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Progressive Ponderings
Economic Refugees

For Democratic candidates, the issue they fear most is immigration. Conservatives are framing this issue in a divisive manner - illegal immigrants, illegal aliens, undocumented workers, aliens, amnesty, border security, even national security. None of these terms is neutral. They all imply guilt, criminality and unpunished actions.

All of the above terms describing immigrants cause many U.S. citizens to look negatively on these people. Once that is accomplished you can brand them as thieves, sexually immoral, lazy, free-loaders, aliens, even terrorists. Nothing has to be proved. Just by being here they have become guilty of every label thrown their way.

Now stripped from the human family, civil rights and human rights don't apply. Candidates are encouraged to use the strongest incriminating rhetoric to raise their poll numbers. Militants run to the border and become vigilantes without criticism. Elected officials and candidates use the occasion as photo-ops. They divide and conquer the electorate by using dishonest exaggerated rhetoric. Without the hate-hype, most citizens wouldn't even notice that we have an "immigrant" problem.

I know some "economic refugees." They clean our houses, hotels, businesses. They plant and harvest our foods. They landscape and build. They take care of our children, some even fight our wars. They're "cheap labor" keeping our prices low and our profits high. Taxes and social security are automatically taken out of their checks. They live a shadow life; exposure would lead to criminality.

These "economic refugees" come here to survive. Hungry, ill-housed, unemployed, without hope, they are victims of globalization in their own country. Globalization has no borders for capital, goods, and corporations, but locks in people and their labor, often into bonded indebtedness, bankruptcy and impoverishment.

How have the international trade agreements and the world banking systems - and their policies - influenced the great imbalances in ownership of the world's resources and wealth? Why do "economic refugees" come to the U.S. under such risk and hardship? If we insist on labeling them "illegal" shouldn't we also label the businesses and people who hire them "illegal?" The corporations that break the law "illegal?" The inside traders that break the law to steal billions, illegal? Is "illegal" limited to certain cultures and races?

The "illegal" framing attempts to make the immigrant issue one of fear and hate, of framing another group of humanity as "evil," as "enemy." They can be "used" but not recognized. Who will speak for these "economic refugees?" Who will address the problems of globalization that create "economic refugees?" Is there a political party that speaks the truth of these "free-market" rejects?

"Refugee" recognizes their humanity and their dignity. It reinstates their civil and human rights. It reframes the problem to look at the causes. Unless we change the structure of global economics we insure a "50 year problem," "perpetual" fences, and recurring American political alienation. Are there any winners when hate prevails? Surely progressive, morally concerned people can find a better solution. "Economic refugee" recognizes the "big" picture.
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