

Immigration under capitalism: Life and death along the US-Mexico border

Part Four

By Eric London
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This is the fourth of a four-part series on the conditions facing immigrant workers on the US-Mexico border. The first part was posted February 28, the second was posted March 2 and the third posted March 6.

The World Socialist Web Site spoke to immigrants and leaders of non-profit organizations about the disastrous impact of Trump's immigration policies on tens of millions of undocumented workers living in the US.

The migrant working class lives under constant fear of raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement [ICE] officers, who sweep into communities and workplaces making mass arrests. One such sweep took place earlier this month in Austin, Texas. The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to Cristina Parker, immigrations programs director of the non-profit organization Grassroots Leadership.

“There are two ways in which ICE raids happened recently. Either they knock on peoples’ doors at home or they follow them from home or work in their cars, pulling them over under the guise of a traffic stop.”

WSWS reporters, in fact, witnessed local police joined by border patrol agents pulling over a car in what otherwise appeared to be a routine traffic stop.

Parker said that ICE officers are usually not in uniform, “so all over they will try to trick or otherwise manipulate people into opening their doors.” She continued: “They will lie about why they’re there. A famous example came from Atlanta last year, where ICE agents in collaboration with police would hold up a photo of a black man, say there was a dangerous criminal in the house, and arrest all those without papers inside. Families only find out after a person has been detained, so people often come home from school or work to find that their parent or spouse isn’t there.

“The apparatus that Trump is now building his deportation machine on was built originally by the Obama administration. One of the most egregious examples was family detention and is something that will mark Obama’s legacy. He opened these giant for-profit family detention centers where they exclusively hold women and children seeking asylum, and he didn’t close

them before handing the keys over to Trump. So everything we’re seeing weaponized right now was built by Obama.”

These conditions did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they have been prepared over decades by the US ruling class’s attempts to address the declining position of American capitalism through military adventures abroad, particularly since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. As David North wrote in the preface to *A Quarter Century of War: The US Drive for Global Hegemony 1990-2016*:

“The belligerent response of the United States to the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union reflected the weakness, not the strength, of American capitalism. The overwhelming support within the ruling elite for a highly aggressive foreign policy arose from the delusion that the United States could reverse the protracted erosion of its global economic position through the deployment of its immense military power.”

Over the course of this historical period, the nationalist and xenophobic run-off from the virtually unbroken series of US wars has come to dominate bourgeois politics. Immigrants provide a convenient scapegoat for a financial aristocracy that has plundered workers’ wages and living conditions to pay for its wars.

The language of the “war on terror” has provided the lexicon for the attack on immigrants, who are barred because they pose a threat to “national security.” In the process, billions of dollars will be diverted from social programs and regulatory agencies to fund the deportation machine.

The Democratic Party has been a primary champion of the attack on immigrants, bolstered by the AFL-CIO, which uses nationalism to turn workers against their class brothers and sisters of other nationalities. The Democrats are responsible for the passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 and the Secure Fences Act of 2006. They are also responsible for the mass deportation program of the Obama administration.

Moreover, last month 37 of 48 Senate Democrats voted to confirm the architect of Trump’s anti-immigrant program, Gen. John Kelly, to head the Department of Homeland Security

(DHS).

The attack on immigrants is an attack on the working class as a whole. Workers should have the right to travel freely in search of economic and physical security without facing harassment, deportation or hardship of any kind. Under the auspices of “border security,” the government is building the framework for a police state that will impact all elements of political, social and cultural life for immigrants and non-immigrants alike.

The nighttime raids, the mass detentions without trial, and the phony “due process” of immigration court proceedings all bear the markings of dictatorship. These are the methods that will be used in the near future against those who oppose the policies of the government, regardless of immigration status. Striking workers, student demonstrators and all those who engage in social protest will be labeled “threats to national security” and be targeted for state repression.

The attack on migrants is not only politically reactionary, it is also irrational. Leon Trotsky wrote in May 1940:

“The world of decaying capitalism is overcrowded. The question of admitting a few hundred extra refugees becomes a major problem for such a world power as the United States. In an era of aviation, telegraph, telephone, radio and television, travel from country to country is paralyzed by passports and visas. The period of the wasting away of foreign trade and the decline of domestic trade is at the same time the period of the monstrous intensification of chauvinism, and especially of anti-Semitism. Today decaying capitalist society is striving to squeeze the Jewish people from all its pores; seventeen million individuals out of the two billion populating the globe, that is, less than one percent, can no longer find a place on our planet! Amid the vast expanse of land and the marvels of technology, which has also conquered the skies for man as well as the earth, the bourgeoisie has managed to convert our planet into a foul prison.”

How all the more true this is today! In a world of instantaneous global communication, the human race is interconnected to a degree that would have been unimaginable just 30 years ago, let alone in 1940.

Advances in technology continue to facilitate human travel and international shipping, linking economic supply lines that deliver goods produced in dozens of different countries to every corner of the globe. Through the use of cellular phones, the residents of even the most isolated villages and hamlets can communicate with friends and relatives located in world metropolises and learn of world events at the swipe of a finger.

Even personal relationships are of an increasingly international character, with family trees commonly branching out across multiple continents. In 2011, 21 percent of US married couples included at least one foreign-born spouse. In 2006, data from the European Union showed eight countries where more than 15 percent of marriages involved spouses from two different countries (Belgium, Estonia, Cyprus,

Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovakia, Sweden), and seven more where between 10 and 15 percent involved mixed national couples (Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Spain, France, Lithuania and Malta). These figures have undoubtedly increased in the intervening years.

The world is pulsing with billions of people whose lives are burdened by the weight of decades of economic exploitation and war and yet are restricted from moving freely across the planet. At the root of this dilemma is the outdated nation-state system, which stands as a central obstacle to the rational organization of the world economy and the free flow of the world’s inhabitants.

Socialists stand irreconcilably opposed to the present division of the world into nation states. We call for bringing the geographical organization of the world into harmony with the international character of the globalized economy. In this manner, humans will be given the freedom to travel as they see fit without visas, border patrol, passports or fear of harassment. Families living in different countries will not be barred from visiting or living with one another simply on account of where people happened to be born or where they happen to live. As the 18th century philosopher Montesquieu said, “I am necessarily a man, only accidentally am I French.”

The abolition of the nation-state system requires the overthrow of capitalism, which entails nationalizing under public ownership the major international banks and corporations, placing control of production in the hands of the working class, and redistributing the world’s resources to meet the needs of the human race. It is on this basis that the fight against Trump’s immigration program must be carried out.

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