I don't think there's anybody who disagrees that we need strong border security. If the president wants to work with us to make sure we have strong border security, let's do that."

Sanders, in line with the trade union bureaucracy, echoes Trump's economic nationalism and pseudo-populist attempts to pit American workers against their class brothers and sisters in other countries.

The vast majority of Americans disagree with the anti-immigrant nationalism of Trump, with nine in 10 believing the government should give citizenship to immigrants who have lived in the US for a number of years. Mass protests broke out at airports across the country in January and February 2017 after Trump announced his initial travel ban. Since then, the Democratic Party has worked systematically to divert and suppress popular opposition to Trump's anti-immigrant, pro-corporate and pro-war program. It has instead promoted reactionary, anti-democratic campaigns.

These include the so-called "Me Too" movement, which rejects basic democratic principles such as the presumption of innocence and due process in order to promote the feminism of privileged layers of the middle class; the anti-Russia campaign, which seeks to shift American foreign policy to an even more aggressive military posture against Russia; and the campaign against "fake news," which is being used to justify censorship of the Internet and social media.

In December, the Supreme Court allowed a revised version of Trump's travel ban to take effect shortly after House Democrats voted two-to-one against a move by a Democratic congressman to introduce articles of impeachment citing Trump's mass deportation program.

Socialists reject the entire reactionary framework of the so-called "debate" over immigration "reform." The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) rejects the position of Democrats and Republicans alike that undocumented workers are guilty of a crime and must be made to "pay" in one fashion or another for their supposed misdeeds.

The SEP upholds the right of workers from every corner of the globe to live and work in whatever country they choose with full citizenship rights, including the right to return to their home countries without the threat of being barred from re-entry to the US and being separated from their families.

The total number of people who work in the same factories, construction sites and other industries alongside the 262,000 Salvadoran TPS recipients number in the millions or tens of millions. The attack on them is an attack on the entire working class.

Only the power of the working class—united across race and nationality—can block the drive to destroy the lives of hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran workers living in the US.

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