



# DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS OF AMERICA

## Statement on Immigration

February 2010

\* DSA will join with humanitarian and labor organizations in calling for immigration legislation that ensures basic labor rights for immigrant and also undocumented workers, gives permanent resident status to undocumented workers currently in the United States, establishes an expeditious and non-punitive road to citizenship, promotes family reunification, halts deportations, and demilitarizes the border. DSA will also work for economic development and labor rights in the third world, so as to reduce the forces that push desperate people to emigrate.

Massive migrations of exploited workers, refugees, displaced farmers, agricultural workers, and asylum seekers result from an unjust global political and economic system that works for the benefit of transnational corporations and at the expense of the world's peoples. Immigration to the United States does not only result from the "pull" of greater economic opportunity. It is also caused by the "push" of growing economic inequality and exploitation in developing societies. Much of the current wave of migration to the United States from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean can be traced to NAFTA and other unjust "free trade" agreements that enabled subsidized U.S. agribusiness to flood these societies with cheap produce, destroying the livelihoods of millions of small farmers and other rural workers. The export-oriented, often capital-intensive form of manufacturing imposed on them by the IMF, World Bank, and WTO also limits the number of good jobs in the urban economy of these developing nations.

The same story can be told about African migration to the nations of the European Union. We can stem the "push" for mass immigration from the developing world only if these economies are allowed to develop in equitable and internally integrated ways. Such development would require the national and international regulation of corporate power by free trade unions and democratic governments, as well as the democratization of international economic regulatory institutions.

But reducing or even eliminating the economic forces driving mass immigration is not enough. In the meantime, we must develop humane policies to respond to the migration of more than 12 million people already living in the United States. The presence of a vast number of highly exploitable workers—workers without legal status in this country—leads to the proliferation of low-wage, unsafe, and insecure jobs for all. Employers can more easily

discriminate against young African Americans, particularly unskilled young men without high school diplomas, when there is vulnerable immigrant labor to exploit, and the availability of a reserve army of the barely employed endangers union wages and union contracts in many areas— notably among lower-skilled construction and factory workers. We need an immediate end to the deportations that keep immigrant workers living in fear and prevent them from exercising the few rights they do possess. We need to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation that grants immediate permanent resident status to undocumented workers currently in the United States and establishes an expeditious and non-punitive road to citizenship for these workers and their families. Such an immigration bill must not include guest worker programs that further exploit these workers and undercut all workers' rights to organize and to secure humane wages and working conditions.

In addition, we must not devote additional resources to militarizing the nation's borders. Since the passage of the restrictive 1994 Immigration Reform Act, the federal government has spent more than \$30 billion on border enforcement. This has not deterred unauthorized border crossings. Instead, it has lined the pockets of "coyotes," or smugglers who serve the needs of exploitative employers searching for cheap labor. The practice of human smuggling has already led to the cruel, painful deaths of some 4,000 people in the deserts of the Southwest and in the holds of ships.

Nor should detention be the routine reaction to asylum seekers who come to the border. Detention should not be automatically or arbitrarily applied to foreign citizens found inside the US without documented status. Such detentions are in fact in violation of generally-recognized international law.