

Working men have no country

Interviews from the San Diego/Tijuana San Ysidro border crossing as closure looms

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The San Diego, California/San Ysidro, Baja California border crossing is busiest in the world, and will be closed to all southbound traffic for a 52-hour period this next weekend from September 23 until noon on Monday, September 25. Traffic is to be redirected some 10 miles away to the Otay Mesa crossing, which has far less capacity.

The temporary closure of the San Ysidro Port of Entry will have significant consequences for the tens of thousands who cross daily. Every day 70,000 passenger vehicles, 20,000 pedestrians, and 4,000 commercial trucks cross back and forth at this entry point.

In an effort to ease tensions over the closure the U.S. General Services Administration, which is administering the project, selected a weekend where the students from the Sweetwater School District which stretches along the border are on Fall break.

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke with workers last weekend at the US/Mexico border crossing in San Diego about the upcoming closure and how the border affects their lives. All of the people interviewed cross daily or weekly, bisecting every aspect of their lives.

Jorge told WSWS reporters that he crosses weekly to purchase clothes for resale, which are very expensive in Mexico. He and his family have obtained a visitor's visa which allows him to make the crossing a few times a week, but doesn't allow him to work in the US. "It's a lot easier to obtain this visa as a family. My wife and two children and I have it, but it's very hard to get as single person because they think you won't come back."

Jorge buys clothes every week and sells them at an open market. He is allowed to cross the border with up

to \$150 of merchandise at each crossing. "If you try to bring more across they will charge you."

Jorge is part of Mexico's vast informal economy, workers who are self-employed or off-the-books and attempting to piece together an existence. According to Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography, over half of the workforce, 59.8 percent of the total population in the country, participates in the informal economy due to the unavailability of jobs and low wages.

When asked about jobs in Tijuana, Jorge explained that he has friends who work in the highly exploitative maquiladora border factories and in the kitchens or restaurants of upscale hotels. "They make about 1000 pesos (\$56) a week. This is not enough, and if you have a family it's impossible. There are a few good jobs, but if you don't have friends in the government there's no way you're going to find job that pays enough to get by."

Miguel, who has worked in the electronics manufacturing industry for 37 years, referred to the border as "a self-serving financial situation."

"The company I work for is based in Fresno, California, but it carries out its electronic assembly work here in the maquiladoras," he explained. "The workers who assemble these parts make about six or seven dollars a day, and it's very difficult work. There is no sick time, no vacation time, just the same tedious work with no growth or future."

Miguel also spoke about the deteriorating social conditions in the US that contributed to the election of Donald Trump. "Things are very fragile for the people in the Midwest. Places like Kansas, Mississippi, Alabama, where there are no jobs. Seventy or eighty

percent of the population in these areas are on welfare and might have one little clinic that's 50 miles away if you need healthcare. He took advantage of these people."

Reporters agreed with Miguel, commenting on the self-serving racist narrative put forth by the Democratic Party blaming racist white workers for Trump's victory. "That's total nonsense," Miguel replied. "The election of Trump was all economically driven. He really made a lot of promises to desperate people that he's not going to be able to keep."

Miguel agreed with the need to unite the international working class, saying, "Absolutely. After 37 years in manufacturing, I can only describe these corporations as financial leeches; Microsoft, Apple, or the company I work for. They pay the workers nothing—six or seven dollars a day—but they are now looking to move the manufacturing to Vietnam, China, Cambodia, or the Philippines. They think six or seven dollars a day is way too much!"

Ivan is a US citizen who lives in Tijuana for the cheaper rent and because he has family who are of mixed legal status. He works at a supermarket in the US and crosses in the middle of the night to avoid the two to three hours long queues that begin around 5 a.m.

Ivan explained that he crosses every day because the pay in the US is astronomically greater. "I used to work at a storage facility in Tijuana making \$60 a week. Here I can make \$400 or \$500 a week. Having to cross every day is hassle, but the difference in pay is so much that I can't not do it. What's \$50 or \$60 in Tijuana going to get you? Maybe food, but with rent, gas, bills, diapers, it doesn't do anything."

The upcoming closure is part of a larger \$741-million multi-year border renovation which is scheduled for completion in 2019, backed by the region's top binational business leaders, including representatives from the real estate, manufacturing, healthcare, technology, solar energy, higher education, retail, and telecommunications industries.

US-based corporations seek easier access to labor in Mexico which is on average 40 percent cheaper than in the US, with a daily minimum wage of \$5, while at the same time the border "renovation" will include additional checkpoints and heightened security measures.

The human toll of the increased border militarization

in recent years can be found in the bodies scattered across the Sonoran Desert as desperate immigrants are forced to cross through sweltering terrain which can reach 120 degrees Fahrenheit and succumb to heatstroke and dehydration. Nearly 6000 bodies have been found since the year 2000 and officials estimate that for every set of remains they find they are likely missing five, putting the deceased in the tens of thousands.



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