

“Poverty is stronger than any border”

Honduras, Guatemala break up migrant caravan at behest of Biden administration

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Hours after beginning its journey to the United States on Tuesday, a new caravan of Honduran refugees was broken up by Honduran and Guatemalan state forces.

About 300 Honduran asylum seekers had joined the caravan, organized spontaneously on social media and by word of mouth, when the Honduran police set up roadblocks demanding negative COVID-19 tests and identification papers before ultimately dispersing the caravan.

About 32 of the asylum seekers reached the Guatemalan border, where they were immediately turned back by the security forces.

This is the third migrant caravan formed in Honduras since two major hurricanes devastated much of the country last November. Honduran police dissolved the first one in December, while the second caravan in late January was brutally repressed by Guatemalan troops with beatings, tear gas canisters and the use of other antiriot gear.

The repression has not stopped smaller groups and families from reaching the US border, with the US Border Patrol apprehending nearly 100,000 migrants in February alone. This is the biggest migrant surge in two decades, according to the US Department of Homeland Security.

The Democratic administration of President Joe Biden has detained more than 16,000 unaccompanied refugee children in crowded and inhuman conditions, while it has continued the Trump policy of summarily deporting the vast majority of asylum-seekers, using the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has only served to scapegoat those fleeing a humanitarian disaster for the health care and social crisis within the United States itself.

In the background of the assault on the latest caravan, US Vice President Kamala Harris, who was recently appointed by Biden to lead the response to the migration crisis, called Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei on Tuesday to effectively deliver marching orders for the crackdown on the refugees.

The White House readout of the conversation speaks of US “efforts to increase humanitarian assistance” and “explore innovative opportunities to create jobs and to improve the conditions” in the region. It concludes with the true purpose of the call: “The Vice President also thanked President Giammattei for his efforts to secure Guatemala’s southern border.”

Giammattei requested a Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for Guatemalan migrants and that the US send COVID-19 vaccines, hoping for a deal similar to that reached with Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), in exchange for serving as an extension of the US Border Patrol.

Expecting the new caravan, the Giammattei government had declared states of emergency in the departments along the expected migrant route, suspending democratic protections and deploying hundreds of troops.

Last Saturday, Mexican troops carried out a show of force along the border with Guatemala. In recent weeks, the AMLO administration has deployed nearly 9,000 soldiers specifically to round up and detain Central American asylum-seekers. So far this year, 35,000 migrants have been detained in Mexico, most of whom have also been summarily deported.

The military and police in Mexico, which have been trained and used primarily for deadly combat over the last two decades, have killed two migrants in three

days. A police official asphyxiated a Salvadoran woman in Quintana Roo on Sunday, and an Army soldier shot and killed a Guatemalan man in Chiapas on Tuesday.

After the second killing, according to the Guatemalan military, a group of about 300 enraged residents from the Guatemalan town of Tacaná drove into Mexico to protest. They managed to take six Mexican soldiers hostage and bring them back to Guatemala, where local police and soldiers negotiated their release shortly after.

What the Biden administration is demanding is that the semicolonial regimes in the region establish open-air prisons through police and military repression.

The latest caravan and surge demonstrate just how desperate the conditions are which the migrants are fleeing.

A refugee in the Honduran caravan, Sergio, explained to CNN, “We are conscious that [the border] is closed, but they can’t stop us. There can be 20 walls and 30 gates, but poverty is stronger than any border. They will not stop the caravans in Guatemala or Mexico. We are going because we need to.”

Another migrant, Francisco, added, “None of us want to leave. We are going by force, for our families.”

Amidst the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hurricanes Eta and Iota slammed the region in a span of just two weeks last November, causing more than \$6 billion in damages. Entire towns need rebuilding and relocation, and vast expanses of crops were lost.

The UN estimates that, as of March 2021, there were 3.1 million people, or a third of the population of Honduras, suffering from severe food insecurity. This is expected to increase to 3.3 million by September.

Over 7,700 people remain in shelters, 53 percent of whom report posttraumatic stress. Hundreds of families remain at makeshift camps along the roads east of San Pedro Sula.

The Biden administration is shamelessly lying when it claims it wants to address the root causes of migration.

On one hand, it is hoarding COVID-19 vaccines, while Honduras has received only 48,000 doses. The country had to seek a \$35 million international loan just to buy enough vaccine doses to cover 1.4 million people, less than 15 percent of the population, but there is no estimate for when those doses will arrive.

On the other hand, as of the end of February, the UN Flash Appeal for hurricane emergency aid in Honduras has received only \$30.9 million out of the \$90 million requested. The US Government gave only \$15.2 million.

Meanwhile, America’s 657 billionaires, who could all fit in one large passenger aircraft, have seen their wealth increase by almost 45 percent, or \$1.3 trillion, during the pandemic. This is 10 times the yearly GDP of the Northern Triangle, with its 33 million people, and 122 times public social spending (i.e., education, health care, housing, social assistance, environment and culture).

Honduras itself has a handful of billionaire oligarchic families and at least 185 individuals with more than \$30 million in net worth.

The desperate conditions in Central America are the result of over a century of imperialist oppression and plunder overseen by parasitic elites at the behest of the US banks and corporations.

At the same time, the lack of measures to halt the immense worsening of mass suffering in recent months is the result of the same policy being employed by US banks and corporations against American workers. The capitalist classes globally are threatening workers with hunger, homelessness and deprivation to compel them to return to work under unsafe conditions and continue generating profits as the pandemic worsens.

The brutal repression against the refugees prepares and heralds a savage response against the resistance of workers within the United States, Mexico, Guatemala and throughout the Americas.

Workers in every country can advance their common interests only by mobilizing politically and internationally to abolish all capitalist exploitation and the obsolete nation-state system, while reallocating the wealth of the financial elite and the resources of society to solve all social needs.



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