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European Languages

زبانهای اروپائی

5 May 2018

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06.05.2018

Trump ends temporary protected status for 86,000 Hondurans

The Trump administration announced yesterday that it is ending temporary protected status (TPS) for 86,000 Hondurans who have lived in the United States for nearly 20 years. To date, the Trump administration has terminated TPS status for 425,000 immigrants, which will lead to a mass deportation roughly equal to the population of Minneapolis, Cleveland or Oakland.

Protections for these immigrants will now expire in 2020, at which point those in the US under TPS will be forced to return to their war-torn, impoverished home country.

The TPS program is intended to provide temporary respite from deportation to immigrants from countries devastated by natural disaster or war. Yesterday's decision signals that the government is effectively ending it. Including the Hondurans, 97.4 percent of all TPS beneficiaries will now see their protected status end.

In its decision announcing the policy change, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said the DHS is "determined that the disruption of living conditions in Honduras from Hurricane Mitch that served as the basis for its TPS designation has decreased to a degree that it should no longer be regarded as substantial."

Roughly 10,000 people died in the 1998 hurricane, from which the impoverished Central American nation has never recovered. Though TPS has been extended every 18 months since the hurricane, yesterday's decision fails to indicate what has changed in the last year and a half. In reality, there is no legal basis for the TPS revocation.

Conditions in Honduras have only further deteriorated since the last extension of TPS. After the right-wing National Party led by incumbent presidential candidate Juan Orlando Hernández committed blatant election fraud in the November 2017 general elections, mass demonstrations broke out across the country.

The government declared a curfew and a national state of exception, and dispatched the military to suppress the protesters, killing 38 and arresting nearly 1,700. Even the imperialist-dominated Organization of American States appealed to the National Party to call new elections, but the Hernández regime ignored the request and inaugurated itself on January 27.

The National Party has ruled Honduras since the 2009 US-backed military coup overthrew then-President Manuel Zelaya. The coup was carried out with the approval of the Obama administration and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. A number of protesters were killed in the demonstrations following the coup. Disappearances of oppositional figures and activists like the indigenous rights leader Berta Cáceres are increasingly common. Cáceres was murdered by elite government soldiers, two of whom were trained at Fort Benning, Georgia, the former site of the School of the Americas.

In the aftermath of decades of destruction wreaked by US imperialism on Honduras, gangs collaborate with the police and the state to terrorize the population. A 2015 *Guardian* study found that 35 Hondurans deported from the US were murdered over the span of the prior year.

San Diego State University Professor Elizabeth Kennedy told the *Guardian*: “These figures tell us that the US is returning people to their deaths in violation of national and international law. Most of the individuals reported to have been murdered lived in some of the most violent towns in some of the most violent countries in the world—suggesting strongly that is why they fled.”

The violence that pervades Honduran society has deep roots, including the US’s decision to station thousands of members of its “contra” death squads in the country in the 1980s. From bases in Honduras, the contras not only conducted its anti-Sandinista and ethnic cleansing activities in Nicaragua, but also assassinated left-wing activists and carried out brutal repression in Honduras itself.

About 80 percent of all participants in this year’s “Stations of the Cross” caravan are from Honduras. An estimated 1,200 people made the 3,000-mile journey from Central America through Mexico to the US-Mexico border. Two hundred people were forced to camp at the

border crossing between Tijuana and San Diego for days before being allowed to submit asylum applications.

Throughout Trump's first year and a half in power, the Democratic Party has not lifted a finger to stop the attack on TPS recipients. One by one, Trump has cancelled protected status for hundreds of thousands of residents of what he referred to as "shithole countries" in Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean, and the Democrats have waged no serious opposition. Instead, they have spent their political capital denouncing "foreign meddling" and "Russian interference," cultivating a xenophobic climate that facilitates Trump and his fascist aides' attack on immigrants.