

Mexican immigrants beaten in New York suburb

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Immigrants and supporters of democratic rights in the New York area reacted with outrage to the brutal beating of two Mexican workers in the town of Farmingville, a town of 15,000 about 50 miles east of the city.

Magdaleno Escamilla, 28, and Israel Perez, 19, were lured to an abandoned building with the promise of work, and then attacked with a crowbar, shovel and knife by two white men.

The workers were driven to an abandoned warehouse off Exit 68 of the Long Island Expressway in Suffolk County in the early morning of Sunday, September 17, and told to start digging. "I told my friend, 'I don't like this one minute,'" Escamilla later related. "I told him to pay attention. It didn't look like there was much work here."

Escamilla was beaten unconscious and awoke to the screams of his friend. "My friend was wrestling with the knife. So I took up the crowbar and the other man ran. I honestly don't know how we got away."

The two workers made it back to the expressway and tried to get help. "We saw cars, but seeing our condition, the people did not want to stop," said Escamilla. Finally, a motorist who thought they had been in an auto accident called the police on his cell phone. The two workers were taken to the hospital, where Escamilla was treated and released, and Perez underwent surgery for a severed tendon in his left wrist.

The incident in Farmingville focused attention on the daily insecurity, abuse and sometimes the dangers to life and limb facing millions of immigrants, many undocumented, who face unemployment and misery at home and have come to find a better life in the US.

As many as 1,000 migrant workers come to Farmingville in the summer, one in 15 residents of the town. They gather at a spot at Horseblock Road and

North Ocean Avenue, which they call the esquina, or corner, and where they are visible to passing cars, as homeowners and contractors pass by looking for handymen or men for yardwork, landscaping, or other low-paying jobs.

Farmingville is only one of many suburban towns and hamlets in the metropolitan area in which poor Hispanic immigrants, mostly from Mexico and Central America, have tried to find day labor. If they are lucky they may earn \$8 an hour, \$50 or \$100 for a day of hard work. Sometimes the wealthy homeowners tell the workers they only did enough to get half of what was promised. Sometimes they get nothing at all.

Meanwhile racist and anti-immigrant forces have organized to demand the removal of the migrant workers. The town of Brookhaven, which includes Farmingville, passed a law limiting the number of tenants per apartment. Some legislators proposed a bill in the Suffolk County Legislature in support of the filing of a federal lawsuit forcing the Immigration and Naturalization Service to take action against the "illegal" immigrants. Every Saturday a group of area residents picket the immigrants, with signs reading "Go Home" and "Stop the Crime," claiming they are responsible for declining property values and an increase in crime, an increase, which police admit has not taken place.

The immigrants have begun to fight back. More than 500 immigrants demonstrated after the beating of the two Mexicans to demand their civil rights. They have also held demonstrations at the County legislature when it considered anti-immigrant legislation. They picket the homes of the contractors who do not pay their employees.

The Farmingville incident is the product of the extreme social polarization, nowhere as severe as in the

New York region. The immigrants, along with the poorest layers of the working class, are demonized and scapegoated to divert attention from the fact that the majority of workers are struggling to support their families as the current boom enriches only a small minority.

The Democratic and Republican politicians either openly encourage anti-immigrant racism or maintain a guilty silence in the face of the conditions created by the system they represent. Farmingville is only a few miles from the border of the Second Congressional District, where the House seat is occupied by Rick Lazio, the Republican Senatorial candidate for New York against Hillary Clinton this year. Neither Lazio nor Clinton have said a word about the beating.



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