

## Silver Palace Workers Organize to "Bury Slavery"

Silver Palace, the only unionized restaurant in Chinatown, has launched a campaign to rid itself of the union. On August 20, 1993, in the midst of negotiations for a new contract, 44 workers were "locked out," when their union refused to sign a contract that would take away such rights as medical benefits, full tips, and job security. In response, the Silver Palace workers and their supporters in the 318 Restaurant Workers' Union have organized two daily pickets to mobilize support from the Chinatown community. A rally on Sunday, August 27, in front of Silver Palace, brought out more than 300 workers and supporters.

For decades, the restaurant industry has been notorious for flouting state and federal labor laws. Immigrant workers are forced to work for as little as 70 cents an hour, and are often threatened with gang violence if they attempt to assert their legal rights (See article on East River on page 3). Eighty-hour work-weeks without overtime pay and benefits are common.

In 1980, after a long and difficult struggle, Silver Palace workers formed the independent 318 Restaurant Workers' Union, making Silver Palace the first unionized restaurant in Chinatown. The improved conditions which the Silver Palace workers won were a hopeful example to all working people in Chinatown. Now Silver Palace wants to drag its workers back towards the slave-like working conditions that are so common by eliminating job security, medical insurance, certain sick days, holidays, and vacation days, and the workers' say in their daily schedules. The management also wants to cheat the workers of their tips. Before the "lockout," the restaurant had already violated federal labor laws by unilaterally cancelling the workers'

*Silver Palace workers who were illegally fired in a "lockout" and supporters at one of their daily pickets.*



medical insurance, firing two dim-sum cart-pushers, and reducing the number of paid vacation days. If successful, Silver Palace's campaign to bust the union will set workers in Chinatown back thirteen years.

On Friday, August 20, the day of the "lockout," the Silver Palace workers gathered outside of the restaurant. Two of them entered the restaurant to demand their pay and obtain their belongings. The management refused to talk to them, and they were arrested. Immediately, the chanting, picketing, and leafleting began outside the restaurant, and has been daily from 10a.m.-1:30p.m., and from 6:30p.m.-8:30p.m.

The August 27 rally brought out a diverse array of workers and supporters, including the families of workers, members of Harlem Fight Back, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence, the Lower East Side Workers' Center, the Chinese Construction Workers Association, elected officials such as City Council member Kathryn Freed, representatives of State Assemblymember Frank Barbaro, State Senator Franz Leichter, and

Mayor David Dinkins.

During one recent picket workers staged a ceremony involving a coffin. The workers said they would not bury the coffin, which was decorated with the message, "No More Slavery, Justice for Workers," until Silver Palace ceases its promotion of slave-like working-conditions. The coffin ceremony was also an attack on the slave-system that immigrants are subjected to generally, and demonstrated the Silver Palace workers' solidarity with other workers who face the same oppression, but are not yet organized.

Meanwhile the Silver Palace management has taken on a position of wholesale defense of the illegal slave-like conditions that exist throughout the restaurant industry. In an ad placed in a Chinatown newspaper, Silver Palace openly outlined some of its take-back terms, including those that blatantly violate labor laws, such as giving portions of waiters' tips to managers. It is incredible that the management of one of the most successful

*(continued on page 7.)*

## Chinese Construction Workers Organizing for Change

*The Chinese Construction Workers' Association (CCWA) was formed in 1991. Since its founding, it has been fighting for the rights of Chinese construction workers and against the racism at the construction sites and in the unions.*

### Gains Made at Foley Square

As a result of the Campaign for Economic Justice at Foley Square in which the Chinese Construction Workers' Association (CCWA) played a key organizing and leadership role, over eighty jobs went to Chinese construction workers at the Federal Office Building and the United States Courthouse, including two to women. Before the Campaign began, only two

workers out of 300 were Chinese. Although the campaign has already achieved this significant victory, it is not nearly enough. At Foley Square, in the middle of a community that is 40 percent Chinese, only 6 percent of the hired workforce is Chinese. The Foley Square Campaign, which ignited the fury of the Chinatown community, began with meetings with Federal agency officials,

developers, and contractors in April 1992 and culminated in two large demonstrations, each of which drew over 3,000 people. The campaign continues now with a lawsuit that has been filed by Chinese construction workers against the projects' developers, for discrimination in their hiring practices.

### Construction Workers Win Legal Victories Against the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)

Two key rulings were cast in favor of construction workers and against the CPC. One ruling found that the CPC unfairly fired construction workers for unionizing. The court ruled that the workers must be paid an entire year of backpay, which CCWA estimates to be \$550,000. The second ruling found that the City of New York and the Housing, Preservation, and Development Department (HPD) are

responsible, along with the CPC, for paying the workers less than the federally mandated prevailing wage. The workers were paid \$4-8 per hour, rather than the legal minimum of \$18-22 per hour. This is a precedent-setting decision, in that it upholds the right of workers to take private action to pursue prevailing wage claims, and because it holds the City of New York and the HPD responsible, along with the CPC, for

the \$2 million underpayment. The decision affects over 250 CPC workers and potentially thousands of other workers in similarly constituted city repair programs. CPC construction workers have been active in the development of the CCWA. Kam Chan, a former CPC construction worker, is the president of CCWA.

### MAYCO Construction Workers Begin to Get Their Due

In November 1992, construction workers, with the support of CCWA, won the \$170,000 in overtime pay that MAYCO owed them. In addition to its failure to pay overtime, MAYCO had withheld the workers' taxes, but at the end of the year would give them 1099 forms. By

giving them 1099 forms rather than W2 forms MAYCO could steal the workers taxes and deny them any unemployment insurance benefits. Because of their successful campaign, MAYCO workers have clarified their employee status. They have not only received their overtime

pay but are now allowed to keep their unemployment benefits. The kinds of abusive policies used by MAYCO are extremely common in the construction industry, so this victory is particularly important for immigrant construction workers everywhere.

### Workers of Color Unite to Fight Racism

CCWA is member of the Coalition to End Racism in Construction (CERIC,) a coalition of fifteen Latino, African-American, and Asian-American groups that fight the systemic exclusion of workers of color in the construction industry. CCWA, along with the other member-groups of CERIC, participated on July 28, 1993 in a demonstration with over 300 pickets, demanding that the federal government create a hiring hall specifically for workers of color.

## BOYCOTT EAST RIVER

### "NO GANG VIOLENCE! NO SLAVE LABOR!"

Months of picketing, leafleting, and chanting by workers and their supporters at East River Restaurant, in Flushing, Queens, has mobilized a real show of solidarity by many customers and the community. The restaurant has often been nearly empty during the pickets, which occur during what were its busiest hours. In an attempt to win back some of its patrons, the management has been offering a 20 percent discount.

The conditions at East River, Queens' largest Chinese restaurant, are typical of the intense exploitation that both documented and undocumented immigrant workers face. The restaurant violated minimum wage laws, paying waiters as little as 70 cents an hour, violated New York state labor law by keeping as much as one-third of its waiters' tips, and failed to forward to the IRS money it had deducted as taxes from waiters' wages. While these illegal conditions are common, what is unusual is that East River's workers decided to fight to change them.

For several months, management has been trying to crush the efforts of East River's workers to organize and unionize. For many years East River had been employing several undocumented workers. Suddenly, as workers began to organize, management demanded that the most active workers fill out I-9 forms. One manager said to the waiters, "If you continue to demand minimum wage and back pay, the company will hire someone to kill you." Workers who were involved in organizing a union election were fired and replaced. One scab, who claims to have ties to a gang, assaulted a pro-union waiter, knocking him down a flight of stairs.

As a result of complaints filed by East River waiters and the 318 Restaurant Workers' Union, the National Labor Relations Board has concluded that the restaurant sabotaged a union election through bribery and the threat of a lockout. Subsequently, the NLRB has issued a complaint against the restaurant, declaring the election, which the



*East River workers and activists in action.*

union lost 10-11, null and void.

The East River workers are demanding their jobs, job security, the right to unionize, overtime wages, unemployment compensation, and the \$300,000 in back wages that they are owed. They are also asking that their taxes be reported to the IRS, and for the government to investigate the use of gang violence to intimidate workers.

With the help of CSWA and the 318 Restaurant Workers' Union, the East River workers have organized a boycott and have filed several lawsuits against the restaurant. Construction workers, garment workers, restaurant workers, security guards, students, labor and community activists, and others have joined the East River waiters in twice-a-week pickets, chanting, "No Slave Wages! No Gang Violence!" Their leaflets and signs are helping to raise public awareness that the conditions that immigrant workers live under must be changed. A legal victory was won when a court turned down an injunction against the picketing. In addition, the workers and activists are also tabling in Queens, bringing the issues of

immigrant-worker exploitation directly to the local community.

While it has publicly denied the waiters' and busboys' charges, East River's management offered to settle out-of-court, most recently for \$200,000. Management would rather pay workers to walk away, than give them back their jobs and job security, and allow them to unionize. As Mr. Luk, an undocumented worker observed, "It is not just a question of money. It is a question of changing the slave-like conditions that we are subjected to." The workers will accept nothing less than their full back pay, unionization, and the full assertion of their legal rights.

One of East River's owners, Alfred Lui, the executive director of a senior citizens' center who ran for Congress last year, is an important figure in Chinatown. Perhaps now he will understand the need for politicians to play a role in labor law enforcement, and for business owners to comply with the law. As the pickets say, "Alfred Lui, Slave owner! - Pay your workers!"

## Immigrant Workers Unite to Get Their Pay: A Non-Payment-of-Wages Campaign Update

One of the most common problems that immigrant workers face is that of owners of sweatshops and other small businesses who shut down and move, without paying their employees. In addition to forcing workers to labor long hours at low wages, now many bosses don't even pay their workers at all. CSWA has represented more than 300 Chinese workers in non-payment cases, and has helped them to organize to defend the right to be paid for their work.

Unfortunately, laws that protect workers are weak and are not properly enforced. New legislation is needed (see box on page 5), as is the repeal of anti-labor, anti-immigrant laws, such as the employers sanctions provision. Agencies such as the State and Federal Departments of Labor are underfunded and many officials in them lack determination to aggressively enforce the law. The failure of mainstream trade unions to effectively address the concerns of workers is demonstrated by the fact

*Workers and activists demonstrate against Diana Pang, who owed them \$150,000 in withheld wages. (See 318 Fashions Story below.)*



that many factories that don't pay their workers, or ignore other labor laws, as in the 318 Fashions case described below, are shops that have unionized into the ILGWU.

To address these issues, workers need to build a network throughout the garment industry. Non-payment of wages is so common and blatant an abuse that it is serving as a unifying issue for garment workers to start sharing information about conditions

in all the factories. Because many of the garment workers who come to CSWA live and work in Brooklyn, CSWA plans to set up a workers' center there. By sticking together and helping one another out, these workers are taking the initial steps towards building a movement to end all wage-law violations. Below are summaries of a few of the withheld-wage cases we have been involved in.

### **A Few Recent Mobilizations by Workers Fighting to Get Paid:**

**Nineties Fashions:** The owner, Mr. Thomas Tam Ching Yin, closed the shop, opening a new one the very next day, only a couple of blocks away. On December 22, 1992, in effort to win their backpay, 13 workers filed complaints with the U.S. Department of Labor urging that it invoke the "hot cargo act." Forty workers and their supporters picketed Tam's new shop at 199 Lafayette St. They also tabled in Chinatown, asking the community to sign a petition directed to the State and Federal Labor Departments. So far, the workers have collected \$23,000 of the \$49,000 owed them.

**The 318 Fashions Campaign:** Seventy workers from 318 Fashions called upon the State and Federal

Departments of Labor, the State Attorney General's Office, and the District Attorney's Office to fully investigate and prosecute their former boss, Diana Pang, who owed them withheld wages amounting to approximately \$150,000. Pang had closed several factories that she owned in the past to avoid paying workers.

In addition to demanding the investigation, workers demonstrated outside of her home in Long Island City, with approximately 30 other workers who have experienced similar wage-law violations at such factories as Wai Chang, Nineties Fashions, Luo Bo, Affirmed Fashions, and Judy Fashions.

**The Luo Bo Campaign:** The

owner of the Luo Bo Corporation in Brooklyn, Mr. Jeffrey Luo, owed workers \$8,000 in withheld wages. They filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Labor on February 24, 1993, and won their back wages plus the overtime pay that had been promised to them by Luo.

**The Woodbine Campaign:** After workers at Luo Bo were successful, workers at Woodbine Sportswear, which is owned by the owner of Luo Bo (Jeffery Luo) and Mr. Tsang Wing Hay, decided to organize and fight for the \$30,000 they were owed in back pay. They filed a complaint with the State Department of Labor in March, and have picketed their former boss' new shop at 120 Baxter St. in Chinatown.

## GARMENT WORKERS ORGANIZE TOWN HALL MEETING EXPOSE SWEAT-SHOP CRIMES BEFORE OFFICIALS

On Tuesday, June 29 at P.S. 124 in Chinatown, over 300 Chinese garment factory workers met with a panel of six federal and state labor officials to discuss the illegal and deadly conditions that exist in garment sweatshops, and the need for the aggressive enforcement of labor laws.

More than 25,000 Chinese workers in Manhattan alone depend on the garment industry for employment. Many work more than 12 hours a day for only \$2 an hour, in violation of minimum wage laws. In many unionized shops, the piece-rate that workers get paid not only amounts to less than minimum wage, but is actually lower than it is in some non-unionized shops. Dust permeates workspaces, garbage blocks fire exits, and bosses often force workers to work overnight in order to meet deadlines. These, and other on-the-job health hazards cause injuries and health problems such as back pains, swollen hands and feet, eye strain, and respiratory problems. Gangs are often used to intimidate workers.

The owners of many of these sweatshops are contractors for large well-known manufacturers who have forced the sweat-shops into fierce cost-cutting competition with one another. As a result, factory owners often withhold tens of thousands of dollars worth of wages. Workers who have gone to the police, the Department of Labor, and their unions have often found them to be unresponsive.

CSWA organized its Garment Industry Working Group to address these problems in a systematic way. Towards these ends, CSWA organized this unprecedented town hall meeting.

Pauline Tsang, president of CSWA and a member of its Garment Workers Group, gave an introduction, describing the recurring labor abuses in the garment industry, and calling for

governmental accountability. Sau-Fong Au, a CSWA board member, facilitated the meeting, which was translated into Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. Workers told of bosses running away while owing them thousands of dollars. One worker stated, "I went to the Labor Department for help, I went to the police department for help, and I just got shifted from one place to another. Finally I came to CSWA." The ensuing campaign resulted in the first and, so far, only imprisonment in this state of a sweatshop owner for the non-payment of wages. This is just one case in over 200 that CSWA has been involved in, that deals with the non-payment of wages.

After some workers expressed concern at the influx of undocumented immigrants, one undocumented woman spoke out. "I am a human being too," she stated, "I would like to work only 40 hours a week too." All workers, documented and undocumented alike, deserve, and are legally entitled to, protection under U.S. labor laws. Several people also desire for universal national health care in the United States.

The government officials attending the townhall meeting included representatives from the State and Federal departments of labor, the State Attorney General's Office, and state and federal elected

officials. Several officials described proposals for pro-worker legislation, such as the new state labor laws that are outlined elsewhere on this page.

The meeting was a success on many levels. First, it brought over 300 workers together for the first time to discuss their common exploitation and to find out about their legal rights. Secondly, it brought government officials face-to-face with the workers that they are supposed to be protecting. It became apparent to many workers who attended that a strong solidarity, which includes undocumented workers, is the only force that will prevent unfair labor practices, win legislation that punishes bosses who break the law, and put an end to sweatshops. Not just small labor contractors, but the manufacturers who control them must be made responsible for the deplorable conditions that exist in the sweatshops. We also need to make sure that agencies that are supposed to protect workers' rights have sufficient funds on both the state and federal level to do so.

### *The "Hot Goods"*

*Provision. Products are considered "hot goods" if produced in violation of minimum wage, overtime, or child-labor laws. Such goods may not be shipped to other states. The Federal Labor department has the power to seize such goods which could include garments, until the labor-law violation in question is satisfactorily addressed.*

### **PRO-WORKER LEGISLATION BEING INTRODUCED BEFORE THE STATE LEGISLATURE:**

Senator Franz S. Leichter and Assemblymember Frank Barbaro have introduced legislation which would make garment manufacturers liable for their contractors' failure to pay wages, increase the criminal and monetary penalties for failure to pay wages, and expand the ability of labor commissioners to seize products that were produced in violation of labor law.

## Editorial: Undocumented immigrants are not the problem

The influx of Chinese undocumented immigrants into this country, like those of the Golden Venture, has sparked a great deal of outrage among U.S. citizens and documented immigrants. Many of them complain that the undocumented are taking their jobs or bringing down their wages. But the undocumented are not the culprits; our country's policies need to be scrutinized.

It is no accident that so many undocumented immigrants, like those from China, are being smuggled into this country in growing numbers, and channeled into an expanding underground economy, which, in New York City alone represents more than a fifth of the city's economy. The trafficking of undocumented immigrants to be used as cheap laborers in the United States is part of a global economic plan to which an influential sector of our country's ruling elite subscribes. This plan calls for government-sponsored policies and laws that promote business interests under the guise of economic prosperity for all.

The Reagan Administration lay down fertile ground for the growth of the underground economy by advocating deregulation and privatization as the keys to revitalizing our country's economy. Its policies also helped to advance a racist, divisive, self-interested ideology that bred increasing anti-immigrant sentiment. The employers sanctions provision of the 1986 Immigration Act is one example of the regressive laws of that era that helped to expand the underground economy.

As a result of that provision, which made it a crime for an employer to hire someone without making sure that person had work authorization papers, unscrupulous employers are seeking out and hiring undocumented immigrants. They pay them sub-minimum wages, and require them to work overnight, knowing that these immigrants are highly vulnerable--and thus easily exploitable.

Undocumented immigrants, desperate for work to survive, will accept just about any job on any terms. Unethical employers use the vulnerable and desperate situation that the law puts undocumented people in, to force documented immigrants and U.S. citizens to accept whatever miserable terms he or she offers. For if they don't, thousands of undocumented workers, unable to get work above ground, are ready to step right in and take their jobs, if offered.

As a result, thousands of Chinese immigrants - documented and undocumented - work in unregulated trades such as restaurant, garment, and construction, where they are experiencing wages as low as 70 cents an hour, hours that commonly exceed 12 hours a day, work weeks that run six to seven days, wages that are withheld for months at a time, and tips that are stolen by management. Unscrupulous employers get away with such practices because labor laws are barely enforced, and even when they are, the penalties are so weak that scofflaws consider them merely a business expense, a minor inconvenience.

The lax enforcement of laws, the weakness of existing laws, and the destructive employers sanctions

provision help to cultivate an underground economy, where employers can freely control employees and squelch dissent by threatening them with blacklisting, deportation, or gang retaliation.

Meanwhile, the economic disparities in our country are growing dramatically, and the conditions of workers are deteriorating. Today, many of the new jobs being created are temporary and offer low wages and no benefits.

The Clinton Administration pays lip service to addressing these issues, but so far has not put forth a serious plan. It is critical for the economic revitalization of our country and for the realization of social and economic justice for all working people, that we redirect attention away from the symptoms of our country's economic crisis, towards real causes and real solutions.

We demand that labor laws be enforced for all workers. We call for new and stronger laws that demonstrate that our government does not sanction the exploitation of workers. We call for the repeal of the employers sanctions provision. We call for a new jobs bill that creates decent and stable jobs. We call for economic policies that advance the welfare and dignity of poor and working people.

### *Teachers at I.S.S. Call for Accountability to the Community*

Early this summer, fifteen out of the eighteen instructors at the Immigrant Social Services summer school program at P.S. 2, on Henry Street, petitioned for a meeting with I.S.S. to discuss increasing their wages. Many of these instructors - who are college and high school students themselves - had taught as part of the program for three years.

I.S.S. responded to their request for a discussion by firing three instructors whom it perceived as leading the group. Trivial and insubstantial reasons were given for the dismissals. One teacher resigned in protest.

Since then, these teachers have

been organizing, with the support of the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence and CSWA, picketing twice a day, and meeting with parents who are supporting their efforts. The workers are demanding the reinstatement of the fired teachers with an apology, that parents and teachers have a say in how the program is run and how trustees are chosen, and that the programs' budget be opened up for public scrutiny.

An outgrowth of this case is the development of a youth-leadership group to address the concerns of young workers.

## **The Chinatown Labor Fair Says: "No Slave Labor! Fight for the Rights of all Workers!"**

The tenth annual Chinatown Labor Fair will be held on September 12, 1993. This year the fair is sponsored by CSWA, the Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, 318 Restaurant Workers' Union, the Center for Immigrant Rights, the Lower East Side Catholic Area Conference, the Asian Pacific Islanders Coalition on HIV and AIDS, Local 300 Postal Workers Union, and other community organizations. The fair will attempt to educate workers about the effects of poor working conditions on their health and well-being, inform them of the rights and services they are entitled to, give them a forum to communicate in, and provide opportunities for government officials and agencies to advance the interests of working people. It will also attempt to bring to all of Chinatown the message that it is in the interest of the whole community to stop the slave trade and slave labor, and that to do so, we must eliminate the thriving underground economy. This can only be accomplished when the community comes together and organizes to promote the aggressive enforcement of labor laws, the passage of stronger pro-worker legislation, *the repeal of disempowering laws such as the employer sanction provision, and the development of economic programs that promote the interests of all workers, regardless of their status.*

The fair is an annual community celebration that consists of a wide range of events, including dances, speakers, and skits. Community organizations, government agencies, unions, and labor organizations will set up tables to provide information about workers' concerns and rights. The fair will take place on Bayard Street between Mulberry and Mott streets. The rain date is September 19, 1993. For more information, please call Rhoda Wong or Shirley Wong at CSWA at 212-619-7979, or Ursula Levelt at the Center for Immigrant Rights at 212-505-6890.

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restaurants in Chinatown thinks it can get away with defending its lack of respect for the basic legal rights of workers by taking the position that they are no worse than other restaurants that exploit immigrant workers. Silver Palace would rather spend money on advertising and offering a thirty percent discount than recognize the basic legal rights that its workers are entitled to.

A letter from the management to the workers states, "We know this will cause hardships for all of us, but it is

nothing compared to the hardships we all would face if we must remain uncompetitive and find ourselves not busy enough to keep all of you employed." Everyone knows that the economy is bad--but it is always working people who bear the brunt of the hardship. This time, workers are refusing to take the fall, and they are calling on the government to enforce its laws, and on Silver Palace to let all of them come back to work, to cease its union busting actions, and to negotiate in good faith.

**CSWA thanks this year's English teachers for their enthusiasm and dedication:** Magdalena Ching, Gwendolyn Moy, June Yang, Wendy Wong, Shirley Wong, Cecilia Ma, Tom Lyons, Rick Yeap, Angel Fung, Jennifer Wong, Ann Morris, Stacey Long, Sonny Lui, Alice Chen, Christy Chang, Ken-Hung Pong, Jenny Chen, Tulips Yang, and Simeon Gallu.

## **Liberation Through Communication: English Classes for Chinese Immigrants**

English-as-a-Second Language classes for Chinese immigrants are being held Sunday mornings from 10 a.m. to noon at St. James School on St. James Place in Chinatown. There are three twelve-week semesters every year. As in the past, three levels are being offered, from beginner through advanced. Additionally, classes are have been organized for those who want to study for the citizenship test. Classes have also been made available for the children of adult students, to help them with their schoolwork, and to teach them about life in the United States, as the children of workers and as immigrants.

The classes are taught by volunteers who are interested in labor issues, working with immigrants, and the Chinatown community. To maximize their utility the classes emphasize language skills that will help Chinese immigrants survive as workers, tenants, parents, health-care consumers, and shoppers.

A students' association was created this year so that English-class students can initiate other activities beyond the classroom. Possible activities include trips to museums, parks, zoos, and restaurants where students can practice their English in real-life situations. Anyone interested in teaching should contact JoAnn Lum at 212-619-7979. Prior teaching experience and some knowledge of Chinese is preferred, but not required.

## Senior Aide Workers Fight For Their Rights!

A group of senior citizen workers who work at the Phoenix Food Service, along with the assistant cook and maintenance workers at the Hong Ning senior center, both of which are run by the CPC, unionized independently in 1991. These workers are enrolled in the Senior Citizen National Community Service Employment Program, which is funded by the Department of Labor. They were the only successful unionization drive in the whole program, in which 60,000 senior aide workers participate nationwide. The general contractor who oversees the contract for the CPC on this program is the National Senior Citizens Council, which is affiliated with the A.F.L.-C.I.O.

Under the guise of providing senior workers with training, this program uproots the participants every two years, moving them from job to job. During one period they may work as cooks, during the next as typists. At each job the workers provide an alternative of cheap labor for their employers, usually for minimum wage, and receive hardly any medical benefits, while they work side-by-side with the regular employees, who generally receive higher pay and better benefits. Anyone who earns below the poverty-level is qualified for this Merry-Go-Round, and they remain qualified as long as their income remains at the same level - *which it does for as long as they remain in the*

*program.*

Although these workers won a union election, their employer refuses to recognize them as regular employees, and has given them no increase in wages or any benefits, since the union negotiations began, two years ago. During this time the CPC has continued to harass active workers. One outstanding example is the case of a pro-union worker whose hours were cut from 35 to 15. He was also required to write a report in English, even though that was not required for anyone else. After a two-year investigation the NLRB issued a complaint against the CPC, which cited a series of labor violations, including the harassment of this worker.

Senior citizen workers, along with other workers, also filed a lawsuit in federal court against CPC's ageism, because they have been denied equal pay for equal work. These abuses, along with its behaviour in other cases, make the CPC one of the worst labor law violators in Chinatown. The workers are planning to have serious talks with politicians if they don't get what they want on the bargaining table.

What these workers would like to know is, why does a program that is supposed to help workers by providing them with valuable training, exploit them as a cheap source of labor, to replace other workers? How is that an agency that is affiliated with the A.F.L.-C.I.O. can oversee such an anti-labor program and sit quietly by, while union negotiations drag on fruitlessly?

### The Lower East Side Workers Center: Bringing People Together

CSWA launched the Lower East Side Worker's Center in 1991 at 191 East 3rd Street in Loisdia. Over the past two years the center has moved towards becoming independent of CSWA, as it continues to bring together Latino, African American, Asian, and other workers on the Lower East Side to fight for jobs and decent working conditions.

The center provides English classes, and organizes sports and cultural activities. Currently it is in the process of organizing a women's committee which will focus on the struggles of Latina women. The center is also developing legal projects, such as workshops on labor law.

Lawyers working through the center are developing cases that deal with problems facing immigrants. For example, they are developing a strategy for securing the right of undocumented workers to remain in the United States while they are in the process of pursuing legal action against their employer. If won, such a precedent would lessen the strength of bosses' threats of deportation for workers who organize to struggle for their rights. For more information, or if you want to get involved, please contact Guillermo Glenn, at 212-473-3936.

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