



# Agitate

## Supplement

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### THINKING DIFFERENTLY ABOUT IMMIGRATION

#### The Right of Free Movement

Though not enumerated in the Bill of Rights, the right of people to move freely is a foundational element to the pursuit of happiness. This tradition is understood within the boundaries of most nations that allow their citizens the right to travel. In the United States, citizens can cross state boundaries at whim, enter cities and communities without molestation (unless, of course they are homeless citizens, but that's another issue). We recognize that sometimes, pursuing opportunity may be a physical act of moving from one place to another.

But the right of free movement as practiced is yet another instance in which the wealthy have more rights than the poor. It is a small matter for people of means, even relatively modest means, to purchase the necessary credentials to travel across international borders. However, this is not the case among the poor. Destitute Mexicans do not have the resources to purchase such credentials and usually lack the bureaucratic know-how to untangle the red tape for getting a visa.

So walls are really only used to restrict the movement of the poor. Walls are a tool of class warfare, not a tool of security. The Mexican Wall (and guns) makes it more difficult for the poor in Mexico to pursue economic opportunity while at the same time making it easier for the poor in both countries to be exploited. It also becomes more difficult for poor people to resist oppression, for walls separate peoples from each other and interfere with their ability to pursue common interests.

#### A Radical Idea

"So, are you proposing that we just allow Mexicans to come and go freely into the United States?" I was asked. The answer is yes. When we recognize that rights, like the right to

speak and the right to move, exist then we must accept that they exist for all people, not just Americans...not just wealthy Americans. If trade can be free to follow its interests, why shouldn't people?

"But then we'll be inundated with the poor from all over the world?" Perhaps. But we will also be inundated with people who had courage and drive enough to cross deserts and rough seas with their families for the hopes of achieving a better life. I say America needs more such people, not less! Where people can move freely it would become difficult to maintain the systems of economic and political oppression that now exist.

In case you're inclined to think that this is just far-left, liberal clap-trap, there is historic precedent. The European Union has, for many years now, recognized the rights of member citizens to travel freely throughout the Union. This isn't exactly the kind of broad humanism I have in mind, but it is a step in the right direction.

It will mean, however, that our politicians, under constant pressure from free peoples, will be forced to face the real issues of immigration, not the symptoms. Immigration is the result of economic and political stratification. For instance, the average worker in Mexico makes 1/10<sup>th</sup> what his contemporary in the United States makes.

(CIS) Immigration is a symptom of oppressive inequalities on a national and global scale. Perhaps our policies, energies and money should be directed at leveling the playing field for all human beings, regardless of nationality. When people are content, they have no desire to move.

Currently, our policies are directed at maintaining and perpetuating class inequalities. International treaties like NAFTA, CAFTA and GATT were sold to us as a way of bringing greater prosperity to all people of the Americas. Of course few really believed this; these treaties were opposed by the vast majority of the people of all affected nations. (globalexchange.org) Regardless, they were approved over our heads and, as expected, the poor remain poor, wealth disparities continue (en Breve: World Bank 1/05) and more and more people are displaced in desperation.

And why not? As it stands our power elite have walls and guns to protect their interests. Policies that promote the greater good of all people are off the table for discussion, and will remain off the table so long as walls and guns are allowed to stand.

### A New Paradigm

Why is the essay above so radical? Why is it that the contents of this issue of Agitate will, almost certainly, not be represented in the debate on immigration? Those who suggest such *nonsense* as throwing open the borders and respecting the right of individuals to travel freely are looked at as far-left wackos with no sense whatsoever.

Indeed, what is required to perpetuate this policy initiative is a dramatic paradigm change away from a core principle of almost all global cultures. What is proposed this month is a radical refutation of **Nationalism**, the establishment of personal identity based on national origin, and the belief that one's nation has special, even superior characteristics that no other nation has.

It is **Nationalism** that makes us believe that establish political boundaries have any legitimacy at all. It is **Nationalism** that brings us to revile and even fear those who don't respect these boundaries. It is **Nationalism** that encourages us to spend billions of dollars and countless man-hours defending these boundaries.

It is easy to assume that human beings are, by nature, **Nationalistic**. The philosophy of **Nationalism** has been a virtually unchallenged truism in America for over a hundred years. But **Nationalism** is not a truism, it is a social construct created by institutions for the purpose of solidifying those institutions within a national spectrum.

Corporate America has long since turned its back on **Nationalism**. Major corporations are transnational in their agenda and infrastructure. Why shouldn't everyone else be able to pursue their interests in the global market as freely as our largest corporations? What is proposed here is a transnationalism for the common man. This essay proposes a recognition of the rights of all people, not based on nation of origin, but rather by the birthright of humanity.

**Push and Pull Factors**  
People don't just arbitrarily choose to leave their homes and their cultures. Uprooting oneself from everything that one knows and loves, including being separated from beloved family members, is not for the weak hearted. Almost always, such a decision is the result of desperation. In the United States we tend to show favoritism from those fleeing from political oppression, like refugees from Cuba, but we give little credence to those fleeing economic oppression, like perpetual poverty and labor exploitation. Such factors push millions of Mexicans to emigrate from their homes every year. But Mexicans are not preserved from political oppression any more than are Cubans. According to Amnesty International, "The flaws in Mexico's judicial system mean that arbitrary torture, unfair trials and impunity are systematic." (amnesty.org 2/7/07) If American politicians are really interested in doing something to stem the tide of Mexican immigrants crossing the border, then an assessment of how US policies and international agreements are exacerbating economic and political oppression there is necessary. Without such a focus it is obvious that maintaining elite privilege and the status quo is more important than actually resolving the immigration problem.

An editorial in *The Nation* (June 11, 2007) describes the current legislation on immigration reform as a "raw deal." Yes, it does allow currently undocumented immigrants the "right" to continue to scrub our floors, pick our crops and clean our toilets, but they'll have to pay \$5000 in fines to do so. In the meantime, a point program would be established that gives higher points to legal immigrants with higher levels of education, work experience and English competency—all things related to higher socioeconomic status. So, as proposed, the current legislation would create a permanent underclass of menial labor while privileging the upper class with greater rights. Imagine that!

## Take Action

Organizations committed to opening the borders are rare, however, a quick on-line search indicates that this paradigm is out there. Organizations as diverse as the Libertarian Future of Freedom Foundation ([www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)) to the Communist Party of the USA ([www.cpusa.org](http://www.cpusa.org)) have expressed a desire for open borders. Agitate would like to gather links from people and organizations that support the freedom of travel and movement. Please forward such links to [agitate@andosciasociology.net](mailto:agitate@andosciasociology.net), and let's get the discussion started. Type "Open Borders" in the subject box.

Of course, it's always a good idea to let your representatives know what you are thinking. See the activism page for a reference to government contact information.

You can also contact the ACLU Immigrant Rights Project ([www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)) as well as the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund ([www.maldef.org](http://www.maldef.org)). These groups do not necessarily advocate for open borders, but they do support the rights of immigrants.

