

NAFTA

NAFTA stands for the North American Free Trade Agreement and it is a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between the United States, Mexico, and Canada. A PTA is an agreement between a group of countries to levy low or zero tariffs against imports from members.

NAFTA took effect in January of 1994, and at the time, it was a hotly debated issue. Those who supported the agreement argued that it would allow for cheap foreign goods to be imported by the United States, which would help to stimulate foreign economies, and contribute to globalization.

Those who opposed NAFTA were mainly labor unions that feared lost jobs and lower wages for American workers; environmental groups who feared dirty industries; and some politicians who feared that firms would relocate to Mexico because they were having trouble selling their goods domestically.

Aside from these issues, how does NAFTA apply to undocumented immigration? When first proposed, NAFTA was supposed to be the quick fix for Mexicans illegally crossing the border and heading for the United States. The predicted growth of the Mexican economy was supposed to be enough to create more competitive jobs in Mexico, and thus reduce the incentive for migration, but this has not been the case. The rise of undocumented immigration since NAFTA was established can be attributed to a few factors:

Along with the reduction of tariffs, NAFTA also allowed for the United States to grant large subsidies to American farmers. In doing so, American farmers were then able to export agricultural goods at a much lower price, undermining the Mexican farmers who had previously been reliant on exports to the United States. This pushed many Mexican farmers off the land, and encouraged them to flee to the United States illegally.

Those displaced workers are largely the result of U.S. corn exports to Mexico. Heavily subsidized American Agribusiness not only put hundreds of thousands of American family farms out of business, but also dumped billions of dollars worth of American agricultural products into the Mexican market, putting millions of peasant farmers out of business.

Corn producing jobs – the nation’s largest cash crop – fell by over one million in the first decade of NAFTA. Additionally, another 142,000 job cultivating flowers and fruit have disappeared. Since the trade pact was implemented, 30,000 small and medium-sized businesses have permanently closed their doors. The end result has been a flood of illegal immigration into the U.S. With jobs drying up in Mexico, millions have illegally crossed the border seeking work. If it were not for NAFTA, illegal immigration would not be such a problem.

Capitalism

Global Capitalism and Immigrant Labor

The larger story behind immigration reform is capitalist globalization and the worldwide reorganization of the system for supplying labor to the global economy. Over the past few decades, there has been an upsurge in transnational migration as every country and region has become integrated, often violently, into global capitalism through foreign invasions and occupations, free-trade agreements, neoliberal social and economic policies, and financial crises. Hundreds of millions have been displaced from the countryside in the Global South and turned into internal and transnational migrants, providing a vast new pool of exploitable labor for the global economy as national labor markets have increasingly merged into a global labor market.

As borders have come down for capital and goods, they have been reinforced for human beings. While global capitalism creates immigrant workers, these workers do not enjoy citizenship rights in their host countries. Stripped either de facto or de jure of the political, civic and labor rights afforded to citizens, immigrant workers are forced into the underground, made vulnerable to employers, whether large private or state employers or affluent families, and subject to hostile cultural and ideological environments.

There is a broad social and political base, therefore, for the maintenance of a flexible, super-controlled and super-exploited Latino immigrant workforce. The system cannot function without it. But immigrant labor is extremely profitable for the corporate economy in double sense. First, it is labor that is highly vulnerable, forced to exist semi-underground, and deportable, and therefore super-exploitable. Second, the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and the militarization of their control not only reproduce these conditions of vulnerability, but also in themselves, generate vast new opportunities for profit-making.

The immigrant military-prison-industrial-detention complex is one of the fastest growing sectors of the US economy. There has been a boom in new private prison construction to house immigrants detained during deportation proceedings. In 2007, nearly one million undocumented immigrants were apprehended and 311,000 deported. The Obama administration presents itself as a friend of Latinos (and immigrants more generally), yet Obama has deported more immigrants than any other president in the past half a century - some 400,000 per year since he took office in 2009.

FTA's

Since the implementation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, the United States has signed several free trade agreements (FTAs) that have reduced barriers to international trade. [1] While these agreements traditionally focused on reducing barriers to the free flow of goods, services, and investments, more recent agreements have included provisions that directly affect US immigration law by creating additional nonimmigrant visa classifications to those available under the Immigration and Nationality Act. [2]

Recent free trade agreements have directly dictated changes in immigration policy, even without substantial congressional input or public debate. The US-Chile and US-Singapore Free Trade Agreements set a dangerous precedent by establishing new immigration policies regarding temporary entry visas embedded in the free trade agreements rather than subject to normal Congressional debate and annual review. If jurisdiction over immigration policy is expanded to other free trade agreements, such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), there could be disastrous effects on immigrants’ rights and working conditions for immigrant and nonimmigrant workers in the US.

The Immigration and Nationality Act sets forth the nonimmigrant visa classifications by which foreign nationals may enter, work in, or invest in the United States. [3] Several of the visa classifications, such as the H1-B visa for workers in a specialty occupation and the H2-B visa for seasonal, peak load, or one time need workers, have annual numerical quotas and face chronic and increasingly worse shortages. FTA-created visa classifications, on the other hand, generally do not have the same quotas. Three such visa classifications are the TN visa created by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the E-3 resulting from negotiations during the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement (AUSFTA), and the H-1B1 created by the US-Chile and US-Singapore Free Trade Agreements. [4]

Businesses tell Congress they need migrant labor.

(Article title in Austin Statesman)

By Erica Werner

“In a letter to be released today, the chief executives of Coca-Cola, McDonalds, Loews Hotels, Tyson Foods, Cargill, and half dozen other national and regional companies say that without action to overhaul ineffective immigration laws and allow lower skilled workers into the country legally, their businesses cannot ensure the work force they need.”

“”This is indispensable for our businesses, but it is also critical for the nation” the executives write.”

This statement can be directly interpreted into something of this nature, “With out workers who can be exploited, we cannot do business.”

This type of situation is what gave rise to the labor movements around the turn of the century. A mass of exploited immigrants, and national workers, being paid as little as possible, so capitalists could make as much as possible.

Odd to see how history repeats itself.

I shall elaborate how multinational capitalism, and the rise of NAFTA and FTA's are responsible for the “crisis”.

Information links & Citations:

Austin Statesman (newspaper)

http://www.umich.edu/~ac213/student_projects/07/global/nafta.html

<http://economyincrisis.org/content/illegal-immigration-and-nafta>

<http://www.law.illinois.edu/bljournal/post/2008/02/14/Free-Trade-Agreements-and-US-Immigration-Law.aspx>

<http://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/trade-issues/trade-and-migration/>

[1] Duke Law Library,
<http://www.law.duke.edu/lib/researchguides/gat.html> (Last visited Feb 9, 2008).

[2] Barbara Wong Loughlin, *The US-Singapore/Chile Free Trade Agreements and Their Impact on US Immigration, in IMMIGRATION PRACTICE UNDER NAFTA AND OTHER FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS* 35 (Janet H. Cheetham ed., 2007).

[3] US Citizenship and Immigration Service,
<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.m.eb1d4c2a3e5b9ac89243c6a7543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=f3829c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD&vgnnextchannel=f3829c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD> (last visited Feb 9, 2008).

[4] *Supra* note 2 at 36.

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/18623-the-new-global-capitalism-and-the-war-on-immigrants>

Immigration: A “crisis” founded through Capitalism and Free Trade.

A Shark Enterprises production
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www.bccaravan.com

Free

“Currently, throughout much of Latin American there is free trade and therefore, the United States will most likely see a continued rise in the amount of undocumented immigration by Latin Americans driven out of their respective jobs.”
University of Michigan

