

Mexican president vows to curb migration after Trump's tariff threat

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The government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) has responded with unvarnished servility to US imperialism following Donald Trump's threat last Thursday to impose a 5 percent tariff on all Mexican imports beginning June 10. Trump said the tariffs would increase every month up to 25 percent until Mexico blocked Central American migrants from reaching the US.

Trump followed his announcement with a series of fascist tweets. Typical was one calling on Mexico to stop "the invasion of our Country by Drug Dealers, Cartels, Human Traffickers, Coyotes and Illegal Immigrants."

On Thursday, López Obrador sent an open letter to Donald Trump signed "his friend," declaring his desire to avoid a confrontation. On Friday, he announced that he would send a delegation to Washington led by Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard to make the case that Mexico is escalating its crackdown on immigrants.

"We are complying with our responsibilities," he said, promising to "reinforce migration law without violating human rights."

Trump has thus far dismissed López Obrador's entreaties and promises as mere "words," and demanded "action." His aides have told the US media that Trump fully intends to impose the first round of tariffs next Monday.

The proposed tariffs—aimed at mobilizing Trump's ultra-nationalist and far-right base in response to mounting calls for his removal from office—would place enormous pressure on manufacturers across Mexico to intensify the exploitation of a working class that is already engaging in militant strikes and protests to demand major improvements in its living conditions.

This threatens the profits of the corporate and financial interests for which López Obrador and his Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) speak. The Mexican ruling class has vastly enriched itself in recent decades by imposing social cuts, privatization and deregulation in order to turn Mexico into a cheap labor manufacturing platform for foreign investors.

Trump's dictates will be used, moreover, to further militarize the country, attack democratic rights and divide the working class in an attempt to contain seething class tensions, while Morena pursues its anti-worker economic agenda.

On Friday, Mexico's deputy foreign minister for North America, Jesus Seade, told Reuters that the government wanted to step up measures to curb migrant flows. On Saturday, López Obrador commended the "openness among US government officials to begin a dialogue and reach agreements and compromises." He called this supposed openness "the first favorable step."

Regarding the new North American free trade agreement, which involves significant concessions to the US—including the barring of any free trade agreement with China—López Obrador said the tariff threats would not stop "an overwhelming majority in Congress to ratify the treaty, with all legislators placing their banners aside."

These statements followed more specific demands made Thursday by the acting US secretary of homeland security, Kevin McAleenan, for Mexico to seal off its southern border with Guatemala and designate itself a "safe third country," which would make migrants from other countries ineligible for asylum in the US.

In his letter Thursday, López Obrador stated: "Remember that I lack no courage. I'm not a coward or a wimp, but I act on principles." He combined this with an invocation of his own, Mexican version of Trump's "Make America Great Again" demagoguery, promising that tariffs would not halt Mexico's ascent to the status of a "power."

"We Mexicans should unite, there should be national unity at this time," he said. "All of us, independent of our political and ideological differences, our ways of thinking, our religions, we should defend Mexico."

While submitting to US demands, he has sought to placate broad sympathy for migrants among Mexican workers and peasants, many of whom have migrated themselves and have relatives in the US. He has reiterated his election campaign promises to adopt a "humanitarian" approach to immigrants, based on incentivizing investments and economic development in Central America and southern Mexico, i.e., providing subsidies for corporations seeking to exploit super-cheap labor.

His policy of promoting "economic development" in Central America is, in reality, a policy to more firmly subordinate workers in the region to the profit drive of globalized finance capital. This goes hand in hand with deeper attacks on social

conditions and police state measures to suppress opposition.

The record of López Obrador's six months in office speaks for itself regarding his "humanitarianism." Between December and May, the number of deportations from Mexico tripled to 15,600.

AMLO has kept thousands of Central American refugees seeking asylum in the US penned up in overcrowded and unsanitary camps on the Mexican side of the border, as part of his capitulation to US demands, in violation of asylum laws and protocols, that asylum seekers remain in Mexico pending the disposition of their applications. A total of 6,748 Central American migrants have been sent from the US to Mexico to wait on their asylum requests.

Mexico has also stopped granting year-long "humanitarian" visas at the Guatemala-Mexico border. This visa, nicknamed "visa vete" [go away visa], is itself designed to disincentivize refugees from requesting asylum, which would legally qualify them for housing aid and other social services.

At the center of the Morena government's immigration policy is the deployment of thousands of immigration agents, federal police and troops to carry out mass raids across the southern Mexican states, detaining those arrested in overcrowded centers and smuggling them back to Central America without granting their right to apply for asylum in violation of international law.

Last Tuesday, in a major operation in the border city of Tapachula, these agencies detained migrants who were part of a caravan of some 100 Central Americans while they were resting in the central park. The same treatment was meted out to over 1,000 migrants from Haiti, Africa and Cuba who were staying in tents and hotels in different parts of the city.

Already terrorized refugees fear a more severe crackdown following Trump's tariff threat. At a refugee camp in northern Tijuana, Laura Brenne, who is fleeing Honduras with her two daughters after her husband was murdered by a gang because his employer refused to pay "war taxes," told the AFP on Saturday: "If Mexico halted all migration, we wouldn't have the slightest chance to enter even their country. I'm just here hoping to enter the US to improve the future of our children."

It should be noted that Trump is building upon policies aimed at maximizing detentions and deportations from Mexico that were implemented in 2014 under the Obama administration's Southern Border Plan, which established, in collaboration with the Peña Nieto government, a militarized web of checkpoints and internment camps across southern Mexico.

As is the case everywhere in the world, the top consideration behind the attacks on immigrants by the Morena government is the fear of social explosions against historic levels of inequality. This is driving the Mexican bourgeoisie into an ever more naked alliance with imperialism against the working class. This is all the more the case following the wave of wildcat strikes in Matamoros in the first two months of the year.

On Thursday, over 200 workers at the Jobar textile sweatshop in the central city of Aguascalientes carried out a spontaneous strike after they were told they would not receive bonuses this year. The same day, a similar number of workers carried out a wildcat strike at the Volkswagen assembly plant in Silao for the same reason.

The government also faces growing resistance to an aggressive program of job cuts at federal government institutions, potentially involving 222,600 layoffs, largely of technicians in essential services.

Just last week, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) announced that it was laying off 1,500 workers. Earlier this year, the secretary of environment and natural resources announced that his department would lay off 16,000 workers over five months, two-thirds of whom would be base-level workers.

Workers at the Social Security and Services Institute for State Workers carried out marches and roadblocks in downtown Mexico City against threats to fire 10,000 workers, or 10 percent of personnel, including medical staff.

The López Obrador administration has created a new military National Guard while enshrining the domestic deployment of the military. While promising to raise compensation for workers at the border by raising the minimum salary, it has allowed companies to more than compensate for this by cutting bonuses. It deployed the police and the federal courts to attack the rebellion by striking Matamoros workers against the unions, while promoting a section of the Mexican trade union bureaucracy not only tied to the ruling party but sponsored and trained by the pro-imperialist AFL-CIO.

In an interview late last month with *El Universal*, Morena Senator Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, a leader of the Miners Union and the main promoter of the AFL-CIO agenda in Mexico, called on the business elite "to incorporate themselves in this transformation and stop attacking the president, the government, the system; they better do that for the sake of their fortunes and businesses."



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