

Voices Without Faces: “We didn’t cross the border—the border crossed us” — Maria and Jacinto speak on exploitation, repression, and solidarity

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30 September 2025

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.

Last week the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced that over 2 million “illegal aliens” had been removed or “self-deported” since January 20, 2025, including more than 400,000 formal deportations.

While his initial targets were immigrant workers, the militarization of Portland confirms that the administration is escalating its fascist attacks to establish a dictatorship. Terrified by the immense opposition of the working population to its policies, the ruling elite is responding with repression.

The mass raids, detentions and deportations that have devastated immigrant families are now accompanied by sweeping assaults on democratic rights. Anyone who disagrees with the regime is branded a “terrorist,” while immigrants are cast as “criminals.”

The Democrats, for their part, refuse to wage a struggle against fascism. They are as frightened as Trump and the Republicans by the explosive levels of social inequality that threaten the stability of capitalist rule.

In Los Angeles, Maria, an undocumented immigrant, and Jacinto, a US permanent resident, spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site* about their lives, their struggles, and their understanding of the broader political situation. Their stories reveal both the immense hardships of immigrant families and the understanding that workers’ upcoming struggles require strategy, solidarity and international unity.

Crossing the border in 1995

Maria remembers the perilous journey across the US-Mexico

border with her mother in 1995.

“We didn’t tell our family exactly when, just the week,” she explains. “The coyotes kept in touch, but at one point we were stranded in the mountains. It was dark, freezing. There were about eight of us, including a pregnant woman. We huddled together for warmth.”

They walked for hours, crossed a river, and endured the cold night. “My mom slipped and hurt her arm,” Maria says. “It was so dangerous. And it was expensive. My mom had to borrow money to pay for the crossing.”

With no family left in Mexico—all her siblings were already in the United States—Maria knew this would be her home. “I felt like there was nothing left for us in Mexico,” she says.

Maria: Fighting for her children’s future

Maria raised three children while caring for her sick mother. Despite poverty and constant fear, she was determined to give her children the best education possible.

“I was always at the school,” she says. “I wanted to make sure my kids had opportunities that I never had. I couldn’t go to college. I wanted to learn how to use a computer, create an email account, just to understand this new world.”

Maria began working with other parents to build a space for immigrant families. “It was a place where parents could come together, talk about our kids, and learn,” she recalls. “We had access to computers, English classes, driving lessons. We learned how to organize, write letters, go to board meetings, and demand our rights.”

What began with a handful of parents grew to nearly 200, most undocumented, many with little or no English. “We wanted to make sure our voices were heard,” she says.

In the US, Maria worked wherever she could. “At first, it was part-time in a dry cleaner, for less than minimum wage,” she recalls. “Then in a toy factory. Later, at an arcade in Redondo

Beach until one in the morning. Sometimes I walked home. Other times I paid for taxis I couldn't afford."

Her wages were never enough to support herself and her aging mother, who suffered from kidney disease. "I would walk her to the hospital at three in the morning for dialysis," Maria says. "Meat was a luxury. Sometimes we had none."

Her mother died after being denied a transplant because she lacked insurance and savings. "She could have lived," Maria says bitterly. "But because she was undocumented, she was left to die."

"Now it's dangerous even to go shopping"

But conditions have changed dramatically since those years. "Back then, you could go out and demand your rights," Maria says. "Now it feels dangerous just to go shopping."

Recently, she tried to visit a store just two blocks from her home. "Immigration agents were everywhere," she says. "I don't drive, so I walk. But I was too afraid. My sister, who survived cancer, is afraid to go to the hospital. She thinks she'll be detained."

The climate of terror has forced thousands into hiding. "People stay home. They don't go to work, they don't go to the doctor," Maria says. "We live like prisoners."

Jacinto: "We didn't cross the border—the border crossed us"

Jacinto was born in Sinaloa, Mexico, where he received his early education. From the beginning, he was conscious of US domination. "In school we learned about how the United States took our land," he says. "Texas, California, Colorado—all those names are Mexican. We didn't cross the border—the border crossed us. We didn't come to America—America came to us."

He referenced dissent today. "Young people wave Mexican flags at protests," Jacinto explains. "They know their Aztec, Mayan, Olmec roots. They understand that Mexico's poverty is linked to US imperialism, built on theft, exploitation, Indigenous dispossession, and slavery."

Jacinto later studied history at UCLA, which deepened his understanding of US imperialism. "No US president, Democrat or Republican, has ever improved conditions for immigrants," he says. "They make progress on issues like abortion or LGBTQ rights, but for workers and immigrants, nothing changes. We remain exploited and repressed."

He emphasizes the comparative nature of poverty. "Being poor in Mexico is worse than being poor here," Jacinto says. "In the US, even the poor often have basic appliances, some social support. In Mexico, poverty is more absolute. That's why people endure exploitation here—they compare it to worse conditions back home. But that makes us vulnerable to capitalism."

For Jacinto, the so-called stereotype of the hardworking Mexican is not a stereotype at all. "It's reality," he says. "The wealth of this

state rests on Latino labor."

He recalls his father-in-law, who worked in a Vernon factory for 40 years, never missing a day. "When he got cancer from toxic exposure, he refused treatment," Jacinto says. "He said he had already done enough for his family. He didn't want to be a burden. That's the ethic—working until the end, even if it kills you."

This ethic, however, is twisted by the system into a weapon of exploitation. "We pay taxes, we contribute, but we see little in return," Jacinto explains. "Yet the media calls us lazy, says we take advantage. It's a lie meant to divide the working class."

Living with a green card: permanent vulnerability

As a permanent resident, Jacinto knows his status offers no real security. "They can take it away at any time," he says. "It's always a risk. You never stop looking over your shoulder."

Despite this, he has dedicated his life to education. "I've worked as a teacher to help immigrant workers," he says. "Because our strength is in knowledge and solidarity."

The power of solidarity

Both Maria and Jacinto agree: the ruling class fears the unity of workers. "That's why they send so many police to demonstrations," Jacinto says. "They know we produce the wealth. They know we have power if we stand together."

Maria adds, "We can't survive alone. We need each other. Our children's future depends on all workers fighting back together."

The experiences of Maria and Jacinto expose the brutal reality of immigrant life in America: exploitation, poverty, repression, and fear. But their stories also affirm the immense potential power of the working class.

"We have to build solidarity, across borders, across languages, across everything that divides us," Jacinto insists. "Only then can we defend ourselves and change society."

Maria echoes this call. "Our voices are silenced because we are undocumented, but together we are strong," she says. "We can't wait for politicians. We have to fight for each other."



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