

IMMIGRATION

MYTHS **VS** FACTS

a look behind the anti-immigrant furor



The subject of immigration reform is getting attention

from Congress and the White House once more. One reason is the extent to which Latino and Asian-American voters reacted in November to the years of attacks on immigrants by rejecting Republican candidates at all levels.

Several different plans for immigration reform have been put forward by Congress, by the White House, by Organized Labor and by non-governmental groups. Most agree that what happens to the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country, as well as their families, is central to any legislative process. The right still asserts that undocumented immigrants, and perhaps all immigrants, constitute a threat to our society, and therefore wishes to prevent or limit any program to give relief to the undocumented.

In this pamphlet, we provide the reader with an argument for the legalization of the undocumented immigrants, in a “questions and answers” format.

Why are so many immigrants coming to the United States?

- **Working people in Mexico and other poor countries have been devastated by the practices of U.S. and other international corporations.** So-called free trade pacts like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) are imposed with conditions that prevent poor countries from meeting their people's needs.
- **After NAFTA came into force, more than 1.3 million Mexican farmers were driven out of business.** U.S. agribusiness, subsidized by our tax dollars, sold corn in Mexico at lower prices than farmers there could produce. Undocumented Mexican immigration to U.S. rose 60 percent.
- **Big corporations in the United States have been glad to take advantage of the cheap labor,** and have sent labor recruiters into economically depressed areas of Mexico, Central America and elsewhere.

So why don't people in those countries fix their situation at home instead of coming here?

- **U.S.-based multinational corporations have put heavy pressure on other countries,** including Mexico, to keep their

economies open to penetration by U.S. corporations.

- **When these countries resist this pressure, the U.S. government and corporations intervene with threats,** bribery and even military force to stop union organizing and political change from taking place.
- **With this pro-business, anti-worker foreign policy, the U.S. government has sponsored coups, civil wars and dictators in Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Honduras.**

My grandparents came from Europe legally. Why can't people from Mexico and other countries do the same? Why do they butt ahead in line?

- **It is not a matter of “butting in line.”** There is no line for them to get in! In 2005, the U.S. government gave out only 5,000 permanent legal resident visas for low-skilled workers.
- **Even people married to U.S. citizens or permanent legal residents sometimes have to wait years to join their spouses.** This is a different situation from the one our grandparents faced.
- **Today it is nearly impossible for most people who don't have relatives here or specialized skills to come at all.**



Do immigrants cause unemployment?

- **There are not a fixed number of jobs in our economy.** The truth is immigrant workers and their families, like all other workers, create jobs at a rate corresponding to those they fill.
- **The real causes of unemployment are rooted in the decreasing wages being paid to all workers.** Our country's workers can no longer afford to buy the products they produce.
- **Immigrant workers are not responsible for the millions of jobs wiped out** by the shutting down of plants across the nation. They are not the cause of massive job loss which occurs when employers increase the workloads of some employees while laying off others.

Do immigrants drive down U.S. wages?

- **It's true that today U.S. workers are seeing their wages drop.** This is especially true for young workers and people of color. But more than anything, this is due to right wing politicians who refuse to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. It is due to right-wing policies that deny workers the right to form unions.
- **Employers will always take advantage of workers who**

don't have the right to defend themselves, using one group of vulnerable workers against the rest.

- **Immigrants are not the cause of higher unemployment rates of African Americans and other U.S. minorities.** The continued toleration of racial discrimination in hiring, the dismantling of affirmative action, and weak labor laws are to blame.
- **The only effective response is to fight for equal treatment and equal rights for all workers.** That is why the legalization of immigrant workers, with full labor and civil rights, is in the interest of us all.

Do immigrants join labor unions?

- **Immigrant workers, even those without documents, have been at the forefront of many recent labor actions** including organizing drives and strikes.
- **One example is immigrant workers at Smithfield Foods' meat-packing plant in North Carolina,** who struck for safe working conditions alongside their African American and white co-workers.
- **The roofers' union reports huge organizing successes among immigrant workers in New Mexico.**

- Immigrant workers are at the core of organizing efforts of laundry workers across the nation.

- Employers regularly use the threat of arrest and deportation to break up union actions where immigrant workers are involved. Nevertheless, union membership is growing even faster among immigrant workers than among others.

- This is why the AFL-CIO and most unions strongly support immigration policies that legalize all the undocumented with full rights on the job and in the community, and a clear path to citizenship.

Do immigrants pay their fair share of taxes?

- Like other workers, most undocumented and documented immigrant workers have both federal and state income taxes deducted from their paychecks. An undocumented worker picking tomatoes in Florida pays more income taxes proportionally than many corporate executives.

- Undocumented workers pay \$7 billion a year into Social Security. However, they are ineligible to collect any benefits.

- Immigrants, like the rest of us, pay sales taxes every time they buy something. They pay property taxes too, either on property they own or through their rent.

What about the crime rate among immigrants?

- Numerous studies show that the rate of violent and property crime among immigrants, with or without documents, is lower than that of comparable sectors of the U.S. population, even though anti-immigrant agitators try to give the opposite impression by highlighting isolated cases of shocking crimes.

What about terrorism?

- Undocumented immigrant workers were not linked to 9/11 or any other recent terrorist attack. Every one of the 9/11 terrorists came here on a legal visa issued by the United States government.

- The vast majority of undocumented and documented immigrants have nothing whatever to do with terrorism, and come here only to work and be with family.

- If hard-working immigrants could have a legal way of coming here, the danger of terrorists entering secretly would be lessened.

What is the impact of immigrants on social, health care and educational services?

- Immigrant workers are not getting a free ride. Like other workers, most immigrants pay the same federal, state and local



taxes which finance our schools, health clinics and other public services.

- **Immigrant workers, alongside their native-born co-workers, generate fortunes for their employers** in industries such as agribusiness, meatpacking, hotels, restaurants and construction.

- **However, Republican administrations since Reagan have given the super-rich huge tax cuts.** If these were rolled back, there would be enough money to finance needed services for everybody: immigrant and U.S.-born.

- **There is no evidence that new immigrants pose a public health danger to their neighbors.** Indeed, studies show that they are on the whole healthier than comparable sectors of the U.S.-born population.

Do immigrants threaten the English language and American culture?

- **There have always been other languages spoken alongside English in the United States,** including Native American (Indian) languages, Spanish in the Southwest and Florida, French in Louisiana and German dialects in Pennsylvania. The different language communities have enriched our country culturally, not harmed it.

- **As a multilingual, multicultural country, the United States has never had an official language,** and there is no need for one now.

- **Our country's experience has been that while new immigrants may struggle a bit with the language, the second generation always speaks English fluently.** This is just as true of Latino immigrants today as it was of other immigrants in the past.

- **All over the country, classes to teach English to non-English speakers are jammed full.**

- **The vast majority of new immigrants believe fervently in democracy, family, freedom and social justice,** and thus are a boon to our values, not a menace.

What is really behind the anti-immigrant furor?

- **Right wing politicians want to distract the public's attention from the failures of the capitalist system** and particularly from the disastrous failure caused by the world fiscal and economic crisis which started in the United States in 2008. These events have lost U.S. workers millions of jobs, homes, savings and their sense of security. Rather than having public anger focus on the real culprits—the “one percent”—the ruling class tries to use immigrants with and without papers as scapegoats.

- **Big business interests want cheap labor but do not want low-paid workers to have rights.** So they whip up scare campaigns against immigrant workers. Their aim is to keep them quiet and underpaid, and the workers divided.

- **Hard-core racist forces are using the immigration issue to whip up hate and fear** against Mexicans, other Latinos, Africans,



Middle Easterners and South Asians. Their strategy is to give legitimacy to racist attitudes and policies in this country. This works to the detriment not only of immigrants but of all U.S. minorities and the rest of us.

What is the solution?

The solution is not to hang a “keep out” sign on the Statue of Liberty’s torch. The solution is not to waste vast amounts of taxpayer money on a useless and environmentally destructive fence. The solution is to carry out a comprehensive, worker-friendly immigration reform including:

- **Legalization of all current undocumented immigrants**, with as broad inclusion as possible, with full labor and civil rights and a clear path to citizenship.
- **Changes in U.S. visa policies so that ordinary working people who want to come here and live and work can do so without violating laws or risking their lives.**
- **Avoidance of guest worker schemes** that keep foreign workers in conditions of serfdom without the right to defend themselves or integrate themselves into our society.
- **Giving immigrant workers the same rights on the job and in the community that other workers have**, so they can join unions and fight together for better wages and working conditions.
- **Changes in U.S. trade and foreign policy** so that the development of the economies of poorer countries is no longer undermined by multinational corporate interests or U.S. government interference.

- **While work is done to reform our immigration system, suspend all deportations of undocumented immigrants**, cancel the Secure Communities and 287 (g) programs which delegate immigration enforcement roles to local police, as well as the requirement for employers to use E-Verify to check up on the legal status of workers. It is cruel and irrational to be deporting people now who may very well qualify for legalization when legislation is passed.

- **Revise immigration enforcement procedures so that they conform to high standards of fairness and due process.**

For more information and sources:

- “They Take Our Jobs! and 20 Other Myths About Immigration” By Aviva Chomsky.
www.scribd.com/doc/3451084/They-Take-Our-Jobs-by-Aviva-Chomsky.
- *The Politics of Immigration: Questions and Answers* by Jane Guskin and David Wilson. Monthly Review Press. 2007.
- **The Pew Hispanic Center.** (www.pewhispanic.org)
- **Migration Policy Institute.** (www.migrationpolicy.org)
- **Immigration Policy Center.** (www.immigrationpolicy.org)
- **The People’s Weekly World/Mundo Popular** (www.peoplesworld.org), and **Political Affairs** (www.politicalaffairs.net)
- <http://www.aflcio.org/Issues/Immigration>

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