

Caravan immigrants speak out

On the spot coverage from Tijuana refugee camp

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For several days, the caravan of refugees from Central America has been stranded at the US-Mexico border in Tijuana. Around 200 people have been sleeping on the pavement and enduring rain and cold nights, while their requests for asylum play out.

Of the more than 2,000 immigrants that started the journey, the caravan has whittled away to less than 200 in Tijuana. As of this writing, only 28 have been allowed to cross the border to begin asylum procedures, barely 1 percent of the initial group.

While the caravan has been subjected to racist and xenophobic vitriol by the Trump administration, they have been helped by Mexican and American volunteers on both sides of the border, who have provided food, legal aid, clothing, diapers, blankets, and tarps and canopies for shelter. Far from bringing drugs and crime, the group is actually escaping horrendous conditions in their home countries, the result of decades of US imperialist support for death squad-backed dictatorships.

Reporters for the WSWS were able to visit the makeshift camp in Tijuana and speak to two refugees who shared their experiences. They described unspeakable violence both in their native countries and along the journey through Mexico. Both individuals displayed an articulate and deep understanding of the political situation, pointing out that the Mexican and American governments are both working together to keep refugees from entering their respective countries.

Carlos, 29, a painter, told us his story. “The things that made me come here are fear for my safety and the lack of employment. We’re all looking for political asylum, decent employment and a better opportunity for ourselves. We came here to work, not to steal or commit crimes or ‘steal jobs’ which is what they always accuse us of doing. I think what Trump is doing with the construction of the wall isn’t right. This world wasn’t created with borders and nations, we made those.

“The Mexican government hasn’t kept any of the

promises it has made. We were supposed to have been provided with 200 visas, but we haven’t received them to this date. So far they’ve taken in 50, and of those from what I hear only eight have been approved so far. The Mexican government are puppets, they’re taking orders from Trump.

“The people, unlike the government, helped us with a great deal, with food, with clothing, with water, offering shelter. The people of Mexico themselves have been a great help to us and we couldn’t have made it without their assistance.

“We were threatened continually, we had to endure attacks by gangs, bribery, extortion. In Sinaloa, they actually fired on the train at one point.”

Another refugee, also named Carlos and also 29, was a shopkeeper from Honduras. He told the WSWS, “Reporters will ask us what it is that brought us here. I tell them: we’ve come fleeing from the violence. We’re fleeing from the organized crime, which can I tell you is allied with the government.

“Some people have felt the need to change their answers to why they’ve come, as just economic reasons—looking for a better job, a better opportunity—perhaps thinking it might improve their odds of getting a visa.

“But it’s not one or the other. There is the violence and there is the reality that it’s hard to find good work. Sixty percent of Hondurans live in poverty, some 40 percent of those in extreme poverty, living on less than a dollar or two a day for the whole family. But the fact is all of us came here because of the violence and the organized crime, that’s the biggest factor for us. In my case, they killed three of my brothers and I left the country with my family as soon as I got the chance.

“I hadn’t heard of the caravan until I was nearly to Mexico going through Guatemala. We were all together with our backpacks and whatever we had on hand and a friend had told me that there is a “caravan trek” that

would go all the way to Tijuana.

“It was grueling, the stretches on foot, on La Bestia [The Beast, the train running through Mexico], on bus. The ‘migra’ [Mexican border patrol] would harass us or try to get a bribe from us constantly. We walked long stretches enduring the hunger, the thirst, the exhaustion, the heat—I can’t tell you just how difficult the heat made things. There was a fever going around too, and it affected a lot of us, young and old. We’d faint from the heat and the sun.

“Unlike the government, the Mexican people helped us in a very big way with water, diapers, clothing, supplies and food.

“In Lecheria [a station in Mexico City], we boarded the Beast where it stopped in the middle of the route. The government was determined not to let us get past Mexico City on the way to Tijuana. One sees that the government was mostly uninterested in providing assistance for the refugees.

“At one point, some of us who had finally gotten our visas had gone ahead and split off from the main body and later stopped by officers. They had their visas torn to pieces right then and there. The leaders of the caravan resolved that all of us would stay together.

“In Veracruz, there was a death after the ‘migra’ had set up an ambush with some 300 officers. They had stun guns, and stunned a woman who had her baby with her unconscious. While she was unconscious a train went over her leg, severing it. We tried to get what help we could for her but three days in, she had died.

“There’s definitely an understanding between the Mexican government and Trump. There’s no reason they can’t take us in right now. They say they’re at capacity, they say this and that, but it’s empty! In the mean time we have to sleep out here in the cold. It’s not the most pleasant feeling having to be spend the night on the concrete in the rain. Likewise, the train at night was freezing—it doesn’t heat up at all. It was absolutely miserable. Fortunately we have these tarps now, which were donated to us by people from the United States. We’ve gotten so much help and support from the people of Mexico and the United States alike.

“Those of us here in Tijuana all have the evidentiary material to prove that we’re political refugees, that our lives really are in danger and that’s why we have to leave our countries. The lawyers that we’d been able to get help from have told us that there’s nobody here that shouldn’t be receiving a visa on humanitarian grounds—100 percent.

“We started out more than 2,000 over in Tapachula,

now we’re down to about 200. Those [who left] are the ones who figured their best chance was getting a visa to stay here in Mexico. The rest of my family, my wife and two daughters, was able to get assistance from COMAR [Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance.]”

Carlos was asked to comment on the political situation in Honduras, to which he replied, “The current president holding office has been nicknamed the Usurper. The elections there were clearly overthrown.

“For my own part, I don’t really go for any of the political parties. I haven’t voted in the recent elections. I don’t think I could vote for any of the candidates without feeling regret about my vote.

“Dozens of people have been killed following the protests in opposition to the government. [Juan Orlando] Hernandez has been trying to silence UNE TV, one of the main networks over there. There’s been push back from human rights organizations, but either way, the government has been tracking down people who participated in the protests without wearing any kind of face covering or mask. They come in real quiet in the night, and disappear them.

“The violence, the reason we’re leaving Honduras, has its origins in the United States. There’s an alliance between our government and the US government. The police and the government are infiltrated by organized crime, and none of us in Honduras have any confidence in the police.

“Trump has plenty of power, but with it he’s just going to pursue his interests. There’s petroleum here, there’s gold. Up to now Honduras hasn’t been able to exploit those resources. With this government and Trump, who knows how that would play out. That’s where that alliance comes in.”



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