

**MEXICAN LABOR MIGRATION AND THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE
TRADE AGREEMENT (NAFTA): 1994-2006**

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INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this paper is to show that Mexican labor migration to the United States—being in absolute terms the biggest, constant and increasing flow of persons in the world—is a substantive part of the flexible transnational labor reserve of the new accumulation process of North American capitalism. The North American capitalist system, particularly U. S. capital, attempts to create and consolidate the North American labor market, using not only this Mexican migrant labor force, but also the Central American and Caribbean migrant labor force in lesser numbers, to develop a “competitive and comparative” regional advantage because of its low cost. On the other hand, this paper shows that as a response to discrimination and superexploitation by the U.S. capitalist system, these migrants have started to nationally and transnationally organize themselves in order to defend their fundamental rights, mainly their labor rights and their rights to mobility and to citizenship.

At the beginning of the 1990s, two of the most recognized scholars in international migration studies, Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller (1993), stated that in the contemporary world, large-scale movements of people arise from the acceleration of global integration. “Migrations are not an isolated phenomenon: movements of commodities and capital almost always give rise to movements of people. Global cultural interchange, facilitated by improved transport and the proliferation of print and electronic media, also lead to migration” (p. 3). They pointed out that migrations have been part of human history from the earliest times. “However international migration has grown in volume and significance since 1945 and most particularly since the mid-1980s. The perspective for the 1990s and the early part of the next century is that migration will continue to grow, and that it is likely to be one of the most important factors in global change” (Ibid).

Actually, since the beginning of the 1990s and until the first half of the 2000s, we have witnessed a remarkable increase in global migration. The 2002, the International Migration Report of the United Nations Population Division calculated that in 2000 there were 175 million people residing in another country other than where they were born. The number of migrants in the world has increased twofold since 1975, the majority of

which reside in Europe (56 million), Asia (50 million), and North America (41 million). Almost one in ten persons residing in the world's most developed regions is a migrant whereas almost one in seventy persons in the underdeveloped countries is a migrant. In five years, from 1995 to 2000, the most developed regions received approximately 12 million migrants from the less developed regions: North America attracted 1.4 million per year, Europe 800 thousand; and Oceania 90 thousand yearly (U. N. Population Division, 2002).

In 2005, according the United Nations' Migration and Development Report, presented by the General Secretary in May, 2006, 191 million persons lived out of their countries of origin: 115 million in developed countries, and 75 million in underdeveloped countries. A third of all migrants in the world have moved from one underdeveloped country to another, and almost the same number of persons has moved from underdeveloped countries to developed ones. 75% of all migrants in the world were concentrated in only 28 countries, the United States receiving one out of five of them. Women migrants represent almost half of the world's total migrants and they are a larger group than migrant men in developed countries. Migrants with advanced studies were responsible for almost half the increase in the number of international migrants ages 25 years old and older in the OCDE countries during the 1990s. In 2000, almost six out of ten migrants with advanced education living in OCDE countries came from underdeveloped countries. From 1995 to 2005, the group of countries with higher income accounted for the major increase in the number of international migrants (41 million) (United Nations, 2006).

These trends will continue in the next five decades because according to the demographic estimates and projections of the United Nations Population Division (U. N. Population Division, 2002), world population will begin to decline largely due to the fact that three out of four countries in the less developed regions will experience a drop in birth rates. But in these 50 years, the global population will increase 2.6 billion persons, from 6.3 billion to 8.9 billion. Huge population increases are expected among the most populous countries even if their fertility levels are projected to be low. From 2000 to 2050, it is estimated that 8 countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria, United States, China,

Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo in order of population increase) comprise half of the projected world population increase.

The United States case is unique among these countries, because as the most developed country in the world, its population growth will be a combination of differential birth rates (low among Anglo Americans and Afro-Americans, high in Asian Americans and Indians, and higher in Latinos, of whom Mexicans have the highest birth rate, being also the youngest population), and high immigration rates, of which Mexicans have the highest one.

According to the U. N. analysis, international migration will remain high during the next half of this century. It is expected that the most developed regions will continue to experience the largest net increase of international migrants, with an average increase of almost two million per year. During the 2000-2050 period, the main recipients who experience the largest net increase of international migrants per year will be the United States (1.1 million), Germany (211 thousand), Canada (173 thousand), United Kingdom (136 thousand) and Australia (83 thousand); and the main countries that will experience a net decrease in international migrants will be China (-303 thousand migrants per year), Mexico (-267 thousand), India (-222 thousand), Philippines (-184 thousand) and Indonesia (-180 thousand). Therefore, we will see that the constant and growing transfer of persons from the countries in the less developed regions—but that are not the poorest ones—to the countries in the richest regions—that have decreasing fertility rates—will continue for some decades ahead (United Nations Population Division, 2003).

While many international migrants are fleeing their countries for political and violent reasons or because of natural disasters, most international migrants today leave their countries for economic reasons. This economic international migration is due to the new process of flexible capital accumulation. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates in 2000, 120 million out of 175 million were labor migrants and members of their families. A fifth, or 20 million of them, are in Africa, and there exist 30 million in Western and Eastern Europe, 18 million in North America, 12 million in Latin America, 9 million in the Middle East, and 7 million in Asia (Taran, 2003).

Castles and Miller (op. cit.: 4) pointed out that even though the vast majority of people reside in their countries of birth and citizenship, and that taking up residence

abroad is the exception, not the rule, “the impact of migration is much greater than the small percentage suggests. People tend to move not individually but in groups. Their departure may have considerable consequences for social and economic relationships in the area of origin” (i.e., because of familial disintegration or reorganization, and the economic remittances sent by workers to their families and communities). “In the country that receives the migrants, settlement is closely linked to employment opportunities, and is almost always concentrated in industrial and urban areas, where the impact on receiving communities is considerable”. They conclude that “migration thus affects not only the migrants themselves but the sending and receiving societies as a whole”, and that “there can be few people in either industrial countries or underdeveloped countries today who do not have personal experience of migration and its effects” (p. 5).

2. FLEXIBLE MIGRANT LABOR FROM MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN TO THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

International labor migration occurs within the context of capitalist economies. It acquires specific characteristics that are derived from a particular form of the organization of production processes. Its characteristics are directly linked to the capital accumulation requirements. In the process of accumulation, capitalism must face permanent, necessary and deep transformations, and these are the elements that assign migration its dimension and continuity. Therefore, international labor migration constitutes one of the structural elements of capitalism.

The current explosion of international migration rates derives directly from a process initiated in the 19th Century that increased migration during the second postwar period in the 20th Century. In this last period, the United States, Western Europe and other secondary centers of capital accumulation, in the face of their own scarce industrial labor army reserves, turned to migrant labor. The current process has different characteristics, but it must be considered part of the same movement whose purpose is to aid in the consolidation of a world labor market on the basis of the internationalization of production (Castles and Kosak, 1973; Castles and Miller, op. cit.; Potts, 1990; Sassen-Koob, 1988; 1999). According to this perspective, labor migration has acquired the form

of a global labor market, a true international industrial reserve army that can be hired anywhere all over the world (Aragonés, 2000; Castles, 2000; Castles and Miller, op. cit.; Machuca, 1990; Peña, 1995; Sandoval y Aragonés, 1996). It is one of the substantive elements of the new model of capitalist accumulation.

According to Harvey (2003), in the current period we have seen a shift in emphasis from accumulation through expanded reproduction (which is currently in an overaccumulation crisis) to accumulation through dispossession. This new process of accumulation of capital arises when the former capital equilibrium has been broken in favor of older accumulation forms, which now reappear under new models, which Harvey refers to as “accumulation through dispossession”. These ways are similar to the one Marx termed “primitive” or “original” accumulation, which never was abandoned by the bourgeoisie, but now it returns back of the hand of the United States decadence. It seems to be a distinctive sign of capitalism in its period of decadence.

But so, how, then, does accumulation by dispossession help solve the overaccumulation problem? Harvey asks to himself. He states that,

Overaccumulation, recall, is a condition where surpluses of capital (perhaps accompanied by surpluses of labour) lie idle with no profitable outlets in sight. The operative term here, however, is the capital surplus. What accumulation by dispossession does is to release a set of assets (including labour power) at very low (and in some instances zero) cost. Overaccumulated capital can seize hold of such assets and immediately turn them to profitable use. In the case of primitive accumulation as Marx described it, this entailed taking land, say, enclosing it, and expelling a resident population to create a landless proletariat, and then releasing the land into the privatized mainstream of capital accumulation. (p. 149)

Accumulation by dispossession, Harvey says, became increasingly more salient after 1973,

in part as compensation for the chronic problems of overaccumulation arising within expanded reproduction. The primary vehicle for this development was financialization and the orchestration, largely at the behest of the United States, of an international financial system that could, from time to time, visit anything from mild to savage bouts of devaluation and accumulation by dispossession on certain sectors or even territories. But the opening up of new territories to capitalist development and to capitalistic forms of market behavior also played a role, as did the primitive accumulation accomplished in those countries (such as South Korea, Taiwan, and now, even more dramatically, China) that sought to insert themselves into global capitalism as active players. For all of this to occur required not only financialization and freer trade, but a radically different approach to how state power, always a major player in accumulation by dispossession, should be deployed. The rise of neo-liberal theory and its associated politics of privatization symbolized much of what this shift was about. (p. 156)

And, since privatization and liberalization of the market was the mantra of neo-liberal movements, Harvey says that,

the effect was to make a new round of “enclosure of the commons” into an objective of state policies. Assets held by the state or in common were released into the markets where overaccumulating capital could invest in them, upgrade them, and speculate in them. New terrains for profitable activity were opened up, and this helped stave off the overaccumulation problem, at least for a while. Once in motion, however, this movement created incredible pressures to find more and more arenas, either at home or abroad, where privatization might be achieved. (p. 158)

Accumulation by dispossession, Harvey states, “can here be interpreted as the necessary cost of making a successful breakthrough into capitalist development with the strong backing of state powers” (p. 154). And “the umbilical cord that ties together accumulation by dispossession and expanded reproduction is that given by finance capital and the institutions of credit, backed, as ever, by state powers” (p. 152). This is, then, how, when, and why accumulation by dispossession emerges from this background state to become the dominant form of accumulation relative to expanded reproduction.

In the case of labor markets, the current trend is to reduce the number of workers belonging to the “core” and resorting each time to using a labor force that can be easily recruited as well as rapidly dismissed without any cost when business gets worse (Harvey, 1990: 175). And it is here where migrant workers become important because they are a cheap labor force that can be hired fast and fired fast. According to Binford (2000: 39), migrant workers are key to the flexible accumulation process. They hold Third World wages, and through their work mainly in agriculture (but also in high intensity labor manufacture, construction, and service sectors), subsidize the managerial and professional sectors that constitute part of the labor force “core” of multinational corporations.

With this understanding, one of the fundamental elements that is needed to increase capital surplus in this new accumulation process is the superexploitation of migrant labor (particularly irregular or unauthorized migrant labor). There are three fundamental forms of superexploitation that capitalist exploitation may assume: the increase of the intensity of work, the extension of the workday, and the payments of labor power below its value. In the U. S. employers utilize all three forms, but the last one is the most important. Machuca (1990: 11) points out:

The differences of value of the wages [increases] inequality, which is preserved within the national boundaries as the expanded reproduction conditions of a given country and makes possible particular ways of pressure and exploitation of this international wage laborer. This migrant worker, under the paradox of a comparative larger income, besides [being submitted]

to more intensive working conditions, does not have labor rights. From this situation, the employer obtains an economic advantage [which has arisen] from the differences of the work force values in both countries.

The Mexican labor force is currently becoming more flexible in order to insert itself into the U.S. flexible labor markets that require larger numbers each time. This has been possible, to a great extent, because it is a labor force whose members lack basic rights (as citizens) in their own country. And, therefore, they will not have the support of the Mexican State in the U. S., which on the other hand, is going to refuse giving any rights to these workers. In this way, they become more vulnerable to larger labor exploitation.

It is a question of structural order because this labor force, according to Dixon, Jonas and McCaughan (1982), has been historically created in the process of the U. S. capitalist development. These authors point out that

The same process of capitalist penetration of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, which in recent years has taken the form of industrial relocation, has historically created a surplus proletariat unable to find employment in its own country. Particularly in this current period of economic crisis, [ever larger] masses of this surplus population have been forced to migrate to the core, in particular the United States, where they have been incorporated as a superexploited sector of the labor force in the U. S. and used to lower the overall wage levels of the U. S. working class (Dixon, Jonas and McCaughan, op. cit.: 106).

They stated that Mexicans, Central Americans and Caribbeans in the U. S. represent a TRANSNATIONAL LABOR FORCE, historically created as consequence of: a) the relations of unequal exchange between the United States and the continuous Mexican/Central American/Caribbean region; b) a deliberate U. S. immigration policy; and, c) the transnationalization of capital. And it serves primarily as a Reserve Army of Labor for transnational and U.S.-based agricultural, service, and manufacturing enterprises. It is a population which is increasingly not restricted by national boundaries, but which is defined by the existing division of labor between two neighboring yet unequal areas within the capitalist world system.

This transnational working class is itself STATELESS: the State of origin promotes emigration as a “solution” to these impoverished masses, and the State which receives them is willing to exploit but not adopt them, opting either to criminalize their status or legalize them on a temporary basis. The transnational labor class is thus the world’s reserve army of labor, subject to massive exploitation since they have no legal rights, or only provisional rights. The root of the problem is that they are a transnational class, protected by no State once they have left their State of origin (Ibid).

The Mexican, Central American and Caribbean immigrants form a constantly expanding transnational labor force of several millions of workers. It is a labor force characterized

by its Statelessness, its fluidity, and its constant motion back and forth between its country of origin and the United States (as a result of both willing travel and deportations). At the same time, as the aforementioned authors say, this labor force is characterized by an advanced degree of integration into the U. S. economy, and comprises a significant proportion of the work force in key agricultural, service, and industrial sectors. U. S. capital sectors overexploit this cheap and vulnerable labor force workers force to reestablish their competitiveness and profit level at the world market.

Mexican migrant workers and migrant workers from some Central American and Caribbean countries have thus become the international flexible labor reserve particularly of the U.S.; and, in general terms, of the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) (Canada, United States and Mexico). These three countries, and specifically the U. S., are looking for the creation and consolidation of the North American Labor Market, in which the migrant labor force—particularly the Mexican one because of its low cost—would be a comparative and competitive advantage at the regional level.

One of the main reasons for this is that by increasing the supply of labor through immigration (legal or unauthorized, temporary or permanent), earnings of native-born workers will be inevitably reduced in competition with immigrants. According to Borjas (2004: 1):

- By increasing the supply of labor between 1980 and 2000, immigration reduced the average annual earnings of native-born men by an estimated \$ 1,700 or roughly 4 per cent.
- Among natives without a high school education, who roughly correspond to the poorest tenth of the workforce, the estimated impact was even larger, reducing their wages by 7.4 percent.
- The 10 million native-born workers without a high school degree face the most competition from immigration, as do the eight million younger natives with only a high school education and 12 million younger college graduates.
- The negative effect on native-born black and Hispanic workers is significantly larger than on whites because a much larger share of minorities are in direct competition with immigrants.
- The reduction in earnings occurs regardless of whether the immigrants are legal or illegal, permanent or temporary. It is the presence of additional workers that reduces wages, not their legal status.

But, on the other hand, the Mexican migrant labor force, together with other immigrant workers, is considered a needed supplement to the native-born labor force. According to Paral (2005: 1) more and more policymakers have come to realize that the U.S

immigration system does not adequately respond to labor shortages in the U. S. economy.

Paral analyzed data from the 2000 census to find that:

- Employment in about one-third of all U. S. job categories would have contracted during the 1990s in the absence of recently arrived, non-citizen immigrant workers, even if all unemployed U. S.-born workers with recent job experience in those categories had been re-employed.
- Thirteen occupational categories collectively would have been short more than 500,000 workers during the 1990s without recently arrived non-citizens immigrant employees, even if all unemployed natives with recent experience in those categories had been re-employed.
- Eleven job categories would have seen their workforce contract by more than 7 percent during the 1990s if recently arrived non-citizens had not been available, even with re-employment of experienced natives.
- The earnings of immigrant workers rise and eventually equal or surpass those of native workers the longer the immigrant live in the United States and as they naturalize.
- Given the long-term economic success of immigrants, over-reliance on temporary worker programs may wisely terminate the upward mobility of immigrant workers just as they begin to achieve their greatest productivity.

In this framework, the Mexican immigrant labor force has been incorporated in larger quantities, each time, into the segmented U. S. labor markets (Borjas and Katys, 2005; Grenier and Cattan, 2000; McCarthy and Vernez, 1997) as well as into the Canadian ones (Binford, et al, 2004; Vanegas, 2003). As a consequence of this, there has been an important response of organized labor, encouraged by some labor unions' success in organizing immigrant workers in the non-tradable service sector and other sectors in the U. S. (Holguin, 2001); it has also been an incipient organizing experience of Mexican migrant workers in Canada. In September 2006, in a historical breakthrough that could eventually impact thousands of migrant agricultural workers brought each season to Canada, Mexican migrant workers at three farms in Québec and one farm in Manitoba have applied to unionize with the United Farm and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Canada (known as TUAC in Québec) (UFCW/TUAC, Media Release, 20/09/2006) (See also, UFCW Canada Fifth Annual National Report on *The Status of Migrant Farm Workers in Canada*, 2005). Together with immigrant workers, Maquila Mexican, Central American, and Caribbean workers are also becoming a substantive part of this transnational labor reserve (Sandoval, 2003).

In the U.S., high Latino immigration rates in general, and Mexican immigration rates in particular, together with high Latino birth rates, led to the surprising increase of the so called "Hispanic" or Latino population during the 1990s. According to the

population census carried out by the US Census Bureau in 2000, this population already has become the first national minority, surpassing the Afro-American population whose numbers supposedly would be reached by the Latinos during the first decade of the 21st Century (Terrien and Ramírez, 2001).

In Census 2000, 281.4 million residents were counted in the United States, of which 35.3 million (or 12.5 %) were residents registered in census as persons of *Spanish/Hispanic/Latino* origin. In this year, the *Latino* term appeared on the census form for the first time. Mexicans represented 7.3 %, Puerto Ricans 1.2 %, Cubans 0.4 %, and other Latinos 3.6 % of the total population. This population increased by 57.9 %, from 22.4 million in 1990 to 35.3 million in 2000, compared to an increase of 13.2 percent of the total U. S. population. Mexicans increased by 52.9 %, from 13.5 million to 20.6 million. Puerto Ricans increased by 24.9 %, from 2.7 million to 3.4 million. Cubans increased by 18.9 percent, from 1.0 million to 1.2 million. Latinos of other origins increased by 96.9 %, from 5.1 million to 10.0 million.

In terms of territorial distribution, 43.5 % of Latinos lived in the West and 32.8 % in the South, and the Northeast and Midwest accounted for 14.9 % and 8.9 %, respectively. Half of the Latino population lives in only two states: California (11 million, or 31.1 %), and Texas (6.7 million, or 18.9 %). Latinos in four counties accounted for 21.9 % of the total Latino population. There were 4.2 % million Latinos in Los Angeles County, California, 1.3 million in Miami-Dade, Florida, 1.1 million in Harris County, Texas, and 1.1 million in Cook County, Illinois. The largest Mexican populations lived in three out of the mentioned four counties: 3.0 million in Los Angeles County, 815, 000 in Harris County, and 786, 000 in Cook County. The relative youthfulness of the Latino population is reflected in its population under age 18 and its median age. While 25.7 % of the U. S. population was under 18 years of age in 2000, 35.0 % of Latinos were less than age 18. The median age for Latinos was 25.9 years while the median age for the entire U. S. population was 35.3 years. Mexicans had a median age of 24.2 years, the youngest of all Latinos (U. S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The Latino population continues to grow faster than other populations in the U. S. Between 2000 and 2002, Latinos were responsible for half of the country's demographic growth, according the Census Bureau report of June 18, 2003. Between April 1, 2000 and

July 1, 2002, this population increased 3.5 million, or 9.8 %, reaching 38.8 million for the whole country. During this same time period, the U. S. population increased 6.9 million (2.5 %), reaching 288.4 million people. In a period of 12 years, the number of Latinos—and particularly Mexicans—increased 74 %, from 22.3 million in 1990 to 38.8 million in 2002 (AFP, 2003). 4.8 million out of 38.8 million of Latinos were Mexican born with an irregular migratory status in the U. S. (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2002).

In 2004, the Latino population reached 40.4 million, according to estimates of the Pew Hispanic Center (2005): 22, 381, 207 out of 40, 424, 528 Latinos were born in the U.S. and 18, 043, 321 were foreign born.

This is a jump of more than 14 % in just four years; meanwhile, the non-Hispanic population was up by barely 2%. The impact of Latino population growth is magnified by the fact that the white and African-American populations are not only stable in size but also aging. As the huge baby boom generation moves toward retirement, young Latinos are filing in behind them.

The estimated Latino population as of July 1, 2005 reached 42.7 million, according the U.S. Census Bureau (2006).

In another analysis of the Pew Hispanic Center (Passel, 2005), it is stated that 11 million out of the more than 18 million foreign-born persons are in an irregular migratory status in the U. S., and half of them are Mexican born. Another 2.5 million undocumented migrants, or about 24 percent of the total, are from other Latin American Countries. So, more than 80 % of the total are Latino immigrants. Using data from the March 2004 Current Population Survey which is conducted by the U. S. Census Bureau and the Department of Labor, the Pew Hispanic Center developed new estimates for the size and key characteristics of the population of foreign-born persons living in the United States without proper authorization. It shows that:

- Following several years of steady growth, the number of undocumented residents reached an estimated 10.3 million in March 2004 with undocumented Mexicans numbering 5.9 million or 57 percent of the total.
- As of March 2005, the undocumented population has reached nearly 11 million including more than 6 million Mexicans, assuming the same rate of growth as in recent years.
- About 80 to 85 percent of the migration from Mexico in recent years has been undocumented.
- Since the mid-1990s, the most rapid growth in the number of undocumented migrants has been in states that previously had relatively small foreign-born populations. As a result,

Arizona and North Carolina are now among the states with the largest numbers of undocumented migrants.

- Although most undocumented migrants are young adults, there is also a sizeable childhood population. About one-sixth of the population –some 1.7 million people- is under 18 years of age.

This population of Latin American origin is an important part of the U. S. labor force. In 2004, 7.1 million out of 18.9 million foreign born workers employed in the U.S. were from Mexico and Central America. This figure represented more than one third (37%) of the total. Approximately 4.9 million (26%) were from Asia, 2.4 million (12%) from Europe, 1.7 million (9%) from the Caribbean, and 1.3% (7%) from South America. Mexican, Central American and Caribbean migrant workers all together summed up 8.8 million or 46 %. And they reached 10.1 million if the South American migrant workers were added. This is to say, more than 50 % of the total immigrant workers were Latinos (Grieco, 2004^a).

According to the Pew Hispanic Center (op. cit.), the rapid increase in the Latino population has made it the second largest ethnic group in the U. S. labor force behind whites. The Latino workers represent 13 % of this labor force, but they are expected to account for about one half of the growth in the labor force between now and 2020.

Not surprisingly, Hispanics also account for a disproportionate share of new jobs. Despite their success in finding employment, Latino workers, especially recent immigrants, are less educated and less experienced than other workers. As a result, they are concentrated in relatively low-skill occupations, have a higher unemployment rate and even less than the average for all workers. Poverty is also high among Latino households and wealth accumulation is low; Hispanic households own less than 10 cents for every dollar in wealth owned by white households (p. 2).

In fact, Latinos comprise the only group that has a falling average income but that also has less health insurance nationwide. In 2003, the Census Bureau estimated that the number of Americans living in poverty increased by 1.4 million and the number of uninsured Americans increased by 1.4 million. That was the third straight year in which both categories increased. And while annual average incomes remained flat, incomes for Latinos dropped by 2.6 percent, the only group whose incomes fell. There were a total of 35.8 million people in the United States living below the poverty line in 2003, 9.1 million of which were Latinos. Also, the number of people without health insurance nationwide went up by 1.4 million, to a total of 45 million Americans, 13.2 million of which were Latinos (News from House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, August 26, 2004).

Latino immigrants retain strong economic ties to their countries of origin and many of them regularly send money home. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, more than \$ 30 billion was remitted to Latin American and Caribbean countries in 2003, 13,500 million of which were sent to their country by 11 million of Mexican-born residents in the United States. In 2004, Mexicans sent home more than 16 billion U. S. dollars. In 2005, they sent home almost 20 billion, and in 2006, more than 21 billion U. S. dollars (\$21, 295 million) was sent by Mexican immigrants as remittances to Mexico (González, 2006). According to the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Central American and Caribbean immigrants sent home more than 13, 800 million U. S. dollars in 2003, but a small quantity of these remittances came from some European countries (El Salvador, 2, 316 million dollars; Dominican Republic, 2, 217 million dollars; Guatemala, 2, 106 million dollars; Jamaica, 1, 425 million dollars; Cuba, 1, 194 million dollars; Haití, 977; Honduras, 862; Nicaragua, 788; Costa Rica, 306; Guyana, 137; Trinidad y tobago, 88, Belice, 73) (IADB, Press Release, 2004, cited in Pellegrino, 2004: 46-437).

In the case of the Mexican, Central American and Caribbean temporary migrant workers in Canada, the numbers are small but significant. Canada has been signing temporary migrant agriculture workers' agreements since the 1960s and the 1970s, mainly with Mexico and Caribbean countries. The agreement was signed between Mexico and Canada in 1973, but it was not until the last decade in which the flow of migrant workers increased. In 2003, 11,500 temporary agricultural migrant Mexican workers were sent to Canadian agricultural farms (vegetables, fruits and tobacco) whose products are exported to the global markets. This number of Mexican migrant workers has remained more or less stable since then. Caribbean temporary agricultural workers have been decreasing in numbers each year, displaced by the Mexican workers because they are a more docile and flexible workforce, mainly because of language barriers and the official control on them by the Mexican State (Vanegas, op. cit.).

The Temporary Agricultural Workers Program between Mexico and Canada has been publicly portrayed by Mexican authorities (officials) as a great success, and as a model to follow when a new Guest Worker Program is to be negotiated between the United States and Mexico. However, the dark side of this program is that workers receive

low wages, work longer hours, have limited protection against labor abuses, and the contract is favorable to Canadian employers. All of these factors make Mexicans a captive labor force, which is very profitable for the Canadian farmers in their efforts to adapt themselves to free market and global competitiveness (Binford, et al, 2004).

If a new Temporary Worker, Guest Worker or “Bracero” Program is negotiated between the United States and Mexico, either as a specific program or a following of the model of the Canada-Mexico Temporary Agricultural Workers Program, migrant workers would enter “legally” into the United States, but they would continue to work in the same conditions as if they were in an irregular migratory status. That is to say, they would receive a minimum wage and no other benefits, becoming superexploitable subjects, which is very important for increasing the profits of North American employers (from the U.S. and Canada).

3. THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (NAFTA) AND LABOR MIGRATION

Mexican migration to the United States is, by its historic character, unique in the world. Mexican labor has always been linked to the different stages of U. S. capitalist development since the 19th Century: in times of prosperity, by the incorporation of big numbers of workers in agricultural, manufacturing, service and other sectors, and in periods of economic crisis, by the deportation of Mexican laborers back to Mexico in huge numbers. At the beginning of the 1980s, when the neoliberal economic model was imposed in Mexico, the Administration of President Miguel De La Madrid (1982-1988) signed the incorporation of this country into the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), now the World Trade Organization (WTO). De La Madrid attempted to establish mechanisms to incorporate Mexican migrant labor force as an exporting good (merchandise) or service in the world labor markets throughout GATT. What Mexico wanted was that labor mobility associated with services be discussed at the Uruguay Round of GATT (Sandoval, 2003). The General Agreement on Service Trade (GAST) did not incorporate the labor migration issue in WTO (International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development, 2001:1).

Mexican President Carlos Salinas De Gortari (1988-1994), negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement with U. S. President George W. Bush, and Canada Prime Minister Martín Brian Mulroney. Migrant labor was excluded from such negotiations, under the premise that free trade would be the solution, in the long run, to the migration “problem” due to the benefits carried out by NAFTA. In 1990 (the year when NAFTA negotiations started), this premise was established by the Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development created under IRCA.

In November of 1986, the United States government enacted the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) to address the “problem” of unauthorized immigration in both domestic and international terms, simultaneously targeting the “pull” and the “push” factors that motivate undocumented migration to the United States. The Act sought to diminish the pull of American jobs by penalizing employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers. To address the push factors, the Act created the Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development to study the causes of undocumented migration to the United States from Western Hemisphere countries.

In July of 1987, the leadership of the Congress appointed the twelve members of the bipartisan Commission. It was instructed, “in consultation with the governments of Mexico and other sending countries in the Western Hemisphere, shall examine the conditions in Mexico and such other countries which contribute to unauthorized migration to the United States and (shall explore) mutually beneficial, reciprocal trade and investment programs to alleviate such conditions” (Section 601, the Immigration Reform and Control Act, Public Law 99-603, November 6, 1986).

The Commission focused geographically on Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, the sources of the greatest number of migrants to the United States. Delegations from the Commission visited Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, The Dominican Republic, Haití, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Canada, Peru, and Puerto Rico. They met directly with heads of state and high-level officials responsible for economic development and migration, and

established joint activities at high governmental levels. They also met with leaders of academic, business, union, and religious organizations and other relevant groups.

The Commission organized a series of public hearings between 1988 and 1990, receiving testimony from dozens of government officials, academics, religious leaders, community leaders, human rights, immigrant and refugee activists, and others. During the same time period, specialists in the United States, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean conducted various research projects focused on two questions raised by the Commission: a) what conditions contribute to unauthorized migration from countries in the Western hemisphere to the United States; and, b) what cooperative economic development initiatives could be undertaken in migrant sending countries to alleviate the conditions that cause migration (Commission for the International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development, 1990^a; 1990^b; and 1990^c).

In Mexico, the source of more than 75% of unauthorized migrants in the U. S., the Commission worked closely with the National Population Council (CONAPO), an interdepartmental group designated by President Miguel De La Madrid as the official counterpart for joint research studies carried out in Mexico, including the selection of qualified researchers (Consejo Nacional de Población, 1992). Central American and Caribbean academicians carried out the research in other countries, and four large United States universities also participated.

The Commission met with Presidents Joaquin Balaguer of the Dominican Republic and Carlos Salinas De Gortari of Mexico on April 18 and May 9, 1990, respectively, to discuss some of their major results.

The Report of the Commission submitted by his Chairman Diego Ascencio on July the 17th, 1990 to the President of the United States, George Bush, to the Vice President and President of the Senate Danforth Quayle, and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Thomas S. Foley, stated that

The Commission was charged with recommending ways to mitigate migratory pressures by addressing a principal reason people seek better lives abroad: lack of economic opportunity. While primary responsibility for providing opportunity for their populations rests with the sending countries themselves, it is very much in the interest of the United States to cooperate with and support their efforts. There are various ways in which the United States can contribute directly to improving the lot of potential migrants in their home countries. Some specific recommendations are in the Report. But there is a great deal more we could do indirectly. Everything we suggest is aimed at reducing pressures for unauthorized immigration to the United States. **But implementation of our recommendations would**

also assist in the protection of our national security interests by contributing to stability in the region and to the furtherance of our commercial interests by improving markets for our exports.

The more job-creating economic growth there is in migrant-sending countries, the less their people will feel forced to emigrate. Overall, reduction of our fiscal deficit and the debt service burden facing developing countries will gradually remove obstacles to their economic growth. **We believe, however, that the most promising stimulus to future growth in sending countries is expanded trade between them and the industrialized countries – particularly the United States, which is their natural market.** (...) While there are other partial remedies, we are convinced that trade is the only option that offers hope to people in the area across a broad spectrum of economic growth. Financial assistance, even if substantially increased, would not have the same impact (...)

There are no short-term solutions to the problem of undocumented migration. Regardless of our efforts and those of the countries themselves, the United States will continue to be a magnet so long as our wages are many times more attractive than theirs. **Moreover, the major paradox of our study is the conclusion that economic development in the short term stimulates migration by rising expectations and enhancing people's ability to migrate. It takes many years –even generations- for sustained growth to achieve the desired effect.**

Except for Central America –over two million of whose people were uprooted by the conflicts of the 1980s –we do not directly propose financial assistance (...)

(...) **The main lesson we drew from our three years of study is that any serious cooperative effort to reduce migratory pressures at their source must stay the course in the face of short-term contradictory results.** We therefore report to the President and the Congress, and to the American people, that carrying out this task will require the commitment, dedication and close cooperation of both the Legislative and Executive branches of government over a long period of time. **(Emphasis mine)**

According to the Report of the Ascencio Commission, the extensive consultations abroad, domestic hearings and research carried out throughout 1987, 1988 and 1989 in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, the areas from which most undocumented migrants come, “confirmed two fundamental conclusions:

- although there are other important factors, the search for economic opportunity is the primary motivation for most unauthorized migration to the United States; and
- while job-creating economic growth is the ultimate solution to reducing these migratory pressures, the economic development process itself tends in the short to medium term to stimulate migration by raising expectations and enhancing people's ability to migrate. Development and the availability of new and better jobs at home, however, is the only way to diminish migratory pressure over time.

These conclusions led the Commission to focus on measures that the United States and sending countries might take cooperatively to provide jobs in their home countries for increasing numbers of potential unauthorized immigrants. The term “undocumented” is used interchangeably with “unauthorized” throughout the Report and refers to persons in the United States without legal authorization. The Report addresses recommendations to both the U. S. and sending countries that, “when taken together, would contribute to

mutually beneficial economic growth, thereby easing the undocumented migratory flow over time”. In this regard,

“the Commission is convinced that expanded trade between the sending countries and the United States is the single most important long-term remedy to the problem it was mandated to study.”

The Commission’s recommendations refer primarily to “promoting greater economic integration between the migrant sending countries and the United States through free trade”, since the sooner the migrant producing countries improve their economies, the shorter the duration of pressures to emigrate to the United States”. Therefore, “U. S. economic policy should promote a system of open trade”. In order to achieve this, the Commission suggests regional economic integration, since:

(...) improved access to U. S. and to those of other developed country markets is the key to the economic future of the area. The United States recognized this in 1983, when the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) was enacted; in 1987, when the U.S.-Mexico Framework Agreement on Trade and Investment was negotiated; and again—on a grander scale— in 1989, when the U. S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) came into effect.

Mexico is an important competitor in the world marketplace. The smaller economies of the Central American and Caribbean countries do not have that potential. The Commission strongly advocates their integration—and Mexico’s—into larger trading areas.

Here is where the bridge was established between free trade and migration –the later as the problem, the former as the solution. With this perspective, the recommendations take aim at greater economic opening, formalizing it through treaties:

- The United States should expedite the development of a U.S.-Mexico free trade area and encourage its incorporation with Canada into a North American free trade area.
- The United States should examine the effect of North American free trade on the trade of other Western Hemispheric countries in order to minimize any damage. It should also support wider free trade within the Hemisphere, but should allow the initiative come from interested countries.

This is how the urgent need arose to create the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and to continue with the rest of the continent by promoting the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). In point of fact, as a result of a meeting between Presidents George Bush and Carlos Salinas De Gortari in June of 1990 (one month prior to the presentation of the Commission’s Report), the Mexican government made quite clear its desire to negotiate a free trade agreement with the United States. Preparations for the negotiations on free trade between the two countries began, and the Canadian government joined a short time later. By betting everything on NAFTA, it is clear that the

Mexican government tacitly accepted the rules of the game unilaterally imposed by the United States regarding migration and many other issues. Both governments believed that the economic and commercial liberalization of Mexico would keep immigrant labor on its own land in the long run.

Today it is clear that the regional integration process and the handling of immigration issues, by both the U. S. and Mexican governments in their own countries and in the immediate regional environment (Central America and the Caribbean), are closely pegged to the recommendations of the Ascencio Commission. The Report of this Commission, in fact, represents a plan by the U. S. government to promote its own strategy of regional integration. Migrant-sending countries would have to rapidly adopt structural adjustment policies, abandoning an economic model dominated by the State for a model in which the market plays the primary role. The Report stated:

The United States should condition bilateral aid to sending countries on their taking the necessary steps toward structural adjustment. Similarly, U. S. support for non-project lending by the international financial institutions should be based on the implementation of satisfactory adjustment programs. Efforts should be made to ease transitional costs in human suffering.

U. S. policies should complement and not frustrate adjustment mechanisms in migrant-sending countries. In practical terms this means, for example, that a move toward export promotion should not be negated by U.S. import barriers.

In order to make even more progress in this transition and prevent it from backsliding, the Report proposed: “Migrant-sending countries should encourage technological modernization by strengthening and assuring intellectual property protection and by removing existing impediments to investment”.

According to this plan, migrant labor would act as a reserve force, regulated in such a way that it could be employed wherever business required. Because of this, migrant labor must maintain its regional comparative advantage, especially its low cost, both for economic functions (in the accumulation process) and for its own reproduction. In order to exploit the labor force in migrant sending countries, it was proposed that:

The United States should support Mexican requests to international financial institutions for funds to improve infrastructure in interior Mexican locations capable of hosting maquiladora activities.

The Commission strongly urges the two governments, and the governments of other migrant-sending countries, to be vigilant about the protection of workers rights and labor standards in maquiladora and other assembly plants (This is due to the “success” the

maquilas have had in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. For the economies of the Smaller Central American and Caribbean countries, maquilas “offer the opportunity of accelerated growth and increased employment”).

International financial institutions should give priority to development projects that focus on decentralized growth in Mexico’s poorer regions. (Due to the fact that small business in the formal and informal sectors is a large force in the economies of Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean) national and international development agencies should work with sending-country governments to reduce legal and bureaucratic impediments to small business development.

Local and foreign private business sectors should increase support for small business assistance programs. Ways should be sought for greater participation of private commercial banks in financing small business, including those owned by migrant households.

Individual migrant investments should be complemented by other financial resources from official and private institutions and tied to programs supporting the small business sector. AID should take the lead in fostering cooperative mechanisms to carry out this objective.

However, to diminish the continuing flow of large numbers of migrants to the United States, it was also important to ensure a decrease in the populations of those countries. To that end: “The Commission endorses the continued financing of voluntary family planning efforts, including those which promote natural family planning. If they are to be effective, such efforts to foster responsible parenthood must take into account the Latin American moral and cultural atmosphere in which they are implemented”.

Some mechanisms for the regionalization of U. S. immigration policies (that will be analyzed in point number 4) were also proposed in the Report:

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) should play a larger role in Western Hemisphere migration discussions by convening meetings and seminars with high-level participation from the United States and Latin American member governments.

The United States should give higher priority to the issue of unauthorized migration and step up greater cooperation on the part of sending countries regarding certain enforcement measures (for example, to curtail smuggling rings or fraudulent document activities).

At the same time in which mechanisms of control and regulation of migrants were established, the U. S. wanted to facilitate the entrance of goods and products by faster and more secure ways at the border: “To facilitate cultural interactions and encourage economic development, more border crossing points should be created and action expedited on those now under consideration”.

In the specific case of Central America, measures for regional integration were promoted, such as the revitalization of the Central America Common Market (formed from 1958 to 1963 by Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, the most successful regional integration initiative of its era), as well as the integration of those countries with Mexico into larger trade areas. However, the Commission’s Report

considered the region an exception needing direct financial assistance: Except for Central America –where more than two million people were uprooted by the conflicts of the eighties –we do not propose direct financial assistance”. On this issue the report stated:

Of the two million people in Central America who have been uprooted by conflict and instability, about one third are displaced within their own country. The others have crossed into neighboring countries. Another 500,000 to one million have emigrated to the United States. The plight of these migrants and displaced persons poses one of the most difficult challenges facing Central American governments and is one of the most volatile political problems related to the peace process. These people have been identified by Central American governments and the international community as the priority groups for receiving assistance.

There is a growing international consensus that development-oriented programs, rather than just short-term humanitarian assistance, can better address the needs of refugees and displaced persons in Central America. This is a welcomed and needed change in focus. For it to succeed, greater cooperation by the United States and other donors is essential.

The Commission’s Report proposed the following resolutions:

The U. S. should actively support the process adopted by the United Nations-sponsored International Conference in Central American Refugees in Guatemala in May 1989 and channel more funds through the U. N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the U. N. Development Program (UNDP) and other relevant international organizations dealing with migration and development.

Most importantly, the United States and the UNHCR should focus more attention and resources on voluntary repatriation and reintegration efforts, including counseling and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to monitor the well-being and safety of returnees.

This goal was and still is, to ensure that Central Americans stop pouring into the United States in the same numbers as they did during the second half of the 1980s, which generated a “crisis” of tens of thousands of asylum seekers at the Mexican border for which the U.S. government had to implement an Enhancement Plan for the Southern Border through the Immigration and Naturalization Service in February 16, 1989. The operational strategy of this plan was:

- Stop illegal entry at the border by means of a large mobile task force of Border Patrol Agents.
- Provide adequate, safe detention facilities for the large number of aliens expected to be apprehended.
- Expedite the adjudication of asylum applications in South Texas through the detail of substantial numbers of examiners, immigration judges, attorneys, and support staff. Request a higher level of intervention with the State Department to provide detail BHRHA personnel.
- Detain and expeditiously deport those whose asylum claims are not based on a well-founded fear of persecution.
- Increase intelligence efforts to determine the sources of illegal flow, isolate checkpoints which might be encountered, and identify smugglers and fraud facilitators who encourage illegal migration to the U. S.

One of the main objectives of the operational plan was to “deter future illegal entry”. The collaboration of the Mexican and Guatemalan migration authorities was asked for by the U.S., and some U. S. Intelligence officers and INS Border Patrol agents were sent into Mexican and Guatemalan cities to collaborate in intelligence gathering to provide information on smuggling patterns and “alien” movements. Based on information provided by these teams, Border Patrol was better able to assess the number and best placement of their detailed officers. The plan stated that:

After implementation of the plan, it is anticipated that routes and smuggling patterns will be modified in attempt to circumvent the enhanced deterrence efforts. The intelligence gathering teams in Guatemala, Mexico City and Monterrey will continue to provide predictive intelligence to ensure that the Border Patrol’s mobile corridor and Anti-Smuggling resources are properly deployed so as to be most effective.

This is the date in which collaborative efforts among U. S., Mexican, and Guatemalan governments started detecting, detaining and deporting unauthorized migrants before arriving in North American territory (Sandoval, 1992).

The relationship established between free trade and labor migration (one as a problem, the other as the solution) by both governments is a false link. Free trade has mainly benefited the U. S. capitalists. With this strategy, the U.S. seeks to secure a controlled and regulated cheap labor migratory flow into the economy during the upcoming decades. The U. S. economy will require the labor force of racial and ethnic minorities (Latinos, Afro-Americans, and Asian Americans) for steady growth and the baby boom generation will depend on it for their retirement.

Estimates of the U. S. Labor Department show that from 2000 to 2010, more than 24 million new, low-skilled jobs will be created, and mostly for Latinos, particularly Mexicans. As previously mentioned, Mexicans comprise the fastest growing sector of the U. S. population due to a combination of high birth and immigration rates. During the 1990s, Mexicans were 42% of all new immigrants (American Immigration Law Foundation, 2002: 6).

There is not a foreseeable future in which Mexican migration flows will decrease in the medium and in the long runs because of NAFTA. According to data of two studies, the flow of Mexican migration has been constant and growing since the 1960s, and it will increase steadily during the next three decades. The first is the Binational Study on

Mexico-U. S. Migration authorized by both governments, and carried out by a binational group of experts in migration. This study states that:

Mexican census data and indirect measurement methods show that the loss of Mexican population from international migration has been systematic since 1960. According to our best estimates, the migration of persons to the United States who have established permanent residence there has been within the following ranges:

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1960 - 1970 | 260,000 – 290,000 |
| 1970 – 1980 | 1,200,000 – 1,550,000 |
| 1980 – 1990 | 2,100,000 – 2,600,000 |

For 1990-1995, net emigration was 1.39 million people, with essentially equal participation by gender, which is equivalent to an annual average of 277,000 for the five-year period. Our estimates based on U. S. data indicate a similar net growth in the size of the Mexican-born population from 1990 to 1996 of approximately 1.9 million persons, or about 315,000 persons per year (...)

The second study is a prospective analysis of the Mexican National Council on Population (Consejo Nacional de Población, CONAPO) on the demographic situation in Mexico published in 1999. In this study, CONAPO experts show that even in relatively good economic conditions (hypothesis A and C of the study which consider a steady growth of the Mexican economy), Mexican emigration will pursue its way in the short and medium runs, and even in the long run. The most optimistic hypotheses foresee the annual flow of Mexican migrants into the U. S. going from 346, 066 persons in 1996, to 412, 725 persons in 2030. And the most pessimistic hypothesis foresee this flow going from 346, 066 persons in 1996 to 514, 314 in 2030.

In a 2005 study, CONAPO shows that the foresight made in its study of 1999 is correct in the case of the most pessimistic hypothesis, and that today more than 400 thousand Mexicans emigrate yearly in a definitive or temporary way to the United States. According to the 1999 pessimistic hypothesis, the number of Mexican migrants would be 411, 991 in 2005, and 439, 086 in 2010. If we observe the Binational Study and the study of CONAPO of 2005, both analyses show that migration increased from more than 300 thousand each year in the second part of the 1990s, to more than 400 thousand today, which is 10 to 13 times greater than the migration rates in the 1970s.

A 2003 study by J. Edward Taylor and George Dyer commissioned for the Report on *NAFTA's Promise and Reality, Lessons from Mexico for the Hemisphere* (Audley,

Papademetriou, Polaski and Vaughan, 2003), using data from the Mexico National Rural Household Survey, shows that NAFTA did not slow migration from rural areas.

Although Mexican exports of fruits and vegetables increased considerably after NAFTA was implemented, generating additional employment, employment in the agricultural sector declined overall. Migration from many rural communities accelerated, and less of that migration went to other rural areas in Mexico. In fact, an increasing proportion of that migration found its way to the United States: Thirty percent of migrants from rural Mexico were in the United States in 2002, versus 19 percent in 1994. From 1980 to 1994, migration from the surveyed rural communities to the United States increased by 95 percent. By 2002, migration to the United States was 452 percent higher than in 1980 (p. 51).

These authors stated that

NAFTA has not helped the Mexican economy keep pace with the growing demand for jobs. Unprecedented growth in trade, increasing productivity, and a surge in both portfolio and foreign direct investment have led to an increase of 500, 000 jobs in manufacturing from 1994 to 2002. The agricultural sector, where almost a fifth of Mexicans still work, has lost 1.3 million jobs since 1994 (pp. 5-6).

NAFTA, in short, has not created enough employment for Mexicans in more than 10 years (the maquiladora industry is the only one that has created jobs, but these are low paid jobs with bad working and health conditions). On the contrary, it has become one of the mechanisms for the creation of the new U. S. labor transnational reserve army, by displacing people from Mexican industries and agriculture, which unevenly compete with U. S. big corporations.

This new reserve labor army is fundamental for the creation of the North American labor market. But the creation of labor markets at global, regional or subregional levels necessarily requires the regulation of labor migrants' flows. Developed countries are controlling and directing such flows according to the new capital flexible accumulation needs. And in the transnationalization of the neoliberal economic model, Latin American and Caribbean technocratic elites in power agree to encourage similar or "Made in U. S. A." measures with regards to the control and regulation of migration flows. The Mexican government has strongly collaborated with the U.S. on this issue, making migrants from Central America and other countries more vulnerable by exposing them to bigger risks in their migratory process, as the U. S. has done with Mexican migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border (Sandoval, 2000a; 2001c).

4. THE REGIONALIZATION OF U. S. IMMIGRATION POLICIES AND THE MILITARIZATION OF THE U. S. - MEXICO BORDER

At the moment NAFTA became effective, the government of the United States established some specific strategies to regulate Mexican, Central American and Caribbean immigration into U. S. territory; but at the same time it strengthened the control of the border by increasing law enforcement and militarization under the pretext of stopping the entry of unauthorized immigrants, narcotics and terrorists.

With regards to the regulation of migration flows, the United States has encouraged the regionalization of its immigration policies through the following mechanisms:

a) The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act Public Law of 1996. Two provisions in this law are the most important with regards to regionalization: Counter trafficking of persons, and the establishment of pre-inspection bureaus at 10 airports of countries from which most of the inadmissible foreigners depart.

b) The Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) or Puebla Process. The members of this Conference are Belize, Canada, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Panama, and the United States, most of them having participated in the Study of the Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development, which was mentioned earlier. The RCM has granted observer status to several countries and organizations. The observer countries are: Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Peru. Observing international and regional organizations are the: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), International Organization on Migration (IOM), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (ECLAC/CELADE), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Special Rapporteur for the Human Rights of Migrants, Central American Integration System (SICA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The primary objectives of RCM “are **the exchange of information, experiences and best practices**, and overall consultation to promote **regional cooperation on migration**”. The RCM “fundamental tenet is the protection and respect for the human rights of migrants; **the promotion of orderly and secure migration; and the dialogue**

and technical cooperation among countries”. Results of the RCM include, among others: **“High-level discussion of migration issues that benefits from the sharing of member countries’ views, including consular protection and counter trafficking practices (...)** **Facilitation of joint operational and training activities addressing the goal of more orderly, humane and secure migration, and facilitation of technical cooperation. Having served as the main regional migration forum for discussing implications for migration in the region following the devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch and the terrorist attacks perpetrated on September 11, 2001 (...)** numerous activities were carried out, including Seminars/Workshops, which were held to enhance the understanding of a number of migration topics such as: **Migrant Trafficking (1998) (...), International Migration and Development in North America and Central America (1998) (...)** **Security Control of Travel Documents (including training) (annually); Modernization of Migration Management and Cross-border Cooperation (2002); Migration Management and Inter-State Cooperation (2002), Development of a Regional Work Plan to Combat Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking of Persons (2003); The Workshop of the Dignified, Safe and Orderly Return of Regional and Extra-Regional Migrants (2003) (...)** **Joint exercises that enhance enforcement against the smuggling and trafficking of persons, and that improve the availability of information about the use of fraudulent documents (...)**”. (The Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) or Puebla Process, 2005) (Emphasis JMS). The RCM meets annually in different countries: Mexico (1996), Panama (1997), Canada (1998), El Salvador (1999), Estados Unidos (2000); Costa Rica (2001); Guatemala (2002), Mexico (2003), Panama (2004), Canada (2005), El Salvador (2006).

c) Puebla Panama Plan (PPP). This is a geostrategic project initiated by President Vicente Fox in November of 2001 (and encouraged by the new President Felipe Calderón, together with President Alfonso Uribe from Colombia, the new partner of such Plan), and financed in part by the Inter-American Development Bank. This Plan includes 9 states in the Mexican South-Southeast and all Central American countries (Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama) with the support of the United States. In the near future, PPP will serve as a regulating mechanism of migrants from Central America and the Mexican South-Southeast, channeling many of

these workers into cheap labor for maquiladora industries, large infrastructure projects (i. e., dams), and hydrological, forestry and service (tourism, commerce, etc.) ventures which are being promoted in the region (Sandoval, 2004).

Regulation of the regional labor markets (North and Central America) requires cheap labor, which is capable of flexible mobility to the United States and Canada, and within the national territories themselves, for employment primarily in maquiladoras that are being extended throughout these areas. However, the regulation involves the incorporation of some workers into, and the exclusion of others from, the North American (read United States) labor market. The problem with unauthorized Central American migrants crossing through Mexican lands on their way to the North has been handled primarily through restrictive policies that attempt to block the passage of these migrants to the labor markets in the United States, Canada, and even Mexico itself, except for those who are already established on a temporary basis in the first two countries. Exceptions are also made for those working as temporary day laborers on Chiapas *fincas* and in other services and industries (domestic work, commerce, construction, etc), but at a very local level. These policies have not been able to completely stop the migratory flow, but they have made the journey more difficult for migrants, who must resort to people trafficking networks which are often tied with drug trafficking, illegal arms, etc.

With regards to the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, it is important to say that in the 1980s, during the two Administrations of President Ronald Reagan (1980-1984 and 1984-1988) larger measures of border control were increased under the premise that “The U. S. has lost control over its borders and no country can maintain this position”. This loss was the result, according to the neoconservative perspective, of unauthorized migrant and refugee flows arriving in large numbers mainly from Mexico and some Central American countries into the U.S., caused by economic crisis and armed conflicts fed by the U. S. government. Drug trafficking from Latin American countries was considered to be the second issue affecting border security. U. S. General Attorney, Edwin Meese III stated that, “illegal immigration and drug trafficking are intimately linked in a symbiotic relationship, and overcoming illegal immigration would be an

important step to the solution of narcotics in the region” (Scott, 1987). Finally, terrorism was considered to be the third issue that could affect border security.

Under these pretexts, the U. S. government started a process for establishing a larger political-military control of the border region, encouraging a military strategy similar to that being applied in some Central American countries: the Low Intensity Conflict (or Low Intensity War), adapted to the particular situation of such region (Dunn, 1996; Sandoval, 1993; 1996a). With the incorporation of terrorism into the U. S. National Security Doctrine, the Pentagon military strategists pointed out that the most probable areas for Low Intensity Conflict outbursts would be not only in underdeveloped countries, particularly in Latin America, but in U. S. territory itself. Robert Kupperman, a military expert in counterinsurgency, stated that “Low Intensity operations are not limited to overseas but they can be necessary within the United States in response to civil disorders or to terrorism” (Kupperman, 1983).

In this perspective, an authorization was given to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by the U. S. Congress to permit the Border Patrol agents the use of firearms and to collaborate with members of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and police forces against drug trafficking and people smuggling. To prevent the possible entry of terrorists or terrorism acts at the border in 1984 the Border Patrol Tactic Unit (BORTAC) was created. BORTAC agents are incorporated into regular units of the Border Patrol, but this unit can be activated in just a few hours and sent to any part of the U. S. This group can be utilized in “emergencies” related to immigration, including disturbances in unauthorized immigrants’ detention centers, as well as in “violent actions” at the border (Tribuno del Pueblo, 1985). After September 11, 2001, BORTAC was reactivated on the Arizona border in which a 30-man team accounted for more than 20 % of unauthorized immigrant apprehensions (8, 331) during a 120 day mission in 2003 (Rico, 2004). The collaboration of the Army and the National Guard in actions of border control can be dated to the 1980s, increasing during the 1990s and particularly after 09/11 (Jimenez, 1987; 1988, 1990; 1997; Dunn, 1996, 2001; Palafox, 1996; 1997; 2001; Sandoval, 1992, 1993, 1996a, 2004, 2006).

On the other hand, “to prevent” and regulate the migrant flows that would increase after NAFTA became effective, starting in 1993 the U. S government implemented a

series of law enforcement plans and militarization strategies along the U. S.-Mexico border. INS fiscal budgets increased seven times between 1980 and 1995 but increased almost three times between 1995 and 2001. This increased budget was used to finance the National Strategic Plan, a comprehensive strategy for the long run created by the INS in 1994 with a strong bipartisan, presidential and congressional support.

This policy of border control is based on the “Prevention-through-Deterrence” strategy first developed by Silvestre Reyes, then Chief of the Border Patrol at El Paso, Texas in 1993 with the operation Hold-the-Line. This strategy means that by fortifying the urban entry points, the most remote and less desirable areas will become the focal points for immigrants, facilitating the apprehensions by the Border Patrol. As part of this strategy, the construction of physical barriers directly on the border was incorporated into the National Strategy Plan by the Border Patrol (In 1990, the Border Patrol chief in the San Diego sector began erecting physical barriers chiefly to deter drug smuggling. The ensuing fence covered 14 miles of the border and was constructed of 10 foot high welded steel by members of the National Guard) (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 1995).

In 1994, Operation Gatekeeper began in San Diego, California; in 1997, Operation Safeguard in Arizona; and also in 1997, Operation Rio Grande in McAllen, Texas. The National Strategy Plan had four phases that started with the sectors of higher levels of unauthorized immigration:

- Phase I: San Diego, CA, and El Paso, TX sectors.
 - Phase II: Tucson, AZ, Del Rio, Laredo and McAllen, TX sectors.
 - Phase III: El Centro, CA, Yuma, AZ, and McAllen, TX sectors.
 - Phase IV: the Northern border, the Gulf Coast and Coast routes.
- (U. S. Department of Justice, INS Fact Sheet, May 1, 1999)

Congress began addressing the need for greater border security, and in 1996, it passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The provisions of this Act were concentrated at the Southwest border and increased border enforcement by authorizing the hiring of 1,000 new border patrol agents each year for FY1997 through FY2001. The IIRIRA Act called for the deployment of additional border patrol agents to areas that were in proportion to the level of unauthorized crossings. The Act also authorized an increase in border patrol support personnel by 300 a year for FY1997

through FY2001 (Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act Public Law of 1996).

As a result of the massive increase in INS agents and resources, almost 90% of Border Patrol agents were dropped along the Southwest border, concentrated in 9 border corridors covering the most important travel routes which account for more than 80% of unauthorized migrant traffic (in term of apprehensions). This redirected the unauthorized migrant traffic from the traditional urban routes to more difficult and less populated geographic areas, providing the Border Patrol agents a tactical advantage over people “illegally” crossing the border and “coyotes” or “polleros”. But, at the same time, this redirection has put immigrants at risk of dying of diverse natural factors or by violence of some nativist groups or criminal gangs (Alonso, 2003). Besides the additional personnel, the Border Patrol has equipment and technology to intimidate, detect, apprehend and remove unauthorized immigrants (Andreas, 2000, Brownell, 2001; Dunn, 2001; Jiménez, 1997; Nevins, 2002; Palafox, 2001).

However, according to an official report, it is not clear if this strategy has decreased unauthorized immigration along the Southwest border. The number of apprehensions increased in areas that were taken as targets by the Border Patrol and subsequently decreased when the implementation of such policy increased. According to this report some sustain, however, that the increase in apprehensions may simply be due to human power concentration in these areas, and the subsequent decreasing in apprehensions may be attributed to “border technological enforcement” (e.g. walls building, electronic sensors, lighting). While this may be the case, it is also possible that the strategy is really working, and the pattern of unauthorized immigration simply changed to more difficult terrain where more immigrants may be crossing notwithstanding the hard nature of the travel (U., S. Department of Justice, Office of Inspector General -OIG-, 2001).

For some experts on migration, all of these measures have not curbed unauthorized immigration, but it has increased the number of unauthorized immigrants who died while attempting to cross the border. In a 2002 study, these experts pointed out that there is little reliable evidence, however, that the policy of “prevention-through-deterrence”, which costs more than \$2 billion annually, had significantly diminished such

immigration (Reyes, Johnson and Van Swearingen, 2002). Some key findings of these experts are:

1. There is no evidence that the border enforcement build-up as such has substantially reduced unauthorized border crossings.
2. There is strong evidence that unauthorized migrants are staying longer in the United States during the period of increased enforcement.
3. The total numbers of unauthorized immigrants residing in the United States increased substantially during the mid to late 1990s.
4. The border enforcement strategy has achieved some of its goals. In particular, it increased the probability of apprehension, changed the crossing places of migrants, and increased the costs associated with crossing the U. S. - Mexican border.
5. During the period of increased enforcement, the number of unauthorized migrants who died while attempting to cross the border has increased.

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the securing and militarization of borders and migration increased and consolidated. President George Bush created the Department of Homeland Security, which incorporated the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Customs and other agencies into a new security administrative structure. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are the new units in charge of border patrol, enforcement of immigration laws within the interior of the country, dismantling human and drug smuggling organizations, and other tasks.

In October 26, 2001, the U. S. Congress approved the USA PATRIOT ACT (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) that established, among others, enhanced immigration provisions. A Smart Border 33 points Plan was signed between the United States and Canada in December 2001. And in March 21, 2002, the governments of the United States and Mexico signed the U. S. - Mexico Border Partnership agreement. The agreement was accompanied by a Smart Border 22 point plan that included several immigration and customs-related border security items. The 109th Congress enacted in 2005 the REAL ID Act (Public Law 109-13) that contains immigration-related border security provisions, and several provisions that would have an impact on border security-related issues at the Southwest border (Garcia, Mikyung Lee, Tatelman and Eig, 2005).

In March of the same year, the United States Border Patrol released a new National Border Patrol Strategy (NS) that has five main objectives:

- Establish the substantial probability of apprehending terrorists and weapons of mass destruction between Ports of Entry (POE);
- Deter illegal entries between POE through improved enforcement;

- Detect, apprehend, and deter smugglers of human, drugs, and other, and other contraband;
- Leverage “Smart Border” technology to multiply the enforcement effect of border patrol agents; and,
- Reduce crime in border communities, thereby improving the quality of life and economic well-being of those areas (US-DHS; CBP, National Border Patrol Strategy, March 2005, p. 13).

The National Strategy notes, with regards to the Southwest border, that while some observers categorize the unauthorized immigrants apprehended as economic migrants, “an ever present threat exists from the potential for terrorists to employ the same smuggling and transportation networks, infrastructure, drop houses, and other support and then use these masses of illegal aliens as ‘cover’ for a successful cross-border penetration” (Ibid: p. 5). And, in order to combat this threat, the National Strategy calls for the continuing expansion of the “Prevention through Deterrence” strategy through the deployment of sensing technologies, enhanced intelligence gathering, cooperation with other law enforcement agencies operating along the border, and the deployment of more mobile personnel and improved air support.

In May of 2006, President George Bush ordered the deployment of 6,000 members of the National Guard along the U. S.-Mexico border to support ICI agents in securing the border against unauthorized migration, people smuggling, drug trafficking and the possible entry of terrorists.

All of these measures to secure the border since the 1980s, however, have another and more important objective. President Reagan’s actions were a pretext for controlling a geostrategic region of great importance for the United States’ policy of hegemonic regional integration. Many advanced industries are located in the region known as the “Sun Belt” (extending from Florida to California to the Southwest, including Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona), including cutting edge industries (electronic, aerospace, biotech, etc). On the Mexican side, the Northern states from Baja California to Tamaulipas, including Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila and Nuevo León, are home of automotive, steel, and mining industries (silver, gold, and uranium), and thousands of maquila assembly plants are located along the border, most of them linked to the U.S. industries. The main centers for nuclear research are also located in New Mexico (Sandia Mountains); as well as military land and naval bases (San Diego, Ca., San Antonio, TX, etc), and the U. S. strategic oil reserves (Sandoval, 1996a; 1996b).

This military control of the U. S.-Mexico border is only a part of the U. S. Grand Strategy to incorporate Mexico into a North American security area. Actually, the White House defined NAFTA primarily as a geopolitical objective of national security more than a geoeconomic strategy, because it would be very important for the U. S. to have a stable neighbor in the South supporting the economic development and expansion of the U. S in the whole Western Hemisphere (Sandoval, 1993). According to Michael Dziedzic (1996), a U. S. Army Colonel expert in Mexico,

Just as the global order evolved, so also has the nature of Mexico's strategic significance. During the cold war, and indeed during World War I and II as well, Mexico was prized as a *geopolitical* fulcrum. On the southern flank of the United States, it was coveted as a source of leverage to pry us away from other vital pursuits. As the post-cold war system has begun to take shape, Mexico's *geo-economic* importance has become much more salient. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is a manifestation of this. Mexico's successful incorporation into the domain of vibrant, free market economies (or its failure to incorporate) will be a major determinant of the viability of our contemporary enlargement strategy. Concurrently, Mexico has also become a choke point for an array of *geo-social* or transnational afflictions that respect no national boundaries (...) Thus Mexico has been, and will continue to be, pivotal to the success of U. S. grand strategy (p. 64).

As a result of NAFTA, Dziedzic says,

the salience of 'North America' as a geopolitical entity and as a unifying factor in national security affairs may be significantly enhanced. For a document that does not explicitly mention security matters, this trade accord is, nevertheless, freighted with implications for regional security cooperation. As the economies of Canada, Mexico and the United States inexorably merge under its influence, NAFTA could serve as a catalyst for close coordination on a panoply of common concerns, including national security. (p. 70)

Finally, Dziedzic states that,

On balance, although important limitations remain the environment for constructing a cooperative, the security regime in North America is more promising today, especially with NAFTA (...) The United States will remain vulnerable to the cancerous effects of geo-social forces unless effective mechanisms of cooperation are forged with other sovereign states. There are no more vital partners in this campaign than our contiguous neighbors. The ultimate significance of the U.S.-Mexican security relationship could be to create a community of interests in which both neighbors regard each other as essential contributors to mutual security in our own geopolitical neighborhood. (p. 71)

This has been the interest of the United States in the last two decades for building a "community of interests" with Canada and Mexico based on its own national security interests. Taking advantage of the situation provoked by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, President George Bush proposed the creation of a North American Security Perimeter (*The Washington Times*, November 26, 2001) extending from Canada, and the

United States to Mexico and the Caribbean, to defend such a “community of interests”. And to defend these “common interests” the Northern Command (NORTHCOM) was created. The Northern Command was established in 2002 (at the same time as the Department of Homeland Security) “to provide command and control of Department of Defense (DOD) homeland defense efforts and to coordinate military support to civil authorities”. Part of its specific mission is to “conduct operations to deter, prevent, and defeat threats and aggression aimed at the United States, its territories and interests within the assigned area of responsibility (AOR)”. This Area of Responsibility includes “air, land and sea approaches and encompasses the continental United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico and the surrounding water out to approximately 500 nautical miles. It also includes the Gulf of Mexico (...) U.S. Northern Command is also responsible for security cooperation and coordination with Canada and Mexico”. (U.S. Northern Command. www.northcom.mil)

The new U. S. Grand Strategy to incorporate Canada and Mexico to the North American Security Perimeter has advanced with the signature of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), or NAFTA-Plus, by the Presidents of the U.S., Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada on March 2005 in Waco, Texas. The integration of Mexico into the North American Security Perimeter is being achieved through several mechanisms. First, by strengthening the U.S.-Mexico “Smart Border” agreement; second, by incorporating the country into the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP); and, third, by the collaboration of the Mexican Army and Navy (Armada) in diverse activities and actions with the U.S. Army and Navy.

In the last decade, there has been a militarization of the Mexican borders under the pretext of stopping drug trafficking, unauthorized immigration, people smuggling, and also the entry of possible terrorists or acts of terrorism. In this way, Mexico is being subordinated to the U. S. national security interests by its own economic and political elites in power.

CONCLUSIONS

Global and regional integration economic processes, which create the regionalization and globalization of migrant flows according to the capital flexible accumulation needs, also have as a consequence the regionalization and globalization of struggles of migrant workers to defend their full rights. Immigrant and refugee rights organizations from not only the United States, Mexico and Canada, but also from diverse Latin American and Caribbean countries are organizing themselves nationally and transnationally to fight for these rights (Sandoval, 2006b; *In press*).

In North America, some organizations and networks, among which are the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC), Common Frontiers and the Réseau Québécois sur l'Intégration Continentale (RQIC) from Canada, and the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART) from the United States, which are part of the Hemispheric Social Alliance, have been fighting for, since the 1990s, the renegotiation of NAFTA and other free trade agreements to include a social charter for workers, including the rights of migrant workers. This has been extended also to the case of the Free Trade of the Americas (FTA) negotiations, for which the Hemispheric Social Alliance has elaborated the *Alternative for the Americas*, with a chapter on labor migration. This document has been discussed in the different World Social Forums carried out in Porto Alegre, Brazil and Caracas, Venezuela and it is written in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese (*Alternative for the Americas*, www.asc-hsc.org).

In these forums, many migrant organizations and migrant and refugee human rights organizations have also participated, including the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (United States), Enlaces America and the National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC) also from the U. S., the Migrant Women Network from Argentina, MIREDES (migrant and refugee organizations from Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico and the United States), and the Regional Network of Civil Organization for Migration (migrant human rights organizations from Canada, United States, Mexico and Central America).

In the last few years, these organizations have been launching and/or supporting national and international campaigns in favor of migrant and refugee rights (See, for example, Tactaquin, 1997). But the larger organizational experience of struggling for their rights and for the regularization of their migratory status came from the immigrants

themselves (most of them in irregular situation in the U. S.) who mobilized themselves by the millions from March to May 1st, 2006 in more than 60 cities throughout the United States. According to Bada, Fox and Selle (2006: Preface), “Mexican migrants, who formed a majority of participants in many of the cities, moved from being subjects of policy reform to having voice in the debate on the reform. Never before had Mexican migrants taken such a visible role in a national policy discussion”

This movement, however, did not arise spontaneously, but rather has been building since the 1980s, and mainly the 1990s, when the U. S. economy was growing rapidly and required a massive labor force that was supplied by millions of immigrants, most of them unauthorized immigrants from Mexico. Throughout this period, migrant workers were discriminated and super-exploited by U.S. capitalism, due to labor criminalization and vulnerability mechanisms imposed by immigration law enforcement and the securing of the border. The Spring 2006 demonstrations and other forms of protests carried out by these immigrants are their reactions to these situations of discrimination, superexploitation, and dispossession of their basic rights. Is it possible that a new collective historical and social subject is arising in the United States? These immigrants are fundamentally struggling for their right to work and to human mobility, but, above all, to be recognized as citizens of the country to which they continue to develop as the most powerful and richest country in the world, by creating wealth and huge profits in agricultural, construction, manufacturing, service, and other sectors (Sandoval, in press).

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