

Trump's Immigration Policy: The Family Separations are Over (sort of) The Racism and Exploitation Remain

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Even Trump had to back down. The heartbreaking images and audio recordings of migrant Mexican and Central American children being separated from their parents after having been arrested crossing the U.S.-Mexican border, and the chorus of bipartisan complaints, made continuing the policy of family separations a political liability. However, ending the policy, which will not apparently affect those families that have already separated, leaves the bulk of the U.S.'s anti-immigrant policies intact.

Some of the most widely reported voices of indignation came from both mainstream and "moderate" Republicans like Susan Collins and Laura Bush, as well as reactionary ones like Texas Senator Ted Cruz. Even Trump's wife and daughter expressed various degrees of opposition to the separations. Let nobody be fooled by their crocodile tears. It is easy for them to condemn the obvious cruelty of the child-parent separation policy, while overlooking the broader attack on immigrants, including the precarious position of young people in the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program. The indignation of these ruling-class voices is pure hypocrisy, and serves to cover up the shameful past and present of U.S. immigration and border control policy.

The mainstream media never discuss the causes of Mexican and Latin American immigration to the U.S.. These are rooted in the legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and support for murderous, reactionary dictatorships, not to mention one of the great imperial land grabs in history: the forcible annexation of huge amounts of Mexican land by the U.S. in 1848, including much or all of what became the states of Texas, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming.

Immigrants as Scapegoat

Fear-mongering about immigration and security of the U.S.'s southern border is largely a smokescreen to avoid discussing the real problems facing most people in the U.S.: income inequality, attacks on social services, particularly education and health care, and the growing political space for the expression of racist, misogynist, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBT sentiments.

There is nothing new about capitalist politicians and ideologues scapegoating immigrants for the social problems arising from capitalist rule. Racist prejudice, fear of cultural minorities, fear of real or imagined political radicalism, and the interests of capitalist labor markets have always driven U.S. immigration law. President Herbert Hoover, who presided over the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, blamed Mexican immigrant workers as its cause. That is deeply hypocritical. U.S. employers have always played it both ways regarding immigrant workers, giving lip service to immigration restrictions while profiting from the restricted rights of their immigrant workers, taking advantage of their weak market position and lack of union protection. Moreover, they have done so in close

collaboration with national and local government bodies.

Agribusiness, where many immigrants from Mexico and Latin America have long looked for and found work, is a prime example of this hypocrisy. As early as the 1920s, fruit, vegetable, and cotton growers engaged in deliberate over-recruitment of immigrant workers, which was accomplished through close collaboration with government immigration officials who opened the border or looked the other way as large numbers of workers crossed into the U.S. The intended effect was to drive down wages and dilute the power of work stoppages, strikes, and other forms of labor protest. During World War II, businesses and the government devised the Bracero Program that regularized residency and work permits for Mexican workers for fixed periods. The starvation wages paid to most immigrant workers in the fruit and vegetable fields were matched by long working hours, poor housing in company-owned facilities, lack of schools, and rampant racist discrimination to boot.

The brutality of the Trump-Sessions deportations of undocumented immigrant workers, which often involves the splitting up of families also has ample precedent in U.S. policy. Herbert Hoover's Secretary of Labor William Doak deported large numbers of Mexican workers. Doak also instructed his border agents to recruit, admit, and transport Mexicans during strikes and labor shortages.

The icy cruelty of Kirstjen Nielsen, head of the Department of Homeland Security, who offered a vigorous defense of the policy and border patrol behavior in general a day before Trump's reversal, may be in perfect step with the brutal tone of the Trump presidency in general. But here again, the history of U.S. immigration policy suggests more continuity than novelty. In his day, secretary Doak defended his border agents against charges of abuse and brutality in the name of protecting "American" jobs. Draconian immigration practices have not been exclusive to Republicans; more immigrants were deported under Obama than his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush.

The hyper-exploitation that immigrant workers still experience in agriculture and other low-wage sectors of the U.S. economy makes Trump's associating violence and gangs like M-13 particularly insulting. The intent, of course, is once again to scapegoat immigrant workers for the problems arising from the contradictions of the capitalist system and divide workers along lines of race, ethnicity, citizenship, and national origin. All working people have much to lose when immigrant workers are under attack.

Solidarity with Immigrant workers and their families

An injury to one is an injury to all

K Mann

P.S.

* Solidarity, June 23, 2018:
https://solidarity-us.org/trump_family_separations/