

Demanding Parole, Immigrants Held in Queens Stage Protest

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Body

Five days after asylum-seekers at an Immigration and Naturalization Service detention center in New Jersey went on a hunger strike to **demand** better conditions, **immigrants** at a center in **Queens** **protested** yesterday to pressure immigration authorities into granting them **parole**.

A group of the detainees at the Wackenhut detention center in Jamaica, **Queens**, distributed fliers over the weekend encouraging others to stop eating, working and attending immigration hearings, said Amy Otton, a spokeswoman for the eastern regional I.N.S. office. Most of the men detained in the 200-bed center, 96 out of 147, skipped breakfast, but at the end of the day, after immigration officials had spent hours talking to the detainees and listening to their concerns, only about 20 stayed away at dinnertime.

No one refused to work -- the detainees clean, do the laundry and help in the kitchen -- and no one who had a scheduled hearing opted not to go, Ms. Otton said. "We made real progress today," she said. "Sometimes they just need someone to listen to them. It is not unusual that they would have concerns about being detained for such a long time."

The **immigrants**, who are often asylum-seekers fleeing war-torn countries and who rarely speak English, can be detained from two to six months, or longer. They are **demanding** to be **paroled** to their families while a judge decides whether they are eligible for political asylum.

Their **protest** came five days after a similar incident at the detention center in Elizabeth, N.J., where 94 detainees went on a hunger strike to **demand parole**, more food and a reduction of telephone charges. That strike ended after the I.N.S. district director in New Jersey, Andrea Quarantillo, met with the detainees and told them she would look into their **demands**, immigration officials said yesterday.

Unlike the center in Elizabeth, the site of a violent uprising by detainees in 1995, Wackenhut, which opened last year, has never before reported any uprising or strikes. Very few there are **paroled**. Although there seems to be no consistent national policy about who is **paroled** and who stays in detention, some I.N.S. districts grant **parole** more often than others. New York is known as granting **parole** to relatively few people seeking political asylum.

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