

PATROL SEARCHES HARDER AS MEXICANS SEEK EASIER LIFE IN U.S.

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Body

Jorge Castro waited for his chance here on the cement bank of the Rio Grande, in the shadow of downtown El Paso, Tex. He waited warily for the right moment to evade detection by American border agents and make a dash for the **United States**.

Mr. Castro said he was trying to get to a regular job as a painter and handyman that he had recently started in El Paso. "It's getting very **hard** in Juarez," he said in Spanish. "I was working in a plant here. I was paid very little for a lot of work." In June the plant laid him off and he began considering **seeking** work on the other side. Border **Patrol** reports increase in number of **Mexicans** illegally entering US

"The devaluation made up my mind," he said. "I went over on a Sunday, got a job on Monday."

Rise in Arrests

Officials of the Border **Patrol**, a law-enforcement arm of the **United States** Immigration and Naturalization Service, say more **Mexicans** are attempting entry in the El Paso region, which stretches 180 miles along Texas and New Mexico west to the Arizona state line. Alan E. Eliason, chief **patrol** agent for the district, estimated that the total of arrests of undocumented aliens for August would show "a 25 percent to 30 percent increase" over the same month last year, when 12,430 were arrested.

Border officials say they believe the reasons for the increase are the Mexican Treasury's Aug. 5 devaluation of the peso, which has fallen in value from 49 to the American dollar to 126, and the start of the harvest season, when seasonal workers, many of them in the **United States** illegally, are used by American agricultural businesses to bring in the cotton, fruit and vegetable crops.

"We think the largest percent of the increase is due to the peso devaluation, because July was rather comparable to last year," Mr. Eliason said.

Local Mexican-American groups and others suggested that the rising number of arrests also reflected a crackdown intended to put pressure on Congress as it considers tough new immigration legislation.

Some Cross Daily

Mr. Eliason said he supported the legislation, now at a critical stage of consideration by Congress, but he called suggestions that the increased arrests were politically motivated "absolutely ridiculous."

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"We are faced with increased illegal entries, we tried to put more people on the line to apprehend illegal entries, and we arrested a larger number than usual because there are increased illegal entries," he said.

Last week the El Paso district reported that on Aug. 24 it broke a one-day record by arresting 1,205 Mexicans for illegal entry into the United States. The average number of daily arrests for the month of August so far is 452, in contrast to 401 in August last year.

"As long as there's that lure, jobs, we're not going to be able to do anything about it," Mr. Eliason said.

Urges Tougher Legislation

State Representative Paul C. Moreno, an El Paso Democrat who is chairman of the Mexican-American Legislative Caucus in the Texas House of Representatives, said he believed the Border Patrol's announcement of record arrests was timed to aid the measure.

"That's the way politics is done, the way bills are passed," Mr. Moreno said. "I have no doubt that's the reason." "We've had the Border Patrol for years," said Joe Loya, director for El Paso of the League of United Latin American Citizens. "Why, all of a sudden, are they being so effective?"

Supported by Administration

The immigration measure is sponsored by Senator Alan K. Simpson, Republican of Wyoming, and Representative Romano L. Mazzoli, Democrat of Kentucky. It would, among other things, require employers to seek proof of citizenship or legal alien status from all prospective workers, and by extension would require job applicants to have such proof available.

Critics of the legislation assert that it would discriminate against Americans of Hispanic descent because, in practice, they say, only Hispanic people would be asked for proof.

The measure, which is strongly backed by the Reagan Administration, also calls for fines of as much as \$2,000 and jail terms for employers who regularly employ illegal workers. The House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to consider it on Sept. 14.

Mexican-American leaders such as Mr. Loya said that the legislation, if passed, would not stem the flow of undocumented aliens from Mexico because economic conditions here were so bad.

Mr. Castro, who has a wife and a daughter, said he now pays 15 pesos for a kilo of tortillas that cost 7 before the devaluation this month. He said the American dollars he brings home help him to cope with the higher prices.

Blending Into the Streets

But even on that point there is disagreement. Another man, Jose Luis Hernandez, said he had "to pay in dollars in Juarez already," eliminating any advantage. As he spoke, Mr. Hernandez had already reached the American side of the river and was waiting to blend with the people on El Paso's streets.

Unlike Mr. Castro, Mr. Hernandez has long made a practice of slipping past border patrols to work in El Paso. So has Olga Martinez Robles, an 18-year-old from the interior of Chihuahua State who waited in a group with Mr. Hernandez. She said she has done housework in El Paso homes since the age of 12. "They pay me the same" as before devaluation, she said, "but it's worth a little more."

Mr. Hernandez said that for four years he has done plumbing work in the United States, for \$4.50 an hour, cash. "Clearly in Mexico," he said, "1,000 pesos is worth nothing."

Graphic

Illustrations: photo of Jorge Castro waiting for chance to cross border photo of Mexican family crossing Rio Grande border

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