

Mexican immigrants seek asylum amidst growing social inequality and crime

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The WSWs spoke with workers seeking asylum in the United States, who line up in scores near the “El Chaparral” pedestrian border crossing at the San Ysidro district of San Diego, California. An immigration official appears with a clipboard and a few names are called at a time to begin the process in making their case for asylum. All immediately gather around in hopes of hearing their names called.

“They call in maybe three or four people, and that’s it for the day,” Rogelio, 38, a construction worker from the state of Guerrero, told a WSWs reporter.

The majority of those present are Mexican citizens forced to make the long and often risky journey to seek out political asylum in the US as a response to cartel-related crime and violence in Mexico.

The American media focuses on gang violence in Central America, often as part of an anti-immigrant campaign to smear as “animals” and criminals those seeking refuge from the consequences of US intervention in the region. Of course, the role of US foreign policy in actively creating the conditions of rampant criminality and corruption goes unmentioned.

Mexico, a long-standing target of Trump’s nationalist and xenophobic vitriol, also faces conditions that resemble in many respects those of its southern neighbors, particularly in its rural zones.

Violence linked to drug cartels, and the attendant governmental corruption, has not abated since the Calderon government’s “declaration of war” on gangs. All the established parties of Mexican bourgeois politics stand exposed as both ineffectual and complicit in dealing with these pervasive symptoms of a crisis-ridden social order.

During the first three months of the year alone, 7,667 murders were reported, an average of 85 a day, according the Executive Secretariat of the National

System of Public Security (SESNEP). This was the most violent three-month period since 2015.

Rogelio, from a small town of less than 10,000 inhabitants not far Chilpancingo, the state capital, said, “I was just speaking with [a woman also seeking asylum], and she was telling about how they had killed her three brothers. If, say, you get mugged or robbed, and you try to contact the authorities about it, you may be never heard from again. They’re the same people, really. The police are completely infiltrated by the gangsters and the hitmen. Everybody in the state knows about it—everybody except the governor, apparently.”

“There is no government there. It doesn’t matter who we vote for in [presidential elections in] July, they won’t really do anything about the corruption and the crime, and this will go on in the same way. Let’s say Lopez Obrador wins. He might say nicer things, but at the end of the day the politicians never keep their word.”

The attitudes towards Lopez Obrador, who is supported by the pseudo-left in Mexico, ranged from pessimism to a kind of “lesser-evilmism” to cautious optimism. Employing populist phrases, Lopez Obrador has managed to outmaneuver his opponents by speaking, however superficially and half-heartedly, to economic issues and disgust at the political establishment, including making the connection between the dire economic situation and criminality.

Of the 28 million people living in extreme poverty in Mexico, the majority are concentrated in rural areas. Indeed, according a recent report by the Latin American Center for Rural Development, Mexico ranks highest among Latin American countries for what is termed “territorial inequality”—the geographical unevenness of access to basic infrastructure and resources, including education. The study also notes

that between 2010 and 2015 the Gini coefficient in 93 percent of Mexican municipalities rose, from 0.37 to 0.45.

Given all of this, the connection between the concentration of poverty in the rural areas of the country and lack of gainful employment forces many into illicit activity.

David, 43, told his story, “I came here seeking asylum about fifteen days ago. I came with my family, it's eleven of us. These fifteen days [here at the border] have been pretty hard. I've never been to this part of Mexico. I came from Morelia, but here I don't have any friends or family.

“I try to do odd jobs when I can. I'm supposed to be waiting here in case my name gets called or else they pass me up, and it's on to the next person. Because of that, I can only afford to work one day and stay here waiting the next.

“Sometimes we can't afford to eat much. My kids are two and four years old, but my brother's kids are here with us too. I was a baker in my hometown, but things are getting too difficult.

“There's no work. You work one day and then don't come to work for the next three. It's really insecure. If you try to sell food or resources on your own, then people harass you for protection money. If you can't afford to pay, you disappear. And that's why I'm here.

“Even here, the hotel across the street charges me 250 pesos per person, and everyone in the hotel has to share the same shower. They charge 100 pesos just to sleep on the floor. A man here says I can buy a camper from him and make payments. That sounds like a good deal right now. There's just no way I'm going back to my state.”



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