

### 3 Filipino dads fear deportation

Written by Administrator  
Friday, 10 December 2010 21:52

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**From left, Ermie Zotomayor, Antonio Laroya and Arnisito Gaviola are now in Winnipeg sleeping on the floor of a friend, awaiting their Dec. 23 immigration hearing. (Photo by the Winnipeg Free Press)**

WINNIPEG — Three dads trying to support their families in the Philippines hope they won't be home for Christmas.

The temporary workers face an Immigration and Refugee Board hearing Dec. 23 after working in a gas bar in Thompson with invalid work permits.

"I hope they let us stay and work," said Ermie Zotomayor, 45. "It's the only means we have to support our families," said the man with a bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering.

He and his two educated co-workers — Antonio Laroya, 45, and Arnisito Gaviola, 42 — each paid \$3,000 to a recruiter in 2007 to find them service jobs in Canada.

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They shared a trailer in High Prairie, Alberta, and worked at a gas station and a restaurant, sending money home to their wives and children in the Philippines.

Following a local downturn in the economy, they were offered similar jobs in Manitoba.

The men said their prospective Thompson employer was supposed to take care of their work permits and needed them to start work right away.

They went to work in February for \$10 an hour, sharing an apartment in the northern city and sending the bulk of their pay home.

“We were caught in a situation where we have to do what we have to do,” said Zotomayor, who’s been advised not to identify the employer. “We don’t want to be a burden.”

On June 24, the men were arrested at their Thompson apartment by the Canada Border Services Agency and held at the RCMP detachment for eight hours.

“We were scared,” Laroya said.

They paid another \$1,500 to an immigration consultant in Calgary to help them, not knowing they cannot work while awaiting their Dec. 23 admissibility hearing.

All three have jobs lined up in Thompson with another employer, but can’t take them.

“Filipino friends in Thompson have been helping us out...giving us food (and shelter),” Zotomayor said.

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Now they're in Winnipeg sleeping on the floor of a friend's apartment awaiting their hearing two days before Christmas.

A fund-raising dinner and dance is being held this evening at the Royal Canadian Legion on Logan Avenue for the "three amigos" as they're known in the community, said Diwa Marcelino with Bayan Manitoba.

It's part of Migrante Canada, a national organization of 16 groups advocating for the rights of Filipino temporary workers.

The three amigos' case is far too common, Marcelino said.

"They were duped by employers and criminalized for trying to work and survive," he said. "Their only crime is working to provide a better life for their family."

Employers benefit from cheap, reliable labor and the workers end up losing their livelihood and being sent home, he said.

If the adjudicator decides Dec. 23, the three men will have to leave Canada, and they have no right to appeal, said a government spokeswoman in Vancouver.

That doesn't seem fair to Jomay Amora-Mercado, the Manitoba representative for Migrante Canada.

"They've contributed to the economy of Canada."

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The national body is pushing for temporary workers to have the right to apply for permanent resident status, she said.

The former temporary worker was a “Timmy’s girl” at a Tim Hortons in Sherwood Park, Alberta, who paid \$5,000 to a recruiter for the privilege.

Migrante Canada wants the federal government to change the way it issues temporary work permits so workers aren’t at the mercy of a single employer, she said.

“It should be work-specific, not employer-specific,” she said.

When a labor market opinion proves there’s a demand for workers, the worker issued the permit shouldn’t be chained to a single employer in that market, Jomay said.

For information or fund-raiser tickets, call 218.7100 or 414.5902.