

Hundreds of Thousands say 'No'—I

By A Correspondent

A great upsurge is taking place across the United States! Hundreds of thousands of immigrants are stepping out of the shadows, into the sun. In Chicago, up to a half million filled Daley Plaza, shutting down the city, chanting “se siente, se siente, el inmigrante esta presente!” (The immigrants are here, you can feel it!) In Milwaukee—home of Congressman Sensenbrenner, author of the cruel bill that set off the protests—25,000 marched. Tens of thousands went into the streets in Washington DC. In Phoenix, over 20,000 demonstrators marched to the office of Republican Senator Jon Kyl, co-sponsor of a bill that would give illegal immigrants up to five years to leave the country. In Georgia, tens of thousands of immigrants stayed away from work in protest against a new state law there that would deny state services to adults living in the US illegally and impose a 5 percent surcharge on wire transfers from illegal immigrants. Students walked out of schools throughout Southern California, and hundreds of thousands are filling the streets of Los Angeles.

The protests by immigrants are in response to the imminent danger that the US Senate will pass the Sensenbrenner bill, which already passed the US House of Representatives last year. The Sensenbrenner bill would make the lives of undocumented immigrants much more hellish than they already are.

In that light, it can't go down that non-immigrants stand on the sidelines in this battle, much less get played into fearing or opposing this just struggle.

What is the real story on why people from around the world are being driven to this country? You can't understand things by just looking at a border and deciding it's immoral for someone to cross it. You have to ask how did that border get there, and what does it represent.

More than ten thousand years ago, a few dozen or so humans migrated over the Bering Straits that connected Alaska and Russia, and began to inhabit what is now called the Americas.

When the Spanish conquistadors came and drew new borders in what they called the Americas, they did it in the service of plundering the people and wealth of this continent. Historians estimate that between 60 and 80 million people were killed by the European invaders—from diseases they brought, through massacres, and through literally working people to death. The conquerors carried out an orgy of rape and death, and tried to wipe out the culture and languages of the people they conquered. In fact, it was the enslavement of indigenous people in mines and the massive kidnapping of slaves from Africa that marked—as Karl

Marx, the founder of communism, put it with bitter sarcasm—the “rosy dawn” of global capitalism.

The Mexican American War that ended in 1848 was a blatant theft of half of the territory of Mexico by the United States. The US seized the area now comprising the states from Texas to California. Here, again, the question is not just that someone crossed someone else’s border, but why. What forces were behind that? What agenda? The Mexican people had won their independence from Spain, and shortly after that Mexico abolished slavery in 1824. But slavery, of course, was still riding high in the United States. Both expanding Northern capital and Southern slavery in need of more land were forces behind the war.

And then there is the present day—when the border is a scene of horror and starvation and brutality for immigrants who are forced to come here and work for slave wages—to enrich the US capitalists. The capitalists can super-exploit these workers because they are deprived of rights—and that deprivation, that terror, begins right at the border, enforced by the border police (*la Migra*) and, now, armed vigilantes.

So there is nothing in the least sacred about this border. It was established by force and murder, in the service of plunder. And from the conquistadors of the 1500s, to the slaveholders of the 1840s, down to the capitalists of today that has been the case. Justice hasn’t had a damn thing to do with any of it.

Fast forward to today. What is it that drives people, from Mexico for example, to risk a terrible death in the desert of the Southwest to work in a packinghouse in Iowa, a garment shop in Los Angeles, or to clean a high-rise in Chicago?

Nativist and anti-immigrant forces claim that immigrants are a drain on the US economy. A widely cited study by Dr Donald Huddle, Professor Emeritus of Economics at Rice University, claims that immigration (legal and illegal) will cost \$932 billion over a ten-year period ending in 2007. Anti-immigrant groups like “FAIR” (Federation for American Immigration Reform) promote the myth that “immigration is a drain on the economy; the net annual cost of immigration has been estimated at between \$67 and \$87 billion a year.” (Source: FAIR website)

In fact, many authoritative studies have documented that, in part because they are ineligible or scared away from using social services, immigrants contribute much more in taxes to local and national government than they use in services.

Beyond that, this myth of immigrants as “parasites” on US society turns things upside down. On one level, it is totally upside down to claim that the people who are actually doing the work to build the house, mop the floors, and harvest the fields—who are actually slaving away in the dangerous factories and slaughterhouses—are somehow “parasites”! ☹☹☹

[to be concluded]