

# The U.S. Border Crisis: A Crisis of the Capitalist System

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The capitalist system has created an international crisis of displaced people due to a convergence of factors. The global economic crisis is now coupled with accelerating ecological disasters and intensified military conflicts. In 2018 there were an estimated 70.8 million people displaced across the globe,<sup>1</sup> a record high. Each year since 2008, extreme weather events and climate change have, on average, displaced an estimated 21 million people, and 10 million more from military conflicts.<sup>2</sup>

This displacement has brought immense misery for the victims of these disasters, pushing many to flee and head for wealthier countries as refugees. They have usually been met with more restricted immigration and asylum policies and an intensifying nationalism as the ruling classes of the wealthy nations devise policies to control the growing numbers of refugees. Increasing numbers of people from Central America have fled to the U.S. since 2017. In response, Trump has intensified his anti-immigrant rhetoric and tightened restrictions on immigration and asylum. And the Democrats, while criticizing his language and brutal aspects of his policies, have approved billions of dollars to carry out these policies.

## **Trump's Campaign of Nationalism**

In his 2016 campaign, Trump blamed the worsening economic situation facing many Americans on immigrants. He held out the promise of building a new wall to stretch along the entire southern border, as well as new limits on immigration, as solutions. Due to job losses in manufacturing and other sectors of the economy, the rising cost of living, and increased levels of inequality, Trump was able to attract people who fell for his racist and xenophobic ranting. Trump claimed that Mexicans and other migrants crossing the southern

border are rapists and criminals invading the U.S. and responsible for increased violence, crime, and job theft.

For his 2020 run, Trump doubled down, staking his presidency on even more blatant racist and nationalistic anti-immigrant rhetoric. He thinks he can win a second term by appealing to anti-immigrant hatred and a return to his border wall mantra, exploiting and carving a nationalist wedge within the population. His racism has encouraged white supremacists to attack immigrants, both at the border as vigilantes and in recent mass shootings, where the gunmen targeted people they believed to be Mexican or Latino.

In response to what Trump claims is a crisis at the southern border, his administration has pushed to increase the size and scope of Customs Border Protection (CBP), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), in addition to expanding the border wall, increasing the detention and deportation of migrants, and reducing the number of refugees granted asylum. For the most part, his policies are in line with previous administrations and with overall U.S. immigration policy. But under Trump, those policies have become more brutal.

## **U.S. Immigration Policy**

Among capitalist countries, the U.S. is not unique in its reliance on immigrant workers. Immigrant workers are often more exploitable as they are often desperate and arrive with little legal protection and no choice but to work some of the most difficult and dangerous jobs. It is not possible for U.S. capitalism to function without immigrant labor (documented and undocumented). U.S. immigration policy does not call into question the need for immigrant workers, but attempts to achieve the most desirable flow of immigrants into the U.S. Too few immigrants mean industries miss out on competitive labor costs. Too many means an overall surplus of workers and an increase in the unemployed immigrant population which could lead to greater social costs like health care, housing, and other government assistance. Immigration policy targets both skilled and unskilled workers depending on economic demands. Often when the number of immigrants entering the U.S. increases too far beyond an economically desirable rate, changes to immigration policy are enacted.

The following are some historical examples of immigration policy changes in response to shifts in the economy:

In the 1930s, during The Great Depression, when unemployment was at its peak, the administrations of Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt deported an estimated 1.8 million Mexican-born immigrants, about 60% of whom were U.S. citizens.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1980s, there was a global recession, peaking in 1982, when the nationwide unemployment rate was 10.8%, the highest since the Great Depression.<sup>4</sup> During this time, official immigration to the U.S. at the southern border was increasing, with over one million migrants arrested at the border in 1985.<sup>5</sup> At that time, President Ronald Reagan called immigration a “threat to national security” and referred to migrants heading to the border as “terrorists and subversives.”<sup>6</sup> In 1986, after the peak year for border crossings, Congress passed immigration reform legislation to regulate the flow of immigration through “Pathways to Citizenship”. Undocumented immigrants (mainly from Mexico) who had been in the U.S. for at least four years could apply for citizenship. Ultimately about 2.7 million people were granted citizenship as a result of this reform.<sup>7</sup>

In 1994, the Clinton administration passed “Operation Gatekeeper” dramatically increasing the militarization of the border between the U.S. and Mexico. It doubled the budget of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to \$800 million. It doubled the number of border agents and the length of the border wall, and tripled the number of underground sensors and other surveillance equipment.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the Clinton years, most undocumented immigrants crossed the border near major cities. Under Operation Gatekeeper, the border wall was deliberately designed to funnel people into the most remote and dangerous terrain. Operation Gatekeeper was passed at the same time as the North American Free Trade Agreement, (NAFTA) anticipating NAFTA’s severe impact on Mexico’s already devastated economy and job availability. NAFTA created a porous border between the U.S., Mexico and Canada to assure the free flow of goods and capital – but not people. One major impact of NAFTA was the export of U.S. corn into Mexico. This GMO corn was subsidized by U.S. tax dollars and consequently

was sold below the cost of production of corn in Mexico. This resulted in Mexican farmers being unable to compete in producing this basic food crop, with many having to leave their farms seeking wage-labor in Mexican cities and the U.S. Once NAFTA and Operation Gatekeeper were in place, immigration arrests at the border increased and peaked in 2000, at 1.6 million arrests.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, from 1986 to 2008 the undocumented population in the U.S. grew from three million to twelve million. This increase happened even with the massive build-up of border security during this time: a five-fold increase in Border Patrol officers, a four-fold increase in hours patrolling the border, and a 20-fold increase in funding for border security.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the 2008 economic recession, the Obama administration similarly increased deportations (about three million in total, the highest of any administration<sup>11</sup>), and there was an increase in the number of overcrowded detention centers for children. This set the basis for the present immigration strategy under Trump.

The main result of this increasingly restricted border policy (besides making border crossing far more dangerous and deadly) was to make it more difficult for undocumented workers to cross the border. For decades the border had been more porous. Many people, more men than women, would cross into the U.S., work and send money back home. They could return home for a while and come back to the U.S., depending on the availability of work. People would often also return home if their work was seasonal or after they had experienced a long period of unemployment. But once the border became more militarized, this back and forth travel decreased and the numbers of undocumented workers remaining in the U.S. kept growing. A permanent undocumented, hyper-exploited workforce was created, where deportations were a constant threat.

### **Immigration of Families to the U.S. Increases**

The number of CBP arrests at the border is the official benchmark for measuring the numbers of people seeking to enter the U.S. without documentation. The number of border arrests peaked at 1.6 million in 2000, and declined afterwards, falling to 303,000 in 2017, the lowest point in half a century. So far, the year 2019 is on

pace to have the highest level of arrests at the border since 2007, with 811,016 arrests as of August 2019.<sup>12</sup>

In the peak years in the 1980s and in 2000, and until recently, the largest category of migrants arrested was “single adults.” But today the majority of those arrested are “family units.” The increase in the number of families fleeing to the U.S. reflects the horrific conditions that people are facing in their countries. As of August 2019, the number of people arrested as part of family units reached the highest ever on record, with 457,871 arrests.<sup>13</sup>

### **U.S. Imperialism in Mexico and Central America**

In 2017 Mexicans accounted for 25 percent of the 44.5 million immigrants living in the U.S. For about 40 years, the Mexican immigrant population had been growing but then it peaked in 2010 and began a gradual decline starting in 2014. Between 2016 and 2017 the Mexican immigrant population decreased by about 300,000 from 11.6 million to 11.3 million.<sup>14</sup>

For decades migration from Mexico to the U.S. mainly consisted of workers seeking economic opportunity in low-skilled jobs. Environmental pressures along with the violence resulting from the multibillion-dollar drug trade bringing drugs into the U.S. have been key factors in immigration as well. The violence that emerged from cartels that control the drug trafficking has been responsible for the murder or disappearance of an estimated 200,000 people in Mexico since 2006.<sup>15</sup> The violence, terror and extortion that these cartels have exerted over parts of Mexico continue to force many to flee for their lives.

But since 2014, an improved Mexican economy and increased immigration enforcement in the U.S., has contributed to a decrease in Mexican migration. More Mexican immigrants have returned to Mexico than have migrated to the U.S. Border arrests of Mexicans are at their lowest point in 40 years.<sup>16</sup> Mexico is no longer the leading country of origin of recent immigrants at the southern border.

In 2017, the number of migrants from the so-called “Northern Triangle” (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras) increased, and made up more than 50% of all migrants at the southern border.<sup>17</sup> In Guatemala and

Honduras half the population lives in poverty. In all three countries there are close to 16 million people under the age of 24 who are unemployed and receive no government assistance. Their youth unemployment is about 20%. The Northern Triangle is also home to some of the highest murder rates in the world, with rampant gang violence, drug trafficking and kidnappings.<sup>18</sup>

These three countries have long been victims of U.S. imperialist policies. U.S. corporations have robbed them of their resources, and when their democratically elected governments have resisted this pillage, they have been overthrown and replaced by brutal U.S.-backed military dictatorships. Many of the military dictators and officers throughout Central America were trained at the “School of the Americas” (aka the “School of Assassins”), now known as the “Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation” in Fort Benning, Georgia. These classes continue to teach how to conduct military coups, and carry out torture and terror.<sup>19</sup>

In 1954, the democratically elected President of Guatemala, Jacobo Arbenz, was overthrown by a CIA coup for carrying out modest land reform. At the time of the coup, the United Fruit Company owned 42% of Guatemala’s farmland, its telephone and telegraph facilities, controlled its major harbor, monopolized its banana exports, and owned nearly all the railroad tracks in the country.<sup>20</sup> After the coup, the U.S. installed a series of military dictators, guaranteeing the dominance of United Fruit and opening up the country to other U.S. corporations. From 1960 to 1996 the military carried out a civil war primarily against the indigenous Mayan population’s resistance, killing over 200,000 people, these massacres were classified as genocide by the United Nations.<sup>21</sup> This violence has not stopped as Guatemala has been ruled by one corrupt regime after another.

In the 1980s, under the Reagan administration, the U.S. military supported the regime in El Salvador’s brutal war against a peasant guerrilla resistance, killing over 75,000. The U.S. government had poured billions of dollars into arming and training El Salvador’s police, National Guard, army, and air force, which attacked the population with white phosphorus and napalm bombs. U.S. Special Forces and the CIA played a major role in creating paramilitary security forces, known as “death

squads” that were responsible for much of the killing.<sup>22</sup> El Salvador has never recovered from the civil war, and remains an extremely poor country. At the end of the civil war, members of the gang MS-13 – which developed among young Salvadoran immigrants in response to the gangs they confronted in the Los Angeles area in the 1970s and 1980s – were deported to El Salvador.<sup>23</sup> Since then the gang has grown into a large, extremely violent criminal organization, spreading throughout Canada, the U.S., Mexico and Central America. El Salvador is riddled with gang violence, high murder rates, torture, rape and kidnapping, which especially targets women and children.

In 1983 the U.S. trained the Honduran military, using it to defend U.S. corporate interests and using Honduras as a staging area for the Contras fighting in Nicaragua. The society was militarized, government opponents were tortured and death squads terrorized and killed civilians. In 2009, the Obama administration actively supported a military coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya. The coup put in place another far right administration. The violence escalated in 2011 and 2012, and Honduras still has the highest murder rate in the world.<sup>24</sup>

It is U.S. imperialism that helped create the economic instability, extreme violence and desperation that has pushed hundreds of thousands to flee Central America. In addition to the violence, nearly two-thirds of the labor force is either unemployed or underemployed.<sup>25</sup>

### **Climate Disruption as a Factor**

Across the globe, greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise, causing record temperatures, glacier melt, and more extreme weather everywhere. Climate disruption has caused serious droughts, destroying many farmlands, and increasing food shortages. Almost 100,000 families in Honduras lack adequate food.<sup>26</sup> Guatemalan families are the largest group of Central American people fleeing to the U.S.

Of the more than 688,000 unaccompanied minors and families who have been arrested by U.S. Border Patrol agents since October of 2018, Guatemalans comprise 48%, up from 37% the previous two years.<sup>27</sup> In addition to constant political repression and violence, the increase in migration from Guatemala has been caused

by ecological disruption due to climate change, especially in the highland regions of Guatemala.<sup>28</sup> The western highlands cover about twenty percent of Guatemala, and the population is mostly indigenous and agrarian. The malnutrition rate is the highest in the Western hemisphere, estimated at about 65%.<sup>29</sup> In the past, grain and vegetable harvests could feed families for over a year but now they are lucky to last a few months.<sup>30</sup> The growing season is getting shorter and shorter, leaving families desperate for longer periods of time. There are regular vast temperature fluctuations, with sudden heat surges followed by morning frosts, and sudden rainfall.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the equivalent of six months of rain will fall in a single week, flooding the area and destroying the crops.<sup>32</sup> The surging temperatures have led to an influx of crop-destroying insects and fungi, requiring more intensive labor, and the use of expensive fertilizers and pesticides.<sup>33</sup> Many families relied on large farms as a source of seasonal wage labor. But many of these large farms have had to close down completely due to increased international competition, intensified by the extreme weather brought on by climate change. On many of these larger farms, 100% of the workers have left for the U.S. with their families.<sup>34</sup>

Coffee growing has also been a major source of income in the region, employing about 120,000 small-scale farmers.<sup>35</sup> Since 2017, most farmers have been operating at a loss, causing many to abandon their farms completely. Production costs for Guatemala’s coffee farmers have increased, as they’ve been forced to buy fertilizers and pesticides to deal with the shrinking growing season and increased pests.<sup>36</sup> One of the worst destroyers is a fungus called “coffee rust” which weakens the plant over time, which decreases the yield, eventually killing it.<sup>37</sup> Internationally, the disrupted climate, especially the warmer temperatures, has been accelerating the spread of coffee rust. This has led some scientists to think coffee itself could be at risk, possibly declining by over 80% by 2050.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Brazilian coffee has become heavily industrialized and mechanized, which has significantly driven down the price of coffee, from \$2.20 per pound in 2015 to a low of 86 cents per pound in 2019.<sup>39</sup> The collapse of this sector of the agrarian economy has greatly contributed to the increase in Guatemalan migration.<sup>40</sup>

## **Immigration Restrictions Tighten Again**

According to U.S. law, people seeking asylum, who are apprehended by a CBP officer, cannot be deported until they have been screened by an asylum officer to see if they meet the criteria that they have a “credible fear” of persecution in their home country.<sup>41</sup> The vast majority of these asylum cases are ultimately rejected by a judge.<sup>42</sup> Currently the backlog in asylum hearings is about 809,000, a quadruple increase since 2008. The average wait for a hearing is about 1.5 years.<sup>43</sup> Cases that result in asylum being granted usually take four years to be completed.<sup>44</sup> During this time, asylum seekers are usually thrown into horrible detention facilities, and then sometimes released into the U.S. while they await a hearing, with different policies for adults without children, unaccompanied minors, and families. Adults without children can be detained the longest, with few restrictions on duration of detention.

## **Expedited Removal, and the “Flores Agreement”**

At the end of the George W. Bush administration, and increasingly under the Obama administration, a process known as “Expedited Removal” began to be implemented. This policy allowed people to be deported without going before an immigration judge. Typically, after being arrested by a Border Patrol agent, a migrant would be transferred to ICE custody within 72 hours, and deported as soon as a deportation order could be signed. This practice was partially responsible for the skyrocketing numbers of deportations under the Obama administration.<sup>45</sup>

But due to a 1997 court case known as the “Flores Agreement”, which restricts the detention of children, “expedited removal” does not apply to unaccompanied minors and families. The rule for unaccompanied minors is that they must be released from a detention facility to the Department of Health and Human Services within 72 hours, where they are detained until notified of a guaranteed hearing. Under a 2015 court ruling, families can’t be detained indefinitely, and in general must be released into the U.S. after about 20 days. And these rules apply whether asylum seekers present themselves to the CBP at a designated port of entry (which is the legal route), or are apprehended in the U.S. by a CBP agent for crossing illegally. Despite

Trump’s claims, most asylum seekers released in the U.S. awaiting their hearings do show up for court.<sup>46</sup>

As the numbers of people arriving at the U.S. southern border has increased again, the Trump administration has tried both legally and illegally to increase deportations, and decrease the number of people entering the country. In April 2018 under the so-called “Zero Tolerance” policy, for two months the Trump administration applied “Expedited Removal” to families, separating parents from children. Family separation like this was an exception under the Obama administration, but became the rule under Trump. As soon as it was implemented, the administration was challenged in the courts and the practice was ordered to stop by June 2018. The official estimate was that 3,000 children had been separated from their parents. But according to Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) officials, tracking systems for children are so inadequate that the total number of children separated from their parents is probably thousands more than the official number. Many of these children will likely never see their parents again. Several reports have documented that the majority of these children showed signs of PTSD and severe emotional trauma.<sup>47</sup>

As the numbers of migrants has increased, coupled with the enormous backlog of cases, the ports of entry have become overloaded. And now there is a long delay even to present oneself to a CBP agent at a port of entry. The majority of recent migrants have been stuck waiting in Mexico to turn themselves in to CBP and wait for a hearing. So instead of waiting at the Mexican border to apply for asylum, many migrants have chosen to be apprehended after having illegally crossed into U.S. territory. Once apprehended in the U.S., they can declare themselves asylum seekers and if they are with family members can, hopefully, wait together to be released into the U.S. to await their asylum hearing.<sup>48</sup> This method of seeking asylum has created new human trafficking methods from Central America to the U.S.

The trek from Central America is a long and dangerous journey, with migrants facing robbery, rape, and kidnapping by traffickers who sell them into slavery or the drug trade, where they can be murdered and disappear forever. In the best of cases, paying a smuggler is expensive and risky, often costing multiple family

fortunes and loans, risking everything one has. Part of the expense has been for the smugglers to take people to remote areas where they can avoid the border patrol as they cross into the U.S. But now the smugglers can simply drop families off anywhere past the Mexican border while they wait for CBP authorities to arrest them and then apply for asylum. This is a much easier journey for the smugglers to make. And some Mexican smugglers are now using express buses to take Guatemalan migrants directly to the U.S. border without stopping or staying the night along the way, charging up to \$7,000 per adult with a child.<sup>49</sup> At the U.S.-Mexico border, migrants are put into large groups, sometimes of more than 300 adults and children. They walk straight across the border, often stepping over barriers in long, coordinated lines.<sup>50</sup> They then turn themselves in to U.S. Border Patrol agents to begin asylum claims. In the last three months of 2018, U.S. border agents have apprehended at least 70 groups of 100 or more migrants, a fivefold increase from the previous year.<sup>51</sup> An estimated 12,000 parents and children have arrived in these large groups, creating tens of millions of dollars in trafficking fees.<sup>52</sup> Others, who cannot afford such an expense have banded together in “caravans” of hundreds of women, children and men to make the long journey on foot together, using their numbers as protection.<sup>53</sup> In total, asylum seekers made up about half of new immigration cases last year, a record 159,590 cases.<sup>54</sup>

In response to the increasing numbers of adults with children applying for asylum, instead of releasing immigrants into the U.S. to await their asylum hearings, the Trump administration has pushed for indefinite detention of immigrants. In the past two years, release rates for asylum seekers fell from 92% to less than 4%. In July 2018, a federal judge blocked the administration’s indefinite detention of asylum seekers.<sup>55</sup> In August 2019, the Trump administration announced that it was overturning the decades-long Flores Agreement.<sup>56</sup> This change allows for the indefinite detention of families. So instead of separating adults from children in order to more quickly process and deport them, and instead of releasing them into the U.S. after about 20 days, the Trump administration has chosen to detain them indefinitely. Overall, the increase in the number of families coming to the U.S. for survival, combined with a growing backlog of asylum cases, on top of policies of

indefinite detention, have meant that an already overcrowded, dilapidated detention system has been turned into a nightmare.

### **A Disastrous Immigration System is Made Worse**

These callous policies of indefinite detention and deportation of children and families did not at all begin with the Trump administration. The Obama administration developed what was called the “Consequence Delivery System,” which included prolonged detention, criminal charges, and deliberate deportation of migrants to remote locations in their home countries in order to try to make the journey to cross the border so difficult that people wouldn’t attempt it again.<sup>57</sup> But it didn’t work. And now, as the numbers of immigrants arrested at the border have surged to their highest point since 2007, what was already a bad system has become far worse.

The detention facilities are packed to capacity with worsening conditions. Reports have come out about detainees, including children, being soaked in urine with no access to showers or basic hygiene. Children have gone unfed and unwashed, crammed into overcrowded cells with contagious diseases.<sup>58</sup> In May, Homeland Security’s Inspector General’s office found that as many as 900 people were being held in a Border Patrol facility built for 125 people. One cell, with a listed maximum capacity of 12 people, held 76.<sup>59</sup> According to former DHS Secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen, no child died in CBP custody during the Obama administration. At least six children have died in CBP custody since 2018.<sup>60</sup>

The system is so overloaded that the average asylum case takes about 578 days to complete – and that means most immigrants are being held in prison-like conditions for over one year.<sup>61</sup> During the Obama administration, the average daily population of immigrants in detention stayed between 30,000 and 40,000.<sup>62</sup> In 2018, under Trump, the average daily population was 45,890, and it has continued to rise this year.<sup>63</sup> As of August 2019, more than 50,000 people were being held in ICE facilities; more than 20,000 people were in CBP centers; and more than 11,000 children were in the custody of HHS, held for an average of 45 days.<sup>64</sup> From December 2018 to June 2019, an estimated 180,000 migrant family members were released into the U.S. to await asylum hearings.<sup>65</sup> In September 2019, the Trump

administration decided to train Border Patrol agents to screen migrant families seeking asylum, instead of trained asylum officers.<sup>66</sup> The same law enforcement agents who detain the families would also interview them to determine whether they have “credible fear” about returning to their countries, and thus qualify for U.S. protection.<sup>67</sup> It is not hard to imagine that Border Patrol agents will be much less likely to approve asylum requests for the migrant families they are trying to deport.

In response, Trump and Homeland Security officials have tried to tighten up the rules around applying for asylum. The administration attempted to ban people who illegally crossed from seeking asylum altogether, which would mean they could immediately deport them and bypass any judicial process, and thereby skip detention. The ban was quickly struck down in court.<sup>68</sup> But since 2018, the administration has restricted the number of asylum seekers legally trying to present themselves at ports of entry, allowing in only a small number of people each day – a policy they call “metering,” which has added to the numbers of migrants stuck in Mexico.<sup>69</sup> Mexico has become increasingly overwhelmed by the numbers of migrants at the border. As a result, many Mexican border towns near ports of entry have had rapid influxes of migrants that can’t be kept in existing detention facilities in Mexico.

Migrants have been forced to sleep on the ground and in the hallways of government offices, been held in a wrestling arena, a fairground, and on outdoor basketball courts.<sup>70</sup> The government has set up fenced-in areas underneath highway overpasses where migrants sleep on the ground. Mexico’s detention centers have at times reached five times their capacity.<sup>71</sup> Detainees at some centers have endured bedbug infestations, overflowing toilets, days without showers, with shortages of food and health care, often in extreme heat or cold.<sup>72</sup> In some Mexican border towns an anti-immigrant sentiment has developed and violent anti-immigrant demonstrations have attacked migrants as they cluster in vulnerable groups.<sup>73</sup>

### **Deportations are Increasing Again**

Under the Obama administration, total ICE deportations were above 385,000 each year during 2009-2011, and peaked at 409,849 in 2012. Deportations

then dropped to below 250,000 in 2015 and 2016. Under Trump, deportations fell to 226,119 in 2017, but then went up to over 250,000 in 2018, and hit a high of 282,242 as of June 2019.<sup>74</sup>

Trump has also pursued a policy of more public ICE raids, with people being arrested in front of schools, in shopping centers and outside court houses.<sup>75</sup> The raids have also targeted immigration activists and undocumented workers for workplace organizing. In August 2019, ICE arrested 680 workers at seven chicken processing plants in Mississippi. Officials said it was the largest raid in a single state in U.S. history. They were likely targeted because workers in one of the larger plants won a harassment lawsuit last year, which forced the company to pay them \$3.75 million.<sup>76</sup>

In September 2017, Trump tried to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, protecting about 800,000 immigrants from deportation.<sup>77</sup> DACA is a program that was implemented by Obama in 2012, providing temporary protection from deportation to immigrants who arrived here as children and were younger than 31 years old as of June 2012. It allowed undocumented immigrants to come out of the shadows, get drivers’ licenses and government issued identification, and to work and go to school without the fear of deportation. It was not a step toward citizenship and DACA status had to be renewed every two years. According to the Pew Research Center, an estimated 1.2 million people were eligible for DACA.

In September 2017 Trump ordered the cessation of accepting new DACA applications and stopped granting renewals for people covered under DACA. The cessation of all new applications was successful, and meant tens of thousands of immigrants who were younger than 15 years old in 2017 can no longer receive DACA protection.<sup>78</sup> The order to stop renewal applications was blocked by a Federal judge in January 2018, so renewals were again accepted. But the Trump administration has appealed that ruling and the Supreme Court will decide the fate of the DACA program around November 2019.

In addition, Trump has tried to revoke what is called Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for thousands of immigrants. TPS applied to immigrants who are

temporarily unable to safely return to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. For decades, many undocumented immigrants have been allowed to live and work in the U.S. under TPS. In 2018, the Trump administration pushed to end TPS status for immigrants from ten countries.<sup>79</sup> Over 300,000 people from countries such as El Salvador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Sudan were threatened with having their legal protections removed, and told they would have to leave the U.S. within 2.5 years or risk deportation. Again, a Federal judge blocked this and the case is under appeal by the Trump administration.

### **Mexico as U.S. Border Control**

The Trump administration has also pushed to increase Mexico's role in U.S. border control. In June, after threatening to impose enormous tariffs on Mexico, Trump made an agreement with Mexico's new President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, that essentially outsources much of the detention, deportation and processing of migrants seeking asylum in the U.S. to Mexico.<sup>80</sup> Migrants are to remain in or be deported to Mexico while they await asylum under a policy known as "Remain in Mexico." In addition, Obrador agreed to an increased militarization of Mexico's southern border with Guatemala, sending 6,000 Mexican troops to that border.<sup>81</sup>

The "Remain in Mexico" policy expands a policy implemented during the Obama administration. Starting in 2014, the Obama administration began providing millions of dollars for Mexico to control immigration, including equipment and training. Mexican authorities increased their apprehension rate of Central Americans by 85% in 2014. Since 2014, the U.S. has given over \$100 million to Mexico for border security. The new agreement continues this funding while tremendously increasing Mexico's overall role in restricting U.S. immigration.

In addition to the "Remain in Mexico" agreement, the Trump administration recently tried to unilaterally impose a new asylum policy on Mexico, the "Safe Third Country Agreement."<sup>82</sup> A similar agreement already exists between the U.S. and Canada. It states that those seeking refugee status are required to request refugee

protection in the first "safe country" they arrive in. Obviously, the situation is very different on the southern border. If Mexico is designated a "safe third country," this would mean that immigrants entering and passing through Mexico would have to apply for asylum from Mexico, a "safe third country" before applying for asylum in the U.S. If they don't, they would not be eligible for asylum in the U.S. They would be deported to Mexico where they could only apply for asylum in Mexico. The Mexican government hasn't accepted this so-called agreement. It was also blocked and modified by a number of Federal judges in the U.S. The U.S. Supreme Court recently upheld the Trump policy while lower courts go through the appeal process.<sup>83</sup> In cities along the Texas border with Mexico, the U.S. government has begun to set up makeshift tents to use as courthouses in order to expedite the process of deporting asylum seekers to Mexico.<sup>84</sup>

The Trump administration also tried to designate Guatemala as a "safe third country." This would require immigrants from El Salvador and Honduras to apply for asylum in Guatemala. If they try to go directly to the U.S. to apply for asylum, they would be deported to Guatemala. Guatemala's government has also rejected this policy.<sup>85</sup>

With or without a "Safe Third Country" policy, the new U.S.-Mexico agreement will significantly increase Mexico's role in U.S. immigration policing. The "Remain in Mexico" policy, along with enhanced border security both at the U.S.-Mexico border and at the Mexico-Guatemala border, will greatly increase the number of undocumented immigrants trapped in Mexico, facing even worse detention conditions than they would in the U.S.

Some Mexican politicians have tried to paint the new agreement as a benefit to the Mexican economy. According to the Washington Post, a group of businessmen in Tijuana, Mexico claimed that there are thousands of job openings at the city's assembly plants ("maquiladoras"), and that they see "a great opportunity" for Central American migrants to work in the factories.<sup>86</sup> They pointed to the availability of work at low wages as a main reason why they think the "Remain in Mexico" plan will succeed, claiming there are 100,000 jobs available to Central American asylum seekers across



the country.<sup>87</sup> And according to the interior minister, Sánchez Cordero, “We want them to be included in society...and that they accept the offer of employment that we are giving them.”<sup>88</sup> In other words, the “Remain in Mexico” policy can also be used as a way to trap a large number of desperate refugees into conditions of extremely exploited labor in order to enrich factory owners.

Some analysts expect that the availability of some jobs may be real, and could increase due to the newly signed United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (also known as the new NAFTA).<sup>89</sup> Under the new trade agreement, new production quota systems have been put in place. In the old NAFTA agreement, in order to qualify as tariff-free, 62.5% of vehicle components had to be produced in one of the three countries (the U.S., Mexico or Canada). But now, under the new agreement, that quota has increased to 75%. The majority of that increase is expected to come from factories in Mexico, where labor is the cheapest, and it has the additional goal of decreasing dependency on China for parts.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps, the “Remain in Mexico” policy will end up supplying some low wage migrant workers to these new factories. But it obviously won’t address the real problems facing people fleeing intolerable conditions in their homelands.

### **The Democrats Have Been Complicit**

Public opposition to draconian immigration policies has existed for some time and has accelerated under Trump’s increasingly repressive edicts. This has taken on many forms – from blocking the deportation of individuals, to demonstrating at ICE headquarters across the country and major border crossings, and demanding the closing of detention centers. Local and state level politicians, usually Democrats, have stated their support for these efforts resulting in an estimated 564 cities, counties or states declaring they have adopted sanctuary policies. These declarations put up some barriers to the deportation process, mainly that local, county or state law enforcement will not actively cooperate with Federal immigration authorities, which means they will not demand proof of citizenship, nor turn over citizenship information to ICE and other agencies unless demanded under court order. But they don’t really provide much protection or physical and financial support for undocumented migrants. They

certainly do not defend people against being arrested by Federal agents.

In the recent period, with the revelation of the horrific conditions in detention centers and the detention and separation of children, a number of Democrats have made trips to the border to show their opposition. But while most Democrats have criticized the horrors of Trump’s immigration policies, they have not only allowed these policies to continue, but they have voted to expand them as well.

In June 2019, Congress passed (with majority Democratic Party support) a \$4.6 billion emergency border aid bill.<sup>91</sup> This funding is in addition to the \$1.37 billion Congress approved in February 2019 to build an additional 55 miles of a border wall.<sup>92</sup> The emergency bill goes primarily to the Department of Homeland Security, CBP, and ICE to expand their agencies. The Democrats agreed to increase funding to ICE, specifically designated to increase the number of daily detainees by 5,000, and to build more detention facilities to reduce the overcrowding but also in order to detain even more people, in anticipation of an even larger number of migrants trying to come to the U.S. Some funds are intended to speed up the processing of cases by adding judges and immigration attorneys, and thereby decreasing the backlog of cases. But the majority of the funds will be used to strengthen and modernize the agencies, and improve their surveillance equipment and ability to share information. In essence this bill is a massive increase in funds for processing, housing, and detaining an anticipated influx of migrants, and was passed with support from a majority of Democrats.

Nancy Pelosi, Democratic Party Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and one of the most powerful Democratic Party leaders, tried to justify her support for the emergency funding. She said, “in order to get resources to the children fastest, we will reluctantly pass the Senate bill. [But] we will do so with a battle cry as to how we go forward to protect children in a way that truly honors their dignity and worth.” In other words, the Democrats, just like Trump, promise indefinite detention of families and children and increased deportations, but they promise it will be done with more “dignity”.

At the same time, Congress passed the largest military budget in U.S. history, which will guarantee even more funds to increase the size of CBP, DHS, ICE, and expand the border wall and numbers of agents. Under the bill, military spending would rise from \$716 billion this year to \$738 billion in 2020, and to \$740.5 billion in 2021.<sup>93</sup> And due to a recent Supreme Court ruling, which allows the inclusion of border security spending in overall Pentagon funding, the Trump administration will use the new military funding to accelerate the extension of border wall construction.<sup>94</sup> And, wasting no time, in September 2019, Secretary of Defense, Mark Esper authorized the diverting of \$3.6 billion in military construction funds to pay for eleven new border wall projects on the southern border with Mexico.<sup>95</sup> Combined with the previous \$1.37 billion from February 2019, this money will allow Trump to carry out his election promise to increase the border wall. It was handed to him by the Democratic Party, which ultimately gave him more support than the Republicans.

### **Increasing Temporary Work Visas**

At the same time as immigration restrictions are tightening, corporations, primarily in food processing and agriculture, have increased their use of temporary work visas (H2-A and H2-B) to make up for what they claim has been a shortage of immigrant workers.<sup>96</sup>

Since 2016, the number of U.S. agricultural visas (H2-A) has grown from 165,000 to 242,000, a record high. And last year, the U.S. issued nearly 200,000 of these H2-A visas.<sup>97</sup> Many employers prefer temporary work visas because they can hire workers when work is needed, and end the contracts when work isn't needed. Trump has frequently touted the idea of expanding the temporary visa program to a wider category of workers as the best alternative to illegal entry into the U.S. In addition, recently the National Association of Manufacturers issued a report on immigration calling for an expansion of guest worker programs in order to meet a variety of business needs.<sup>98</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The ruling class of the U.S. understands that there will be increasing numbers of people forced to flee from countries to the south of the U.S. as well as other continents. From their perspective it is necessary to

prevent an unregulated flow of people into the U.S. They want to control the flow to ensure a constant supply of labor that works under precarious conditions, whether as workers in the fields or as programmers in Silicon Valley. To accomplish this, the politicians who represent their interests are ready to implement new inhumane immigration controls, the "hardening" and militarization of the border, and ICE raids throughout the U.S.

It is the system of capitalism that is responsible for the massive disruption of the lives of millions of people. And in reality, both Democrats and Republicans have always defended this system and they always will. They are not going to stop the stripping of the resources and the distortion of the economies of these countries. They won't stop supporting military dictatorships. Neither will they aid in the reconstruction of areas destroyed by the wars carried out to maintain U.S. corporate control. And their systematic destruction of the Earth's ecosystems and global climate disruption only guarantees an increasing number of climate refugees around the world.

Trump's racist, fear-mongering rants may appeal to some. And the concern the liberal Democrats show for children, who are separated from their parents and caged in horrific conditions in U.S. detention centers may sound convincing. But all these politicians point to the people immigrating to the U.S. as the problem – not the system that has created intolerable situations for them in their home countries.

These politicians want the U.S. population to see the people forced to migrate to the U.S. as a threat to their existence. They are not! This is the old strategy of divide and control. In the workplaces the bosses want people to believe that it is this or that group of workers who are making their work more difficult. In the neighborhoods, the finger is pointed at "these or those people" who are supposedly making life worse or more dangerous. Within the U.S., increasing numbers of people are also being pushed from their homes. And while they do not have to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to seek shelter, more than a half a million people in the U.S. live without regular shelter. Meanwhile the politicians celebrate the construction of massive office buildings and luxury apartments while claiming that building

housing for working people and people without homes is impossible.

The workers already in the United States have the same interests as those who are forced to flee from their homelands. The majority of immigrants are workers too, who face the consequences of the capitalist system run by the same wealthy capitalist class. Across the world, our futures are linked together regardless of where we were born. We have no common interest with those who want us to believe that we are linked to them simply because of our citizenship. We have no reason to respect these borders that divide us. We occupy the same planet. And our home is being destroyed by the predatory nature of this system of capitalism – a system that knows no boundaries when it comes to seeking profits. We have every reason to stand together in struggle to bring a halt to the reckless destruction of our lives and our planet by those who hold power today, who base themselves on a system of oppression and exploitation. If we continue to leave our future in the hands of the capitalist class, we have everything to lose. If we stand together and fight for our future, we have a world to win.

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