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Mexican Emigration to the United States
and United States efforts to Curb It

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INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of a new set of sweeping immigration reforms, the nation is holding its breath during these first stages of implementation; waiting to see whether or not these reforms will effectively curb the flow of illegal immigrants who enter the United States each year from Mexico in search of a better life. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 authorizes an unprecedented amount of resources to the United States Border Patrol, significantly raises the threat to employers who may hire the "undocumented", and grants amnesty to those who have been living in the United States for at least five years. The answer to these questions can be found by looking back to the history of Mexican emigration to the United States. This must be looked at in conjunction with Mexico's current state of affairs. The new immigration law is not the solution to stemming the flow of illegal immigrants. It is only a "band-aid" remedy for some much more deeply rooted problems.

PART I

THE BACKGROUND OF MEXICAN EMIGRATION TO THE U.S.

Throughout history it has always taken something phenomenal to push a mass of centuries-old indigenes off their native land. For peasants whose very existence is based on that land, just about the only thing that will uproot them is the very failure of it. Peasants are displaced when the land no longer works for them or when they can no longer work for the land. The former reason applies to the millions of Irish immigrants who came to the United States during the Great Potato Famine. The latter is one of the main causes of the massive immigration of Mexicans to the United States at turn of the century. The land and labor reforms implemented during the thirty-three year regime of General Porfirio Díaz and the ensuing revolution that overthrew him uprooted millions of Mexican peasants during the first third of the twentieth century. Porfirian attempts to pull Mexico into the new century succeed in pushing these millions away from their ancestral land and towards the land of opportunity to the north.

Rural peasants had traditionally lived on communally owned land called ejidos or on small privately owned haciendas for hundreds of years. During the Porfiriato,

the name given to the Porfirio regime, land development laws took this land out of the hands of the peasantry and placed it into the capitalistic hands of foreign and domestic investors.¹ The land law of 1883 authorized companies to survey the public lands. Their efforts entitled them to one-third of the surveyed land with the option to buy the remaining two-thirds at a bargain price. The law was designed to encourage foreign colonization of the rural areas. What occurred most of the time though was that the rural peasants were usually stripped of their land. If these private owners or communal ejido owners could not produce documented proof of their ownership, the land was considered public and subject to purchase by the foreign companies. Within five years of this land law the companies had bought out over sixty-eight million acres of rural land. By 1894 nearly one-fifth of the total land mass of Mexico was in the hands of foreign land companies.²

The seizure of this land was detrimental to the peasants, although it was deemed a necessary element in the drive to modernize the country. The ancient institution of ejidos was destroyed to make way for the new, more efficient haciendas. The haciendas took up vast quantities of land. Sometimes ranging in sizes

from 45,000 to one million acres, they were able to produce tremendous amounts of export items such as coffee and sugar.³ The haciendas helped modernization proceed at a revolutionary pace, but as Lawrence Cardoso writes, "The men, women and children of rural Mexico paid a horribly disproportionate price to pull their country into the twentieth century."⁴ The former ejido dwellers were driven off the land they had lived on for centuries and were forced to wither work and live on the new haciendas or would have to drift from hacienda to hacienda looking for seasonal work during harvest time.

If this initial displacement was not enough to drive the peasants north, then the ensuing developments were enough indeed. Food prices shot up because a majority of the land was not used to feed its own citizens, but instead was used to produce export items. The development of railways further facilitated the faster and more convenient export of luxury items, pushed land values up, and also served to break up the remaining ejidos. Rapid population growth added to the poverty, starvation, and tremendous unemployment. The health advances of the Porfirian era decreased the mortality rate drastically; a rate which this new economy was not yet prepared to support.

Until the latter part of the nineteenth century, population growth was painfully slow because of a high mortality rate, but with advances in public health, especially in the use of mass vaccination ...the population leaped from about 9 million in 1876 to almost 15 million in 1910.⁵

Now with a majority of the land in the hands of a minority, the peasantry was not only displaced, but deprived. Wages declined because of overpopulation that created a surplus of laborers. Arthur Corwin calls this abject poverty la miseria rural, the misery of semi-starvation resulting from the common low wage equal to starvation resulting from the common low wage equal to twenty-five cents a day in United States currency.⁶

The peasants who were forced to work and reside on vast haciendas lived not only in a state of poverty, but in a virtual state of debt peonage. Involuntary servitude was outlawed by the Constitution of 1857 and by state constitutions, but nevertheless existed in most of the rural areas.⁷ The tienda de raya, a company store owned by the hacendados, advanced food, seed, and supplies to the landless peon families. Most of the time the uneducated peon was advanced more than his monthly wage so that he was forever kept virtually in a state of debt. because wages were rarely increased

the amount of credit and loans issued could never realistically be paid off thus keeping the worker in debt to the hacendado for most of his life. The debt owed to the hacendado did not even stop when the peasant died. Through ancient custom as well as by law the debts were passed on from fathers to sons.⁸

The isolation of the rural haciendas made it easier for the hacendado to abuse his workers. He had complete control over the peon families that lived on his land. Quite reminiscent of the feudal lord, the hacendado was the ruler of the peasant villages that supported and worked his land. Because the hacienda was so rural and vast, and because the government's support was with the landholding class, the hacendado ruled with almost absolute control over the peon families and any migrant workers which happened to be passing through.

They, or the rural police, could mete out corporal punishment with impunity and execute workers and their families for real or supposed infractions of hacienda rules.⁹

Quite frequently the hacendados would use this "free hand" to abuse and exploit these peones. In the Yucatan the peones would be kept much like slaves.

They were forced to work in chains and were often flogged.¹⁰

While these reports of physical violence were not as frequent, it was the working conditions that were most intolerable to the peones. With no land of their own, in a state of perpetual debt, impoverished, and hungry, the only way out for most of these peon families was the way north.

For the Mexicans who stayed behind and could not escape the hacienda life, the Revolution of 1910 added a new incentive for not only the peons, but the hacendados themselves to leave the land. Though the thirty-three years of Porfirian rule had widened the gap between the minority of the wealthy and the majority of the poor, the instability that his overthrow generated made conditions even harsher for the lower classes. Ten years of instability, chaos, and violence resulted from Francisco Madero's overthrow of the Porfirian regime. What resulted was inflation, increased starvation, unemployment, and a lack of personal security. All these factors contributed to more than ten percent of the population, probably in excess of one million people, to flee northward to the United States.¹¹ The mass exodus of these people virtually left the haciendas in a state of upheaval. Families fled the haciendas leaving them without anyone to work them. In addition to this, the hacendados

themselves fled fearing their former workers would rise up against them. The hacienda system which had kept the peones impoverished for years was suddenly wiped out, and without it Mexico reverted back to subsistence farming or else no farming at all.¹² The devastation that was left in the last years of the revolution continued to push the Mexican people from their land.

While scholars may argue over the root causes of the mass migration to the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century, the one sure thing is that these millions did indeed come here to the United States. Many times in history when something as phenomenal as this mass influx of immigrants occurs it takes a series of incidents colliding head-on. It took the rapid modernization of the countryside, the land and labor reforms, and the Revolution of 1910 to uproot these native people from their homeland. However one of the biggest coincidences in this historical saga was the development of the technology that made it possible for these millions to cross vast desert regions in search of a better life. ironically, the new railroad technology that had helped to throw the peasants off their land was also the mode of transportation that enabled them to make the long

trek north to the United States. Railroad development under Díaz in the 1880's was aimed at connecting Mexico City with the northern frontier border region.¹⁴ During the migration period Mexicans could take the Central Railroad right up to El Paso. From El Paso the migrants could take any number of lines in the United States to the bigger cities of Los Angeles, Chicago, and Kansas City.¹⁵ It was this railroad technology that made it easier for the Mexican peasantry to move en masse toward a better way of life.

If the economic and political conditions were not enough to push the peasantry away from Mexico, the agricultural and industrial conditions in the American Southwest were ripe enough to help pull them over the border. Changes in the economy of the Southwest called for an enormous amount of cheap labor. Railways in the United States had finally connected the industrial East with the minerals, such as copper and coal, from New Mexico, Colorado, and Arizona.¹⁶ With the southwest still sparsely populated, the Mexican immigrants were looked to as a necessary and convenient source of cheap labor.

What was considered by the Americans as cheap labor was to the impoverished Mexicans an oasis of

higher wages. In Mexico the wages paid to a rural laborer almost never exceeded twenty-five cents a day with the average hovering around twelve cents per day.¹⁷ In the United States the most unskilled worker was paid no less than fifty cents a day with miners and railroad workers earning sometimes more than two dollars per day. This great disparity between wages in the United States and Mexico added another pull factor in Mexican emigration to the United States.

The same wages and a need for stoop labor in the agricultural industry continued to entice Mexicans to emigrate. Most of the agriculture in the Southwest, especially in California, depended on cheap labor. Crops like cotton, sugar-beets, citrus fruits, and vegetables necessitated hand labor. Domestic workers were usually unwilling to do this kind of work in the first two decades of the century for such low pay.¹⁸ The peons which had fled from such desperate conditions in Mexico, however, were willing to provide this stoop labor that domestic workers could afford to refuse.

During the United State's involvement in World War I, this cheap labor was not only convenient for American employers, it became necessary. With American

the tide of Mexican illegal workers that had been ebbing

* All information about the Bracero Program taken from The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy by Michael S. Crealy. (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1971)

men going into military service, another labor void was created. Wartime industry opened up new job opportunities in factories for the Mexican laborer. Agricultural and industrial interests lobbied the Secretary of Labor to be allowed to recruit Mexican labor in the name of national security.¹⁹ With these new opportunities for the Mexican immigrant opening up, they continued to flow over the border though the end of the Mexican Revolution was rapidly approaching.

The flow of immigrants from Mexico slowed during the Great Depression as the demand for labor in the United States decreased. After the Depression the need for manpower was resurrected as the United States entered the Second World War.* This time Mexican workers were welcomed over the border not only by the agricultural interests, but by the federal government as well. During the ten years between 1950 and 1960, 3,300,000 Mexican workers were legally employed in the United States as braceros. The word literally means "arms" and in the United States the term is equated with the phrase "hired hand". What began as a series of emergency agreements between the United States and Mexico during World War II became official public policy in 1951 as Public Law 78. The tide of Mexican illegal workers that had been ebbing

* All information about the Bracero Program taken from The Bracero Program: Interest Groups and Foreign Policy by Richard B. Craig, (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1971)

and flowing since the turn of the century gave way to an orderly, administered migration that satisfied both the agricultural industry and the braceros who came north seeking work and an overall higher standard of living. The Bracero Program, as it came to be called, between 1942 and 1964 was a bi-lateral public policy that provided for a carefully planned opening of the United States-Mexican border.

This public policy entered the initiation phase of the process upon the entry of the United States into World War II. The problem that was immediately recognized was that there existed a critical shortage of manpower as in World War I that could only worsen as the war continued. This crisis was brought on primarily for three reasons. The first and most obvious was that the flood of men who rushed into military service eliminated much of the nation's labor pool. Men left their jobs and fields to go join the war effort. Secondly, those who stayed behind had a new labor option to not only consider but fulfill. The wartime industry drew men away from the fields not only for patriotic reasons but for enticing better paying jobs as well. The demands from the war industry succeeded in draining the agricultural of much of its labor resources. Another cause for this

shortage of manpower in the United States was a result of wartime paranoia. In 1942 thousands of Japanese-Americans from mainly on the Pacific coast were herded away from their homes and jobs and placed into internment camps. This detention pulled thousands of laborers away from the fields and crops of Central California. The potential outcome of this shortage of labor could have left too few men to harvest too many crops. This in turn would create a shortage of food leading to tremendous inflation. Fortunately American policy makers quickly recognized this problem and identified its solution. The only solution was that new sources of labor had to be found.

The logical source of labor was found in the force of labor that had been flowing over the border for many years. The Mexican Nationals, as they were called, were looked to once again to accommodate the labor shortage. The legalization and recruitment of these foreign rural proletariat was a drastic change in policy for the Americans and had to be examined carefully, but quickly in light of the immediacy of the situation. Because of this, emergency planning had to be carried out by the federal government. Federal involvement into

an industry that had essentially been run through private agencies brought on some problems right at the outset of this phase. Agricultural employers and labor bureaus were concerned that the standards that would be set for the foreign workers would be extended to domestic labor. These people were not accustomed to having their conditions of employment subjected to scrutiny and negotiation except perhaps from amongst themselves. The positive aspects of this policy was that planned immigration would be orderly. Recruitment of Mexican braceros would not only be legal, it was to be carried out by the Federal Government itself. There would not only be a supply of manpower, there would be a supply of men who would have to meet certain criteria before they could be employed. However, whatever the pros and cons, they were to be reckoned with later. Because of the growing scarcity of agricultural labor an emergency agreement had to be hammered out immediately with the Mexican government.

The selection process of this policy was carried out in a bi-national context. A joint committee of the United States and Mexican governments was set up to supervise this importation of Mexican labor. In May of 1942 the Mexican government through its embassy in

Washington set down certain guidelines that were to be met by the United States. The first requirement was that recruitment would only be allowed if a dire need for labor existed. This need had to be proved beyond a doubt by the employer himself. One of the most important items on the Mexican agenda was that these migrant recruits were under no circumstances to be encouraged to remain in the United States. Mexican officials wanted to be assured that this labor loan would only be temporary as part of their contribution to the wartime effort. Transportation costs to the United States and from upon the completion of the term of work were to wholly the burden of the employer. The Mexicans were also adamant that these migrant workers were not to be subjected to racial discrimination, the kind they had experienced as illegals in the Southwest. The workers were to be provided with a written contract that would establish the length of the period of work and even more importantly the wage. Finally, the Mexicans recommended that a bi-lateral commission be established to implement the program.

these items were put down on paper in July of 1942 as an international executive agreement and were ratified on both sides the following month. Since the dire need for manpower was on the part of the United States, most of the principal provisions of the agreement

the program by creating unattained conditions however, guaranteed the adequate living and working conditions of the braceros. The workers were not to be subjected to military service while they were in the United States and discrimination was to be strictly prohibited. The written contract between the workers and the employers assured wages, housing and sanitary conditions, and that the work was to be only in the area of agriculture. The only deduction from the bracero's paycheck would be ten percent that would be placed into a saving's account to be paid to the worker upon his return to his homeland. To satisfy the domestic workers, the agreement stated that foreign laborers were not to replace the domestics, but were only to fill in where shortages could be proved beyond a doubt.

When this policy was first put into operation, the responsibility fell into the lap of the Farm Security Administration. However the Farm Security Administration ran into problems with the commercial agricultural interests at the outset. Ever since its inception as a part of the New Deal, the administration had been looked to with suspicion by those farmers. This was the case with the Bracero Program. Representatives of the agricultural industry accused the administration of trying to sabotage

the program by creating unsettled conditions between the braceros and their employers. Within a year the responsibility of implementation was transferred to the War Manpower Commission. After the war when this commission was dismantled control was handed over to the United States Department of Labor. Mexico worked on implementing the program through the Department of Foreign Affairs. Its responsibility was in setting state quotas and assembling selection centers within their own country. Within a span of six years the program was implemented by four different agencies.

As a whole the Bracero Program has been considered a success. Its ends were achieved by supplying a tremendous amount of labor during a critical time in American history. In fact, the wartime program was so much a success with agriculturists, after the war, employers found it hard to wean themselves from this convenient supply of labor. Sometimes this occurred even to the point of denying or prolonging the bracero repatriation. The braceros were indeed convenient. Unlike domestic workers who had family ties, the braceros were flexible and could easily be transferred from place to place. Employers found the Mexican immigrants to be ideal farm laborers. Perhaps more important to these agricultural

employers was that these men could be sent home when they were through with them.

However numerous the advantages of the Bracero Program it also had its share of problems. Commercial growers were not happy with the fact that the wages they were paying were mandated by a federal agency. Labor contracts which had previously always been quite informal were now negotiated by diplomats. Discrimination was rampant against both the foreign and domestic workers. For the braceros, the discrimination was spawned by the racism they had been assured would not exist. Regardless of the executive agreement, domestic workers were frequently displaced by the Mexicans.

Despite these drawbacks, the program overall was a success. So much so that in 1951 the agricultural interests put enough pressure on the government that the program was revived. This time however, instead of an informal executive agreement, the program was signed into law as Public Law 78. For period of twenty-two years this program had administered an orderly opening of the United States-Mexican border. During those years more than five million Mexican immigrants provided their "arms" as a service to the ever-growing business of agriculture.

In 1964 this faucet of virtual free-flowing labor was suddenly shut off with the termination of the program. As the United States agricultural industry once again acquired a labor surplus, the Mexicans were once again conveniently sent home.

FOOTNOTES-CHAPTER I

- 1 Michael C. Meyer & William L. Sherman, The Course of Mexican History (New York, 1983), p. 458
- 2 Ibid., p. 459
- 3 Lawrence A. Cardoso, Mexican Emigration to the United States 1897-1931 (Tucson, 1980), p.1
- 4 Ibid., p.2
- 5 Arthur Corwin, Immigrants and Immigrants: Perspectives On Mexican Labor Migration To The United States (Westport, 1978), p.40
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Cardoso, p.3
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., p.4
- 10 Michael C. Meyer & William L. Sherman, The Course of Mexican History(New York, 1983), p.462
- 11 Lawrence A. Cardoso, Mexican Emigration to the United States 1897-1931 (Tuscon, 1980) p.38
- 12 Ibid., p.41
- 13 Ibid., p.13
- 14 Meyer & Sherman, p.459
- 15 Arthur F. Corwin, Immigrants and Immigrants: Perspectives On Mexican Labor Migration To The United States (Westport, 1978), p.45
- 16 Ibid., p.46
- 17 Cardoso, p.22

FOOTNOTES-CHAPTER I (continued)

- 18 John Martinez. Mexican Emigration to the United States 1910-1930 (San Francisco, 1971), p.22
 - 19 Cardoso, p.47
 - 20 Ernesto Galarza, Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story (Santa barbara, 1964), P.15
- to millions of Mexicans who have over the border even after the dismantling of the Bracero Program. The result of this crisis in the Mexican economy is that the United States still offered hope for a better way of life. With a tremendously developed and billions of dollars in debt, the majority of Mexican people still live in abject poverty, unemployed, underemployed, and desirous of the better way of life that the American economy can offer. Even with the discovery of petroleum in the early 1930's Mexico has worked itself into a panic situation requiring the emergency services of foreign capital. Yet it was the presence of this foreign capital in the first place that had pushed Mexico farther into debt, thereby creating a vicious circle. Though scholars may argue over the exact cause of this crisis, it was indeed a combination of internal and external factors to put this country to the brink of bankruptcy.
- The flight of Mexicans from their homeland over the past two decades directly related with the flight of domestic capital out of the country and the flight of

PART II

THE RECENT CRISIS IN THE MEXICAN ECONOMY

The crisis in the Mexican economy over the past ten to fifteen years continues to send millions of Mexican workers over the border even after the dismantling of the Bracero Program. The result of this crisis in the Mexican economy is that the United States still offered hope for a better way of life. With a tremendously devalued peso and billions of dollars in debt, the majority of Mexican people still live in abject poverty, unemployed, under-employed, and desirous of the better way of life that the American economy can offer. Even with the discovery of petroleum in the early 1970's Mexico has worked itself into a panic situation requiring the emergency services of foreign capital. Yet it was the presence of this foreign capital in the first place that had pushed Mexico further into debt, thereby creating this vicious circle. Though scholars may argue over the exact cause of this crisis, it has indeed taken a combination of internal and external factors to push this country to the brink of bankruptcy.

The flight of Mexicans from their homeland over the past two decades directly correlates with the flight of domestic capital out of the country and the flight of

foreign capital into that country. Faced with the rising competition of Japanese and European goods, United States based transnational companies have come across the need for new sources of raw materials, new markets, and most of all, cheap labor. The United States companies have found these necessities in many Latin American countries, especially in Mexico. James D. Cockroft writes,

Mexico has both industry and oil, as well as the most precious commodity of all-- inexpensive labor power close at hand.

From 1945 to 1978 U.S. companies and banks invested an estimated \$150 billion abroad, creating and overseas commercial empire that by 1980 was generating half a trillion dollars in sales...Together with Brazil and Venezuela, Mexico accounts for over half of the investments in Latin America. The average 18.3 percent rate of return on U.S. investments in Mexico remains the highest in all Latin America.¹

Because of these foreign investments into the country, Mexico has become increasingly integrated into not only the United States' corporations, but into an international system that is under the control of foreign monopolies.² Although some may argue that this foreign investments

creates jobs for the people of Mexico, this is not necessarily the truth. In 1978 foreign investments totaled nearly five billion dollars, yet despite this nearly half of Mexico's work force remained unemployed.³ One of the reasons foreign investments have not helped the unemployment problem is that most of these companies use high-tech labor saving machinery. While foreign companies controlled thirty-one percent of the total industrial production in 1978, they only employed sixteen percent of the industrial work force.⁴

While the influx of foreign capital into Mexico is not help employ the work force, it did actually hurt the agricultural sector. These foreign investors once again caused peasants and farm workers to move off their land. The small peasant farmers could not compete with the modern technology the foreign investors brought in. These small independent farmers could not afford the modern equipment that increased production like that of the United States' agribusinessmen. As a result they were forced out of business and displaced from their lands. Many farmers would sell or lease their land to the American agriculturalists and then would face the choice of hiring themselves out to the company or

leaving to become migrant farm workers on some other farmer's land.⁵ These are the types of farm workers who would often migrate north, crossing the border to find work on the higher paying fields of the American Southwest. In fact, this land monopolization and expansion of agribusiness caused the number of landless peasants to double in the 1970's.⁶

Because Mexico has become so tightly interwoven into the international economic arena, it has made itself vulnerable to any shake-up in the international market. This was the case during the recession years of the early 1970's. In an attempt to brace for the effects of the impending economic recession, the Mexican government borrowed heavily from the international banks. The money was used in the wrong way. Part of it was used for capitalist and transnational enterprises within the country. The government used another part of the money to buy industries that were no longer making money. In addition to escalating the foreign debt to twenty-eight billion dollars, the resulting crisis in Mexico increased unemployment and drastically reduced wages.⁷ By late 1975 the effects of the recession in the United States caused the layoffs of more than 32,000 workers near the border. In the interior the effects

were similar. In the Federal District half a million workers were dismissed and nearly 3,000 small companies went bankrupt.⁸ The crisis alone sparked another surge of millions over the border to the United States in search of work.

The economic crisis heightened in 1976 when rumors that for the first time in twenty-two years Mexico would have to devalue the peso circulated. Although the president, Luis Echeverría, assured the Mexicans this would not happen, the ensuing panic took its toll. Millions of pesos were exchanged for dollars and investments in the United States by wealthy Mexicans.⁹ Consequently devaluation came just a few months later in September of that year. The peso fell sixty percent from 12.50 to 20.50 to the dollar. Another mistake resulted in the further devaluation of the peso. Because Mexican policy makers did not allow the peso to float long enough to reach its true level, just one month after the first devaluation of the peso, it fell an additional forty percent. The effects of this second devaluation were devastating. The first devaluation had been no accident. The second one proved that there were some definite major problems of financial mismanagement within the Mexican government.

The 100 percent devaluation of the peso was perhaps the most devastating to the workers whose buying power diminished as the prices more than doubled. For example, the government allowed the price of frijoles to increase 265 percent, pricing out more than half the market.¹⁰ Frijoles are the main source of protein to the Mexican diet. The price increase caused a virtual semi-starvation of the workers. In addition to this, tortilla and bread prices tripled at the same time.¹¹ These were some of the conditions that awaited the incoming president, Jose Lõpez Portillo, in 1976. Capital flight, dollarization of the economy, and a one hundred percent devaluation of the peso.

The conditions above only worsened as Lõpez Portillo took office. In December of 1976 the president was forced to sign a \$1.2 billion dollar loan agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).¹² The conditions that came along with this loan were most detrimental to the Mexican people. The agreement with the International Monetary Fund demanded strict measures to be implemented inside the country. One of the requirements was that wages were to increase no more than ten percent, Government spending on social projects was to be drastically cut back. Instead of the social

programs the government was to increase subsidies to the business sector. Another requirement of the loan agreement was that employment in the public in the public sector could not be allowed to increase by more than two percent annually. This austere program demanded by the international capital forces took its toll on the working class by severely reducing the standard of living. Buying power which was already limited by devaluation and increasing inflation continued to erode. The cutbacks on social services left many more impoverished, hungry, and out of work as a result of the reduction in government spending.¹³

The problems that Mexico faced in the 1970's were caused in part by an incomplete industrialization process. Although Mexico is much more industrialized than many other Latin American countries, the transformation process from an agrarian society to an industrialized one has been incomplete. Part of the reason for this is that Mexico was not able to sustain its own growth by itself. James Cockcroft attributes this to the heavy infusion of foreign capital into the country.

In spite of achieving rates of industrialization and economic growth superior to those of most of the rest of Latin America, Mexico did not emerge

into an autonomous sustained growth.

The economic causes of this failure-- and that of the new development strategies introduced in the late 1970's--are located in the weakness of Mexico's patterns of capital accumulation and the economy's dependence on foreign capital.¹⁴

One of the faults in Mexico's process of accumulation lies in its own reliance on its own cheap labor.

Because of this dependence on cheap labor, businesses, whether they be agricultural or industrial have gone out of their way to maintain their system so as to accommodate the low-cost labor force. Because these employers have been able to rely on this abundant supply of cheap labor they have never had to go all the way with industrialization, thus hindering or even preventing the transformation of the society. The result from this is the lower productivity of an only partially industrialized society preventing Mexican products from being able to compete with the products of a foreigner, both on the international and the domestic markets.¹⁵

Another consequence was that it increased the trade imbalance. Between 1976 and 1981 the importation of production materials had tripled¹⁶ Mexicans were finding foreign goods to be less expensive than their

own. With their buying power so drastically reduced they were forced to buy the products that were keeping their country prisoner in a trade deficit. This vicious circle continued throughout the 1970's with more than eighty percent of all capital goods coming from the foreign market, thus increasing foreign capital's domination in Mexico.

The discovery of oil in Southeast Mexico gave a boost to the Mexican economy in the late 1970's but could not prevent the crisis of the 1980's that still plagues Mexico today. In 1977 at the beginning of the administration of Jose L6pez Portillo, his economic advisors devised a plan that would be paid for by oil export revenues supplemented by foreign borrowing. The plan was aimed at stabilizing the economy first, and then allowing it to expand. A rise in production and imports together would hold down inflation while growth would occur through an increase in demand. Officials hoped this would raise the employment level and the standard of living thereby sharing the benefits of oil wealth with all Mexicans.¹⁷

Part of the plan called for restoring confidence among the investors and savers, stemming domestic capital

flight and at the same time restoring government revenues. This public confidence was indeed restored in part when López Portillo announced that oil revenues were much greater than anyone had anticipated.¹⁸ That increase was up to 16,000 million barrels, an increase of 4,000 million barrels over the previous estimate of 11.2 thousand million barrels. Consequently by 1978 the stabilization efforts finally began to work. Inflation declined and the gross domestic product grew seven percent. As public confidence spread, private investments and public spending grew, increasing the aggregate demand. The oil revenues and public and private spending had produced the boom that the government had longed for.

Although Mexico seemed to be on the road to economic recovery, the discovery of petroleum was not a cure-all for the country's social and economic problems. By the late 1970's the unemployment rate was still at twenty-five percent with underemployment plaguing almost half of the country's work force. Although the petroleum industry creates quite a bit of capital, it does not require much labor.¹⁹ At full production Mexico's petroleum industry could absorb about 150,000 new workers every year, but by 1980 there were 800,000 Mexicans entering the work force annually. In addition to this, while the

industrial sector was booming the agricultural production could no longer keep up with the population surge. Regardless of the discovery of petroleum, the capital it generated could not touch all sectors of society.

By mid-1981 the stabilization strategy began to fall apart. A world oil glut contributed to an increase in inflation and another devaluation of the peso in comparison to the dollar. The weakening in the world petroleum market hurt the Mexican economy enormously. While the Mexican government had anticipated over twenty billion dollars from petroleum export revenues, the actual income was only fourteen billion dollars. The six billion dollar deficit caused an upset in Mexico's international balance of payments. The public spending that the stabilization plan had called for along with the lower oil revenues, thereby creating a tremendous budget deficit. Instead of cutting back on federal spending that would concur with the decline in oil revenues, the Mexican government made a decision that would prove quite costly. It decided to finance the deficit by borrowing more money from the international capital market. By the end of 1982 the foreign debt of the public sector had reached a total of 59,000 million dollars.²⁰

This has been the trend over the past five years. the loss of public confidence in the economy has

increased capital flight out of the country. Devaluation of the peso and a monstrous foreign debt have spawned numerous futile attempts to reduce the budget deficit, reduce imports into the country, and to reduce foreign indebtedness. Most of the measures have taken their toll on the working class. In the summer of 1982 in an effort to reduce inflation the government announced 100 percent price increases in bread and tortilla prices and a fifty percent rise in gasoline. These measures only caused inflation to increase even more and increased the dollarization of the economy. Once again the working class fell victim to the mismanagement of their own government and the foreign opportunists. It is only logical that in such a chaotic economy it follows that Mexican workers would continue to seek better for themselves in the far more stable economy of the United States.

11 Ibid.

12 Donald L. Wyman, Mexico's Economic Crisis: Challenges And Opportunities (San Diego, 1983) p.11

13 Mayer & Sherman, p.680

14 Cockcroft, Mexico p.253

15 Ibid., p.254

16 Ibid.

FOOTNOTES-PART II

- 1 James D. Cockcroft, Outlaws In The Promised Land,
(New York, 1986) p.153
- 2 James D. Cockcroft, Mexico: Class Formation, Capital
Accumulation, and the State (New York, 1983) p.253
- 3 Ibid., p.256
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 James D. Cockcroft, Outlaws In The Promised Land,
(New York, 1986) p.153
- 6 James D. Cockcroft, Mexico:Class Formation, Capital
Accumulation, and the State (New York, 1983)p.254
- 7 Ibid., p.259
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Michael C. Meyer & William L. Sherman, The Course of
Mexican History (New York, 1983) p.676
- 10 Cockcroft, Outlaws In The Promised Land p.259
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Donald L. Wyman, Mexico's Economic Crisis: Challenges
And Opportunities (San Diego, 1983) p.11
- 13 Meyer & Sherman, p.680
- 14 Cockcroft, Mexico p.253
- 15 Ibid., p.254
- 16 Ibid.

FOOTNOTES PART II (continued)

17 Wyman, p.5

18 Ibid.

19 Meyer & Sherman, p.680

PART III

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Over the past two decades the United States has had to struggle with this phenomenal inpouring of Mexican labor to the United States. Legislators have been torn between the need for cheap unskilled labor in the agricultural and service industries and the need to stem the flow of illegal immigrants from south of the border. Congress has grappled with the issue for many years before the current law, but that effort to curb illegal immigration has received special attention since the early 1970's. Yet when looking back over the research behind these various bills there is something missing. The root cause of Mexican immigration to the United States as previously discussed has been for the most part ignored.

Many of the recent attempts at immigration legislation have taken address some of the pull factors. The Immigration reform Act of 1986, signed into law as Public Law 99-603 is similar to many of the prior immigration bills drafted over the past two decades. The Simpson-Mazzoli Bill of 1983 is comparable to the

Roybal Bill and the new law in that they all contain employer sanctions. Now this takes care of some of the so-called "pull factors", the factors and conditions that pull workers from Mexico, but it does not take care of what pushes Mexicans away from their homeland and to the United States and has been for all these years especially since the recent crisis in the Mexican economy.

I have already discussed the crisis in the Mexican economy that has been pushing Mexicans toward the United States, yet this Mexican connection, the push factors have not even for the most part been addressed by the various commissions and legislators which have drafted up prior bills and even the act that is now law.

In 1970 Theodore Hesburgh headed up the Select Commission on Immigration and refugee Policy. For two years the commission held regional hearings and considered papers on the subject of immigration. Yet in all the records of this commission, only one discusses the concept of push factors.¹ In all of the history presented to the commission the only one that addresses this factor is one by Josephina Card entitled, "Push and Pull Factors at Origin and Destination as Determinants of Migration". In the study Dr. Card discusses structural factors inside the

country of origin that push people into another one.² Yet even this paper does not address Mexico's unique historical and economic factors. It is a study of highly skilled Filipinos responding to negative factors within their country and positive ones in the United States. Even members of the commission conceded that, "The author emphasizes that her study should be seen as illustrative and suggestive since she bases it upon only one select group of migrants."³

The final report two years later by the Hesburgh Commission reflects this practical omission in their research. Instead of admitting or even considering the possibility that until economic conditions are improved in Mexico, the flow of illegal immigrants will continue, the commission recommended that,

...the United States expand bilateral consultations with other governments, especially Mexico and other regional neighbors regarding immigration.⁴

In this one section, the only one in the entire report that even considers a bi-lateral solution, the commission only briefly mentions what should be the entire focus of stemming the flow of illegal workers into the country. The United States must work together with Mexico on a

bi-lateral law that will work on solving the economic problems and eliminating those economic push factors. Instead of focusing on the Mexican connection as a solution to the immigration problem, the Hesburgh report basically recommended a modified amnesty clause, increased legal migrations, and provided for a guest worker program.⁵

In the 1970's the debate over the immigration problem was prompted by a kind of alien hysteria rather than a sincere attempt towards a bi-lateral solution. In 1977 President Jimmy Carter proposed an immigration package based on groundwork laid earlier in the decade by Congressmen Peter Rodino (D-N.J.) and Joshua Eilberg (D-Pa). In the proposal Carter, who claimed to be a liberal humanitarian, expressed this alien hysteria that is found in so much of the legislation attempts of the decade. He wrote,

In the last several years millions of undocumented aliens have illegally immigrated to the United States. They have breached our nation's immigration laws, displaced many American citizens from jobs, and placed an increased financial burden on many states and local governments.⁶

Even the Simpson Mazzoli Bill is not a sincere attempt at immigration reform. Instead of focusing on real solutions, it concentrates more on satisfying agricultural interest. As James D. Cockcroft observed,

The Simpson-Mazzoli Bill is actually a labor proposal disguised as an immigration law. Its promise of a return to contract labor outlawed in the 1880's will do less to spur economic recovery than enforcement of existing laws like the Fair Labor Standards Act and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act.⁷

This is typical of how the debate over immigration throughout the years has been. The debate centered on how to curb the flow of immigrants from Mexico and still keep our agricultural and service industries functioning. The Hesburgh Commission report and even the current law both satisfy this need through the provisions for a guest worker program.⁸

The new Immigration Reform Act of 1986 concedes that there is a need to look into condition in Mexico to help stop immigrants from coming to the United States. In section 601 the law calls for a commission for the study of international migration and cooperative economic development to be established. In the duties of the

commission it calls for this:

The Commission, in consultation with the governments of Mexico and other sending countries in the Western Hemisphere, shall examine the conditions in Mexico and such other sending countries which contribute unauthorized migration to the United States and mutually beneficial trade and investment programs to alleviate such conditions.⁹

This one section amidst many titles within the law is exactly what should be the entire focus of immigration reform. Instead of debating over how much more money to allocate to the border patrol and how many workers it will take to supply the necessary cheap labor to the agricultural sector of our country, immigration reform should center on the root problem of Mexican emigration to the United States; the economically desperate condition in Mexico which are pushing their people over the border to the United States.

FOOTNOTES PART IIII

- 1 Papers of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy Push and Pull Factors at Origin and Destination as Determinants of Migration by Josephina Card
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Papers of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy p.265
- 4 U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest. Final report and recommendations by the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy 1981 p.28
- 5 Ibid, same report
- 6 Message from the President of the United States, November 4, 1977, Document No. 95-202
- 7 James D. Cockcroft, Outlaws in the Promised Land (New York, 1983) p.211
- 8 U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest. Final Report and Recommendations by the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy 1981 p.220 and Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986
- 9 Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, Public Law 99-603

CONCLUSION

For almost a century now Mexican workers have been crossing the southern border of the United States every year in search of the better life the United States has to offer. These immigrants who cross the border go against all odds to bring their families to the United States and sometimes even come alone to work for money to send back to their families in Mexico. Fleeing from decades of poverty and landless, the United States to them is an oasis of new hope and new opportunities. the recent and current crisis in the Mexican economy, and those desperate economic conditions in Mexico are still pushing Mexicans over the border in search of work. However these push factors have been almost completely ignored by legislators working on immigration reform. Instead of trying to work bi-laterally with the government of Mexico to try and eliminate those push factors United States policymakers have drafted a law which does not even address the root cause of Mexican immigration into the United States. Until a sincere attempt is made to alleviate the crisis in the Mexican economy, Mexicans in search of work and a better way of life will continue to cross the border in hopes of finding that in their wealthy neighbor to the north.

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