

CONFLICT AND MIGRATION

THE REALITY OF THE MEXICAN BORDER



BY THE
BORDERLANDS EDUCATION COMMITTEE

San Diego, California

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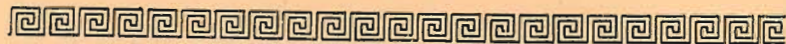
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The Borderlands Education Committee is a group of North American activists based in San Diego. We are doing educational work in the Anglo community in solidarity with the Mexican national liberation struggle on both sides of the border.

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The Borderlands

Comparison between San Diego and Tijuana

Outside of shopping and playing Jai Lai, Anglos in San Diego know very little of Tijuana, although it is just across the border. This reflects how North Americans relate to the whole country of Mexico. We know so little about this nation and its people, their identity, history and land, even though the U.S. has been so directly involved—even establishing the border in its present location through military conquest.

For that matter, few Anglos really know San Diego and the role it plays as the largest U.S. city along the 2000 mile border with Mexico. So let's look at San Diego, the town we all live in, briefly, and then view Tijuana, the town we all visit, and compare them.

These two cities of roughly equal proportions sit side by side, so near to one another, but so far apart with their stark inequalities. These two urban

We know so little about this nation and its people, their identity, history and land...

centers, situated in the same metropolitan area, share many things: a common air basin—and common smog, a common coastline and the river that flows through them. They also share a common history of economic and social development as both have been affected by forces that molded each to the other.

Driving through these parallel cities, one watches as the similarities fall off sharply. Gross disparities exist between them in wealth, resources and, most importantly, in the living and working conditions of their peoples. From the condos, high-rises and tract homes on this side to the wooden and clapboard structures tilting on the hillsides bolstered by embankments of rubber tires on the other side, the differences are all too apparent. No where else in the world where a major metropolitan area crosses an international border are there such disparities in the living standards as exist between San Diego and Tijuana.

Many of us are familiar with San Diego's leisure world and palm-studded horizons, but below the surface something else is going on. Like Tijuana, San Diego has experienced rapid growth and expansion in the last generation or two, and now has a population sprouting around the million mark.

Yes indeed, San Diego has a diversified economy. It includes a powerful aerospace industry that expands with each launching into space and with each war. It includes growing electronics and clothing manufacturing enterprises in the city's surrounding "industrial parks." It includes agricultural fiefdoms that ring the urban areas, where hundred of undocumented Mexican workers live in brush shelters and caves near the fields.

Then there's the fishing and tuna industry, ship-building where the Navy is the main customer, the towering and pervasive tourist industry, the burgeoning educational and medical factories of which UCSD is an integral part, the growth of downtown redevelopment, the sprawling suburbs that rip through the earth off to the north, the east and south.

But look past the suntan oil, the leisure suits, the high-rises and affluent suburbs and we see a different city: a metropolis of highly segregated neighborhoods, where non-white people are in effect prevented from living north of Mission Valley, except for a few neighborhoods. This is the city in which, up until 1960, 90% of black people lived in only two communities. This is the city where freeways and junkyards divide up the Mexican neighborhoods. This is where, although upwards of a third of the county residents are Mexicano, there's never been a Mexican elected to the County or City governments.

We see a city where the rich play by day, in the tennis courts, golf courses and the circus of sea sports. This while poor immigrants travel by night, through the dark, moist valleys of the borderlands, across the harsh, dry and barren fields of the desert.

By blinking through the sunshine, we primarily view a city of special importance; we see that San Diego has been established as the Pearl Harbor of the mainland coast where the U.S. armed forces, the Navy, predominate.

The Navy also has a corresponding dominance and conservative influence at the top echelons of the aerospace and shipbuilding industries, and in the backrooms of San Diego's politics. This influence is displayed quite openly in such local issues as the Naval Hospital/Florida Canyon dispute and in

A quarter of the people of San Diego are either Navy personnel, dependents, former Navy, retired, or Naval and civilian workers—close to 400,000 people. A third of the entire U.S. fleet is based in San Diego with some 45,000

What divides Tijuana and San Diego is a border, an arbitrarily drawn artificial line that was established 130 years ago by military conquest...

sailors stationed aboard the 137 ships and vessels that call the city their home port. The military is indeed the single largest employer in the county, payroll over 150,000 people. The Navy brings in \$7 million a day to this city. It's the bedrock of San Diego's economy.

San Diego has 30,000 Marines up at Pendleton. Then there's the training depots, the naval air bases, the submarine bases, military docks, research facilities, helicopter pads, military hospitals, nuclear weapons on the subs, nuclear waste and dumping sites, missile silos, housing complexes, the Naval headquarters, and the corrupting military-related research being performed at the universities... the airport relocation controversy.

San Diego is a Navy town. San Diego is the Navy's town. It basks in the sun as a Pacific and frontier fortress.

across the border

All this military might and wealth sits across the border from Tijuana and Mexico. And it's obvious that Tijuana is very poor compared to its northern neighbor. Whereas San Diego's city budget spends roughly \$250 per taxpayer a year, Tijuana spends 22 pesos, or one dollar a year per person.

With 5000 emigrants arriving from the south every month, Tijuana's economy and situation is much different and even less diversified than San Diego. Growing at a rate of 5 to 10% a year, twice that of San Diego, its major industries are tourism and light manufacturing.

Tijuana's population has exploded in the last 40 years from 21,000 to close to a million. Unemployment is a staggering 20 to 30% or more. Social services and housing conditions are impoverished and barely existant compared to the reality just a few miles north. Only a quarter of Tijuana's roads are paved. A third of the residents go without electricity. Only two-thirds have plumbing and only half the neighborhoods have some kind of drainage system. Garbage is not collected regularly. The city is near bankruptcy itself.

Tijuana residents have access to only one hospital in the entire city, compared to the many numerous ones scattered about San Diego. Public schools in Tijuana are jammed as students are turned away. Sixty to seventy pupils cram into a single classroom, while in San Diego, schools are being closed for declining enrollments. These are the differences a few miles can make.

Tijuana is changing. With government sponsored redevelopments—downtown, and along the Tia Juana Reiver plain, new office buildings, freeways, and new shopping centers, new apartments and model homes for government workers, Tijuana's image of a rowdy border town are fading. Tiajuana's role, both along the border and within Mexico, is growing in significance and influence. With nearly four dozen banks, Tijuana is the third largest center of savings accounts in Mexico.

The largest border city on the Mexican side, Tijuana has become one of Mexico's wealthiest cities, and a

major financial and industrial center. However, little has changed over the last decade for the average resident. The minimum daily wage is only a meager \$6.50, still the highest of all Mexico. Most of those who are working are just making enough to get by on.

Incredibly, the cost of living in Tijuana is almost on the level of San Diego's, due to the soaring peso inflation and the city's greater distances from the industrial centers of Mexico, certain foods, clothing, and consumer goods are often cheaper in San Diego. Thus many residents cross and shop in San Diego stores, spending close to an estimated \$500 million annually on this side of the border. This accounts for 9 to 12% of all San Diego retail sales.

Thousands of green-card workers who cross daily and work legally in San Diego also spend millions of dollars north of the border. For every dollar green-card holders make in San Diego through employment, about 82 cents comes back to the U.S. one way or another.

In the other direction, U.S. tourists spend around \$120 million a year in Tijuana, the city that claims it attracts more visitors than any other city in the world. The tourist trade has fostered the 800 or so curio shops within the downtown area, putting 15,000 people to work, making and selling artifacts and crafts. Yet it is this very tourism that keeps the city in an impoverished dependency on the U.S. dollar.

Tourism created Tijuana and maintains the city in an inferior economic status. U.S. and Mexican investors take their profits instead of creating new industry and lessening the city's reliance on the tourist money. And San Diego definitely benefits from the influx of visitors traveling south to shop and play in Tijuana, for of course they also spend a lot of money in San Diego.

Because of this dependency, many of the basics are imported from the U.S.: nearly 70% of its machinery and appliances, over 60% of its food, drink, tobacco, and half of all clothing and footwear.

The newer industry in Tijuana, the assembly plants of electronics, textiles, toys, CB radios and TVs are mostly owned by U.S. corporations. These plants, called maguiladores, employ some 8,000 people at wages far lower than prevail just over the border on the U.S. side. As part of the Border Industrialization Program, the plants

are subsidized by the Mexican government, and were initially begun in the mid-60s as a response to the large-scale migration of unemployed Mexicano laborers to the northern border region. Studies have shown, however, that the U.S. owned maguiladores mainly employ local people, primarily young unmarried women, and not the many coming from the south.

Tijuana's high unemployment thus remains and continues to grow as a direct result of this migration.



some historical notes

San Diego's dominance over Tijuana is nothing new, as is apparent if we trace some history.

100 years ago, San Diego was a small seaport town, surrounded by large ranchos. Lured by cheap land as bounty seized from native people and from Mexico itself—from the War of 1848—white settlers began pouring into the area. This was the time of the Manifest destiny as U.S. capitalism pushed west after the Civil War.

Tijuana was initially one of those large ranchos in the area. Accompanying San Diego's boom in the 1880s, Tijuana was established as a border town. With growing population and money, U.S. investments began in Baja, with foreigners ultimately owning the majority of the peninsula. A railroad was constructed in 1906 linking San Diego with Yuma and points east, crossing at the border at Tijuana. This was a time when Tijuana had more saloons than resident housing.

Continually attracting visitors south, Tijuana remained dependent on U.S. tourism. Horse racing, gambling and alcohol were the promises drawing Anglos into this hey-day of the popular casinos. Prohibition added to Tijuana's expansion in the 1920s as many Anglo-

San Diego's dominance over Tijuana is nothing new...

owned bars and businesses sprang up. During the war years, U.S. sailors poured into the city every night seeking refuge from military life. Into the 50s and 60s the prostitution and booze industries continued to thrive. Then in the mid to late 60s, the black market exploded with the marijuana and pills trade.

But in the 1970s the commodities of the black market changed—to people, undocumented workers. As the economic conditions in the south grew worse, and because of its proximity to the border, Tijuana became one of the major border smuggling points in the sale of humans across the border.

So today Tijuana bulges with the aspirations of thousands who've traveled north from the interior of Mexico. This has caused Tijuana to even surpass San Diego's census count, and has established the city as the second largest city on the North American Pacific coast.

What divides Tijuana and San Diego is a border, an arbitrarily drawn artificial line that was established 130 years ago by military conquest, and is today guarded jealously by the armed forces of the United States. It is over this armed and fenced border that San Diego continues to dominate Tijuana. And this domination is but a microcosm of the larger relationship between the two countries, U.S. and Mexico.

These two cities are divided by the border, while they are locked together in a web of history and economic and social forces. While the fence divides the cities, it also divides a land, a people and a nation. And in an era in history where nations long suppressed by others are throwing off the shackles of colonialism, this makes the U.S.-Mexico borderlands a highly controversial and volatile area. The war zone between San Diego and Tijuana that has been created by U.S. Imperialism is but one facet of this situation.

The quiet and sun-swept calm of San Diego during the daylight hours gives this city in motion a false facade. At night, in the valleys along the border and to the east of the suburbs, amid the grid of freeways traversing southern California, another reality prevails. It is the reality of the dark and fearful world of the undocumented workers migrating northward, from the interiors of Mexico.

Across from San Diego, Tijuana has been established as a major stopping and smuggling point for thousands of these migrants. They are poor campesinos who've been driven off their traditional lands and replaced with machinery, by encroaching North American and foreign corporations in the south.

One of the few avenues for them is to move where the money and jobs exist. They travel north through a borderland that used to be part of their own country,



but find a guarded and patrolled fence line. many of the migrants stop and remain in Tijuana and the other border cities along the 2,000 mile frontier between Mexico and the United states, accounting for the extremely high unemployment in these cities. Others continue north, for even a fence cannot stop hunger.

Those who do push on are the most courageous and most desperate. With hope in their hearts, they seek only work and lives worth living, and money to send home to waiting families. they are jobless, landless and lack the 'right' documents.

Many never reach their destination, for every year hundreds of migrants perish, either as victims of the harsh desert and terrain of the borderlands, or they drown in the rivers that parallel the frontier. A few suffocate to death, stuffed into the steaming back trunks and boiling enclosed compartments of the cars and trucks of the coyotes, the smugglers.

Many of the pollos, as the migrants are called in border slang, are thrust into another destination: the War Zone, that volatile strip of land running along the border.

For the migrants' most visible enemy is La Migra, the Border Patrol, the arm of the U.S. Government that patrols the frontier and who maintains the war zone. It is La Migra who meets them in the dark valleys of the borderlands with guns drawn, who raids the large farm

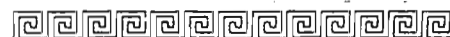
estates, the sweatshop factories and neighborhoods. In the grip of La Migra, the immigrants are shot at, beaten, raped, harassed and verbally abused as they are rounded up like so many cattle. A few do not survive their encounter with the Border patrol.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service, the INS, with its agents mounted and patrolling in their "war wagons"—as their paddy vans are called, is in fact a military force. Many of the agents are former soldiers and marines, and many of its leaders are former military officers. Before Leonard Castillo, who recently resigned as INS head, its leader was Marine Corps Commandant General Chapman, who wanted to enlarge the Border Patrol to the size of the Marine Corps itself. Many of the La Migra raids are coordinated with local police and undercover agents, as well.

At their disposal, the INS has Vietnam-tested military hardware and equipment: electronic body sensors scattered along the borderline alert them of migrants' movements, helicopters with infra-red scanners, searchlights, patrol wagons, tear gas, riot equipment and .357 magnums. In addition, many agents carry lead-lined gloves and illegal blackjacks, and a few others have unregistered "throw-away" guns, all with which to commit "unregistered" acts of brutality against the migrants. And today, in these times of costly gasoline, a few agents are mounted on horseback—bringing back haunting scenes of the murderous Texas Rangers.

With this arsenal, a million undocumented people were rounded up in 1978. Over 400,000 arrests were made within the 65 mile stretch of land between the Pacific Ocean and rugged desert east of San Diego.

It's been estimated that for every undocumented worker caught, 7 to 10 people with brown skin are stopped and harassed. Because of this, a virtual police state exists within the numerous Mexican communities of the U.S. The Border Patrol has become a standing and operating army, an army of occupation.



The fact that the Border Patrol has created a violent war zone along the border is evidenced over the last several years. During this period local agents have engaged in shoot-outs with Mexican police, they have murdered migrants coming across, have shot at individuals with high-powered rifles out of helicopters, have refused to allow dying children across for emergency medical attention, have sexually abused women migrants. And now it's apparent that agents conspire in carrying out systematic beatings of migrants in order to escape official reprimands of their superiors.

Violent confrontations within the War Zone between San Diego and Tijuana, although long a consistent pattern, have intensified in recent years. In late January on 1978, a Mexicano migrant was shot to death, and his two travelling companions wounded by the since-disbanded San Diego Police Border Crime Task Force.

On August 4th of the same year, a Border Patrol agent near Calexico wounded an undocumented worker in the leg, and then returned him to the Mexican side of the border without giving him any medical attention. Then a month and a half later, five Migra officers were pinned down for nearly three hours by rifle shots fired from across the border, near the San Ysidro port of entry.

Just a little more than a year ago, in mid-March 1979, patrolman Dan Cole handcuffed migrants Efren Reyes and Benito Rincon together after arresting both of them while attempting to cross near Tijuana. As Cole began placing them inside the War Wagon, one of them resisted and began pulling away towards the fence. Agent Cole opened up with his .357, killing Reyes instantly and seriously wounding Rincon. The Border Patrol has since characterized the shooting as justified self-defense.

While the Border Patrol has an arsenal of weaponry, the increasing resistance to their presence at the border has escalated into serious incidents where Mexican youths pelt agents with rocks. During the late evening of November 23, 1979, rocks thrown from the north side of the border lodged into the blades of an INS helicopter swirling close overhead. It was forced to make a crash landing on the dry river bottom. Then INS re-inforcements were prevented for half an hour from rescuing the injured agents in the helicopter by a continuous barrage of more rocks.

Very recently, early April 1980, large crowds met Border agents with rocks as darkness settled over the Tia Juana river, the flow of water that separates the two sides. Agents were forced to use teargas and gunshots to disperse the Mexican youth. INS leaders dismiss these incidents by declaring that the rock-throwers are all in the pay of the coyotes, simply providing diversionary events to draw agents away from heavier smuggling areas. Yet the same agents describe the crowds as larger than 60 and maybe into the hundreds. In this dangerous situation, what smuggler could afford to employ all these youth?

By discounting these incidents as merely diversionary tactics, the INS and media refuse to acknowledge the very real pent-up feelings of anguish and desperation the rock-throwers and undocumented people have for the border and its guardians. They want jobs and better lives, and many of them understand the history of the borderlands better than the uniformed agents. They know that the border was established only by military conquest by the U.S., that it is an arbitrary line drawn 130 years ago and still maintained by military force. These youth, in their late teens and early 20s are guided by national feelings: for them this area is still Mexico.

The War Zone, then, is disputed territory. With the rise of the militarization of the border by the U.S. government, there is an opposing rise of resistance. And it is increasing.

Recently in San Diego four Border Patrol agents were brought to trial—charged with violating the civil rights of migrants, based on documented beatings and abuse. The first trial ended in a hung jury, which voted 11 to 1 for conviction. Later a San Diego court convicted two of the agents, but punished them with slaps on the wrists. Yet this was the first time any such legal action had been taken by the U.S. government in prosecuting its own border agents.

Local Chicano activists have declared that "...the Border Patrol is now totally out of control and is nothing but a lawless agency which is accountable and responsible to no one." Other Mexican grass-roots organizers here on this side of the border add, "La Migra is part of the colonial occupation forces that guard the frontier." Many have called for a full-scale Congressional investigation to review the actions of the Border Patrol.

The INS does not only patrol the border. It also is used to break up legal strikes. In 1972, for example, farmworkers struck a large California agri-business estate for better working conditions and higher pay. The INS then issued massive numbers of green cards, bringing in workers from the south to labor in the strife-torn fields. It worked, and the strike was broken.

The INS is also used to repress outbursts from the Mexican communities, as during the 1975 walk-out from Southwestern junior high school. There, Mexican students protested the lack of bilingual education and the racism of school administrators. The INS sent its agents to the homes of protest organizers, demanding citizenship papers, harassing them and their families.

imprisoned

When the Border Patrol captures undocumented people, it imprisons them in detention centers, like the Chula Vista station or the Metropolitan Correctional Center that towers above downtown San Diego. Many are held up to 6 months while waiting to go to court.

Children of undocumented workers are also held—some of them as "material witnesses" in cases involving smugglers. Separated from their parents, the children are fingerprinted and given criminal records, and some are detained for months. Once they are no longer needed, the INS sends the children back to Mexico without making efforts to reunite them with their parents. Often they are turned loose onto the streets to fend for themselves.

If arrested at a workplace, a migrant is handcuffed and whisked away, without pay, without belongings, without notification to the family. The crime: working without papers.

Everyone agrees that the numbers of those migrating have been growing. An estimated undocumented population of 6 to 12 million live and work throughout the U.S.—mostly in California and what we now call the "Southwest."

Usually Anglos think of undocumented workers as mainly working on farms and in agri-business. But only 4 to 8.5% do so. The rest work in food processing and service industries, clothing manufacture, electronics and transportation.

In San Diego County the number of undocumented people employed is not known, with estimates ranging from 21,000 to 60,000. They earn from \$150 to \$260 million in wages, but spend more

than half of that right here as consumers of local goods and services.

These same workers contribute nearly \$40 million in social security and income taxes to San Diego County—monies that they never see again.

Most of the jobs they take are the lowest rated, status-wise, averaging \$2 an hour or less. Throughout all the industries where migrants and employed, one-quarter of them paid less than the minimum wage.

Thus, undocumented workers are a vital labor force, not only for San Diego, vital labor force—not only for San Diego and Los Angeles—but throughout the "Southwest." Without them, whole economies would collapse—from the tomato fields of North County in San Diego to the sweatshops of L.A., from the Mid-West bread basket fields to the factories of Chicago.

Take just the garment industry, for example. Shop owners admit that their industry would collapse without them. This is an industry that has shifted out of New England and New York to the cheaper shops out west. 90% of the garment industry sweatshops pay less than the minimum wage to undocumented workers, whose products are then sold to J.C. Penny, Sears and Buffums.

If tomorrow, all the undocumented workers left L.A. and San Diego, the garage-parking, landscaping, fast-food, garment, luggage, janitorial-service industries would immediately shut down. Much of the local manufacturing and agricultural enterprises would follow. There would immediately be a severe curtailment of life as we know it in Southern California.

In fact, much of the sunny affluence that white people seemingly enjoy in this part of the world exists because the economic base of the "Southwest"—historically the Northwest of Mexico—was built and is maintained by migrant and undocumented workers, and their ancestors, from Mexico.

At their workplaces, migrants are denied safe, sanitary working conditions. They are abused and betrayed often by their employers, who frequently call the INS in just before payday. Instead of receiving protection and help from unions—until recently most unions considered them 'scabs', and a threat to U.S. workers rather than as a challenge to organize.

Some unions are now picking up the gauntlet and are beginning to view undocumented workers as allies and not competitors. In fact, recently in L.A. a strike was won by workers without papers.

Outside the cities, undocumented people who labor on large farms are often forced to live right next to the fields, in brush shacks, denied basic kitchen and toilet facilities. Those who complain are handed over to La Migra.

If they do live in residential communities, they are still subjected to INS raids and harassment—leading lives of intimidation and fear. A common Anglo myth holds undocumented people responsible for high crime rates—but in fact their neighborhoods are the quietest and experience low crime, for fear of detection.

Another Anglo myth says that they suck social services away from "bonafide" citizens—but even though they paid for them through paycheck deductions, hardly ever do undocumented people seek to claim

Undocumented workers are one of the most super-exploited peoples in the country. They greatly contribute to the high profits of U.S. business...

them or use social services—again for fear of detection. They also pay for benefits, taxes and social security insurance... and never see anything in return.

Because of their status, migrants are denied so-called 'civil-rights'; they cannot vote, or hold office, or take anyone to court.

Their children attend schools taught in a foreign language. The state of Texas even denies giving any education to the children of undocumented workers.

Daily they all are subject to racist abuse and harassment from employers, health administrators, their fellow workers, the KKK, the press and media who continue to label them inferior with the terms "illegal alien."

As the recession of the 1970s worsened, undocumented people became the scapegoats—targeted by politicians from Nixon through Carter who blamed them for every economic woe afflicting the U.S. One big myth that's still around holds them

responsible for taking jobs away from U.S. citizens. But these are the back-breaking and sweatshop jobs that no one wants anyway.

The truth remains...if anything, they have contributed more to your economy, through the sale of their labor, through the loss of their country's resources which the U.S. uses up, more than anything else.

Like a virtual faucet, the border is opened during times of economic expansion and labor shortages. And it is closed in times of recession, when unwanted workers are rounded up and deported. The U.S. government performs this task in order to control the flow of people and material goods, capital and labor, totally suiting the profit goals of North American businesses.

All this isn't new, by any means.

The first massive waves of immigration from Mexico occurred during the 1910 Revolution. Through the 1920s these migrants were welcomed, and even sought after. It was a time when the fields, groves, mines and other industries needed laborers to work cheaply. Agents of large farming estates traveled south into the interior of Mexico and recruited farmworkers with promises of good pay and higher standards of living. So thousands came north and helped build the economy of the "southwest."

With the Depression of the 30s, however, the situation changed drastically—with businesses failing and closing down. Mexicans were blamed for the high unemployment, and subsequently several millions were deported by the U.S. government—packed onto railroad cars heading south.

During World War II, the U.S. experienced a labor shortage. So, flip-flopping policy, Mexican workers were once more encouraged to cross the border and work in the factories and fields. 200,000 did so.

Begun in 1942 and lasting until the early 60s in some form, the Bracero Program was the official agreement worked out between the two governments. It allowed eventually up to 400,000 Mexican workers to cross legally each year to labor in the U.S. But under this program, there the U.S. government ended up leasing workers directly to employers, many abuses occurred. These left the workers poor, neglected and in the worst living conditions—all with the government's sanction.

As the post-war economy faltered and the U.S. experienced a recession immigrant workers and Mexicans again took the brunt of the blame. The government and the media whipped up a jingoistic campaign—so volatile that even the name was racist. Under this INS-sponsored "Operation Wetback"—a joint effort between INS, the Navy, the FBI and state and local police—2 million Mexican workers were rounded up and deported.

With the prosperous upturn of the 1960s, North American businesses again needed cheap labor, and this is why a form of the Bracero program lasted until early in the decade. The tone around immigration changed, however, with the recession of the seventies. A new

"anti-wetback" campaign was geared up, but with a name change: now it was directed against the "illegal aliens"... a sub-human reference and identity given a whole generation of immigrants.

Under Nixon the immigration department initiated its militaristic system of capturing, imprisoning and then deporting millions of Mexican workers, and it was continued under Ford and Carter. It is this policy of dealing with an economic and political problem militarily that has created a war zone right here on the border.

Undocumented workers from Mexico are, as a group, one of the most super-exploited people in the country. While denied basic civil and human rights, they

greatly contribute to the high profits of U.S. businesses and to the affluent living standards of Anglos. They represent for large businesses a highly controllable, mobile and cheap labor force.

Although immigration does act as a release valve for Mexico's economic and social problems, deportations and policing the border with a military force do not go after the roots of the causes: unemployment and poverty. And these exist mainly as a result of the actions of North American and international corporations—the international banking and loan institutions that dominate the economy of Mexico.

Short History of Mexico for Anglos



Most North Americans don't know too much of the history of our southern neighbor, even though our nation has been deeply involved in its internal affairs. This involvement over the last 150 years has led to the domination of Mexico's economy by North American capitalists. To understand this relationship, and to understand why undocumented workers migrate north, we must trace Mexico's history and highlight the role of the United States. Doing this, we counter the distortions and our right lies that U.S. schools teach North Americans about Mexico.

Long before the European colonialists landed on the shores, native civilizations flourished in the Americas, building large cities, establishing trade and industry, exhibiting high levels of science, technology and art.

By the time Cortes arrived in 1521 to seize land and riches for Spain, the Aztecs ruled over a highly complex society in Central Mexico. Employing the old method of 'divide and rule', the Spanish conquered the Aztecs and other peoples throughout Central America through a series of bloody wars. The Spanish consolidated their colonial holdings over the next 300 years.

By 1600 the population of an estimated 25 million had been reduced to only some 2 1/2 million by famine, overwork and European diseases.

Unlike the English, and later the Anglo-Americans, however, the Spanish did intermarry with the native peoples—

Thus a new race, a new people were born—the Mestizo. By 1800, mestizos and Indians made up 80% of the population of what was then "New Spain."

The Spanish extracted wealth from their colony through mining and large-scale farming and ranching. The Spanish monarchy was financed for years by the gold and silver coming in from Mexico. In fact all of Europe benefitted from the plunder of the Mexican colony. Indian laborers were forced to give up their communal lands and were collected on the haciendas, the large ranchos where they were subjected to debt peonage and slave-like hardships.

Left with a fraction of the poorest land, and at the bottom of the new social structure, the Indians rebelled against the Spanish continually.

Spain used the system of church missions to colonialize the Californian coast and the rest of their holdings up in the north. This colonialization meant the enslavement of thousands of native peoples to perform the labor of the farms and ranches. Many Indians died of this brutal exploitation as the missions were nothing more than early forms of concentration camps. Those Indian tribes that survived had the least contact with the Spanish missions.

Finally, a weakened Spanish hold on the country was broken. In 1910, the Grito de Dolores was proclaimed—

calling for an end to Indian slavery and a return of lands to their rightful owners. Under the leadership of Miguel Hidalgo and Jose Morelos, two enlightened parish priests who are today regarded as the fathers of independence, a mass popular rebellion broke out. It was nominally in favor of independence, but it was fueled by popular hatred against the European elite that governed the society. The elite were willing to accept the support of the mass movement, but they were not in favor of any reforms which would undermine their class power. They executed Hidalgo and Morelos, but they finally did win independence from Spain in 1821. Thus the nation of Mexico was born.

Twice the size that it is now, the new nation included much of Central America, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah and parts of Colorado and Oklahoma.

The war of Independence, although ridding the country of the Spanish crown, failed to dismantle the class structure that existed. For the masses, economic exploitation continued. The powerful church, the military and the Hacienda lords, moving in to fill the vacuum, amassed great wealth for themselves over the following decades. More importantly, the new rulers opened Mexico to further exploitation by the colonial powers of France and Britain, and to the expanding country to the north—the United States.

The weak central government, however, did not or could not prevent foreign control of the economy. In addition, there was also a threat to the land and territory of Mexico developing.

The Yankees Come

Up in the north, Yankee settlers appeared in the early 1800s. At first a trickle, then a flood, they began pushing southeast and west, leaving behind them a genocidal trail of broken treaties with Indian nations and an economy based on Black slave labor. It was a time of booming expansion and a period of struggle between the slave south and the industrialized north.

Fueled by feelings of white, national chauvinism and desires for land, and propelled by the ideology of Manifest Destiny, the settlers and their country eyed Mexico greedily. At first with Mexico's permission, but later as illegal aliens, Anglo immigrants moved into northern Mexico and began staking claims. This surge was mainly in Texas, where the new immigrants attempted to expand the southern plantation economy by bringing in African slaves.

Taking advantage of the weak central government in Mexico City, the settler colonialists agitated for separation and began skirmishing with Mexican troops. This blew-up into a war, as Mexico feared, and quite rightly so, that the Texans and the U.S. secretly desired to take over the whole country. We are taught that the Alamo was a heroic defense by freedom-loving fighters. The opposite is more true, for those who resisted the Mexican army were mainly mercenaries, Indian-killers and slave-owners attempting to illegally seize Mexican land.

The result: a large portion of Mexico in 1836 separated and became the Anglo colony of Texas. This was the opening salvo of war between Mexico and the United States.

In 1846, desiring to expand the territory of the U.S. in the interests of the slave owners, President Polk declared war on Mexico, and ordered an invasion by U.S. troops. The North Americans drove towards the capital in campaign long remembered for its savage and brutal treatment of Mexicans by U.S. troops. These included instances where Anglo soldiers scalped and murdered captured prisoners of war.

General Winfield Scott invaded and bombed Vera Cruz, turning the city into a burning inferno, killing countless civilians. Scott refused to let up on his bombardment to allow women, children and non-Mexicans to evacuate.

San Diego witnessed a relatively minor skirmish in the San Pasqual Valley. There, mounted Mexican lancers routed U.S. troops under the command of the famous Indian-killer Kit Carson as they tried to make their way to San Diego. Forced to retreat, they slaughtered and ate their mules, and were finally relieved by reinforcements from town. A monument now stands commemorating this innocuous defeat.

The U.S. army captured Mexico City militarily in 1847 and forced the Mexican government at gunpoint to give up half its territory. Thus, in the space of a few years, the U.S. annexed Texas and the entire northwest of Mexico. Till this day, Mexican students are taught that this territory was illegally seized by the gringos and is only held temporarily.

During the fighting in Mexico, 150 Irish American soldiers, disgusted with the intense anti-Catholic feelings of the other North Americans, deserted and joined to fight on the Mexican side—forming the Saint Patrick's Brigade.

However, they too were defeated and captured. Fifty were executed, the rest whipped and branded.

Back in the U.S. there was opposition to this expansionism, including the anti-slavery abolition movement. Henry Thoreau went to jail for refusing to pay the war tax, and Abraham Lincoln, as a Congressman, challenged Polk's policy as well as his sanity.

In order to legitimize the U.S. seizure of half the nation, Mexico was forced to sign the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The treaty contained provisions ensuring the civil and property rights of the 75,000 Mexicans who remained in the territory now controlled by the U.S. But like treaties the U.S. signed with Native peoples, it became little more than a scrap of paper.

In the wake of the defeat, a power struggle between certain sectors of the ruling class burst into the forefront of Mexico's political arena.

Up to then, the state and the Church basically operated together. A strong, conservative social force even today in Latin America, the Church was much stronger back then. Church lands accounted for almost one quarter of the national wealth. This wealth and influence was used to block any social progress. The Church was allied with other conservative forces: landlords, merchants, monarchists and the militarists.

Liberal forces, led by Benito Juarez, the first and only Indian to gain the Presidency, wished to dismantle the old semi-feudal economic structure. Only after a bloody civil war in 1857 was a new constitution written that enacted some reforms and secularized the Church's property.

During this period, monarchists in Mexico and France allied themselves and attempted to impose their ruler on the country, an Austrian aristocrat connected to the old Spanish crown named Maximilian. But he too was toppled by the Juarez forces.

Mexico's main problem, though, the inequitable distribution of land, was not dealt with. This meant that the campesinos, the peasantry, the great majority, saw little gains for themselves. Juarez opened up Church lands for sale, mainly to rich Yankees who bought up much of the large landholdings for cattle ranches in the states of Sonora and Chihuahua, and bought up the sugar refineries and hemp plantations in the south.

The reforming liberals ultimately agreed with the conservatives by allowing the hacienda system to remain intact, and by continuing the suppression of the indigenous peoples. As a result, the pattern of repression and exploitation and grass-roots rebellion was not broken. Juarez in reality had opened up the country to capitalist development, and allowed the United States to increase its efforts to take over Mexico's economy. Juarez's reforms actually did more to set up the coming Diaz dictatorship by building up the central government, than in distributing land to the poor.



Colonialism in the North

Up north in the territory seized in the war, thousands of Mexicanos continued to live their lives, but now under the domination of another nation and a foreign government. But many Mexicans did not quietly accept the lynchings and murders, the theft of their land and resources, and the loss of civil rights. Many resisted throughout the 1800's with armed struggle.

One such hero of resistance was Joaquin Murieta, a miner who had come to California to make a living. But Anglos killed his wife, beat and robbed him, driving him and many other Mexicans out of the mines. Joaquin fought back, like Robin Hood, stole from the richer Anglos and gave to the poor Mexicans.

The mythical figure of Zorro, popularized by Walt Disney, had his origins during this period. The son of the last Mexican governor of California, Pio Pico, led raids and ambushes, not against fat Sgt. Garcia, but against Yankee settlers from Los Angeles to Santa Barbara.

In Texas, Juan Cortina also fought back against the invaders. With an armed organization and an ideology of liberation, he waged guerrilla warfare for nearly 20 years.

Las Gorras Blancas, a New Mexico secret organization of the poor against the rich, also resisted the encroaching settlers and the new capitalists. They proclaimed, "Our purpose is to protect the rights and interests of the people in general and especially those of the helpless classes..."

Powerful cattle barons in Texas set up the Texas Rangers as a terrorist force to maintain control in the areas where Mexicans were the majority. So glorified in movies and TV, they were actually armed colonial mercenaries, torturing and killing thousands of Mexicans.

Over the years, using the machinery of the legal process and the knots of the lynch rope, Anglo settlers came to completely control the economic, political and social life of the new territories—despite the guarantees to Mexicans spelled out in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Dominated, Mexicans suffered the loss of their land, their political rights, their culture,

language and customs. This was colonialism. The Mexican people became the colonized and the Anglo-American settlers became the colonizers.

Mexicanos were a colonized people in a land whose economy they had built. The skills in building adobe houses, in sheep-herding, in mining and irrigation farming that Anglos later employed were learned from Mexicanos. Virtually everything we credit the Anglo-cowboy with was taken from his Mexican counterpart, "el vaquero" including much of western slang. The labor of Mexican workers on the railroads, in the mines and in the fields laid the basis for the economy throughout what we now call the "southwest."

The Revolution

By the latter part of the century, the Mexican government had been strengthened but not democratized. A new ruler came to power, a man so ruthless in dealing with his opponents and the Mexican people that even today he remains a symbol of despised despotism—Porfirio Diaz. His powerful dictatorship lasted for 35 years and was only broken by the upheaval of the 1910 Revolution. Diaz tried to modernize Mexico with railroads and revived industries, but he did it from the top down, using the saber and bullet for persuasion. Opening wide the doors to the interior of the country to foreign powers, especially the U.S., Diaz allowed foreign investments to control mining, utilities, banking and commerce. The north became very strongly dominated by wealthy North Americans like William Randolph Hearst, who owned 6 million acres of land.

Other U.S. capitalists, with visions of colonial profits dancing in their heads, continued to buy up the country. By the time of the revolt, two-thirds of all U.S. foreign investments were in Mexico. While most of all rural families went landless, as Diaz had appropriated the Indian communal lands.

Once again rising up against tyranny, masses of campesinos confronted and struggled against Diaz and the entire capitalist system. The bloody revolt raged across the land, resulting in over a million deaths.

Peasant leaders such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa emerged to fight the federal government and its

allies. In the state of Morelos, Zapata began a revolutionary re-distribution of land to the poor, declaring that those who work the land should own it. Villa, meanwhile, led the rebellion in the north. Other revolutionaries in the Yucatan and up around the border called for a socialist Mexico. These included Flores and Enrique Magon, who operated out of Los Angeles.

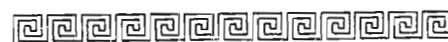
Women played a very strong and significant role during the Revolution, joining their men at the front and supporting them behind the lines. General Carmen Robles led her brigade, and fought alongside of Villa and Zapata.

Because U.S. businesses and investments became threatened by the revolt, the U.S. government once again intervened militarily in the internal affairs of Mexico. In a classic show of gunboat diplomacy, U.S. Marines landed and occupied Vera Cruz in 1914. Two years later, General Pershing invaded from the north in pursuit of the elusive Pancho Villa. Villa's forces had attacked and burned sections of Columbus, New Mexico in retaliation for the U.S. authorities allowing the federales to travel through the U.S. to hit Villa on his northern flank.

Up here on the border, Tijuana witnessed its own combat, as Flores Magon's forces took over the town, attempting to set up an independent socialist republic of Baja California, along with members of the I.W.W. in 1911. They were soon overwhelmed by Tijuana townspeople and troops from both the U.S. and Mexico.

Eventually through the conflict Mexico's own emerging capitalist class allied with the U.S. government and businesses, consolidated its forces and engineered a coup against the moderate leader Francisco Madero, led by General Huerta. The more revolutionary insurgents were outmaneuvered; Zapata and Villa were both ambushed and assassinated, the Yucatan socialist movement was brutally smashed. Magon was jailed by the U.S.

The fighting ceased and the forward motion of the Revolution was halted. Yet another constitution was written, this one with minimum wage laws, rights to unionize and strike and provisions for equal pay by sex and nationality. But throughout this turmoil, little of substance was gained by the campesinos and urban workers.



Twentieth Century

Over the next several decades, Mexico had a series of presidents who initiated very little land reform, but who suppressed any insurgent movements. As the U.S. economy boomed in the 1920s, massive investments increased into Mexico as North America continued its control over the Mexican economy.

With the coming of the world-wide Depression of the '30s, Mexico too suffered basic shortages and high unemployment. As a result, popular discontent with the so-called "revolutionary" government increased.

Riding this crest of renewed rebelliousness and growing populism, then-president Cardenas initiated an array of seemingly far-reaching reforms: an extensive land program with which over 45 million acres were distributed, nationalizing the railroads, legalizing trade unions.

By this time, Mexico had become the third largest producer of oil in the world, but most of it was controlled by U.S. and European companies, so in 1938, with popular mass support, Cardenas nationalized the oil industry.

By forging an alliance between the capitalists and the urban working class, Cardenas strengthened and centralized the Mexican state in order to speed up the industrialization of the society. It is his organization that is the parent of the party that today governs the country.

After Cardenas, a succession of regimes finalized the co-optation of the goals of the Revolution. This allowed foreign money to dominate and direct the modernization of the economy.

Yet Mexico was still part of the world capitalist market—which was clearly dominated by the large developed and imperialist powers. Like other third world countries, Mexico found itself continually dependent on foreign capital and technology, hampering its efforts to grow out of an underdeveloped and mainly agrarian economy.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Mexico increased its process of industrialization. Yet it remained a neo-colony of North America. During this period, a series of struggles broke out involving labor struggles and land take-overs by organized campesinos. To maintain stability, the government responded with repression, sending labor leaders to jail, and putting down the rural insurgency with military force.



Thus standings on its 150 years of history and turmoil as a nation, Mexico reached the stage with which it faces the modern day of the 1960s.



For North Americans to understand the root causes that lead thousands of Mexicano workers to migrate north in search of jobs in the United States, we must comprehend Mexico's current reality and the role that our country plays in its internal affairs.

Present day Mexico is a land of extremes and contradictions. So vast and beautiful, Mexico is the third largest country in Latin America, with a population of some 65 million. Nearly half of its people still live in rural areas, while 12 to 20 million push together in the area of Mexico City, one of the world's largest cities.

This is a land of dire poverty and of huge cosmopolitan cities. Half of the workforce is not employed, 1000 unemployed persons reach Mexico City each day. This is a country that is a rising industrial power, yet 1000 malnourished children die every 24 hours.

Mexico City, the virtual center of the country, is a very modern city, with traffic jams to match. Yet thousands walk the streets without jobs and money.

Outside the cities, the poverty is blatantly obvious. In southern regions, the beauty of the land contrasts with the conditions people live in. Palm huts,

adobe villages without sanitary facilities, no electricity or mail service. For many villages the only water is a nearby creek. Children with swollen bellies are plagued by parasites. And so-called constitutional liberties lie in the dust as privately-paid gunmen (pistoleros) rule the countryside, assassinating outspoken village leaders.

Mexican society is a class society. At the bottom are the campesinos and indigenas, next the urban working class, above them a small middle class, and on the top a tiny elite ruling class of Mexican capitalists. But as we'll see, even this elite isn't in firm or complete control.

The Countryside

Almost half the nation, the great masses of rural campesinos and peasantry, earn only 6% of the national income, giving Mexico one of the world's most unequal distributions of wealth. Actually they are no longer classic peasants, for as ownership of the land changes with the development of capitalist agriculture, they are increasingly turned into a rural based working class. And due to these land changes, this class is the chief source of northern emigration.

Increasingly, rural areas are coming under the control of large US and foreign companies as they buy up the best growing lands. These corporations are replacing human labor with machinery, but are not providing employment for those who've been

replaced. This means that a traditionally agrarian society is being disrupted, throwing thousands off their farming land, making it impossible for many people to support themselves and their families. Thus people flock to the already over-crowded cities looking for jobs.

These mainly North American corporations, in partnership with large Mexican landowners, are farming Mexico's rich, fertile valleys. Over half of all the vegetables consumed in the US during the winter are supplied by these agri-business giants, which control over \$100 million a year of Mexico's vegetable export industry. Thus Mexican farmers and peasants are being replaced by the very same corporate companies who dominate the rural areas of the US.

In northern Mexico, in the states of Sinaloa and Sonora; the rich farmlands resemble the agricultural valleys of California, Arizona, and Texas. In these states, independent Mexican farmers who can't afford to compete against the modern technology of the corporations are forced out of business.

In Sinaloa for example, corporate farming has developed very quickly. Today 85 families control one-quarter of all the irrigated lands. Between 1960 and 1970, the number of subsequent landless farmers doubled to 126,000 people.

Because of these conditions, Mexico has a large migrant work force of some 5 million people. From the harvests in Sinaloa and Sonora, the migrants move to Baja California, earning a meagre \$2.50 to \$5 a day. The migrants harvest and pack the tomatoes, cucumbers, and bell peppers for loading onto trucks and railroad cars, where they are shipped to border cities. There the vegetables are met by buyers from Safeway, Lucky's, McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken and other US food giants.

The growing monopolization of the best lands by U.S. and foreign corporations contradicts the concept of communal land—land owned and worked by a village or community. This communal land, or ejidos, account for only half of all arable acreage in the country, and are partially a product of popular struggle as campesinos have battled and have been killed in attempts at taking over new ejidos.

Many ejidos, however, are constantly losing money, and are being subsidized by the government. Although other ejidos are productive, the over-all

market is controlled by the large agricultural businesses. This results in the government actually using the ejidos to control business, as the government still has the final say in who owns the lands.

Large land-owners hold the rest of the land, and they are protected by small armies of pistoleros.

Land take-overs are one response to the deterioration of Mexico's rural economy. Migration is the other response by thousands of farmworkers. Thrown off the land, unable to find meaningful work in the cities, these people migrate north for survival. And many cross into the U.S. to work in the fields and sweatshops.

To this day, the indigenas, the native peoples of Mexico, remain at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale, marginalized through laws and customs. Many Indian communities have been destroyed, their traditional lands taken from them. They face constant pressure from the government in the forms of assimilation programs and the guns of government troops. But many of them resist, by retaining their own languages and cultures, and their sense of native heritage.



Industrial Urban Mexico

The last 50 years in Mexico have witnessed the spectacular growth and expansion of the urban working class in a society that's been largely agrarian for centuries. As more and more sectors of the economy become industrialized, this class of urban laborers has significantly increased its role in society. Today it exerts tremendous pressure to democratize the industrialized sectors.

Yet these working people are forced to labor in increasingly more exploitative and demeaning conditions. As most industrialized sectors of the economy fall under the control of U.S. corporations, speed-ups, repression and inflation hack away at their living standards. One-fourth of the urban workforce is employed in industries dominated by

just 4 U.S. corporations. Their wages are kept low by an alliance between the Mexican government and these companies. Representatives of U.S. companies sit on the labor relations board that determines minimum wages. Companies like General Electric, Westinghouse, Union Carbide and Philco each employ thousands of workers.

The traditional avenues for workers to force change, the unions, are mostly controlled by the government.

U.S. corporate investments jumped considerably with the establishment of the Border Industrialization Program. It began in the early '60s as a response to the large-scale migration of unemployed to the northern border region. To provide employment for the new arrivals, the program was created jointly by the Mexican government and U.S. corporations.

Agreements were worked out where basically Mexico would subsidize U.S. industries in building assembly plants along the border. U.S.-owned factories, then, were established in the border cities producing clothing, toys, electronic parts, TVs and CB radios. The finished products are then shipped into the U.S. for sale without payment of import or export fees.

These corporations are allowed to use the large army of unemployed along the border, paying less than \$4 a day to workers. With tax breaks, no import fees, little or no costs for utilities, and cheap labor these maguriladores mainly benefit their U.S. owners.

The assembly plant workers labor in dangerously unhealthy conditions, where young, unmarried women work 6 days a week, 9 hours a day for very meager pay. In the electronics plants, which comprise about 70% of all the shops, women are forced to perform such close work that many complain of constant headaches. Some don't last a year. Those who do need glasses to aid their failing eyes. Thus there's a constant turnover of workers. People who complain or who even talk about unions are fired. Attempted strikes are suppressed by the government.

Working women, then, have been especially singled out by the U.S. dominated sectors of the economy as "ideal" for their factories. Because they have traditionally been left out of being employed, woman laborers are particularly susceptible to the low-paying jobs offered by these factories.



Many of the plants and factories that have moved into Mexico from the U.S. are in fact "run-away shops." They are owned by companies who have pulled out of U.S. locations to re-settle where they can pay workers a lot less, have no unions to deal with, and have no environmental controls on their pollution. Thus, they end up exploiting people on both sides of the border.

Today the giant corporations, by far the majority U.S.-based, dominate the most important sectors of the Mexican economy: autos, rubber and chemicals. Since World War II, and steadily increasing each year, these corporations have made heavy investments in the country's industries, to where they own more than \$5 billion today. Of all the shares of Mexico's top 300 companies, one-half are controlled by such giants as GE, Dupont, Ford and DelMonte.

Profit taking has been enormous. And it increased each year. In one fiscal quarter, for example, in 1977, \$49 million was invested by them into Mexico and during the same period \$366 million was taken out in profits. For every dollar invested, 7 were removed as profits.

80% of foreign investments are from the United States, and these have been in the fastest growing sectors. Ten U.S. companies own over half of all North American assets in Mexico. If you break Mexico's economy down into its basic groups, the majority are controlled by foreign corporations.

Oil in Mexico has captured recent headlines in the U.S. Indeed, Mexico's future and potential is tied into that one critical resource. Recent discoveries have placed the country's oil reserves at 120 to 200 billion barrels, making it potentially the world's primary oil producer and exporter. And naturally, U.S. eyes are squarely on it.

The U.S. National Security Council hopes to see 30% of the U.S.'s oil needs supplied by its southern neighbor. For these reasons, the U.S. government and business circles are concerned about Mexico's political instability.

Oil and gas, nationalized since 1938, are operated by PEMEX, a government monopoly. But despite its oil fields, PEMEX, until just recently, has been operating at a loss. And this is important in understanding how Mexico's government owned industries actually are run at a loss in order to subsidize the private and foreign industries.

Masks of the Government

At the top of Mexico's society, the small elite manages the society. They do this through the one-party government of the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party.

The government, however, wears two masks. On the surface, it has a progressive and nationalist stance. Mexico has always recognized the socialist government of Cuba. It takes an apparent hard-line on oil sales and border negotiations with the U.S.

Recently, Mexico refused to allow the ex-Shah of Iran back into the country. And it is not boycotting the 1980 Olympics. Mexico now sits on the United Nations Security Council and attempts an independent orientation in world diplomacy.

On the other hand, the government wears another mask in its domestic policies. It is one of repression and austerity. For in reality, Mexico's rulers maintain a strategic alliance with the large North American corporations and the international banking institutions.

The party that dominates the government has a history of corrupt elections. Lopez Portillo, the current president, who ran unopposed for his office, wields tremendous power. The government itself is run on a spoils system of machine politics, where the huge bureaucracy has become the base for the politicians.

Recently, Portillo has made overtures to open up the country's political life, by allowing other political parties to be elected to the national congress. This "democratic opening" is little more than a facade, however, for the government maintains its policy of silencing internal dissent. This was seen recently in Tijuana, when agents acting for the government closed down the city's only independent newspaper, ABC.

The government at the same time has been building up its army, and is receiving millions of dollars in military hardware from the U.S. under the cover of fighting the drug trade. Reports from families, labor and student groups cite the incarceration of thousands of political prisoners. Many Mexican dissenters have simply disappeared, presumed assassinated either by government thugs or by para-military right-wing groups that operate at the behest of the rulers.

Dependent on foreign technology and capital, and with one of the largest foreign debts in the world, \$32 billion, the government is forced to follow the dictates of the banks and the IMF. These institutions are demanding that Mexico's rulers initiate a program of strict austerity.

This has meant cutbacks in public money for health care, for schools, new housing, and has meant restrictions on wage increases and reductions of people employed by the government. These powerful institutions are also demanding political stability, which gets translated into government suppression of strikes and labor disputes by force.

Thus trapped in this vicious cycle of dependency through its debts, the country's progress in both social and economic terms is blocked. Its development is directed by these international banks, credit agencies and giant corporations. And their interest is solely in using Mexican labor and resources for their own profit.

This is the essence of Mexico's situation. The country still remains a virtual colony of United States companies, yet no foreign armies or governments run it—in economic terms, Mexico is a neo-colony. At least for appearances sake, Mexicans remain in the top positions of society.



In the Depression of the 1930's Mexican workers fought for higher pay and better working conditions in the fields and canneries. Despite their struggles, Mexicans were blamed for the high unemployment and many were deported.

While half a million Mexicanos served in the U.S. armed forces during World War II, Mexican youth, wearing the rebellious zoot suits, were attacked on the streets of Los Angeles. In June 1943 hundreds of sailors went on a racist rampage, pulling young "pachucos" out of theatres and off streetcars and brutally beat them.

When the war was over across the seas, another war continued back home, as Mexicanos continued to fight for better lives. One such fight took place at the zinc mine in Silver City, New Mexico, in the early 1950's. The mainly Mexican miners had gone out on strike for equal pay and treatment but had their demands rejected by the mine owners, who then called in the police and company gunmen to attack the picket lines. With the men barred from further picketing by a court injunction, their wives and children replaced them. Despite the jailing of over 60 women and children, the strikers held fast and the strike was eventually won. This strike was immortalized in the movie, "Salt of the Earth."

And today the conditions of Mexicanos living within the U.S. has not substantially changed; the struggle continues.

conditions today

Official figures place seven and a half million Mexicanos in the U.S. But these are low because they are based on the 1970 census that did not specifically count Mexicanos, and because they do not represent the some 6 to 12 million

undocumented people who also live here. Mexicanos live mostly in the border states plus Colorado, but growing numbers live in mid-west cities, like Chicago—home of half a million Mexicanos.

Los Angeles is the second largest Mexican metropolitan area in the world having close to two million, with predictions it will have a Mexican majority in 20 years. East L.A. is the largest barrio of the U.S. with 700,000 Mexicanos, a full third speaking only Spanish. Already half of all births in L.A. are Mexican.

Despite the numerical size of their people on this side of the border, Mexicanos are clearly not represented in the U.S. political system. Although they make up a third to a fifth of California, Mexicanos hold only 2% of the 20,000 elective posts in the state, and not one state-wide elective office. There hasn't been a Mexican on the Los Angeles City Council for 17 years. San Diego, with a population approaching a quarter of a million Mexicanos, has never elected one to the city or county governments.

Living mostly in urban areas, one in five Mexicanos lives below the official poverty line, with their median family income \$5,000 below that of non-Mexican families. Mexicanos often live in the poorest sections of town, in mainly segregated neighborhoods, in the cheapest housing and apartments, and having to deal with absentee landlords.

Social services are limited and even the few gains that have been made in bilingual education are threatened by reactionary legislation that would end vital programs. The schools themselves are often old and run-down. In San Diego's Barrio Logan, for example, a temporary elementary school was built in the 1930's. People in the community have been promised a new school year after year, until now some 40 years later they have the same structure, standing in the midst of junkyards where it was constructed so long ago.

In employment Mexicanos generally hold lesser-paying, low status jobs. In San Diego, nearly two-thirds of Mexican workers hold service or blue-collar jobs, while not even half of all Anglo workers do. And unemployment is generally twice the rate that it is for whites. Youth, especially, cannot find adequate work and meaningful employment.

The U.S. government plays a particularly harsh role in Mexican

Mexicans in the U.S.

Whether they call themselves "Chicanos," "Mexican-Americans," "Hispanics" or "Mexicanos," at the root of their situation is the conquest and subsequent colonization of half the territory of Mexico by the United States in 1848. As we continue in our examination of the conditions of Mexicanos on both sides of the border, we survey those forces aligned in opposition to the status quo. Doing this, we highlight some history that is the backdrop to the conditions Mexicanos are in on this side of the border.

Throughout this century Mexican workers have played important roles in the U.S. labor movement, particularly west of the Rockies. As they have provided much of the basis for the economy of the West with their labor, Mexican working people proved their worth in the groves, the mines, and in the factories of the fields. In the early 1900's, Mexicanos made up 80% of the railroad workers on the western lines that were so significant in the West's industrialization.

During the famous Ludlow, Colorado coal mine strike in 1913, twelve thousand miners—half of them Mexican—went on strike against the Rockefeller family. Evicted from their company-owned shacks, the strikers were forced to set up tents in a nearby ravine. National Guardsmen, ordered to take control because Rockefeller refused to negotiate, opened fire on the encampment and set the tents on fire, killing 18 including 7 children. Half the dead were Mexican. Thus the Ludlow Massacre became history.

communities. Local police and Border Patrol agents harass and intimidate many legal citizens in their zealous search for undocumented people. With their neighborhoods often turned into occupied territory, cultural diversions like low-riding become targets for mass arrests by police. Whittier Boulevard in Los Angeles and Highland Avenue in National City both were scenes of recent heavy crack-downs by police.

Vigilantes like the Klan make repeated open threats against Mexicanos. Other Anglos harbor racist stereotypes of Mexicans that are a rationale for colonialism. This colonial mentality says it's okay for white people to be better off while Mexicanos are being oppressed. This mentality of white supremacy, if not surfaced in violence directed at individual Mexicanos, allows for Mexicanos to be beaten up by the Border Patrol at the border.

Mexico In the sixties

On both sides of the border, Mexicanos, since the 1960's have experienced a new surge for social change.

Down south, Mexico, like most of South and Central America, has experienced people's movements aimed at overthrowing the ruling elites. Across the continent during the '60's and '70's guerrilla movements have stubbornly resisted the dictatorships who have been relying increasingly on U.S. arms and money to control their societies.

In 1968, with the approach of the World Olympics in Mexico City, the discontent took to the streets to draw the world's attention to the injustices of Mexican society. Led by students and young people, the movement quickly achieved mass proportions, openly challenging the Mexican government's complicity with the power of North American corporations.

Diaz Ordaz, then president, made his move. The showdown that occurred in early October stands today as an important watershed for Mexican politics. Thousands of demonstrators massed at a peaceful night rally. Suddenly troops on nearby rooftops began firing into the crowd of men, women and children, slaughtering hundreds, perhaps as many as 2000. The massacre revealed the true faces of the Mexican regime to the people, for whom the date October 2nd remains a day of vengeance and remembrance.



Although the student movement was crushed into inaction for several years, many committed themselves to continue the struggle against the government and its allies. Since the mid-70's, the student movement has been gathering strength and making alliances with other sectors of the people.

In the countryside, another situation exists. Confronted with the increasing power of large land-owners and agricultural monopolies, landless families have taken part in numerous land invasions and take-overs each year.

Armed campesinos risk their lives in these attempts to regain or establish ejidos. In 1977 there were 1000 people killed in the more than 300 land take-overs that occurred. Over 60,000 acres have been occupied by farmworkers in the past several years.

Although the government backs many of the land invasions to control agriculture and the farmworkers, the take-overs by an increasingly organized rural people represent an important facet of the struggle for change in the countryside.

Since the early '60's a new wave of guerrilla warfare has emerged, with two of the most significant movements led by Jenero Vasquez and Lucio Cabanas in the jungles and mountains of the area around Acapulco. Other modern-day Zapatistas operate in the southern region today, organizing rural people for a base for armed struggle and social change.

As the rebellion grows against the rich landowners and foreigners, the U.S. will probably increase its military presence. The Mexican police have received \$70 million in aid from the U.S. government since 1973, \$2 million in military arms alone in 1979. Already, imprisoned guerrillas report that they've been interrogated by English-speaking men. Helicopters that the U.S. sells to the government for drug trade crack-downs are used for spotting guerrilla camps deep in the jungles and mountains.

In the cities, sectors of the Mexican labor movement are struggling to become stronger and more independent from the government controlled unions, despite the jailing of leaders and the suppression of strikes. These urban forces are fighting to democratize and socialize the country's industries and resources.

Despite the role of the Church and the heavily ingrained machismo of the culture, a growing movement in Mexico is emerging to challenge these traditions, particularly in the urban and industrial areas. Women are organizing at the assembly lines and packing houses in defense against the exploitation of longer hours and less pay than men. Confronting the patriarchy of the society, women in Mexico represent an important influence in developing opposition to the status quo.

The growing popular resistance to the Mexican oligarchy includes urban coalitions made up of families unable to pay rent. They are leading take-overs and seizures of whole communities—colonias. There they set up their own schools, day care centers and establish new political structures. These coalitions, like the Committees for Popular Defense, envision a Mexico where the factories, farms and neighborhoods are run by the people collectively. They see themselves in a struggle for state power and the creation of a socialist republic.

What happens south of the border deeply affects Mexicans north of the border. When repression came down in and after 1968, some activists escaped and traveled north to inspire the struggles of Mexicans in the U.S.

reawakening in the north

Reawakening in the north during the 1960s, an explosion occurred in the Mexican communities. A mass resurgence arose attempting to challenge the racism and colonialism.

The United Farmworkers Union, created in 1962 and led by Cesar Chavez, became a major rallying force, organizing a grape strike and boycott, and later a lettuce strike. Repression against the union escalated in 1973 as growers, police and the Teamsters union tried to break strikes the UFW was waging in the vineyards of California's Coachella Valley. Nearly 5000 people were arrested. Beatings and killings still occur in the fields against the farmworkers as the murder of Rulfinio Contreras in 1979 shows.

In northern New Mexico in early June 1967, armed men took over the courthouse in the small mountail village of Tierra Amarilla. This action led by the Alianza and Reies Tijerina, was a protest against government violations of the land grant rights of Mexicano owners.

One thousand National Guardsmen with tanks were called out and mass arrests were made of the families involved.

In the late sixties and early seventies the wave of protest hit the schools and the education system. Thousands of Mexican students in '68 walked out of their classrooms in Los Angeles, in Denver and throughout Texas, demanding an end to racist policies and teachings. This upsurge ignited demands for Chicano Studies Programs at many colleges and led to the formations of MEChA's—Mexican student organizations.

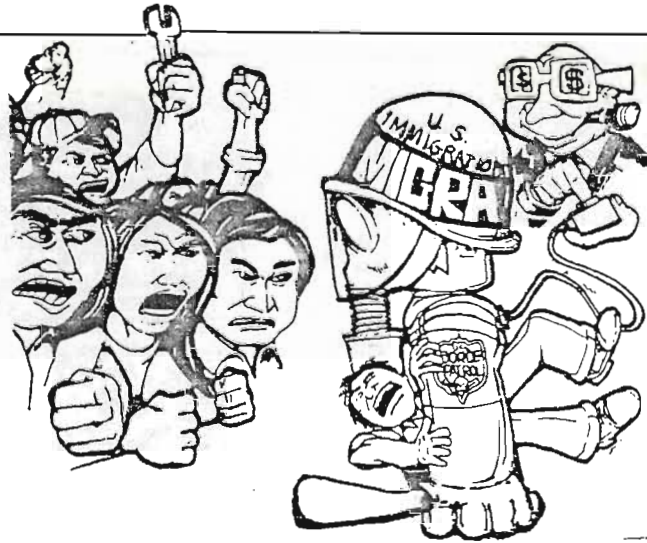
Over the years this new spirit of resistance found many different forms. The Crusade for Justice, created in Denver, Colorado, fights for the rights of people in the barrios. The Brown Berets, organized to put into practice community service and protection programs whose members often were jailed for their confrontations with police.

As Mexicanos realized that the 2-party system wasn't representing them, they formed an electoral party, the La Raza Unida Party, in 1969. Running candidates for local elections, it has had the most success in southern Texas, where whole towns are now governed by Mexicanos.

Some communities, fed-up with Anglo-dominated institutions, have created their own health clinics, schools and farming co-ops.

During the VietNam war the Mexican community's first resistance to the conflict began as a defense of their own people, who were being drafted and killed far out of proportion to their numbers in the general population. In late August 1970, tens of thousands of Mexican families marched in protest but were then attacked with tear-gas and shot-guns of the L.A. County Sherriffs. Three people were killed, including the well-known L.A. Times reporter Ruben Salazar. In response, a riot ensued and Whittier Boulevard was burned. A decade later, August 29th remains a rallying call and has become a symbol of resistance.

With every police murder and killing, opposition to the status quo grows. Many cities have experienced protests against police brutality and the role of the police as an occupation force. These



have occurred in Albuquerque, Dallas, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Taos, Denver, San Francisco, National City and many smaller towns.

Throughout the border states and increasingly in the mid-western states, Mexicanos are actively taking part and leading many struggles by working people for better conditions and pay. The famous Farah Company strike in 1972 is an example of this, where 400 mostly Mexican workers won a long and bitter fight.

Beginning in the early '70's and continuing today, protests have been mounting against the deportations of undocumented workers and against the brutality of La Migra. This solidarity has been an important way for the movement for change on this side of the border to relate to its counterpart on the other side.

The art and mural movement, reborn also in the mid-60's, has become a way to explain, enlarge on and enrich the Mexicanos struggle for justice and self-determination. It has helped establish their culture, giving it roots and identity.

From the mid-60's on, a mass movement surged up as Mexicanos in the U.S. awakened to their history and the reality of their conditions. This has become a grass-roots political struggle for power and self-determination, forcing out questions of identity and different strategies. The continual oppression of their people, the role of the police and other occupational forces, and the legitimacy of the U.S. government are all challenged by this movement.

Reclaiming ones identity after years and decades of lies and myths is no easy task, and today Mexicanos in the U.S. cannot agree exactly on what course or strategy to take, in just which direction of change they should head.

The struggles of Mexicanos on both sides of the border are deeply inter-related. However, people in the south have traditionally ignored the problems of the people in the north, and visa-versa.

Political theorists in the south point out that Mexicanos in the U.S. will not win in their struggle against discrimination until Mexico is free and independent. This won't occur until the North American grip on the economy is broken by popular struggle. At that point, the question of re-unification of the north and south, long a dormant issue, will most certainly be raised.

The differences of life between San Diego and Tijuana, the horrible plight of the undocumented workers, the domination of Mexico's economy and society by U.S. businesses, are all related. As we've seen, Mexican society is rushing toward a crisis. The government cannot hide the contradictions it has helped create. The insurgency of the people is rising once again as more and more working people, women, campesinos, and students realize that the real solution is independence and self-determination.

As social revolutions burn throughout Latin America, like in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico will most certainly be shaken by the effects over the coming years. And we can expect North America itself to be shaken.

As North Americans, our interests are aligned with justice and social change, and in this part of the world Mexicanos are the leading force acting for change. We must move in solidarity and activate ourselves, demanding: 1) democratic rights and unconditional amnesty for undocumented workers, 2) an end to the militarization of the border, and more broadly, 3) an end to the colonization of people on this side, and an end to U.S. domination and control of Mexico on the other.