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Mexican President López Obrador cracks down on Central American migrants

In his state of the union speech last week, American president Donald Trump continued his racist and fascistic rant against oppressed Central American migrants who are seeking asylum in the United States, depicting them as illegals steeped in drugs and violence.

Trump's diatribe won praise from Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), who said "it is Trump's right, his vision. He was respectful enough of our government and I thank him for that, because we are doing our part."

This week, AMLO's government responded with force when some 2,000 immigrants detained in Piedras Negras, Coahuila rebelled against their jailers from the local police and federal armed forces. For nine days, the Central American refugees have been detained by Mexican police at Trump's behest, right across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas.

According to Univision, migrants were physically repressed by Mexican government forces on Tuesday night when a group attempted to leave the abandoned factory where they are being detained. On Wednesday afternoon, migrants began turning over tables in the facility in protest over the poor conditions in the detention center. The immigrants demanded better access to food and more sanitary conditions. Hundreds of children are among the detainees.

Last month, AMLO agreed to participate in Trump's "Remain in Mexico" policy, under which asylum seekers are returned to Mexico for the foreseeable future while awaiting a court hearing in the US. AMLO's government has kept silent despite the charge by Amnesty International on February 1 that the US-Mexican policy is not only "absolutely

illegal,” given its aim of deterring asylum seeking by making it inaccessible, but “shameful and malicious” as well.

If migrants stay in Mexico for an extended time period, this will also allow US immigration to argue in court that asylum in the US is no longer necessary because Mexico has become a “safe third country” due to the migrants’ extended stay there.

The Mexican government has cynically cloaked its acquiescence with a policy that allows migrants to register and obtain visitor cards for “humanitarian reasons.” The cards permit the holder to remain in the country and work for at least a year. According to Mexico’s Institute of National Migration, thus far 12,000 visitor cards have been issued.

Yet the High Commission of the United Nations for Refugees says that only 46 percent of those who have applied have been granted the visitor cards. This is despite the fact that, according to the Commission, 63 percent of migrants from the “Northern Triangle” of Central America, encompassing Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, left their countries because they feared violence, while seven of 10 feared that their lives would be in danger if they returned.

Even if these immigrants could scrape together occasional work in Mexico, they will be paid at the lowest end of Mexico’s miserly wage scale. If they manage to escape horrific detention conditions in places like Piedras Negras, they and their children can share the miserable conditions of life in poor, violence-wracked barrios along the US border and be relegated to living in makeshift slums and encampments. In other words, they will largely face the same conditions they fled, in many cases with the same gang persecutors dominating their neighborhoods.

While López Obrador speaks about the need to respect immigrant rights, his new budget proposal for next year includes a 20 percent cut for refugee funding.

As Adam Isaacson of the Washington Office on Latin America told the *Financial Times*, “You’re going to have hundreds of migrants with no resources, no safety net, no system.”

In return for its part in these barbaric policies the Mexican government has received pledges from Washington of billions of dollars to permit Mexico’s ruling class to develop Mexico’s southernmost poor states as low-wage platforms for exploitation by US corporations.