

Trump's war on immigrants escalates

Thousands seeking asylum in US to be pushed back into Mexico

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The Trump administration and the government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) implemented new rules Friday requiring that the majority of asylum seekers from Mexico and Central America remain in Mexico while their immigration cases are considered in the United States. The total numbers of migrants from the region currently seeking asylum at US ports of entry is estimated at six to seven thousand.

Previously known as “Remain in Mexico,” the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has formally announced the new policy as the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP). Representatives for Trump and AMLO had been negotiating the deal since last year.

US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) will begin initial implementation of the MPP at the San Ysidro Port of Entry in Tijuana, which borders San Diego, California, the busiest land border crossing in the world. Three hundred sixty-five days a year, 70,000 passenger vehicles, 20,000 pedestrians, and 4,000 commercial trucks cross back and forth.

Until now, migrants seeking asylum who had “passed” a credible fear interview were released from detention into the United States with relatives, friends, or humanitarian agencies while awaiting their court hearing, a process that can take years because of a backlog of more than 800,000 cases.

The new policy will prohibit the release of the asylum seekers to family or other support networks that might provide for them and compel them to languish homeless in the streets of Tijuana or rent short-term lodging, which the vast majority cannot afford. According to Syracuse University's Transactional Access Records Clearinghouse, the wait time for most asylum cases can be nearly two years.

An anonymous DHS official told NBC News and the *Washington Post* on Thursday that under the MPP, asylum applicants will get a “notice to appear” that requires them to return to the San Ysidro entry on a specific date for US officials to take them to a hearing in downtown San Diego.

In the meantime, border personnel would set up a telephone number for the asylum seekers to call for updates on their cases.

The official further stated that the new policy would not apply to “vulnerable groups,” presumably children, unaccompanied minors, pregnant women, and the ill. In a weak attempt to portray the new policy as humanitarian, he added, “If they express a fear of returning to Mexico, this doesn't apply.”

The MPP is in outright violation of international refugee and asylum law, which mandates that persons presenting themselves for asylum must be granted safe entry to the country where they are seeking refuge while they await proceedings. This is regardless of whether their case is accepted or denied in the end.

Advocates and legal counselors have also denounced the number ledger system being used by US Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) as a violation of international asylum and refugee law, noting that it is illegal for the US to decide they are only going to process a certain number, currently between 200 and 300 per month.

The MPP and related measures targeting asylum seekers are part of the Trump administration's efforts to whip up right-wing and fascist support to scapegoat immigrants in the face of widespread teachers rebellions, anger by government workers on the verge of destitution, and the general movement of the international working class against austerity and for social equality.

Trump claimed this past Wednesday in a White House press conference that Central American countries are directing people to leave, “I actually think they encourage the caravans because they want to get rid of the people from their country ... We have a lot of very dangerous people that want to come into our country. And we're not letting them in.”

Reiterating that claim, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said in a statement. “For far too

long, our immigration system has been exploited by smugglers, traffickers, and those who have no legal rights to remain in the United States.”

No doubt the calls by Matamorán auto parts workers for their counterparts in the US and internationally to join their strike and cast aside their unions is being considered in the escalation of the assault on the rights of immigrants. These baseless and continued attempts by the Trump administration to associate the migrant caravans with criminal elements are nothing but an effort to prepare the population for continued bloody crackdowns at the border.

In December, US military and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) fired tear gas, rubber bullets and flash bang grenades at desperate workers and their families at the San Ysidro Port of entry. Recent revelations of Federal spending records show enormous arms and ammunition purchases by CBP to assault the caravan. One, for \$108,464, is labeled: “AMMUNITION FOR CARAVAN EFFORT.” Another, for \$16,906, reads: “EMERGENCY PURCHASE OF RIOT GEAR IN RESPONSE TO CENTRAL AMERICA MIGRANT CARAVAN.”

Meanwhile, on Mexico’s southern border with Guatemala, thousands of migrants have gathered and are awaiting “humanitarian” visas to enable them to continue their journey north. Mexico has received more than 12,000 petitions for humanitarian visas, which allow recipients to remain in Mexico for one year.

However, AMLO has openly embraced the dirty work of the Trump administration to close the door to Central American immigrants at Mexico’s southern border.

Legal advocates warn that allowing Mexico to become what is known in asylum law as a “safe third country” could permit US immigration officials to argue in the future that asylum in the United States is no longer necessary if refugees have “safety” in Mexico.

Such a designation is entirely at odds with the reality of life in Mexico, where nearly 28 million people live in extreme poverty, the majority of whom are concentrated in rural areas. A United Nations study found that 14 percent of children suffer from stunted growth as a result of malnutrition and over half of Mexican children live in poverty.

Half of Mexico’s 127 million residents do not earn enough to meet basic needs, and one in five suffers from hunger. The Center of Investigation and Documentation of Housing and the Federal Mortgage Society reports that around 34 million Mexicans reside in crowded and inadequate housing with more than two persons per room living in shack homes built from poor materials such as cardboard and reeds.

According to the 2019 World Report on Human Rights abuses in Mexico, between December 2012 and January

2018 the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) received more than 4,600 complaints of abuses by the military. Additionally, 64 percent of the prison population reported having suffered physical violence at the hands of state officials. Of these, “19 percent reported receiving electrical shocks; 36 percent being choked, held underwater, or smothered; and 59 percent being hit or kicked. In addition, 28 percent reported that they were threatened that their family would be harmed,” it noted.

The country also faces a skyrocketing homicide rate. Mexico’s Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection recorded 33,341 intentional homicides in 2018, a 15 percent increase over 2017, making 2018 the deadliest on record, with an average of 91 deaths a day.

Notably absent from the coverage of the caravan is the fact that there are thousands of Mexicans, particularly from rural areas, who are seeking asylum in the United States, fleeing the same conditions as their Central American counterparts. They have also spent endless months and years languishing in Tijuana as they seek refuge in the US.

The implementation of the MPP comes on the heels of multiple lawsuits filed against the Trump administration’s punishing treatment of more than 10,000 immigrant children held in detention centers across the country. On Friday, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) filed a class action lawsuit that accuses the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) of targeting undocumented sponsors of unaccompanied children. The SPLC claims that the ORR worked with immigration officers to arrest the sponsor if they were determined to be undocumented. Lawyers claim that in the past year at least 170 willing sponsors have been arrested and put into deportation proceedings.

The aspirations of migrants arriving at the US-Mexico border are the same as those of the international working class, the only social force capable of defend the rights of the asylum seekers. They seek jobs, homes, health care, educational opportunities, stability, and a life free of state and gang violence. What is required is the unity of the American, Mexican, and Latin American working class fighting for a socialist program which would include a multi-trillion-dollar program to rebuild Central America, to be paid for by expropriating the wealth of the billionaires in the US and throughout the Americas.



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