

## Justice for Undocumented Immigrants: Demand a Real Path to Citizenship

Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) favors both the DREAM Act as well as broader immigration reform legislation that would grant immediate permanent resident status to all undocumented workers and their children and would establish an expeditious and non-punitive road to citizenship for these workers and their families. Such measures should render illegal the all-too-frequent local law practice of using racial-profiling to arbitrarily check individuals' immigration papers. These practices effectively criminalize "breathing while brown."

DSA also opposes any and all guest worker programs, because they not only exploit the workers involved but also undercut all workers' rights to secure humane wages and working conditions, especially in the service and agricultural sectors.

DSA will work with other immigrant rights and labor organizations to promote family reunification, to halt deportations, to demilitarize our borders, and to help all of our children—regardless of legal status—to realize the dream of attaining a university education. Finally, DSA will participate in the global struggle for equitable economic development and labor rights, so as to reduce the forces that push desperate people to emigrate.



"Okay, hands on the salad bar... you're charged with intent to purchase vegetables picked by illegal immigrants."

Legalizing the status of all immigrant workers and their families, as well as providing for a transparent and expeditious road to citizenship, embodies basic democratic socialist principles. First, those who are governed by the laws of a democratic society should have an equal say in the making of such laws. Second, all those who contribute meaningful labor to a democratic society, who care for our elderly, our children and our disabled, deserve full membership in our society. Third, immigrant workers cannot fight for rights on the job and against their exploitation by employers without having full legal status, political rights and an

expeditious road to citizenship. Threats of deportation for undocumented workers, as well as second-class status in guest worker programs, also restrict the capacity of all workers to organize. These policies create a new form of indentured servitude, as any worker fired by their employer can be immediately deported.

Democratic socialists understand that massive migrations of exploited workers, refugees 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 U.S. from Mexico, Central America, Africa 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 economies of these developing nations. The same story can be told about African and East European migration to the European Union.

We can stem the “push” for mass immigration only if developing 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 presence of nearly 12 million undocumented people already living in the United States. As socialists we know that “an injury to one is an injury to 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. Increasing the bargaining power of low-wage workers would also force employers to raise the skill-level and productivity of these workers, thus decreasing the “pull” for large numbers of exploitable undocumented immigrant workers.

Finally, the United States should cease further militarization of our borders, a policy that has radically accelerated under the Obama administration. Since the passage of the restrictive 1994 Immigration Reform Act, the federal government has spent more than \$45 billion on border enforcement. This activity 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 6,000 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 our borders. Detention should not be automatically or arbitrarily applied to foreign citizens found inside the United States without documented status. Such detentions are in fact in violation of generally-recognized international law.

The immigrant rights movement is the civil rights movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its demand for labor rights demonstrates that only by building a truly international labor and democratic political movement can we transition from a global capitalist world to one that promotes economic and social justice.

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