

A fairy tale ending to INS horror story

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

July 24, 1997, Thursday,, ALL EDITIONS

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Section: LOCAL NEWS; Pg. 01B; Colin Campbell

Length: 547 words

Byline: Colin Campbell

Body

Here is a **horror story** involving the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service with a happy **ending**.

Here is a victim of bad law, bureaucratic bullying, jail, job loss and deportation who wakes up **in** another country a few days later and learns that the **INS** has just typed a few X's onto a form letter and, presto, he can return.

But it helps if you're a journalist who has worked **in** Atlanta for CNN since 1994. It helps if you have a good lawyer and maybe access to a congressman's office.

Because if you're just a foreigner who has failed to file a document and you can't understand the mean new U.S. immigration laws and the **INS** bureaucrats tie you **in** knots ---forget it. But here is one happy **ending**. It makes you wonder about the others.

John Psaropoulos, a young CNN producer who was born **in** Greece, was deported last Friday after a four-month battle with the **INS** that left him and his American fiancée reeling.

On July 15 his lawyer, Charles Kuck, had appealed this banishment, which had resulted from Psaropoulos' attempt to re-enter the United States with a lapsed visa. But day followed day, and the waiver didn't come.

Last Thursday and Friday I called the **INS** several times and told officials the expulsion seemed ridiculous. But the **INS** said Psaropoulos not only had lacked his proper document but was also dishonest.

"He lied," District Deputy Director Fred Alexander said. "He misrepresented a material fact." Asked for specifics, Alexander said, "I do not have that before me."

District Director Tom Fischer told me, "We have questions about his integrity." But when I asked for details, Fischer said, "I cannot share the file with you. That's privileged information."

Imagine such power!

I also phoned the district office of my congressman, John Lewis, and urged an assistant there, Jefferey Hood, to call the **INS** on Psaropoulos' behalf. Hood kindly did so ---but it was too late. The plane was leaving. The **INS** bosses had left for the weekend.

Fischer, the **INS** district director, admitted Friday, just hours before Psaropoulos' departure, that he had not read the man's 3-day-old appeal. I read a few lines of the four-page legal argument over the phone. Fischer said its message was clear ---and a waiver wasn't going to happen.

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On Monday Psaropoulos was granted an appeal that was mailed to his suburban Atlanta address. Deputy Director Alexander said Wednesday that "Mr. Fischer granted that waiver" and that it had been "routinely handled." I was told Fischer was unavailable.

I'd be amazed if the waiver was "routine." I suspect, rather, that the **INS** changed its mind when confronted with the clear danger of embarrassing publicity and political heat.

"I've never had them act this quickly on one of these applications," Kuck said. Naturally, he was delighted.

Good God, good God," Psaropoulos said when I phoned him Wednesday **in** Greece and assured him that his five-year-ban had been lifted. "I'm stunned. I was quite despondent and depressed. This is like a **fairy-tale ending**. I can't believe it."

His lawyer said later that some aliens should be kicked out. "But Congress went too far . . . and John is the tip of the iceberg. There are hundreds of people being abused by the **INS**."

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: IMMIGRATION (90%); DEPORTATION (90%); IMMIGRATION LAW (90%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); LAWYERS (74%); WRITERS (73%)

Company: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (94%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

Organization: IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (94%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (84%)

Industry: LAWYERS (74%); WRITERS (73%)

Person: JOHN LEWIS (54%)

Geographic: ATLANTA, GA, USA (91%); UNITED STATES (93%)

Load-Date: July 25, 1997