

Walls or Roads

James Petras

History is told by Walls and Roads which have marked significant turning points in the relation between peoples and states.

We will discuss the story behind two walls and one road and the circumstances which surround them and their consequences.

The Berlin Wall

In the aftermath of World War II, Europe was divided between East and West. On one side the Soviet Union (SU) and its Communist allies and on the other the United States and its Capitalist partners.

The Soviets faced a formidable task in rebuilding their sector having lost tens of millions of soldiers and civilians and facing great scarcities of resources without aid from the wealthy West. North America sought to roll-back the post war agreements and proceeded to subvert the East by promising higher living standards, greater cultural and personal freedom. The East resorted to greater control and sacrifice in order to reconstruct their economies. The unequal contest between East and West in terms of personal consumption was contested by the more radical social investments in national public health, educational and social programs.

The West succeeded in attracting professionals, skilled workers and important cultural figures by offering attractive economic and individual incentive which the East could not or would not match.

In order to contain the ‘brain drain’ the East adopted repressive measures including building what was later referred to as the Berlin Wall. Despite physical obstacles Easterners fled across and under the Wall.

When the East succumbed to pressure and internal opposition, the economy was taken over by the capitalist West which incorporated most of their factories and workers under control by private foreign capitalists. Hundreds of thousands of workers in the East suffered unemployment and loss of social welfare and millions moved to western countries.

The former Eastern countries were annexed into the Western military alliance(NATO) and were incorporated into US wars in the Balkans, the Middle East and Southern Asia.

The end of the Wall strengthened the US military and increased the wealth of the European Union. The Soviet Union disintegrated, and Russia was impoverished, and its economy pillaged for over a decade. Eventually Russia recovered and regained its sovereignty , independence and its status as a world power.

The US Wall: Mexico and Central America

The mass migration of Central Americans and Mexicans was directly linked to two essential factors:

NAFTA and the US intervention in the civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The US coup in Guatemala in 1954, Washington's massive million dollar a day intervention in the El Salvador revolution and the 3 decades of Pentagon support for the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua and the military coups in Honduras resulted in the killing of over 400,000 Central Americans while over 2 million Central Americans were uprooted, tortured, jailed and forced to flee across the Mexican - US border.

The flood of refugees, products of US imperial wars', crossed into the US seeking safety and employment. The US refused humanitarian assistance, hundreds of thousands were denied entry or were expelled.

In Central America, Washington backed the military and oligarchies which controlled the land, evicted farmers and denied land to the returning peasants.

The US responded by expanding the border police and immigration security forces, seizing and expelling tens of thousands of hard working refugees. Walls were built along the Mexican frontier, to prevent refugees from crossing the border, condemning them to violence and misery.

Millions of Mexican peasants were displaced by the NAFTA agreement which promoted US agro-exports which undercut Mexican staples. NAFTA undermined US industrial workers as multi-nationals sought low wages .

Bankrupted farmers in Mexico sought to cross the border.

They were joined by tens of thousands of Mexicans who fled from the drug cartels which were protected by US allies among the corrupt Mexican politicians, police and army. The drug cartels reaped tens of billions of dollars by laundering their drug profits in the leading New York, Miami and Los Angeles banks. The Wall kept Mexican workers out while the US government allowed drug money in-- to flow to US bankers which profit from the drug laundering.

The conflict in the US between the two parties is an argument over the methods of denying the refugees entry-- “walls” versus “barriers”-- but not over US bank laundering and NAFTA. The US Wall protects profiteering and punishes its victim by keeping them out.

China’s Belt and Road: Opening Borders

Contrary to the US mania for Wall building on the Mexican border blocking refugees, President Xi Jinping has allocated \$900 billion dollars for roads and infrastructures to open China extend links with South and Central Asia, the Middle East, East Africa and Europe. China is building sea ports, roads, airports,-- opening trade, and increasing the flow of labor to markets and investments.

China does not face refugees fleeing from US invasions as is the case of the Central Americans. Nor are Chinese agricultural exports displacing farmers, as is the case of Mexicans bankrupted by NAFTA.

China's One belt, One Road (OBOR) promotes regional and international integration – in contrast to US imposed disintegration of Central American linkages. China promotes free trade agreements with its Asian partners in opposition to US protectionist tariffs and walls.

China's OBOR policy is based on promoting the upgrading of underdeveloped countries in order to complement China's advanced technological exports.

Conclusion

Walls are built by the US to constrain the fallout from its Central American wars and unequal trade agreements with Mexico. The Soviet Wall was constructed to protect its backward, uncompetitive economy.

China needs infrastructure, breaking walls, to facilitate the flow of goods and services across borders and incorporating labor, not arresting and expelling it.

The Walls reflect backward and regressive policies; global roads and belts link countries to peaceful and productive global integration.