

Why *DO* People Come Here?*

Why do people come to America? Because the capitalist-imperialist system of the United States has messed up the rest of the world even worse than what it has done in this country. One example—among many—is Mexico.

As part of gaining its riches and power, the U.S. has made it impossible for many people to live in their own countries. To get a deeper understanding of how this system works and how it controls and shapes people's lives, look how it is that immigrants from Mexico end up in the United States.

1. 150 years ago, after Mexico became independent from Spain, the United States waged war on Mexico and stole a large part of its territory. One of the main reasons behind this was that slave owners in the southern U.S. needed more land. The U.S. replaced Spain and other European colonial powers as the alien force dominating and plundering Mexico. In the early 1900s, during the Mexican Revolution, the peasants in Mexico had been promised land. But in reality the masses of peasants have continued to be exploited as poor farmers while their country is plundered by the United States.



Peasants harvesting compasuchil (marigold) flowers in the fields surrounding Cholula town in Puebla state, Mexico, 2007.

2. Throughout the 20th century, U.S. capital expanded into and increasingly dominated farming in Mexico. U.S. capital has increasingly integrated Mexican agriculture into the needs of the world market. U.S. capital dominates and distorts Mexican agriculture, and increases Mexico's dependency on imperialism. The imperialist powers, especially the U.S., have increasingly forced the Mexican government into debt. Then financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund—which are dominated by the U.S.—put tremendous pressure on the Mexican government to cut social aid and services to pay off their debt. These financial institutions also pressure the Mexican government to promote crops that can be sold on the world market—which is controlled by the rich countries and their financial institutions. Land and resources have been shifted away from basic food production and the results have been a disaster for the peasants. Peasant farmers are growing crops, not for their own needs, and not necessarily for what is needed in Mexico itself. They are growing things geared to a world market dominated by companies controlling billions of dollars.

But the Mexican peasants cannot compete in this world market and are not able to survive by farming. For example, in Chiapas, most peasants used to grow corn and beans. But over the years many have switched to growing coffee for export. When the price of coffee fell on the world market in 1990, thousands of Mexican peasants were ruined.

3. The 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (signed between the U.S., Mexico and Canada) has intensified the already desperate conditions of many peasants in Mexico. NAFTA mandated that the Mexican government drastically cut farm subsidies to small farmers, while in the U.S. agricultural exporters continue to receive the equivalent of \$10 billion in subsidies per year. In 2004, 10 years into NAFTA, nearly 30 percent of Mexico's population was living on less than \$1 a day. As Mexico became more dependent on imports of corn and wheat, it also became more vulnerable to sudden world market price rises. So NAFTA has also aggravated the problem of hunger. From 1994-2004 (according to World Bank figures), **6 million campesinos, or one-quarter of the rural population, were forced to leave the countryside and look for another way to survive.** In Mexico, only one-third of new job seekers entering the employment market will find a job. This has put even more pressure on people to go to the U.S. to look for work. Emigration has reached the level of 600,000 people per year who risk their lives to cross the border into the U.S. In 2007 alone, **562 people died crossing the border into the U.S.**

Many small farmers in Mexico have been ruined by NAFTA's policy of allowing foreign food companies to import their goods without tariffs. The exploited and unemployed people of Mexico's rural areas make up 44 percent of the migrants to the U.S., even though they only comprise one-quarter of Mexico's population. Many of Mexico's domestic industries were forced to close when NAFTA allowed foreign industries operating in Mexico to import materials from their own foreign suppliers. Many foreign companies who took advantage of NAFTA's "free trade" provisions to super-exploit cheap labor in Mexico have since moved to China and other countries where the price of labor is even cheaper. This has caused a large increase in Mexico's unemployment rate.

4. Through all this, hundreds of thousands of peasants and others have been forced to leave their homes in Mexico, to look for work, to search for a way to survive, in the United States. And in the U.S. they face intense and brutal discrimination and exploitation—working in the factories and fields, once again to enrich the capitalists—living in fear every day that they will be rounded up by the immigration police.

The stand of the revolutionary communist movement—and of everyone who hungers for revolution—toward immigrants must be clear: to welcome such immigrants as brothers and sisters... to insist on equality of nations, including equality in culture and language... to stand with them as they oppose repression... to draw on their desire for revolution, encouraging them to get into and spread the new revolutionary thinking of Bob Avakian... and to recognize in such immigrants a source of great strength for the revolutionary movement to put an end to this system, and bring in a new, revolutionary one that is truly internationalist.



2007 demonstration in Mexico City against rising corn prices.

* The text and photos on this page were inspired by a section of the talk by Bob Avakian in the DVD—*Revolution: Why It's Necessary, Why It's Possible, What It's All About*, where he talks about "Why Do People Come Here From All Over the World?" [Here is the link to the audio of this section: bobavakian.net/sound/why_do_people_come_here_english.mp3]