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INS again accused of harassing Hispanics

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A Watsonville man claims Immigration and Naturalization Service agents entered his home Dec. 22 and arrested him without explanation and without identifying themselves.

According to his statement — given anonymously — two INS agents ignored his valid residency card, repeatedly referred to him as a “f— Mexican” and drove him to the Salinas Detention Center, where he was held for two hours before being driven home.

He claims he was given no explanation and was not allowed to use a telephone.

The man's story was told yesterday by community activists at a meeting of the Immigration and Naturalization Task Force for Monterey Bay Area held in Castroville yesterday.

And there were more allegations:

- A woman claims she was arrested last month in the Beach Flats neighborhood in Santa Cruz while in a laundromat with her two children.

- Four women reportedly were detained Dec. 30 in Monterey at the restaurant in which they worked, and after questioning were sent to the El Centro Detention center in southern California. The owner of the restaurant then fired the remaining workers, fearing further action by the INS.

- Last weekend, two boys riding

bicycles in the Beach Flats area reportedly were chased by INS agents in an automobile and escaped by riding their bikes into the San Lorenzo River.

The task force that heard those stories yesterday is headed by Con-

Silver charged the INS with “stepping up” enforcement activities, including detaining individuals who “look Mexican.”

“The INS border patrol is up to its old tactics, not only in Santa Cruz but in Watsonville,” he said. “There

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gressman Leon Panetta. Also attending the meeting were the mayors and police chiefs of Watsonville and Santa Cruz and representatives of the Migrant Media Education Project, the Santa Cruz County Community Action Board, the League of United Latin American Citizens, and health and social services representatives from Monterey and Santa Cruz counties.

The INS was also represented. Chief Patrol Agent William Carter (Livermore sector) spent a good portion of the two-hour meeting explaining and defending the actions of his organization.

Jon Silver of the Migrant Media Education Project was the most vocal critic of alleged INS activities.

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In 1984, INS agents operating out of Salinas blocked off residential streets in the Beach Flats area and attempted to apprehend “undocumented” persons.

The raid angered the Santa Cruz City Council, the county Board of Supervisors and community activist groups and helped inspire the formation of the task force to monitor the activities of the INS.

Passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 further mag-

nified issues concerning undocumented workers, often referred to as illegal aliens. The bill provided legal status to approximately 20 percent of the undocumented workers in the United States.

Further provisions of the act allow persons to apply for “amnesty” to remain in the country, or apply for the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) program to remain for a 90-day period.

Panetta said yesterday that last year 1,148,857 applications nationwide were received for the amnesty program, of which 330,526 were approved and 6,449 “turned down.” He said 235,000 applications were received for the SAW program with 26,700 gaining approval and 2,500 turned down.

Silver blames the Immigration Reform Act for an increase in INS activity, activity that he said has “terrorized” communities and prevented people from applying for the SAW program or amnesty.

Carter, the INS agent, said the INS does not conduct raids and has not been stepping up activity of late.

“We do not have sweeps or raids by definition. Not at all,” he said. “We have four agents who work this area. I have a hard time believing that four agents are doing all these things.”

According to INS statistics, 440 persons were apprehended in Monterey County last year, 15 of whom were “referred” to the Immigration Service. In Santa Cruz County, the

numbers were 278 and 8.

One concern voiced by police representatives and Santa Cruz Mayor John Laird was that of communication between the INS and local police. Laird said local police should be informed of any planned INS activity and Carter agreed.

“Anytime we are going to run what we define as an ‘operation,’ we’ll call,” Carter said. “And we’ll call when our people are going anywhere.”

Watsonville Police Chief Ray Belgard said INS “interaction with us has been real close, real tight.”

“It has never been a problem with us,” Belgard said.

Carter wrote a letter to Panetta denying any wrongdoing by agents during an arrest of two people in Beach Flats in November in which Silver charged the INS with conducting “residential neighborhood round-ups.” Carter said the arrests were made in a “calm, deliberate, and professional manner.”

He would neither deny nor confirm allegations of INS wrongdoing in December, and last weekend, as cited above.

“It bothers me terribly that individuals with nothing to fear from us would go riding off on bikes at the risk of getting killed by a car,” he said. “I’ve worked in Texas and Arizona, and I’ve seen individuals run from us simply — and for no other reason — than to make life miserable for the border patrol.”