

United States: Trump Ratchets Up Anti-Immigrant Campaign

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While much of the media continues to focus on the Mueller report and the squabbles between the White House and the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, Trump's real crimes are scarcely addressed or ignored altogether.

This column will take up only one of these crimes, Trump's intensification of his racist war on immigrants. He is not alone on this – the ultra-right throughout Europe and elsewhere have similar anti-immigrant policies.

In recent weeks Trump has appointed new officials at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that underline this intensification in the face of a new wave of people from Central America seeking asylum from extreme violence and poverty in their home countries.

These conditions are largely the result of U.S. imperialist exploitation and U.S. fomented wars, especially in the past 50 years.

A new source of violence in these countries is the cartels that are one source of the drugs to feed the high demand for them in the U.S. The "War on Drugs" which does nothing to address the health problems caused by drugs, but makes those capitalist enterprises involved in the manufacture, distribution and selling of them illegal, criminal enterprises, competing with guns and corrupting police agencies or subduing them with armed force.

In the past year or more we saw Trump's policies of the separation of children from their asylum-seeking parents, putting them and their parents in cages in detention centers under horrible conditions, mass deportations, etc. etc.

An article in the April 22 issue of *The Nation* by Martin Garbus, a lawyer who spent one week in the Dilley, Texas family-detention center, the largest one in the U.S., described what he saw and heard from the asylum-seeking inmates. This center is privately run for profit by CoreCivic,

Journalists and politicians are generally not allowed in such centers, but Garbus was allowed in as a lawyer to help asylum seekers with their appeals. Such asylum seekers cross the border (the Rio Grande river) and then turn themselves into Border Patrol agents.

"At first," he writes, "the agents take them, in their wet cloths, to the hielerla, or "ice box," a large refrigerated processing center where the asylum seekers have to try to sleep on the concrete floor or sit on concrete benches, shivering under Mylar blankets, prodded and deliberately kept awake by agents all night and day. Often bathroom breaks are not granted, or not in time, so both women and children soil themselves. This prison-like detention is an attempt to persuade these immigrants to give up before they are even interviewed by an asylum officer....

"Next, the detainees are sent to the perrera, or "dog house," a place where families are put in cages, cyclone fencing between them, as though they are animals. But at least the chain-link cages – dog kennels, really – are warmer, the mothers told me."

Without going into all the horrible conditions at the Dilley prison Garbus describes (reading the article is worthwhile), he sums up: There is no reason for immigrants to be held in such facilities other than racism and the profit of the detention center owners and investors."

Beginning in December 2017, it was Kirstjen Nielsen, who oversaw all this criminality as Secretary of the DHS.

In the last few weeks, Trump dumped Nielsen, and other DHS officials. An article in the *New York Times* explained, "The president has grown frustrated with administration's handling of immigration and other security issues, with apprehensions at the southern border soaring and some officials resisting policies they deemed impractical or illegal." Apparently, Nielsen wasn't anti-immigrant and racist enough for Trump.

On May 6, Trump appointed Mark Morgan as the new head of ICE, after withdrawing his previous nominee, Ronald Vitiello, saying he wanted the agency to go in a "tougher direction."

In an interview on Fox News, Morgan "displayed much more enthusiasm for the aggressive policies backed by Mr. Trump and Stephen Miller, the architect of the president's immigration agenda," the Times wrote.

The *Wall Street Journal* reports that Miller has backed the formal reinstatement of Trump's family separation policy that Trump was forced to say he ended (immigrant rights advocates say that the practice continued in some instances), and has been pushing officials at the DHS and Justice Department to "get in line" with a more hard-line immigration approach.

In the same Fox interview, Morgan supported Trump's suggestion that he might bus immigrants crossing the border to "sanctuary cities" that refuse to cooperate with the Border Patrol or ICE to arrest immigrants – to punish such cities.

"Mr. Morgan also strongly backed Mr. Trump's characterization of the problems at the border as a security crisis," the Times wrote. This characterization dovetails with Trump's racist assertion that there is an "invasion" of brown-skinned people coming up from Central America, who are rapists, drug dealers, sex traffickers and other criminals.

CNN reported that Trump told border agents not to allow migrants entry at the border and to tell the judges that rule on asylum claims "We don't have room."

The next day Trump told the Republican Jewish Coalition, "I'll do whatever is necessary to stop an invasion of our country. That's what it is.... Get Out! Get out! Sorry. Can't handle it. And I told my people yesterday, 'Our country is full.' We're full. Our system's full. Our country's full. Can't come in."

In another development, a group called the United Constitutional Patriots (UCP), which the American Civil Liberties Union describes as an "armed fascist militia organization", took 12 hours of videos of themselves and posting them online. Some showed the gang illegally holding migrants at gunpoint.

One of these showed what Peter Simonson, the executive director of the New Mexico ACLU, described on Democracy Now: "What you see is literally dozens of families huddled in the sand in

a remote part of the desert [near the border] in the dead of night, surrounded by men in military camouflage, many masked, with heavy weaponry, semiautomatic weapons in some instances.”

The group claims it turns the immigrants it captures over to the Border Patrol. But in another video, one of the vigilantes is heard considering another means of dealing with them: “The only problem is, if we shoot [them] it’ll be an international crisis. We’re too close to the border. Would save some time, though, wouldn’t it?”

If the UCP did shoot some immigrants, they would not video themselves doing it. It wouldn’t be difficult to hide any bodies in the desert.

A UCP spokesman, Jim Benvie, told the *El Paso Times*, “What is the rule of engagement here? The rule of engagement is ... the only time we’re going to open fire is if we feel immanent threat or danger to our lives....

“We’re retired vets, retired law enforcement, special forces. We come down here ... as a group of Americans to help protect the border crises that’s going down here. This is a national security issue. Obviously, Border Patrol is part of this, as well. We’re trying to assist them.”

In some of the videos, the vigilantes are shown impersonating Border Patrol agents, which is also illegal.

Some of the videos show UCP members posing together with Border Patrol agents who are on horseback. Officially, the Border Patrol says it neither condones nor endorses the group.

After the videos became public, the FBI arrested the leader of the group, Mitchell Hopkins, on April 27. He first drew the FBI’s attention in 2017 when it received unconfirmed reports that his group was training to assassinate Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton, and George Soros. The latter, a billionaire who has donated to liberal causes, is Jewish.

However, the FBI hasn’t arrested anyone else in the UCP, in spite of their blatant illegal behavior that they themselves documented.

To Trump’s “Get out! Get out!” we should say “Welcome! Come on in!”

Barry Sheppard
