Migrant caravan of workers displaced by hurricanes departs Honduras

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10 December 2020

A caravan of about five hundred Hondurans, including many families with young children, began its journey to the United States on Wednesday night and early Thursday. The migrants are trying to escape the destruction of their homes and livelihoods by two back-to-back and record-setting storms last month, Hurricanes Eta and Iota. These intolerable conditions have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The caravan assembled informally over several days at the main bus station in San Pedro Sula. After the Guatemalan government announced that migrants will not be allowed to enter without passports and a negative COVID-19 test, the caravan split up in an attempt to enter Guatemala through two different border crossings.

Much larger groups are expected to join or form new caravans in the next weeks departing from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and southern Mexico. As early as December 7, a director of a migrant shelter in the Mexican city of Tenosique on the Guatemalan border reported, "About 20 people are arriving each day who say they lost properties, homes, crops, from Honduras as much as Guatemala."

The UN estimates that across Central America 6.8 million people were affected by Hurricanes Eta and Iota, 5.5 million of them in Honduras and Guatemala. In these two hardest-hit countries, 140,000 homes were destroyed, and 400,000 people remain in makeshift shelters—many without running water or food.

About 330,000 people have not received any emergency aid because they remain isolated by the destruction of roads and communication infrastructure. Even before the pandemic, over half of the population was already living under the official poverty line, with the UN estimating that 5.2 million people in Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala required humanitarian assistance due to "chronic and extreme violence, forced displacements, food insecurity and the increasingly adverse effects of climate change."

Throughout December, countless testimonies have appeared on local, international and social media describing absolute desperation. Among the most frequent statements of the hurricane victims are "We lost everything," "We only left with what we could carry," "We escaped with what we were wearing," "We have been living on the streets since," and "How are we going to eat?"

A 13-year-old child at Campur, Alta Verapaz, a Guatemalan town that was entirely flooded, explained to UNICEF: "It was hard leaving our home. It's still hard. At least I can't get used to being here at the Cruce Chinamá school. I'm used to my normal life at home. I don't know what to do here. It feels like a dream that never happened. I would like to wake up and see it never happen."

After years working to save money and open a fruit shop, Luis Salgado from Honduras told *Jornada* that the flooding damaged all his produce, and he was left in debt and unable to feed his three children. "First came the pandemic, then the hurricane. We have no money for the children," he said as he began to march north.

That these migrants are not being dissuaded by the massive deployments of troops and the creation of unsanitary detention camps by the right-wing governments in Guatemala, Mexico and the United States speaks volumes about the situation they confront. Neither has the ongoing upsurge in COVID-19 cases and deaths across Central America, Mexico and the United States stopped their journey.

As recently as October, a caravan of 3,000 Honduran migrants was broken up by Guatemalan soldiers and summarily deported, while Mexican President Andrés

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Manuel López Obrador was threatening them with prison sentences of up to ten years had they reached Mexico. The Mexican government had already deployed more than 26,000 soldiers under orders of the Trump administration to detain earlier migrant caravans.

The post-hurricane wave of migration also coincides dangerously with the efforts of Trump to overturn his electoral defeat in November and remain in power through extraconstitutional means. This has included the stoking of anti-immigrant chauvinism to mobilize fascistic militias and layers of law enforcement and military officials in his support.

Refugee rights groups in Guatemala and Mexico have reported that migrants have also been encouraged by the election of President-elect Joe Biden of the Democratic Party, which is seen as more immigrant-friendly than the Republicans.

Biden, who was Vice-President under an Obama administration that carried out a record number of deportations and the separation of migrant families, has signaled through his cabinet selections that the rampage against immigrants will continue under his administration. He nominated Alejandro Mayorkas to head the deportation machinery at the Department of Homeland Security after being deputy secretary under Obama and the warmonger Susan Rice as domestic policy adviser, being charged with implementing the tactics of the war on terrorism against native and migrant workers alike within the United States.

On the other hand, the migrant caravans, a phenomenon that reached large proportions after 2018, objectively represent contingents of workers and part of a resurgence of the class struggle across the Americas and beyond in recent years. Just like the strikes and mass protests, the caravans are mass mobilizations of workers and youth driven by capitalist austerity and the neocolonial exploitation of labor and natural resources by Wall Street and imperialism.

The caravans have coincided with waves of strikes and mass protests in Honduras against the authoritarian National Party regime, which was installed in a military coup backed by the Obama administration in 2009.

The murderous business re-openings and lack of economic assistance despite the pandemic and hurricanes have already fueled several mass protests across Guatemala, following the congressional approval of an austerity budget that has since been suspended.

The struggles against the right-wing policies imposed by the local elites, the transnational corporations and globalized finance capital can only develop in an insurrectionary mass character and succeed if they become strategically oriented to a unity with the international working class and the overthrow of the capitalist nation-states and the profit system.

It’s an existential matter for workers in Mexico, Guatemala and the United States to join forces with workers in Honduras and internationally to confront the efforts of imperialism to pick off the global working class and poor one piece at a time, while the nationalist and pro-capitalist parties and trade unions fan nationalism and pit workers against each other across national lines.

Based on these fundamental considerations, workers across the region must fight for the defense of their migrant class brothers and sisters from Honduras, Guatemala and beyond. This means defending their ability to travel and settle anywhere they see best for their families, with full citizenship rights.

Workers must also fight for the expropriation of the financial oligarchies and major corporations to allocate trillions of dollars to rebuild Central America, including an emergency program to provide health care, quality education, housing and all other basic needs for those displaced by the storms.

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