

New migrant caravan departs Honduras defying stepped-up controls

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A new caravan of more than 1,000 migrants left the northern Honduran city of San Pedro Sula on Wednesday on its way to the United States. Following the example of the October 2018 caravan that grew to over 7,000 migrants and reached the US border, the workers and peasants organized the caravan for several months through social media and chat groups.

A smaller group of about 400 migrants left San Pedro Sula on Tuesday and had already crossed into Guatemala at the town of Corinto after breaking through a line of Guatemalan police who ordered them to get processed at the border station.

Given the intensified crackdown against migrants by the regional governments, the caravan speaks to the desperate social and economic life in Honduras and is expected to grow. In 2018, the caravan also began with only a few hundred migrants in Tegucigalpa, but was joined by thousands from across Central America and southern Mexico.

The UN reports that 42,710 Central American migrants arrived at Mexico between July and December 2019, a 70 percent drop compared to the first half of the year, which was marked by tens of thousands of migrants in caravans being intercepted in Mexico. Apprehensions by US border authorities declined from 114,000 in May to less than 33,000 in December.

“These tendencies could be related to the fact that Mexico and the United States are implementing stricter migration policies as social and economic conditions in the Central American countries continued to deteriorate,” wrote the UN Humanitarian Coordinator last week.

These conditions that Hondurans are escaping *en masse* are rooted in the century of US imperialist plunder and military rule, exacerbated dramatically after the 2009 military coup backed by the Obama

administration.

Those seeking refuge from the resulting poverty and violence now face illegal US troop deployments across its southern border, the unconstitutional building of Trump’s border wall, 21,000 Mexican soldiers tasked with rounding up migrants, US detention centers compared by specialists to “torture facilities” under whose custody at least seven children have died, and the destruction of asylum rights.

These measures, which the Trump administration seeks to use to mobilize its far-right base and assert increasingly dictatorial powers, have been continually played down or ignored by the Democratic Party, whose opposition to Trump has sought to circumvent any issues that could unleash mass social tensions in the United States.

On Tuesday, *Diario Tiempo Digital* interviewed the Conor Ávila couple traveling in the new caravan with their three children. The family attended informational meetings about the recent US and Mexican policies and overall dangers, but, in the words of the father Francisco, originally from Nicaragua, “What comes to our minds is that we must do whatever we can to feed our children.” His wife, Darlen, completed her studies to become a school teacher in 2011 but never got a post.

“There are killings daily and a lack of jobs,” said another migrant. Two-thirds of the workforce are underemployed in Honduras, largely as low-paid informal laborers without access to health care or social security benefits.

Any resistance against these conditions is met brutally by the US-backed regime. A wave of mass protests erupted across the country between April and July against austerity and the privatization of health care and education. The military and police carried out

several killings, disappearances and even the invasion by troops of the National Autonomous University of Honduras to shoot down students.

Washington informed the Honduran government of president Juan Orlando Hernández that it will send immigration officials to Honduras to deal with the caravans. As recently as last Thursday, both governments finalized an agreement to allow the United States to carry out such a deployment and collect biometric data. This follows similar US deals already implemented in Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Last year, the White House cut all foreign aid to the Northern Triangle—Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador—to demand such anti-migration agreements. Then, \$143 million was delivered in security aid to implement the anti-immigrant measures.

Announcing the immigration deal in the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa next to president Hernández, the US acting Homeland Security secretary, Chad Wolf, promised “working together to target the gangs and cartels that spread corruption, violence and fear in Honduras.” Weapons and training, however, are being given to a regime that shoots down students, workers and peasants demanding better standards of living.

Moreover, several Honduran and Mexican drug traffickers have testified in US courts about handing millions of dollars to Hernández, while US prosecutors describe in a document filed last August as part of the case against the president’s brother that \$1.5 million donated by cartels were used in Hernández’s reelection campaign. These revelations also led to major roadblocks and marches, which were heavily repressed.

Acting Secretary Wolf specifically congratulated Hernandez for “his efforts to improve public security, attracting more investments to Honduras.”

However, it has been the Mexican security forces that have played the central role in Trump’s anti-immigrant offensive. According to the Guatemalan Migration Institute, Mexico returned 66,660 Hondurans, 48,686 Guatemalans and 15,837 Salvadorans just along its land border with Guatemala during 2019. By comparison, Mexico granted asylum to 3,173 refugees in total between January and August last year.

Since January 2019, more than 40,000 asylum seekers who arrived at US ports of entry have been sent back to Mexico as part of the “Remain in Mexico”

agreement between both countries. In many cases, refugees are sent to central or southern Mexico, hampering their ability to attend their scheduled hearings.

In its 2020 World Report released Monday, Human Rights Watch concludes that “human rights violations committed by security forces—including torture, enforced disappearances, and abuses against migrants—have continued under the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.” It adds: “President López Obrador created the National Guard, made up largely of military personnel, and ordered its deployment to control irregular immigration.”

The report indicates that National Guard members have attempted to invade independent shelters, while those at government holding centers experience “inhumane conditions, including extreme heat, bug infestations, lack of access to basic hygiene, limited medical services and poor food quality.”

That the migrant caravans marching against the consequences of the highest levels of social inequality in the world coincided with an international resurgence of the class struggle internationally demonstrates how the crisis of capitalism is drawing workers into struggle across the world. On the other hand, the ruling classes are all moving toward dictatorship to defend their wealth, using anti-immigrant measures as preparation for mass repression.

As it broke through the police cordons in Guatemala and Mexico, the 2018 caravan appealed that “migrants are not criminals, we are international workers!” Today, workers across Guatemala, Mexico and the United States must mobilize to demand the safe passage of their class brothers and sisters from Honduras who face the same enemy: global capitalism and its outmoded nation-state system.



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