

An interview with Javier Luengo-Garrido, Coordinator at ACLU-Massachusetts' Immigrant Protection Project

By our reporter
10 January 2018

Last week, Democratic Senator Charles Schumer made clear in advance of talks with Trump on extending protections for 800,000 recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that he supported further measures to militarize the US-Mexican border. Senator Bernie Sanders reiterated his support for stepped-up attacks on undocumented workers in an appearance Sunday on the ABC program "This Week." Sanders declared he supported "more security, but not a wall."

The WSWS spoke with Javier Luengo-Garrido, a coordinator at the ACLU's Immigrant Protection Project in Northampton, Massachusetts, about the recent announcement by the Trump Administration to deport over 200,00 Salvadorans over the next 18 months.

* * *

WSWS: What do you make of Sanders' statement: "I don't think there's anybody who disagrees that we need strong border security. If the president wants to work with us to make sure we have strong border security, let's do that."

Javier Luengo-Garrido: I think he's talking about defining how much money is allocated for border security. He is not saying let's build a wall. I do not personally agree with that. It means sending more ICE officers to the border to do more enforcement.

WSWS: How do you perceive the role of the Democratic Party in setting immigration policy?

JLG: The problem is that being the minority party, they haven't been able to get anything done. They were not willing to do anything about DACA or TPS. Neither party got anything positive done when they could have.

WSWS: What about the role of the Democrats under Obama? For example, thousands of children and mothers were imprisoned in 2014 in warehouses, in order to "send a message", as Obama said at the time.

JLG: I see an inability of turning the conversation into what it should be. Americans want education, health and security. Immigration is not their priority. But the Democrats should have been able to put it on the top of the list.

WSWS: But Obama did "address" the issue by escalating deportations, detentions, beefing up security forces at the border.

JLG: Yes, the increase in deportations under Obama and detentions did not help. Many times you have families trying to cross the border, handing themselves over to border agents. I know that he started asking ICE to go after people with a certain profile, and that did not help, because people became immediately deportable for small offenses like DUIs, which would place someone in what they call category 2 for things like domestic violence, alcohol abuse, etc. Category 1 includes people convicted of dealing drugs, murder, etc. Now a lot of people are being detained and sent back because of that.

WSWS: Can you describe conditions in El Salvador?

JLG: TPS was valid for anyone in the US before February 2001. Now you have adults with families in which most of their kids are US citizens, still under 18, so if the parent gets deported, you are leaving family members alone and sending someone back to a country where they have not lived in a decade and a half or two decades. Gangs like MS13 and Calle 18 still run those countries, so there is no reason to think that someone we send back will not be assaulted or even killed. One

of the fears people have of being returned to El Salvador is that if a gang knows your family is here, they will try to kidnap you for ransom, because they know there is money here.

WSWS: What do you think of the Socialist Equality Party's position that the fight for immigrant rights is bound up with class struggle, that workers should have the right to travel and work anywhere on the globe?

JLG: I agree with that position. The way they talk about immigrants is terrible. The fact is these people, in different percentages, they work in service, construction and restaurants. The White House says that immigrants are criminals, or "bad people," that they are stealing jobs, or don't have "American Values." But I see people who are highly religious, work 2-3 jobs because they love their family, who help each other in the community. They want to leave thousands of children without parents, and that's not how majority people in this country think.

As far as the border issue is concerned, borders are dictated by economic powers, the result of war and economic interests. There is a lack of historical memory, for example why has the US ended up with such a high number of immigrants fleeing their own countries to get here, risking their lives, trying not to get killed? It's because the extent of American power does not end at Mexico, Canada—the reach of American power is actually fueling immigration, with American money drugs and weapons fueling violence that makes people leave. All the violence in Guatemala and El Salvador for example, it's because the US interest was in keeping those countries poor and subordinated to their interests, with coups and interventions.

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>