

Voices Without Faces: “I don’t exist there, nor do I exist here” — A mother and daughter speak out against the war on immigrants

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Voices Without Faces is a new series of articles on the World Socialist Web Site. Our purpose is to focus on and give a voice to immigrant workers who are isolated from and out of the view of other workers, and the capitalist press, by raising real life conditions as well as, importantly, political issues. Readers and workers are encouraged to participate. Your anonymity will be guaranteed.

From January until today, between 150,000 and 200,000 immigrants have been deported under Trump’s second term, according to conservative official figures. While the administration’s fascistic rhetoric claims these expulsions are aimed at “dangerous criminals,” the reality is that the main targets are working immigrants—the very people who pick the crops, clean the buildings, care for the elderly, and staff the warehouses and factories that keep the economy running.

Veronica, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, has lived and worked in the United States for 34 years. Her daughter Nancy, a US citizen, has inherited the constant fear of deportation and the determination to fight for others. Together, their stories illuminate the human toll of the bipartisan assault on immigrants and the human dignity that lives in workers despite the most repressive and exploitative conditions.

Crossing the border: “I had no idea what it was to cross a border”

Veronica arrived in the United States in July 1991, at the age of 24, after being denied a visa.

“I was with a Salvadorean woman and a Guatemalan boy, I thought we were alone, instead there were thousands of people. We climbed the wall near Tijuana, my thinking was that I would never do this again, it was so dangerous,” she recalls. “We ran across a freeway—I didn’t even know what a freeway was. It was terrifying.”

Her first glimpse of Los Angeles was at 3rd and Union, where police had young “cholos” handcuffed against a wall. “I was dirty and hungry. That night, I slept in a closet in an ugly apartment crowded with ten men.

“I came from a family where we never lacked food or a place to live,” she said. “Here, I went hungry. I even ate from the trash. I never imagined I would go through that.”

Exploitation from the start

Like millions of other immigrants, Veronica was thrown immediately into the lowest-paid, most exploitative jobs.

“My first job was in the garment factories, trimming loose threads from clothes. We worked by the piece, not the hour. I could be there from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and earn \$15. My co-workers ironed the clothes in hot weather, it was terrible.”

She worked in a small restaurant kitchen for a plate of food, only to be propositioned by the owner.

“I was raised with principles,” she said. “I was naive when I came here, but in that moment, I immediately understood his malicious intentions. He said he’d give me money if I stayed with him. I refused and ran away.”

In another factory, her employer deducted “taxes” from her pay but never reported them. “I have accumulated nothing toward Social Security. All those years of work—nothing in my name.”

Raising a daughter amid violence and poverty

Nancy grew up watching her mother endure domestic violence. “I was just a kid, playing on the floor, and suddenly my dad was strangling my mom on the couch,” she says. “When you see things like that, you carry it with you forever.”

Veronica hid the abuse out of shame and fear. “Sometimes there was no milk for her, so I gave her water with sugar,” she said. “I didn’t want the neighbors to know. I was afraid they’d take her away.”

When Nancy was six, Veronica left the relationship and took night cleaning jobs. “I left her alone because I didn’t trust anyone to take care of her,” she says. “One day she asked for a McDonald’s hamburger. I said no, rent came first. But I saw her cry quietly in her room, and I told her, ‘Put on your shoes—we’re going to buy your hamburger.’ From that day, I swore she would never go hungry, that she would never go through what I went through.”

Life under the Trump administration: “They are hunting us”

Veronica has lived without legal status for more than three decades. Under Trump's current term, the fear is constant.

"I see black trucks with tinted windows and think, what if it's immigration? Some of my friends won't leave their homes. We send each other messages—raids here, checkpoints there. Even US citizens of Hispanic origin are afraid."

The militarized occupation of public spaces such as MacArthur Park, a place she first saw in its beauty 34 years ago, symbolizes the change. "It feels like we're animals being hunted," she says.

"My home is here, but here I am not recognized as a human being. Mexico was my home, but what would I do there if I was sent back? At 57, what are my options in a small town? I don't exist there, nor do I exist here."

Nancy: Learning from her mother's sacrifices

Despite their hardships, Nancy understood early on that her mother's struggles were for her safety and education.

"My mom went through thorns to make sure I had a safe environment and the things I wanted as a kid," she says. "I went to LACC (Los Angeles City College), got two associate degrees, then a bachelor's from Cal State Northridge."

After studying information sciences, she is committed to giving teenagers a safe space to explore their interests without fear. "I want them to know it's okay to not know what you want to do yet. It's okay to like what you like." Like her mother, she said: "What I went through, I don't want them to go through."

The threat of losing citizenship

Earlier this year, Nancy saw "birthright citizenship" trending online. The Trump administration is attempting to revoke it for the children of undocumented immigrants.

"At first I thought, there's no way," she says. "Then I realized they were serious. I was born here. If they take that away, what am I? I'm not Mexican. I don't have a Mexican passport. No country would take me. I'd be stateless."

"I finally have new opportunities, and now I have to think, I could lose everything. How can I protect my loved ones if I lose something I was born with?"

Solidarity and division

Veronica has seen both solidarity and betrayal. "I've met African American, Asian, and white workers who support us," she says. "One woman told me, 'First they came for people my color, then the Asians, and now Hispanics.'"

"But I've also been told by other immigrants—people who crossed like me but got papers—that I should go back. That hurts more than anything a white person could say."

The atmosphere for youth: "We've lost the chance to live normal lives"

Nancy links the repression at home to US wars abroad, including Washington's backing of Israel's assault on Gaza. "The youth are being told to accept war, deportations, censorship as normal," she says. "Social media is full of bad news—raids, missile strikes, new laws. We're supposed to talk about our hobbies, but instead we talk in code so we don't get fired or banned."

"I want young people to have somewhere they can talk freely, without fear. Right now, that's disappearing."

"No human being is illegal"

"I've worked here more than three decades," Veronica says. "I've paid taxes every year—unless the boss stole them. I've raised my daughter without government help. I've done nothing but work and contribute to American society. Yet I live in fear every day. And now they talk about revoking citizenship from people like my daughter. This isn't about criminals. It's about criminalizing workers."

Nancy adds: "No one should go through what my mom went through. No one should have to wonder if they'll be taken from their home just for existing."

A fight for the whole working class

Their experiences shatter the lie that mass deportations are about "public safety." They are part of a wider assault on the democratic and social rights of the entire working class, native-born and immigrant alike.

As Veronica puts it, "If we stayed here, it was for a purpose—so our children could reach a goal." That goal, for all workers, can only be won through unity across borders, ethnicities, and citizenship status, in a fight for a socialist society where no human being is illegal and the wealth produced by labor serves human need, not private profit.



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