The Attack on Immigrants in the USA

Erase the Borders of the National State

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The flood of human beings across national borders has shaken the world. There are more refugees than at any time since World War II—about 60 million. However, this article focuses on the immigration question for the U.S. These are mostly people from Latin American countries, fleeing poverty as well as civil wars, criminal gangs, and government repression. However some of the issues are relevant to thinking about the problems of refugees from the Middle East.

One of the most heartening things in recent years has been the on-going popular struggles in the U.S. of Latinos and immigrants (overlapping groups). Since the massive demonstrations in 2006, these groupings have not stopped raising their issues and fighting for their rights. Their efforts overlap with the popular fight for a $15 minimum wage and for unionization of some of the most oppressed and exploited sections of the working class.

I participated in the 2006 march for immigrant rights in New York City. As I looked at the people with red-brown skin, high cheekbones, and straight black hair, I thought, "*These are the descendants of North American natives. Who are the 'immigrants' and who the 'Americans'?*" Unfortunately, the immigrant movement has so far been channeled into support for the Democrats (under the slogan, "*Today We March, Tomorrow We Vote!*"). This has limited its power, as opposed to increasingly militant demonstrations and the promotion of mass strikes.

There is a great deal of sympathy for the immigrant communities. (Polls have found that most U.S. people favor some sort of "path to citizenship" for undocumented immigrants.) But there has also been much racist and nativist hostility to immigrants, especially to Latinos. There is also fear and hostility toward Muslim and Arab immigrants, especially since the Parisian terror attacks. Such views are especially (but not only) found among Southern white middle class and working class males.

These views have been especially whipped up by leaders of the Republican Party, right now by politicians running for president. Donald Trump has declared that the Mexican government is deliberately sending criminals, rapists, drug smugglers, and murderers into the U.S. The other Republicans have used milder language to appeal to the same prejudices. Perhaps most ironically, this includes right-wing "libertarians," enemies of "big government" and "regulation." They propose to beef up the police forces at the U.S.-Mexican border, to force business owners to keep track of their workers' backgrounds, and to expel the 11 to 12 million undocumented immigrants already in the U.S.—without discussing the kind of police state this would require.

These nativist proposals and racist insults are backed-up by scientific sounding researchers. For example, a lot of Republicans have been running with a report from the Center for Immigration Studies by Karen Zeigler and Steven A. Camarota (2014). The CIS has been described as "anti-immigrant." (Riley 2008; 20) It was founded by John Tanton, a one-time environmentalist who "*…employs* [racists] *and actively promotes their views.*" (23) "*In 1994,* [a white supremacist] *and Tanton coauthored a book titled The Immigration Invasion.*" (24)

This CIS report appears to contradict the dominant consensus among economists. However, Jason Riley (a conservative "libertarian" member of the Wall Street Journal editorial board) thinks that it is inconsistent for supporters of capitalism to call for free trade in goods and the free international movement of money but not to advocate freer international movement of people! He summarizes the research:

"*Economists across the political spectrum, from liberals…to conservatives… have demonstrated that the free movement of labor adds efficiency and productivity to our economy. Hence, immigrants tend to stimulate economic growth rather than cause unemployment. These conclusions…are the rule. Indeed the current economic literature is replete with such findings….*" (Riley 2008; 220)

Zeigler & Camarota want to counter these findings. In particular, they seek to refute the idea that there are labor shortages in any area of the U.S. economy which might justify increasing (or even permitting) immigration from Mexico or elsewhere. Instead they seem to blame immigrants for the high rates of unemployment among "native" U.S. citizens (by "natives" they do not mean "American Indians" but people whose ancestors immigrated here much more recently).

Their argument is this: "*…since 2000 all of the net gain in the number of working-age (16 to 65) people holding a job has gone to immigrants (legal and illegal)….*[There has been a] *long-term decline in the employment for natives across age and education levels….*" Therefore "*immigration reduces employment for natives." This is even though "Immigration has fallen in recent years.*"

Not being an economist, I will not attempt to challenge these statistics. But even if we take them as correct, we still have to ask, why is this happening? If there has been a general fall in the number of jobs available in all areas, then it is the fault of the corporate rich (the capitalist class) and their government. These businesspeople are the ones who manage the economy and who decide to expand or contract industry and services, which provide more or fewer jobs. If the capitalist economy is stagnant and barely moving, even during this post-Great Recession "recovery," then this says something about the capitalist system. It demonstrates that the 30 years of prosperity which followed World War II are definitely over, since about 1970. Prosperity is not coming back.

"*Since 2001, however, the rate of [economic] expansion has fallen below two percent—less than half the postwar rate—and many economists believe that it will stay there, or fall even further. In economic-policy circles, the phrase of the moment is 'secular stagnation'.*" (Cassidy 2015; 111) Immigrant workers have nothing to do with it.

Of course, businesspeople like to hire the most vulnerable and most desperate workers. The bosses can pay them the lowest wages and get away with mistreating them—or at least they hope so. This is why they like to hire immigrants. But many immigrants come from countries with traditions of militant working class struggle and will disappoint these bosses!

There is a debate within the capitalist class over how to deal with the immigrants, documented and undocumented. Most businesspeople want a stable, steady, workforce. They have backed a "comprehensive" immigration policy. This includes some Republicans and all Democrats. Their (liberal) immigration bills would increase border "security," control over immigrants, deporta-

tion of "undesirables," some sort of revived "bracero" or "guestworker" program (temporary and limited migrant farm labor), and a very limited "citizenship program." Such proposals are generally worse than nothing (worse than the current situation) and should be opposed. There is the "Dream" program which would mostly push undocumented immigrants into the U.S. imperialist armed forces.

A minority of the rulers is willing to energize the worst, most nativist and racist sentiments of some of the white population, in order to get support for their real program (attacks on the standards of living of all working class and middle class people, regardless of color or nationality). Having stirred up these hysterical nativist sentiments, like Frankenstein's monster, Republicans politicians have moved to advocate total anti-immigrant policies which most of the capitalist class does not agree with. The Republicans are serving as the cutting edge of the attack on the working class and all oppressed people—and the Democrats are not that far behind.

Revolutionary anarchists must resist these attacks as best we can by telling the truth. Supporting immigrant rights to full equality (without "comprehensive" anti-immigrant repression) has revolutionary implications. For example, Riley (2008), the conservative supporter of increased immigration, feels compelled to end his book by writing, "*Although it will surely be characterized as such, this book is not an argument for erasing America's borders or dissolving our nation-state.*" (223) We anarchists are indeed for erasing America's (and all nations') borders and dissolving our (and every other) nation-state. Only a new social system, self-managed by the people participating in it, stateless and cooperative, can create a new kind of prosperity.

References

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