

Central American caravan reaches Mexico chanting “We are international workers!”

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The caravan of more than 7,200 refugees escaping desperate poverty and rampant violence in Central America has successfully crossed into Mexico on its way to the United States. The caravan, which has taken on the character of a mass political demonstration, is mostly composed of Hondurans and includes about 2,300 children and 2,200 women.

With hundreds of miles behind them and hundreds of miles ahead, the migrants marched on Sunday toward the Mexican city of Tapachula in the state of Chiapas.

In spite of the scorching sun and military helicopters hovering overhead, the spirited caravan chanted, “Migrants are not criminals, we are international workers!” and “Why kill us? We are the hope!”

The 3.5-mile-long caravan, which departed as a group of about two thousand Hondurans from San Pedro Sula ten days ago, reached the Guatemala-Mexico border Friday. After they easily overran a fence set up by the Guatemalan authorities, they made their way across the Rodolfo Robles bridge and the port of entry into Mexico. However, they were tackled and attacked with tear gas by 400 Mexican riot police.

After the violent assault and as only a miniscule stream of migrants were being allowed in to begin applying for asylum, the caravan held discussions Friday night about the days or weeks they would have to wait and the high likelihood of being deported. Thus, the decision was taken to join the hundreds of others who had already risked crossing the Suchiate river into Mexico and to re-group at the central plaza in Ciudad Hidalgo, state of Chiapas.

Throughout Saturday, they crossed *en masse*. After being welcomed similarly by the Guatemalans, the migrants were received by hundreds of Chiapas residents— *chiapanecos* —with food, clothes, other supplies and cheers.

On Sunday, the caravan re-assembled to continue their trip north in the form of a massive column that thanked, greeted, and invited locals with the chant: “Mexico, Mexico!” Appeals aimed at American workers and youth for “help” are already being reported. The caravan’s journey is fraught with danger. Yesterday, six Guatemalan immigrants died in a crash as they were being driven in a truck full of 40 people outside of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico.

Donald Trump pledged to bar all caravan members from

entering the US. He tweeted Sunday: “Full efforts are being made to stop the onslaught of illegal aliens from crossing our Souther Border [sic]. People have to apply for asylum in Mexico first, and if they fail to do that, the US will turn them away.” This statement is a clear violation of international law.

The mass support for the immigrant caravan across Latin America testifies to growing consciousness of the international character of the working class.

Workers in the US and Canada must understand that the migrants traveling to the US are their allies, not their enemies, as President Trump and his corporate allies in the Republican and Democratic Parties would have them believe. US workers in California and the Midwest would do well to remember the prejudice their “Okie” grandparents faced when migrating from Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas to the West Coast during the Dust Bowl and the Great Depression. Their Chinese, Japanese, Irish and Italian predecessors faced brutal racism and discrimination upon arrival in the US, almost always without papers or documentation.

The ruling class has always sought to pit workers against each other based on race and nationality to escalate its social attacks against the entire international working class and to prepare the population for wars abroad. The US government and its puppet regimes in Mexico and Central America are opposing the caravan as a major “threat” in part to serve their own immediate political interests, but also because they view as a threat the movement that is becoming increasingly a symbol of proletarian internationalism.

The Central American caravan is a working class demonstration of people desperate to find a safer environment to escape the imminent threat of death. For millions, jobs, health care and education are simply not an option in neighborhoods (*barrios*) devastated by a long history of brutal repression and civil-war levels of violence involving gangs and state forces.

At its root, the poverty, inequality, violence and social crisis across Central America is the product of 100 years of American imperialist exploitation implemented via CIA-backed coups, death squads and dictatorships. Fundamentally, the victims of this legacy face the same objective enemies as workers in Mexico, the United States and everywhere: the financial

oligarchy and the capitalist system.

In this way, the caravan is casting a new light upon the existing objective links that unite workers internationally, while exposing the absurd and imaginary boundaries that divide it.

As the caravan participants move north, they face deadly environmental conditions and dangerous roads, along with constant threats from the Mexican navy, federal and state police, and immigration officials aiming to disperse the caravan to begin round-ups and mass deportations. The Mexican federal police set up lines of riot police near intersections between Ciudad Hidalgo and Tapachula on Sunday but has not dared to use them for fear of provoking massive opposition in Mexico and internationally. Instead, officials sought to lure migrants into trucks supposedly to take them to a shelter. According to *El Universal*, the migrants refused this trick.

With mass support by Mexican workers and youth and by the power of its size and class-based unity and appeals, the caravan could continue to advance and grow and cross the 1,100 miles until it reaches the US port of entry in Brownsville, Texas.

Donald Trump has sought to exploit the caravan to mobilize his base less than three weeks ahead of the November 6 mid-term elections, calling the workers and peasants in the caravan “hardened criminals” and threatening to deploy “the military, not the [national] guard” to the US-Mexico border.

In response to such threats, the Democratic Party has turned their backs on the immigrants, rejecting any consideration of them, with Nancy Pelosi, the leader of the House Democrats, and Charles Schumer, leader of the Senate Democrats, issuing a statement Saturday claiming Trump “is desperate to change the subject from healthcare to immigration” and refusing to respond to Trump’s fascist attacks of physical violence.

The Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto, has denounced the caravan as “unprecedented” and “irregular and violent.” Meanwhile, the president-elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, speaking Friday in Chiapas on the caravan, declared: “We want to keep this friendly relation [with the Trump administration], and I think we will look for options and alternatives. We do not want to fight.”

These statements show that regardless of political party, the US and Mexican ruling elites are joined in their attempt at dividing and trapping the caravan within the web of the Mexican National Migration Institute (INM), which now serves as the southern extension of *La Migra*, a.k.a. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Under the stinging headline “Trump tweets, Mexico obeys,” the Mexican *El Proceso* noted Sunday, “the [Mexican] procedure to obtain asylum is long, tough and often involves spending several months in migration detention centers, without being able to obtain a job. And, if that wasn’t enough, the application generally gets rejected.”

El Proceso cites data from the national refugee agency: Mexico received 14,596 asylum applications in 2017, processed

6,877 of these by the end of the year and granted asylum to only 1,907 refugees. Out of the total of Honduran applicants, only 9 percent were granted asylum, and 7.8 percent of Honduran minors.

Responding to the absurd conspiracy theories advanced by all governments that the march was organized as a publicity stunt by the opposition parties, whether by the Honduran bourgeois opposition or the Democratic Party in the US, a Honduran migrant responded: “How do you organize such a caravan? How do you organize such need?”

Refugees and migrants from Central America say they would prefer to die than go back to their impoverished and violence-ridden home countries. For many migrants, deportation from the US or Mexico actually constitutes a death sentence, as they are escaping from widespread violence and even direct persecution by gangs and the murderous state.

Under enormous pressure from Washington, with Trump threatening to immediately cut aid unless it stopped the caravan, the Honduran government has escalated its assault on the migrants, harassing them as they march toward the border. On Saturday, the Guatemalan and Honduran presidents, Jimmy Morales and Juan Orlando Hernandez, discussed the issue, denounced the caravan, and announced joint “efforts for a peaceful and safe return” of the migrants.

Nothing of the sort can be expected. The police-state dictatorship in Tegucigalpa, installed through a military coup overseen by the Obama administration in 2009 and kept in power through fraudulent elections backed by Washington, enforces social conditions that maximize the extraction of profits and resources by US and other transnationals, suppresses social opposition by employing its military and death squads, and enjoys close ties with drug cartels and the US military, with hundreds of troops stationed in the country.



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