

Migrant caravan reaches US border as Latin American governments discuss austerity and repression

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17 November 2018

The first migrant caravan, which departed San Pedro Sula, Honduras, on October 12, has begun arriving in the Mexican city of Tijuana, across the US border from San Diego. According to the most recent count made by the government of Querétaro, 6,531 migrants are traveling as part of the first caravan and are expected to re-group in the coming days.

On the US side of the border, the Trump administration has deployed nearly 5,900 active duty troops, in addition to 2,100 national guardsmen patrolling the border since April under the pretext of stopping a smaller migrant caravan.

With the Democratic Party entrenched behind Trump's assault on immigrants and democratic rights, the White House has continued building tent cities for tens of thousands more migrants. Customs and Border Patrol agents have been carrying out drills with helicopters and weaponry as part of preparations for a violent assault on the caravan, and Trump has threatened to deny asylum applications outside ports of entry.

The troops at the border, while currently placing barriers and barbed wire, have been given the order by the Northern Command to protect the Border Patrol. Moreover, CNN reported this week on discussions between the Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security on securing authorization from the White House for a more direct involvement by the military in "the policing of the border," which would violate US federal law.

On Wednesday night, a few hundred members of the caravan who arrived early in Tijuana were attacked with rocks, kicks and punches by a group of far-right thugs calling on the police to deport them. Most in the group of migrants were forced to board buses provided by the police to go to a "temporary shelter," an offer they had repeatedly rejected during their 2,400-mile journey crossing Mexico, due to fears of being driven into detention centers.

In fact, one of the buses carrying migrants across Sonora toward Tijuana was intercepted by the Mexican Federal Police on Thursday night, with about 60 migrants being sent to a detention center and reportedly being prepared for deportation. Another one crashed with a patrol car on Friday and flipped over, with ten migrants being sent to the hospital.

Leodan Pineda, a single father who was traveling on a bus that reached the border, told *El País*: "This is the toughest experience I've had to face as a father. Everything has happened to us, they've tried to kidnap, assault us; we got really sick. I hope to reach a prosperous country, without hunger and so much misery, where my daughter can study."

The members of the caravan are planning on requesting asylum at the US port of entry; however, it currently takes days to even be seen by immigration officials, and applicants are then sent to detention centers. A vast majority of those applying for asylum are rejected and then deported, in spite of the fact that most are escaping the threat of generalized violence from gangs and state forces.

Another migrant in the bus withLeodan, Merlín Hernández, 26, expressed feeling part of a broader struggle for all immigrant workers: "This caravan defines a lot. If we make it through, I'm sure that there will be more caravans in the future."

After the initial clashes on Wednesday night, a group of locals bravely intervened to defend the migrants left behind. "I'm from Tijuana. Let them [the migrants] wage their struggle. When the government fucks us up, all of you stay quiet... you don't even care, while they are all united," yelled one young worker at the angry mob. "They are waging their struggle against the US government. That country is built with immigrants... You don't represent Tijuana, and I'm with them because they are struggling."

Having crossed Mexico, the migrants witnessed the common issues facing workers internationally. At the US border, a migrant woman from Honduras told CNN that they wanted to cross into the United States because "staying here would be just like staying in my country," referring to the widespread violence and poverty.

Shortly before, on Wednesday, the incoming president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO), presented his security plan which will create a new military National Guard and place the Federal Police under the auspices of the Defense Secretariat, while seeking to enshrine the unlimited deployment of the National Guard in the

Constitution.

Critics and supporters have described this as a planned escalation of a war ostensibly against drug cartels that has left more than a quarter of a million dead since 2006. Not only has the country's homicide rate continued to set record peaks, but the military has been shown to carry out extrajudicial executions with impunity and has become a central player in quelling protests among workers and students.

At the same time, a report by Doctors without Borders found that 92 percent of Central American migrants who reach the US have directly suffered some form of violence in their countries or in their trip through Mexico, including one third of women reporting sexual assault. The organization describes "a pattern of violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence and forced repatriation akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts of the world today."

These conditions have led to a veritable exodus of hundreds of thousands each year from the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. More and more migrants have been organizing caravans to travel more safely and receive support along the way. Currently, a second caravan composed of about 1,500 migrants, mostly from Honduras, is crossing the state of Mexico and is hoping to reach Tijuana next week, while a third one with 2,000 migrants from El Salvador has arrived in Mexico City.

On Thursday and Friday, heads of state and top businesspeople from across Latin America, Andorra, Spain and Portugal met at the Ibero-American Summit in Antigua, Guatemala, to discuss regional investments and political issues.

The main recurring themes during the conference were the mass migrations from Central America and Venezuela, along with growing social instability across the region as a product of staggering inequality. No official went beyond empty appeals for "cooperation" and proposing deeper austerity and pro-business incentives to "stimulate growth."

For instance, Marta Lucía Ramírez, the vice-president of Colombia, which is facing the influx of approximately one million Venezuelans escaping a growing humanitarian crisis, warned of growing unrest and "anarchy" across the region. In the same breath, however, she excused the absence of Colombia's President Iván Duque, claiming he is promoting a new bill with sales taxes, tax credits for businesses and "most importantly spending cuts." Duque, more precisely, was overseeing the violent repression of thousands of students and workers who were protesting Thursday against the austerity measures.

The approach by the ruling classes to the desperate social crisis in the Northern Triangle has been no different. In Honduras, an electoral fraud last November was followed by mass demonstrations across the country and brutal repression that involved shootings into crowds and daylight raids into homes of protesters, resulting in dozens of demonstrators killed and hundreds arrested.

The widespread opposition by Honduran workers, peasants and youth against the fraud—and, before that, the 2009 US-backed military coup that installed a regime even more pliant to the interests of Wall Street and the Pentagon—has been effectively channeled and suppressed by a coterie of "left" social organizations, including Morenoite, Pabloite and neo-Stalinist parties organized in the National Resistance Popular Front (FNRP) and the Libre Party. Last year, they closed ranks behind the presidential candidacy of Salvador Nasralla, a former Pepsi Honduras CEO, Pinochet admirer and TV personality.

Predictably, Nasralla and Libre Party leader, Manuel Zelaya—the same president deposed in 2009, a major landowner and former chief of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise—sought to subordinate mass opposition to brutal repression to their own empty appeals to the State Department, its regional diplomatic arm, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the UN, while isolating protests from the widespread support for their struggle against the coup regime among workers across Latin America and beyond.

Far from the product of some conspiracy on the part of opposition parties in Honduras, as Tegucigalpa and Washington both claim, the most recent exodus from the country demonstrates the devastating consequences of the betrayals carried out by these parties, which have undermined the popular resistance to the continuous social attacks by the US-puppet regime of President Juan Orlando Hernandez.

In this sense, while highlighting the common social issues and economic bonds shared by workers across Central America, Mexico, the United States and internationally, the caravan also demonstrates that workers need to fight for an independent, socialist and international solution to the crisis of global capitalism, in opposition to imperialism and all factions of the ruling elites, which are ultimately governed by imperialism.



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