

# Tenth immigrant dies in Texas trailer atrocity

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The death toll continues to rise among the 39 immigrants who were discovered in the sweltering trailer of a semitruck early Sunday morning in San Antonio, Texas. Nine were already dead when the trailer was opened, having succumbed to intense heat and lack of oxygen after being locked in the trailer for some 24 hours. Some survivors fled when the trailer, parked in a Walmart lot, was opened.

Federal authorities announced Monday morning that one of 20 survivors taken to the hospital in critical condition had died, bringing the number of fatalities to 10. They warned that others suffering from extreme heat stroke and dehydration might succumb.

New reports based on interviews with the immigrants in custody estimate that as many as 180 people may have been crammed into the sealed trailer as it made its way through Texas in a large-scale smuggling operation. One unidentified immigrant explained that people took turns gasping for air through a hole in the trailer's side. Many passed out from the heat. Others shouted and banged on the walls to get the driver to stop.

After one immigrant entered the Walmart looking for water, a worker at the store called the police. Everyone inside the trailer had a heart rate of more than 130 beats per minute when the doors were opened. Their skin was hot to the touch.

At least 17 victims remain in critical condition as of this writing, with one source reporting that some may have irreversible brain damage from the high temperatures. The identities and nationalities of the passengers have not been confirmed but at least a portion are known to be citizens of Mexico and Guatemala, according to officials in those countries.

Jesus Romero, who directs the immigration service project ISAAC down the street from the Walmart, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that the incident was “a tragedy of colossal proportions.” Romero added,

“There were actually women and children in this truck, and some of them died. And their only sin is to have broken our immigration laws in order to come to work. It is so horrendous that these things have to happen to people who mean us no harm and contribute so much to our society.”

Media coverage has focused on the truck driver, who has been arrested and faces charges that could bring life imprisonment or even the death penalty. This is a heinous crime. Yet the media is saying nothing about the government officials, business interests and politicians who bear the overriding responsibility for these deaths and the thousands more caused by their witch-hunting, persecution and exploitation of immigrant workers and youth.

Guilt begins with the Trump White House, Homeland Security Secretary Gen. John Kelly, those who run the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency and the border police, and their accomplices in both parties who have over the past several decades enacted a series of laws, under Democratic as well as Republican presidents, militarizing the border and imposing ever more vicious attacks on undocumented workers.

The criminalization of impoverished workers fleeing countries in Central and Latin America devastated by the depredations of US imperialism for more than a century has been carried out under increasingly onerous and antidemocratic laws backed and signed by presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama, paving the way for Trump's program of mass arrests and deportations.

The surviving victims of the San Antonio death trailer will be thrown into detention centers and promptly deported, most likely without being given an opportunity to plead their cases before a judge.

The 60-year-old Florida man who was driving the truck, James Matthew Bradley Jr., has been charged with knowingly transporting illegal aliens. He denies knowing that anyone was locked in the trailer.

Ruben Garcia, who runs the immigration service Annunciation House in El Paso, Texas, told the WSW: “It’s interesting as I listened to the news reports and I heard the various law enforcement officers, they want to single out the smugglers for this horrific act. But there isn’t a word, not a single word, about what pushes people to take these kinds of risks.”

Garcia added, “They have launched their investigations and they have arrested the driver and it will make it seem how righteous that we are going to go after these ‘bad people.’ And no one will ever say what it is about the policies that push people to have to work this way.”

Garcia has worked with immigrants for over forty years. He explained that nearly every immigrant who passes through his organization has been brought to the US by smugglers. The dangers posed by the drug cartels and the horrendous conditions that exist in countries such as Mexico compel immigrants to pay exorbitant amounts of money to be smuggled through in groups.

Garcia concluded, “This tragedy in San Antonio serves as a symbol of the present environment. If our system is incapable of acknowledging that these are the kinds of realities that drive people out of their country, if enforcement is the only solution offered, where we say, ‘They don’t belong here, kick them out, lock them up,’ then they are going to turn to the smugglers and you are going to have the San Antonio situation again and again.”

The deaths of the immigrants in San Antonio are a crime against the entire international working class, for which the American ruling class is directly responsible. Decades of imperialist aggression and plundering throughout the world, spearheaded by the United States, from the destruction of entire societies such as Iraq and Syria, to the 2009 ousting of the president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, has left 66 million people displaced worldwide, the highest number ever recorded.

The same politicians who organize imperialist violence against the international working class carry out brutal policies of austerity and repression against the workers at home. The tools of oppression forged in the attack on immigrants are being used against the working class as a whole. The massive surveillance apparatus, ostensibly erected for “national security,” is illegally spying on the entire country, native-born and

immigrant alike. The same police forces, armed to the teeth with military equipment supplied by the Pentagon, that are being empowered under Trump and Kelly to help round up and detain immigrants, brutalize and kill US citizens every day with impunity.

All of the problems exposed by the tragic deaths in San Antonio are produced by the capitalist system. In an age where money, commodities and the elites move with ease across national boundaries, there remain millions who are forced to risk their lives entering countries without documents, while thousands of armed men hunt them down.

The Socialist Equality Party stands for the unconditional right of workers of every country to live and work in whichever country they choose. We call for full democratic and citizenship rights for all immigrants, including the 12 million or more in the US now classified as “illegal.”

We call on workers of all nationalities to unite in defense of immigrants all over the world. This fight is an inseparable part of the defense of the rights and social interests of all workers and the struggle against the growth of militarism and war. It requires a common struggle against the capitalist system and all those parties and political forces that defend it.



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