

# Mexico intensifies persecution of Central American immigrants

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The Mexican government of President Enrique Peña Nieto has launched an intensive crackdown on immigrants in direct collaboration with the Obama administration. It initiated new repressive measures in the aftermath of this summer's arrival at the US border of tens of thousands of children.

Of the children immigrants, a disproportionate number came from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Nearly all immigrants from these Central American countries, which have been wracked by intense violence produced by decades of US imperialist domination, have to pass through Mexico first.

Determined to block this flow and to deny these children the refugee status to which they are entitled, the US has put pressure on Mexico to impose tighter controls, while providing assistance for it to do so.

Among the first measures taken by the Mexican government at the behest of Washington have been frequent raids on the "La Bestia" trains, which had previously been a popular method for migrants to travel north. Hundreds of migrants used to ride these trains at a time, but now only dozens will attempt to make the journey this way because of police repression. Pushed off the trains, many find themselves forced to travel on foot through the jungle where they are even more at the mercy of both nature and criminal gangs. (See: "From El Salvador to the United States: An immigrant teenager's story")

Mexico is now taking additional steps to prevent immigrants from crossing its territory to reach the US. It has invested \$80 million in speeding up La Bestia trains to discourage boarding while in motion, set up 12 checkpoints at key locations in the Mexican interior, and has begun policing the Guatemalan border.

Its policing of the Guatemalan border in some ways resembles the military nature of Washington's

patrolling of the Mexican border. Mexico has identified 370 distinct, "informal" crossing points and has set up multiple lines stretching up to 100 kilometers back to monitor. By use of patrols and terrain, migrants are to be funneled into 11 "formal crossings" where their biometric information will be tracked using devices provided by the US as part of the Mérida Initiative.

Migrants will be legally allowed to travel up to 100 kilometers into Mexico and may stay for up to 72 hours. After that, they are subject to deportation back to their country of origin if caught.

According to the Washington Office on Latin America, (WOLA), the formal crossing checkpoints have "biometric kiosks [that] collect information about border-crossers in a database that, a U.S. Embassy document avers, 'will be a powerful tool to support judicial proceedings and counter-terrorism efforts.' The equipment, part of a larger US\$58 million Mérida Initiative biometric program mainly benefiting the National Migration Institute, registers crossers' fingerprints, irises, and facial characteristics. This information is linked to Mexico's public security database network as part of the 'Migration Program for the Southern Border of Mexico.'"

Furthermore, Mexico now performs aerial surveillance of the Guatemala border.

It should be noted that the Mexican elite profits from this crackdown, at the expense of the working class. As WOLA puts it quite unabashedly, "The program's economic component seeks to exploit the area's natural resources, which it claims would complement efforts to guarantee security for investments in the area, thus contributing to productivity and safety. Migration is an aspect of this strategy, as migrant flows may be used for labor, particularly in agricultural sectors like banana and oil palm plantations."

In other words, migrants in Mexico will be used as a source of extremely cheap labor and to put downward pressure on already low wages in order to better exploit the Mexican working class.

Officials from the Mexican Secretariat of the Interior's national security commission were quoted as saying that the development of border security is being carried out for two ends: "development for security," and "security for development." It is notable that

the increasing exploitation of migrant workers is accompanied by an intensification of the repressive capabilities of the state.

The disappearance of the 43 *normalistas* (rural teacher college students) in Guerrero and the attacks on Central American migrants have a common source. They are both instances of repression by the Mexican state and are the consequences of it acting in the interests of both its own ruling elite and US imperialism.

It is in large part due to the Obama administration's efforts that Mexico has stepped up its persecution of immigrants. After the immigration crisis this summer, Washington was determined to ensure that such a crisis would not reoccur. This led it to undertake negotiations with Latin American countries to help stem the flow of immigrants to the US.

The US also has a vested interest in ensuring the stable continuation of the Peña Nieto regime in Mexico. Under Peña Nieto, the Mexican government has undertaken a historic privatization of the oil industry and has been a boon to foreign investment. The US establishment has not so much as reprimanded the Mexican president for his regime's complicity in the massacre of the Mexican students, which, were it to happen in any country targeted by the US would quickly be invoked as the pretext for sanctions and regime change.

The Mexican state finds a natural ally in the US in undertaking its vicious attacks on its own people and on immigrants. But just as the ruling classes in these two countries have common interests, so too do the working classes of all of the Americas have a common enemy.