

Speech of Henry Foner

at

Protest Rally on Arrests of Illegal Aliens

Sunday, May 6, 1973

Brotherhood-In-Action

In an interview given a few months before he resigned as Attorney General of the United States, Richard Kleindienst told the press that he approved of the dragnet raids that Immigration authorities were conducting against dark-skinned Latin Americans.

Now, in view of the many other illegal acts of the Department of Justice that he apparently also approved -- like the cover-up of the Watergate scandals -- this is not much of a recommendation. But it does tell us something about the mentality of those who are behind this attempt to make the so-called illegal aliens the scapegoats for what is wrong with our economy.

And there is certainly a good deal that's wrong with it. Everyone knows by now the mockery of the Nixon Administration's price controls and what has happened to the cost of living under them. We also know that during this period, wages have been tightly controlled, and that this has led to a feeling of bitterness and frustration on the part of American workers.

What better way to divert that bitterness and frustration than by pointing -- not to the profiteers and the gougers of our economy -- but to the illegal alien. He is the cause of all your troubles. He is taking jobs away from honest American citizens.

He is undercutting wages and conditions. He is causing the welfare costs to go up and with them the tax burdens of the American people. That's how the story goes, and it is unfortunate that many Americans, and even many labor unions, fall for it.

I say it is unfortunate, because it is nonsense, and it is very dangerous nonsense. As long as unions allow themselves to be deluded into believing that their main enemy or even an enemy is the illegal alien -- so long will they be demobilized in the important and necessary fight against their real enemies -- the big business interests, the profiteers, and their corrupt protectors in government. And it is dangerous for another important reason. As surely as night follows day, the campaign against the illegal alien must become racist. Why? Because when you start to look for Latin Americans who may be here illegally, then you start looking for people with dark skins. That is exactly what happened with each of the dragnet raids that the Immigration authorities have carried out. And it will continue to happen until we put an end to these raids and to these persecutions.

What about the charge that is frequently heard that the illegal alien endangers the wages and conditions that the unions have built up. The immigration agents themselves have given the lie to this slander. Just a few months ago, the American Committee for Protection of Foreign Born and the Coalition of Latin Americans and Friends of Latin America conducted a picket line protest demonstration against the raids. That night, Radio Station WRVR asked me to participate in a telephone interview during a program they were

doing on the raids. Just before I spoke they interviewed the head of the union that represents the Immigration Department agents who actually conduct the raids. In the course of his justifying the raids, he admitted that most of the illegal aliens work in union shops. Now if they work in union shops, then they can't possibly undercut their fellow workers wages and conditions. In a union shop, it does an employer no good whatsoever to hire an illegal alien because he has to pay him the same wages and give him the same benefits as he does any other worker. What the head of the immigration agents union was really complaining about was the fact that the representatives of the unions in the shop where illegal aliens work do not cooperate with the Immigration authorities in fingering the men for them. Imagine that! One union leader criticizing another because he refuses to act as a stool pigeon! I want to say to you here and now that I would rather go to jail myself before I would act as a stool pigeon or informer for the Immigration authorities, and I think I speak for hundreds and thousands of other labor leaders. And if I read the papers correctly -- if I do, I will have a lot of company from the same Department of Justice and Nixon administration.

Finally, I want to get to still another very dangerous part of this campaign against the illegal aliens -- and it is connected with the Rodino Bill, which recently passed the House of Representatives. This bill would make it a crime for an employer to

knowingly hire an illegal alien. Now, that would be all right if you were talking of the giant South Western and Western farmers who import immigrant farm labor, and who exploit them mercilessly for their own profit. But is that the case here in New York? You have already heard that at least in union shops -- and the Immigration authorities admit that most of them are in union shops -- the employer has nothing to gain by hiring them. But now, with this law, he is just not going to take any chances. As long as he faces criminal penalties if the man or woman he hires is illegally here, he simply is not going to hire any alien at all -- and that means that he will shy away from exactly the types of people that the Immigration authorities look for in their dragnet raids -- those with dark skins and Spanish accents. That is the real danger of the Rodino bill -- that it will mean fewer jobs for dark skinned Latin American workers.

It is for all these reasons that I am proud to associate myself with this meeting and this effort.

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