

As AMLO cracks down on migrants, presidential candidates advocate their super-exploitation in Mexico

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Almost 3,000 migrants, including some 500 minors, were attacked last week by Mexican National Guard troops as they arrived at the town of Juchitán, third-largest in Oaxaca state. Having walked continuously for three weeks from the border with Guatemala, the migrant workers used their sheer strength in numbers to push through the lines of soldiers and reach the city.

The caravan formed near the border with Guatemala on Easter week under the name “Migrant Via Crucis.” It is marching behind a wooden cross and a large sign with the words “Killers of Poor Migrants,” in protest against the cruel measures used to block their path.

Describing themselves as “international workers,” the migrant caravan is drawn from at least 20 nations spanning every habitable continent, and includes Mexicans trying to reach the US border.

The phenomenon of caravans began in 2018 as a means of migrants using their numbers as protection from government forces and gangs, which often work together, and to garner greater assistance from the communities along their way to the US-Mexico border.

The caravans have become both a social barometer and a form of mass protest which expresses the common class interest of workers across nationalities and all backgrounds in opposing the irrational capitalist nation-state system, which is dragging all humanity into the same abject misery, mass violence, state repression and war from which migrants seek to escape.

Members of the caravan hope to first reach the 19th parallel—19 degrees north of the earth’s equatorial plane, crossing just south of Mexico City. The Biden administration has drawn this as the imaginary line north of which asylum seekers can download the CBP

One mobile app, which was set up last year to offer—in dribs and drabs—to make asylum request appointments at the US-Mexico border. This is merely a new version of the Trump-era “Remain in Mexico” policy.

Despite 560 miles still ahead, and a hike from the Pacific coast to the country’s capital at 7,400 ft., it is not exhaustion, hunger and sickness that might seal the fate of the “Migrant Via Crucis,” but military repression ordered by Mexico’s modern-day Pontius Pilate, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

The pseudo-leftist AMLO has repeatedly boasted in recent weeks how his stepped-up crackdown was responsible for a reduction of over 50 percent in encounters between migrants and the US Border Patrol between last December and January, with numbers remaining lower since.

The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) reported that this was the steepest monthly drop in the existing 25-year record for official data. It found that all US deterrents since 2021—wall building, mass arrests of crossers, US troop deployments, “buoy walls” on the Rio Grande, mountains of concertina wire or the initial approval of the Texan SB4 “migrant hunting” law (still under court review)—all had a “null effect” on disincentivizing the desperate migrants.

What did accomplish a major drop was “a sharp increase in the tempo of Mexican security and migration forces’ operations to interdict migrants,” which involved record apprehensions. Mexico detained 120,005 migrants in January and 119,943 in February, compared to figures below 25,000 in early 2022.

This has included deploying hundreds of soldiers and migration agents across the northern border, with CNN’s David Culver reporting, “This is the toughest

level of enforcement I have seen at the US-Mexico border and it is coming from the Mexico side right now.”

WOLA cites an increase in abuse by authorities, including several reports from April of extortion, illegal detentions, beatings, robberies by migration officials and threats by soldiers against humanitarian workers assisting migrants.

Out of all those detained, however, Mexico has deported only 6,555 migrants this year. The vast majority are being bused back to southern Mexico. “The policy has basically been to wear people down, so send them from the north to the south and dump them in the south so they have to make their way back up,” Gretchen Kuhner from the rights group Imumi explained to the *Financial Times*.

Cruelty and outright criminality to keep workers against their will in Mexico, where they face extremely precarious and unsafe conditions, are the official policy not only of the AMLO administration but of the entire Mexican ruling class.

Statements by the two main candidates in the June 2 presidential election in Mexico make clear that this policy serves much more than to appease US imperialism.

Xóchitl Gálvez of the right-wing Heart and Strength for Mexico coalition has pledged to work closely with the United States in blocking migrants. But her main related proposal, which she has repeated countless times, is to use migrants as cheap labor. “Mexico has a labor shortage, so why not see in the South American migrants the opportunity to have that labor force?” she stated last month.

Claudia Sheinbaum, the hand-picked successor of AMLO, has proposed to stop migration through “investments for development,” which is merely a euphemism for the same policy.

During an interview with Bloomberg published on Friday, she said that Mexican nationals should serve to meet “the labor force needed by the United States” But, within Mexico, she advocated for “job creation: this development of southeastern Mexico will be very important for the southeast itself, for Mexicans, and also to contain migration in terms of job prospects within Mexico.”

She also committed to maintain a “very good relationship” with another Trump presidency, even

though the Republican fascist has vowed to act as a “dictator” and deploy hundreds of thousands of troops to carry out mass detentions of migrants and deportations. For his part, Biden has consistently adapted to the anti-immigrant policies demanded by the far right, even expressing his willingness to “shut down” the southern border.

The cold, profit-driven calculations behind the migrant policy in Mexico have far-reaching implications. Last November, social researcher Dr. Mateo Crossa Niell wrote in an op-ed in *El Universal* that the migrant surge represents “a huge attraction ... for transnational corporations that settle in Mexico in search of low wages.” He added that “maquiladora sweatshops are betting on taking advantage of the vulnerability, fragility and criminalization of the migrant population in Mexico to incorporate them as an industrial labor force. All of this with the full support of the Mexican state.”

Accompanying the process of globalization, Mexican maquiladora sweatshops have been fueled since the 1970s by cheap labor from rural migrants within Mexico who moved into the sprawling cities near the US-Mexico border. Today, Dr. Crossa explains, migrants offer employers “an exhaust valve” against workers’ growing demands for better salaries and conditions.

He argues that the future of “nearshoring” to Mexico, which is of strategic importance for US imperialism’s plans for war, may come to “depend” on this policy.

The main conclusion workers must draw is that nationalist chauvinism is their worst enemy. The defense of the migrant caravan and of the right of all migrants to live and work wherever they choose must be emblazoned upon the banner of workers in every country as an indispensable part of the struggle against capitalist exploitation and imperialist war.



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