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Migrant Caravan: Survival is Not a Crime

The caravan of a few thousand Central American refugees traveling to the U.S.-Mexico border is a desperate journey of survival. People are walking and sometimes riding on trucks to the border, more than 1000 miles away, to apply for asylum. This may be the largest single caravan of migrants to the U.S. in recent history, but it is not that unusual. For decades smaller caravans of migrants have traveled from Central America seeking asylum in the U.S. The decision to leave their home countries and their families, and risk their lives in this journey is not an easy one. In their home countries migrants face brutal and corrupt governments, gang death threats, crippling poverty, and environmental catastrophe. Thousands of farmers have been driven from their lands by years of drought that makes farming impossible. Migrants travel in caravans as a way to provide some security against gangs that regularly attack them throughout their journey, often robbing, raping, kidnapping or killing them.

This recent caravan began in Honduras with about 150 migrants in response to the miserable living conditions there. But the caravan swelled to about 7,000 people once word spread and attracted migrants throughout the country and from Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. More than half of the migrants are women and young girls. One mother traveling with her two daughters said about the journey: “We prefer to die on the American border than die in Honduras from hunger.”

An initial slogan of the caravan was: “The violence and poverty is expelling us.” In Honduras, more than 66% of the population lives in poverty, and 20% live on less than \$1.90 per day, regularly going without food during the year. In the poorest areas, 49% of people suffer from malnutrition and 34% of children have stunted development. Over 15% of the population is unemployed. With one of the highest murder rates in the world, Honduras is overwhelmed by the armed violence of criminal gangs and corrupt government, police and military forces.

President Trump has decided to use the images of migrants fleeing life-and-death situations as a way to spew his vile racism, hoping that the fear and hatred he stokes will lead to support for Republicans in the mid-term elections and his 2020 re-election campaign. After repeatedly referring to the migrants as “criminals” who are planning an “invasion” of the U.S., Trump has sent over 5,200 active-duty troops to the U.S.-Mexico border to assist the Border Patrol. That is the same number of U.S. troops in Iraq. This is a blatant ploy to build up people’s fear and hatred of immigrants.



Trump’s attacks on immigrants are nothing new. Both Democratic and Republican administrations try to paint immigrants as villains who pose a threat. Under the Obama administration, immigrants were deported in record numbers. So far, fewer immigrants have been deported under the Trump administration than during any year under the Obama administration. In 2014 when Secretary of State Hilary Clinton was asked about the tens of thousands of migrant children who have come to the border seeking asylum, she responded: “We have to send a clear message: Just because your child gets across the border, that doesn’t mean the child gets to stay.” Both Democrats and Republicans are responsible for attacking immigrants and portraying them as if they were criminals.

The real criminals are not migrants fighting for survival. The real criminals are those who are responsible for the horrific conditions of violence and poverty that people are fleeing. And it is the U.S. government along with U.S. corporations who are overwhelmingly responsible. For decades, the U.S. has supported brutal regimes throughout Central America. Many of the military dictatorships from the region were trained at U.S. bases and backed by U.S. funds. In 2009, the Obama administration supported a military coup that overthrew the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya in Honduras, paving the way to the corrupt military dictatorship that governs there today. These policies serve to help U.S. manufacturing and agricultural corporations continue to suck the wealth

out of Central America through access to resources and extremely low-paid workers.

This is the old trick of divide and conquer. To keep control, politicians encourage divisions based on nationalism, racism, and other prejudices that their system creates. The last thing politicians and those who run this society want us to recognize is that immigrants and native-born workers are on the same side of the same fight, facing the same common enemy. Migrants are fighting to survive the poverty and decay that banks and corporations, backed by the U.S. government, have imposed on their countries. And here in the U.S. it is the same banks, the same corporations and the same politicians that are responsible for the destruction of our environment, the loss of our jobs, our rip-off healthcare, our unaffordable housing, our inadequate schools, our endless debt, and the violence that plagues our whole society.

Every human being deserves the right to a fulfilling life. What stands in our way is not other workers. What stands in our way is a system that operates at our expense to benefit the rich – a system of capitalism which Trump, just like his predecessors, serves to protect. We can’t allow ourselves to be trapped by their lies. We have every reason to stand together – immigrant and native-born, legal and undocumented, black and white. Collectively, it is our labor that makes their system work for them, and together we have the ability to replace it with one that works for us.

UPS Teamsters—Voting No is Not Enough!

Teamsters Union members who work for UPS recently voted to reject a proposed contract. But the top officials of the Teamsters Union said that the voters actually approved the contract. The vote was 46 percent approving and 54 percent turning it down. But the union leadership said that fewer than 50 percent of the eligible members voted, and the rules require a two-thirds majority to turn it down. What kind of a rule is that? One that gives the union officials way more control than they should have. The workers had previously voted overwhelmingly to authorize a strike if the contract was defeated. But these officials found a legalistic way to avoid leading a strike.



This is the Teamsters’ biggest contract, representing around 250,000 workers. This contract is up for renewal every five years. Whatever the workers get or don’t get, they are stuck with it for a long time, unless they are ready to make a fight for what they need. So what were some of the main issues over which the workers were ready to strike?

- The union leadership asked for and got a \$13 per hour minimum wage for part-time workers. This is not a living wage. Even Amazon just announced a \$15 minimum for workers doing similar work. Why not at least fight for the same pay as them?
- UPS wants to start a two-tier pay structure for truck drivers, with one tier for part-time weekend work that is less than what other drivers get. The official Teamsters leadership agreed. This would mean different pay for the same work for the same company – a clear attempt to divide the workers.
- The contract does not require UPS to create any more full-time jobs. They can continue to maximize their use of part-time workers to minimize costs through the lower minimum wage and the weekend rate.
- The contract continues to let UPS pit some workers against others through the use of subcontractors for some of the work that UPS Teamsters can do.
- The contract fails to address forced overtime issues that involve not only exhausting shifts but harassment of workers by supervisors.

Because the workers voted “No!” on the contract, all of these issues should be on the table. And the workers should be able to vote on any revisions. But the union leadership says it is going back to the table with the company because some regional contracts were not approved and it will look at all issues. The union officials’ claim that the national contract was approved means that they won’t submit it again to a vote. So what can we seriously expect?

The UPS Package contract was not the only one that workers voted down. UPS Freight handles large items and has a much smaller group of workers with a separate contract. They also voted their contract down. The union leadership says they renegotiated it and the workers should vote for it. But it’s almost the same. As of this writing, the revote hasn’t happened yet.

The situation of UPS workers is similar to what many workers face, whether they have a union or not. All bosses try to minimize costs at the workers’ expense. Bosses try all kinds of ways to divide workers against each other – full-time versus part-time, by race and gender, and so on. If we have a union, the officials often seem to be more on the bosses’ side than the workers’ side. So, what should we do?

First of all, workers need to understand that it’s essential to organize ourselves. The real union is the rank-and-file workers, not the officialdom like the Teamsters with its headquarters in Washington, DC within walking distance of the Capitol and the White House. If workers are to win anything, it will be because we organize ourselves to take on both the bosses and the official union leadership. Can it be done? In 1997, a rank-and-file upsurge by UPS workers led to a 16-day strike that won major concessions from UPS. So it can be done. It’s been done. Some UPS workers today still remember that strike. This year the workers voted to authorize a strike if they weren’t satisfied with the proposed contract, which they voted down. The union leadership tries to stand in the way while the workers are ready to fight. But the officials can’t drive the trucks and sort the packages in the warehouses. Workers need to recognize our power and use it.

A Nation of Immigrants – One Working Class

The U.S. is supposedly a nation of immigrants – people who chose to come here. The real history is quite different. Yes, the majority of people who populate the U.S. were immigrants or descended from immigrants. But there were millions of people living here before the European invasion. Estimates say there were 12 million people living here – referred to today as “Native Americans.” Their ancestors came here an estimated 30,000 years ago. With the European invasion, genocide began with diseases carried by Europeans and continued with the systematic massacres of native people who were driven from their homes. By the late 1800s the native population had been reduced to about 250,000. Another population, of close to half a million people, was brought here involuntarily from Africa, enslaved and violently ripped from their homes. Many more Africans were brought from the Caribbean and sold as slaves to work on the massive plantations.

Everyone else living in the U.S. is an immigrant or descended from immigrants. Some were wealthy, seeking to exploit the riches they found. The rest migrated, most escaping from intolerable conditions of poverty, wars, and persecution – all looking for a better life.

The colonies were run by elites from Europe. The people who did most of the work in the northern colonies were poor Europeans. Many Europeans came as “indentured servants” – people who signed a contract to work for an employer for a number of years in exchange for travel.

Between 1840 and 1850, almost 20 percent of Ireland’s entire population came to the U.S. to work. They fled the famine in Ireland where the British rulers imposed massive starvation on the population. At the same time hundreds

of thousands of Chinese workers fled horrific conditions in China and immigrated to the West Coast, looking for jobs. Many worked building the transcontinental railroad, and in the logging and mining camps.

In 1848 the U.S. fought a war to expand its empire, seizing the entire northern part of Mexico. The states of California, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona were created and the 200,000 inhabitants of what had been Mexico, found themselves now in the U.S. After the Civil War, there was a huge expansion of U.S. industry. Between 1882 and 1914, twenty million immigrants came to the U.S., from all over Europe – from Germany, Scandinavia, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Russia, and many other countries to work in the factories.

Immigration is usually a political issue, with politicians playing on people’s insecurities. Despite the fear-mongering of Trump and other politicians, there is not an invasion from Mexico or Central America. The largest immigration today is from China, India and countries in Southeast Asia. In fact, immigration from Mexico has fallen since 2009. Most undocumented immigrants from Mexico (78%) have lived in the U.S. for ten years or more. There has been an increase in immigration from Central American countries due to the catastrophic conditions people are facing there. The economic, social and political crises brought on largely by the policies of the U.S. government, and the plundering of those countries by U.S. corporations has pushed millions into desperate poverty. And climate change has accelerated the destruction of crops and farmlands, causing hundreds of thousands to flee their farms in search of a livelihood throughout Central America.



Throughout history, patterns of immigration reflect the changing conditions in different parts of the world. In the countries with more developed economies, like the U.S., new immigrants often work in the hardest, dirtiest and lowest paid jobs like agriculture, sweatshops, factories, construction, and meatpacking – jobs that most native-born workers would prefer not to work.

The rich and their politicians have always used our cultures, languages, and histories to try to divide us. At times these divisions have been overcome and workers have launched massive movements that won important victories. The largest movement like this in the U.S. was in the 1930s. Our diverse histories and traditions should not weaken us. Our strength lies in our common bond – that we are the ones who do the work of this society. We have every interest to put an end to the system of exploitation that oppresses all of us.

Uber and Lyft: 21st Century Technology, 18th Century Conditions

Six New York taxi drivers have committed suicide in the last year. Taxi drivers are now having to work ridiculously long 12-14 hour shifts just to survive. One driver, Doug Shifter, blamed his suicide on having to drive 100-120 hours almost every week. Before shooting himself outside City Hall, he wrote a Facebook post blaming politicians for allowing rideshare companies such as Uber and Lyft to enter the city. The influx of cars from these companies effectively “squeeze[d] rates to below operating costs,” forcing drivers out of the industry and out of a means to support themselves. Another taxi driver in this string of suicides, Yu Mein Chow, had been in extreme debt from a \$700,000 loan he had taken out seven years ago to buy his taxi medallion (a license that allows you to operate as a taxi driver). Due to the rapidly increasing size of rideshare companies, he just could not compete with the flood of unlicensed and low-paid drivers entering and taking over the market for cabs.



However, it’s not great for the drivers of these new taxi companies either. In fact, last month New York saw its first Uber driver suicide. Other drivers, like the Chicago Rideshare Advocates, have become so fed up that they’ve begun organizing and protesting for increased wages and safety protections. Since these rideshare drivers are usually considered “independent contractors,” rather than employees, they have no legal protections, nor a minimum wage, health insurance, workers’ compensation, sick pay, overtime, or unemployment benefits. Drivers have to pay their own taxes, maintain their own cars, cover their own insurance, and are responsible for their own gas. They are completely on their own. And since Uber and Lyft compete to dominate the taxi and rideshare market, they have also been increasingly cutting driver pay to lower their prices.

For example, the average Uber driver makes only about ten dollars an hour. Working a 40-hour week at this rate puts them around the federal poverty line for a family of two. Drivers also have no way of knowing how much time they’ll spend or how much money they’ll make each time they work. They can’t see what the destination is until the passenger is picked up. Because of this, there’s no way to tell whether accepting a ride will be a waste of time or not. These companies also collect hidden fees and take high commissions, leaving drivers in the dark about what their full earnings should be. One driver compared working for Uber to gambling, since it’s impossible to predict income or how much time you’ll spend on a job.

At the same time, Uber and Lyft have flooded the streets with drivers in order to provide on-demand car service.

For example in New York City, the number of app-based drivers went from 25,000 in 2015 to 80,000 in 2018. There are so many drivers that more than 66% of them spend about 30 minutes of every hour driving around empty. According to recent reports, in many cities the increased number of cars on the road has been so great that it has also meant an increase in traffic congestion.

But where are all of these extra drivers coming from, and why are they willing to work for such little money? Ever since the loss of several millions of jobs from the economic crisis of 2008, the majority of jobs that have been added have been part-time jobs that don’t pay very much. About 33% of the work force today (around 42 million workers) earn less than \$12 an hour, with no medical benefits. Companies like Uber and Lyft are tapping into this large pool of underemployed workers who need to make more money in order to survive. Most drivers on these applications end up working less than 20 hours a week and only for a few months, temporarily supplementing their regular income. Those that do work full-time often scrape by with low wages and extreme workweeks.

Uber and Lyft like to boast about their innovative approach to the taxi industry, highlighting the cheap costs and increased use by riders. In reality, there’s very little that is new here. The only reason the costs are low is because the drivers are paid so little. We may be living in the age of 21st century technology, but working conditions still resemble the 18th century.

Marriot Workers on Strike

Seven thousand hotel workers across the U.S. are on strike against Marriott, the world’s largest hotel chain. Its sales last year totaled \$23 billion. But workers haven’t seen this money in their paychecks or benefits – all they’ve seen is more work. Many are working two or three jobs to make ends meet. Rising housing costs have also forced many to live far from where they work, making for extreme commute times. Workers have inconsistent schedules. For many workers once peak tourism season is over, their hours are reduced and they lose their health care coverage. Another strain on hotel workers is Marriott’s program that encourages guests to opt out of housekeeping. But hotel workers say it’s an excuse to cut jobs and make them do

more work in less time. If enough hotel guests opt out, housekeepers are sent home, waiting to find out if there’s work for them. Then they have to be on call ready to come back in on short notice.

The hotel workers are part of the union, UNITE HERE, and have three demands for their strike: job security, an end to unsafe overwork, and better wages and benefits. Their slogan is: “One Job Should Be Enough.”

The conditions that these hotel workers face are similar to other workers throughout the country. And their strike is a reminder that the only way to improve our situation is to organize and fight for a better life.



Where We Stand

The world we live in today is increasingly ruled by prejudice and fear, under a system of widespread violence and war, where exploitation and oppression are the rule, with the many dominated by the few. The name of this system is capitalism.

The Force For Change Exists Today

Everywhere, working people’s labor makes society run. Working people have the power to bring this system to a halt and bring about the changes needed. Like slavery, feudalism and other systems that enriched the minority at the expense of the majority, capitalism’s removal is long overdue. The time for socialism has come.

We Stand For Socialism

- A world based on peaceful collaboration and international cooperation of working class people – not the exploiters who rule today.
- The common ownership and sharing of the world’s resources and productive capacity.
- An egalitarian and democratic government, organized and controlled from the bottom up.

- Protection of the world’s ecological systems, putting science to work to sustain life, not destroy it.
- A society where human relations are based on respect, equality and dignity of all peoples, not racism, sexism or homophobia.

Who We Are

We believe the international working class is the social force that can transform society and create a new world. But to do so, revolutionary organizations must be built in the working class. For this reason our group aims its activity primarily at workplaces, where struggles have the most potential to transform the world. Our newsletters are a tool to begin this work. What a handful of people decide today can determine our future. Join us to work for a better future – one that is both necessary and possible.

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