

WORKERS VANGUARD

24 March 2006

**Down With Racist U.S. Imperialism!
For Socialist Revolution
on Both Sides of the Border!**

Full Citizenship Rights for All Immigrants!

As millions of impoverished Mexican and Central American immigrants risk their lives to find some means of livelihood in the U.S., the racist U.S. imperialist rulers are proposing a spate of new anti-immigrant measures. Each in its own way, the various proposed “reforms” would further strengthen the stranglehold of repression and regimentation implemented in the name of a bipartisan “war on terror.” The HR 4437 bill passed in the House of Representatives in December calls for building 700 miles of wall at the border and for making it a felony to even be an undocumented immigrant, or to assist one in any way. Two alternative proposals in the Senate would also tighten border control, albeit without a new wall, while creating massive “guest worker” programs that amount to indentured servitude.

The racist border wall proposal has provoked widespread outrage in Mexico. In the U.S., opposition runs the gamut from Latino organizations and the trade unions to the Catholic church hierarchy, Democratic Party liberals and even a section of the Republican Party. In Chicago this month, some 100,000 demonstrators marched against these measures. Further protests against HR 4437

**Joint Declaration of the
Spartacist League/U.S.
and the
Grupo Espartaquista de México**

are planned in other cities. As proletarian internationalist opponents of U.S. imperialism, the Spartacist League/U.S. opposes both the criminalization of immigrant workers and the legalization of indentured servitude. The SL/U.S. and the Grupo Espartaquista de México, sections of the International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist), join in calling for the unity in struggle of the U.S. and Mexican proletariat. We demand: Down with racist anti-immigrant repression! No deportations! Full citizenship rights for all immigrants!

We start from the standpoint that only socialist revolution internationally can put an end to the growing immiseration of the toiling masses—both in dependent capitalist countries like Mexico and in the imperialist centers. Under capitalist imperialism, a handful of wealthy industrial powers strive to divide and redivide the rest of the world for their own aggrandizement, leading to neocolonial exploitation and imperialist war. As we explain in the ICL Declaration of Principles (*Spartacist* [English-language edition] No. 54, Spring 1998):

“Modern capitalism, i.e., imperialism, reaching into all areas of the planet, in the course of the class struggle and as economic need demands, brings into the proletariat at its bottom new sources of cheaper

labor, principally immigrants from poorer and less-developed regions of the world—workers with few rights who are deemed more disposable in times of economic contraction. Thus capitalism in ongoing fashion creates different strata among the workers, while simultaneously amalgamating the workers of many different lands. Everywhere, the capitalists, abetted by aristocracy-of-labor opportunists, try to poison class consciousness and solidarity among the workers by fomenting religious, national and ethnic divisions. The struggle for the unity and integrity of the working class against chauvinism and racism is thus a vital task for the proletarian vanguard.”

The massive increase in immigration from Mexico over the past period is a direct result of the imposition of the NAFTA “free trade” agreement in 1994, which forced millions of Mexican peasants out of the countryside and led to a huge increase in urban poverty. Close to 10 percent of the Mexican population now lives in the U.S., and the money they send home—some \$20 billion annually—is Mexico’s third-largest source of income. A 1991 joint statement of the Mexican, Canadian and U.S. sections of the ICL called to “Stop U.S. ‘Free Trade’ Rape of Mexico” and declared: “There is a burning need for an *internationalist* proletarian opposition which stands with the working class and impoverished peasantry of Mexico against the imperialist assault” (*Workers Vanguard* No. 530, 5 July 1991).

The fundamental divide in all capitalist countries is the divide between the working class, whose labor makes society run, and the capitalist class, which reaps enormous wealth from exploiting that labor. The Mexican rulers’ crocodile tears over the plight of Mexican immigrants is used to enhance the nationalist lie that exploiter and exploited share the same interests because “we are all Mexicans.” This is only a smokescreen to cover exploitation and oppression by the parasitic Mexican bourgeoisie, which serves as the local enforcer of imperialist domination. In 2004, the Mexican government arrested almost four times as many Central Americans—over 200,000—seeking transit to the U.S. as were arrested by the U.S. border authorities (*La Jornada*, 13 November 2005). The GEM opposes such attacks and calls for full right of transit as well as full citizenship rights for all those who want to stay in Mexico.

In the U.S., the most powerful and dangerous of the imperialist countries, the multiracial proletariat has a particular obligation to oppose the wars and

depredations of the U.S. capitalist class. Defense of immigrant rights is necessary not only to fight the exploitation of the most vulnerable layers of the population. It is also crucial to reversing the decades-long decline of the trade unions, by enlisting immigrant workers, many of whom have a history of militant struggle, in the front ranks of the labor movement. Mexican immigrant workers can serve as a human bridge linking the struggles of the North American and Latin American proletariat.

Opposition to anti-immigrant racism in the U.S. is directly intertwined with the struggle against black oppression. It is particularly important to combat anti-immigrant chauvinism among U.S.-born black and white workers, while immigrant workers must grasp that anti-black racism remains the touchstone of social reaction in the U.S. Black oppression is the cornerstone of American capitalism. It was the Southern slavocracy’s desire to extend slavery that partly motivated the 1846 invasion of Mexico, which resulted in the U.S. stealing half of Mexico’s territory. A workers government in the U.S. would return to Mexico certain predominantly Spanish-speaking areas along the border.

As expressed in the two Senate “guest worker” bills, the bourgeois opposition to the nativist racist mindset expressed in HR 4437 reflects the interests of employers reliant on low-wage, non-union labor, like Wal-Mart. The bill being fashioned by Republican Arlen Specter with the tacit support of the Bush White House includes criminalization of undocumented immigrants and their supporters. Unlike the Specter proposal, the bill co-authored by Republican John McCain and liberal Democrat Ted Kennedy holds out the promise of eventual permanent residency or citizenship for some “guest workers.”

Even without the proposed new criminalization provisions, in 2004 more than a million Mexicans were detained trying to enter the U.S. Intensified border repression, whether carried out by the hated *la migra* or vigilante terror gangs like the Minutemen, simply forces desperate immigrants to seek more dangerous and deadly routes. In 2005, at least 279 bodies were found near the Sonora-Arizona border alone. U.S. college students Daniel Strauss and Shanti Sellz were recently arrested in Arizona for

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attempting to transport several severely dehydrated immigrants to a hospital and face up to 15 years in jail and fines of \$250,000 for “conspiring to traffic” immigrants (*Proceso*, 12 March). Drop all charges against Strauss and Sellz!

“Use ’em, abuse ’em and send ’em back” has long been the motto of U.S. capitalists, who have seen Mexico and other countries as a vast reservoir of cheap labor to be tapped in order to drive down wages in the U.S. The current “guest worker” legislation is reminiscent of the notorious *bracero* program of 1942-64, under which thousands of “temporary” Mexican workers, denied the most elementary rights, were brought in to slave in agribusiness. Former *braceros* and their families are still trying to get wages never paid them.

What is needed is a class-struggle mobilization to *organize the unorganized* into the unions with full rights and protections. The potential for this was seen in the widely popular strike by Southern California supermarket workers—black, Latino and white—in 2003-2004. Had the union tops made a concerted effort to extend the strike nationally and to enlist Teamsters truck drivers in halting shipments to the supermarkets and warehouses, that strike could have ended in a resounding victory and paved the way for an organizing drive against Wal-Mart. A successful drive to organize Wal-Mart would have an immediate impact in Mexico, where the corporation is the largest private employer.

But instead of mobilizing union power in defense of immigrants, the union tops embrace one or another of the capitalists’ anti-immigrant “reforms,” particularly favoring their so-called “friends” in the capitalist Democratic Party. This policy of class collaboration, sacrificing labor’s interests on the altar of capitalist profitability, flows from the labor bureaucracy’s support for the capitalist system and its identification with the “national interests” of U.S. imperialism. This program has led to defeat after defeat, leaving the U.S. labor movement weaker today than at any time since the early 1900s.

When NAFTA was first proposed in the early 1990s, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy denounced it from the standpoint of chauvinist protectionism, railing against Mexicans “stealing American jobs.” The Teamsters bureaucracy, today a component of the “Change to Win” breakaway from the AFL-CIO, is notorious for its chauvinist campaigns against Mexican truckers on U.S. roads. The leaders of two other leading “Change to Win” unions—the heavily immigrant SEIU service employees union and UNITE HERE hotel, restaurant and garment workers union—support the McCain-Kennedy plan for a new *bracero* program.

For its part, the AFL-CIO bureaucracy has waffled on McCain-Kennedy. Rejecting guest worker programs, AFL-CIO executive vice president Linda Chavez-Thompson declared in a March 1 statement: “We propose that if employers can demonstrate a real need for outside workers, these workers should be allowed into our country with the SAME RIGHTS AND LABOR PROTECTIONS as any U.S. citizen.” This leaves it to the capitalists to determine who will be let in and under what conditions they will remain. Opposed to a program of class struggle, the labor tops look to the capitalist state to defend the rights of workers and immigrants. The unions should use their power to fight for full citizenship rights for *everyone* who makes it into this country.

A class-struggle perspective requires an uncompromising fight for the class *independence* of the proletariat from all wings of the capitalist exploiters. In the U.S., that chiefly means breaking the ties that bind labor to the Democratic Party, which occasionally postures as “friends” of labor, immigrants and black people to better hoodwink the exploited and oppressed. The Democratic Party avidly embraced Bush’s “war on terror” and now proclaims itself the party most capable of prosecuting this “war,” which was never more than a pretext for imperialist adventures abroad and ripping up democratic rights at home. Indeed, it was Democratic president Clinton

Declaration of Principles and Some Elements of Program International Communist League (Fourth Internationalist)

Adopted in 1998 at the Third International Conference of the ICL,

the ICL’s Declaration of Principles is a concrete expression of our purpose: to build national sections of a democratic-centralist international which can lead the struggle for worldwide socialist revolution.

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who enacted the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which calls for deporting even longtime permanent residents for trivial offenses committed years earlier. Under Clinton's "Operation Gatekeeper," a border wall was built to seal off San Diego. Break with the Democrats! For a workers party that fights for a workers government!

In Mexico, bourgeois nationalism is the chief means binding the exploited to their exploiters. It was the nationalist PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), not the clerical reactionary PAN (National Action Party) of "free market" exponent Vicente Fox, that pushed through the NAFTA agreement in the early '90s. And the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which is today the chief exponent of populist nationalism, does not even oppose NAFTA.

While the PRD has not yet gotten its chance to devastate living standards as have the PRI and the PAN, its populist nationalism is but another means of administering capitalist/imperialist exploitation. In the context of the tragic death of 65 miners in an explosion caused by the bosses' criminal thirst for profits, PRD presidential hopeful López Obrador joined Fox in denouncing the miners union, accusing its leaders of being "contract dealers." Break with all the bourgeois parties—PAN, PRI, PRD! For a workers party that fights for socialist revolution!

Our model is the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which replaced the rule of the capitalists and landlords with that of the working class and raised high the banner of world socialist revolution. Despite the Stalinist degeneration that ultimately opened the door to capitalist counterrevolution in 1991-92, the Soviet Union demonstrated the power of a planned, collectivized economy in providing employment, education, health care and decent living conditions. When put to the service of all humanity, the enormous wealth and productive resources extracted by the U.S. bourgeoisie from the sweat and blood of working people in the U.S. and around the world would provide an enormous impetus for the advance of all mankind. But that requires the smashing of the capitalist state and the expropriation of the rapacious U.S. bourgeoisie through proletarian revolution.

The counterpart to the nationalist myth of "we are all Mexicans" is the idea that there is no class struggle in the U.S. The December strike by largely black and immigrant transit workers in New York, which crippled the world center of finance capital, refuted that notion. The multiracial U.S. working class is potentially the most powerful ally of Mexican workers. The SL/U.S. and the GEM are dedicated to forging revolutionary workers parties on both sides of the border as part of the fight to reforge Trotsky's Fourth International, world party of socialist revolution. ■

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