



Don't fall for the fake reforms of Obama/Congress

Full rights for all immigrants, now!

May Day is the holiday of the world's workers. It commemorates the May 1 start of the 1886 general strike for the 8-hour day in the United States, a historic strike in which the working people united across national lines to fight for their independent class interests. And it's a day when workers today lay demands upon the capitalist class as a whole, and rally forces for future battles.

This year workers of all nationalities must again stand up for immigrant rights. When migrant workers from Mexico and elsewhere are forced to live under the threat of deportation they are subject to vicious exploitation. The low wages and brutal conditions imposed on "illegals" fattens the profits of the capitalists and helps them lower wages and conditions across the board. Thus the need for the entire working class to fight for full rights for all immigrants.

Meanwhile the capitalists, who have sunk the economy and impose job and wage cuts everywhere, try to blame austerity on the immigrants they abuse. They fear that immigrant and US-born workers will unite to fight for full rights, now. They remember the years when huge demonstrations of immigrant and non-immigrant workers took to the streets.

This is why Obama and a group of Republican and Democratic legislators are putting forward their own "reforms" styled to suit the needs of capitalist businesses, not those of the victims of the present system. Backing these fake reforms are the sellout trade union leadership and a number of meek reformist organizations in the Latino community and elsewhere. The present bipartisan reform bill may not make it through Congress and likely will be watered down further. But the general features are clear.

Continued deportations

The supposed friend of migrant workers, Obama, has already deported far more people than any president in US history, including a record of over 400,000 in fiscal year 2012. Nearly a quarter of those deported were parents of children who were US citizens. But wait!. Aren't the new reforms supposed to provide undocumented workers with a path to citizenship? But many immigrants won't be eligible for the program: some won't be able to provide the necessary documentation, while no

one who came to the US after Dec. 31, 2011 will be eligible at all. Repressive measures at the workplace are to be stepped up against those not taking part, while those who do take part in the program will find that they face many traps and restrictions.

A long, degrading, and snare-filled path to citizenship

Just to get a green card, an undocumented immigrant would first have to slave ten years under the new "Registered Provision Immigration" (RPI) status, pay thousands of dollars in fines and fees, prove that they've worked regularly, and demonstrate knowledge of civic and English. Further, anyone laid off or who had a medical emergency during those years couldn't get unemployment compensation, Medicaid, or food stamps despite all the taxes they've paid, and unemployment for more than 60 days at a time may threaten one's RPI status. Three misdemeanors or one felony conviction would disqualify one, while one continues to face harassment for being poor and Mexican or for trying to organize a union or a strike.

Moreover, if you get through all this, whether you get a green card depends on how many green card holders the politicians decide they will allow. To move from green card status to full citizenship takes 3 more years, 13 (!) years in all. And you couldn't get a green card until the the Secretary of Homeland Security certifies measures concerning the "security" of the US-Mexican border and immigration status checks at the workplace.

Is it any wonder that a supporter of this reform, Republican Marco Rubio, praises this path to citizenship because "the alternative we've created is going to be longer, more expensive and more difficult to navigate" than going back to one's home country and waiting for ten years to apply for a US visa."

More "guest workers"

Compared to the millions of undocumented immigrants overall, the so-called "guest worker" programs cover only a small number of immigrants, who are imported to the US legally but still without full rights. Highly educated and skilled "H1-B" employees would

eventually reach 180,000. Another 200,000 “W visa” workers would enter as agricultural, construction, hotel and other low-wage workers in the first year. To show what humanitarians they are, the bill’s backers will supposedly allow guest workers to be paid the same as other workers already there. Of course the whole idea of bringing in the guest workers is to keep already miserable wages from rising by assuring there will be more workers available than jobs.

Further militarizing the Mexican border

Twenty year ago, fewer than 4,000 Border Patrol agents worked the entire southern border. Today there are 18,500, while drones and detectors are everywhere. But nothing can stop people from escaping a desperate economic situation. Only the collapse of opportunity due to economic disaster in the US has caused border crossings to drop for now. Meanwhile, the border police-state has made crossing the border so hard that over 477 people have died trying last year. The bipartisan “reform” bill would add billions of dollars to beef up police measures and continue the trail of death.

Workers, unite for immigration rights!

So that is what the bipartisan group of politicians from the two main parties are offering. It amounts to no immigrant rights now; continued slave labor indefinitely; some relief maybe in the distant future. Who does this serve? The capitalists who don’t want rights for the undocumented lest they organize against their poverty and unite with other workers to do so.

Who tries to bolster support for this fake reform? The leadership of the AFL-CIO, and the section of immigrant rights groups with ties to the Democratic Party.

What is the way out then? History teaches that a progressive immigration reform is only going to be won through massive and militant struggles like those of the 1930s and 1960s and early 1970s. This was the path the immigration rights movement was starting to take in early 2006: huge demonstrations, the May Day “day without an immigrant” strike and boycott, etc.

A first step in reviving the movement requires exposing the rotten reform currently being debated in workplaces, schools, and in working class communities. Workers, students, and activists should get together, even if in small groups at first, to promote the program of full rights for immigrants.

We should expect no quick victories, but our cause is just. The reform the capitalists want means continued abuse of millions of immigrant workers. The reform the working class should demand is **full rights for all our class brothers and sisters now!** <>

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