



Campaign for “sanctuary schools” in Canada

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Photo: movilization in Toronto in favor of migrants- Notimex

President Trump’s attack on undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has created a flow of refugees across the border to Canada. These are people who fear that they will be deported from the U.S. back to the country they have had to flee.

Canada and the U.S. have an agreement that refugees must apply for status in the first country where they arrive. If an individual applies at the Canadian border with a request for refugee status, they will be rejected. However, if they sneak across the border, they can be arrested, and then can apply for refugee status in Canada. The Canada—US border is almost 9 thousand kilometres and most of it has no fence—and certainly not a wall. This has led to the strange practice of people risking their lives by crossing an open border in -20 or -30 degree Celsius freezing weather and asking to be arrested. They are then taken by the police to a facility where they can stay while applying for refugee status.

Individuals without legal immigrant status are some-

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times refused services available to those with legal status, but campaigns on behalf of refugees are trying to change that.

The city of Montreal has formally become a sanctuary city, while the City of Vancouver has adopted an “access without fear” policy. It ensures people without legal status will not be reported by city employees to immigration officers and will not be refused city services available to all residents.

In British Columbia, a coalition called “Schools for All” unites the migrant rights groups such as Sanctuary Health and No One Is Illegal with local unions of the BC Teachers Federation in a campaign to raise awareness of the problems immigrants without status, pushing local governments and school districts to adopt sanctuary school policies.

The campaign has some British Columbia school districts making the institutions under their jurisdiction “sanctuary schools.” These districts have assured parents that their lack of immigration status will not lead to their children being refused school registration, nor will their uncertain immigration status be reported to federal immigration agencies. District authorities will not cooperate with any attempt by immigration officials to locate undocumented people via the public school system.

The movement for sanctuary schools has arisen because some parents are unwilling to send their children to school for fear that they could be detained and deported. “We understand the barriers in registering kids in other school districts and the real fears these families experience due to their information being shared, of being rejected or detained and deported,” explains Sanctuary Health spokesperson Byron Cruz.

No One Is Illegal also campaigns for the Canadian federal government to end its agreement with the U.S. that prohibits refugee claims for people who are currently in the United States. The existing policy means that anyone from Latin America who gets across the border to the U.S. from Mexico is barred from applying for Canadian refugee status—another form of a wall.

Harsha Walia from No One Is Illegal says “It’s immense in light of what’s happening in the U.S., ensuring that locally and municipally, our communities are taking a stand that says people are welcome, that refugees are welcome, that undocumented students are welcome, and doing it in ways that go beyond the symbolism of it.” These are not universal sentiments in Canada, however. The right-wing Conservative party is selecting a new leader, and several candidates are staking out an anti-immigrant platform. The Trump effect from the U.S. has made it more respectable for politicians to take positions that normalize views that have been marginal in the past.