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Trends. The Political Psychology of Expansion of Labor Rights for Illegal Immigrants

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The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has announced that it will extend various anti-discrimination rights to illegal immigrants. These rights will include job dismissal or discrimination because of race, sex, age, or religion. Illegal immigrants who are inappropriately dismissed or discriminated against are to be treated as legal workers with the possibility of back pay, punitive damages, and--with certain qualifications--even reinstatement. What will be the political psychological consequences of this labor rights expansion?

The expansion seems to support the US concept of human rights and civil rights for all--regardless of one's legal status. It also may reinforce these rights for those who--at least theoretically--had them before the expansion. Moreover, it may decrease the probability and ease with which employers knowingly hire and then abuse illegal immigrants.

The expansion also may increase the amount of illegal immigration into the US--weakening the rule of law--as protection for them increases. The expansion also could be misused by illegal immigrants to bring suit against employers who did not violate discrimination laws and policies and who may not even have known that the immigrants were illegal at the time the immigrants were hired.

Which of the above or other consequences prove to be germane is an empirical question. However, the political discourse--even without empirical data and interpretation--must be based on the integration of conceptions of individual and collective rights and of means and ends. Too often, parochial and one-sided interests grab the discourse spotlight. And, too often, this political psychology only guarantees that groups of people are hurt--unknowingly, unwittingly, and uncaringly. (See Cowan, G., Martinez, L., & Mendiola, S. (1997). Predictors of attitudes toward illegal Latino immigrants. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 19, 403-415; Greenhouse, S. (October 28, 1999). U.S. to expand labor rights to cover illegal immigrants. *the New York Times*, p. A1; A19; Huddle, D.L. (1993). Dirty work: Are immigrants only taking jobs that native underclass does not want? *Population and Environment: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 14, 515-538; Suarez-Orozco, M.M. (1996). California dreaming: Proposition 187 and the cultural psychology of racial and ethnic exclusion. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 27, 151-167.)) Keywords: Civil Rights, Employment, Human Rights, Illegal Immigration, Labor Rights, Political Psychology.)