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It's Too Late for Trump's Wall



Drawing By Nathaniel St. Clair

As we watch the congregation of desperate people at the southern U.S. border, and as the crisis generated by Trump's shut down the federal government, we have come to support

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the creation of a wall, an impenetrable barrier against those who should not cross it. Unfortunately, it is too late – much too late. The wall should have been created two hundred years ago. If such a wall had existed in 1846, President Polk and his expansionist supporters could not have orchestrated an aggressive war against Mexico, one which resulted in the loss of almost half of all Mexican territory.

The existence of such a wall also would have prevented U.S. banana, sugar and tobacco companies from overrunning Nicaragua in the late 19th century, which led to people being displaced from their land and exploited for their labor. When the popular Nicaraguan President José Santos Zelaya promoted democratic reforms in 1909, he was overthrown at the insistence of U.S. corporations. The U.S. sent Marines to aid in the coup, and afterwards continued to occupy Nicaragua for the two decades. Even after its military withdrew, the U.S. didn't give up control of Nicaragua, but empowered a brutal dictator — with the understanding that he would use his rule to support U.S. business interests.

In the absence of a wall, the people of El Salvador experienced a similar fate. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Salvadoran landholding aristocracy dominated the country, while maintaining close ties with the United States. Things changed in 1931, when a member of the Salvadorian Labor Party — Arturo Araujo — was elected president. He ran on a platform of providing for the people's basic needs and restoring land to the poor who had been largely forced off it. Araujo held the office for less than a year before being overthrown by the elite-controlled Salvadorian army, with the U.S. standing ready to provide needed military support. In the repression that followed tens of thousands of Salvadorians were murdered, disproportionately indigenous people. The U.S. formally recognized a ruthless authoritarian as the president of El Salvador shortly thereafter.

Due to the absence of such a wall, prospects for a decent life for people in Honduras dwindled by the early 20th century as U.S. banana companies acquired enormous tracts of land in the country. The U.S. repeatedly dispatched military forces to the country to protect U.S. investments there and repress fruit workers' efforts to unionize. And imagine what the lives of people in Guatemala could be like today if the popular president promoting a more just and equitable society, Jacobo Árbenz, had not been overthrown by a U.S.-backed coup in 1954 at the behest of the U.S.-based United Fruit Company. Guatemala was ruled afterwards by a series of U.S.-backed, repressive dictators.

In the second half of the 20th century people in Central America and Mexico challenged increasing poverty, worker exploitation and government repression and struggled for

democracy and social justice. The United States government supported the ruthless regimes in the region with military support and training. There were over 250,000 fatalities by 1989 as a result of these conflicts – primarily in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua – and countless traumatized families saw their hopes for a better life vanish.

Then the implementation of NAFTA and CAFTA both intensified worker exploitation, the collapse of small farms, impoverishment, and environmental destruction. While all this represents a “good deal” for U.S. corporations and investors, whose interests are paraded as the “national interests,” in truth such “deals” constitute crimes against humanity.

The poverty, violence, and despair in Central America is, then, not an inherent condition, but rather the disastrous consequence of U.S.-policy that single-mindedly focused on the interests of powerful corporations and elites, both in the past and now. Throughout the region, the use of the U.S. government has sought to protect business interests at any cost. It has operated without concern for the integrity of Mexican and Central American national borders or the “homeland security” of the masses of people who live there. From the vantage point of the people there, they have been, and continue to be, the victims of U.S.-sponsored “murderers and thieves.”

Tragically, people desperate to flee the resultant impoverishment, exploitation and violence routinely find racism, imprisonment, and heartbreak waiting for them at the U.S. border. These folks, many travelling as families, are scapegoated for the declining quality of life and growing economic marginalization of people in the United States. Many in the U.S. are unaware of the oppressive and destructive policies their government has employed in Mexico and Central America (and for that matter, of similar U.S. practices throughout the world.)

Today, Mexico and Central America would be far better places if the U.S. had been constrained by a wall on its border back in 1846. Today what is needed is the type of barrier featured in the Harry Potter series, a platform 9¾. This barrier would be selective in who could pass, permitting all asylum seekers and others seeking a better life to cross uninhibited, while remaining impermeable to further U.S. military and covert intervention. People living south of the U.S., desperate to cross the border, should be treated with dignity and respect, and the people in their countries should have the unimpeded right to pursue the democracy, justice, and equality they have so long struggled for.