

California Democrats announce cynical \$50 million fund to “Trump-proof” the state ahead of mass deportation of immigrants

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Responding to widespread public concern over President Donald Trump’s threats to quickly begin mass deportations of 13 million undocumented immigrants following his inauguration Monday, California Democrats have approved \$50 million in state funding for immigrant services. Last week State Senate Budget Committee Chair Scott Wiener announced he would amend legislation to provide \$25 million to legal aid for Californians at risk of deportation, detention and wage theft.

The bill comes after a special legislative session was announced last month by Governor Gavin Newsom to supposedly “Trump-proof” the state from federal intervention. The Senate Democratic Caucus also authorized another \$25 million to the California Department of Justice to supposedly fight the federal administration in court.

The funding is a cynical maneuver on the part of the Democratic Party to assuage widespread fear among millions of immigrants and their families and friends, while deflecting attention from its own horrendous record on deportations and its decades-long assaults on immigrants. Moreover, the \$50 million is a pittance compared to the tens of billions or more that will be spent on carrying out the Trump administration’s mass detention and deportation of millions of immigrants and their families.

Significantly, the announcement also comes during the midst of the catastrophic fires in Los Angeles in which the Newsom administration has clashed with Trump over the botched state handling of the crisis. The Republicans, led by Trump, have gone so far as to threaten to withhold disaster relief if California Democrats do not cooperate in their deportation of immigrants.

Wiener described the threats as “inhumane” and said that California would be a “bulwark against Trump’s extremist agenda.” Despite any posturing about the fate of immigrants, Biden promised the “smoothest” transition to Trump, who has declared among his highest priorities the deportation of millions of workers and their families, dismantling birthright citizenship. In recent days it has been reported that Trump plans to begin with mass raids in the Democratic Party stronghold of Chicago, the third largest city in the United States.

The Democratic Party is not a constituency for either the defense of immigrants or of democratic rights, and cannot be entrusted to wage any significant struggle against the assaults which are forthcoming.

The Democrats’ policy on immigration

Democrats have been at the forefront of a massive and brutal assault on immigrants which has been escalating for decades. The administration of Bill Clinton (1993-2001) was critical in militarizing the border from San Diego to El Paso with Operation Hold the Line in 1993, Operation Gatekeeper in 1994, and Operation Rio Grande in 1997. The operations were tasked with “showing force,” adding miles of new fence and expanding technology to hunt and find immigrants, employing stadium lighting, infrared night-vision scopes and buried seismic motion sensors.

Under Clinton, the number of immigration agents more than doubled, from 3,400 to 7,700. Would-be immigrants were forced to cross the inhospitable deserts of the American southwest, killing an estimated 27,000 people since 1994.

The Democratic Party under President Obama (2008-2016) also holds the notorious record of the most deportations of immigrants, even more than Trump. The Obama administration deported 2.7 million people, earning him the epithet of “Deporter-in-Chief.”

Under Obama, a vast network of concentration camps were established to detain, process and deport millions. The so-called Secure Communities Program was re-christened the Priority Enforcement Program, allowing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to cooperate with local police. Obama also expanded the “bed mandate,” essentially a quota system requiring ICE to hold an average of a given number of immigrants every day. Obama expanded the mandate from 28,450 to 36,000, an enormous gift to ICE.

In 2010, Obama signed a bill giving \$600 million to militarize the border even further, hiring thousands more border agents, deploying 1,600 National Guard troops and flying Predator drones in the sky. As a result, spending on detention soared under the Obama administration, to \$2.6 billion a year, twice what it was in 2006.

Obama was also notorious for spearheading brutal crackdowns on migrants fleeing Central America, with the Programa Frontera Sur in 2014. The administration, working with Mexico, set up checkpoints and conducted raids on its southern border with Guatemala to intercept refugees *before* they reach Mexico. This had the desired effect of axing the right to asylum, forcing migrants to go back to the very countries they were trying to escape from in the first place.

The record and rhetoric of the Biden-Harris Administration towards immigrant rights is completely in line with the fascistic attacks by Trump. The last administration infamously upheld Title 42, a COVID-19 era ban on immigrants, and then imposed a new ban on refugees seeking asylum at the border. The images of refugees

languishing at the border under freeway underpasses in Texas and being corralled by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents on horseback will forever taint the Biden-Harris years.

In 2021, Harris also infamously told would-be migrants from Central America seeking refuge in the US, “Do not come... If you come to our border, you will be turned back.”

In her failed presidential bid, Harris pledged \$20 billion to border security, including \$8 billion to ICE and \$3 billion to expand the detention camps to house up to 50,000 people. She also pledged to give CBP another \$7 billion, including \$723 million to hire more agents.

On the campaign trail, Harris attacked Trump from the right, saying, “Donald Trump doesn’t want to fix the problem...he talks a big game about border security, but he doesn’t walk the walk.”

The stage was already set for Trump’s mass raids by one of the final actions of the outgoing Biden Administration, with raids by CBP in California’s Central Valley region of Kern County, the largest dragnet of its kind in years. Officials arrested at least 78, primarily agricultural workers, and terrorized entire towns where residents locked themselves in their homes for days.

The massive assaults on free speech and democratic rights on college campuses across the country, particularly in states which are run from top to bottom by the Democratic Party, are one expression of the hostility of this capitalist party towards the working class and immigrant workers.

Widespread protests have erupted on college campuses since the start of the ongoing Gaza genocide. Students in the thousands have faced arrest, criminal prosecutions, and administrative and punitive actions by university officials that threaten their schooling and future.

Among the most vindictive was the persecution of Momodou Taal, a British-Gambian student at Cornell University in New York, who was threatened with deportation for engaging in peaceful protests that were aimed at Boeing and L3Harris, two companies that profit from US and NATO’s imperialist wars, including Israel’s genocide on Gaza. Taal’s persecution was led entirely by the Democratic Party which controls both the university and the state government of New York.

The assaults on students at thousands of high school and college campuses for engaging in protests against the genocide were aimed at silencing free speech and opposition of the Israeli-US backed assault. The crackdown on University of California campuses, particularly at UC Los Angeles, where university officials and police stood by for hours as the protest encampment was attacked by far-right and Zionist elements, is another clear example of the disdain of the Democratic Party for the most basic democratic rights.

From their inception in the middle of the 1980’s, so-called “sanctuary cities” or distinctions as a “City of Refuge,” were and have continued to be largely symbolic. In general this has referred to pledges by county or city ordinances of local governments to order some limit on complying with federal immigration agents. This can encompass numerous aspects, from withholding information to prohibiting the use of city funds and resources for federal immigration enforcement.

Since 2017 eleven states have defined themselves as “Sanctuary States,” including California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and Utah.

Despite their designation as such, federal immigration authorities have not been hindered or prevented from carrying out mass raids and deportations. According to the organization Freedom for Immigrants,

California has the third-largest number of immigrants held in detention centers, 90 percent of whom “are held in privately-run immigrant detention centers.” Eighty percent of those detained are kept in detention centers controlled by three main companies, CoreCivic, GEO Group, and Management and Training Corp.

Sweeping measures are expected this week by the new Trump administration, led by “border czar” Tom Homan, measures which have been outlined in recent weeks. Trump plans to build a vast network of immigrant jails, family tent detention centers, which include transit routes for trains, buses and military aircraft, to facilitate mass deportation on an unprecedented scale. The plan is expected to cost at least \$86 billion, an enormous sum to be paid for by the working class, and relies on the employment of the Alien Enemies Act and Insurrection Act, which would place the country under martial law.

The response of Biden and the Democrats has been to collaborate with Trump’s attack on immigrants. Democrats have rubber stamped critical legislation backed by Trump including the Laken Riley Act, which provides the pretext for the vast expansion of the immigrant prison network by requiring that the Department of Homeland Security detain immigrants who have been arrested for minor offenses such as burglary, theft, shoplifting or larceny.

The law is named after Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student who was killed last February in Georgia by an undocumented immigrant previously arrested for shoplifting. Trump and the far right have seized on the murder and exploited details of her tragic death to promote his anti-immigrant agenda.

Forty-eight Democrats in the House of Representatives voted to support the bill on January 9, essentially giving Trump and the new fascist administration a blank check. This reactionary legislation provided political cover to the Democrats, who in large measure support mass detentions and deportations, though they are careful to couch their support in a supposed fight against “criminals.”

In every city across the country, as the crackdown on immigrant workers unfolds, workers, teachers, nurses, students, railroaders, auto workers—all industries of workers and young people—will come into direct struggle against these anti-democratic measures. Their unions, where they exist, tied as they are to the Democrats, will refuse to carry out mass struggles.

The working class must understand that the defense of immigrants cannot be entrusted to the Democratic Party or the nationalist trade union apparatus. As the WSWS has explained, the anti-immigrant measures which the fascist Trump administration is preparing are a precursor to the measures which will aim at the entire working class, as it enters into struggle against imperialist war, the domination of society by a parasitic financial oligarchy, and for the struggle for the socialist reorganization of society.



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