

The migrant caravan and the fight to unite the international working class

Eric London
23 October 2018

The massive caravan of immigrants that left San Pedro de Sula, Honduras for the United States on October 13 has attracted widespread attention and support among tens of millions of workers and impoverished people across Latin America. What began as a small group of several hundred immigrants traveling together for security and safety has expanded into a 7,000-person transcontinental political demonstration for equality and democratic rights.

Each day, millions tune in as Mexican, Central American and US Spanish-language news stations carry live reports from the caravan, tracking its path as it winds its way through southern Mexico, where local residents greet the migrants with delegations carrying food, water, clothing and other necessities.

The caravan participants view themselves not as downtrodden victims but as confident representatives of the working class. In the face of threats from US President Donald Trump and violent attacks by Mexican and Guatemalan police, their chants of “migrants are not criminals, we are international workers!” resonate in a region decimated by poverty, violence and corruption.

The conditions in Central America’s “Northern Triangle” from which these workers are fleeing are all, at their root, the product of the horrific crimes committed by American imperialism across the region for over a century.

In Guatemala, the US orchestrated a coup against democratically elected Jacobo Árbenz in 1954, installed the dictator Castillo Armas and set the stage for a 36-year civil war lasting from 1960 to 1996. In the early 1980s, the US-backed dictatorship of Efraín Ríos Montt carried out widespread mass murder of workers and poor villagers, including a calculated genocide against the Mayan indigenous population that left tens of thousands dead.

The residents of neighboring El Salvador endured the horrors of civil war from 1979 to 1992, which left nearly

100,000 dead. The US military, employing scorched earth tactics it had perfected in Vietnam, directed the El Salvadoran government as it murdered dissidents like Archbishop Óscar Romero and conducted atrocities like the massacre at Sumpul River, where troops killed 600 villagers wading across to escape into Honduras.

Honduras has historically served as the US launching pad for mass murder across the region. Throughout the 1980s, the US trained paramilitary “contra” forces in the country and deployed them to ransack Nicaragua after the revolution that overthrew the US-backed dictatorship of Somoza in 1979.

Imperialism has acted to secure the profits of American corporations like the United Fruit Company through the suppression of strikes and rebellions among workers and poor peasants across the region. The total casualties are in the millions. As former US general Smedley Butler put it, “I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.”

Though the names of the corporations have changed, the domination of American imperialism has only intensified. The hated Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández is in power because his predecessor, Porfirio Lobo Sosa, was installed in the wake of a coup backed by the Obama administration that ousted democratically elected president Manuel Zelaya in 2009.

In 2014, Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres denounced then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for her personal role in orchestrating the coup. The US-backed government murdered Cáceres in March 2016.

With this history, Central America remains the world’s most unequal region, and Honduras its most unequal country. Sixty-eight percent of Hondurans live in poverty and 44 percent live in extreme poverty.

US President Donald Trump has promised he will use the military to bar the demonstrating workers from entering the US, indicating his readiness to massacre the

immigrants should they attempt to walk across the border as they have done in both Guatemala and Mexico.

The Democratic Party has deliberately ignored these dangerous preparations. In a press release Saturday, Democratic congressional leaders Charles Schumer and Nancy Pelosi said Trump was “desperate to change the subject from health care to immigration” and refused to respond to Trump’s fascistic threats.

Bernie Sanders did not even mention Trump’s pledge to seal the border and deploy the military in a 30-minute stump speech for Democratic Senate candidate Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin yesterday. Compared to the Democrats’ hysterical fury over allegations of sexual misconduct, their silence on the fate of impoverished immigrants—including many women escaping domestic violence, rape and sexual slavery—betrays the reactionary character of the #MeToo campaign.

This silence is compounded by the self-proclaimed socialist organizations that operate within the Democratic Party. The Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have not mentioned Trump’s recent attack on immigrants on their web page, and neither the DSA-aligned *Jacobin* magazine nor the International Socialist Organization’s *Socialist Worker* has any article on immigration on their front page. This is only the latest evidence that these nationalist, pro-capitalist organizations have nothing to do with socialism.

It is urgent that workers of all nationalities recognize in this caravan a friendly regiment of class allies.

Under capitalism, the lives of billions of workers are totally subordinated to the profits of the major banks and corporations. Like dirt in a gust of wind, wars, depressions or changes in wages and commodity prices thrust millions of workers from their homes, uprooting them from their families and their cultures and forcing them to seek safety in far-flung corners of the world.

Despite the immense danger posed to immigrants, however, the process of mass immigration and the caravan in particular have revolutionary implications.

The working class is proving *de facto* by marching across national barriers that the *de jure* division of the world into nation-states under capitalism is incompatible with the aspirations and material needs of billions of workers. By marching across borders, the caravan is proving that the laws making immigration “illegal” are as much a block on the progress of humanity as were the laws legalizing the purchase and sale of human beings as slaves.

In a 1913 essay titled “Capitalism and Workers’

Immigration,” Vladimir Lenin explained:

“There can be no doubt that dire poverty alone compels people to abandon their native land, and that the capitalists exploit the immigrant workers in the most shameless manner. But only reactionaries can shut their eyes to the *progressive* significance of this modern migration of nations... Capitalism is drawing the masses of the working people of the *whole* world [into the class struggle], breaking down the musty, fusty habits of local life, breaking down national barriers and prejudices, uniting workers from all countries in huge factories and mines in America, Germany and so forth...”

American workers must come to the defense of their brothers and sisters from the south. The Socialist Equality Party demands:

- Safe passage and legal entry for all caravan participants into the United States
- Abolition of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the dismantling of the militarized border region
- Immediate liberation of all immigrants detained in the United States
- The provision of jobs, homes, health care and educational opportunities to the caravan participants and all immigrants
- A multi-trillion-dollar program to rebuild Central America, to be paid for by expropriating the wealth of American billionaires
- The right of all workers to safely travel across the world without fear of harassment



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact