

Letter from a Reader: “In Praise of the Coffin”

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This letter is translated from CSWA’s Chinese-language newsletter. When workers picketed Silver Palace and Jing Fong they carried a coffin with the slogan, “Bury Slave Labor.” This letter, contributed anonymously, explains the plight of the workers and the significance of the coffin.

In our five thousand years of proud Chinese history the coffin sings the most passionate war songs. How many heroes and warriors for the defense of their country, for the honor of their ancestry, for the well being of the common man, have gone to war with grave determination and a coffin on their shoulders? The coffin is their determination, their resolve, their battle flag. A flag is an encouragement for the army to proceed forward, to overcome all enemies.

How many scholars and wise men for the sake of awakening their deluded rulers have carried a coffin with them as they advised their King? This is how page after page of our poetical history has been made – a history which possesses the power to rock the sky and the earth; to touch the spirits and the gods.

The coffin has long been in our history. It has witnessed the sorrow of our ill-fated country and represents the pain and struggle of the Chinese working class.

The workers of the Silver Palace were chased out of their work place, forced into surrendering their livelihood [during a seven-month lockout in 1994.] Throughout that harsh winter they protested for their right to work. Yet their cry for help and justice was not answered, as the bosses plotted the workers’ demise. Finally, our army of unemployed were forced to go to war with a coffin. Holding this battle flag of their ancestors, singing an ancient and passionate war song, our warriors won their first battle. They reclaimed what was rightfully theirs from the hands of the bosses [a new union contract was won.] This filled the bosses with hate and fear. They tried to remove the battle flag of the workers so that once again the workers could be slaughtered without resistance.

The claim that workers protests are destroying Chinatown’s economy is a lie. For example, have you ever heard of lovers who decided not to get married because workers are boycotting the restaurant where they were going to celebrate? These banquets are not canceled, but are simply moved to other restaurants. Thus the economy of Chinatown is not affected. The workers’ demands will not have any adverse effect on the economy, but rather a fair distribution of wealth is good for and economy. The land redistribution in Taiwan, which lead to its economic boom, is one example.

Is it healthier for our economy for waiters, who earn only \$200 per month, to get their tips, or is it better for tip money to be stolen by a few wealthy bosses?

With their tips waiters have more money to buy basic necessities from others within Chinatown. What they get from the community they return to the community. They are the backbone of Chinatown. There are countless examples: the only way for a society to prosper is to keep its wealth among the people.

In contrast, when bosses centralize the wealth of our community in their pockets they just invest in real estate in affluent communities or buy luxury cars. They suck

wealth out of Chinatown and move it to other communities. Is it good for Chinatown for these bosses to economically rape our community?

The wealthy few are trying to trick people into opposing the battle flag of the workers, the coffin. The bosses disguise themselves as the protectors of the Chinese community.

Bosses, won't you ever think of the well being of the working people? Won't you please tell your kind, the bosses of the sweatshops, to have mercy? Do not be so lacking in conscience as to take 5-7% of income from workers who make less than \$100 a week. [Many sweatshop bosses do not issue checks for workers' salaries, but rather pay in cash and then deduct a 5-7% cash transaction fee.] Won't you please tell the bosses of the restaurants to obey the law, to protect the rights of the workers? Won't you please tell the unscrupulous landlords to provide heat and hot water in the winter for their poor tenants?

These are basic survival needs. If the wealthy few cannot guarantee these most basic rights to the impoverished masses, how can they expect the masses not to resist? How can they hide the truth any longer?

You righteous few who engage in the fight of the working class, you are the liberators of Chinatown! You abolish slave labor. As for those who can only think of profits and self interest, who behave like dogs barking over a piece of meat, we should ignore them, because the public will soon see the truth and join the fight. This is a hard battle, but victory is near.