

The International Korner

What are the issues with immigrants' rights?

In the last week of September, thousands of immigrant workers and advocates for immigrants boarded buses in Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Chicago, Houston, Miami, and Boston for the national Immigrant Workers' Freedom Ride. Immigrant workers and advocates from all corners of the country lobbied Congress for immigrant rights and participated in a massive rally in New York City. Why was there a need for a movement like the Freedom Ride? What are the current issues affecting immigrants in the U.S. today?

Economic and Workplace Issues

- ❖ By conservative estimates, immigrant households paid an estimated \$133 billion in direct taxes to federal, state, and local governments in 1997. The typical immigrant and his or her descendants pay an estimated \$80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in local, state, and federal benefits over their lifetimes.
- ❖ The practice of "SSA no-match letters" has caused job loss and anxiety among immigrant workers. SSA no-match letters are mailed by the Social Security Administration to employers and stating that an employee's social security number does not match SSA's records. Employers, confused about the effects of the law, sometimes unnecessarily (and illegally) re-verify employees' immigration status. Unscrupulous employers use re-verification as a means of retaliation against workers exercising their right to organize.

Social Service/Benefit Issues

- ❖ Immigrants contribute \$10 billion each year to the U.S. economy. However, working-age immigrants who have been in the U.S. for more than ten years are less likely to receive welfare than the native-born. In Connecticut, recent budget cuts are preventing legal immigrants from receiving public assistance and health care benefits (SAGA and Husky B), along with care for the elderly.

Education Issues

- ❖ The DREAM Act (S. 1545)/Student Adjustment Act (H.R. 1684) is a pending federal legislation that would allow the children of undocumented immigrants to receive in-state college tuition. Some legislators have commented that these children should not be held responsible for the actions of their parents, and rightfully so. The bill

would also allow for these students to legalize their status. However, many others state that this legislation would encourage illegal immigration.

Civil Liberties

- ❖ Since 9/11, thousands of Arab, Muslim, and South Asian men have been profiled by the federal government. The U.S. government's "special registration program" required men older than 16 from certain countries to show up at immigration offices during Fall 2002 and Spring 2003. The government intends to deport more than 13,000 of the nearly 83,000 men who complied with the program.
- ❖ Unlike the criminal justice system where indigent defendants are appointed attorneys to represent them, indigent immigrants in deportation proceedings are not entitled to appointed attorneys. Over 85% of indigent immigrants face deportation proceedings unrepresented.
- ❖ New federal legislation known as the CLEAR Act (H.R. 2671) would allow local and state police officers to enforce federal immigration law. Police officials in many cities around the nation have stated that this policy would put countless immigrant communities at risk.

For more information about advocating for immigrants or to learn more about current legislation, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov>

To learn more about current issues affecting immigrants, see the following sites:

www.iwfr.org

<http://archive.aclu.org/issues/immigrant/hmir.html>

www.arc.org

www.nelp.org/iwp/rights/socialsecurity/index.cfm

www.nilc.org

For a list of national pro-immigrant organizations and contact information, go to www.publiceye.org/research/directories/immig_grp_defend.html