

VISAS URGED FOR DEAF MEXICANS / THE IMMIGRANTS WERE SMUGGLED INTO NEW YORK FOR FORCED LABOR. THEY BEGGED AND SOLD TRINKETS.

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Body

A congressman recommended special visas yesterday for deaf Mexicans smuggled to New York for forced labor, while four more people suspected of running the subway sweatshop were arraigned in federal court.

"Each of the Mexican nationals victimized by this horrific crime should be allowed to stay in this country; they should not be subjected to further hardship through deportation proceedings," Rep. Charles E. Schumer (D., N.Y.) wrote to Attorney General Janet Reno.

In another development, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani expressed disbelief that a city building inspector who visited a Queens home where dozens of the immigrants were housed in crowded conditions had concluded several months ago that it was a legal, two-family residence.

Following a weekend tip from four deaf-mute people who walked into a Queens police station, police found 57 people, most of them also deaf-mute, living in two homes in Jackson Heights, a heavily Hispanic neighborhood.

Seven other Mexican immigrants, some deaf, were arrested Sunday on charges that include alien-smuggling and grand larceny. An alleged ringleader, identified in a published report as Reinaldo Paoletti, remained at large, either in the United States or Mexico.

Four of the suspects were held without bail yesterday in U.S. District Court in Brooklyn on federal charges of smuggling, harboring and transporting illegal immigrants and conspiracy. The four, all illegal immigrants, are Alfredo Rastrian-Paoletti, 37; Jose Paoletti-Lemus, 28; Santa Gonzalez, 21, and Rosa Maria Beltran-Sanchez, 25. Three other people were arraigned Sunday.

Paoletti-Lemus, Beltran-Sanchez and Gonzalez all communicated by sign language during the hearing; authorities said Rastrian-Paoletti is the only one of the four who is not deaf.

Bruce McIntyre, a lawyer for Paoletti-Lemus, said outside court: "There may have been victims, but my client was not one of the people taking advantage of them. He was more a victim than a victimizer."

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The immigrants, who appeared to be in good health, worked long, seven-day weeks begging and peddling cheap trinkets on the subways and on city streets, according to the federal complaint filed at the arraignment. Their earnings were allegedly confiscated by "bosses" as payment for bringing them here.

Investigators found \$35,000 in cash in one of the houses, \$10,000 of it in \$1 bills, according to the complaint.

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