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LADB Staff

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## **Mexican Migration to U.S. Expected to Continue Despite New Barriers**

*by LADB Staff*

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The number of undocumented immigrants entering the US from Mexico is expected to increase in the coming years despite efforts by US federal and state governments to discourage illegal immigration. In an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper *El Universal*, sociologist Jorge Santibanez Romellon of Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana said a lack of job opportunities in Mexico will force an increasing number of Mexicans to seek employment in the US, even with new physical and legislative barriers, such as California's punitive Proposition 187, which denies educational and health benefits to undocumented workers.

Also speaking with *El Universal*, Mexican Labor Secretary Javier Bonilla Garcia acknowledged the Mexican economy has failed to create the jobs needed by the Mexican population. Bonilla said Mexico's 1997 GDP growth of 7% created about 670,000 direct jobs, which was insufficient to meet the needs of the 1 million Mexicans entering the job market. Workers unable to find jobs in the formal economy, said Bonilla, either become street vendors or move to the US to find employment.

Oscar Gonzalez Cesar, president of the Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos (AMDH), said the neoliberal economic model followed by President Ernesto Zedillo's administration has increased the country's poverty, forcing a growing number of Mexicans to leave the country for the US. "Since the peso devaluation in 1994, our country has experienced a generalized bankruptcy of small and medium-sized enterprises, an extraordinary increase in unemployment, and a massive growth in poverty among the general population," said Gonzalez Cesar. The AMDH president said more than 40 million Mexicans live in poverty, with at least 25 million living in conditions of extreme poverty.

Gonzalez Cesar criticized former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari for leaving immigration issues off the agenda during negotiations with the US and Canada on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Statistics compiled by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) show an immediate increase in the number of undocumented workers seeking to enter the US in the months following the devaluation of the peso (see *SourceMex*, 03/01/95). A recent INS report said the number of Mexican undocumented workers in the US has increased by an average of 150,000 each year since 1988. Of the 5 million undocumented workers residing in the US as of October 1996, 2.7 million were Mexican nationals, said the INS report.

The growing influx of undocumented workers has led US states and the federal government to take harsh steps to deter illegal immigration. The most publicized state action is California's Proposition 187, approved in November 1994. At the federal level, US President Bill Clinton this year proposed a 10% budget increase for the INS, including funds to hire additional Border Patrol agents.

### *UN resolution criticizes US stance on immigration*

The hardened stance against undocumented Mexicans in the US was a major topic at the Third Annual Regional Conference on Migration in Ottawa, Canada, in February. A resolution passed at the conference called for "urgent measures" to counter the US policies, including demilitarization of the US- Mexico border area and the enforcement of UN and Organization of American States (OAS) human rights provisions in US-Mexican relations.

As a result of the Ottawa conference, the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) approved a Mexican-led initiative to expand protection of immigrant rights worldwide. The proposal's language is general but was drafted with Mexican immigrants in mind. (Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service Report: Illegal Resident Population; El Financiero International, 02/09/98, 03/02/98; Proceso, 03/08/98; El Universal, 01/09/98, 02/03/98, 04/14/98, 04/16/98; Excelsior, 04/22/98)

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