

US IMMIGRANTS' STRUGGLE

Hundreds of Thousands say 'No'—II

By A Correspondent

An article in the New York Times (“NAFTA to Open Floodgates, Engulfing Rural Mexico,” Dec 15, 2002) profiled the plight of Eugenio Guerrero, a Mexican pig farmer, whose farm was ruined by cheap imported US pork. In 1994 the US and Mexico signed the NAFTA agreement—the North American Free Trade Act—which enabled US capital to more thoroughly penetrate Mexico. Shortly after NAFTA went into effect, the Mexican financial system nearly collapsed under the burden of foreign debt. The big capitalists in the US then engineered a so-called “bailout” deal, which forced the restructuring of the Mexican national budget to further serve external imperialist capital. In 1995, the Mexican government ended most agricultural subsidies, making it even more difficult for Mexican pig farmers like Eugenio Guerrero to survive. (According to this same Times article, a typical farmer in Mexico receives \$722 a year in government subsidies, while the average American farmer receives more than \$20,000.)

The combination of cheaper imported pork from the US and the slashing of subsidies worked together to further chain the lives of the people of Mexico to US imperialism. By the end of 2002, one third of all Mexican pig farmers who had farms when NAFTA was implemented had been driven out of business. Eugenio Guerrero told the Times, “[W]e are putting our independence at risk. We are becoming a country that depends on foreigners for food.”

There are literally a million such stories—of vegetable, chicken, pig, and other farmers driven off the land in Mexico. According to a 2004 report by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, at least 1.5 million Mexican farmers lost their livelihoods under NAFTA.

Some of those displaced *campesinos* ended up in the *maquiladoras*, the vast belt of sweatshops on the US-Mexico border where workers, including large numbers of youth and women, have the life worked out of them for wages that are something like 1/10th those paid to workers in the US.

But the relentless motion of capital has swept even some of those jobs to Asia, where wages are even lower, and workers' rights are even more brutally repressed. All this is just one expression of a whole worldwide setup that drives hundreds of millions of people from their homes, often across borders, to survive—and to be further exploited.

In fact, large numbers of immigrants from Mexico and other places have ended up in the US meat-packing industry, where their low wages and repressive conditions have facilitated the restructuring and profitable revival of the US meatpacking industry. And US capital cashes in yet again when the packaged meat is shipped to Mexico, a country now largely stripped of agricultural self-sufficiency. The meat may turn a profit for the US corporation, but the cost in human lives is huge. And it doesn't stop there—these parasites who have destroyed Mexican agriculture and restructured it to suit their needs, who have driven workers from those farms to then slave in their industries within the US, now skin

the ox one more time: using these same workers as scapegoats for the economic insecurity caused by their system.

It's worth one more look back at the history of this country—not so far back. After the Civil War, Black people in this country were re-chained to the Southern plantations as sharecroppers, living under constant threat of lynching, denied basic political rights, and living lives little different in many ways than slavery. Black people at this time were forged into a nation within the borders of the US—but an oppressed nation, in a setup that enabled the agricultural barons of the South to superexploit them. But with innovations in cotton production that made them “no longer necessary” in that work, along with the growing demand for industrial workers in the factories and the fear of lynching, they were driven north in search of work.

The jobs Black people were sent into included the hardest and most dangerous jobs in on the bloody and disease-infested killing floors of the meatpacking plants—jobs chronicled in the blues songs of the period that talked about being “tied to the killing floor.” Like Mexican immigrants today, they were pushed from their homes and pulled into industry by the motion of capital.

There were Tancredo types back then too, whipping up racist attacks on Blacks (in this same period, there were also racist mob attacks on Chicanos—the “Zoot Suit Riots” as well as mass deportations of Chicanos and Mexican-Americans regardless of their citizenship). In the cities of the North, white workers in particular were told that *Black people*, not the system, were responsible for crushing their lives.

In the spring of 1943, three Black workers at a Packard auto plant in Detroit were promoted to the formerly all-white job of metal polisher. Up until that time, Black workers in the Detroit auto plants were kept in the most low-paying, dirty, dangerous jobs—often in the ferociously hot foundries. White workers went on a week-long racist strike known as the “Packard hate strike.” That June, fights between Blacks and whites broke out at Belle Isle, Detroit’s largest park. Over the next 24 hours, 25 Black people (and 11 whites) died—at least 17 of the Black people who died were killed by police, who sided with the white mobs. Just as they are now, the system promoted and enforced racist hatred at the same time it claimed to be waging a global war for democracy and freedom.

Playing on and promoting white supremacy, directing the anger of exploited white workers at Black people has been a hallmark of this system, and those who see how this works with racism directed at Black people need to recognize how it is being used now, again, against another scapegoat—the immigrants.

Fear is being spread and there are fascist movements being promoted from on high which offer people “certainty”—and provide them with scapegoats—in a time when the ground seems to be disappearing from beneath their feet. The main fascist force is the movement led by people like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and James Dobson. These Christian fascists either blame the poor for their own condition or else give them false hopes of a “better life through Jesus.” Meanwhile, they seek to impose a cruel morality based on a literal interpretation of the Bible — which includes very harsh measures that will be imposed on the masses, including measures that have genocidal implications for Black people and other oppressed

nationalities—and they demand that this be made the law of the land. Along with this, the Christian Fascist agenda provides a program to cohere or re-forge a “united Christian America” on a white supremacist, male supremacist, “USA Number One” basis. At the same time, an anti-immigrant, nativist movement—like what one sees with the Minutemen—is emerging with powerful backing from on high. Some of these forces try to be slick and some of them are openly racist, but they all bring to mind the vigilantes and lynch-mobs that are so integral to American history and culture. This fascist vigilante movement both overlaps and combines with the Christian Fascists, and also has its own dynamic. This state-sponsored nativism bases itself on backward sections of white middle class people, but it also seeks to mobilize white and Black workers (and even documented immigrants) against those whom, based on their real interests, they should be standing shoulder to shoulder with.

This system of imperialism has militarily and politically dominated nations around the globe. It has ran-sacked their economies, chained people’s livelihood to imperialism, and driven people from their homes to this country. It viciously preys on them when they are forced across the border into the US. And then, this system says these people are illegal, a threat to “national security,” and the cause of the problems of everyone else in this country. All this, in service of a system of global plunder. *[Concluded] [Source: Revolution]*