

# **FEDS ARE MISUING IMMIGRATION LAWS**

Saint Paul Pioneer Press (Minnesota)

January 31, 2000 Monday

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**Section:** EDITORIAL; Pg. 9A

**Length:** 467 words

**Byline:** Bernardo Ruiz, Commentator

## **Body**

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The United States should stop using immigration law to punish union members.

This month, nine Minneapolis hotel maids won a lawsuit against Holiday Inn Express. The workers had helped form a union in August. In October, managers of the hotel fired them and reported them to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which had them arrested. The Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on behalf of the workers, who won a \$72,000 settlement. It was the first time the EEOC ever intervened on behalf of illegal immigrants.

Despite their victory, the workers still are likely to be deported to Mexico.

This is not the first time U.S. employers have used threats of deportation to keep immigrant workers from organizing labor unions. It will not be the last. But employer sanctions against workers trying to organize have grown more frequent and widespread.

Last March, 13 apple-packing houses fired more than 500 immigrant workers in Washington state who were part of a union organizing drive.

In another case, management at RCR Classic, a Los Angeles furniture manufacturer, allegedly targeted pro-union workers by sending them letters asking them to verify their legal status.

These examples demonstrate how current immigration laws help unscrupulous employers to break unions.

When Congress passed the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, employers suddenly became de facto agents of the INS. They are required by law to verify the immigration status of their employees. Many employers willingly continue to hire undocumented workers. But as soon as these workers agitate for better pay or for safer conditions or for union representation, some employers turn them in.

The chances of a company getting fined by the INS are less than two-tenths of a percent, according to the Washington Post. This gives employers little reason not to hire undocumented workers. And it gives those employers tremendous power to dismiss employees at will while blaming the government.

In an election year, immigration and labor are hot-button issues. But candidates should address the fundamental conflicts in U.S. immigration and labor policies.

Many industries in the United States depend on immigrant labor. Whether they are picking produce, sewing clothes in factories or building roads and highways, immigrants are an essential part of today's work force.

Workers should have the right to organize freely - no matter what their immigrant status.

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Ruiz is associate editor at NACLA Report on the Americas magazine in New York. He can be reached at [pmproj@progressive.org](mailto:pmproj@progressive.org), or in care of the Progressive Media Project, 409 E. Main St., Madison, Wis. 53703. Distributed for the project by KRT News Service.

## Classification

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**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** LABOR UNIONS (99%); **IMMIGRATION** (94%); **IMMIGRATION LAW** (92%); SERVICE WORKERS (90%); DEPORTATION (90%); US **FEDERAL** GOVERNMENT (90%); FOREIGN LABOR (90%); HOTEL STAFF (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); RECRUITMENT & HIRING (89%); CITIZENSHIP (78%); DISMISSALS (78%); MANAGERS & SUPERVISORS (78%); CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS (78%); FINES & PENALTIES (78%); LABOR FORCE (78%); SUITS & CLAIMS (78%); LITIGATION (78%); MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (78%); EMPLOYMENT SEARCH (76%); PLATFORMS & ISSUES (70%); LIBERAL MEDIA (63%)

**Company:** MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE INFORMATION SERVICES (50%)

**Organization:** US EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION (83%)

**Industry:** HOTELS & MOTELS (90%); HOTEL STAFF (90%); MANUFACTURING FACILITIES (78%); RESTAURANTS (73%); HOTEL HOUSEKEEPING (73%); APPAREL MFG (66%); FURNITURE MFG (66%); LIBERAL MEDIA (63%); HIGHWAYS & STREETS (60%); ROAD & BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION (60%)

**Geographic:** MADISON, WI, USA (79%); NEW YORK, USA (79%); WASHINGTON, USA (79%); WISCONSIN, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (93%)

**Load-Date:** January 29, 2002