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Former Manager of Iowa Slaughterhouse Is Acquitted of Labor Charges

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The former manager of a kosher slaughterhouse in Iowa that was the site of a 2008 [immigration](#) raid was acquitted on Monday of criminal charges that he knowingly employed under-age workers at the plant.

After a five-week trial in state court in Waterloo, Iowa, the jury rejected prosecutors' arguments that the manager, Sholom Rubashkin, had seen many warning signs that child laborers were working on production lines at the [Agriprocessors](#) plant. The jury, after about 12 hours of deliberations, found Mr. Rubashkin not guilty of all 67 charges of [child labor](#) violations.

"The key was whether the state had evidence that Mr. Rubashkin actually knew that minors were working in the plant and willfully permitted that condition to exist," said Mark Weinhardt, a defense lawyer. "The state simply did not have evidence to prove that."

The verdict brought rare good news for Mr. Rubashkin since the raid at the plant in Postville on May 12, 2008, when federal agents arrested 389 illegal immigrants, most from Guatemala. The operation became an emblem of the high-profile immigration enforcement strategy under President [George W. Bush](#).

In November, Mr. Rubashkin was convicted in federal court in Iowa of 86 counts of bank fraud in connection with loans to Agriprocessors. Federal prosecutors are seeking a 25-year sentence on those charges. Sentencing is scheduled for June 22.

Iowa's child labor case was the only criminal action against Mr. Rubashkin arising from the large number of illegal immigrants who were employed at the plant. After winning the financial fraud conviction, federal prosecutors dismissed all immigration-related charges against him.

The trial testimony left no doubt that at least 29 under-age laborers, and probably many more, were working on the slaughter and packing lines at the Agriprocessors plant. Nilda Nuritza Rucal testified that she was put to work without training on the day she was hired, taking feathers off chickens with sharp scissors. She said she was 15 at the time.

Another immigrant, Elmer Isaías López Marroquín, testified that a human resources manager at the plant instructed him to lie about his age to state inspectors. He said he was 16 when he started to work on the plant's killing floors.

When they were hired, the under-age workers presented false documents showing they were at least 18, the legal age to work in production areas of Iowa slaughterhouses, according to testimony.

The jury foreman, Quentin Hart, a Waterloo councilman, said after the trial that the jurors doubted the young immigrants' credibility. "Each one of them indicated they didn't tell the truth and indicated they knew they had to be over the age of 18 to get a job, so they acquired documentation from somewhere," Mr. Hart said, according to The Associated Press.

Thomas H. Miller, the Iowa deputy attorney general in charge of the criminal bureau, said prosecutors were disappointed with the verdict. "When we had this many minors working on a slaughterhouse floor, we felt this was a fight that needed to be fought," he said.

F. Montgomery Brown, another defense lawyer, said of the acquittal, "This is a vindication by a courageous jury that Sholom is not the kind of man who would want minors working" in the plant.

The end of the case is likely to be bitter for many of the 29 young immigrants who agreed to testify in the state trial, including seven who were flown back from Guatemala by prosecutors. While a handful of them received special United States visas for victims of abuse, most had temporary immigration status that expires now that the trial is over.