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Migrant caravans flee U.S.-made crisis

Demand Biden let them in!

By Greg Butterfield

While the eyes of the world were fixed on the presidential transition in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 17, the Guatemalan army attacked a caravan of 8,000 Honduran refugees trying to reach the U.S. border 2,400 miles away.

"In the town of Vado Hondo, in the department of Chiquimula, bordering Honduras, the security forces confronted the migrants with tear gas and stun grenades. The security officers charged the crowd with batons and sticks, and managed to stop the migrants from advancing beyond Vado Hondo. In the incident of violent repression, hundreds of people were injured," reported Peoples Dispatch.

People are fleeing terrible conditions under the repressive, drug-trafficking Honduran regime — put in power after a U.S.-engineered coup in 2009 — and a string of subsequent disasters, including hurricanes and the pandemic. They had managed to cross the border between Honduras and Guatemala the day before.

This brutal attack on women, men and children is deeply connected to both the outgoing U.S. administration of Donald Trump and the incoming one headed by Joe Biden.

Trump, of course, openly and with extreme cruelty condemned the caravans coming from Central America to the U.S.-Mexico border, which began in late 2018.

For more than two years, thousands of people from Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and other countries have remained in ramshackle conditions waiting for an opportunity to apply for asylum that never came. Thousands more were forced to return home to dangerous situations or seek whatever work they could find, stateless and homeless.

Others — including refugees from Haiti — have been waiting even longer.

Trump's regime bullied and bribed Guatemala and Mexico to crack down hard on refugees and migrants.

But how different is the new Biden administration? In practice, so far, not much.

While speaking in more diplomatic language, the message from Biden transition officials to the refugees was the same: Don't come! And this posture encouraged the crackdown by the right-wing, U.S.-armed Guatemalan government.

By Jan. 19, both U.S. and Central

American media reported that the caravan had been largely dispersed by the Guatemalan army repression. Only a handful of refugees reached shelters near the border with Mexico, where Mexican soldiers were also amassed to block the caravan.

Many people were bused back to

Honduras, where they faced an un-

known fate. Many more drifted away

in smaller groups, seeking other

ways forward, such as the dangerous

trip across the Suchiate River.

Despite the repression, two more

caravans of Honduran refugees

are preparing to risk the trek in the

coming weeks.

What Biden did and didn't do

Biden took office Jan. 20 and immediately signed 17 executive orders meant to reverse some of the most egregious Trump policies.

This included repealing the so-called Muslim Ban that blocked passport holders from several majority-Muslim countries from entering the U.S. and restoring the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that provides a pathway to citizenship for undocumented residents (popularly known as "Dreamers") who arrived in the U.S. as children. And he stopped construction of Trump's "border wall" boondoggle.

Biden also ordered the Department of Homeland Security and immigration agencies to put a stop to some deportations for 100 days while their policies are "reviewed." However, the moratorium order is full of holes and leaves much of the discretion up to agencies riddled with some of the worst white supremacist Trump backers.

The new U.S. regime has no plans to shut down or even curb the notorious Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) gestapo, only to "refocus" it on deporting people who are alleged to have committed crimes while in the U.S. and recent arrivals.

This was the same policy followed by the Obama administration when Biden was vice president and earned Obama the title "Deporter in Chief."

The Obama administration deported more than 3 million people.

The first few days of the new government also failed to address the horrific detention of migrants and refugees, including children, who have managed against all odds to cross the border into the U.S.

As for the caravans, an unnamed Biden transition official told NBC

News, "There's help on the way, but now is not the time to make the journey."

"Over time, the official said, the Biden administration plans to set up a way to safely process migrants at the border and allow asylum seekers to make their claims."

Fighters for migrant and refugee rights are not convinced. "The 11 million [estimated undocumented workers in the U.S.] have seen this before," said a Jan. 20 statement from Movimiento Cosecha, "a Democratic Congress and president promising a pathway for all. And we saw 3 million deported and an absence of political willingness to fight for our families."

Cosecha chapters across the U.S. carried out banner drops and other actions during inaugural week, vowing that "the community is not waiting for others to take action, we are leading the fight for dignity and respect."

A banner appeared in Brooklyn, NY, on the morning of Inauguration Day that read, "Democrats deport and detain too. Permanent protections now! Abolish ICE!"

Build working-class SOLIDARITY

By John Parker and Gary Wilson

Donald Trump made racism the core of his campaign and encouraged the recent coup attempt at the Capitol in order to negate especially the votes of Black people, who suffer a history of voter disenfranchisement in the U.S.

The electoral victory of Joe Biden and Kamala Harris was seen by most to be a rejection of Trump and racism. The election has removed Trump and put Biden in the office of president. And it's understandable that people would feel a sense of relief.

Continued on page 2

- ▶ Organize against fascism
- ▶ Proud Boys OUT! 2
- ▶ Honor Dr King 3
- ▶ Women's job loss
- ▶ Bronx produce workers 4
- ▶ Disbar Giuliani
- ▶ Free Leonard Peltier 5
- ▶ Trump & the Pentagon 6
- ▶ Somalia! 7



Appeal from Honduran activist

On Inauguration Day, Lucy Pagoada-Quesada, a teacher and leading Honduran activist living in the U.S., issued an open letter to President Joe Biden. Pagoada-Quesada represents Department 19 of Resistencia/LIBRE, the official North American chapter of the resistance movement in Honduras.

"You were vice president when, in 2009, the government of your party led by President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton supported the military coup in Honduras against our Constitutional President Manuel Zelaya Rosales," she reminded Biden.

"In 2010, the U.S. government imposed on us Porfirio Lobo-Sosa, whose son Fabio Lobo is imprisoned in the U.S. for cocaine trafficking. In 2013, they also imposed on us the narco dictator Juan Orlando Hernández, whose brother Antonio (Tony) Hernández is imprisoned

Continued on page 4

Guatemalan security forces repress Honduran migrants in Vado Hondo, Jan. 17.

- Migrant caravans flee U.S.-made crisis
- Appeal from Honduran activist
- Build working-class solidarity
- Organize workers and oppressed to fight the fascist movement
- Protesters say 'Proud Boys out of New York!'
- 'Honor Dr. King's revolutionary vision'
- Harlem remembers MLK the fighter
- Women accounted for all jobs lost in December
- Bronx produce workers fight for justice
- Disbar Rudy Giuliani. Reinstate Alton Maddox!
- Was Trump ousted from the military chain of command?
- Trump & Pentagon in coup attempt
- U.S.-Africom out! Justice and reparations for Somalia!
- Condena a la fraudulenta calificación de Cuba como estado patrocinador del terrorismo
- 'Recordamos a Lenin como recordamos a Fidel'

