

Energy Depletion and Immigration

by
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Our Congress has produced a draconian new immigration bill that would attempt to close US borders and severely oppress immigrants—particularly illegal immigrants—within this country. These efforts have resulted in a new civil rights movement, which has grown virtually overnight to incorporate protests throughout the country and a national day of boycott honored by millions of workers. The government has answered this new civil rights movement with a surprise raid that rounded up hundreds of illegal immigrants working in sweatshops. The owners of the shops will be fined, but the immigrants will be jailed and then deported. The true purpose for staging these raids right now can only be to intimidate illegal aliens within this country so they will not take part in protest marches or boycotts.

What is the purpose of this new immigration bill? It will not halt the flow of illegal immigrants, or even limit that flow. So long as the US remains a supposed model of economic abundance, people from poorer and more repressive countries will flock here. And so long as they perceive the profits to outweigh the risks there will be citizens in the US seeking to enrich themselves by smuggling aliens into the country. We can no more stop the flow of illegal immigrants across our borders than we can stop the flow of drugs.

Undoubtedly the people who drafted this legislation know this. They are not complete idiots. So what is the real reason for such draconian legislation? To find the answer to this question, perhaps we need to determine what this legislation will do.

If this legislation becomes law, it will drive illegal immigrants further underground. It will leave them completely at the mercy of their employers. No matter how they are abused or misused, they will be too fearful of imprisonment and deportation to speak up. This legislation will complete the transformation of illegal immigrants into a new form of unseen and unheard slave class, totally at the mercy of their employers.

Is it a coincidence that this new legislation was drafted so soon after the partial success of farm workers in Immokolee fighting for better conditions and better pay against the fast food giants who want a cheap source of tomatoes and lettuce for their burgers and tacos? The true purpose of this new legislation could be to nip a growing immigrant labor movement in the bud. Furthermore, as economic conditions within this country and around the world deteriorate, this repressive legislation would help to keep a growing population of immigrant laborers under control.

Those who have studied the subject of energy depletion and its implications have long been concerned about the problem of feeding our growing population as the production of fossil fuels continues to diminish. Without fossil fuel inputs, it is estimated that agriculture in the US will only be able to feed two-thirds of our current population. And without fossil fuels, the world population would have to decline to 2.5 billion in order to be sustainable. (See **Eating Fossil Fuels**, Pfeiffer, Dale Allen. In press, New Society Publishers. To be released in October of 2006).

Those who are aware of this problem have argued that one step in limiting the US population would be to close our borders. I have not agreed with them. As stated above, closing our borders alone will not stop the flow of illegal immigrants. It will only leave them more at the mercy of their employers within this country. As long as there is such a disparity in wealth and well-being between the US and other countries, there will be people attempting to flee to the US no matter what abuse they are met with on this side of the border.

If we truly want to solve the immigration problem, then we must start by addressing the reasons why people would rather slave in the US than remain in their homelands. To solve the immigration problem, we must first face the fact that the US has built itself upon the riches of other nations. Over the past centuries, we have virtually robbed the resources from the rest of the world. We have done this by supporting corrupt governments that would sell us their resources for pennies, by setting up death squads and counter-insurgency forces wherever people tired of their US-backed oppression, and by staging interventions wherever populist movements or politicians threaten the flow of resources. All of this has led to conditions where immigrants must flee to the US if they want to savor some portion of the riches extracted from their own countries.

The only way to solve this problem is to stop our flagrant appropriation of the world's wealth. If we want to stop the flow of illegal immigrants into this country, then we must raise up the living conditions in their homelands. We must give them a reason to remain where they are and give them hope for their future. If these people could make a decent living in their own countries, they would not want to leave everything that is dear to them in order to slave in the US.

To affect this program, we must first curb our own consumption. But this is something that we must do if we are to survive anyway. Conspicuous consumption must come to an end, or we are all doomed. We must also stop supporting corrupt governments and death squads. We must instead place our backing behind truly democratic reforms in agriculture and all resources, and throughout the workplace and all of society. We could do all of this for only a fraction of our current military budget. Let's start in Iraq, by nationalizing the Iraqi energy resources and returning control over them to the Iraqi public.

It is most ironic that Presidente Chavez of Venezuela, whom the Bush administration has been trying to topple for several years, is probably closest to the model of the sort of political leader that the US should be backing in order to solve our immigration problem.

If we cannot solve this problem in a rational and compassionate manner, then we will all suffer for it. A new slave immigrant class within the US could (and would) be used as a tool to demolish worker's rights within this country, particularly in a contracting economy due to energy depletion. In this case, those who thoughtlessly support a crackdown on illegal immigrants are ultimately pounding the nails into their own coffin.