

NEWS FROM THE PLANT

When Frank Stewart came to work early Tuesday morning, he punched in and went up to the locker room to change clothes.

"Where were you yesterday?" asked Joe Williams, who changed at the next locker. "Don't you know we work on Mondays around here?"

"I had to go to court to fight a speeding ticket. First they kept me waiting half a day. Then I had to look at this stupid movie about how to drive."

"You missed some real excitement around here," said Joe. "The government pulled a raid."

"What do you mean, a raid?"

"Just what I said," Joe answered. "A raid. Around four guys in suits came in and started asking questions. 'Where were you born? Where are your papers?' Questions like that. As soon as some of the people in packing saw what was happening, they took off. Man, you never saw anyone disappear so fast."

"No kidding? Where did they go?"

"I don't know. Out the door. Behind the boxes in 114. In the can. Maria told me one lady in her department hid out in the garbage pail."

Frank was starting to get the picture.

"Who were these guys?"

"Bill, the union steward said they were agents from the INS - Immigration and Naturalization Service. They were looking for people in this country without papers."

Frank was disappointed he'd missed the excitement.

"Wouldn't you know I'd pick that day to be off. How come I always miss all the fun?"

Joe looked serious.

"It wasn't much fun. I saw them hassling Julio -the Puerto Rican over in assembly. They were really giving him a hard time - making him show his papers. And he's a citizen, so he hasn't got papers. They were calling him a liar. Pushing him around. They wouldn't believe he was Puerto Rican. They kept asking him if he got here by bus."

Joe clearly didn't think much of the way the agents acted.

"They were pulling every person who looked like they were Mexican off their lines and hassling them. They even stopped Steve, and he's Japanese. This one agent kept talking to him in Spanish. The place was crazy - people running all over; lines backing up; everyone getting all shook up. The only departments that weren't touched were the ones where almost everyone's white."

"Did they catch anyone?" Frank asked.

"When I saw them leaving they had Juan Lopez and Eliseo that works in packing. And they had one of the Spanish women from assembly. I think her name is Mercedes. The foreman said they were here without papers. I guess they'll all be put on a bus back to Mexico."

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FOR HONEST WORK.

"Why some of those people have been here for years. Two of Juan's kids were born here. And just last week he was telling me about the plans for his son's christening."

"Maybe so," said Joe, "but the christening will have to take place in Mexico, because he's gone from here."

Frank finished changing his clothes. He didn't say much for the rest of the day, but he listened to other people talking. Some of the conversation was about the raid of the day before. People wondered if there were others without papers in the plant besides the three they caught.

That night, after Frank and his wife, Joyce, had put the children to sleep, they sat around talking. He told her about the raid.

"It doesn't seem right," she said. "Those people have been in the plant working like everyone else. Juan's wife just had a baby. How will they live with

three kids and him losing his job? And both of them being sent back?"

"I don't know. Some of the guys were saying it was a good thing that they got the three of them, because it will mean more jobs for Americans. That makes sense. It's hard enough to get a job now.¹"

"Isn't Juan the one you used to trade food with?" Joyce continued.

"That's right. He'd give me tacos from home sometimes, and I'd give him some of my lunch. He really likes your meat loaf."

Frank thought for a minute.

"The other thing some of the guys were saying is that the Mexicans who are here illegally don't pay taxes and are a drain on the economy. I read something about that in the "Tribune" last week."

"How could Juan not pay taxes?" Joyce asked, frowning.

"That's ridiculous. The company deducts taxes from his check the same as they do from yours - before you even see the money."



They both sat quietly for a minute, before Joyce continued.

"You'd think that a rich country like this wouldn't have to turn away anyone looking for honest work. After all, there are plenty of things that need doing."

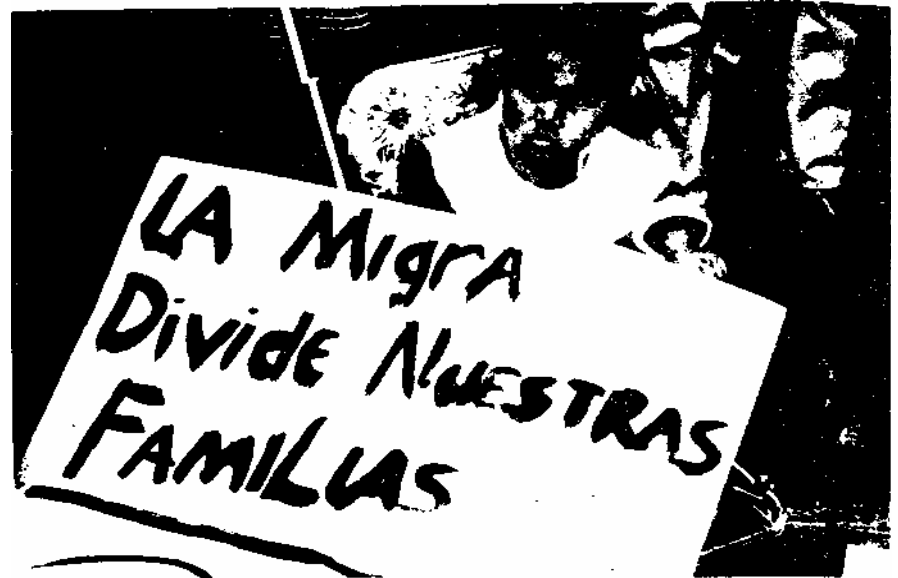
WORKERS WITHOUT PAPERS

The incident at the plant that Frank and Joyce Stewart talked about was only one of many such incidents all over the country. It is estimated that there are from six to twelve million people living in the U.S. without what the government calls "proper papers". They come from all over - from Canada, from Hong Kong, India and Greece, from Jamaica and Haiti - but the largest number come from Mexico.

Why do they come? The answer, in most cases, is simple: a chance to work. And work they do, in agriculture, food processing and serving, clothing manufacture, transportation - wherever productive labor is carried on.

The argument is often made that the undocumented workers don't pay taxes. Exactly the opposite is true. Joyce Stewart was right when she pointed that out to Frank. Juan Lopez' employer withheld federal and state taxes from his paychecks. When Juan was returned to Mexico he was unable to recover the excess in income tax he paid during the course of the year. And taxes aren't the only losses suffered by people forced by the U.S. Government to leave. There is the money the employer takes out for social security. If people are forced to leave they lose it all. Even if they stay, they can't collect social security for the time they were here without papers. People also lose bank accounts, furniture, and other household goods and personal belongings - everything that can't be packed up and put on a bus with them.

There are other losses as well. Greedy lawyers charge all kinds of money to "defend" victims of immigration arrests. In the end, the people have to leave anyway, and they leave a lot poorer than before the lawyer took their money. Similarly there is the problem of notaries. In Mexico, a notary is almost



like a lawyer: someone people go to for certain legal services that do not require actually going to court. In the U.S., anyone with \$15. can be a notary. But since the Spanish word is similar - notaria - and since unscrupulous notaries with neon signs outside their neighborhood offices are able to attract people with immigration problems, many notaries do a large illegal business. They steal money from people and give back false promises or simple services that are available at low cost, if the people only know where to look for them.

People without proper papers suffer other financial losses as well. There is the money that some pay to contractors for jobs and false papers. Not everyone does this, since not everyone has the money or the connections. But there are many contractors or middlemen who fix workers up with papers and jobs, in return for big sums of money. If these workers get caught by the immigration agents, they lose the money they put up for the jobs and papers, as well as everything else.

There are personal losses. Families are broken up by the immigration laws. The U.S. Constitution says that any person born here is a citizen. This means

that many undocumented workers have children who are citizens. If children are old enough to stay and work, they may choose to stay and support the family when it is sent back. Or the child may go back with the family and then return when it is old enough to work. Also, it is very common for sisters and brothers to be separated by the immigration laws.

DISCRIMINATION IN THE U.S.

So why, with all these problems and risks, do people come? As we said before, the answer is simple: a chance to work. Because he didn't have papers, Juan Lopez was forced to take a low paying job with little union protection. Some are more fortunate and manage to get jobs in high paying industries like auto and steel. Most, however, have to settle for the \$2.50/ hour jobs: in unorganized factories, in service stations, in restaurants. And the lowest paying jobs in this country are usually the hardest, the hottest, and the dirtiest.

In addition to the problems resulting from lack of official documents, Juan, like other workers of color, was a victim of the system of U.S. white supremacy: discrimination based on skin color. Furthermore, he had to survive the discrimination against him because



his first language was Spanish. Not many employers will hire people who don't speak English – even when the job has nothing to do with speaking English, or any language for that matter. And in many jobs, if there are white people willing to do the work, other workers don't get hired. So Juan and his family faced double discrimination: color and language.

Besides discrimination at work, people like Juan live in constant fear and uncertainty. They know that if the immigration officials catch up with them, what little amount of financial security they've found will be taken away. Anything can lead to being caught: a raid, a fight with a neighbor, sending a child to school, a speeding ticket or just walking down the street and being Mexican. Raids and other forms of harassment are still common despite the government's claim that they are no longer doing this. In and near the community of South Chicago, there have been recent raids on local restaurants and numerous work places such as Republic Steel, Jay's Potato Chips, Solo Cup and two local hospitals. In the case of the hospitals, supervisors called an "employees meeting" and once the workers were assembled, the doors of the meeting room were closed and the immigration officials were brought in. Even workers with proper papers are hassled as the government is liable to stop any Mexican or person of color, trying to find "illegals." Being caught means jail, until the victim can put up \$500 to \$1500 in bond, or until that person is on the bus to Mexico.

WHAT ABOUT MEXICO?

Can't they find work in their own country? Often the answer is no, and one of the reasons for that is U.S. business. The border between Mexico and the U.S which is closed up tight to Mexican workers who want to come north, is wide open to U.S. corporations running away to Mexico. Large corporations like to boast how their investments help underdeveloped countries grow in industrial strength. The truth is a lot different. When U.S. corporations enter a country like Mexico, they provide jobs for just a handful of people – at the cost of distorting and retarding economic

growth of the country as a whole. Thus, Mexico has been unable to develop many of the basic industries vital to any independent country because the new business enterprises are crushed by giant U.S. agricultural, auto, pharmaceutical and other monopolies. When U.S. corporations invest money, large profits are sent back to the U.S., to the banks and shareholders of the corporation. Thus, money is drained out of Mexico and many other countries of Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and South America, enriching the wealthiest segments of U.S. society. When the Lopez family came north looking for work, they were simply trying to follow the money that the Yankee exploiters have taken from their country.

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Another problem that these U.S. corporations in Mexico create for workers is the language problem. The companies often want their employees, especially those in office jobs, to speak English. And because these companies want English speaking workers, Mexican schools want English speaking teachers. Since the arrival of U.S. business interests in Mexico, speaking Spanish is not good enough for many jobs. So people come here to learn English while they work, in hopes of some day landing a better job back home. It is doubly aggravating to Mexican workers here to have to put up with the argument "If they live here they should speak our language", when even in their own country, its getting to be important to speak our language.



COMPETING FOR JOBS

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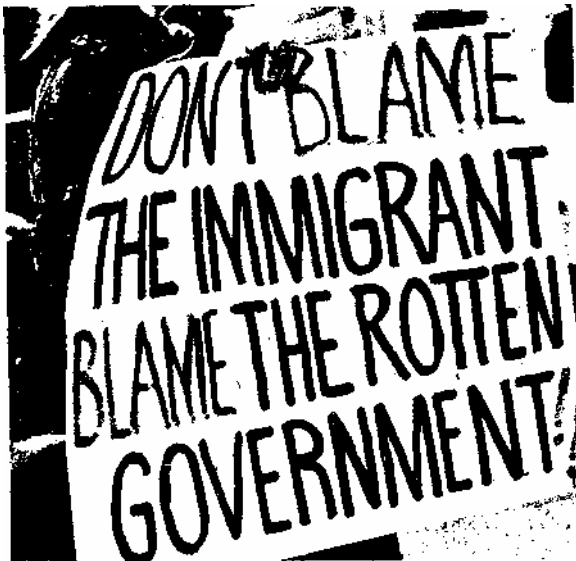
Many workers just stay a few years in this country, before returning home. Others, like Juan, settle here and raise families. Do they compete with "American" Workers for jobs? Of course they do. Under the present system, all workers compete for jobs. But we think there is something wrong with the idea that competition of workers is more important than their contribution. Workers without papers, like immigrant workers generally – be they from Africa, Europe, South America or the East – have built the railroads, dredged the canals and dug the mines that have given this country the mightiest industrial base on earth. With so many more tasks waiting to be performed, the country cannot afford to turn away those who come from other lands looking for work. The contribution that the immigrant workers, including those without official papers, have made in the U.S. is enormous: a lot greater than the contribution made by those who are seeking to deport them.

THE TRUTH ABOUT IMMIGRATION LAWS

Whenever we have high unemployment, those representing the interests of big business attempt to cover up their own responsibility for this situation by blaming working people. As the U.S. unemployment rate rose in the last five years, new laws were introduced to the Congress which were designed to blame Mexican workers for the U.S. economic troubles. One of these laws, the Rodino Bill, was defeated due to the united

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opposition of many people who understood its unjust-ness and the dirty trick behind it. However, a number of states have enacted similar legislation and others are attempting to do so. Furthermore another bill, called the Eilberg Law, was sneaked through the U.S. Congress to replace the Rodino Bill. Among other things, the Eilberg Law reduces the annual quota of Mexicans legally entering the U.S. from 43,000 to 20,000. It also changes the status of parents with children born in the U.S. by making them wait until the child is 21 before they can get the papers which would make them legal residents. This provision makes many more people liable for deportation and divides families. Such laws must be resisted and stopped. But it is even more important to resist all efforts to deport working people who are simply trying to work for the money that is being drained out of their country by U.S. corporations.



A PAGE FROM HISTORY

Frank and Joyce Stewart didn't know it, and neither do most people, but there is a precedent in history for the kinds of reactionary deportation laws that are being enacted against workers without papers now.

In 1850, when slavery still existed throughout the U.S. South, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law. This incredible law was designed to stop the steady stream of slaves escaping to the North. It provided for fines and prison terms for anyone sheltering refugees from slavery. Suspected runaway slaves could be arrested on request, or on sight, without a warrant and turned over to a claimant, on nothing more than the claimant's word that he was the owner. It was all perfectly "legal" — just like the deportation hearings are today. A person would be arrested and brought before a judge. In about one minute, the person would be charged, the owner would testify the victim was "his" slave, and the so-called trial would be over.

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The appeal the slave holders made to enlist northern support for the Fugitive Slave Law was in many ways like the argument put forward today by the U.S. Government for deporting undocumented workers. The slaveholders — the biggest and cruelest exploiters of labor of their time — painted themselves as heroes and champions of white labor. They boasted that they were protecting white people from competition for jobs by black laborers. "After all," they argued, "as long as black folks are working without wages on the plantations, they can't take away white people's jobs."

These arguments were exactly backwards. They were