

## “DREAM” TURNS INTO A NIGHTMARE

### “Guestworkers” Sue Company, Saying They Were Deceived



The issues surrounding ongoing allegations of the abuse of immigrant workers resulted in a weeks-long hunger strike in Washington, D.C., in the summer of 2008. Metalworkers from India walked off their jobs in early March at shipyards in Mississippi and Texas. A dozen of them then staged the hunger strike on Embassy Row in Washington, D.C.

Workers say they were victims of human trafficking under the guise of the U.S. “guestworker” program. They say labor recruiters for Signal International deceived them into paying thousands of dollars — as much

as \$20,000 in some cases — for visas they were told would allow them and their families to live permanently in the United States.

Signal International is an oil-rig construction company based in Pascagoula, Miss. The company points the finger at labor recruiters, saying it too was deceived about how the workers were brought to America.

According to *The New York Times*, workers said they “lived in sweltering labor camps, crowded 24 workers to a room, under curfew and restricted from leaving the yards, with \$1,050 a month deducted from their paychecks for their upkeep.”

In addition, they said it wasn’t until after they arrived in the United States that they were told they could not get permanent visas, only the temporary “guestworker” visas tied to their shipyard jobs. Workers say they were told they would be deported if they left the shipyards.

The workers now are suing Signal, and Signal is suing the labor recruiters. The U.S. Justice Department is investigating.

In leaving their jobs, the metalworkers lost their legal immigration status. They hope their hunger strike will force the Justice Department to allow them to remain during an investigation into the case.

“Everyone has a dream,” one of the hunger-striking workers told *The Times*. “If we could come here legally to live with our families, that was my dream.”

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