

Binational workers speak out during the San Diego-Tijuana border closure

By Norisa Diaz
28 September 2017

All southbound vehicular traffic was halted from Saturday until mid-day Monday at the San Ysidro Port of Entry, the busiest border crossing in the world, causing disruption in the lives of tens of thousands who cross daily or weekly. On a typical day 70,000 passenger vehicles, 20,000 pedestrians, and 4,000 commercial trucks use the port of entry to cross back and forth between San Diego, California and Tijuana, Mexico.

The temporary closure is part of a larger \$741 million renovation project scheduled for completion by 2019 in which the number of freeway lanes will be doubled from five to ten. An additional 22 pedestrian inspection checkpoints at the San Ysidro Port of Entry will also be installed.

As the WSWS reported last month, the real purposes of the expansion are to further militarize the border as well as increase the efficiency by which goods and labor can pass through the border, a major priority for the region's biotechnology, defense, pharmaceutical, software and communications sectors which comprise nearly 30 percent of the workforce or 400,000 jobs.

Workers and families either crossed on Friday before the border closure, crossed on foot, or avoided the border all together.

WSWS reporters spoke to workers at both the San Ysidro and Otay Mesa pedestrian crossings about their living conditions, deportations and the attack on immigrants, and the ways in which the border affects all aspects of their lives. Their responses made clear the intimate and deep connections between workers living in Mexico and the United States and the irrationality of the border which divides them from each other.

Raul is a truck driver for a US company that transports medical devices manufactured at factories in Ensenada, Mexico and delivers them to facilities in San

Clemente, California. Depending on traffic, he crosses the border two to three times a day with goods manufactured in the Baja California factories.

WSWS reporters explained that the smoother flow of goods, labor, and capital were the real purpose behind the border expansion and the increased profits of US corporations who work with the Mexican ruling elite to exploit the cheap labor in Mexican factories. The daily minimum wage in Mexico is about \$5 USD.

"Sometimes it takes me five hours to cross a truckload into the US from Mexico. This is what they care about," Raul explained. "I also think the air contamination is terrible. Imagine all of our trucks and cars in line for 5 hours with the engines running."

He also noted the difficulties the border poses for students who have to cross every day. "There is also all of the workers and children who cross every day to go to school, forced to wait in line for hours. It affects them and the children aren't able to get enough sleep. It's just wrong."

Connecting the recent hurricanes and earthquakes that have led to loss of life and caused billions in damage in both countries, Raul noted that in the US and similarly in Mexico the governmental response has been appalling. "People are suffering in Mexico, especially in the poorest towns of Chiapas and Oaxaca who have been devastated by the earthquake. People are also suffering here in the US too. Many people have lost their homes [since the 2008 crisis], and so many people go hungry."

Carmen is a caregiver for the elderly in San Diego. Though she is a citizen of the United States, she and her children live in Tijuana due to the high cost of living in San Diego. "Crossing every day is hard, I don't have as much time to spend with my children, but I can make more in one day in the US than I can in two

weeks working in Tijuana.”

She said that prior to September 11, 2001, “the border had never been so difficult,” but now with the increased security, justified by the so-called War on Terror, wait times can be two plus hours at rush hour so she crosses into the United States at 3 a.m. every morning for a wait time under an hour.

Lizzy told the WSWWS that she crosses from Tijuana to go to work at Las Americas, an expansive retail mall in the United States that is a minute walk from the pedestrian bridge at the San Ysidro port of entry, frequented by shoppers who come from both sides of the border. She also crosses to attend a local community college.

“I work and go to school in the US, but my family lives in Tijuana (TJ). The border separates my family and that separation is really tough. I used to live in Las Vegas with my aunt and uncle and it was really hard since my parents lived in Mexico. I cross because I make more money in the US, than in TJ. One of my friends works at a coffee shop in TJ, she works seven days a week and full time. I work four days a week at half time and I still make more than she does.”

Yolanda is a cook who works full time at the restaurant chain Denny’s and part time at Ihop. She and her family live in Tijuana due to the high cost of living in San Diego as well as the mixed citizenship status of her family.

Responding to a discussion of the deportations under the Trump administration Yolanda said that she has witnessed an increase of deportations in public spaces. “Deportations were always happening but you’re seeing it out in public more. Recently I saw agents at Las Americas [shopping mall] stopping people who were just out shopping with their family and asking them for their papers. A lot of people do not carry these things on them, so they just took them away. It’s so wrong. Trump is trying to instill a lot of fear in people.”

Yolanda described a situation which had happened the night before when she crossed at 3 a.m. to return to her family in Tijuana. She said a woman who appeared to be pregnant said she was starving and asked Yolanda if she could have the bag of food she was carrying. Yolanda gave her the food and the jacket she was wearing.

“I asked her to tell me what happened to her and she

said that her and her friend who clean houses were deported and that she was waiting for her friend to be released. They let this poor pregnant woman out into the streets of Tijuana in the middle of the night! She asked me who the food I was carrying was for and felt bad when I told her it was for my son. I insisted that she take it and gave her my jacket I was wearing. I only wish that there was more I could have done for her.”

Jorge, an industrial worker from Mexico City for a company that makes floor epoxy explained that he was crossing to visit family in the US. “What I’ve noted since Trump was in office is that people are afraid. The government wants no relationship with immigrants, they don’t want to help them succeed. A tribute to that is the wall they’re going to build.”

Commenting on the September 19 earthquake and the governmental response, he said, “That earthquake is really bad. I was able to avoid this one but the one in 1985 caused my family a lot of grief. Help has been coming but only from the community. At this point, no one expects help from the government. Our current president Pena Nieto promises to help but news on the street is he isn’t even allowing outside sources to help the earthquake victims. The military isn’t allowing resources and organizations to go in there to help. And if you think about all the spending these politicians do during the campaigns. That amount of money is ridiculous and can go to help regular people especially now in a time of crisis.”

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