Caravan challenges Mexico's complicity in US assault on immigrants

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29 October 2021

Mexican officials scrambled Thursday to deal with a statement by the American ambassador that the Biden administration and the government of President Andrés López Obrador (AMLO) have an agreement to deport back to their countries Central American and other immigrants blocked from crossing the US southern border.

The controversy erupted as some 4,000 immigrants, many of them women and children, are marching in a "caravan" through the southern Mexican state of Chiapas en route to Mexico City to demand their rights, which have been trampled by the AMLO government.

Ambassador Ken Salazar, a former right-wing Democratic Senator from Colorado, made his remarks while touring border cities and praising the US Border Patrol. "Everybody should understand that the US-Mexico border is closed to unlawful entry," Salazar said. "Persons attempting to enter the United States unlawfully will be detained. The United States and Mexico are committed to returning migrants who unlawfully enter to their country of origin."

Senior Mexican Foreign Ministry officials, speaking on condition of anonymity to the daily *La Jornada*, claimed that Salazar's statement was "ambiguous" and that there was no "bilateral" agreement on deportations.

Whatever agreements between Biden and AMLO have been put in writing, in practice, the Mexican government is collaborating fully in a brutal system in which refugees and migrants reaching the Mexican border are summarily expelled. Both the Trump and the Biden administrations have invoked Title 42, an obscure part of the US health code, to cloak their violations of the right to asylum and due process under the phony mantle of combatting COVID-19. There is no scientific evidence whatsoever that migrants crossing the US southern border are a significant vector for transmission of the virus.

Under Biden, who sanctimoniously promised to pursue a more humane immigration policy, these Title 42 expulsions have reached roughly 100,000 a month, a 50 percent increase over those carried out during the last three months of the Trump administration.

Immigrants kicked out in this manner have been forced onto airplanes, without being told where they are going, and flown to the southern Mexico cities of ?Villahermosa and Tapachula. There they are loaded into convoys of buses controlled by Mexico's National Guard and immigration agency, INM, and driven to the Guatemalan border to be dumped in the middle of the night into what are among the most dangerous areas of Central America's Northern Triangle.??

Thousands of others have remained trapped, without means of obtaining any livelihood, in Mexico's southern border cities of Tapachula and Ceibo, which are ringed by National Guard checkpoints.

It was in Tapachula, on the border with Guatemala, where the latest caravan began last week. Migrants have described the town as a "prison," while even legislators of AMLO's Morena party have called it a "concentration camp." Many migrants have languished there for a year or more waiting for Mexican authorities to either grant them asylum or regularize their immigration status.

Chanting "We are not criminals, we are workers, we are immigrants" and "Libertad, Libertad," at least 2,000 migrants marched out of Tapachula on October 23. Confronting a checkpoint north of the town, the marchers forced their way through columns of helmeted, shield-bearing members of AMLO's National Guard. At least one three-year-old boy suffered injuries to his head in the failed attempt to turn back the marchers. Two previous caravans from Tapachula earlier this year were violently broken up.

The caravan has progressed relatively slowly, marching with temperatures reaching over 100 degrees Fahrenheit and under heavy downpours, forced in some cases to sleep on the side of the road. The Mexican government has forbidden the marchers from using any type of vehicles.

Leaders of the caravan have reported that a census showed that 1,200 of those on the march are children, and 70 percent of them are under the age of seven. Many workers are pushing baby carriages down the highway or walking with children on their shoulders. There are also reportedly 68 pregnant women on the march, as well as a number of disabled adults and children.

Some estimates have put the size of the caravan at 4,000 or 5,000, considerably smaller than those of 2018 and 2019, but the largest since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Republican Party and its media outlets, such as Fox

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News, have attempted to portray the caravan as an existential threat to the United States. Donald Trump fulminated: “I hope everyone is watching the MASSIVE Caravan pouring through Mexico and headed to our Country. This must be stopped before they reach our Border.”

It is apparently the number of marchers and the presence of so many women and children which has led to the Mexican government to adopt what Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard described as a policy of “prudence” toward the latest caravan, i.e., refraining, at least for now, from unleashing the National Guard to violently disperse it.

The caravan, launched in the name of “dignity, freedom and peace,” is a march against the illegal policies of both the Biden and AMLO governments in abrogating the right to asylum and the right of immigrants to protection and due process.

Luis Rey Villagrán, a Mexican immigrant rights advocates and one of the organizers of the caravan said that upon reaching Mexico City, the marchers would demand “permanent residence cards on humanitarian grounds for each and every one of those who is walking on this march.”

A coalition of civil liberties and pro-immigrant organizations from Mexico and Central America joined under the slogan #ProtecciónNoContención (Protection Not Containment) appeared on October 26 before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) to present charges of “grave violations of human rights against immigrants” on the part of the López Obrador government in Mexico. These include its collaboration in the Title 42 expulsions by the United States and the summary deportations from Mexico itself without providing migrants the right to appeal for asylum. The indictment also included the charge that the AMLO government has “militarized” Mexican immigration policy, treating migrants as criminals.

Since June 2019, when the Trump administration threatened Mexico with trade sanctions if it failed to contain the flow of immigrants to the US border, the AMLO government has adopted a policy of “containment” in league with Washington. With US logistical aid, it has deployed 28,000 members of the National Guard to Mexico’s southern and northern borders, a force larger than the entire US Border Patrol.

In March 2020, the López Obrador government agreed to accept Central Americans summarily expelled from the US on the Title 42 pretext, and in August 2021, it agreed to their airborne expulsions to southern Mexico. Meanwhile, within Mexico the National Guard has brutalized and killed migrants, while federal and local authorities have engaged in systematic repression.

In the latest incident, police in Tijuana Thursday surrounded an encampment of migrants expelled from the US, destroyed tents and confiscated belongings of those who were not present and then encircled the entire camp with a six-foot chain-link fence. A local official claimed that the raid was for the migrants’ “protection.”

The overwhelming majority of those marching in the latest caravan are from Central America, fleeing conditions of endemic poverty, violence and political repression which all have their roots in the horrific crimes committed by US imperialism to secure the profit interests of American banks and corporations across the region for over a century. This has included support for bloody dictatorships like that of the Somozas in Nicaragua, CIA-orchestrated coups as in Guatemala in 1954 and the genocidal counterinsurgency wars in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in the 1980s.

The refusal of those marching to accept the conditions created by imperialism and its corrupt servants in the national bourgeois governments of Central America and their defiance of anti-immigrant repression is part of a worldwide resurgence of the class struggle. Like workers everywhere, they are refusing to accept the conditions create by a failed economic system—capitalism—that threatens workers’ jobs, living standards and very lives, under conditions of a global pandemic.

The determination of the marchers also stands as a devastating exposure of those in the pseudo-left like *Jacobin* magazine and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of the Democratic Socialist of America, who have, respectively, lauded AMLO as a “left” and a “progressive,” and denounced those attacking Biden’s immigration policies from the left as “bad faith actors.”

Workers in the United States must defend working people from Central and South America, Haiti and Mexico itself, who are risking their lives in an attempt to reach the US. The victory of the struggles of American workers against the transnational corporations that have reaped massive profits amid the mass death and sickness of the COVID-19 pandemic depends upon workers uniting across national borders. This can be achieved only through an unconditional rejection of the anti-immigrant xenophobia and nationalism peddled by the capitalist parties and the corporatist unions and the defense of the democratic right of immigrant workers to live and work in the country of their choice.

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