

Eight migrants drowned in capsized boat off the San Diego coast

Jesus Ugarte
13 March 2023

At least eight people died last weekend off the coast of San Diego, California, in one of the deadliest maritime border crossing incidents in US history. The tragedy took place late Saturday night when two panga boats capsized in the Pacific Ocean near Black's Beach in La Jolla, about 35 miles north of the US-Mexico border.

A distraught female passenger in one of the boats was able to call 911 around 11:30 p.m. to report the emergency. She had been traveling with seven other people in one of the pangas, while the other boat carried anywhere from 10 to 15 people. The exact location was determined using GPS coordinates from the caller's cellphone. When emergency crews arrived, they found the two capsized boats and eight bodies in the surf.

Poor visibility and a very high tide made the search difficult. On Sunday at 3:30 p.m. the search for victims was called off by the US Coast Guard, though it is still unclear if there were more unidentified victims.

In recent years, maritime border crossings have surged, with fatalities on the rise in the US and internationally. Less than one month ago 59 migrants were killed when their vessel shipwrecked on the rocks off the Calabrian coast in Italy en route from Turkey. The dead included a newborn baby and 19 other children.

Reports indicate that San Diego has witnessed 23 fatalities since 2021. In the current fiscal year, which began in October 2022, Border Patrol data shows that approximately 300 boat crossings took place, which translates to a rate of one to two incidents per day. Such figures, however, likely represent a significant undercount of the actual number of cases. This prompts a critical question: What factors have contributed to this recent upsurge?

The Biden administration has continued to intensify the anti-immigrant measures put in place during the Trump administration. In March 2020, the Trump administration invoked Title 42, a rarely used section of the US Code dating back to 1944, which allows the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prohibit the entry of non-citizens into the country if they believe there is a "serious danger" of the introduction of a communicable disease into the US.

Under the guise of a COVID-prevention measure, the Trump administration began to expel asylum seekers and other migrants caught crossing the border without documents. Up until January, the order has been used more than 2.7 million times in encounters with migrants. It has also been a bottleneck for tens of thousands of migrants waiting in Mexico for their chance to request asylum in the US.

President Joe Biden, who falsely posed during the 2020 election campaign as a friend of immigrants by verbally condemning the separations of children from parents and guardians spearheaded under Trump, renewed the punitive Title 42 measure when it expired last December. In addition to renewing the measure, Biden also extended its reach and scope such as when the exemption covering Venezuelan migrants was removed.

The Biden administration has continued, like Trump, to reiterate the dubious claim that Title 42 is a public health measure and not an immigration policy. The supposed concern for the spread of COVID-19 rings hollow, given the handling of the pandemic by both administrations, which has allowed more than 1.1 million deaths combined and the mass disabling of millions suffering from Long COVID.

With Title 42 set to expire in May, last month the

Biden administration announced strict new requirements which effectively bars entry to immigrants who try to cross the southern border on foot and denies them the right to apply for asylum. Furthermore, the *New York Times* reported last week that the White House is considering reviving the detention of migrant families.

The Biden administration has also renewed its commitment to the construction of a border wall, a project initiated by the previous Trump administration. Despite campaigning on the false promise to not build “one more inch of wall,” the Biden administration has announced dozens of new border wall projects, exposing the bipartisan nature of the anti-immigration policies. The plans include the construction of two 30-foot walls across Friendship Park in San Diego and monitoring further into the Pacific Ocean to prevent crossings by sea.

Any rhetoric by Democratic Party members which attempts to portray the party as pro-immigrant is in direct contrast with its anti-immigrant policies. The Obama administration deported more immigrants than any administration before or since, and the Biden administration has continued to exacerbate the xenophobic and reactionary measures instituted by Trump. Both capitalist parties are deeply invested in the imperialist foreign policies which are driving the displacement and migration of millions of people.

With the deterioration of living standards, more people seek to flee crippling poverty and violence in search of higher wages and family north of the border. This, in conjunction with the increase of anti-immigration policies, has forced migrants to undertake increasingly treacherous and hazardous routes to cross the border. These perilous paths include journeys through the hottest parts of the Sonoran desert or embarking on dangerous maritime crossings in the most challenging conditions of visibility and navigability.

The rise in anti-immigration policies is part of an international attack on the working class. Just last week, UK’s Home Secretary Suella Braverman published a video announcing the new Illegal Migration Bill, which permanently denies the right to asylum to almost all migrants entering on a small boat. Claiming immigrants arriving by boat as “unfair” to the people who are awaiting asylum, she pledged to make “stopping the boats” her top priority. Her

announcement was met with outrage, with some commenters drawing parallels between her rhetoric and that of the Nazis.

Among the dissenting voices was renowned former football player and current BBC sports host Gary Lineker, who was promptly dismissed by Britain’s state broadcaster. The outpouring of support that Lineker has received has plunged the BBC into a crisis, exposing it as nothing more than the propaganda arm of the ruling class.

As Braverman decries the supposed tax burden caused by the few thousand desperate migrants seeking asylum by crossing the English Channel, the ruling class has wasted no time in pursuing its imperialist agenda.

Just one day after the tragic incident at Black’s Beach, Biden met in San Diego with the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to discuss the purchase of nuclear-powered attack submarines for war with Russia and China.

While the capitalist elite funnels hundreds of billions of dollars to the war effort, the working class faces austerity and surging inflation. The only solution to the immigrant crisis is a world free of the borders imposed by capitalism and where the needs of humanity are the priority, rather than the warring interests of the capitalist oligarchy. This can only be achieved through a fight for a socialist system based on uniting the international working class. We urge all workers to join this fight and to attend the upcoming international meeting series on the war in Ukraine and how to stop it.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact