

Winter 2018 U.S. Immigration Alert!

A Newsletter from National Immigrant Solidarity Network
Winter 2018 Issue, Volume 65
No Immigrant Bashing! Support Immigrant Rights!

<http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

\$3.00/Copy



Hey Trump: 'Tear Gassing Children Is Outrageous and Inhumane!

In This Issue:

Terror at the Border: Experts Condemn the Tear-Gassing of Children (Pg 1) | How a march at the US-Mexico border descended into tear gas and chaos (Pg 3) | US Must Take Responsibility for Asylum Seekers and Their History (Pg 5) | No one is illegal-Solidarity with the Migrant Caravans (Pg 7) | Caravans Challenge the Continent's Governments (Pg 8) | Please Support NISN! Subscribe the Newsletter! (Pg 12) | March, 2019 US Activist to China Silk Road, One Road One Belt Study Delegation (Pg 12)

Please Donate to National Immigrant Solidarity Network!

All Donations Are Tax Deductible!

Make check payable to NISN/AFGJ and it will be tax deductible! Send your check to:

National Immigrant Solidarity Network
P.O. Box 751, South Pasadena, CA 91031-0751

_____ \$100.00 _____ \$ 50.00 _____ \$ 35.00 _____ Other Amount \$ _____
(\$35 or more will receive 1 year free subscriptions of the Immigration Alert! Newsletter)

11/30: Terror at the Border: Experts Condemn the Tear-Gassing of Children

Paul Gottinger - CounterPunch

On Sunday, US border officers fired tear gas at groups of asylum seekers attempting to reach the US border. Images of mothers and small children fleeing the gas drew widespread outrage from politicians and human rights groups.

Wind carried the gas a kilometer away, impacting many individuals not attempting to reach the US border.

As a result of the tear gas, one woman collapsed unconscious, a baby fainted, with many others were screaming and coughing, and a child with Down syndrome was among those affected by the gas.

"I felt that my face was burning," said Cindy Milla, a Honduran woman. "I ran for my life and that of my children."

But on Tuesday, President Trump defended the use of tear gas, claiming the tear gas used was "very safe".

Experts contacted by the author strongly disputed Trump's assurances and called the tear-gassing of children illegal and potentially deadly.

"Tear gas should never, in my opinion, be used on children," said Dr. Alastair Hay, Professor of Environmental Toxicology at the University of Leeds. "The stinging of the eyes and coughing fits that the tear gases cause will terrify any child."

If a child with asthma comes into contact with tear gas, it could provoke a dangerous asthma attack in a vulnerable population that may not have access to medicine.

Dr. Rohini Haar, Visiting Professor at UC Berkeley School of Public Health, agreed that exposing children to tear gas was dangerous.

“Children are particularly vulnerable to weapons like these—they have more naive respiratory systems, more fragile skin, perhaps don’t know to close their eyes and mouths so they get more in, and they don’t know quite how to get the stuff off as well as adults.”

Dr. Anna Feigenbaum, who has written a book on the history of tear gas, said, “The safety of tear gas was determined by its exposure to fit, male bodies. Tear gas can be far more dangerous for children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions.”

Tear gas is a toxin, which is lethal if an individual receives a high enough dose, and the lethal dose for children is much lower, according to Dr. Feigenbaum.

“It’s a chemical weapon, not a condiment,” Dr. Feigenbaum said.

“Poisoning the air that children breath puts their lives at risk.”

Tear gases work by compelling people to flee in a panic, which can cause children to be separated from parents, trampled, or trigger an asthma attack.

A percentage of people exposed to tear gas will have long-term impacts, according to Dr. Wright, a professor at Leeds Beckett University. Studies have even linked tear gas to miscarriages.

Both Dr. Feigenbaum and Dr. Haar questioned the legality of using tear gas on children, and Mexico is calling for an investigation into the incident.

“This is a violation of UN Basic Principles on the Use of Force,” said Dr. Feigenbaum.

Dr. Haar said, “Both the US military and police all use standards of conduct that require the use of proportionate force. I can’t imagine how tear-gassing unarmed civilians is proportionate.”

There is also concern that officers using tear gas do so improperly.

“A major hazard for civilians targeted with these weapons is direct injuries to the skull when the projectiles are fired at heads at close range – in contravention of company technical guidance,” said Dr. Wright.

Tear gas is banned for use in war by chemical weapons conventions, but is regularly used against civilians, with especially brutal results by authoritarian regimes.

In 2013, thirty-nine prisoners in Egypt suffocated to death when tear gas was fired into a prison van. In 2011, Saudi Arabia helped the small country of Bahrain crush its Arab Spring uprising, and the security forces extreme use of tear gas killed at least thirty people.

Dr. Feigenbaum criticized the idea that tear gas is truly non-lethal weapon. “Why do we have so many deaths, if these are non-lethal weapons?”

Dr. Wright said the goal of tear gas use is to appear to be less dangerous, but not necessarily be less dangerous.

“In terms of alleged safety, it should be recalled that some of the first WWI agents were so called tear gases,” Dr. Wright said.

In the US alone, there have been over 100 people killed by tear gas, with most of these deaths occurring in prisons or in SWAT raids, according to Dr. Feigenbaum.

Now tear gas has been turned on vulnerable families living in desperate conditions near the US border.

At least some of the tear gas used on Sunday appeared to be Triple Chaser and Saf-Smoke Grenade, based on canisters found near the border.

Triple Chaser and Saf-Smoke Grenade are both manufactured by Defense Technology, a subsidiary of The Safariland Group. Defense Technology’s website includes a warning to potential purchasers of both Triple Chaser and Saf-Smoke Grenade:

“This product can expose you to chemicals including Lead Salts and Hexavalent Chromium, which are known to the State of California to cause cancer, and Lead Salts, which are known to the State of California to cause birth defects or other reproductive harm.”

Dr. Feigenbaum said Triple Chaser is a particularly dangerous form of tear gas because the canister splits into 3 parts, making it hard to control where it will land.

Recently the Trump administration gave US troops at the border have permission to use force to protect border officers, and attempted to take away the right to claim asylum by those who entered the US without authorization.

“In the longer term, we are likely to see much greater use of such weapons at borders as conflict and climate induced migration increase,” said Dr. Wright.

Dr. Anna Feigenbaum summed up one reason she thinks we may be seeing border officers using tear gas at the border.

“Tear gas is cost effective if you don’t have the resources to built permanent infrastructure. You can use tear gas to create a temporary border wall as a solution to the border crisis.”

11/26: How a march at the US-Mexico border descended into tear gas and chaos

Dara Linddara – Vox

A planned peaceful march by the migrant “caravan” broke down on Sunday at the US-Mexico border in Tijuana, as groups of desperate people attempted to cross the border en masse — escalating into US Border Patrol agents firing tear gas that spread for nearly a kilometer through a crowd that included hundreds of asylum seekers, including children.

One or more people threw rocks at Border Patrol agents, who responded with tear gas and rubber bullets. The San Ysidro Port of Entry, the biggest official border crossing into the US, remained completely shut down in both directions during the unrest and for hours afterward.

The violence was the culmination of a situation that’s been deteriorating for over a week, after caravan members began to arrive in a city that’s already hosting thousands of asylum seekers waiting to cross legally into the US at San Ysidro. The stated purpose of Sunday’s march — for caravan members to be allowed to seek asylum in the US, or to meet with a representative of the US government — reflected the growing desperation and frustration of Tijuana’s waiting asylum seekers.

The unrest and tear gas aren’t simply the US government’s response to the arrival of the caravan. Nor were they directly related to a pending agreement between the US and the incoming Mexican government, reported Saturday, that would force asylum seekers to remain in Mexico while the US processes their claims.

The caravan’s weeks-long journey has come to an end just as pressure is rising, across the border. Trump’s border policy has squeezed asylum seekers at both ends: Officials stress that migrants ought to present themselves legally at ports of entry, while asylum seekers at ports are forced to wait days or weeks for entry to the US, and President Donald Trump himself says they shouldn’t be coming at all.

Trump has been portraying the US-Mexico border as in crisis since the spring, but the crisis (at least in Tijuana) has finally arrived. Each side of the US political debate perceives a different emergency: Trump and conservatives see an invasion of hostile, criminal forces, while his critics see an unprovoked attack on vulnerable families. But both views reflect the same underlying crisis: that so many asylum seekers, exhausted and desperate, are on the doorstep of the US, trying to reconcile their legal right to seek asylum with the reality that they’re not going to be allowed in “the right way” anytime soon.

What happened during Sunday’s march and port shutdown

* On Sunday, members of the migrant caravan (the first wave of which, numbering several thousand people, began to arrive in Tijuana last weekend) planned to hold a march to demand asylum in the US and protest the conditions in the migrant shelters where they’re staying. Caravan members sought to be allowed to enter the US or speak to a representative of the Trump administration to negotiate.

* In preparation for the march, Border Patrol deployed additional agents to the border around San Ysidro for crowd control. Active-duty military (who have been assisting border agents along the US/Mexico border since last month) don't appear to have been involved in crowd control themselves, but did assist Border Patrol agents in moving barricades into place.

* Shortly after 11 am Pacific time, the march splintered as groups of people attempted to cross the border en masse. According to BuzzFeed News, hundreds of marchers got past Mexican federal police who were barricading the border from the Mexican side. (In the confrontation, one Mexican police officer suffered a minor injury: a split lip.)

* Around 11:15 am, US and Mexican authorities shut down the San Ysidro Port of Entry entirely, blocking both pedestrians and vehicles from crossing from Mexico into the US or vice versa.

* Shortly before noon, US officials fired tear gas and a "flash-bang" grenade at a group of people attempting to cross through a fence into the US. Video taken of the incident shows rocks being thrown at agents before the tear gas was fired. (Customs and Border Protection officials said Monday that four agents were hit with rocks over the course of the day.) Witnesses also reported that Border Patrol agents fired rubber bullets.

* Agents also fired tear gas at a group of people who were attempting to use a train crossing to enter the US. That group included families with small children, who attempted to hide under the train to avoid the gas.

* Wind carried the tear gas up to a kilometer away, an area that included hundreds of asylum seekers.

* In a separate incident an hour later, Border Patrol agents fired tear gas canisters to disperse a group of people attempting to cross the Tijuana Canal into the US.

* By mid-afternoon Pacific time, the asylum seekers had dispersed and retreated. The San Ysidro port opened to pedestrians around 3:45 pm, and was open to all traffic by 6.

* Mexican police report that 39 people were arrested for trying to cross forcibly into the US and will be prosecuted. While the US government reported that no one successfully crossed into the US, witnesses and Mexican police sources said that people were arrested by US Border Patrol agents after crossing.

* Customs and Border Protection officials told reporters Monday that all uses of force, including the firing of tear gas, will be reviewed under agency policy to judge whether they were appropriate or not.

Pressure on the San Ysidro port has been building for months

The chronology above makes it clear that what happened wasn't a planned incursion by "the caravan" into the US — or even the first attempt by caravan members to seek asylum in the US. What happened is that people desperate for entry into the US took matters into their own hands — and US Border Patrol officials reacted with force.

But to understand how people who arrived in Tijuana barely a week ago are already so desperate, you have to understand that thousands of people were already waiting to seek asylum in the US before the caravan even began to arrive.

The San Ysidro port of entry is the most common place for Central Americans to seek asylum in the US, because it's so large and because the route to Tijuana is safer than traveling through northeast Mexico into Texas. But for months, the number of asylum seekers going to San Ysidro has outstripped the number the US actually allows in to seek asylum.

Under a policy of "metering" asylum seekers, in which US officials limit the number of people who are allowed to enter the port and ask for asylum each day, migrants currently wait two months or longer in Tijuana before being allowed to enter the US.

Citing resource constraints, the US allows 60 to 100 asylum seekers — or fewer — into San Ysidro each day. An unofficial wait list of hundreds of people over the summer ballooned to thousands this fall. Before the caravan arrived, wait times stretched to two months, and the migrant shelters in Tijuana were already near capacity.

Many of the caravan members have been put up in a sports complex in Tijuana that's been converted into a temporary shelter. Over the weekend, rains flooded the sports complex. The local government and nonprofits have struggled to feed everyone.

The mayor of Tijuana — possibly using the issue for his own benefit — has said repeatedly that he doesn't have the money to support so many asylum seekers and has demanded that the national government give him more funds.

Many migrants in the caravan weren't expecting the wait or the conditions. They've already been traveling for weeks, often with children in tow, with the hope of getting asylum in the US. In many cases, they've had the mistaken expectation that asylum would be granted immediately after they arrived. That hasn't happened, and they're getting desperate. And desperate people do desperate things.

Conservatives see Sunday's march as an attack; liberals see Trump's response as a war crime

Sunday's events in Tijuana have alarmed both conservatives and liberals in America, for totally different reasons. Conservatives look at reports of migrants throwing rocks and conclude that the border truly is under attack, and that Trump has been right about the character of the caravan ("stone-cold criminals") all along.

Liberals, meanwhile, have focused on images of families running away from tear gas and been horrified that the US government would act so cruelly toward people trying to seek asylum, which is legal under US law.

Tear gas is considered a chemical weapon under international law, making the US government's response seem all the more hostile. But it also highlights the strangeness of the role that Border Patrol is playing right now: It's a domestic law enforcement agency that's working in concert with law enforcement in another country to prevent people from crossing a border.

Tear gas is illegal for international use, but not for use in domestic law enforcement. Local police departments in the US frequently use it to disperse crowds when someone in the crowd is engaging in illegal activity, especially when someone in the crowd is throwing things at law enforcement officials.

But this isn't domestic law enforcement: The tear gas canisters clearly crossed an international border, and their aim, working in concert with Mexican officials, was to prevent people from being able to step onto US soil (at which point the US would be obligated to hear their asylum claims without turning them back under current law).

The fundamental problem is that both countries — the US and Mexico — are dealing with a large and increasingly desperate group of people. Many of those people are families and small children. Some of those people responded to desperation by attempting to cross into the US between ports of entry, which is a federal misdemeanor; a few reacted by throwing things at Border Patrol agents massing against them.

The US was successfully able to dispel the crowds Sunday. But there's no indication that the situation in Tijuana — the waiting, the poor conditions, or the desperation — is going to get any better on its own soon.

11/10: US Must Take Responsibility for Asylum Seekers and Their History

David L. Wilson – TruthOut

Most people are capable of holding two or more conflicting ideas on any given issue. Immigration is no exception.

A large segment of the US public was horrified in May and June when they saw the Trump administration snatching toddlers away from Central American mothers who arrived at the US border seeking asylum. Many would still be appalled if they knew that the White House is seeking to continue the practice in a different form. Most undoubtedly feel genuine sympathy for young people trying to escape violent gangs or abusive partners. Still, a lot of these same sympathetic Americans don't actually want the asylum seekers to come here.

Some may be influenced by administration efforts to induce panic about immigrants "invading" the US — for instance, President Trump's decision to send troops to counter the latest migrant caravan, even though US Army planners have concluded that "only a small percentage of the migrants will likely reach the border."

But others look around at failing schools, collapsing infrastructure, neighbors dying of drug overdoses or going without affordable medical care, and they ask themselves whether the United States can really spare any of its limited resources to help people from somewhere south of the border. When they hear Fox News commentator Laura Ingraham saying, "It's not our problem," and President Trump at the United Nations telling migrants to stay home and "[m]ake their countries great again," they tend to nod in agreement.

These are real concerns. One of the most important questions before immigrant rights activists today is whether we're going to take these concerns seriously and make a sincere effort to address them.

Burning Your Neighbor's House

Anyone who has followed the history of US involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean knows that the current crises in the region are absolutely "our problem."

The US government and US companies have dominated much of this hemisphere politically, economically and militarily for more than a century. There's no shortage of studies and articles describing how US-backed policies and regimes have driven migration here over the decades, especially from Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. Investigative journalist Allan Nairn summed the case up forcefully on Democracy Now! in 2016. Many of the undocumented Guatemalans now living in the United States fled a genocidal campaign that a US-backed military regime carried out against their country's Indigenous population in the 1980s, explained Nairn, who reported from the country at the time. "And then Americans complain," he continued. "Well, you know, if you go and burn down your neighbor's house, don't complain when, as they run from the flames, they come on to your lawn."

But a decently large segment of the US population knows nothing about their government's role in spurring immigration. On the contrary, people misguidedly think of US foreign policy as humanitarian, characterized by much too generous giveaways to ungrateful foreigners. After all, they rarely hear anything to the contrary, since US foreign policy is basically bipartisan. Establishment Republicans and Democrats hold the same views on most of the issues, and the corporate media follow their lead.

The US relationship with Honduras provides a textbook example. In June 2009, the Honduran military overthrew the country's relatively progressive president, Manuel Zelaya Rosales. President Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave de facto support to the coup's organizers, who solidified their position five months later with a highly suspect presidential election. In 2017, another questionable election further consolidated the coup regime by handing right-wing President Juan Orlando Hernández a second term. Trump endorsed the election results.

Crime increased significantly after the coup, with the homicide rate jumping from an already high 60.8 per 100,000 in 2008, to 81.8 in 2010 and 91.4 in 2011. But most US political and media actors ignored the correlation between the right-wing takeover in Honduras and the rising violence that sent asylum seekers fleeing to the United States.

The Responsibility to Engage

So what can immigrant rights activists do to break through the silence about the link between immigration and US policies?

We could encourage the corporate media to provide more nuanced coverage. Many reporters on the immigration beat understand migration's root causes, but in the absence of pressure from the other side, they end up giving into more conservative editors, or else just reflecting the environment in which they work. Still, it's unrealistic to expect the media to do all our work for us.

Fortunately, many groups are already working to provide context for migration to the US. For instance, Witness for Peace, founded in 1983 by faith-based peace activists in response to US funding of the right-wing contra rebels in Nicaragua, recently concluded a Northwestern speaking tour with journalist Jennifer Ávila addressing threats to the free press in Honduras. When reporters are kept from investigating, Ávila noted, the government is free to continue the corruption and repression that drives people in her country to undertake dangerous journeys to the US border.

Meanwhile, María Luisa Rosal, an organizer for School of the Americas (SOA) Watch, was touring campuses in the Midwest and California to promote her organization's upcoming annual November gathering at the US-Mexico border, which will bring US and Latin American activists together for rallies, panels and workshops on such topics as organizing for "the right to stay." This is a term Mexican activists coined for people's right not to have policies imposed on them that force them to leave their homes. SOA Watch was started in 1990 to draw attention to the role of the US Army School of the Americas military training program (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in 2001) in producing Latin American human rights abusers. SOA

Watch activists say their focus is currently on raising public awareness of "militarized US foreign policy as a principal root cause of migration."

Efforts like these need broader support. Grassroots education is hard work, but it pays off. Right now, we have an important opportunity to end, once and for all, the delusion that the US government is acting as the world's benevolent big brother.

We don't lack examples of US-supported regimes giving people reasons to flee; each week seems to bring new ones. On October 21, the Guardian reported that the trial for the March 2016 murder of Honduran environmental and Indigenous rights activist Berta Cáceres was now "in chaos." Cáceres — one of the best known and most popular grassroots leaders in Honduras, and a 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize recipient — was killed while leading a struggle by the Indigenous Lenca against an internationally financed hydroelectric project. The accused include a manager from the Honduran company owning the dam and three active or former military officers; two of the officers received training from US military programs. Irregularities in the trial suggest that the defendants may get off with acquittal or a light prison sentence.

The US political class isn't paying much attention to these developments; it's too busy obsessing over the migrant caravan, which in fact, originated in Honduras. But the Cáceres case points to the sort of treatment Hondurans and other Central Americans can expect when they try to "make their countries great again."

11/18: No one is illegal - Solidarity with the Migrant Caravans

PRT Mexico

Thousands of migrants from Central America have made politically and socially visible the structural violence and systematic violation of their human rights that they experience on a daily basis, without governments attending to the causes or the basic necessities of survival, through their organisation into caravans. These are some of the reasons that forced them to flee their countries, with only what they carry on their backs and suffering the hardships of a long journey towards an uncertain destination. They flee from capitalist criminal, institutional, state and patriarchal violence. They advance in defiance of the threats of the police and military who guard the different borders, as if at war with the wretched of the earth. Solidarity with migrant sisters and brothers suffering from hunger, thirst, disease and exhaustion has been expressed by thousands of people who have supported them with food, water and clothing to mitigate their hunger and thirst and the inclement weather. Impelling all the actions of support and solidarity in the towns and cities they pass through is a task born out of social consciousness, that they should not be left on their own. This solidarity of the peoples is preventing diseases from worsening and reducing the risk factors. Thus, the passage of caravans is touching the hearts of those who understand that today these are women, men, LGBT+ people, young people, adolescents, girls and boys who are in the middle of a tremendous humanitarian crisis of forced migration. And it is becoming clear, too, that these caravans are only the concentrated _expression_ of what about 250 million people who are forced to migrate in any corner of the planet experience.

The first large caravan started in Honduras, in October of this year, made up of thousands of people, almost half of them women and children, passed through Mexico City and now continues its journey to the northern border with the United States. They had overcome the obstacles of police violence on the southern frontier of Mexico, the threats and assaults of criminal groups, the disappearance of a hundred at the hands of armed groups, extortion of all kinds and a xenophobic hate campaign and racist discrimination promoted and stimulated by the US government of Donald Trump and the right-wing. Those who feed reactionary and fundamentalist ideologies through different media, stimulate prejudices, fears and rumours that proliferate as part of the dominant ideology, which penetrate even amongst ordinary people, awakening selfish individualism and alienated competition that obscures the knowledge of reality.

Against those who think that the caravan is a great media montage and the product of an orchestrated operation, we denounce the growing economic, political, insecurity, murder, femicide and disappearances in Honduras that have caused this growing organized migration. Likewise, we denounce the misery and unemployment generated by neoliberal policies and the systematic repression of a government established by the military dictatorship, which mounted a coup against the timidly progressive government of Manuel Zelaya, in 2009. This is coupled with the high levels of criminal violence that exists in Honduran cities, such as San Pedro Sula, considered the most violent city in all Latin America. All these are the immediate causes of the current forced migration.

The other caravans on the way, from El Salvador and Guatemala, also show that terrible conditions of survival, as in large regions of Mexico, lead to a degree of despair to thousands of people who see no other perspective than to cling to a possibility of improvement by fleeing their countries. Although without any security, especially because of the racist, xenophobic and discriminatory policies that lead the Trump government to militarize the border with Mexico with heavily armed soldiers, also with armed, racist, right-wing supremacist and fundamentalist groups of civilians, who have already committed atrocious crimes against Latin American migrants.

So far, more than three caravans, totalling more than 10,000 people, have decided to cross Mexico these days with the aim of reaching the United States; and everything indicates that more people will follow with this objective. Although we must emphasize that this forced displacement has been happening for many years, but in a clandestine manner. Thus, according to official figures, from January to September 2018, more than 41,000 Hondurans and Hondurans who travelled through Mexico were registered, although the great majority have already been deported by the Mexican government.

What is new now is that instead of this permanent and long term “ant” migration, it is now a mass, collective migration which faces together the great risks and dangers of murder, femicide, sexual violence against women and disappearance that crossing Mexico involves. It should be noted that, for more than a decade, this led families and mothers of Central American migrants disappeared in the Mexican territory to organize an international movement for their search. Therefore, the current collective, massive mobilization of broad sectors of the Central American peoples is an escape from the catastrophic conditions imposed by capitalism in the region and the extreme violence it has unleashed. It is a social response that has decided to change these conditions, to jointly walk a long and dangerous path in search of a dignified life. Given this situation, Trump’s threats only encourage an attack or confrontation on the border with Mexico. We consider that both the outgoing Mexican federal government and the incoming one have the obligation to guarantee respect for the human rights of migrants as they pass through the country, and we hold them responsible for not guaranteeing their right to freedom of transit. and their human rights, in addition to protection, security, medical attention or transportation in transit through Mexico.

For an anti-capitalist alternative and social and political solidarity with migrants

Faced with this serious humanitarian crisis, the only effective response is to reject the consideration as a “problem” of migration and to satisfy the social needs of millions of women, men, LGBT+ and children, migrants and indigenous peoples. We demand that the richest countries are host countries, as other countries in the world already are.

We demand the right to migrate, to have freedom of movement, transit and residence. As internationalists we demand the human rights of all people to live with dignity and enjoy all the political and social rights of the country in which they reside. The constitutional reform on human rights approved in Mexico in 2011 establishes precisely that these rights are recognized not only for the Mexican population, but also for a foreign population residing in Mexico or passing through the country.

In turn, migration should be a freely adopted option. However, millions of people are forced to migrate to escape misery, poverty, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, war, ecocide, ecological crisis, lack of perspectives and so on. All people should enjoy full rights, including, but not limited to, the right of asylum for those fleeing war and persecution.

We support the self-organization and struggles of migrants, starting with their specific and particular demands, but seeking to build the necessary links with class, gender and anti-racist discrimination issues and showing how this is a single interconnected process. We promote experiences of mutual aid between the exploited and discriminated class and their common struggles, either by building social and union struggles that include workers of all kinds or through collective projects, such as self-managed housing projects, cooperatives, solidarity associations and informal groups of economic and social mutual aid.

As internationalists we consider that freely decided migration and the mixing of populations are positive for societies. Building links between popular and social movements in the countries of origin and host countries is a vital part of the development of social movements of resistance to capitalism, ties that point to the possibilities of a new world based on sorority, solidarity and mutual aid.

Because no human being is illegal, let us strengthen solidarity and internationalist struggle with the migrants who are on the road today.

Enough of racism and xenophobia!
Sorority and solidarity
For a workers and peasants’ government

11/12: Migrant Caravans Challenge the Continent’s Governments

Dan La Botz - New Politics

Central American migrants, both desperate and courageous, have thrust themselves into the center of Mexican and U.S. politics with their demand for refuge and asylum. As the head of the NGO Pueblos Sin Fronteras told a reporter, “This isn’t just a caravan, it’s an exodus created by hunger and death.”

The thousands of migrants organized in caravans and walking north from Central America, through Mexico, and to the United States—some 3,000 miles—have raised a challenge to the governments and to the people of North America. Driven by poverty and violence, their long march is an implicit critique of the Central American governments that have failed to protect them and have made it impossible for them to earn a living. At the same time, it is in its very form a denunciation of Mexico,

since they must travel in caravans because of the violence that migrants face in Mexico from both criminals and the corrupt police. And when the caravan reaches the border, it will be a challenge to the United States to adhere to its laws and international agreements that allow migrants to present petitions for refugee or asylum status.

Beyond all that however, the simple act of walking north is a courageous and defiant act of resistance against the economic and political system that envelopes North America, with its “free markets,” its authoritarian governments, and its failure to meet the basic human needs of millions. The migrants have put contemporary capitalism and imperialism on trial.

The migrants—men, women, and children—formed the caravans in late October. Migrants have for years traveled in groups because of the danger in both Central America and Mexico of being beaten, robbed, raped, kidnapped, or murdered by either criminals or police, but these caravans of thousands represent a new development. Usually migrants pay thousands of dollars to smugglers known as coyotes or polleros who arrange to take them across the Mexican and U.S. borders. These new migrant caravans, however, at first simply forced their way across the Mexican border, overwhelming border police, or crossed the Suchiate River. They have compelled the Mexican government to permit them to enter the country.

In Mexico, migrants have been supported by local governments, the Catholic Church, and NGOs such as Pueblos Sin Fronteras (Peoples Without Borders), which have helped to provide them with water and food and also aided in choosing the best routes and campsites. The NGOs have also helped with the many who have become exhausted, gotten sick, or been injured. Irineo Mújica, the director of Pueblos Sin Fronteras, reported that Mexican police had roughed up both men and women in the caravan. “Never in the history of the caravans have we seen such violence. I understand that the Mexican government is desperate, but violence is not the solution,” said Mújica. At times groups have broken off from the caravan to find their own way or to take advantage of passing flat bed trucks, riding, crowded on the trailers. There are reports that as the caravan moved along some 100 migrants have gone missing and some believe they have been kidnapped by the criminal cartels.

As the migrants come, Mexico’s in-coming President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who will take office on Dec. 1, proposed an international development program for Central America to get to the root of the issues that cause the migration problem, and promised that his planned public works programs would create 400,000 jobs Mexicans and immigrants. Speaking in late October, he said, we will have jobs for all, for both Mexicans and Central Americans. Faced with migrants challenge and under pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump, out-going Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto offered the migrants a program called, “Estás en tu casa” or “You are at home,” that would provide asylum, work permits, identification cards, medical care, and schooling. At the same time, he made that plan contingent upon the migrants remaining in the southern Mexican states of Chiapas and Oaxaca. The caravan held meetings to discuss EPN’s offer, which was rejected by the group as a whole. Most wanted to continue on. As one man said, “These states are overwhelmed by poverty, in Mexico the jobs are up north.” Hundreds, however, accepted the Mexican offer and dropped out of the caravan.

At this moment, two caravans, several thousand migrants altogether, have now reached Mexico City where the Mexican government has offered them shelter in the Jesús Martínez “Palillo” stadium. Portable toilets have been set up, but they haven’t been adequate for the numbers of people and visitors, creating unsanitary conditions. Edgar Corzo Sosa of the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) says that, “Pregnant woman, and above all, the newborns, are the most vulnerable group. There is no census, it’s complicated, but a third of the caravan is made up of children, and there are altogether about 5,000 people”

President Donald Trump, campaigning feverishly, attending 17 election rallies, principally to support Senate candidates in the midterm elections, made the caravan the center of his campaign. He called the caravan an “invasion,” asserted that the migrants were members of Mara Salvatrucha or MS-13, “hardened criminals” and he claimed that there were “Middle Easterners”—read terrorists—among them. Trump threatened to send 15,000 U.S. troops to the border and said that U.S. soldiers could fire on migrants if they threw stones. He has threatened to cut off aid to the Central American nations from which the caravans have come and the American president also raised the idea of using his executive power to end constitutional birthright citizenship in the United States.

What Caused the Caravan Crisis?

American imperialism is at the root of the current migration crisis. The story of the United States in Central America is a long one going back to the nineteenth century, but the most recent chapter begins in 1981 when U.S. President Ronald Reagan supported right-wing governments in Guatemala and El Salvador while also fighting against a popular revolution in Nicaragua. U.S. weapons poured into those countries during the civil wars there that lasted until the 1990s. Those wars took hundreds of thousands of lives and left parts of those countries in ruins.

Peace in these Central American nations was negotiated in the mid-1990s, just as the United States and the Central Americans governments were negotiating the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), a treaty that opened their

economies to foreign competition. The treaty devastated local industries and agriculture, leading to vast unemployment. Farmers lost their farms; factories threw workers out on the street.

More than a decade and a half of war had flooded the region with heavy weapons and the disbanding of the various armies left thousands with no means of employment. The United States government set up a chain of drug dealing operations that were used to fund the Contra War against Nicaragua and those continued after the war ended. In the 1980s, the United States also began to deport Central American gang members in groups like the MS-13 and M-18. Many of these men and women had had no contact with the countries to which they were being deported, and once back in Central America they established branches of the gangs they had belonged to in the United States. This toxic mix of groups trained in violence, easily available heavy weapons and criminal drug activity has made the “northern triangle” Central American countries of Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala some of the most violent countries with the highest murder rates in the world.

The most recent imperialist intervention in Central America occurred when former President Barack Obama and his then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sponsored a military coup in Honduras against the democratically elected leftist president Manuel Zelaya. Since then, the antidemocratic government of President Juan Orlando Hernández has instituted a neoliberal model that has deepened the economic dependence on the United States and worsened living conditions for millions of Hondurans. Hernández has also criminalized the organizers of the caravan who have attempted to respond to the humanitarian crisis that so many Hondurans have been living.

Today, a new ruling elite dominates Central America. As Aaron Schneider and Rafael R. Ioris wrote in NACLA, after the extraordinary violence in the Honduran election of 2017, there has been “a growing consolidation of power by a new kind of right-wing alliance in Honduras and across Latin America: an alliance that brings together the power of the traditional landed elites and that of the financial elites who have benefited more recently from globalized neoliberalism. This alliance emerged amid the ashes of the Cold War and the dawn of the Washington Consensus.”

Today, Poverty and Violence

Poverty has been and remains endemic in most of Central America where about one-third of the population lives in extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is defined by the United Nations as “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information.” The World Bank recently put this in economic terms, describing those in extreme poverty as earning less than \$1.90 per day.

As the International Labor Organization wrote a year ago, “Over 50 million young people in Latin America and the Caribbean face a labor market characterized by unemployment, informality and a lack of opportunities.” About half the people in Latin America work in the informal economy—in Central America the rate is between 40 and 80 percent—that is to say people work for employers who often ignore labor laws and provide no benefits, or people are self employed in micro-businesses or as peddlers. The lack of jobs and decent pay, mean a life of poor housing and bad health, while families face insecurity and children are put at great risk of malnutrition that can affect both their physical and mental development.

Climate change is also playing a role in the Central American migration. According to Scientific American, a drought this year deprived some 2.8 million people in the region of their food. The drought has affected the so-called “dry corridor” of Central America, that runs through southern Guatemala, northern Honduras and western El Salvador. Olman Funez, a young farmer from Orocuina in southern Honduras said, “The drought has killed us. We lost all our corn and beans.”

The choices made in Washington and New York, decisions to promote so called “free markets” or to continue to permit the expansion of carbon fuels such as coal and petroleum, have brought misery to Central America, exacerbating poverty and setting people in motion, moving out and moving north, going to where they can find jobs.

Violence in the Central American nations is also a way of life, and it has been increasing recently. Guatemala has been violent for years, but the terror has increased recently. While anyone might be murdered at almost any time, peasant and worker activists are often the victims of violence. Between May 9 and June 8, seven leaders of peasant organizations were murdered in Guatemala.

As Simon Granovsky-Larsen writes in NACLA, “Data collected by human rights organizations over the years show a relatively consistent pattern: outside of police or military shootings at protests, one rights defender has been killed in Guatemala every month or two all the way back to 2000. The campesino murders of 2018 obliterate any predictability with shocking violence. Guatemala has not seen anything like this since the official end of its armed conflict in 1996.” The violence against peasant leaders is intended not only to stop their labor organizing, but also to deter peasants from politically challenging the government.

A popular democratic rebellion against Daniel Ortega’s authoritarian regime in Nicaragua was violently suppressed by his government with arrests, torture, and hundreds of deaths, led tens of thousands of Nicaraguans to flee to neighboring Costa

Rica. Political violence in some states has combined with the criminal violence found throughout the region creating an expanding blood bath. Survivors of the slaughter have joined the migration through Mexico toward the United States to escape the misery and violence that enveloped them.

The Challenge Facing the Caravan in the United States

The migrant caravans may face its greatest challenge at the U.S.-Mexico border when migrants attempt to present their applications for refugee or asylum status. The immigrants must present their application for asylum to an immigration judge, which means they must be given an immigration hearing. Economic refugees, those who come simply because they want to work and earn a living are not eligible for refugee or asylum status. The U.S. law defines refugees or those seeking asylum as “a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

The United States today offers hope to few refugees. Under President George H.W. Bush the government accepted between 125,000 and 142,000 refugees. In the 2000s, George W. Bush and Obama years, the United States admitted about 80,000 people each year. However, under the Refugee Act of 1980, the president has the responsibility, in consultation with Congress, to set a maximum number of refugees who will be admitted to the United States each fiscal year. This year only about 22,000 refugees have been admitted. Trump has said that that number will now be 30,000 for 2019.

Trump has declared that, “The United States will not be a migrant camp and it will not be a refugee holding facility.” He has threatened to close the U.S. southern border altogether, though for economic reasons though he seems unlikely to do so. Trump’s Homeland Security used the U.S. Border Patrol to “systemically deny entry to asylum seekers,” according to an immigration rights group. The Trump administration’s policy is that all adults crossing the border without inspection or without immigration documents are to be arrested. When they are arrested children are now routinely separated from their parents, as thousands have been, among them hundreds of small children. Trump’s most recent step week, based on national security from threats coming from abroad, has been to order that any migrant who crosses the border illegally be denied asylum. Civil rights groups argue that many of Trump immigration policies are illegal and they are challenging them in court.

The U.S. border is now largely militarized, with thousands of Border Patrol agents backed up by the National Guard and now some U.S. Army troops. Except along the Rio Grande River, there is a nearly continuous border wall between the United States and Mexico. It is possible to climb the wall or cross through the gaps, though cameras and radar monitor the area, and many who attempt to cross are captured, though hundreds also die in the desert every year. Thousands make it to the other side, to a life in the legal shadows, constantly under the threat of arrest and deportation.

The caravan, nevertheless, moves on, now heading into the dangerous arid regions of northern Mexico dominated by drug cartels and the corrupt police who work with them. Meanwhile, throughout the United States groups of humanitarians—religious and political—have been organizing to go to the border, to greet the migrants and to show solidarity with the migrants. They will be protesting government policies and attempting to welcome those who come as refugees and asylum-seekers.

Migration as Class Struggle

This caravan is not the first and will not be the last. As Laura Weiss wrote recently, “The use of caravans as an activism—and survival—strategy was popularized in Central America. Since 2008 Central American mothers whose children disappeared while crossing through Mexico have carried out an annual caravan through Mexico to create awareness about their struggles. In 2012, the poet Javier Sicilia and the Movimiento Por La Paz con Dignidad y Justicia (the Movement for Peace with Dignity or MPJD) ran a caravan through Mexico and into the United States to draw attention to drug war violence after his son was killed, and a number of similar caravans zooming in on drug war violence and abuses followed in later years.” Caravans in Mexico go back decades: caravans of peasants, of teachers, of miners. They are versions of the religious peregrinations that form part of Central American and Mexican culture: people walking in their faith. Walking to where the Virgin once visited the earth, to where the saint helped the poor and downtrodden. Walking with God.

Please Donate to National Immigrant Solidarity Network!

All Donations Are Tax Deductible!

Make check payable to **NISN/AFGJ** and it will be tax deductible! Send your check to:

National Immigrant Solidarity Network

P.O. Box 751, South Pasadena, CA 91031-0751

_____ \$100.00 _____ \$ 50.00 _____ \$ 35.00 _____ Other Amount \$ _____

(\$35 or more will receive 1 year free subscriptions of the Immigration Alert! Newsletter)

Please subscribe to our NISN Immigrants Daily-Info E-mail List!

Send e-mail to: isn-subscribe@lists.riseup.net or web: <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/isn>

Please join our Following NISN E-mail Lists

Asian American Labor Activism Alert!

send-e-mail to: api-la-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

or visit: <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/api-la>

New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania areas immigrant workers information and alerts

send e-mail to: nyc-immigrantalert-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

or visit: <http://lists.riseup.net/www/info/nyc-immigrantalert>

US-Mexico Border Information and Action Alert!

send e-mail to: Border01-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

or visit: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Border01/>

Virginia state-wide immigrant organizing E-mail list

send- e-mail to: va-immigrantrights-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

or visit: <https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/va-immigrantrights>

May Day 2017 national organizing e-mail list

send e-mail to: mayday2017-subscribe@lists.riseup.net

or visit: <https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/MayDay2017>

About National Immigrant Solidarity Network

NISN is a coalition of community, immigrant, labor, human rights and student activist groups, founded in 2002 in response to the urgent needs for the national coalition to fight immigrant bashing, support immigrant rights, no to the sweatshops exploitation and end to the racism on the community. Please visit our website:

<http://www.ImmigrantSolidarity.org>

Contact Information:

E-mail: info@ImmigrantSolidarity.org

(213) 403-0131 (Los Angeles)

(202) 595-8990 (Washington D.C.)

Please donate to NISN! (All donations are tax deductible!)

Check pay to: **NISN/AFGJ**

Send to: **National Immigrant Solidarity Network**

P.O. Box 751

South Pasadena, CA 91031-0751

Please subscribe to the U.S. Immigration Alert! A Monthly Newsletter from National Immigrant Solidarity Network

1 year subscription rate (12 issues) is \$35.00

It will help us pay for the printing costs, as well as funding for the NISN projects (additional donations to the ISN is tax deductible!)

Check pay to: NISN/AFGJ

National Immigrant Solidarity Network

P.O. Box 751

South Pasadena, CA 91031-0751

March, 2019 US Activist to China Delegation: Silk Road, One Road One Belt Study Delegation (12 Days, Date TBA)

<http://www.ChinaDelegation.org>

Cost: \$1700USD (Plus US-China Airfare)

Projects of National Immigrant Solidarity Network (NISN) and Action LA Network

Fiscal sponsorships of Alliance for Global Justice

All Proceeds will support NISN and Action LA Network