



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Caravan brings people's aid, solidarity to refugees trapped at border

written by John Parker, Sharon Black and Jefferson Azevedo
December 8, 2018



Near the border in San Diego, Dec. 1, 2018. Credit: Greg Butterfield

Tijuana, Mexico

Sometimes as workers we forget that we're part of a large family of working people

around the world. But it's the truth. And when your family is under attack, you want to do everything you can to help.

This spirit of solidarity fueled a people's aid caravan from Los Angeles on Dec. 1 that carried desperately needed supplies destined for the more than 6,000 refugees — children, women, men, LGBTQ+ people, Indigenous and Afro-Latinxs — trapped in Tijuana, Mexico, by President Donald Trump's attempts to block Central American asylum seekers from entering the U.S.

These are workers fleeing political and economic violence imposed on Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and other countries by decades of U.S. intervention under both Republican and Democratic regimes. They are facing down the barrels of the racist Border Patrol that teargasses families, and the thousands of U.S. troops deployed by Trump, who said that these troops should shoot at the slightest provocation.

In response to what it characterized as “a humanitarian crisis,” the American Indian Movement of Southern California (AIM SoCal), along with Movimiento Cosecha L.A., initiated this solidarity caravan — one of many now being organized throughout the Southwest and across the country.

We represented the Welcome/Bienvenida Refugee Caravan Committees, along with other activists from Baltimore, Los Angeles, New York and San Diego. Participating organizations included Assistance for the Resistance, Kids Out Of Cages, the Harriet Tubman Social Justice Center-Los Angeles, the Baltimore People's Power Assembly, Solidarity with Novorossiya & Antifascists in Ukraine, and more.

The call went out for people to donate needed supplies, which were collected at Bernie's Coffee Shop, a long-abandoned diner in Los Angeles' museum district that has been converted into a movement space. And so, during the last week of November, as the word spread, donations blossomed — including tents and tarps,

diapers and bottles, coats and blankets, toiletries and toys, bottled water and canned food.

Workers solicited donations in their workplaces, schools and communities. It was truly inspiring to see the outpouring of people's solidarity as it took shape day by day. Volunteers gathered nightly to unload donation drop-offs, sort items, and fold T-shirts and other clothing.

Caravan to the border

Then, on Saturday morning, Dec. 1, a multinational, multigenerational team of more than two dozen activists gathered at Bernie's to load the people's aid into cars, minivans and pickup trucks for the 3-hour-plus trip to the U.S.-Mexico border.

By midafternoon, the vehicles converged at a San Diego home which serves as a coordination center on the U.S. side. There, we received an orientation from local activists, who gave updates on possible border closures and a hunger strike by a group of Central American refugees protesting the alarming conditions they face in Tijuana.

We learned that aid delivery would be especially challenging this weekend due to Mexican authorities' decision to move thousands of refugees from the Benito Juárez sports complex near the border to a shelter 11 miles away. Though justified by the government as a move to improve conditions for the refugees, many believe it was meant to discourage border protests by the refugees like the one that was brutally attacked with tear gas by the U.S. Border Patrol on Nov. 25.

Before crossing the border, it was important for us to pack our aid discretely to avoid harassment, fines or confiscation. We ended up taking about half of the aid brought down from Los Angeles. The rest was left at the house in San Diego to bring over the border the next day.

As dusk fell, the solidarity caravan converged at the Enclave Caracol activist center in Tijuana. As we carried in boxes and bags, we saw long lines of seniors, teens, parents holding babies and many others spilling out of Enclave's entrance into the courtyard.

Inside, volunteer workers cooked and served hot meals to asylum seekers. Children sat on wooden benches reading and coloring.

We spoke with volunteers who sorted the donations. Although Enclave deals mostly with food and beverage donations, their well-organized team helped dispatch cars with clothing and other aid to distribution points around the city.

After waiting hours in long lines to cross back into the U.S., some members of the solidarity caravan returned to Los Angeles on Saturday night. Others camped out at the coordination house in San Diego and went back over the border on Sunday to deliver the remaining aid.

Organizers reported that these were the first donations to go directly to the asylum seekers with no government intervention. More than 500 people received aid.

Supporting asylum seekers

"Supporting the asylum seekers is very important to me," explained Marco Flores of AIM SoCal. "U.S. intervention in their home countries has cause great instability, violence and extreme poverty. This has left many of them no choice but to flee.

"As a citizen of the United States, I feel a personal responsibility to help these people. This country has benefitted from their suffering and now we have a responsibility to be there for them in their time of need. Turning away would be selfish and cowardly. We can't sit back and watch this injustice happen without doing something about it. They are human beings who are deserving of love and life just like anyone else."

Gloria Verdieu, a community organizer from San Diego, said: “I think it’s important that the African communities in the U.S. and the asylum seekers understand that this struggle is one struggle. We are all in this together.

“I couldn’t help but recall the images from New Orleans after the Katrina and Rita hurricanes. The people evacuated, majority African American, referred to as refugees in the country of their birth, seeking asylum. I recalled 2016, when Haitians came seeking asylum. It’s all the same.

“I realize it can be hard for us — working-class people — to see how important it is to show true solidarity, because we are struggling every day to survive. We need all the support we can get right here in our depressed communities. Yet we must continue to push for unity and peoples’ power.”

Members of the solidarity caravan promised to continue the struggle demanding that all the refugees be allowed into the U.S., and to carry out further aid drives in the weeks to come.

In the words of a banner unfurled by the Welcome/Bienvenida Refugee Caravan Committees: “There are no borders in the workers’ struggle!”

