

Brutality on the US-Mexico border: Migrants die as Texas blocks rescue

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Friday's tragedy on the US-Mexico border at Eagle Pass, Texas is a demonstration of the brutality of the capitalist ruling elite in its treatment of desperate migrants fleeing poverty and oppression, mainly in Latin America, conditions for which American imperialism itself bears responsibility.

A woman migrant and her two children died in the Rio Grande Friday after Texas state troopers and National Guardsmen refused to allow US Border Patrol officers to reach the river and carry out a rescue operation. The federal agents were responding to a report of six migrants in distress in the water. The three bodies were retrieved on the Mexican side of the river.

The exact circumstances of the drownings remain under investigation. Officials of the Texas Military Department (TMD), the agency that controls the deployment of state troopers and National Guardsmen on the border, claim there was no contact between the migrants and state forces before the drowning. They deny that state officers barred the migrants entry or forced them back into the river to their deaths.

What is undisputed is that when the Border Patrol contacted the TMD Friday night, they were told that the state would not allow federal agents into the area of Shelby Park, which had been occupied by the TMD on Wednesday. National guardsmen erected barbed wire barricades to keep out both local residents and federal agents.

The Biden administration went to court, seeking an order requiring Republican Governor Greg Abbott to withdraw the state forces from the border. Abbott declared that he was merely enforcing the law. "Texas has the legal authority to control ingress and egress into any geographic location in the state," he told reporters Friday. That power was necessary "to maintain operational control."

A Texas Department of Public Safety official told the *Washington Post* that it did not receive any communication about the drownings on Friday. Migrant drownings are "nothing new," Lt. Chris Olivarez, a DPS spokesman, told the *Post*. This callousness sums up the outlook of both state and federal governments, and both

capitalist parties, the Democrats as much as the Republicans.

While several Democratic Party officials shed crocodile tears over Abbott's actions on the border—the federal Department of Homeland Security, for example, called Abbott's actions cruel, dangerous and inhumane—there is infinite hypocrisy on display. The Biden administration has endorsed and enabled the Israeli slaughter of thousands of Palestinian children, with the enthusiastic backing of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

There are significant legal and Constitutional issues at stake in the clash between Biden and Abbott. Abbott recently signed into law a sweeping bill, SB 4, passed at his behest, which creates a new state crime of "illegal entry" punishable by compulsory departure from the country (i.e., deportation in all but name). Migrants who refuse to leave would face up to 20 years in prison.

The Biden administration filed suit in federal court charging that the law violates the Constitution, under which control of the national borders is a power reserved to the federal government. The states have no authority to arrest people crossing the border, any more than they can inspect cargo or collect customs duties.

Abbott has become the rallying point for fascistic Republican politicians all over the country, who have hailed his defiance of the Biden administration and his vicious attacks on migrants. Last week, a delegation of 60 Republican congressmen, led by Speaker Mike Johnson, visited the border at Eagle Pass in an effort to bolster their claims that the Biden administration is deliberately encouraging a flood of illegal migration. The House Committee on Homeland Security said Wednesday it would initiate formal impeachment proceedings against Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, the point man for the Biden administration on this issue.

Senator Roger Marshall of Kansas claimed that the Texas law was an effort to enforce Article I, Section 10, Paragraph 3 of the US Constitution, which reads:

No State shall, without the Consent of Congress, lay any Duty of Tonnage, keep Troops, or Ships of War in time of Peace, enter into any Agreement or Compact with another State, or with a foreign Power, or engage in War, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent Danger as will not admit of delay.

This passage would appear to prohibit Abbott's actions. But the governor and his supporters claim that migrants crossing the Rio Grande constitute an invasion, and that they place the state of Texas in "imminent danger." This is both legally absurd and politically ominous. If Texas is being invaded, then the state government may claim the right to use whatever force is required to repel the attack.

Abbott was asked about the border issue in an interview with a far-right podcast host last week. He said the state has deployed "all the tools and strategies" against migrants, including placing floating barriers in a section of the Rio Grande that block river crossings (and could lead to deaths if the migrants try to swim under them), and adopting the new state law, SB 4.

The Texas governor concluded: "The only thing we are not doing is, we are not shooting people who cross the border because, of course, the Biden administration will charge us with murder." This was less a joke than a threat.

Texas Representative Chip Roy, a member of the ultra-right House Freedom Caucus, went Abbott one better, suggesting that secession might be an option in the conflict with the Biden administration over immigration policy. A press release from his office declared: "My fellow Texans rightly ask whether Texas and similarly minded Americans should remain part of a federal government forsaking their well-being, safety, and security in violation of the compact under which we entered the union."

For all its empty rhetoric, the Democratic Party and the Biden administration have sought repeatedly to reach an agreement with the Republicans that would effectively abolish the right of asylum and close the US-Mexico border—in exchange for increased military funding for Ukraine. The central priority of the Democratic Party is the escalation of war abroad, which is not only driving the global refugee crisis, but also entails as a corollary the escalating assault on democratic rights at home.

In the fiscal year 2023, the Biden administration carried out more than 142,000 deportations, more than twice the number from the year before, as the Democratic Party oversaw an escalating assault on migrants. As with everything else, the Biden administration has repudiated its empty promises to carry out a more humane immigration policy.

The tensions between state and federal government, and between Texas and major cities like New York and Chicago, where Abbott has "exported" more than 100,000 migrants who would otherwise be released in Houston or Dallas, are another sign of the centrifugal tendencies ripping apart the United States as the 2024 presidential campaign begins the primary voting stage.

The New Year's statement issued by the WSWs International Editorial Board warned that these tendencies are the product of the deepening crisis of world and American capitalism, and the entry of the working class into explosive class battles.

The escalating sectional tendencies threaten to break apart the entire post-Civil War settlement which reestablished unified federal authority over the separate states...

Of course, the conflict tearing apart the existing political structures is not between progressive and reactionary factions of the ruling class. The Democrats and Republicans are two reactionary factions of the corporate and financial oligarchy. However intense their tactical differences, they are entirely subordinate to their common reactionary agenda.

The alternative to the twin reactionary parties of big business, the Democrats committed to imperialist war and domestic repression, the Republicans to an increasingly open fascist assault on all democratic rights, is the revolutionary mobilization of the working class. A key element of this is to recognize the international unity of the working class.



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