

Who can stop the war on children at the border?

written by Greg Butterfield
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Five children detained at the border have died since December.

Children, like the truth, are often the first casualties of war. And children are dying

in the war being waged by Donald Trump and the boss class against migrants and asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Jakelin Caal Maquín, age 7. Felipe Gómez Alonzo, 8. Juan de León Gutiérrez, 16. A still-unnamed toddler, just two-and-a-half years old. Carlos Hernández Vásquez, 16. These are the casualties we know of — so far — since December. All were asylum seekers from Guatemala who died in U.S. custody.

And now there is Darlyn Valle, age 10.

A young refugee from El Salvador, Darlyn was trying to reach her mother in Nebraska when she was captured by the Border Patrol. The U.S. government held her in custody from March to September 2018, despite a chronic heart condition that required surgery. Darlyn was forced to undergo surgery without her mother or other family at her side.

She was finally sent to a facility in Nebraska — three days before her death on Sept. 29.

In all the months since, U.S. officials never revealed Darlyn's death — until they were forced to, probably by the threat of whistleblowing, after the [death of Carlos on May 20](#) at a Border Patrol station in Weslaco, Texas.

[CBS News broke the story](#) about Darlyn on May 22, reporting: “Manuel Castillo, Consulate General of El Salvador in Aurora, told CBS News his office had no knowledge of the girl's death. Castillo said the office was caught off guard by the news, and was hoping the CBS News report would help him track down the family. Castillo said concerned local residents called him, saying, ‘We can't let this happen again.’”

Nor can we forget the names of other migrants and refugees killed by the enforcers of Trump's “Build that wall” incitement, like [Roxsana Hernández](#), a 33-year-old trans

woman who was abused and denied proper treatment for HIV, and [Claudia Gómez González](#), 20, who was shot in the head and killed by a Border Patrol goon.

Over 80 people have died at the hands of the Border Patrol since 2010, according to the [Southern Border Communities Coalition](#).

The media now routinely publish pictures of families living in increasingly squalid conditions in “camps” run by the Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE): children [fenced in under bridges](#) or sleeping in piles of garbage [under makeshift tents](#). The Trump administration is planning to [vastly expand detention facilities](#), imprisoning still more refugees and migrants, including children and families.



Inhuman conditions for asylum seekers at Border Patrol facility in McAllen, Texas.

It didn't start with Trump

The reports are coming more frequently. They can seem overwhelming, especially to working-class parents struggling to keep their children healthy and safe in a country gripped with economic insecurity, poverty and racist terror.

It's important to understand that this war on children didn't start with Trump. The Obama administration and previous governments, both Republican and Democrat, laid the groundwork.

According to a [newly released report](#) by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School, "Migrant children under the care of United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) were allegedly beaten, threatened with sexual violence and repeatedly assaulted while in custody between 2009 and 2014.

"Border authorities were accused of kicking a child in the ribs and forcing a 16-year-old girl to 'spread her legs' for an aggressive body search. Other children accused officers of punching a child in the head three times, running over a 17-year-old boy and denying medical care to a pregnant teen, who later had a stillbirth."

This happened during the presidency of Democrat Barack Obama, who was known as the "Deporter in Chief" for the [record-high rate of raids and deportations](#) that took place under his watch. Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden were both high officials during that time.

While no children were reported to have died in immigration custody under the previous administration, the trend leading toward today's crisis is clear.

But it's more than that. In his war-mongering campaign against Venezuela, Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton recently [invoked the imperialistic Monroe Doctrine](#), which stated that all of the Western Hemisphere was the U.S.'s

“backyard.” While that overtly racist statement drew some self-satisfied snorts from the corporate media, the truth is, U.S. authorities and the wealthy ruling class they serve have never stopped living by this doctrine.

Decades of U.S.-instigated coups, wars and economic strangulation are driving the exodus of refugees from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and other countries.

And the war on children doesn’t stop at the border. It continues on the streets of the U.S., in the denial of health care, the decimation of public education, and by homegrown death squads, including racist police and vigilantes. The casualties include familiar names like Tamir Rice, Aiyana Jones, Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, and lesser known ones, like [14-year-old Antonio Arce](#), who was shot and killed by police in Tempe, Ariz., in January.

Unite to fight

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Whistleblowers are [courageously coming forward](#), despite the danger exemplified by the U.S. persecution of Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange and others. There are congressional committees and lawsuits aplenty.

All of these tactics can be useful for furthering the struggle. But by themselves, they amount to stopgap measures at best, which cannot solve the fundamental problem.

To give one example: Despite loud crows of victory from Trump’s congressional competitors like Nancy Pelosi, the [crisis of family separations](#) has continued as it has receded from the headlines.

Meanwhile, children are dying.

The fundamental problem is capitalism. All the defenders of the profit system — left,

right and center, Democrats and Republicans alike — have a stake in Trump’s divide and conquer tactics. They don’t want the workers and oppressed communities here to unite with our class siblings across the border and around the world.

They will not take the fundamental steps needed to end the crisis of children dying at the border, just as they have done nothing to end the epidemic of police murders. Defenders of a system based on the idea that fundamental human needs like jobs, health care, education, housing and food are privileges, not rights, will not solve the problem.

But there is another group in society: one that plays a fundamental role in the economy and has an inherent stake in uniting across borders to fight its common enemy. That is the working class.

We can look at the recent wave of teachers’ strikes in defense of public education as an example. In state after state, education workers and communities have united to push back attacks on students and the right to education, and made important gains.

Remember, too, how the threat of airline workers to withhold their labor — and hit the bosses’ pocketbook! — quickly ended the long “government shutdown” earlier this year.

What if the workers’ and community organizations, including unions, threatened to withhold their labor until the war on children and all migrants and refugees was ended? What if they reached out to workers’ organizations in the countries that people are fleeing from? What if they organized caravans from all over the country to go to the border and bring aid and solidarity to those trapped in Washington’s prison camps?

