

# *A Call to Action*



*An Analysis of our Struggles  
and alternatives to Carter's  
Immigration Program*

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## AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM

The massive attack on immigrant labor, especially undocumented workers, which has grown over the last two years and which is about to be formalized in Carter's new Immigration Policy is one of the most pressing political issues in the Chicano community today. We must be clear about the origins of this policy and how we are going to deal with it. We, the authors of this pamphlet, see this attack as a response by business and government to the growing strength of the Chicano movement and believe that our strategic reply must be based on an understanding of what this means.

## OUR GAINS. . .

The growing strength of the Chicano movement must be measured by concrete gains we have achieved through struggle during the last ten years against fierce opposition.

We gained increased wages for farm workers

-- despite mechanization, runaway agribusiness and the Teamsters.

We gained increased money for welfare, health clinics, legal aid and recreation.

-- despite the attempt to use "poverty programs" to control our barrios and "buy us off."

We gained scholarship money for our own purposes and struggles

-- despite attempts to assimilate and control us.

We gained all of these things because we overcame divisions in

our community, especially the division between local and immigrant labor. It has been the growing strength of our weakest sector--undocumented workers which has undermined the usefulness of immigration to business. The increasing access of undocumented workers to social services and legal aid together with new links to local worker organizations (e.g., UFW, TFW) has also strengthened them and hence all of us.

## have created THEIR PROBLEM

The repeated failure to contain us by poverty programs, technological change, runaway shops, and the manipulation of immigrant labor has undercut the business ability to make us work for low income and thus their ability to make profits. When Secretary of Labor Ray Marshall voices fears of a "new [Chicano] civil rights struggle of the 1980s" we can see that we are their problem. Our strength is their crisis.

## THEIR SOLUTION. . .

2.

Faced with our growing strength -- especially the declining usefulness of immigrant labor to weaken us, business and government have tried to undermine our unity through inflation (esp. food and energy prices), the imposition of austerity (fiscal belt-tightening and reduced social services), and above all a massive attempt to terrorize us through political repression under the rubric of a campaign against "illegal aliens" . . . . .

## THE CARTER PLAN

Because the basic source of growing Chicano/Mexicano power has been the increasing unity of a borderless people, the fundamental thrust of Carter's Plan has been to try to destroy that unity by splitting the community. First, the whole campaign attacks only one part of the community promising the others that if they don't intervene they will remain untouched. The plan hopes to isolate undocumented workers from community support. Second, limited Amnesty aims to further weaken undocumented workers by splitting them in three parts: those granted total amnesty, those only given temporary resident permits and those to be deported at once. Third, the expansion of the INS Border Patrol and the intensification of its raids and roundups are designed to terrorize the whole community, undermining any remaining tendency to support the undocumented workers. Fourth, the proposal for worker identification cards, rationalized as necessary to prosecute employers hiring undocumented workers, are more likely to serve as a racist method to harrass and monitor Chicano workers along the lines of the internal passports of the Soviet Union or the "pass system" of South Africa.

## creates A PROBLEM FOR US

Each aspect of their solution creates a new problem for us. We must find ways to defeat these new uses of inflation, austerity and repression against immigrant labor. We must prevent our isolation from anglo workers, we must defeat attempts to split our own people. We must deal with terrorist methods of harrassment. We must stop the plan for identification cards. In short we must strengthen our unity to defeat this divide-and-conquer strategy.

3.

## OUR SOLUTION

To solve the problem of the new attacks on undocumented workers in the U.S. we must decide how to strengthen those strategies and programs on which our gains have been based. Besides organizing peaceful pressure campaigns for human rights, unconditional amnesty, and other legal changes to benefit undocumented workers, we need to consider the possibilities of:

--expanding the efforts to unite local and undocumented workers through pressure on labor organizations like the United Farm workers, the Texas Farm workers, ILGWU, and the AFL-CIO.

--expanding and coordinating the informal network of family and social contacts which help and protect undocumented workers as they move back and forth across the border.

--militant action to demand an expansion of social expenditures (eg. public health, scholarships) and income for undocumented workers (especially for women workers who do double work as housewives) on the model of the early welfare rights struggles.

--strengthening the organizational linkages between groups of workers on both sides of the border. For example, by organizing support for workers in Mexico through attacks on U.S. subsidiaries of the firms against which they are struggling (eg. Del Monte).

--expanding the programs of legal aid counseling to undocumented workers and militantly challenging the legitimacy of laws and of a legal system set up to attack workers.

At the same time, and on the basis of these efforts, we must decide how to directly attack Carter's new programs. We must consider the possibilities of:

--organizing the physical resistance to immigration raids in factories, fields and community.

--organizing the disruption of INS operations, especially deportations, the way we once disrupted the functioning of the draft and the war effort.

--organizing the collective public melting of the proposed worker identification cards if and when they are deployed.

In general our only solution to this multisided problem is to find ways to counteract each aspect and organizationally coordinate all these different struggles so that they reinforce and support each other.

## Civil Rights fight of 1980s?

LOS ANGELES-In his *Los Angeles Times* interview, Secretary of Labor Marshall offered one candid reason why the Carter administration wants to draw an iron curtain across the Mexican border.

"I believe we are now building a new civil rights struggle of the 1980s by having an underclass of people come into this country," he said, "unable to protect themselves, easily exploited, dissatisfied with their status and yet fearful of being exported.

"Their children will be even more dissatisfied and likely to revolt against such conditions, and they will demand their civil rights in the

fashion of the civil rights struggles which began in the 1960s."

Marshall compared the situation with "that of the blacks who moved out of the South into the urban North. At first, the people who went out of the South tended to be relatively satisfied with the jobs which were not very good by the standards but which seemed to be good compared to those available in the rural South.

"But - their children do not make that kind of comparison, and they joined in the revolt against their conditions. The children of the illegal aliens will be doing the same thing in time."

### A FURTHER ELABORATION

To clarify the forgoing discussion we would like to amplify on a number of crucial points of analysis.

We begin from the reality of Aztlan--which we understand as a borderless community of workers with a common language and cultural background whose unity has been established by inter

twined struggles despite its division by an artificial national border which separates Chicanos to the North from Mexicanos to the South. Aztlan thus constitutes a sector of the North American working class which consists of both waged workers and peasants whose struggles are linked and opposed to the capitalist class on both sides of the border.

5.

### THE AUTONOMY OF WORKERS STRUGGLES

It is true that from the point of view of the capitalist system the division of La Raza by a border has facilitated the hierarchical division of our community with higher (usually waged) income paid in the North and lower (usually unwaged) income paid in the South. Furthermore it is generally recognized that this division has been used against us by the employment of workers from the South as union and strike breakers against workers in the North.

Yet at the same time we see this labor mobility as not always being onesidedly in the interests of business. We must see how Mexican immigration northward is an autonomous working class demand for higher income and less backbreaking work in the fields. The difficulties government has had in controlling this flow in periods of crisis has demonstrated the degree to which migration has represented the autonomous demands of Mexicano workers.

We must also see that it is exactly this immigration (part rotational, part permanent) which has made the borderless community a reality over several generations by creating complex networks of family, social and political linkages. It is these social networks that have made it possible for Mexicano workers to continue to move during the deportations of the 1930s, the round-ups of Operation Wetback in the 1950s, and during the anti-documented worker campaigns of the last three years.

### OUR STRUGGLES CAUSE THEIR CRISIS

This increasing ability to escape formal governmental and informal (eg. labor contractor smuggling) controls constitutes one element of the "immigration crisis" for capitalism. Unplanned immigration is an immediate threat. Furthermore, if the mobility of workers has been one cause of Carter's attempt to reestablish control, another equally important aspect of the struggles of undocumented workers has been their increasingly successful efforts to breakout of their isolation. This we can see in the growing links with other, more organized workers, such as the United Farm Workers, one of the strongest Chicano organizations. On August 27th 1977, the UFW

unanimously rejected Carter's plan and stepped up its organization of undocumented workers. The Texas Farmworkers Union has also been organizing undocumented workers in Texas since 1975. There have been reports of similar efforts in several northern cities. Such growing Chicano-Mexicano unity spells crisis for a system based on pitting the Chicano worker against Mexicano.

We must also point out that the undocumented workers have been making gains in other ways as well. They have been making increasingly successful demands for a variety of social services legal assistance and income supports. As they have been able to secure welfare, unemployment benefits, *health services*, etc. they have undermined their character of low cost labor and have, like Chicanos and others in the late 1960s, begun to demand incomes which are increasingly independent of labor.

Although these gains of undocumented workers have been smaller and come later in the development of Chicano and Mexican struggles, we see them as particularly important because increasing the power of the weakest part of the class means decreasing the ability of capitalists to use these workers as a weapon against stronger workers. This is also true for the struggles of Mexicanos south of the border. The recent rapid growth of wage gains by agricultural workers in Mexico and their land seizures in the Northwest undercut the North/South *hierarch*-. strengthening both undocumented workers and Chicanos.

#### THE DANGER OF ISOLATION

If the growth in the power of workers in Aztlan has been based primarily on the way we have been able to overcome many of the divisions used against us, the limits to that power still lies in divisions which have not been overcome, both within the community and between the community and the non-Aztlan working class. The serious dangers of isolation are amply demonstrated by the chronic malnutrition and starvation of peasants in rural areas of Mexico who are unable to link up with workers in other areas to fight for a better life.

In the Chicano community we have seen many efforts to isolate and destroy particular groups -- as with the Teamster attack on the UFW. That attack was only defeated because the UFW had been able to establish ties with some 17 million other workers--mainly housewives--who supported them through the boycott.

7.

The current attack on undocumented workers is another attempt to isolate and destroy a sector of a borderless community. It too will only be defeated if we prevent that isolation and strengthen our unity--first within our own community on both sides of the border and then with other parts of the North American working class.

#### THE INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER OF THE CRISIS

It is important for us to see that the growth of our power, as well as the current attacks against us, are part of a wider pattern. Our struggles formed part of an international cycle of struggles. That our efforts have been linked with those of workers in Mexico through the immigration of workers is obvious. We also must remember that the recent Chicano movement struggles of the 1960s occurred during the Vietnam War, when Blacks, students and women rose up at home and abroad demanding justice in Southeast Asia and in their own communities. The struggles of undocumented workers in the U.S. was paralleled by those of immigrant workers, in Northern Europe where they had moved in the hundreds of thousands demanding increased income and a better life:

With this background it is not surprising that the new attack on undocumented workers in the U.S. are being duplicated right now in Europe. Turks are being expelled from Germany, Algerians from France, etc. all in attempts to overcome linkages which they had established with local workers.

If we are successful in building that new round of Chicano struggles which the Secretary of Labor fears and Carter's plan is designed to prevent, if we succeed in defeating these attempts to undermine our unity and income, then we will have preserved our power and helped to plunge the capitalist system even deeper into crisis. If workers in other parts of the world, eg. immigrant workers in Europe, also succeed, (and to a degree our success depends on theirs) then we will draw closer to a decisive rupture which must come with a generalized confrontation between workers and the State. Their problem is that we may find the organizational forms necessary to win that confrontation and destroy them. .

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