

'US using immigrants scapegoats'

The Obama administration has deported about 400,000 immigrants in 2011, setting a new record for such expulsions since the formation of Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency eight years ago.

Over 50 percent of the 396,906 deportations, from October 2010 through September 2011, concerned illegal immigrants with criminal records.

Press TV has interviewed Edward Corrigan, an international lawyer, to discuss the issue further.

Press TV: Obama, himself the son of an immigrant, has expelled a record number of immigrants from the US, what do you make of that?

Corrigan: There is a lot of pressure on the American government now from the right wing to crack down on immigration violators, in particular criminals, there is also the element that, I think, some of it is legitimate, some of it of course, I think, borders on racism but the fact that these people are illegally in the US for many years, they had a very lax policy. The policy largely was that employers who employed illegal aliens in fact usually get off scot-free so they were allowed to exploit foreign workers which undercut the wages of regular American workers.

So a lot of business interests and some people on the right actually like to take advantage of that but now the government is cracking down, this is like the second year that they have deported a record number of people, they are focusing on criminals, people who have broken the law, so that is the bulk of them. I think it is reasonable that people [who] are illegally in the country and break the laws [and] commit crimes would lose any right they would have to apply through regular channels.

The US has been very strict, their focus is primarily on criminality but they do talk about national

security and threats to the state but these are really minimal, the bulk of it is directed at criminals and sort of is catered to an element in the US population that is wanting to crack down on illegal immigrants and the problems that come with that. There is quite a lively debate at various times, they have talked about giving an amnesty, they have done in the past, there are millions of immigrants in the US, many of them paying taxes, many of them doing good jobs so it is a very controversial issue, to say the least.

Press TV: Where does this leave the American Dream, the pursuit of a better life, if you will, by these immigrants many of them left with no choice by leaving their family and friends behind?

Corrigan: There are certainly a lot of harsh aspects to it but the one [who] breaks the law and commits crime, I think you do surrender, if you are asking the US government or any other country's government for special privileges to come in [through your main] family, you are putting all that at risk, I think, that is the right message to be sending to people.

In the US there is an economic downturn where a lot of people are out of jobs, there is a real political problem, I think, that Obama faces, parts of it are legitimate, parts of it are not, as I said, they do border on racism. Some of the immigrants want the doors closed behind them so they take a very strong anti-immigrant position on their own, so that is rather peculiar.

There is talk of a debate in the US about allowing a lot people to stay as long as they have not broken the laws but the big problem is the poor economic climate in the US that there aren't a lot of jobs Americans are out of work, there is a lot of poverty in the US, we see the protests now in New York, and almost any major American city, against the banks the banks have been certainly protected but the average American has not and this creates anger and tension about the lack of jobs, the lack of opportunities to support your families and, as we have seen in the past, illegal immigrants end up being scapegoated to a large extent which is a huge problem but there are elements to that, I think, are legitimate; you cannot just go into a country because you feel like it, every country has immigration policies, they pick and choose, there are processes that are involved.

You cannot just apply to go to the US on your own you have to be portioned in by a family member or by spouse or perhaps an employer so it is very difficult to get in the US but they have a huge border, I guess there was a time when there was like 850,000 that were entering the US illegally from the year 2000 to 2005, that is close to one million people a year entering the US illegally, certainly [there are] over ten million illegal immigrants in the US at the present time and that is subject to a very lively debate and sometimes it is very acrimonious, some of the states are passing draconian laws which do unfairly target illegal immigrants but their legal position is of course very weakened, we should encourage them to go through the proper channels, it is a complex issue, parts of it are very disturbing but on the other hand you just cannot decide to go to the US or Canada or any other country because you like the idea yourself, there has to be some sort of selection process that is done.

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