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## **Effect Of New Immigration Legislation Declines: Flow Of Mexican Workers To U.S. Continues Unabated**

*by John Neagle*

*Category/Department: General*

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A new US immigration law took effect in May 1987 but illegal crossings from Mexico into the US are again on the rise. According to Border Patrol and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) officials, it is too early to explain the increase or to evaluate the new law. US and Mexican academics who monitor immigration assert that the law is not working. During a conference organized by the Center for US- Mexican Studies at the University of California-San Diego in June, INS Commissioner Alan Nelson said the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act "has had a good start and is working well." About 2.3 million illegal immigrants have applied for amnesty under the law, he said, and most employers "want to comply" with a prohibition against hiring undocumented workers a ban that the INS began to enforce fully through employer sanctions June 1. The INS says that the number of apprehensions of undocumented aliens dropped from 1.6 million in 1986 to 1.1 million in 1987, a 30% decline. The INS, however, has no explanation for why apprehensions this year are up 20% from last year. According to a study by Wayne A. Cornelius, director of the Center for US-Mexican Studies, the deterrent effect of the legislation is wearing off, and a new wave of illegal immigrants is taking advantage of "a major built-in loophole in the law." The loophole, says Cornelius, is that employers are not required to verify the authenticity of documents presented to them by job applicants. He added that this factor is generating a booming market in phony papers that undocumented workers purchase, borrow or even rent by the hour to prove legal US residence and thus, obtain employment. For Cornelius, another effect of the law is that undocumented workers are staying longer in the US because the complications, costs and risks of shuttling back and forth across the border from job to job have increased. As a result, he says, there is a stronger incentive for whole families to migrate together. [Complicating the Border Patrol's task is an escalation of drug-related violence along the frontier. An INS spokesperson in Washington, Duke Austin, told the Washington Post that the Border Patrol accounts for 70% of all drug seizures by US law enforcement agencies along the border, which often lead to "armed encounters" with drug runners. According to the INS, the Border Patrol in 1986 made 1,300 seizures of drugs, with a street value of \$186 million. In 1987, drug seizures rose to 2,751, with a value of \$582 million. Most of the seizures along the US-Mexican border last year consisted of cocaine: 12,813 pounds worth \$399 million, up from 2,496 pounds worth \$99 million in 1986. According to a monograph, "Undocumented Aliens and Crime," published this year by the university's Center, migrant workers themselves are not considered responsible for much serious crime in the US, but are often the victims of assaults, robberies and rapes by border bandits. An estimated 90% of these crimes go unreported because the undocumented workers fear deportation.] (Basic data from Washington Post, 06/22/88)

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