

IMMIGRATION AND IMMIGRANT RIGHTS

The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout its history, men, women, and children have come from every corner of the earth seeking political, economic and religious freedom. The burning desire and commitment of these new Americans to make a better life for themselves and their families helped create the diverse and dynamic society that makes the United States a unique country. With each wave of immigration, small businesses have been created and neighborhoods have been revitalized.

As Jews, we have benefited when America maintained a welcoming policy towards immigrants. For many of us, the bold decision by our parents and grandparents to leave their *shetlekh* (small towns and villages) in Eastern Europe for *di goldene medine*, the golden land of America, has enabled our generation to live in unimaginable and unprecedented prosperity and freedom. Sadly, we, as a Jewish people, also know all too well the consequences of a “closed door” policy towards immigration; how many thousands, maybe even millions, of our people would have been spared the death camps of the Holocaust if the United States had had a more liberal immigration policy in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s?

Although The Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring agrees that the United States has the right and responsibility to control the influx of undocumented immigrants, the current laws and regulations are clearly not working. The extremely limited number of visas that would allow immigrants to work legally in the United States has created a virtual black market of immigrant labor. There are an estimated 10-12 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States and because they are forced to live in the shadows, many of them are easily exploited, working in below minimum-wage jobs, in poor working conditions, with little or no benefits. Many who are here legally, have little hope of obtaining permanent residency status because of increased restrictions and backlogs in the process. Many who have achieved permanent residency status face increasingly longer waiting periods for citizenship, delaying their ability to fully participate in American society.

The current administration has publicly committed itself to creating a more humane immigration policy. However, The Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring is alarmed by the legislation passed by the House of Representatives in December 2005 that would solely restrict the entry of immigrants and classify undocumented immigrants, as well as those who assist them, as criminals without providing any path for achieving legal status. Supporters of this bill (HR 4437) cite concerns for national security and blame problems in the domestic economy and high costs of welfare on legal and illegal immigrants, even when such rhetoric is contrary to the facts, and threatens to unravel the cherished tradition of the United States as a pluralistic society.

Instead, The Workmen’s Circle/Arbeter Ring calls for comprehensive immigration reform that would:

- Provide a reasonable and fair path to legal status for undocumented immigrants, as well as a path for citizenship for all immigrants within a reasonable period of time;
- Allow children of undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements to be able to study at state-funded colleges and universities at the same level of tuition as children of legal residents;
- Provide for more efficient family reunification;
- Create legal avenues for entry and employment of foreign workers and their families;
- Insist that labor laws apply equally to documented and undocumented workers;
- Allow refugees and asylum seekers full due process without fear of deportation while their cases are pending or on appeal.
- Amend the “material support provision” in the USA Patriot Act and the Real ID Act so that refugees and asylum seekers who pose no threat to our security are not barred from the United States;
- Create policies that would seal our borders against undocumented migration to the United States, contingent on a fairer, freer immigration policy.

United States immigration laws and regulations must reflect a positive policy towards immigrants and immigrant populations that recognizes and appreciates the contributions that they make to American society.

Mir Zaynen Ale Imigrantn! We Are All Immigrants!

(Adopted by the 2006 National Convention)