

Voice of the Left

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Immigration: A "Fair and Balanced" View

Many of my constituents on the Left will not like much of what I am about to say. Frankly, it's astonishing to me to hear so many progressives citing right-wing talking points on this issue. It's equally troubling to hear the leadership of some of our largest unions pandering to the platform of Big Business. Perhaps a reexamination of our core liberal principles is in order.

The United States has the right and duty to secure its borders. In light of the very real terrorist threat facing our nation, this fundamental principle has never been more important than it is today. So, what do we do about all these folks who are here illegally? (Yes, I'm not afraid to use the word.)

Well... Let's step back for just a moment. Whether or not we want to admit it, for the last twenty years the United States has practiced an "open border" policy with regard to our southern neighbors. No, this has not been an official policy, but ask anyone who lives near the border as to how aggressive our efforts have been to prevent people from coming across. Within this context, progressives need to step forward with a solution that protects the economic and strategic interests of the American people, while being as fair as possible to all those concerned.

To begin with, we need to dispel the corporatist Republican myth that "there are some jobs that Americans just won't do." NONSENSE. Americans will do virtually any job if they're paid a living wage. The idea that industry and agriculture will collapse without illegal labor is patently absurd. However, there is a strong possibility that the American middle class will be crushed if this problem continues to be ignored.

Just fifty years ago, 35% of American workers had a union job, and 70% of Americans could raise a family on a single, 40-hour-week paycheck.

What happened?

SIMPLE TRUTH: More workers = lower wages. This basic law of economics has been understood by progressives (and ignored by conservatives) for generations. This is precisely why thirty years ago the United Farm Workers (UFW) and its founder, the great Caesar Chavez, were firmly opposed to illegal immigration. Let's not forget that the Left fought (many of my liberal forbearers paid with their lives) from the 1870s through the 1930s to limit the pool of "labor hours" available to the Robber Barons. They also fought to regulate immigration to a manageable level that would not dilute the unionized labor pool. This was a historic period. These noble efforts helped to create America's middle class.

Without a vibrant middle class, any democracy is doomed. Without labor in a position of power capable of counterbalancing capital/ management, no middle class can emerge.

THE SOLUTION: 1) Secure the border. If this requires military forces, so be it. **2) Implement mandatory registration for all illegal immigrants.** Any currently undocumented worker with a previous felony conviction should be immediately deported. **3) Initiate a compulsory ten-year preliminary naturalization process for the newly-registered illegal aliens who have lived here lawfully (other than entering the country illegally).** At the end of the ten-year period such persons could *apply* for citizenship through the normal five-year naturalization process. **4) Punish employers who hire undocumented workers with severe financial and criminal penalties.** There is nothing compassionate about handing higher profits to the egregiously overpaid CEOs of today's Fortune 500 companies. **5) Affirm that emergency health care is an absolute *right* for all people within our boundaries regardless of status.**

No, we cannot and should not be forced to accept anyone who simply wishes to come here. The idea that the United States should formally adopt an open-border policy is tantamount to committing economic and cultural suicide. On the other hand, we need to recognize the enormous economic gulf that exists between the United States and its southern neighbors and seek to reasonably accommodate all those who respect our laws -- even those who may have initially disobeyed them.