

BORDERS: THE NEW BERLIN WALLS

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By the 1990s only the uncurbed passage of labour from one market to another remains as an impediment to realizing the ultimate meaning of freedom for the transnational entrepreneurs. Advances in technology and communications have permitted capital to move unobstructed throughout most of the world. From board rooms in Tokyo, New York and London, loans, credits and investments were transferred to cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America to finance new factories or agribusinesses – or to speculate. International agreements cleared the path of centuries-old obstacles that impeded commodities' free passage across national borders – at least for the time being.

Current frontiers, the encumbrances to workers' travel, derive not only from historic settlements, wars and treaties, but also from ideologies and sentiments of racism and nationalism, constructs that distinguished a worker or petty merchant in one country from his counterpart in another. Ideologies that divided workers or prevented competition at one historical period, continue to function in the 'new global village', frustrating the creation of a global and mobile labour force, which would allow capital to reduce further the socially necessary cost of labour.

Even as improved transportation allowed for increased mobility, social attitudes and laws obstructed people of darker skin or different customs from working inside national borders. Over centuries, in the age of empire, a virtual pigmentocracy was established and it set the standards and rules of residence and citizenship within the North American and West European nations – with implicit or explicit bias against people from the South and the East. Eurocentric axioms continue to provoke fear among members of the working and middle classes that hordes of 'uncivilized' immigrants will pollute, dilute or in some form pervert the direct line of western culture that runs from Greeks and Romans through Europe of the Reformation and Enlightenment and into the present; all held together by a White Christ and Moses that people of darker hues cannot truly share.

In the 1990s, as notions of 'global village' are taught in classrooms around the world, the idea of free labour passage from one country to

another remains elusive, if not downright politically combustible. Social and political forces in several European nations and the United States threaten violence if large numbers of workers from poor countries continue to migrate to take on the most menial tasks in the developed nations. Thus, as borders disappear for capital and goods, formally at least, they remain quite intact to control the passage of labour.

The fence that separates the United States from Mexico doesn't deter most of the millions of Mexicans and Central Americans who have learned how to scale it, tunnel under it or cut holes in the barbed wire. Each year they pick the Americans' food, clean their houses, care for their children, build and maintain their homes and offices, and even dig their graves. A large number are deported every year, or choose to return to their homeland on weekends where they maintain their families and permanent residence. In fact, the day, week or month labourers, like those who stay for years, are little recognized participants in the social and economic life of both countries: citizens of the poor country, aliens in the rich one.

From the 1970s on, the new Hispanics, the generic category for Spanish-speaking Mexican, Central American and some Caribbean people, have become part and parcel of the US economy and culture. Yet, opinion polls show that sizable sectors of the white, Afro-American and even resident Spanish-speaking public do not want the newcomers living permanently in the country. These fears are abundantly communicated to legislators who translate them into action. Although millions of people from the South do cross the forbidden line, many millions more cannot.

Some Southwestern and Western border residents as well as uniformed members of the Border Patrol have taken to shooting those trying to elude the border barriers. In 1990 and 1991, vigilante patrols killed and wounded several people crossing the Rio Grande in Texas. In December 1990, a twelve year old Mexican boy scaled the fence that divides Mexicali and Calexico, California. He claimed he only wanted a better view of a fight that had developed on the US side of the border. He saw the INS truck approach and retreated to the fence. The border patrolman's dum-dum bullet ricocheted through the lad's insides as he dropped to the ground on the Mexican side. One Mexican observer said the scene reminded him of incidents he had seen on television of East German border guards shooting people attempting to ascend the wall to the West.

As television during the Cold War years feasted on spies coming in and going out into the cold, the increasing migratory labour force faced less glamorous lines separating the world of abundance from that of scarcity, those with possibilities from those in hopelessness, people of the South in need of work from those in the North who had it. For millions of people living in the South, the Berlin Wall was a dubious symbol. For them, the struggle between East and West, communism and freedom, good and evil, hardly related to the partitions they encountered: the borders that closed their access to jobs.

By the 1990s, there was no violence at the site of the torn-down Berlin Wall. But a different kind of violence erupted throughout Germany and other parts of Europe. In some cities neo-Nazi, skinhead gangs murdered 'guest workers' – with the collaboration of sectors of the police. In Italy border guards 'set an example' for would be immigrants by brutally beating Africans and Albanians seeking refuge and work. In 1992, in France and other northern European countries right wing political parties gained strength by using xenophobia as their central issue.

Racism was hardly new to Europe and the United States, but the coincidence of recession and waves of immigration produced a combustible equation. Borders in the 1990s no longer maintained political security against penetration by East or West of each other's territories, but protected the affluent North from the desperate and disparate South. However, the anti-immigrant frenzy, along with headline-creating riots and the frenetic demands to erect race and class-based barriers obscured a deeper dynamic: the restructuring of labour into a mobile and global force.

The neglected immigration prism

In the 1990s, immigration has again become an acceptable prism through which to view world events. After the end of the Second World War the movement of labour was a low research priority compared to the dramatic possibilities inherent in the Cold War equation. Nevertheless, underneath the fog generated by Cold War crisis mongers, a powerful shift was occurring in the nature of the world's labour force.

Well before the Soviet Union and its Bloc disintegrated, scores of millions of people living in rural and self-subsistence environments were shaken like ripe apples on a tree into the world's pile of wage labour. Women comprised the majority of this new labour force. They, their mothers or grandmothers were driven from villages often by the very troops who were supposedly 'freeing' or 'protecting' their country from communism, or by international banks promoting 'development'. Their own governments behaved as collaborators in the massive uprooting of their citizens. Like a modern enclosure movement, powered by war, technology and 'development' policies, a new wave of displaced people emerged as potential labourers. For centuries, their families had lived as peasants on the margin of global capitalism. Men, women and children migrated from Africa, Asia and Latin America – and Southern and Eastern Europe as well – to find themselves occupying the lowest rungs of the labour ladder in the affluent West, or the oil-rich areas of the Persian Gulf. The immense acreage on which peasants grew subsistence crops for millennia was turned into agricultural plantations, subsidiaries of food-exporting, agri-business corporations.

The US Mexican border marked one segment of the North-South partition line, which Mexicans began crossing in large numbers in the 1950s when US growers needed a cheap labour force for newly irrigated desert lands of California, Arizona and Texas. These 'wetbacks' (the pejorative term derives from the fact that Mexicans had to cross the Rio Grande river to enter Texas or New Mexico) served as an avant-garde of the developing mobile labour pool. By the 1980s Mexicans were joined by Central Americans, Chinese, Southeast Asians, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders who infiltrated the porous borders and port cities of the United States to make garments and semi conductors, wash dishes and pick vegetables – enterprises that had room for low wage immigrants willing to work in substandard conditions and without Green Cards.

For many decades US workers had struggled with employers to have a union as a bargaining agent on issues of wages and working conditions. The vulnerable immigrant is afraid not only to join a union, lest he be expelled from the country, but has no leverage without a union to bargain on any questions of wages or conditions. US citizens and permanent residents will not, indeed cannot abide the conditions that desperate Salvadorans or East Asians feel forced to accept. When there was economic boom, the displacement of blacks and resident Hispanics by **green-cardless** Salvadorans was less abrasive than under bad times.

In addition, after a decade of using cheap immigrant labour, entire sectors become dependent on that work force. Should the INS enforce the law and deport the busboys and dishwashers in Los Angeles and Washington D.C., as examples, the restaurant industry would face a serious crisis. What began as a temporary displacement of one low wage workforce by a lower one quickly became institutionalized.

Causes of the new immigration

The reasons for the mass migrations in the contemporary world have been as diverse as high and low intensity wars, new technology, land erosion, 'development' plans of the IMF and the lures of a commercial paradise contained in the US television and movie shows exported to the third world.

Some of the immigrants came to the United States because they were environmental refugees, meaning their land was depleted, poisoned, deprived of water or simply insufficient in size to support successive generations. Others were ejected from their villages, towns and even their countries by greedy oligarchs or transnational food companies – backed by military dictators. Often small farmers could not afford the technology required to compete with agro giants. In some countries, peasants became victims of 'development' policies sponsored by multi-lateral agencies and governments. Still others were escaping the ravages of wars that sometimes

lasted for decades. Indeed, a case could be made that World War III, between the rich and poor parts of the world, was well underway when World War II – a conflict between wealthy nations – ended.

The colonial or imperial powers fought virtually one continual war against revolutionary, independence, and anti-colonial movements. Simultaneously, third world nations and tribes fought each other, often over capriciously conceived territorial lines drawn by colonial administrators. When possible, the imperial powers delegated repression to proxy armies trained by or under the tutelage of Special Forces or CIA operators.

The ongoing wars in the South impinged on the civil society of the North only when extraordinary sacrifices were required – in Korea and Vietnam for the United States; Vietnam and Algeria for France. These imperial wars had unforeseen immigration effects on the imperial homeland. The CIA's Vietnamese, including some tribes people, or Central Americans running from a dirty war sought refuge in the United States – which had to provide a home at least for a small percentage of these victims of foreign policy adventures. From 1959 through 1993, the US government waged almost continual low intensity war against Cuba, one tactic of which was to welcome any Cuban 'escaping' from communist tyranny, while simultaneously denying visas to Cubans who wanted to emigrate legally – thereby forcing the desperate ones to hop on rafts to cross the shark infested Caribbean or to hijack planes.

The wars, however, overshadowed a larger process that was turning Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and **Central America** from rural-based peasant societies into urbanized and 'modernized' nations. 'In an absent minded way,' wrote Samuel Huntington in 1968, 'the United States in Vietnam may well have stumbled upon the answer to "wars of national liberation"'. The effective response lies neither in the quest for a conventional military victory, nor in esoteric doctrines and gimmicks of counter-insurgency warfare. It is instead forced-draft urbanization and modernization which rapidly brings the country in question out of the phase in which a rural revolutionary movement can [succeed].'

The 'reciprocity' of US wars in the Third World is ironic, as 'leftist rebels' and right wing 'freedom fighters' both arrived at the shores of the United States. Indeed, distinctions became meaningless. There were 'refugees', like anti-Sandinista Nicaraguans and the first waves of CIA Vietnamese, and 'economic migrants', as the later 'boat people' and the early groups of Salvadoran migrants in the United States were branded. These categories obscure the facts of history: wars produced huge migrations of people. US involvement in these wars meant that those fleeing war (winners or losers) would try to come to the United States because it was the richest country and afforded the most opportunity to poor people. Huntington did not anticipate that his brand of 'modernization', when applied throughout the rest of the Third World, would also bring leaders of 'the countries in

question' to a point where they would be forced to export their own populations to survive.

Just as economic pressure reaches its highest point inside third world nations, the cry is heard in the developed world to stop further immigration of people of colour. Those holding anti-immigration sentiment do not necessarily relate the arrival of the new comers to failures of US foreign policy, or to flaws in the 'development' strategy of the IMF and World Bank. Americans have been noted for their historical amnesia. Indeed, in 1993, when professors mention the wars in Southeast Asia and Central America, students' eyes tend to glaze over as if these events belong in the realm of a hazy past. Yet, often sitting in the same classroom are Vietnamese or Central American students whose very presence resulted from a US foreign policy 'mistake',

In both regions policy makers assumed implicitly that a US-designed order could be imposed through high (Vietnam) and low (Central America) intensity conflicts. The wars failed to realize the objective, but they did beget several million refugees – one of the unforeseen consequences of intervention. From the mid 1970s through the early 1990s, the United States took in Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Afghans, Nicaraguans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans displaced by wars.

Vietnam

By the time that US forces withdrew from Vietnam, in 1973, South Vietnam's most lucrative enterprise was providing services to the Americans stationed there. The importation of enormous quantities of US manufactured goods overwhelmed whatever economy had existed previously. When the war ended Vietnam no longer had the independent capacity to feed its population. After the initial flight of Vietnamese on the CIA payroll or intimately linked to the US-backed government came refugees fleeing not so much from communism but from a country that could not provide for them.

The first wave of almost 130,000 Indochinese (primarily Vietnamese) reached the United States in the spring of 1975. These people were generally well-educated, French-speaking, and Catholic, members of the Southeast Asian elite who were connected with war-time US military and business interests. Some were Vietnamese associated with the Phoenix Program (a CIA-directed operation that relocated – or killed – Vietnamese suspected of being sympathetic to the Viet Cong into government controlled zones). Some of these CIA operatives were torturers and killers. But also among the first wave of immigrants were doctors, lawyers, military officers, business men and civil servants who brought their children to America and began lives with their new sponsors, Americans volunteering

to help the new arrivals over the trauma of their exit and difficulties of assimilation.

Subsequent waves of 'boat people', as they became known in the late 1970s and early 1980s, were considerably less well-educated or connected with American society. Instead of calling them displaced people because of the wreckage of war, the escaping Vietnamese were promoted as refugees fleeing communism and welcomed with some resettlement aid and services. The flood of refugees from Indochina to the United States served simultaneously as a painful reminder of a failed policy in Vietnam and as a propaganda tool to show how people were escaping from communism. In fact, many of them were 'economic refugees' seeking to make a better living than could be eked out of post-war Vietnam.

Among the unintended consequences of the war in Southeast Asia were the fate of the progeny of US troops. These children, singled out by their physical features and American first names, were ostracized along with their families from Vietnamese society. Several thousand such youths, along with siblings and parents (usually their mothers), have been resettled in the United States since 1988. One example should suffice to illustrate their vicissitudes.

Lo didn't consider migrating to the United States until she gave birth to a girl in Vietnam who shared the Anglo features of her father, a US soldier. Despised in Vietnam, the two boarded a boat in 1983, and after surviving a terrible odyssey at sea, arrived in the United States. In 1991, both mother and daughter cleaned hotel rooms in Washington, D.C. and boast of becoming 'American'. Both are seeking an American man to marry. Lo began to cry when she thought about Danang, her home, and her family. Her daughter shrugged when the subject arose. 'I don't like Asians,' she said.

This sentiment echoed nativist resentment against the 'boat people', who were 'taking our jobs away'. In Galveston, Texas and Monterey, California, organized campaigns against newly-arrived Vietnamese fishermen 'unfairly competing' with the locals, led to violence. In other areas as well the later waves of Indochinese refugees stretched the United States' good-will capacity. Government officials decided they had paid enough for the mistake of Vietnam and admissions of Vietnamese in the 1980s was decided yearly; government funding for resettlement was reduced and meted out erratically.

Central America

The United States intervened periodically in Central America to prop up puppet governments or bring down democratic and revolutionary regimes. But until the 1980s the interference in Central American affairs had not produced a massive exodus of refugees into the United States itself. When

the CIA began its military support of the government of El Salvador and simultaneously its sponsorship of the counterrevolutionary war against Nicaragua in 1981 it produced impossible conditions, especially for people in areas of actual combat – which spread significantly over the next decade. With US-sponsored wars occurring in their countries, large numbers of Central Americans saw little opportunity to survive economically. Some Nicaraguans were or professed to be political refugees escaping Sandinismo and were granted asylum. Salvadorans, fleeing from a right wing government, were at first branded 'economic migrants', although their country was in the throes of an even more devastating civil war.

By the end of the 1980s remittances from workers in the United States to families throughout Central America, Mexico, the Caribbean and the Philippines had become props to maintain national economies, the difference between national solvency and bankruptcy. Filipinos send home some \$3 billion a year from the United States alone. Salvadorans and other Central Americans remit more than \$2 billion yearly.

In El Salvador, the remittances began to make an appreciable difference to the dollar balance in the government treasury. Indeed, President Jose Napoleon Duarte pleaded with Ronald Reagan, during a 1982 visit to Washington, not to deport the newly arrived Salvadoran labourers, explaining that their remittances to their families provided El Salvador with desperately needed millions of dollars in foreign exchange.

The millions who have migrated are a third world export of last resort. During the Persian Gulf War alone, India lost more than \$2 million in remittance income derived from its labour in the area. Philippine Airlines estimated their loss at \$800,000 a day from cancelled flights to the Gulf. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and several of the North African states also had sizable labour forces throughout the region, as they do in other parts of the world.

Central American immigrants settled in communities where their kin already lived. Most of the new arrivals continue to be smuggled into the United States from Mexico by 'coyotes' who provide transportation, fake visas and lodging for undocumented immigrants who pay between \$2,000 and \$5,000 for passage to the United States. Almost forty percent of the approximately 2 million Central Americans in the United States live in Southern California. Los Angeles has now become the largest Salvadoran city outside of San Salvador. But other immigrants live in tent colonies in the canyons and gullies between Los Angeles and San Diego. Each day they seek work picking fruit or as construction workers. Self-segregated by nationality, the refugees exchange news of their home countries while lookouts peer down from the bluffs to watch for INS officials.

Although the conditions under which the newly-arrived live in California ravines or field barracks are atrocious, their counterparts in large cities hardly enjoy ideal living conditions. In the Mount Pleasant neighbour-

hood of Washington, D.C., where up to 100,000 Salvadorans reside, men share single rooms, often using the 'hot bed' system – one sleeps while the other works – which the Chinese immigrants invented in San Francisco in the 1920s. Salvadorans make up 50 – 70 percent of the total Latino population in the Washington area. Restaurants, child care, house work and the construction industry provide employment for those without working papers.

In Washington, D.C. in 1990 a policewoman shot a Salvadoran man on the street in the Mt. Pleasant neighbourhood. She claimed he had drawn a knife when she confronted him in a drunken state. The Salvadoran men around him at the time said he was too drunk to do anything. The shooting incident was only a spark that lit an already combustible pile of grievances. Afro-Americans and Hispanics alternately fought police and each other. Throughout three days of rioting, some members of each group cast racial aspersions on the other, while simultaneously Central Americans and Afro-Americans expressed solidarity with each other against police, landlords and insensitive city officials.

Behind the interracial tension there were concrete issues. The Salvadorans provided a welcome low-wage labour force for entrepreneurs. Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, a period marked by extensive expansion, Afro-Americans fared worse as Hispanics took some of their traditional jobs in construction, restaurant and hotel servicing and home and child care. With the 1991 recession, the Hispanics, voiceless and undocumented, were the first to be marginalized by the slumping economy. It is little wonder that the uprooted, war-weary and unemployed would take to the streets and in doing so add another ripple to America's evolving racial/ethnic history. Like the Los Angeles riots of 1992, the Washington blow-up indicated that a crisis might well be brewing around the issue of continued immigration while mounting numbers of coloured Americans receive diminishing services and no aid for their chronic state of unemployment.

The new US population

Counting Hispanics, people of colour will become the majority in the United States before mid 21st Century. In the late 1980s new and contradictory patterns began to emerge with the new labour force. Watsonville, California, located on the Monterey Bay, in the Pajaro Valley, was for decades the home of food processing plants. In 1990, after winning a prolonged strike against four canneries and processing plants – for \$6.25 an hour and modest health benefits – the workers found themselves victims of plant relocation. Three of the four major factories were purchased by a British transnational and moved to Irapuato, Mexico, ironically the birth-place of some of the 'illegal' workers in Watsonville.

But the story doesn't end with the relocation of the factories. In the Irapuato area the farmers ceased growing corn and beans, the traditional staples, and began planting strawberries and broccoli for the nearby plants to freeze and export to the United States. Corn and beans were then imported from the United States at a higher price to feed the work force, whose daily wage was about \$4.00.

In addition, children as young as thirteen were recruited to work full-time shifts and management paid no health or other benefits to the work force. In Mexico, the food processing plants had no expensive environmental regulations to meet. There was no oversight of farming methods; so the locals who sold their crops to the factory used nearby river water to irrigate their chemically fertilized and toxically-sprayed crops. The nearby tannery and slaughterhouse dumped chemicals and animal remains into the river.

In Watsonville itself the unemployed workers had no redress. Unions found themselves ill-equipped to confront the relocation issue. In Irapuato the unions were corrupt and dealt with management, so the newly employed workers there also lacked means to protest the low wages and poor conditions. In both places wage labourers were experiencing the meaning of the new world order. This kind of transformation of the workplace and environment offers chilling prospects for the future, especially in the event that a NAFTA agreement is reached.

Immigrants with a business culture and education often find that the United States remains a land of opportunity and, once having taken advantage of the possibilities, fall into the familiar language of racism that has been part of US culture since the 17th Century. A pecking order based on class and nationality often develops.

A Korean man in New Jersey boasts of his ability to provide his children with private schooling, nice clothes, stereos, and a large house. His family moved from the 'slums' of northern Virginia, where he berated 'Those Vietnamese!'. 'Why are they here?' he shouted in his thick Korean accent. 'They don't work, they're dirty and they don't speak good English!'

One Mt. Pleasant resident held forth on the newly-arrived Salvadorans. Twenty years ago black men could find work washing dishes and doing day construction. Black women could clean houses and take care of white children. No more. 'The Salvadorans got it locked up. No wonder. They come here and take our jobs because they work for dirt wages and take all the shit the boss gives them. They live like pigs in a sty, seven to a room and can't even speak English.'

Raul and some of his Salvadoran co-workers at the Chinese restaurant in Alexandria, Virginia denounce their adopted home and talk nostalgically about how wonderful life was in San Miguel, El Salvador before the war, before they had to emigrate, illegally, to find work to support their families. They were lucky because they arrived in the 1980s, when jobs were plentiful.

For the Salvadorans: 'They [Afro-Americans] don't like to work hard. We have to work because our families down there [El Salvador] will starve if we don't send the money. Here there is work. There we had no work. no land, lots of war. When I make enough money I'll return and buy some good land and live like a king.'

The new immigrants are part of a diverse population of more than 15 million people of colour (counting Hispanics) who have arrived in the United States since 1965, a dramatic contrast with the relative trickle of Third World immigration during the first twenty years after World War II, a period marked by a racially and ideologically restrictive immigration policy, dominated by the McCarran-Walter Act. The McCarran-Walter Act established a preference system, 'to best preserve the cultural and sociological balance of the country.' The State Department would grant visas only to immigrants who had relatives living in the United States, provided they passed political loyalty tests. The Act restricted Southern and Eastern Europeans, Asians and Africans, on the presumption that they were less assimilable than Northern Europeans. Congress opened a few holes in the McCarran-Walter law by creating 'separate doorways' to allow into the United States anti-communist refugees from Eastern Europe in 1952.

These 'doorways' allowed the President some minor immigration compensation for his foreign policy setbacks. In contrast to many of the pro-Nazi and extreme right-wingers who entered under this programme, members of radical and working-class movements who had dominated US immigration before World War II were kept out. The Hungarian uprising of 1956 left thousands of US-inspired 'freedom fighters' in a precarious state until they were allowed in under emergency immigration provisions. The Cuban revolution of 1959 produced an exodus of refugees most of whom had two things in common: they were white and anti-communist. By 1970 more than 500,000 anti-communist Cubans had settled in the United States. The first waves of Cubans received warm welcomes in the United States, in contrast to the largely poorer and darker-skinned Marielitos of 1980.

The McCarran-Walter Act corresponded to a country still racially segregated by law. Immigration patterns changed colour lines during the days of the New Frontier and the Great Society. The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 repealed the national origins quota and facilitated family reunification by reserving three fourths of all new visas for family members wishing to join relatives residing in the United States. The Act was crafted to encourage a new round of European immigration, since most families in the United States had come from Europe. But it also benefitted residents of English-speaking territories in the Western Hemisphere and made new Asian migration more viable as well.

In the wake of the collapse of communism Congress made provisions to allow up to 700,000 skilled immigrants from Eastern Europe. The ex-

Soviet systems thus ended up bearing the cost of educating engineers and scientists who would ultimately migrate to the West. One of the effects of this influx of high tech immigrants was to drive down salaries of US technicians. Indeed, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of East European specialists coincided with the recession of 1990 and exacerbated the already difficult employment situation in certain high tech industries. IBM, once the company that crowed about its no layoffs policy, dropped tens of thousands of its employees in the early 1990s, many of them engineers and high-skilled professionals.

President Bush carefully avoided linking the new immigration policy with the layoffs that were occurring. In his new world order, 'immigration is not just a link to America's past, it is also a bridge to America's future,' Bush said as he signed the Immigration Act of 1990, allowing major increases in the number of immigrants each year. The bill, President Bush said, puts 'an end to the kind of political litmus test that might have excluded even some of the heroes of the Eastern European revolution of 1989.' Under the law, new immigration of skilled workers – engineers, architects, doctors, etc. – will increase by 400,000 the number of immigrants who will be accepted from 1990 through 1993, reaching a total of 2.1 million. The only 'defectors' still welcomed and aided are Cubans who are still considered political refugees, fleeing from Communism.

But new immigration policy doesn't mean erasing borders. Quite the contrary. In Western Europe and the United States, the welcome mats in the 1990s are reserved for the rich and skilled. Even Canada, long one of the freest of nations on the immigration question, tightened its restrictions on non-skilled foreigners.

The world's workers and the nature of their work

Massive uprooting of people has been an on-going process for centuries as capital continues to try to rationalise its quest for the local labour force on a global scale. But the crisis nature of Cold War ideology shrouded this process underneath ideological wrappings. It also masked a crisis of more durable proportion caused by the uprooting of tens of millions of people. Families, villages, towns and entire cities were altered or relocated. By 1990, migrating labourers abounded in the United States and the Caribbean Basin, Europe and the Persian Gulf. During the 1990 Gulf War hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other Emirates became displaced workers when their jobs were adversely affected by the war. Indeed, Indian brain surgeons and ditch diggers alike had maintained Kuwaiti society from top down. Where the labour market beckoned, workers arrived, the United States being the most attractive place. In turn, the economies of the

labour-exporting countries became dependent on the earning from their new export.

Maria from El Salvador now lives in suburban Washington, D.C. where her mistress has taught her how to operate the automatic dish washer, while the mistress herself plants flower bulbs in her manicured garden. Before the war in El Salvador, Maria planted flowers and corn and fed the animals on her small plot. The course of the war in the 1980s forced Maria's family off their land. In San Salvador, the capital city, swollen by refugees from the countryside, some of Maria's relatives found work. But her family in the poor urban barrio depends on her \$300 a month remittance. They write to her that she has made the difference in their lives between suffering and minimal comfort. In the evening, Maria often babysits and does day end household chores before going off to her room where sometimes she weeps from loneliness.

Ninoy stoops to pluck the berries from the California ranch controlled by a trans-national company in Europe. Like Maria, he also grew up on his family farm, where generations of the Ramos had lived until they were forced to move. Like his Salvadoran counterparts, Ninoy sends his monthly remittance to the house in the Manila slum where his family now resides. He does not write to them about his crooked back, a result of bending over day after day.

In December, 1992, outside of a suburban Washington, D.C. bowling alley, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan and Guatemalan men waited to pick up Christmas day jobs until the alley's owner got a judge to prohibit the men from gathering. 'It was like an axe falling on me,' said one of the prospective labourers when a policeman shooed him away. 'This was supposed to be the land of opportunity, but there's nothing but cold here.'

In New York City, **Caridad** found work sewing buttons on blue jeans in a dusty garment centre factory. She earned \$6.00 an hour, provided she met the daily quota. By skimping and scraping, not eating lunch, sharing a room with three other women and depriving herself of all but bare necessities, she not only survived but managed to send a monthly cheque of \$250 to her family in Nicaragua. One day in late 1991 she arrived for work, but the factory door was shut. On it was a sign in English only that one of her fellow sewers finally interpreted. 'CLOSED. NO MORE WORK.'

In the late 1980s and early 1990s scores of textile factories owned by US entrepreneurs opened in Honduras and El Salvador, some of them encouraged by US Embassy staff. The stitchers made \$.40cents an hour doing the same work that **Caridad** performed for \$6.00. Eventually, **Caridad** and some of the other women who once made jeans found other work in the New York area, baby sitting, house cleaning or making beds in hotels. Some, however, took a quicker route to an income and became prostitutes or drug dealers, parts of criminal gangs of their own countrymen.

In 1990, San Francisco, California police arrested an eighteen year old Salvadoran man – we'll call him Jesus Diaz – on a downtown street for selling rocks of crack cocaine. The young man spoke almost no English and reported that he had come to the United States only four weeks prior to his arrest to find work. His native village had been partly destroyed by the decade-long war and he later admitted that he was not anxious to do military service in El Salvador. But he had sought work in several California cities to no avail. Indeed, he discovered that hundreds of Salvadoran men waited on street corners in hope of being hired – but on most days the pick-up truck that carried men to do daily yard work or farm work did not arrive.

As the police interrogation proceeded, the young man refused to name those who recruited him, pleaded guilty to a charge of selling crack and received a three year prison sentence. Police estimated that in the two weeks he hung out on the busy street he sold upwards of \$10,000 worth of the illegal drug. A veteran police sergeant said that there were hundreds of Jesus Diazes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area and other cities who could not find work and were therefore easily recruited to sell drugs.

The deal Jesus made was that if caught he would serve the three year sentence, would be given \$2,000 as long as Jesus kept his lips sealed about the names of his recruiters, Salvadoran army veterans from his home town.

Across the Bay, in Oakland, California police investigated the stabbing death of a newly arrived Mexican youth by a Cambodian teenager. Both belonged to rival gangs that were fighting over control of a piece of territory – a street corner, in this instance. In Long Beach, California Mexican and Cambodians blazed away at each others' homes with sub-machine guns. In New York City Vietnamese and Chinese gangs blew each other away in Chinatown.

In other cities blacks are pitted against Hispanics, Asians against blacks or sometimes one ethnic or racial group declares war on rival factions. These gang wars or street wars to control a corner, a block or a **neighbourhood** are based on the economic reality of global migration in the 1990s. It is not only true in the United States but in Germany and other European nations as well.

The increase in crime in the United States over the past two decades is partly related to the fact that the economy and social order is ill-equipped to integrate the numbers of immigrants into the legal economy. Drugs and its concomitant partner, gun-running, inevitably produce a crime ladder, one which impacts on the middle class. Just as dealing in illegal drugs requires gunmen, so too does it beget other kinds of law breaking. On the other side, there are crazed crack addicts who rob and sometimes kill for one rock. And the immigrants involved often target one another. The Cambodians win a corner from the Mexicans not because they hate Mexicans, but so that they can control drug traffic, gambling and **prostitu-**

tion. At one side there are groups like the 'Jamaican posses', bands of poor youth who come to the United States or Canada as security agents for drug dealers, and who like their Columbian counterparts, develop a psychopathology of murder as a tool of intimidation.

The IMF and World Bank 'development'

For much of the developing world the 1980s were marked by budgetary rule by the IMF. Economists from the Fund practically eliminated spending on health, education and social services. The IMF demanded that borrowing countries eliminate subsidies for food staples, remove protection for local crops, devalue local currencies and in all ways reduce labour costs, under the pretext that such conditions would be irresistible to foreign investors.

By being forced, bribed or cajoled into accepting the IMF-World Bank premise, that the state apparatus was a wasteful impediment to development, third world governments, one by one, delegitimized the very core of their development alternative. Instead of having the state provide some cushion for the most desperate segment, the multilateral agency intellectuals insisted that government officials had to trust in the **equilibrium-seeking** 'free' labour market, so that the longer-run national good could be pursued. The effect of two decades of those development policies was to destroy national autonomy in most third world nations by eviscerating their national budgets.

The IMF formula pushed Third World governments initially to integrate themselves into the world economy as exporters of cheap agricultural and manufactured goods, and labour. Third World nations competed against each other to attract foreign capital by reducing wages and offering **tax- and regulation-free** environments.

When the price of export commodities dropped or failed to keep pace with imports – which occurred in predictable cycles – the non-oil producing South became ever more dependent on exporting their most abundant commodity: labour. Some hard-pressed countries found a means not of developing, but at least surviving by exporting labour and using the remittances as a form of catastrophic national economic insurance.

'Haiti's long term future will be urban,' a 1983 World Bank report concluded about that poor country's population movements. 'This migration will sustain the development of assembly industries, cottage industries and other urban, labour-intensive activities consistent with an export-led growth.' What the Bank report omitted was that the act of transforming rural people into migrant wage labourers in their home country was also a step toward making them into immigrant labour for the United States.

Similarly, in nearby Jamaica the multilateral lending institutions prevailed in a struggle to force the Jamaican government to discard notions of

self-sufficiency in favour of the export oriented growth pattern. In the 1970s, Prime Minister Michael **Manley** had encouraged unemployed slum-dwellers from Kingston and other over populated urban centres to take up subsistence farming by offering small plots and other services. **Manley** also tried to limit imports, while simultaneously building infrastructure in health, education and roads. These policies, while supported by the Jamaican electorate, did not resound happily in the international lending community.

After his 1976 re-election, as bauxite prices dropped, depreciating Jamaica's revenues, **Manley** confronted Jamaica's balance of payments problem. The IMF loan package effectively reversed the very programmes on which he had won his election and re-election. By 1979 **Manley** and his Party felt compelled to reject the IMF solution as incompatible with the development programme he had pledged to fulfil. **Manley** lost his 1980 re-election bid to Edward Seaga who pledged a supply side solution for Jamaica's woes. Despite support and aid from President Reagan and David Rockefeller, massive loan infusions from the multilateral agencies and bilateral aid from the United States, all totalling over \$4 billion, Seaga's Jamaica did not attract significant amounts of private capital and its export-oriented strategy failed to provide the necessary income to make its economy viable.

When Seaga left office in 1989 Jamaica's debt had risen to \$10 billion (for a population of 2.2 million) and its balance of payments situation had worsened. The supply-side advocate discovered that if even a semblance of democracy exists the Prime Minister's movement in bringing drastic monetarist reforms is curtailed by constituent pressures. So, Jamaican unions who helped elect Seaga could not be disregarded after his election unless Seaga was willing and able to turn toward military or police rule.

The result of Jamaica's inability to recover from its downward cycle has meant that Jamaicans continued to leave the island in large numbers for the United States, Canada and Great Britain. More Jamaicans live abroad than on the island. This safety valve probably helped stem the outbreak of violent rebellion as it did on neighbouring islands where similar conditions prevailed and the US government allowed for some escape clause.

New industries did spring up in the Caribbean region, but mostly in so-called 'free enterprise zones'. In Kingston and other island capitals young women, recently arrived from the countryside, laboured in dim light and heavy air over sewing machines or semi-conductor tools. These women frequently travel to other Caribbean islands, following the trail of the factories which close down without notice and relocate on other islands even at the vaguest hint that a union organiser was nearby or that the government wanted to regulate health or safety features.

Throughout Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, young women forced from their farms and villages found work at small parts electronics

assembly, textile manufacturing, apparel, toys and other products for Western markets. Besides reducing labour costs, foreign employers sought young women in patriarchal societies because they were turned quickly into obedient, disciplined and adept performers of tedious jobs. The young women and girls, without the opportunity to join unions, had no vent for grievances about low wages or poor work conditions without the risk of being fired.

The superintendent of a Maquiladora electronics plant in Ciudad Juarez, on the US Mexican border, explains: 'We like to hire girls who don't have too much experience because they aren't spoiled. We shape them to our needs by appealing to their feminine sensibilities. Then you can trust they won't fly off the handle, making unrealistic demands or joining unions. We like to think of our company as a family where everyone knows their duties.'

The role of US culture in stimulating labour migration

If wars and IMF-designed economic policies were in and of themselves insufficient to promote a steady flow of labour from the Third World, the US culture industry provided additional incentive. Included among the varied meanings of freedom was the right of US capital to penetrate other countries' markets. In this vein, entertainment conglomerates placed their technically superior TV shows, slick advertisements and other shiny pieces of commercial culture into Third World homes and public theatres.

With the distribution of radio and television sets throughout the Third World, western culture arrived en masse in the form of entertainment. The magical qualities of the hi tech programmes and special effects of the Hollywood films offered more than an evening's diversion or vicarious sensations: inside each show there was etched an implicit definition of the beautiful, i.e. the good. Virtue and nobility were identified with the American way of life. The deliberate and organic life style of the village became implicitly boring and therefore inferior.

Inherent in the form and content of Hollywood movies and network television shows is the idealised American way of life – from sexual behaviour through dress and car fashions to family interaction. The appearance of incredible affluence stands out as the invariable component in the perfectly produced episodes of police and family dramas and inane sitcoms. This message became crudely translated to mean that in America there continues to exist the great Horatio Alger possibilities, the myth of **Anyman** as potential millionaire – of super hero or great lover – available only in the land of the free.

The images bespoke of possibilities that the majority of the world's people could never attain – the two car, middle class family living in a

suburban split level with a boat mounted on a trailer and all three kids going to Grade A universities.

Hollywood and US television productions assume fashion as gospel, in clothes, gadgets and diet. In turn, the imported culture raised demand among Third World middle and even working classes for imported food, consumer goods and entertainment. The seed of yearning was planted: big city life in America was exciting, if not always safe.

The results of this three-way intervention – war, development and technology – in Third World societies helped to forge a new set of social, political and economic ties between the United States and nations of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. The anti-communist idiom was like the seed cover for the kernel of US exports: 'freedom' to join the growing pool of migrant wage-labourers – freedom from all previous obligations.

The material results of 'development' left little of permanent value in scores of countries. But considerable damage was done. Dams diverted rivers, often to the disparagement of the surrounding farmland and the larger environment. In some areas people starved or had to move because development projects depleted their trees and water. Most of the major infrastructural projects brought labour forces from one place to another, wasted resources and destroyed the environment. Or, the projects simply remained unfinished.

Often, when a dam or bridge was built or the project ran out of money, the recently recruited labour was left unemployed and without benefits. Once unemployed, the worker fell from the column of suffering to the column of disaster. Forced to leave the country of birth or seek work in criminal sectors, the former peasant had unknowingly joined the mobile work force of the world.

He or she could not look to reformist governments or progressive labour unions to redress grievances or provide sustenance. By the late 1960s and into the 1970s reformers were replaced by generals who, in the name of order and stability, dropped notions of social equity from the official vocabulary and unabashedly obeyed the orders of the giant lending institutions. Repressive military regimes destroyed or weakened labour unions. So, already low wages dropped lower, and consequently reduced the socially necessary cost of labour.

This story of changing patterns of world labour over the last forty-five years has now become apparent as the Cold War vocabulary changes into rhetoric of 'new world orders' to justify interventionism. Despite its epic lack of success by the middle 1980s, the principles of 'free market' and 'free trade' had become axiomatic in most Third World state policy. This meant that Third World labour would remain cheap and abundant at the core and the periphery and that Third World land and resources would be available to any bidder. The notion of substantive human rights had all but disappeared from official language. Ironically, the words freedom and **pros-**

perity were substituted for rights, to justify economically beneficial arrangements for global capital.

Conclusion

When historians study the Cold War in future generations they may conclude that the movement of wealth from the South to the North, which includes the movement of labour, was one of the understudied dynamic processes of the period. Just as the post-World War II era, through the late 1960s, saw the ascendancy of human rights as a universal doctrine that allowed labourers and the poor to make claims for justice and equity, so did the era of the 1980s see the reassertion of the strength of capital, under the euphemism of freedom. By the 1990s, terms such as labour rights in policy and business circles became the equivalent of mating with alien species.

The gains western labour made during the 1960s in wages, benefits and other 'expenses' that capital was forced to pay, were reduced beginning in the late 1970s and then further cut in the 1980s. What the Reagan and Thatcher 'revolutions' accomplished was precisely the reduction of the socially necessary costs of maintaining and reproducing a labour force.

This was but the last stage of a process that involved the virtual destruction of the world's peasantry. Although the elimination of the peasant as the basic provider of the world's food did not begin in the post-war period, in the Third World it made its most epic moves in that era. The human consequence of this transformation is material for the greatest human tragic drama of the end of this century.

The combined push of bank and corporate-based development, **organised** by the IMF and World Bank, the unending wars fought mostly under the anti-communist ideological umbrella and the aggressive push of US technology and culture acted as a triple force for change in the Third World. By 1990 the Third World population with some exceptions had become a global labour force without even symbolic protection. Those aspiring for independence and social justice had to redefine strategies. When Soviet leaders announced they would no longer play Cold War – that is, behave as if they were a socialist super power competing with the capitalist United States for the great battle over social systems – the Third World was deprived of the one country that had been willing to write the equivalent of insurance policies for some revolutions, and act as arms and fuel supplier for others. Socialism no longer stood as a social system, backed by a major power, to threaten the reign of capitalism – except as an idea, and then one that had been discredited in the major media and through the cultural apparatus of the West.

From Washington, triumphant language obscured the reality of the phenomenon that had occurred. 'Freedom' in the former Soviet Union

and Eastern Europe meant increased suffering for the vast majority along with the transplanting of institutions of free speech and politics that translated in reality into parliamentary bickering and procedural confusion. Capitalism's 'victory' in 1990 did not materialise into what members of Solidarity in Poland had thought of for the decade of the 1980s as justice.

The end of the Cold War initiated the era in which capital could dictate its terms as never before to the world's labour supply and claim nearly unimpeded access to much of the world's resources. The removal of the Soviet Union from the arena of international competition meant the powerlessness of international labour – until new forms of resistance consolidate.

One of the ironies of the period was the ambiguity of national borders. On the one hand, capital and labour flowed across them with few obstacles. On the other hand, people deemed to be aliens – not included in the needed labour flow – became feared enemies who would deprive the indigenous work force of jobs and contaminate the blood of the body politic.

Those people allowed, if not forced, to pick and package the food supplies for tens of millions of US and European households were also seen as undesirable residents. The boundary that provided no impediment for the food to enter from Mexico to the United States bore a 'keep out' sign for those Mexican labourers deemed unnecessary.

No longer do border guards shoot people as they come from former communist countries into the West; the symbolic dividing line has vanished. In the 1990s, walls have lost their ideological disguises, but have acquired racial and ethnic spikes that promise to grow more menacing. In 1992 1.8 million immigrants came to the United States, 'far too many for us to absorb,' complained an INS official. 'And if this keeps going there will be a crisis.'

Indeed, neither the economic nor social structures of the United States and the other advanced countries can adjust to the constant influx of low wage workers of different colours and ethnic backgrounds. There is little reference in official addresses to the welcoming greeting given by the Statue of Liberty, but at the same time Western economies gear up for higher 'productivity', which amounts to lowering wages while increasing the amount each worker produces – a job ideally suited for the world's migrating labour force since they are the neediest and most unprotected of all workers. All this portends ethnic and racial strife amidst class conflict as the grim formula for the future.