

## **Smuggling of immigrants is continuing; Enforcement lax; economy needs workers**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
January 22, 2002 Tuesday,, Metro Edition

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The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
aje.com

**Section:** Metro News;

**Length:** 886 words

**Byline:** RHONDA COOK

### **Body**

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Five recent cases of smuggling illegal immigrants into the Southeast --- including one leading to a guilty plea Jan. 7 --- highlight a trend that immigration experts say will continue as long as there are low-paying jobs and a need for workers to fill them.

Even with a recession, said immigration consultant Tom Fischer, a former Atlanta district director for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the region's economy is "still better than most other countries'. And the dollar is still extremely strong."

"When you look at landscaping and home construction, you look at the poultry industry, the farming industry, apples in North Georgia and onions down in Vidalia, we are a fast-growing, diverse economy here in Georgia that is labor-intensive and looking at a labor force ready, willing and able to come here to work," he said.

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Enforcement is far from what is needed, said Fischer, who was district director in Atlanta for 11 years. "I could have arrested 10,000 people a month if I had had the resources, staff and money."

Given immigrants' levels of desperation, experts believe few are discouraged, even by high-profile raids coming as INS has placed more priority on addressing the growing problem of human smuggling.

The problem is huge.

"People want to make more money and more profit, and they want to take advantage of these people because they are undocumented," said Lani Wong, chairman of the Atlanta chapter of the National Association of Chinese Americans. "We all care so much about profits."

Consider: In one of the largest cases in the nation's history, authorities last month indicted Tyson Foods Inc. and several executives on charges that they paid smugglers to bring illegal Mexican immigrants to jobs in nine Tyson plants in 15 states, not including Georgia. On Jan. 7, an ex-Tyson Foods employee pleaded guilty to conspiracy, admitting that he smuggled illegal immigrants into the country to work for the poultry company and provided them with fraudulent identification. Last March, the INS detained 99 suspected illegal immigrants from China, El Salvador, Indonesia, Mexico and other countries after raiding 10 China Cafe restaurants and a half-dozen

Smuggling of immigrants is continuing; Enforcement lax; economy needs workers

apartments and houses. The next day, the owners of four Chamblee employment agencies were charged with **smuggling workers** from Latin America to work in Chinese restaurants from Georgia to Ohio. Federal charges from both of those investigations are pending. On Aug. 12, 1999, INS agents discovered 132 Chinese men and boys in the secret compartment of a freighter in Savannah. Authorities said smugglers charged the men a fee of \$50,000, 125 times more than the annual Chinese salary of \$400. **Smuggled immigrants** often repay the fees by working for years in conditions that resemble indentured servitude. Six men indicted in that case were sent to prison with sentences ranging from about two to seven years. Also in August 1999, federal authorities unsealed indictments accusing 13 people of **smuggling** Asian girls and women to Atlanta and DeKalb County for a life of forced prostitution. Authorities said some of the women, working in squalid rooms furnished only with a mattress, were sold for sex 10 times a day. Two Russian nationals were convicted in Atlanta in 1999 in a scheme to import up to 40 illegal Russian **immigrants** to work in a floor-cleaning business in the metro area and in Albuquerque, N.M. Authorities charged a Lawrenceville consulting company months later in a scheme to bring Indian computer programmers here to do Y2K-related work. They said most of the jobs never materialized.

Those are just a few of the thousands of people from countries around the globe who pay big money to be **smuggled** into the United States by plane or ship, officials say.

Most have one thing in common: They are roundly exploited once they come to the United States. Some are forced into prostitution to repay **smuggling** debts. Others endure years in sweatshops. Still others toil with low pay, few benefits and squalid housing.

"A lot of people want to take advantage of them because of their status," Wong said. "These people desperately want a job."

While the **workers** may find jobs that pay enough by the standards in their countries, it is not enough to live here, said Ramon Moreno, director of protection for the Mexican Consulate in Atlanta. So they are forced to live in crowded conditions or in circumstances provided by the smuggler or employer.

And many times, Moreno said, they have problems getting paid.

Moreno said he is trying to help the families of 30 **workers** who were returned to Mexico before they were paid all their salaries. The deported **workers** could be owed as little as \$100 or as much as \$1,300, Moreno said.

"I'm sure we'll be able to help them collect this money," Moreno said.

But an even greater problem exists for those **workers** who hire out as day laborers.

"I hear these horror stories of day laborers who work every day but by the time Friday comes and it's pay day, these people will not come and pick them up," Wong said.

"So they don't get paid. Those employers are not going to pay them and they [the **workers**] have no way of getting their money. And this happens everywhere."

Staff writer Mark Bixler contributed to this article.

## Classification

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Language: ENGLISH

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (92%); **SMUGGLING** (90%); ILLEGAL **IMMIGRANTS** (89%); GUILTY PLEAS (89%); ALIEN **SMUGGLING** (89%); INDICTMENTS (87%); ASIAN AMERICANS (78%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); ARRESTS (78%); FRAUD & FINANCIAL CRIME (78%); CONSPIRACY (78%); WAGES & SALARIES (77%); EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (77%); RECESSION (77%); TRENDS (77%); LABOR FORCE (77%); WORKFORCE DEMAND (77%);

Smuggling of immigrants is continuing; Enforcement lax; economy needs workers

**ECONOMIC** CONDITIONS (77%); **ECONOMIC** NEWS (76%); **ECONOMIC** GROWTH (76%); FOOD SALES & REVENUES (74%); AGRICULTURAL SECTOR PERFORMANCE (74%); JAIL SENTENCING (73%); EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES (72%); ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS (71%); MEN (69%); INVESTIGATIONS (60%); HISTORY (50%)

**Company:** TYSON FOODS INC (81%); TYSON FOODS INC (81%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (76%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (57%)

**Organization:** IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (76%); IMMIGRATION & NATURALIZATION SERVICE (57%)

**Ticker:** TSN (NYSE) (81%)

**Industry:** FOOD INDUSTRY (89%); RESTAURANTS (89%); EMPLOYMENT SERVICES (77%); POULTRY (74%); FOOD SALES & REVENUES (74%); POULTRY & EGG PRODUCTION (74%); FOOD & BEVERAGE (74%); AGRICULTURAL SECTOR PERFORMANCE (74%); EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES (72%); CONSTRUCTION (70%)

**Geographic:** ATLANTA, GA, USA (93%); SAVANNAH, GA, USA (71%); GEORGIA, USA (94%); MEXICO (92%); CHINA (92%); EL SALVADOR (79%); INDONESIA (79%); UNITED STATES (79%); LATIN AMERICA (79%)

**Load-Date:** January 22, 2002