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USA :

President Obama's Backhanded Maneuver Targets Anti-Deportation Movement

- IV Online magazine - 2014 - IV473 - June 2014 -

Publication date: Sunday 29 June 2014

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Earlier this week, a number of organizations claiming to support immigration reform—including SEIU (Service Employees International Union), National Immigration Forum, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, Sojourners, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights—signed a letter to President Obama asking him to delay executive action against deportations until at least the end of summer, arguing that Congress needs one last chance to pass reform. Within hours, the administration publicly agreed to delay action as “requested.” This is an outrageous and transparent attempt to undue the gains of the powerful movement against deportations.

The Democratic Party strategy on immigration has always been to focus the debate on Congressional legislation and paint the Republicans as the real obstacle, thereby winning a political battle without taking any meaningful action. But we know and Obama knows that the President has always had the power to prevent deportations and end programs like Secure Communities without Congressional action, and the administration has already proven their ability to act under pressure by granting the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and putting an end to new 287(g) agreements. Earlier this year, mounting pressure from the militant and growing anti-deportation movement forced President Obama to agree to a review of deportation practices and to promise changes by early summer. Even after the announcement, pressure has continued to grow with many Congressional Democrats publicly stating that the administration needs to take executive action to significantly change deportation policies.

This recent development is clearly an attempt to reverse some of that pressure, buying time for the administration and putting the focus back on Congress and the Republicans. Not long after the story broke, an anonymous staffer for a DC immigration advocacy group told activists that their organization had been approached by a white house adviser and asked to sign this letter in order to give the administration cover. The President, who has deported a record two million people during his time in office, is making a desperate last attempt to avoid action and to shift blame back onto the Republicans just in time for the mid term elections.

It is also an attempt to divide a movement. The militant youth who have built and led the contemporary movement against deportations have only recently been finding support from more mainstream and well-resourced organizations, including labor unions. A united movement poses a serious threat to the administration and to ruling class interests. This backhanded maneuver can be read as an attempt to drive a wedge between undocumented youth activists and the broader forces that might support them, thereby weakening a powerful movement and keeping much of that movement under the influence of the Democratic Party.

It remains to be seen how well the strategy will work. There is certainly a fight back: organizers have loudly called out SEIU and the other groups who decided to sell out the 90,000 or more people who will be deported during the window granted to the administration. Some mainstream immigrant rights groups that have long supported reform have released statements denouncing the administration’s decision. Even the New York Times published a strongly worded statement from its editorial board that identified the real political dynamics and called the President’s bluff.

At the same time, Reform Immigration for America, one of the largest and most influential immigration, NGOs has released a strongly worded statement pushing for a renewed fight for legislative reform: "starting today, this country will see activism around immigration reform on a massive scale," their latest E-mail states. Other large and powerful groups are sure to follow. These groups will attempt to reorient grassroots forces toward reform, while saying nothing about the decision to delay administrative action. SEIU and other groups whose reputation in the movement matters little can take the heat for selling out tens of thousands of people, and RIFA and their like can complete the job.

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We must resist and fight back against this two-faced strategy. We need a united working class movement demanding an end to deportations, an end to programs like Secure Communities, and legalization for all. SEIU and their allies have willingly acted as the administration's lapdogs in an attempt to divide this movement and grant cover to politicians who want to avoid action yet again. And so we call on everyone who believes in justice to see this move for what it is. We support the activists who are tirelessly fighting against the deportation regime and fight to ensure that nobody takes the bait by backing down from the demands for executive action and returning to yet another round of futile lobbying for reform.

May 29, 2014

[1] at the end of May

[2] Solidarity has also signed this statement from the Not1More campaign, and we encourage you to have your organizations do the same <http://www.notonemoredeportation.co...>