

## The Immigration Debate

# Politics of Class and Corporations

By Tom Barry | August 9, 2005

*(This is the second in a series of reports by the IRC Americas program that examine the political forces shaping the immigration debate in the United States. All recent immigration policy reports are found at: <http://americas.irc-online.org/index/immig/index.php>.)*

Stark divides mark the American political landscape. Red vs. blue states, the culture war, and the patriots vs. the peaceniks, to say nothing of the deepening economic divides between rich and poor, with the middle class beset with debt and worries about the future. Despite these deep divides, the aphorism that politics makes strange bedfellows holds true—especially in the intensifying debate about immigration.

Organized labor, human rights advocates, the *Wall Street Journal*, and Corporate America find themselves in bed together in the immigration debate—not only often sharing views about the benefits of immigration flows but also connected through pro-immigration organizations. At the same time, many leftists find that they have more in common with the anti-corporate, pro-worker discourse of anti-immigrant figures like Pat Buchanan than liberals and progressives who avoid talking class politics.

The political left usually can be counted on to criticize the dominant domestic and foreign policy agenda as representing the interests of corporations over workers and poor communities. Complaints about the downward pressure on wages and the corporate practice of using cheap labor to divide the workforce typically have had a left-wing provenance. In the immigration debate, however, the politics of class and corporations has muddled traditional political lines.

Any way you look at the immigration debate—from the right or the left, liberal or conservative, working class or corporate capitalist—the clash over immigration policy is reconfiguring the political landscape. A *Wall Street Journal* article titled “Borderline Republicans” notes how immigration restrictionist forces on the right are fracturing the Republican Party. Once again, according to this voice of big business, liberals are to blame. Republican restrictionists “have teamed up with radical greens and zero-population-growth-niks to intimidate and defeat other Republicans willing to defend immigration.” The *Wall Street Journal* warns: “It behooves GOP restrictionists to better understand their new bedfellows.”<sup>1</sup>

Right-wing critics of U.S. immigration and border control policies have, until recently, been voices in the

political wilderness, consigned to the far margins of both political parties. Today, however, they have pushed their way into the center of a heated political debate about immigration policy.

Listening to Lou Dobbs and his guests hammer the “Broken Borders” theme night after night on CNN, it’s clear that the populist right, fear-mongers, and cultural nationalists have succeeded in establishing the dominant frameworks for the exploding immigration debate. Equally apparent is that the current immigration debate has sidelined immigrant advocates. Especially when the issue is jobs and wage levels, pro-immigration groups increasingly find themselves fumbling for credible arguments to counter the rising backlash against immigrants.

“Not only do illegal aliens cost the nation tens of billions of dollars in social services,” says Dobbs, “but they depress wages for American citizens. American business is exploiting cheap labor and paradoxically doing so with the blessing of national unions.”<sup>2</sup>

Many of the immigration restrictionist groups have adopted the term “open borders lobby” to describe supporters of liberal immigration policies. Included in this lobby, according to anti-immigration groups, is the Bush administration itself. Carrying Capacity Network, a nationalist environmental organization, maintains that the open borders lobby is “powered by well-funded special interest groups and certain big business lobbyists.”<sup>3</sup>

Mark Krikorian, who heads the influential anti-immigration Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), states, “The high-immigration Right works hand-in-glove with the anti-American Left.” Like many anti-immigration groups, CIS believes that Corporate America and leftists share a



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common agenda of open borders, albeit for different reasons.<sup>4</sup>

## Class Analysis—from the Right

Anti-free trade progressives and unions can take credit for introducing the issue of outsourcing labor and production. Lately, however, it's the right-wing populists and immigration restrictionists who have seized on the outsourcing issue, characterizing the corporate practice as an insult to hard-working Americans and the nation itself. For many anti-immigration groups, the deepening reliance on a foreign-born workforce—both in foreign outsourcing or the employment at home of illegal, legalized, or guestworker immigrants—underscores their argument that corporations and pro-immigration advocates are in cahoots to shaft native-born U.S. workers.

As implausible as it may seem to those with a stereotyped view of the right wing, the immigration restrictionists have injected class analysis and critiques of Corporate America into the center of the 21st century immigration debate in the United States.

While pro-immigration groups focus their defense of workers on the plight of immigrant workers—a strategy that gains them few converts and tends to alienate them from legal workers—immigration restrictionist groups have positioned themselves as the champions of U.S. labor.

For decades, the classic argument of pro-immigration groups and immigrant advocates has been, as President Bush stated when announcing his guestworker/legalization plan in late December, that “there are some jobs in America that Americans won’t do and others are unwilling to do.”<sup>5</sup> A growing sector in the restrictionist movement dismisses this as just another “open borders” position that doesn’t reflect the harsh reality of domestic economic and social conditions.

Immigration restrictionist groups like NumbersUSA note that illegal immigrants actually fill the job slots—in

construction, as janitors, in meatpacking, poultry plants, etc.—that not long ago offered a living wage, benefits, and were often unionized. In his book, *The Case Against Immigration*, NumbersUSA president Roy Beck argues that legal and illegal immigration has been a key factor in the deterioration of those jobs.

According to NumbersUSA, “The 500% increase in immigration numbers has played an integral part in destroying middle-class occupations and turning them into minimum-wage jobs.” Beck contends that liberal immigration policy has reduced economic opportunity for black Americans, deepened the poverty of farm workers, destroyed the health of poultry plant employees, and turned many construction, manufacturing, and service jobs into “work Americans won’t do.”<sup>6</sup> NumbersUSA helped found the Coalition for the Future American Worker. Both organizations vehemently oppose visas for high-tech immigrant workers.

NumbersUSA charges that the new pro-immigration policies adopted by the AFL-CIO under President John Sweeny and by other U.S. labor unions that organize immigrant workers may be providing a short-term boost to organized labor but are undermining the overall position of the U.S. workforce.<sup>7</sup>

Left-of-center reporters and analysts have, of course, also noted this phenomenon, yet it’s the immigration restrictionist groups that have successfully turned this common observation into a powerful argument for aggressively nationalistic immigration reform.

As a result, pro-immigration advocates have recently begun to modify their standard argument on the jobs issue. Instead of contending that immigrants take jobs that other U.S. residents don’t want because of the lowly nature of the job or because there are not enough documented residents to meet the labor demand, the pro-immigration camp is now offering a more sophisticated labor argument.

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For the last three decades or more, pro-immigration voices made the case that immigrants did not constitute a threat to native workers because they took jobs, such as field hands, roofers, and dishwashers in restaurants, that U.S. citizens no longer wanted because of the low wages and poor working conditions associated with such low-skilled work. But the increasing presence of immigrants in a wide range of job sectors—from services and agriculture to traditional and high-tech industries—dominated until the last couple of decades by citizen workers has undermined the traditional pro-immigration arguments.

In the new context of economic globalization and of increased interest in organizing immigrant workforces, immigration advocates have advanced a set of revised pro-immigration arguments. Couched in pro-worker terms, these arguments appeal mostly to the immigrant workforce and have thus far failed to persuade the U.S. workforce at large.

## **Workers of the Global Economy Unite!**

Organized labor and other pro-immigration sectors now argue that immigrants take jobs that U.S. citizens don't want not because they are undignified jobs, but because these jobs pay unlivable wages and provide no benefits. What's necessary, according to pro-immigration groups, is that all workers, whether citizens or not, join together to demand livable wages, better working conditions, and a basic benefit package. Rather than join with immigration foes in demanding that borders be sealed and all undocumented workers be deported, pro-immigration and immigrant groups now argue that the only way to stop the downward pressure on wages and working conditions is to guarantee the rights of all workers to organize and fight for fair compensation for their labor.

"In a global economy, in which employers pit workers against each other, the fate of both native-born workers and immigrant workers are linked," wrote James Parks in the AFL-CIO magazine. "Employers that try to exploit

immigrant workers are the same ones that fight all workers' rights. The most effective way to counter the strength and financial resources of exploitative employers is through a strong union movement that includes all workers, regardless of where they were born, their race, gender, or sexual orientation."<sup>8</sup>

This view represents a change from past positions. Until the 1990s, organized labor numbered among the leading anti-immigrant forces. Immigrant workers were considered "scabs" who took work from legal workers, even by such largely Latino unions as the United Farm Workers.

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As an *Arizona Republic* report on immigration issues recalled, "Cesar Chavez, a labor leader intent on protecting union membership, was as effective a surrogate for the INS as ever existed. Indeed, Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union he headed routinely reported, to the INS, for deportation, suspected illegal immigrants who served as strikebreakers or refused to unionize."<sup>9</sup> Bert Corona, founder of the bracero advocacy group Hermandad Mexicana, repeatedly criticized Chavez and the UFW during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s for advocating INS (Immigration & Naturalization Service) roundups and deportation of illegal workers in California.<sup>10</sup>

Anti-immigration groups frequently point out the labor movement's history in supporting anti-immigration policy reform. Vernon Briggs, a labor history scholar associated with the Center for Immigration Studies writes, "At every juncture, and with no exception prior to the 1980s, the union movement either directly instigated or strongly supported every legislative initiative enacted by Congress to restrict immigration and to enforce its policy provisions."<sup>11</sup>

Today, the AFL-CIO has changed sides in the face-off between anti- and pro-immigration groups and embraced immigrant organizing as the future of organized labor. To a large extent, the AFL-CIO and U.S. unions have accepted that they stand little chance of making significant inroads or even halting the decline of unionization in

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what remains of the industrial base that employs citizen workers. Instead, they have focused new organizing drives on manufacturing and service industries with large immigrant bases.

AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson recently affirmed this turnabout in perspective: “The fact that millions of immigrant workers in our economy are forced to accept low wages, no benefits, and outrageous working conditions, is something that negatively affects us all. For these reasons we must push for a strong blanket standard of treatment that will not make exceptions and that will benefit the middle-class as a whole.”<sup>12</sup>

Many see this as a return to labor’s early roots when unions focused on organizing the immigrant workforce that came to America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—a time when unions, especially textile workers, were largely ethnic groupings. Early in this century, the United Auto Workers and United Steel Workers reached out to the workers who were first and second generation immigrants from Ireland, southern, and eastern Europe. “In many ways, the new AFL-CIO immigration policy signals a return of the union movement to its historical roots,” wrote Parks, explaining the AFL-CIO’s new immigration policy, “The union movement was formed by mainly European immigrants seeking a better life. Immigrant workers were in the forefront of important early battles for workers’ rights, such as the Haymarket Square explosion in 1886, which led to the eight-hour workday.”<sup>13</sup>

Today, the fastest growing constituencies for organized labor are once again immigrants. Both legal and illegal immigrants have found protection and support from unions such as the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE), and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU)—labor unions that are organizing service workers in hotels, restaurant chains, retail chains, and office buildings

across America. These unions, especially HERE and SEIU, were at the forefront of the fight in the late 1990s to reverse the AFL-CIO’s anti-immigrant policies.<sup>14</sup>

The AFL-CIO now has a policy statement that makes its new position clear: “The AFL-CIO proudly stands on the side of immigrant workers ... A broad legalization program providing permanent residence status, rather than a new guestworker program, should be the focus of our efforts.”<sup>15</sup>

“We have long called for an end to immigrant worker exploitation and for reform of our nation’s broken immigration system,” states the AFL-CIO, adding that its “core principles remain unchanged,” including the following:

- “All workers, regardless of their country of origin or immigration status, must have effective, credible, and enforceable labor rights;
- “U.S. immigration laws must be reformed in a comprehensive manner that gives undocumented workers a path to citizenship, and which removes the current incentives to exploit the undocumented;
- “Labor and business should work together to design mechanisms to meet the legitimate needs for new workers without compromising the rights and opportunities of current workers.”<sup>16</sup>

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According to AFL-CIO president John Sweeny, “Immigration reform must provide a certain path to legalization for workers from around the world who are already living and working in the United States; repeal and replace employer sanctions with stiffer penalties for employers who take advantage of workers’ immigration status to exploit them and undermine labor protections for all workers; reform, not expand, temporary worker programs; and reform the permanent immigration system so that those who want to reunite with their families and play by the rules are not penalized by unconscionably long waiting periods.”<sup>17</sup>

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But the new arguments come late in the quickly evolving immigration debate, and unions and immigrant advocacy groups haven't managed to convince broad sectors of the U.S. working class that its future lies in cross-border worker unity, rather than an "us vs. them" attack on immigrant workers. Meanwhile the populist, class-based terms employed by the anti-immigration voices and echoed by the mainstream press have been hugely successful in portraying immigrants as the scapegoat of labor woes.

NumbersUSA and the Center for Immigration Studies cite classic supply-and-demand economic principles to argue that the bounty of desperate foreign-born workers has created a demand-side political economy—one in which businesses can easily break unions, pre-empt union organizing, and demand that employees work for low wages, no overtime pay, and no benefits. All the while, the businesses that exploit this supply of cheap labor are increasing their productivity and profit margins.

Moreover, the linkage between labor's relatively new pro-immigration stance and what's identified as the "pro-immigrant" movement is still weak. While their rhetoric places restrictionists squarely on the side of U.S. native workers (in discourse at least), the immigrant rights and organizing groups identify themselves as pro-immigrant rather than pro-worker or pro-American. This view is based on a belief in universal human rights and while necessary and laudable, it has proven to have less resonance with the U.S. public in the context of a highly polarized immigration debate. Moreover, it effectively sidelines them from the current debate about what is best for U.S. workers.

In contrast, the restrictionist camp has developed a very effective message in its repeated criticisms of the open borders lobby as an undifferentiated interest group

of immigration lawyers, immigrant rights advocacy groups, and big business that is easy for working class America to see as the enemy. In many ways, the restrictionist right has succeeded in conjuring up a new target for backlash politics based on the old anti-liberal themes. But instead of the "liberal establishment," today's enemy has become the open borders lobby.

## Dangerous Liaisons

Restrictionists regard pro-immigration groups such as the National Immigration Forum, National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) as being extensions of the liberal establishment, and part of the open borders lobby.

This critique has shadings of the type of conspiracy theories about a pervasive liberal establishment that have long been the stock of right-wing polemics. Although clearly not a conspiracy, Wall Street and pro-immigration advocacy groups do have more in common than their shared disdain for the immigration restrictionists.

The "pro-immigration" National Immigration Forum is a classic example of a group that has joined Corporate America with labor and immigrant-rights groups. The forum, established in

1982, says its board of directors is "composed of advocacy leaders and institution builders who collectively reflect the broad pro-immigration community with respect to race/ethnicity, geographical, religious, and political views."

Among the board members of the National Immigration Forum are representatives from the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), Motorola, National Restaurant Association, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Sitting alongside these representatives of Corporate America are principals from the Hotel

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Rick Swartz, who founded the National Immigration Forum, is widely respected for his nearly three decades of human rights and immigrant advocacy work. Like many liberal immigration lawyers, Swartz found that the interests of business and immigrants were often the same when it came to immigration policy. As part of his immigrant advocacy and work as a Washington lobbyist, Swartz has specialized in forming what he terms “left-right coalitions.” His work on uniting diverse political sectors to support the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s cemented his reputation as an immigrant advocate who could bring different political forces together.

In the mid-1990s, Swartz helped the National Immigration Forum forge a pro-immigration coalition bringing together Wall Street corporations, Silicon Valley high-tech firms, the libertarian right, and ethnic groups that was ultimately successful in beating back the immigration restrictionists. At the time, Swartz was serving as a consultant for Microsoft on skilled-labor immigration policy, and one of the central members of the unusual coalition was a former Swartz employee who became the immigration lobbyist for the National Association of Manufacturers.<sup>19</sup> Currently, Swartz is organizing a “left-right coalition” that opposes agricultural subsidies in the United States.

Other organizations represented on the boards of the country’s most prominent pro-immigration coalitions are religious and ethnic organizations that routinely take positions on behalf of the rights and welfare of immigrants. The National Council of La Raza, which anti-immigration groups routinely lambaste because of its ethnically charged name, is closely tied to Corporate America through its 24-member board of corporate advisers, including such transnationals as Wal-Mart, State Farm, McDonald’s, Kraft Foods, and JC Penney.<sup>20</sup>

For both the National Council of La Raza and the National Immigration Forum, immigration policy reform is largely regarded as facilitating immigration flows with no mention of any actual or perceived need to restrict new immigration.

The one-paragraph summary of NCLR’s immigration policy position is as follows: “NCLR supports comprehensive immigration reform legislation that contains three elements: legalization, the creation of legal channels for future migrants, and the reduction of family backlogs. By legalizing immigrants who live, work, and contribute to life in the United States, the United States could deal fairly with hardworking people who have responded to an economic reality that has been ignored by the law.”<sup>21</sup>

The National Immigration Forum says that its mission “is to embrace and uphold America’s tradition as a nation of immigrants.” Its slogan is: “Immigrants are America.” Describing its work, the National Immigration Forum says that it “advocates and builds support for public policies that welcome immigrants and

refugees and are fair and supportive to newcomers in the United States.” The forum’s three principal goals are to support “fair immigration policies,” advocate immigration policies that “strengthen the U.S. economy,” and “help newcomers and the communities where they settle.”

Fair immigration policies are described as ones that “reunite families torn apart by unreasonable and arbitrary restrictions; secure fair treatment of refugees who have fled persecution; legalize the status of hard-working immigrants caught in legal limbo; promote citizenship as a pathway to full political participation; secure equitable access to social protections; and protect immigrants’ fundamental constitutional rights.”

According to the forum, immigration policies that strengthen the economy are ones that “are consistent with global realities, foster economic growth, attract needed workers to America, and protect the rights of

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workers and families.” It does this by working “with an unusually diverse range of allies—immigrant, ethnic, religious, civil rights, labor, business, state and local government, and other organizations—to forge and promote a new vision of immigration policy.”

With respect to its third goal, the National Immigration Forum works “to help newcomers gain access to the supports they need to climb the ladder of social and economic mobility, and to help localities weave immigrants into the fabric of community life.”

## **Costs and Compromises**

Politics are by definition about compromises and tactical alliances. As a general rule, political purists, those who attempt to stay above the political fray by rejecting the need for tactical alliance and compromise, have little political sway—situating themselves on the sidelines as critics rather than as reformers.

It may be that the type of alliances formed by the National Council of La Raza, National Immigration Forum, and other champions of immigrants have succeeded over the past couple of decades in advancing a pro-immigration policy agenda and holding the line against restrictionist forces and their anti-immigration agenda.

But there are clearly political costs involved in such alliances if the end objective is to advance an immigration reform agenda that makes sense to most Americans. Would the pro-immigration forces be more outspoken against the labor practices of Wal-Mart or the labor policies advocated by the National Association of Manufacturers if they weren’t so institutionally tied to these business interests? Would their analysis of the immigration issue include a more critical look at NAFTA as a cause of expulsion, rather than offering open or tacit support for the trade agreement, if transnational companies were not on their boards? Similarly, would these

forces be more willing to consider the interests of all U.S. workers and communities if they didn’t have institutional alliances with unions and advocacy groups that focus solely or largely on immigrant organizing or immigrant rights and solidarity groups?

The alliances and the positions of pro-immigration groups make them extremely vulnerable to the charge of constituting an open borders lobby backed by corporate interests. At a time of rising concern about the economic, environmental, and social costs of immigration, as well as new concerns about threats to national security coming from an ever increasing sector of U.S. residents who aren’t citizens, the pro-immigration forces are finding themselves increasingly consigned to the margins of the immigration debate.

Their diminishing ability to establish the prevailing framework, however, has as much to do with their unwillingness to compromise and make new alliances as with the type of alliances and compromises the leading pro-immigration groups have already made. Although pro-immigration groups since Sept. 11 now frequently include statements about the need to improve immigration processing so as to identify any links to terrorist organizations, they generally reject the notion that a fair

immigration policy needs to set limits.

Pro-immigration groups see immigration policy reform as largely an issue of facilitating access for immigrants and their families. In their view, a pro-immigration immigration policy is what is best for the country and for immigrants. The obvious cost of such a position is that it identifies the pro-immigration forces as representing special interests such as immigrant rights groups, immigration lawyers, corporations that profit from immigrant labor, ethnic lobbies that grow stronger as their constituencies expand, and unions that organize immigrants. In contrast, the restrictionist groups have been more adept in framing their reform proposals as representing

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the interests of the broad majority of U.S. residents rather than only those responding to special political or economic interests.

The standard response by pro-immigration groups to the “them vs. us” immigration question is that immigrants are good for the economy because they expand the domestic consumer market, improve business productivity, and keep the U.S. economy competitive in the global market. There is good evidence supporting all such claims about the macroeconomic benefits of immigration.

But when these arguments about the economic benefits of immigration are used, as they so often are, by immigrant-rights groups to support their pro-immigration positions, it strikes a discordant note. At one and the same time, the immigrant-rights groups maintain that 1) immigrants should not be penalized because they are so essential to a robust U.S. economy, and 2) the U.S. economy should not be structured in such a way that it is dependent on the exploitation of the low-wage labor of immigrants. Nowhere is it explained how immigration-related benefits to the U.S. economy are transferred to the U.S. workforce, whether immigrant or non-immigrant.

Macroeconomic arguments don’t win much sympathy from the unemployed or low-paid and high-tech U.S. workers (whether citizens or immigrants) who feel vulnerable in an economy that receives a constant supply of cheap unskilled labor from Mexico and cheap skilled labor from India by way of temporary worker programs created for the U.S.-based high-tech industry.

Nowhere do the pro-immigration groups and unions deal with immigration policy as an issue of numbers. Accepting the argument that immigration is good for the U.S. economy, does this argument hold true for an economy and a society regardless of the number of immigrants—10 million, 20 million, 30 million? Accepting the argument that immigration is good for the U.S. economy,

if this immigrant workforce is organized, given full access to the country’s declining social welfare infrastructure, and is legalized, does this argument still hold true?

Aside from the economic considerations—both for the macroeconomy and for individual members of the workforce—there is also the question of how many immigrants can be integrated into U.S. society and communities. Pro-immigration advocates routinely dismiss social and cultural concerns about immigration as racist and rabidly nationalistic (as they often are). Is it really true that “immigrants are America,” or is it just part of a

litany of politically correct recitations by liberals and progressives that distorts reality more than describes it?

Unless pro-immigration advocates deal with immigration policy as a matter of numbers, they will be subject to tarring by anti-immigration forces as being part of an open borders lobby along with corporate voices.

### **The Challenged Pro-Immigration Forces**

Something is clearly askew when unions, progressives, and liberals find themselves being credibly labeled as instruments for Corporate America’s cheap labor agenda.

Pro-immigration groups come to the widening immigration debate severely handicapped by their own associations, their apparent stance of defending “foreigners” against “natives,” and the difficulty they have in answering the charges that they are essentially an open borders lobby.

This charge is so powerful because it affirms the widely shared sense that a nation and its people have the right to control national borders. When immigration advocates respond to the open borders charge with arguments that don’t acknowledge the need for limits—whether to protect the U.S. workforce from oversupply, to ensure sustainable environmental development, to prevent an unsupportable demand for social services, or to manage the pace of social and cultural integration—they leave

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themselves vulnerable to restrictionist critiques that they don't believe immigration flows should be controlled.

As a result, anti-immigration—and decidedly anti-immigrant—voices have succeeded in moving the immigration policy debate increasingly to the right.

Lou Dobbs's "Broken Borders" campaign, complemented by the rhetoric of anti-immigration groups, taps the country's deepening sense of economic insecurity and vulnerability to internal attacks. The backlash populism of the anti-immigration forces presents new challenges for those concerned about human rights, economic justice, and the rise of the politics of hate and fear.

If moderates hope once again to set the terms for immigration policy reform, they will need to find ways to counter the charges that they are in effect arguing for open borders, cheap labor, or ever-rising immigration flows.

In their effort to help shape the immigration debate, progressives, liberals, and humanitarians face an identity crisis—their dual role as immigrant advocates and as advocates for what's best for all U.S. residents and citizens.

The close association of the pro-immigration groups with immigration lawyers and immigrant communities gives them a good understanding of the problems facing legal and illegal immigrants. This understanding is an invaluable contribution to the immigration policy debate. What's more, immigrant advocates and immigrant groups themselves, such as hometown associations, play an important role in educating the U.S. public and policymakers about the positive, essential contributions of immigrants to a vibrant U.S. society and economy.

But if immigrant advocates and immigrants themselves are to move from the sidelines to the center of the intensifying immigration debate, and by doing so help staunch the growing influence of the retrograde restrictionist forces, they must meet five major challenges.

The first challenge is to gain credibility as advocates for an immigration policy that considers the totality of U.S. national interests—not just the needs and problems of immigrants or the demands of business for new foreign sources of cheap and skilled labor. Marshalling the same facts and figures used by the *Wall Street Journal* and Corporate America, as pro-immigration advocates often do to describe the net economic benefits of immigration, falls far short of what is needed if immigration reformers are to gain the attention and support of the U.S. public. Macroeconomic figures that show immigrants boosting

national economic growth provide little solace to workers who see immigrants holding jobs they or their parents once had, or who find themselves competing in a labor market where immigrant workers are willing to work longer, harder, and for substantially lower wages.

A second closely related challenge is helping U.S. citizens realize that their communities are communities that include a wide variety of immigrants and that this mix is a healthy one. It's likely that most U.S. citizens already know from personal experience that immigrants play a vital role in their communi-

ties, yet restrictionist groups and media personalities have convinced many that immigrants are not only a negative influence but are expendable—that the U.S. government could and should deport 10-11 million illegal residents with no ill effects. Part of the bill of goods that restrictionist voices offer is nostalgia for a society that never existed—one with full employment and where everyone shared the same culture and values.

The challenge, then, is to offer a progressive vision of a healthy multiethnic, multicultural society. Such a society that would collectively move forward with policies to assure full employment, protect labor rights, and provide basic social services to all, without unfairly burdening the middleclass, while at the same time facilitating social integration and a sense of community through language instruction and good basic education.

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The third challenge that immigration advocates face is overcoming their hesitation to describe the immigration problem as a class problem. The first step in injecting class analysis into their advocacy is to disentangle themselves from business—whether it be Fortune 500 corporations, the National Association of Manufacturers, agribusiness, high-tech firms that increasingly rely on skilled foreign workers, or even the strong lobby of immigration lawyers—which often support liberal immigration policies based on their vested professional interests.

Corporate pro-immigration positions often coincide with those of immigrants and immigrant advocates. But failing to distinguish between immigration reform motivated by a desire for cheap labor and immigration reform advocated to attain a just society make the entire pro-immigration movement extremely vulnerable to the critique that it is an open borders lobby.

The fourth challenge is one faced by more than just immigrant advocates. It is the challenge of integrating legitimate concerns and demands into a new agenda for national economic development. As it is, U.S. economic development is defined almost exclusively in traditional macroeconomic terms such as rates of economic growth, productivity, inventory levels, retail sales, housing starts, etc.

If pro-immigration advocates are to stem the rising forces of anti-immigrant backlash that are sweeping the United States and gaining momentum throughout the world, they must ally themselves with other policy reformers who are beginning to make the case that development must be redefined to mean full employment, livable wages, an organized workforce, a highly educated society, and environmental protection and restoration. By failing to situate their demands within the context of a new national development policy that is not beholden to narrow business interests, immigrants and immigration advocates risk not only losing the immigration reform debate, but contributing to an ominous economic and political future—one that will likely be

characterized by some mixture of harsh restrictionism and a cut-throat national economy where all workers, legal and illegal, compete for jobs that don't offer a living wage or basic benefits.

The fifth main challenge is connecting the dots between immigration policy and foreign policy. In their advocacy and education, anti-immigrant forces don't hesitate to describe the immigration problem as an international one—painting a picture of the United States beset by a non-stop invasion of the world's poor, fleeing war, corrupt governments, and the lack of opportunity at home. The simplicity of their recommended solutions—walling the United States in and deporting all those without residency papers—appeals to those who believe that to retain the present standard of life, this country should be less connected to the rest of the world, creating a Fortress America.

Those who oppose the fear and hate politics coursing through the immigration debate cannot deny the reality that the United States still represents

the “land of opportunity” for people of an increasing number of countries. But also true is that most of the would-be emigrants would prefer to live and work in their home countries if economic and social conditions improved.

This challenge, then, is also a challenge for U.S. foreign policy, other industrialized nations, and the international economic institutions—namely to support measures that contribute to broad and sustainable development in Mexico, the Central American nations, and other “sending” countries, rather than economic reforms that obstruct or undermine true development. What needs to be said, loud and clear, is that there is no existing or proposed immigration policy—whether highly restrictive or liberal—that will work, unless it works in conjunction with a foreign policy based on good neighbor principles and a deep appreciation of interconnectedness.<sup>22</sup>

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At the same time, though, the burden of addressing the immigration crisis, whether in the United States or any other receiving nation, is first the responsibility of the sending nations. Yes, nations such as Mexico should criticize abusive treatment of their nationals but such complaints ring hollow if they are not backed by national development policies that aim to keep their own citizens at home rather than policies that directly or indirectly contribute to their expulsion from their homes.

Longer and higher border walls, amnesty, guestworker programs, and proposed earned citizenship programs are all temporary fixes. Immigration policy and border control strategies that ignore the power of the forces of supply and demand while at the same time narrowly framing immigration policy as only a U.S. domestic policy problem are doomed to fail.

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## END NOTES

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<http://americas.irc-online.org/reports/2005/0506ideologies.html>.

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