As Pace of Deportation Rises, Illegal Families Are Digging In

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Body

The day after his wife was ***deported*** to their home country, Honduras, Lilo Mancia grieved as though she had died.

Neighbors arrived with doughnuts and juice for their two small children, while Mr. Mancia, an ***illegal*** immigrant like his wife, Maria Briselda Amaya, took telephone calls from relatives and tried not to break down.

"The first thing I thought of was the children," Mr. Mancia, who is fighting his own ***deportation*** order, told the visitors gathered in his second floor walkup apartment in New Bedford a couple of weeks ago. "The future we imagined for them, it all collapsed."

Last year on May 1, hoping to influence Congress to adopt legislation making ***illegal*** immigrants legal, hundreds of thousands of immigrants held marches and work stoppages across the country. This May 1 there will be another round of rallies and marches, but this time immigrants will also be protesting a surge in ***deportations***.

The events are expected to be much smaller than a year ago, organizers said, as stepped-up enforcement by the authorities has made ***illegal*** immigrants wary of protesting in public and more doubtful that Congress will soon act to give them a chance at legalization.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, facing intense political pressure to toughen enforcement, removed 221,664 ***illegal*** immigrants from the country over the last year, an increase of more than 37,000 -- about 20 percent -- over the year before, according to the agency's tally.

While President Bush and many Democrats have called for a path to legalize some 12 million ***illegal*** immigrants, a significant number of Republicans in Congress reject the plan because they view it as amnesty for lawbreakers. They advocate a broader campaign of ***deportations*** that would expel many ***illegal*** immigrants and, they say, drive millions more to give up and go home.

"We are not calling for I.C.E. to become the Gestapo knocking on doors in the middle of the night," said Rosemary Jenks, director of government relations for NumbersUSA, a group in Washington that seeks to curb immigration. "But we have to increase the likelihood that if you are here illegally you will be caught."

So far, many of the ***deportations*** have caused ***illegal families*** to hunker down and plot ways to avoid detection and resist ***deportation***, not run voluntarily for the border, immigrant advocates said. In Massachusetts, immigration agents have been challenged by lawyers, labor unions and state officials who question their raid tactics and are fighting trench by legal trench to block ***deportations***.

Mr. Mancia was amazed at the offers of help he received, including from the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, the state's Department of Social Services and Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts.

Mr. Mancia has been given emergency aid to pay his bills while his ***deportation*** case proceeds, and Elizabeth Badger, a public service lawyer in Boston, was still fighting his wife's ***deportation*** after she was on the ground in Honduras.

''I'm not going anywhere,'' Mr. Mancia declared defiantly to a downstairs neighbor. ''I'm going to stand my ground here until I win.''

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials say their priority is to locate and ***deport*** fugitive immigrants with criminal records or convicts who are finishing prison sentences. Still, thousands of ***illegal*** immigrants like the Mancias with no criminal history have been caught in raids, the officials acknowledge.

Also, new expedited procedures have allowed agents greater flexibility to ***deport*** ***illegal*** immigrants caught in border areas, bypassing court hearings. Many immigrants, when caught, agree to leave voluntarily because it means they are not barred from returning legally in the future.

Seen from the working class communities like New Bedford, the ***deportations*** are a blunt instrument. Frequently the ***deported*** immigrants were not alone in the United States, but came from ***families*** with a mix of legal and ***illegal*** members who were well settled in this country.

A growing number of deportee ***families*** have children who were born here and are United States citizens. (The Mancia's younger son, Jeffrey, was born in Texas.) More than 3.1 million American children have at least one ***illegal*** immigrant parent, said Jeffrey S. Passel, a demographer at the Pew Hispanic Center.

Mr. Mancia and his wife were among 361 workers arrested on March 6 in an immigration raid at Michael Bianco Inc., a leather goods factory in this faded manufacturing town. She remained in detention while he was released to care for their boys, Jeffrey, 2, and Kevin, 5.

On April 18, Ms. Amaya was awakened at 4 a.m., driven by immigration agents to Kennedy Airport in New York and placed on a passenger flight to Honduras, Mr. Mancia said. Telephoning her husband as soon as she could place an international call, she said little, only that she was disoriented and more afraid of her home country than an American jail. She has no house, property or job in Honduras.

''She has no words right now,'' Mr. Mancia said, explaining why his wife refused to be interviewed by telephone.

Mr. Mancia has been left to fight off his own ***deportation*** and face a series of difficult choices.

He must decide, he said, whether to press his case in the United States or declare defeat and take the boys to rejoin their mother in Honduras. If forced to depart, he will weigh whether to leave his sons with friends in New Bedford to get a quality of schooling he believes they will not have in Honduras. Mr. Mancia said he and his wife had decided to leave their home in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, for their safety, because criminal gangs used the streets as a combat zone. Ms. Amaya's sister was on a public bus returning from Christmas shopping on Dec. 23, 2004, when gang gunmen shot it up, killing her and 27 other passengers, he said.

''We walked over dead bodies in Honduras,'' Mr. Mancia said. ''The children see that and they don't grow up well.''

He was the first to come to the United States, crossing at night at Laredo, Texas. In January 2005 Ms. Amaya took the same route, carrying Kevin, then a toddler. Caught by the Border Patrol, she applied for political asylum and was released temporarily. After Jeffrey was born in Houston, they came to New Bedford. Her asylum petition was eventually denied.

Stitching military backpacks in the Bianco factory at $7.00 an hour, the couple achieved stability that felt almost like prosperity. They bought a white aluminum kitchen set and a microwave oven. Kevin was content in kindergarten, reciting his ABC's and chattering in English, which neither parent speaks.

Soon they had a ***family*** cluster in New Bedford, as three other relatives from Honduras, drawn by word of jobs at Bianco, came to work there as well.

"We knew it would be hard to get legal papers," Mr. Mancia said. "Since so many people were in the same situation, we learned to live like the rest."

After the March 6 raid, immigration lawyers appealed Ms. Amaya's asylum case and she became optimistic. But she remained in immigration detention in the Bristol County jail, unable to receive visits from the children.

"He is refusing to eat and needs to be coaxed to take sustenance," Arthur Dutra, a teacher at the John Hannigan School, wrote in a March 15 letter about Kevin's condition. "He asks for his mother repeatedly."

A nurse at the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center, Jacqueline Arieta, wrote in a separate letter that Jeffrey was having recurring earaches and losing his appetite due to "acute sadness."

A gaunt man with a mild voice, Mr. Mancia said he did not mind cooking for the boys or washing their clothes at the Laundromat. He said he and his wife, balancing two factory jobs, had learned they both had to do housework.

The help he has received in fighting his ***deportation*** has allowed him to believe that he might avoid his wife's fate, even though he has no papers, no job skill to offer other than hard work and very limited legal avenues to pursue. Although Jeffrey is an American citizen, he would not be able to petition for his parents to be admitted to the country legally until he was 21.

Mr. Mancia said he was preparing for any outcome, even the prospect of a separation from one or both sons so they could remain at least temporarily in the United States.

"My son is an American," Mr. Mancia said "He needs to be educated in American schools, to speak English. He needs this country."

Ms. Jenks, of NumbersUSA , said the responsibility for the impact on children of the ***deportations*** rests with their parents.

"If parents are going to come here illegally, unfortunately the child faces the consequences as well," she said.

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Graphic

Photos: Mr. Mancia and Kevin making a visit to a law office in New Bedford, Mass.

Lilo Mancia, above, has received many calls and visits of support since his wife, Maria Briselda Amaya, was ***deported*** to Honduras and is now fighting his own ***deportation***. His son Kevin, 5, below left with a letter from his mother, has been refusing to eat. The Mancias' son Jeffrey, 2, shown in a photograph with Ms. Amaya and Kevin, has also lost his appetite because of "acute sadness," a nurse wrote. (Photographs by Robert Spencer for The New York Times)(pg. A18)

In the early morning hours of April 18, customs officials sent Lilo Mancia's wife, an ***illegal*** immigrant, back to Honduras. Mr. Mancia, shown with his son Jeffrey, is still fighting a ***deportation*** battle of his own. (Photo by Robert Spencer for The New York Times)(pg. A1)

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