

HARSH REALITY: MEXICO'S NAFTA PROBLEM

Introduction

Twelve years after the signing of NAFTA, Mexico is economically weaker than before the treaty went into effect. In this *News in Review* module, we look at some of the reasons why this has happened, and its effect on Mexico as well as its powerful neighbour to the north. We also introduce the candidates in Mexico's presidential election and consider the fate of some illegal immigrants.

Further Research

To stay more informed about events in Mexico, consider a visit to the official government Web site at www.presidencia.org.mx. The site offers commentary in English, French, and Spanish. The Embassy of Mexico in Canada is at www.embamexcan.com.

 Sections marked with this symbol indicate content suitable for younger viewers.

Most Canadians know little of Mexico—other than as a popular vacation destination. Yet the country is our partner in one of the most important free-trade agreements in history: NAFTA, the document that defines the way Mexico, Canada, and the United States do business together.

NAFTA tends to be defined in the way Canada and Mexico trade with the United States. Canada is the United States' largest trading partner. Mexico, which once was second largest, has recently dropped to third (China now exports more goods to the American market than Mexico), but remains primarily dependent on its U.S. trade

But Mexico is also very important to Canada as a trading partner. Canada has become Mexico's second largest trading market after the U.S. In turn, Canada has made Mexico its fourth most important market.

NAFTA has increased trade among the partners, but in many areas it seems to have failed Mexico. The country remains mired in economic problems. Its overall standard of living has actually decreased since the treaty took effect. Poverty, especially in the south, has increased. Many of the jobs created in the first years after 1994 have evaporated.

Some of Mexico's problems are political. President Vincente Fox, elected in 2000, has failed to live up to

expectations. His tenure has produced few of the promised improvements in education, economic and social conditions, justice, and the country's infrastructure.

The most obvious result of this economic decline is the huge increase in illegal Mexican immigration to the United States. Mexicans look to their northern neighbours and see an enormous source of jobs—jobs that will pay them a salary to support not only themselves but also their extended family. Americans are more divided, seeing illegal Mexican immigration as both a threat and a source of cheap labour. The illegal immigration issue has divided both the governing Republican Party and the entire country.

Mexicans, on the other hand, see these illegal immigrants almost as heroes. The earnings that Mexican immigrants—illegal or otherwise—send home to their families are now the second largest source of foreign capital for the country. Immigrants have become one of their most important exports.

On July 2, Mexico will elect a new president and congress. The issues that face them are almost overwhelming. As NAFTA partners, Canadians should be aware of Mexico's importance. This election will determine the way in which we interact with this partner for many years to come.

To Consider

1. What appears to have been the biggest result of NAFTA for Mexico?
2. How has illegal immigration divided Americans?

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Video Review

Carefully answer the questions in the spaces provided.

Before Viewing the Video

How much do you, as a Canadian, know about Mexico? Before viewing the video, list four or five things that come to mind when you think about the country and its citizens.

Did you know . . .
Canada is the number one exporter to the U.S.

After you view the video: are any of these impressions altered by what you have learned from it? Explain.

Viewing the Video

1. In 1998, what position did Mexico hold as an apparel exporter to the United States? _____
2. Which country is described as becoming "the world's factory floor"?

3. What is Mexico's current placing among exporters to the United States?

4. What are some reasons Raoul Villa gives to explain Mexico's lagging export economy?

5. What has happened to Mexico's standard of living since 1993 (pre-NAFTA)?

6. How much has illegal immigration to the U.S. from Mexico gone up since NAFTA went into effect?

7. What does bathing suit company manager Carlos Pacheko say it will take for Mexico to compete successfully with China?

8. What percentage of Mexicans has finished high school? _____%
9. Mexico's workers earn only a small percentage of what other NAFTA workers earn. What is it? _____
10. What does Adolfo Peniche say is the basic first step in Mexico's economic growth?

For Discussion After Viewing the Video

A second viewing of the video may be advantageous before discussing the following questions.

1. Is it realistic to believe that Mexican manufacturers will be able to compete with China for U.S. markets? Explain fully.

2. Americans own the majority of Mexico's export factories. As a NAFTA partner, does the U.S. government have any moral responsibility to find ways to encourage their owners to keep them in Mexico?

3. Many reasons—social and economic—are given by participants in the video for why Mexico's economic position has worsened under NAFTA. Which ones would you list as the most significant? Why?

4. What impact might Mexico's problems in NAFTA have on Canada? Should Canada be involved in helping to resolve these issues? Explain.

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NAFTA

Further Research

To explore the original NAFTA document, visit www.mac.doc.gov/NAFTA/naftatext.html.

Negotiations to create the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States, and Mexico were completed in 1992. The treaty came into effect in 1994. For many, it seemed a natural offshoot of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement of 1988. The 1988 agreement was intended to simplify trade in many commodities between Canada and the United States. NAFTA, it was hoped, would do the same with Mexico.

While legislation to set up the 1988 Free Trade Agreement passed easily in both Canada and the United States, NAFTA was a far more controversial treaty. Opponents were especially active in both the U.S. and Mexico.

The Supporters

In the United States, a coalition of U.S. firms argued that free trade with Mexico might mean that some U.S. jobs would move to Mexico, but that there would be a real increase in good U.S. jobs. Freer trade, they said, would lead to increased exports to Canada and Mexico in high-wage industries. This would also lead to a substantial U.S. trade surplus with Canada and Mexico. Supporters also argued that free trade would create more jobs in Mexico, and the number of migrants to the U.S., illegal or otherwise, would decrease.

In Mexico, supporters argued that free trade would modernize the Mexican economy, improve standards of living, and create hundreds of thousands of jobs. Closer ties with the U.S. and Canada would strengthen democracy in a country long subject to one-party rule.

The Opponents

Sarah Anderson, reviewing the first decade of NAFTA for *Canadian Dimension* (March-April 2004), calls the debate over NAFTA “historic in that it represented the first time that large numbers of Americans engaged in lobbying on an international economic issue.” She lists “labour unions, environmentalists, human rights advocates, family farmers, and consumer groups” among the leading opponents of the deal.

The arguments against NAFTA were several. Many U.S. firms had already moved to Mexico because of lower wages and casual enforcement of environmental standards. NAFTA would likely mean that many more would follow. Some firms would likely use a threat to move to Mexico to counter union demands for wage increases. Environmentalists were concerned that a heavily polluted area along the U.S.-Mexico border would become even more polluted.

Many Mexicans argued that any jobs likely to be created would only be low-wage ones, and do nothing for future economic development. Especially worrisome was free trade in agricultural products, which was expected to affect the southern, poorest part of Mexico the hardest.

The Results

Between 1993 and 2002, trade among Canada, the U.S., and Mexico more than doubled, increasing at a rate of \$1.2-million per minute. Foreign direct investment by the NAFTA partners in the three countries also doubled.

Hundreds of U.S. firms shifted their production to Mexico, and the U.S. Department of Labour certified that at least 500 000 workers lost their jobs as a result (most independent observers put the actual figure as closer to 880 000). The U.S. trade deficit with Canada and Mexico, \$9-billion in 1993, rose to \$87-billion in 2002.

In the first year of NAFTA, Mexicans lost over one million jobs because of NAFTA-related reforms requiring the privatization of several large industries. Until 1997, millions of young Mexicans also had their education cut short and were pushed into child labour. Since then, the government has worked hard to reverse this trend, with considerable success.

By 2000, 1.3 million jobs were created in the *maquiladoras*, factories created to produce products specifically for the export market. About 85 per cent of these *maquiladoras* are U.S.-owned, and they employ primarily women. By 2003, about 230 000 of these jobs had disappeared. Some had been shifted to China, where wages are significantly lower.

Wages in Mexico are hardly outstanding. In 1994 the government set a minimum wage of about \$4.20 a day. In 2005, this was still the minimum wage. In the last two decades, Mexican salaries are estimated to have lost 76 to 81 per cent of their buying power. In the 1970s, Mexican salaries were about one third those of their U.S. counterparts. They now average about one eighth.

Under NAFTA, workers' rights are poorly protected. Before the treaty went into effect, 75 per cent of the work force was unionized. The figure is now 30 per cent.

Rural Mexico was even harder hit. Between 1994 and 2000 corn imports doubled (corn is the Mexican staple food). In the south, 1.3 million farmers were displaced. Rural poverty increased from 79 per cent in 1994 to 82 per cent by 1998. Forty million Mexicans now live in poverty—25 million of them in extreme poverty, living on less than \$1 per day.

It seems little wonder that migration from rural Mexico to the U.S. has risen over 183 per cent since NAFTA's inauguration in 1994.

For Discussion and Debate

Under NAFTA, millions of agricultural workers have been displaced and lost their incomes. Do Canada and the U.S., as treaty partners, have any responsibility in seeing to their future welfare? Or is the responsibility solely that of the Mexican government? Explain your positions carefully.

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Modern Mexico

Further Research

Web sources on Mexican history include The History Channel at www.historychannel.com/exhibits/mexico/?page=home; Geographia.com at www.geographia.com/mexico/mexicohistory.htm; and The Library of Congress at www.loc.gov/rr/international/hispanic/mexico/resources/mexico-history.html.

The birth of modern Mexico was a bloody one; and, until recently, its politics has been frequently marred by episodes of violence.

Beginnings

The story began in 1876, when Porfirio Diaz overthrew the legitimate government of Mexico. Diaz had lost the presidency to Benito Juarez in the 1871 election. Diaz's 1876 revolt defeated Juarez's successor, and he assumed the presidency in 1877.

Diaz's rule lasted until 1911. Under his dictatorial rule, Mexico made great advances in commercial and industrial development. These, however, came at a cost. Much of the industry was sold off to foreign interests. In agriculture, Diaz favoured the rich landowners, and much of the communal land owned by the peasantry was given over to them. Unlike economic development, social development—education, rights of labour—was largely neglected.

Recognizing that opposition to his rule was growing, Diaz announced that he would welcome an opponent in the 1910 election for president. The man who stood against him, Francisco I. Madero, was forced to flee to the U.S. after Diaz ordered his arrest. Nevertheless, backed by Emiliano Zapata (leader of a revolt in Southern Mexico), Madero returned to Mexico and won the election. In 1911, Diaz was forced to resign and leave Mexico forever.

Revolution

Madero's presidency did not last long. Zapata and another rebel leader, Pancho Villa, refused to submit to presidential authority. In 1913, Victoriano Huerto,

the commander of Madero's army, plotted with Zapata and Villa to overthrow Madero. He seized Mexico City and took over as dictator. Four days later Madero was dead.

Huerto lasted only until 1914, when Villa, Zapata, and a third rebel leader, Venustiano Carranza, drove him out of office. Carranza seized power. In August 1915, a commission made up of eight Latin American countries plus the United States recognized Carranza's government as the legitimate Mexican government. With the exception of Pancho Villa, all the rebel groups accepted an armistice. Villa vowed to continue fighting, even going so far as to lead raids into the United States to demonstrate his contempt for U.S. policy in Mexico.

Mexico's new constitution came into effect in 1917, and Carranza was elected president. The constitution restored communal lands to the peasants and established a labour code. Carranza's oil policies, however, led to conflict with foreign oil companies. In 1920, three generals led a revolt in which Carranza was killed. One of those generals, Álvaro Obregón, was elected president. In 1928 he, in turn, was assassinated, by a religious fanatic.

PRI

Founded in 1929 as the National Revolutionary Party, renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in 1946, a new political party dominated politics in Mexico until the election of Vicente Fox as president.

In 1934, the man who is still Mexico's best-loved leader was elected president. General Lázaro Cárdenas

Quote

"More than four years after his inauguration, Fox, who cannot run for re-election, is not simply a lame duck, he is a dead duck."
— George W. Grayson, *Harvard International Review*, Spring 2005

oversaw the adoption of a new program that leaned toward socialism. Land reform, social programs, and education were emphasized. The railway system was nationalized, and oil companies were expropriated.

Over the years, the PRI's hold on power was all-encompassing. Candidates for the legislature were hand-picked by the president, and election fraud was a common occurrence.

Economic problems dominated government agendas. Especially troublesome were conditions in southern Mexico, where largely indigenous peoples still live in conditions of extreme poverty. In 1994, after NAFTA was signed, the state of Chiapas became the centre of an armed insurrection by the Indian guerrillas of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Today at least 32 independent rebel communities remain in Chiapas, and the area is largely out of government control.

Vincente Fox

Corruption scandals lost the PRI its legislative majority in 1997, but it was the election of President Vicente Fox in 2000 that best symbolized the decline of PRI. Fox, a conservative reformer from the National Action Party (PAN), prom-

ised big changes. George W. Grayson lists the highlights (*Harvard International Review*, Spring 2005): "He pledged to create one million jobs per year, attain seven per cent growth in gross domestic product, boost investment, revamp the education and health-care systems, combat poverty and corruption, clean up the environment, gain legal status for his countrymen living unlawfully in the United States, and accomplish sweeping economic and judicial reforms."

Unfortunately, Fox lacked the skills and interest in compromise that mark a successful politician, especially in a country like Mexico, where a variety of political parties make it difficult to put together a majority on almost any issue. Fox also tended to fail to fully focus on issues, changing his priorities from month to month. By 1993, PRI had regained a clear plurality in the legislature.

Constitutionally, Fox is unable to run in the 2006 presidential election. Although he is ending his presidency with a personal popularity rating of about 60 per cent, history will likely view his presidency as one of failure and lost opportunity.

Activity

Make a list of at least five qualifications that you feel the next president of Mexico should have. Compare your list with those of your classmates. Be prepared to explain your choices.

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The Next President

Quote

"It will not be an election decided on policy proposals,' Manuel Camacho, a close adviser to Mr López Obrador, says firmly. That is because all three candidates not only agree on what the main issues are—the economy and crime—but also largely agree on what needs to be done: stimulate growth and get tough on criminals. So the election has become primarily a contest of credibility: who can be trusted to follow through best on proposals that are basically quite similar?" — *The Economist*, February 25, 2006

On Sunday, July 2, 2006, Mexico will elect its next president. Eight political parties will be participating (some as part of coalitions), and five candidates are in the running. Three of the five actually have a real chance of being Mexico's president.

Felipe Calderón (National Action Party, www.pan.org.mx)

Vincente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) currently holds the office of president. He is prevented by law from running for re-election, and PAN is running Felipe Calderón. He was the surprise winner of the PAN primary, defeating the candidate favoured by Fox.

Calderón is considered a fresh face in Mexican national politics, although he was a member of the congress and then head of PAN from 1996 to 1999. He served eight months as energy minister before leaving Fox's cabinet to run for the presidential nomination.

At 43, Calderón is nearly 10 years younger than both his main opponents. A lawyer who also trained in public administration at Harvard University, he is a strong NAFTA supporter. As such, he ably represents the conservative, pro-business focus of PAN.

Of the three candidates, Calderón has the best reputation for political integrity and is especially proud that he won his party's nomination without making any backroom deals. Despite being the least known of the candidates, he has now moved into the lead in many Mexican opinion polls.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Alliance for the Welfare of All, www.prd.org.mx)

López Obrador represents the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), allied with Convergence and the Labour Party. He was almost prevented from running for president. In 2004 the Fox government asked the Mexican legislature to remove his status of legal immunity (as mayor of Mexico City) in order to charge him with violating a court order—a move that would have made him ineligible for office. Several protest marches—one of over a million people—were organized to prevent this from happening. Mexico's attorney general resigned, and the government dropped the case.

López Obrador, known to his many fans as AMLO, made his reputation as mayor of Mexico City. A former member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), he left it in 1988 to become one of the founders of PRD. He twice ran for governor of Tabasco province, losing both times—in 1994 to Roberto Madrazo Pintado, the PRI's candidate for president in this election.

López Obrador was elected mayor with less than 35 per cent of the vote, but proved very good at grabbing popular attention once he was in office. He held daily 6:30 a.m. press conferences that drew both local and national attention. He created popular social programs: a pension scheme for seniors, grants for the disabled, improved education for the children of single mothers. He opened new schools and a new university.

While the mayor is billed as a populist candidate, many of his views and programs for Mexico should he become president are vague and tentative. He has little knowledge of foreign affairs. Two of his closest associates as mayor were forced to resign their offices because of scandal. López Obrador began his campaign with a 10-point lead over his opponents—a lead he has watched slip away. One month before the election, he is placed second by most polls—or in a virtual tie with Calderón.

**Roberto Madrazo Pintado
(Alliance for Mexico,
www.pri.org.mx)**

Under Roberto Madrazo Pintado, the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI (allied for this election with the Ecological Green Party of Mexico) regained its position as Mexico's strongest national party. He took over the leadership in 2002, two years after the party lost the presidency to Vicente Fox of PAN.

Madrazo is considered a master politician and has been active in PRI since his teens. His father was governor

of Tabasco, and he himself won that same seat by defeating López Obrador in an election later documented as having “irregularities.” He has been accused of spending more than 60 times the legal limit in order to win. He governed Tabasco in what was typical PRI style—through handouts and vote-winning public projects.

Madrazo won the leadership of PRI and ultimately the right to run as presidential candidate after Francisco Labastida became the first PRI candidate to lose a presidential election in 70 years. As leader, he helped the party to major wins in the Mexican Congress and in several governorships.

Many Mexicans associate Madrazo with the darker side of the PRI and Mexican politics, considering him to be both too ruthless and dishonest. Madrazo, on the other hand, recognizes that security is the biggest election issue for most Mexicans and is billing himself as the “law and order” candidate. This could prove to be an effective tactic in an election too close to call. Most polls show that he is currently running in third place, but not far behind the other two candidates.

For Discussion

Read the quotation from *The Economist* in the sidebar to this article. Assuming that there really is little difference among the candidates' platforms, which of the three leaders would you vote for as president? Why?

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Illegal Immigrants

Did you know . . .

Of the nearly one million illegal immigrants that enter the U.S. in a year, only about three per cent enter from Canada.

Quote

"The only way you'll stop Mexicans coming to the U.S. is if you lower American wages to the same level as Vietnam. Someone worth maybe \$100 a month in Mexico who comes to the U.S. becomes a human ATM machine." — Charles Bowden, Tucson journalist, quoted in *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 2006

As a selling point, proponents of NAFTA in both the United States and Mexico argued that the treaty would improve Mexico's economic situation and cut down on the number of illegal immigrants from Mexico to the U.S. The treaty was signed in 1993 and came into effect in 1994.

Five years later, in 1999, about 656 000 illegal immigrants entered the U.S. from Mexico—up 66 per cent from 1992. One organization, the Pew Hispanic Center (<http://pewhispanic.org>), estimates that there are between 11.5 million and 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, and that about 6.2 million of them are Mexicans (*The Washington Post*, April 17, 2006).

What drives them north? In many cases it's the knowledge that there is a job available—any job. Every year about one million young people enter the Mexican labour force. The Mexican economy creates enough jobs for only about half of them. This crisis is partly due to a population explosion. The 15- to 38-year-old segment of the population is now at 38 million and is expected to hit 40 million by 2015.

Meanwhile the United States has become dependent on illegal labour. Just at the point when NAFTA was taking effect, the Mexican government devalued the peso, and Mexico went into a recession. At the same time, the U.S. economy was growing and creating new labour demands. Mexicans responded in the millions.

As Simple as the Money

The possibility of making a seemingly fabulous amount of money also brings illegal immigrants to the U.S. The

difference in manufacturing wages between the U.S. and Mexico is about 11 to one—in other words, an American doing the same work in a factory job as his or her Mexican counterpart makes about 11 times as much.

For agricultural workers, the difference is even greater—sometimes 20 to one. A good wage for a worker in a southern Mexican cornfield is \$4 per day. Contrast that with a similar worker picking grapes in California for \$60 to \$70 per day. In a country where 40 per cent of the population lives in poverty—25 per cent in extreme poverty (less than \$1 per day)—these wages seem like all the money in the world.

The wages of illegal immigrants benefit not only them, but also their relatives back home in Mexico. Money sent back to Mexico by immigrants to the U.S.—legal and illegal—is now about \$20-billion per year. This is Mexico's second largest source of foreign currency, after petroleum sales and royalties.

Getting There

Until 1994, the bulk of Mexico's illegal immigrants came to the U.S. by crossing the border with California. In that year the U.S. began "Operation Gatekeeper," which included the construction of two high fences, helicopter surveillance, night-vision cameras, and electronic sensors. The program slowed illegal traffic in the area to a trickle.

But illegal crossings from Mexico to the U.S. hardly stopped. Most of these now take place in the Arizona desert, where there are few man-made obstacles to prevent this. In 2004 alone the Arizona Border Patrol arrested

Quote

"The United States must secure its borders. This is a basic responsibility of a sovereign nation. It is also an urgent requirement of our national security." — President George W. Bush (*Toronto Star*, May 16, 2006)

580 000 illegals, half the national total. Before 1994 that figure was nine per cent.

For those attempting it, the Arizona crossing is far more dangerous than any others. It is impossible for one person to carry enough water to make the five-day trip. In 2004, at least 221 people died trying to complete the journey there.

These difficulties have opened human trafficking opportunities for criminal organizations. For about \$1 500 per person, guides called "coyotes" will lead groups of illegals through the desert. The coyotes are quite happy to leave for dead any who find the trip too difficult.

A Mixed Welcome

Polls have shown that a majority of Americans want a government crack-down on illegal immigration. Recognizing this, some U.S. senators and congressmen have become outspoken in their condemnation of illegals. One of the most vocal is Colorado Republican congressman Tom Tancredo, who calls them "a scourge that threatens the very future of our nation," and blames "a cult of multiculturalism" for many of

the country's problems (*Newsweek*, April 3, 2006). Tancredo has gone so far as to propose that a 1 100-kilometre-long fence be built between the U.S. and Mexico.

Tancredo's campaign is also directed at President George W. Bush. Bush, who comes from Texas where there is a large Latino minority, understands the economic contribution of unregistered immigrant labour and the damage that would result should they all be deported. Bush has proposed the creation of a guest-worker program. This would allow currently illegal workers to stay in the country for a set period of time. At the same time, Bush has tried to appease the anti-illegal hawks by sending the National Guard to assist the Border Patrol in monitoring the U.S.-Mexican border.

The debate has split not only the Republican Party but also the entire country. Meanwhile, over six million Mexican nationals continue to work illegally in the U.S., most doing jobs American citizens don't want. They also continue to pump billions into the Mexican economy back home. Few commentators expect this situation to change much in the near future.

For Discussion

1. Popular opinion may want illegal immigration stopped at the U.S.-Mexico border, but it will be extremely difficult to make real inroads without huge increases in money and personnel. Should additional resources be thrown at the problem? Why or why not?
2. If the U.S. does decide to further crack down on illegal immigration from Mexico, what should be done about the millions of illegals already in the country?

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Role-play Activity

The United States is not the only country that finds itself dealing with immigrants who have entered the country illegally. Canada, too, is dealing with this problem. It is estimated that as many as 200 000 illegal immigrants are working as part of Canada's underground economy. This role-play activity illustrates the human issues involved.

Canadian officials have recently strengthened their efforts to find and deport aliens who are in the country illegally. One recent deportation attempt in Toronto caused a national controversy. On April 27, members of the Canada Border Services Agency (www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca) arrived unannounced at a Toronto high school. They had come to detain two students whose family had lost their appeal for refugee status and who had failed to appear for a deportation flight to Costa Rica.

The brother and sister (a grade 9 boy and grade 10 girl) had been students at the school for two years, and both were good students. The officials told the children to clean out their lockers because they were leaving and would not be returning to the school. Crying and begging school officials for help, the children were loaded into a waiting van and taken to the Toronto Immigration and Holding Centre, where they were held with their mother and grandmother.

The following day, agents visited an elementary school and threatened to detain two other students (ages 7 and 14) unless their parents came to the school within 30 minutes. The family had also been ordered to return to Costa Rica and failed to do so.

The public uproar and media coverage meant that, ultimately, all the students and their families were released. The high-school students will be allowed to finish their year. The second family's case is reportedly under appeal.

There were two major developments as a result of these incidents. The Toronto District School Board has adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy to prevent schools from sharing information about student immigration status with Canada Border Service agents. The federal government has ordered field agents to avoid entering schools unless permitted by a parent or guardian, and only for reasons of family reunification.

Role Play

How would you feel if you were involved in a similar incident? How would you react as one of the students detained, or as one of their classmates? What would you expect your teacher or principal to do? What might government agents say or do to ensure compliance with their demands?

Activity

For this role-play exercise, you will need:

- 2-3 students whose families are undocumented or “illegal” immigrants
- several classmates/schoolmates
- 1-2 teachers
- 1 principal and 1 vice principal
- 3-4 border agents

Each group should briefly plan their parts in advance, but all the groups should bear in mind that the removal of the students would come as a complete surprise.

It may help to ask yourselves:

- Border agents: How should we go about detaining these kids? Whom should we approach first? How do we deal with any potential resistance?
- Principal and vice principal: What are our responsibilities? How do we ensure this operation is legitimate? Whom should we contact? How do we protect the kids?
- Teachers: How should I react when these students—all great kids—are removed from my class? What are my obligations to the students, administrators, government agents?
- Undocumented students: How would I react if government agents suddenly arrived and told me I was leaving and not coming back? To whom would I turn for support?
- Classmates: Would I even understand what was happening? To whom would I turn for an explanation? What would I do once I understood what was going on?

In the real situation, the actual removal was polite and discreet. Nevertheless, once word spread, the protest was loud and widespread. This exercise could be expanded by adding a media reaction—how would the media present the story to a wider public? Students might write a short news release describing the event.

Fill out this organizer with the names of the students selected for the different roles.

Roles	Names
Illegal Immigrants	
Other classmates	
Teachers	
Principal/Vice-principal	
Border Agents	