

The Hidden Agenda of Mexico's Fox Administration

by

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The issue of migration is one of the most significant changes in Mexican foreign policy to take place during the administration of President Vicente Fox (Castañeda, 2001: 89). Beyond the anecdotal and symbolic effect of the holding of the first act of protocol with representatives of the migrant community in the Los Pinos presidential residence, it is considered a “priority issue” in the National Development Plan of 2001–2006. The need to approach it with “a new and long-term focus” is expressed within the framework of “a comprehensive negotiation [with the United States] that deals with the structural roots of the phenomenon, its manifestations and effects, and that considers attention to the migration issue as a shared responsibility” (61).

In keeping with this position, the former foreign minister Jorge G. Castañeda stated in his December 3, 2001, Report of Activities that for the first time in the history of the bilateral agenda, the issue of migration had been included, on the basis of the principle of shared responsibility, with a long-term view to taking advantage of the synergies existing between the two countries. He added that, after a hiatus caused by the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, negotiations had fully resumed and both countries had recognized the need to add security as an issue within migration and reach a broad agreement as soon as possible.

Aside from the former foreign minister's optimism regarding the course of the bilateral negotiations, it is important to underline that the migration issue is also—although for very different and contrasting reasons—a priority matter for Washington. The United States's growing interest is due, among other reasons, to the presence of more than 23 million Mexican-born inhabitants, constituting the “hard core” of its number-one minority, so-called Hispanics, the recent overwhelming surge of emigrants from Mexico, and the

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obvious problems and challenges from the U.S. "national security" standpoint represented by its southern border, a little more than 3,000 kilometers long, which, with close to 1 million crossings per day, ranks as one of the most transited in the world.

As a product of the negotiations, five major discussion items were initially incorporated into the bilateral agenda: (1) to regularize the immigration status of the more than 3 million undocumented Mexicans living in the United States; (2) to establish a temporary-worker program that would permit Mexican laborers access to particular regions and sectors of the U.S. job market; (3) to agree on a special immigration relationship between Mexico and the United States and, as a result, increase the number of visas available for Mexicans with the goal of approximating the current number of immigrants present; (4) to strengthen border security through coordinated action between Mexico and the United States, with special emphasis on combating the smuggling of persons and preventing the deaths of migrants at the common border; and (5) to promote regional development programs in the areas of highest migration from Mexico and a possible program of guest workers (Tuirán, Fuentes, and Ramos, 2001: 4).

The unprecedented nature of this agenda raised great expectations in government circles and some sectors of the migrant community, but none of the issues raised were completely dealt with, and because of the events of September 11 it has been virtually cancelled. Furthermore, it would not be inappropriate to point out that the agenda excluded the proposal made by Fox in his presidential campaign of a free flow of labor. From whatever vantage point, the following questions regarding the procedure followed in the bilateral negotiations are relevant: What is the nature of the shift by the Fox administration in migration affairs? Is it a strategic turnaround in Mexican foreign policy or merely a short-term change of scene? Is there a hidden agenda under the cloak of the new government position? And if so, what are its contents and its foreseeable consequences?

Given these overarching questions, the main objective of this article is a critical assessment of the migration policy of Fox's regime, taking into account the broad and intricate spectrum of labor relations established between Mexico and the United States under the influence of neoliberal globalism. Above all, I am interested in delving into the content and scope of said policy, attempting to reveal the true picture of the relationship between the two countries that seems to be hidden in the official discourse.

My primary hypothesis is that the shift that took place in Mexican migration policy under the Fox administration signifies, over and above some partial achievements reached before September 11, a *greater subordination of the country to the strategic, geopolitical, and geo-economic interests of the*

United States. This, in turn, is related to the strategic role assigned to Mexican labor in the agreement on U.S. industrial restructuring both within and beyond its borders.

The work is subdivided into four sections. In the first, the nature of trade between Mexico and the United States under the aegis of neoliberalism is examined. In the second, I deal with the special dialectic created in this context between Mexico's export growth and international migration. Thirdly, I analyze the context and scope of the bilateral agenda in migration matters. Lastly, a brief reference is made to the responses and processes of creation of alternatives that have emerged from the very foundations of the migrant community.

THE TRUE FACE OF TRADE BETWEEN MEXICO AND THE UNITED STATES

In order to deal with the nature of trade between the two countries, two background items are relevant. One of these is the formation of three blocks possessing different models of capitalism after the dissolution of the postwar "order" and the establishment of a strategy—which John Saxe-Fernández (2001: 171) calls "neo-Monroeist"—tending to intensify U.S. hegemony in the continent. The other is that country's need to confront its trailing in competitiveness and technological innovation with regard to Germany and Japan and thereby to reverse—or at least temper—its critical problem of foreign debt. The United States, once the world's major creditor, became a net debtor in 1987, and in the face of this new dynamic in the world economy U.S. transnational companies have adopted a strategy aimed at drastically reducing the cost of labor. The neoliberal reforms and painful structural adjustment programs imposed on Mexico, like those of the other Latin American countries, are inscribed, in this perspective, through their dominant classes and the various international agencies operating in the service of the U.S. government and the powerful interests—banks and transnational corporations—that it represents (Otero, 1996; Valenzuela, 1996; Guillén, 1997; Veltmeyer, 2000). Here I propose to examine in depth one of the strategic objectives toward which these measures are aimed: situating the export sector as the fundamental hub in the reorientation of the Mexican economy and placing it at the service of U.S. imperialism. To this end, and given the optical illusion created by the repositioning of the country as the number-one exporter in Latin America and eighth in the world (with 90 percent of the export platform made up of manufactured goods, 39.4 percent of which are classified as "technological progress disseminator goods"), it is crucial to determine what it is that it

actually exports and to identify the principal actors in and beneficiaries of the export “boom.”

Examining the types of Mexican exports, the first thing that stands out is the high energy and significance achieved by the maquiladora companies, conceived as assembly plants linked to internationalized productive processes with very little integration into the national economy. From 1982 to 2001, maquiladora industry sales abroad multiplied by 25, reaching a level close to half of total manufacturing exports (48.5 percent) in the last of these years. Moreover, this proportion rises to 54 percent if export surplus alone (i.e., the difference between the value of the exports and their import requirements) is considered (Cypher, 2000: 16). Along with this can be observed a spectacular growth in manufacturing without maquilas, whose exports increased by 20 times in the same period. What seems even more significant is that in some of its more dynamic segments, such as the automotive, there is a certain trend toward maquilization under a logic of segmentation and industrial outsourcing with an extremely high import component. Between 85 and 90 percent of the components of the vehicles exported to the United States are imported (Unger, 1990: 77). Gerardo Fujii (2000: 1014) highlights this characteristic in the following terms:

The dynamism of the export sector does not pull the rest of the economy along but rather is filtered to the outside, primarily to the United States. Two very dynamic areas of export serve as examples: automobiles and the electronic industry. Both sectors are characterized by the predominance of transnational companies that concentrate the assembly phase of the final product in the country with largely imported components. In this way, it seems that the industrial sector tends to be likened to the assembly industry in zones bordering the United States.

Lending weight to this same line of analysis, James Cypher (2001: 12) maintains that “the export ‘miracle’ of Mexico can be largely explained by the globalization strategies created in Detroit—the United States automotive industry made up approximately one of every five dollars of nonpetroleum Mexican exports in 1997.” Moreover, reinforcing this trend, the participation of temporary imports in the country’s total exports was almost 80 percent between 1993 and 2001 (Dussel, 2003: 332).

Another important component in this peculiar gear-mesh is the overwhelming presence—estimated at between 65 and 75 percent—of intrafirm trade with the United States (Baker, 1995: 402), an issue that, in addition to violating the “free market play” preached by neoliberal orthodoxy, makes evident the intense plunder to which the Mexican economy is being subjected through this mechanism. We must not lose sight of the fact that the concept of

shared production inherent in intrafirm trade does not imply shared profits. Export prices in this type of trade are artificially fixed by the companies without declaring “profits,” which not only facilitates a net transfer of profits outside the country but also allows each job created to be subsidized and charged to the Mexican economy.

What is paradoxical is that despite the energy with which the Mexican economy has thrown itself into exports—whose levels rose from US\$22 billion to US\$158 billion between 1982 and 2001—it does not contribute to mitigating the acute problem of foreign debt but, on the contrary, translates into an expansion of imports. It is particularly revealing that from 1988 to 1994 manufacturing exports grew at an average annual rate (5 percent) less than half that registered for the importation of those products (12 percent) (Rueda, 1998: 110). The extent of these trends is such that Enrique Dussel (1996: 80) refers to this mode of industrialization as “import-oriented.” And although this importing dynamic was momentarily interrupted by the 1995 crisis, it revived from 1997 to 2002, with a deficit of a little more than US\$6 billion in the first year and more than US\$17.5 billion in the last.

All of the above reveals the scope of the new export dynamic, making clear that it is a process that is not connected to the internal economy, in contrast to what the movement toward a secondary-export standard (i.e., specialized in manufactured exports) would imply, and has minimal multiplier effects.

What has been stated so far, aside from showing the fragility and volatility of the export dynamism, presents us with the need to reexamine the nature and scope of what the country exports. It is evident that for the majority of our foreign commerce—the segment that belongs to the area of intrafirm trade and encompasses the maquila sector—the category of manufacturing export does not apply. As Carlos Tello (1996: 50) notes, what is actually being sold outside is labor, without its leaving the country. Through this, the shrinking of part of our economy is concealed behind the veil of supposed growth in the secondary-export area, reducing it and compelling it to function as reserve labor for foreign capital. Perhaps it would not be superfluous to add that this export specialization line has a certain relationship to the direct export of labor from Mexico to the United States through labor migration, stamping a characteristic mark on the nature of trade between the two countries. In both cases it entails a *net transfer of potential profits beyond the border*.

This analysis of the nature of the Mexican economy’s reincorporation into the U.S. capitalist orbit brings us to two conclusions. First, *labor* constitutes the country’s principal export product, with a net contribution to the balance of trade in excess of US\$28.6 billion in 2002. To reach this estimate, both the value added of the maquiladora industry as an approximate indicator of

indirect export of labor and the remittances derived from the direct export of labor are taken into account. Mexico also exports *natural resources* (primarily petroleum) and *assets*. The lion's share of direct foreign investment has been aimed at the latter, the acquisition of assets at auction prices stemming mostly from the privatization of public enterprises and thus contributing to the concentration and centralization of capital of the large transnational companies. It is worth adding that this investment has been channeled toward the purchase of the financial sector of the country through the acquisition of its largest banks: Bancomer by the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya and Banamex by Citibank.

Second, and perhaps best summarizing the extremely restricted nature of the process of capital accumulation in Mexico, is the transfer—or rather the plunder—of surpluses produced in the neoliberal context and under the aegis of U.S. imperialism. It has been estimated that the surpluses transferred, mainly to the United States, between 1982 (the year in which the neoliberal shift began) and 1997 amount to US\$457 billion at 1990 fixed prices (Saxe-Fernández and Núñez, 2001: 150–151). This figure covers two types of transfers: those related to payment of debt service and what could be considered trade losses (whether through the trade balance or by income, through franchising and concessions or patent rights). The importance of this figure—which does not include the transfer of potential profits via the direct and indirect export of labor—assumes its true dimensions when we consider that Latin America is the highest tax region of the underdeveloped world and that Mexico is at the top of it.

THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN EXPORT GROWTH AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

The counterpart to the current export face of the Mexican economy—which confers upon it the appearance of an enclave (Delgado Wise and Mañán, 2000)—is found in the pauperization of the majority of the population. I am not using the term “enclave” in its classic sense but considering it as an expression of the plunder and expropriation of a portion of the country and its labor force by foreign capital under highly destructive macroeconomic conditions that restrict the domestic sphere of the economy and depress salaries. In such an enclave, social inequalities deepen and an ever greater mass of workers who fail to find a place in the country's formal job market is created, with the result that one-third of the economically active population is in the so-called informal sector. This is the breeding ground for the vigorous cross-border migration that is currently occurring.

Providing an idea of the magnitude of this phenomenon, the following figures are eloquent: With the United States as the country with the highest levels of immigration in the world, the contingent of Mexican immigrants constitutes by far the largest single group (27 percent). The population of Mexican origin residing inside the northern neighbor's borders amounts to 22.9 million, including residents—legal or not—born in Mexico (9.2 million) and U.S. citizens of Mexican ancestry. The number of Mexicans who have emigrated to the United States in the past decade (measured by the net annual flow) is ten times greater than that registered two decades ago (Tuirán et al, 2001: 6). According to estimates by Rodolfo Corona, in the past five years an annual average of 370,000 Mexicans established residence in the United States (*La Jornada*, March 8, 2003). This figure represents the greatest flow of settlers in the world. The number of temporary migrants is estimated at 800,000 to 1 million per year (Tuirán, 2000). According to the most recent World Bank estimates (2003: 59), Mexico is practically on the same level as India as the major recipient of remittances in the world, with a total amount of consignments of almost US\$10 billion in 2002.

Although U.S.-Mexico labor migration is a phenomenon with a long history that dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century, in its current phase it is noted for its unprecedented intensity and dynamism. A dynamic of this nature also causes important qualitative transformations in migratory geography (diversification in the regions of origin and destination and greater involvement of urban areas), the occupational spectrum of trans-border workers (new fields of incorporation into the U.S. labor market), migratory patterns (age, sex, schooling, position in the home, length of stay, legal status, etc.) and remittances (amount, sending/receiving mechanisms, use, and impact).

The following information, taken from the 2000 U.S. Census, emphasizes some of the thorny new problems in the phenomenon:

Although the intensity of international migration varies by territory, 96.2 percent of the country's towns register some type of link to international migration. A similar situation exists in the United States, where residents of Mexican origin—despite being concentrated in a handful of states—have a presence in almost the entire country, including Alaska and Hawaii, where slightly more than 100,000 Mexicans live.

Of the population over 15 years of age, 55 percent of those born in Mexico and living in the United States have at least a high school education. This figure drops to 40.7 percent in the group of temporary or cyclical migrants and rises to 71.8 percent if we consider the entire spectrum of the population of Mexican origin. The corresponding Mexican national average is 51.8

percent, which means that in general terms, and contrary to what is commonly held, more qualified labor is leaving than staying in the country.

A type of movement that is not very visible and does not fit the stereotypes of labor migration is the one corresponding to Mexican residents in the United States who have bachelor's degrees or postgraduate-level education, the figure for which is more than 250,000.

The percentage of the economically active population of Mexicans residing in the United States who work is 15 points higher than that registered for the population living in Mexico.

The number of migrant workers born in Mexico who have formal jobs in the nation to the north is approximately 5 million, a figure equivalent to one-fourth the population employed in the formal sector in Mexico.

Thirty-six and two-tenths percent of the immigrants of Mexican origin in the United States work in the secondary (i.e., industrial) sector, while in Mexico only 27.8 percent do so. This situation contrasts with the stereotyped vision of the migrant as an agricultural worker; only 13.3 percent of the immigrants of Mexican origin work in the primary sector, indicating a fundamental change in the cross-border labor market.

Along with these characteristics, there has been a significant increase in the flow of remittances to Mexico, which multiplied by 3.5 during the past decade to reach, in 2002, a historic high of US\$9.8 billion (Table 1). This not only consolidates the country's position as one of the principal recipients of remittances or *migradólares* (migrants' dollars) in the world but also identifies labor exportation as the third-highest source of foreign exchange, with a contribution to the balance of payments that exceeds that of tourism and agricultural exports. The importance of remittances as a compensatory factor against the external imbalance becomes even more evident if we analyze the net contribution of each sector to the generation of foreign exchange (Table 2). Here remittances represent the second-largest source of net income, after petroleum. Moreover, because of the drop in international petroleum prices in 1998, this type of income rose to first place. That remittances have managed to climb to this position, becoming the source of foreign exchange registering the most consistent growth throughout the 1990s, not only makes them more visible and appealing to international financial capital but also puts the apologists of the Mexican exporting "miracle" in a tight spot: How can the underdeveloped nature of the Mexican economy and the profoundly asymmetrical character of its trade relations with U.S. capitalism be hidden in the face of this evidence?

Moving to the social plane, not only is the strategic importance of migration ratified but its magnitude is reassessed, since, as Rodolfo Corona (2001: 38) emphasizes, "migration and remittances constitute generalized aspects

TABLE 1
Significance of Remittances in the Generation
of Foreign Exchange (millions of dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sector of Origin</i>				
	<i>Remittances</i>	<i>Tourism</i>	<i>Petroleum</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Agriculture</i>
1991	2,660	4,340	8,166	32,307	2,373
1992	3,070	4,471	8,307	36,169	2,112
1993	3,333	4,564	7,418	42,500	2,504
1994	3,475	4,855	7,445	51,075	2,678
1995	3,673	4,688	8,423	67,383	4,016
1996	4,224	5,287	11,654	81,014	3,592
1997	4,865	5,748	11,323	95,565	3,828
1998	5,627	6,038	7,134	106,550	3,796
1999	5,910	5,869	9,920	122,819	4,144
2000	6,572	5,953	14,884	145,261	4,263
2001	8,895	6,538	12,801	141,346	4,007
2002	9,814	6,060	13,109	142,031	3,866

Sources: Banco de México (www.banxico.org.mx) and INEGI (www.inegi.gob.mx).

of the life of the country, involving one of every five Mexican homes.” This phenomenon is heightened in the rural areas of nine districts in the central-western region, where the proportion rises to one out of every two homes.

The contradictory dynamic created between migration and economic growth under the aegis of neoliberalism can be summarized as follows: (1) Although remittances are extremely important as a source of foreign exchange for the country and as subsistence for many Mexican homes, they also entail a net transfer abroad of potential profits. (2) In contrast to the labor force that is indirectly exported (via maquilas), that which emigrates and establishes itself in the United States consumes a very significant part of its income there, thus transferring its potential multiplier effect to the U.S. economy. The incomes of workers of Mexican origin in the United States amounted, in the year 2000, to around US\$250 billion, of which US\$87 billion corresponded to residents born in Mexico. These quantities contrast significantly with the remittances sent to Mexico, which, however impressive they seem, amounted to US\$6.57 billion in the same year. (3) From a fiscal point of view, the international migrants contribute more to the recipient economy than they receive in benefits and public services. Migrants contribute to the equity capital available to the U.S. government through the transfer

TABLE 2
Contribution of Remittances to Net Trade Balance
(millions of dollars)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Sector of Origin</i>				
	<i>Agricultural</i>	<i>Petroleum and Gas</i>	<i>Manufacturing</i>	<i>Tourism</i>	<i>Remittances</i>
1991	242	7,030	-14,660	1,905	2,660
1992	-746	6,896	-22,066	1,788	3,070
1993	-129	6,054	-19,068	1,948	3,333
1994	-693	6,265	-23,350	2,305	3,475
1995	1,373	7,507	-117	3,028	3,673
1996	-1,079	10,469	-124	3,327	4,224
1997	-345	9,227	-6,023	3,710	4,865
1998	-976	5,406	-9,881	3,760	5,627
1999	-554	8,954	-10,363	3,768	5,910
2000	-582	11,337	-18,638	3,990	6,572
2001	-1,229	7,764	-17,293	3,771	8,895
2002	-70	10,310	-9,585	2,033	9,814

Sources: Banco de México (www.banxico.org.mx) and INEGI (www.inegi.gob.mx).

of resources. According to information from the National Immigration Forum (www.immigrationforum.org), in 1997, the migrant population in the United States provided US\$80 billion more to the Treasury than it received in benefits from the U.S. government at its three levels: local, state, and national. With this contribution migrants are driving the recipient economy. (4) Although it is difficult to measure this aspect, by pressuring the labor market the migrants tend to have an adverse effect on wages in the recipient economy, especially in the fields in which they operate. A recent study by Jean Papail (2001) underscores that the gap between the average income received by Mexican migrants and the national minimum wage in the United States has tended to diminish over the past 25 years; measured in constant 2000 prices, it dropped 38 percent in that period, falling from US\$11.70 to US\$7.20 an hour. What is paradoxical is that this situation coexists with changes in the job qualifications of the above-mentioned migrants—that is, with higher levels of education and presence in the manufacturing sector. Thus the vicious circle in which Mexican migration is trapped becomes evident, with the dice clearly loaded in favor of the United States's hegemonic interests.

THE MEXICAN GOVERNMENT'S MIGRATORY POLICY: FROM "NO POLICY" TO OPEN SUBORDINATION

Under strict cost-benefit estimates—with the clear purpose of avoiding a confrontation with the United States, particularly regarding undocumented immigrants—the Mexican government opted to follow, from 1974 until relatively recently, a strategy that García y Griego (1988) has called “the policy of no policy,” which consisted of not having, at least explicitly, a policy on immigration.

The negotiation and signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement became a basic referent for the subsequent course of bilateral relations and, specifically, for international migration. That the Mexican government agreed to exclude the immigration issue from the agenda of the negotiations and to adhere uncritically to the principle of the free flow of capital and commodities confirms not only its lack of commitment to the migrant sector but also its candid and, in this case, open subordination to the hegemonic interests of the United States.

The lukewarm posture adopted by the Mexican government in the face of Washington's ferocious assault on the human and labor rights of its citizens fits into the same mind set. Among the many measures implemented by the U.S. government to institute a reign of terror on its strip of border with Mexico were numerous operations deployed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to contain, at any cost, the increasing flow of Mexican migrant laborers. In view of the fact that Mexico is the United States's number-two trading partner, this bears no relation to what should be a civilized “good neighbor” policy between partners. A clear indicator of the vigor with which the anti-immigrant policy is being carried out is the ever-increasing—not to say exorbitant—budget granted the INS, which amounted to US\$4.18 billion in 1999. Mirroring the xenophobic spirit of California Governor Pete Wilson's unsuccessful Proposition 187, on September 30, 1996, the so-called Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act went into effect. The significance of this law (still in force) is that it institutionalizes the *criminalization of labor migration* through a series of arbitrary standards of procedure that violate the human and labor rights of the cross-border workers (see Mohar, 2001: 51).

One of the most shameful results of this hard line of U.S. immigration policy is undoubtedly the escalating number of deaths of Mexicans on the northern border, which between 1998 and 2000 reached a total of 1,236. This fact demonstrates the resort to “death as a dissuasive element of migration” (Villaseñor and Morena, 2002: 13), confirming the predisposition toward

state terrorism as an essential ingredient of U.S. foreign policy and internal security.

It is not irrelevant to add that the main response of the Mexican government to such challenges was the enactment of the law of retention of Mexican nationality (Martínez, 1999: 251). In essence, this was a measure designed to allow Mexicans residing in the United States to defend their rights by allowing them to obtain U.S. citizenship without losing their own. Nevertheless, it continues to be—and this has been a point of constant contention—a law that does not grant sufficient guarantees for the full exercise of Mexican citizenship to those who avail themselves of it, that is, the right to vote and to run for elective office. Until I examine this point later on in greater depth, it is pertinent to note here that the law in question—which came into effect on March 20, 1998—has been taken up and recodified in the heart of the migrant community in the United States as an increasing demand for the full exercise of political rights.

As I noted initially, with Vicente Fox's accession to the presidency of the republic in December 2000 a reassessment of the migration issue occurred, making it, for the first time in the history of Mexico–United States relations, a priority issue on the bilateral agenda. How should we interpret the change in posture of the two governments on the migration issue? What should our reading be of the agreed-upon agenda for the negotiations? To what interests does it respond? What is its true scope? Moreover, considering that each of the five major issues in the agenda—regularization of the immigration status of citizens, a guest worker program, increase in the number of visas, tightened security on the border, and the promotion of development programs in areas of high migration—what can we conclude about the progress of the negotiations? Despite the fact that the bilateral agenda was practically cancelled after the events of September 11, the truth is that the Mexican government has never stopped trying to revive the negotiations, and this makes it important to examine the questions raised in some detail in an attempt to determine the direction the process was taking.

First of all, the shift in attitude of both governments regarding the migration issue was based on the recognition of a reality: the overwhelming increase of migration against the tide of what was foreseen or proclaimed by neoliberal doctrine and the inability of the United States to contain it (or, better yet, regulate it) unilaterally and under strict police or military-style measures such as those contained in the 1996 law (Mohar, 2001: 54). Stemming from the recession being experienced by the U.S. economy and its procyclical impact on that of Mexico, this situation is being reevaluated through the prism of the hemispheric security of the world's number-one capitalist power.

Second, although the five major issues of the bilateral agenda deal with matters of interest to the migrant community, they avoid a question that is fundamental to Mexico's strategic interests: the liberalization of the flow of migrants. It is, therefore, a *structurally limited agenda* that does not attack the root causes of international migration and, on the contrary, aims—as the Mexican government itself proclaims—to “move toward a regimen of orderly flows” or at least regulated ones. It is not hard to see that the dice in the negotiation are weighted in favor of the strategic interests of the United States, a country which, at the very least, will continue to benefit from the use of a reserve of cheap labor coming from Mexico. On this basis, President Fox's presumption, expressed in his First Government Report and ratified in the annual activities report of then-Foreign Minister Castañeda, that “for the first time in history the United States has agreed to negotiate the issue of migration in a comprehensive way with another nation, in this case Mexico,” seems plausible.

As for the “progress” made on each of the issues of the binational agenda, the following observations and comments are relevant. First, to date there is practically nothing important to report with respect to the regularization of the migratory status of the more than 3 million Mexicans carrying the stigma of “illegals.” The only information we have about it is that the possibility of “amnesty” (a term inherent in the discourse that criminalizes labor migration) has been virtually abandoned by the U.S. government, to be replaced by a more modest program of “acquired adjustment” (Miller and Seymour, 2001: 1). The February 2002 INS announcement that some 300,000 Mexicans could avail themselves of the so-called delayed amnesty is in keeping with this perspective.

Second, the subject of temporary workers is the one that has aroused the greatest interest among officials and legislators in the United States. Everything points toward the establishment of a program allowing a certain number of Mexicans to work legally in the country with a guaranteed minimum wage and access to some health benefits as long as they return to Mexico after a year's stay; the number of workers allowed to register would be adjusted annually according to U.S. economic conditions, especially the unemployment rate (Roldán, 2001: 85). Through this program, described as concerning guest workers (perhaps as a way of distinguishing it from the discredited Bracero Program), one of the basic elements of Washington's position in the negotiating process is clearly expressed. With the “generous” offer to take millions of Mexican migrant workers out of the “shadow of illegality,” the program proposes, in its main proponent Senator Gramm's own words, “to strengthen the United States's economy and stimulate [through remittances sent to Mexico and the skills acquired by the “guest” workers in the program]

the long-postponed economic development of Mexico.” In tune with this concept, a “pilot” project was carried out in the state of Zacatecas with the participation of the U.S. companies LEH Packing, ACME Brick, Kanex, San Angelo, and Marcus Drake (García Zamora and Moctezuma, 2001). And although it seems that the program has President Fox’s blessing, the Conferencia Unida de Mexicanos en el Exterior (United Conference of Mexicans Abroad), which brings together some 20 migrant political organizations, declared its open “rejection of the guest or temporary workers program” and expressed its disapproval of the exclusion of representatives of the migrant community from the negotiations (*El Universal*, January 5, 2002).

Third, there is no information available on possible progress in the number of visas available to Mexicans. The INS country information dates to 1999, as does that appearing on the U.S. Embassy web site in Mexico. The only information we have is that in the H-2a visa program—corresponding to temporary agricultural workers—the participation of Mexicans diminished relative to other nationalities between 1995 and 2000.

Fourth, of the five issues on the bilateral agenda, the one regarding border security has received by far the most attention from both governments and produced the greatest rapprochement. In this instance, as in the temporary workers program, the vision and interests of the northern neighbor have been imposed. A clear example of this is the Action Plan for Cooperation on Border Security, signed on June 22, 2001, which is designed (Sandoval, 2001: 252) “to prohibit the passage of persons 3 kilometers south of the border and to authorize operations of dissuasion of migration between the Border Patrol and the Grupos Beta and the exchange of information between Mexico’s Office of the Attorney General and the INS to combat bands of immigrant-smugglers.” This has to do with a series of coordinated operations through which Mexican police are placed at the service of U.S. security, being assigned the tasks of combating undocumented migration under the supposed commitment to protect the human rights of their fellow citizens. The 377 deaths of Mexican migrants in 2001, the 29 percent increase in the INS budget announced by President Bush on January 29, 2002, and the decision to increase by almost 800 percent the number of National Guard members posted on the border announced by the White House on February 6, 2002, are unmistakable signs that human rights do not figure among Washington’s priorities.

As for the Mexican authorities, their lukewarm reaction regarding the violence and terrorism unleashed by the government of the United States reveals that human rights are similarly not a priority for the Fox administration. Worse yet, in exchange for certain privileges regarding Mexican labor migration—which up till now have proved only false promises—the Mexican

government has agreed to perform the role of sentry for the United States on its southern border through the promotion of two complementary programs: the Plan Puebla Panama and the Plan Sur. The latter program, which began July 1, 2001, was designed to “reduce the porosity of the dividing lines between our country and Guatemala and Belize through increased police and military presence within the framework of the commitment acquired by the Fox administration from Washington regarding the reduction of the flow of undocumented immigrants across the common border” (Sandoval, 2001: 252). It is above all an operation to seal off Mexico’s southern border through police control and militarization, thereby reproducing in Mexico a security system designed by the United States. Under this system, the Mexican government is assigned the “dirty work” of containing Central and South American migration in an unprecedented act of servility and subordination. Fox’s recent offer to tighten control over the flow of migrants reaffirms this position beyond any doubt (*La Jornada*, February 14, 2002).

Finally, progress on the issue of regional development in the areas of highest migration is practically nil. The only thing that exists is programs promoted by state governments such as *Tres por Uno* (“Three for One”) in Zacatecas, *Mi Comunidad* (“My Community”) in Guanajuato, and most recently *Adopta una Comunidad* (“Adopt a Community”) under the impetus of the Fox administration (*Reforma*, January 20, 2002). The first two of these programs seek to channel the collective funds of migrants to finance social welfare plans (Torres, 1998). What is unique about the latter program—aimed at five states in the republic—is that it is conceived as a strategy for combating poverty. This approach, however, stems from a mistaken idea of the relationship between marginalization and international migration (Santibáñez, 2002). Even recognizing the extreme structural restrictions imposed by the neoliberal context (Veltmeyer and O’Malley, 2001), none of these programs seriously proposes the possibility of taking advantage of the potential of remittances—as well as other resources available to the migrant community—to contribute to local and regional development (Delgado Wise and Rodríguez, 2001).

From what has been presented to this point it is clear that the result of bilateral negotiations on migratory questions is solely and exclusively favorable to the strategic geopolitical (hemispheric security) and geo-economic (use of the advantages offered by the country in terms of cheap labor and natural resources) interests of the United States. The agenda is submitted as a zero-sum game, in which what one gains the other loses. In this asymmetrical process of negotiation, which has nothing to do with the principle of shared responsibility, the dignity that characterized the foreign policy long

implemented by the Mexican government has been disfigured and replaced by *overt subordination*.

THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY CONFRONTED WITH THE CHALLENGES OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALISM

To conclude our analysis, it is fitting to mention, as James Petras underscores (2001: 85), that

the idea that some intellectuals have that there is a need to create an alternative is, of course, an expression of their ignorance of the existing alternatives in the process of creation and/or unconscious acceptance of what globalization argues: that there are no alternatives. Instead of repeating time-worn clichés about the “need for alternatives,” it is more appropriate to relate now to the alternatives in process of preparation being practiced by the movements in struggle.

The alternatives are there to be given greater substance, coherence, and projection in the nation-state and even beyond.

From this perspective, the first thing we must indicate is that the migrant community is increasingly less isolated, scattered, and disorganized. As a contradictory subproduct of the historical evolution and maturation of social networks of migrants, an ever more perceptible and significant movement toward what Miguel Moctezuma (2001) understands as a collective binational and trans-territorial agent has been produced. This process manifests itself in the formation of a broad constellation of clubs (which currently total more than 500), associations of these district federations in various states in the United States, and alliances and coalitions of organizations with a national and binational outlook. The migrant community is advancing toward superior organizational arrangements characterized, among other things, by having a relatively permanent formal organization, strengthening links of cultural identity, belonging, and solidarity with their places of origin, opening prospects of dialogue with different public and private entities from both Mexico and the United States, and having substantial financial potential—through collective funds that go beyond the limitations and inflexibilities characteristic of individual or family remittances—to allot to social welfare plans and local and regional development projects.

One of the demands that has caused the greatest interest in migrant communities is to be able to exercise full citizenship rights as Mexicans abroad. In this demand—which is a direct result of the constitutional reform of 1998

regarding the retention of nationality—are summarized three demands that point in a direction opposite to that of the ideology and actions of neoliberal globalism: strengthening of national identity against the tide of disintegration and dismemberment inherent in globalism, a collective impetus toward local and regional development in contrast to the destructive impact of the internal market and the national productive bases typical of neoliberal restructuring, and democracy from the bottom up, attacking the separation between political class and civil society exacerbated by neoliberal “democracy” (Petras and Veltmeyer, 2001: chap. 6). On another level, the demands of the migrant community in the United States are aimed at the regularization of their legal status, full citizenship rights, and the formation of a multicultural society, as opposed to political exclusion, socioeconomic marginalization, and ghettoization. I would add here the demand for open borders directed at one of the nerve centers of the strategy of imperialist domination prevailing in the current framework of Mexico–United States relations.

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