

“Congress Clears Overhaul of Immigration Law”
(excerpted from *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1986)

Legislation Synopsis

On October 17, 1986, Congress approved legislation that transformed U.S. immigration laws. The legislation known as the Immigration Reform and Control Act or Simpson Mazolli Act allowed for:

- fines and in extreme cases jail terms for employers who knowingly hired illegal immigrants.
- amnesty to be bestowed on any illegal aliens able to prove that they had lived continuously in the United States for four years, on or before January 1, 1982.

The sanction against employers was instituted to help close a loophole in U.S. immigration law, which while previously stating that it was illegal to enter or work in the country without proper papers, did **not** make it illegal for employers to hire “undocumented workers.”

Legislation Provisions

Employer Sanctions

- It is unlawful for any person to knowingly hire, recruit or refer for a fee any alien not authorized to work in the United States.
- All employers must verify newly hired people by examining a U.S. passport, a certificate of U.S. citizenship, a certificate of naturalization or a resident alien card.

Legalization

- Temporary resident status will be provided for aliens who have resided continuously in the United States since before January 1, 1982, and those who could not be excluded for reasons specified in the immigration law.

Background

S 1200 was the first comprehensive overhaul of U.S. immigration laws since the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. Compromise fostered the bipartisan support needed for the bill to pass the House and Senate.

Approval

- Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act in October 1986.
- President Reagan signed the bill on November 6, 1986.