

# The CAAV VOICE

Newsletter  
of the  
Committee  
Against  
Anti-Asian  
Violence

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## EDITORIAL

Every day there are Asian Americans in New York City who are victims of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment. When we think of Asians being victimized, we imagine teenagers stalking with baseball bats or—the more likely occurrence—men in blue with their nightsticks and guns. In reality, however, New York City Asians, especially immigrants regularly face the greatest abuse where they work—from health hazards to homicide. Racism and anti-immigrant discrimination in the labor market force Asians into dangerous jobs in marginal industries—jobs with low pay, long hours, poor working conditions, no benefits and little security. These conditions are condoned by the government, whose regulatory agencies and criminal justice system turn a blind eye to abusive practices or participate in the abuse themselves.

## CAAAV TAKES ON SYSTEMIC VIOLENCE

This pattern of exploitation and neglect may be found in industries employing large numbers of Asians. In garment factories and restaurants labor laws are not enforced. In nail salons and sweatshops, there are few health protections for the women workers.

THIS ISSUE:  
FOCUS ON  
CABBIES

SEE PAGES 4 & 5

The police are indifferent to the murders and rampant assaults on taxi drivers, vendors, and workers in delis, take-out restaurants and newsstands. On the other hand, the

police themselves are often quick to attack these workers when called to help or mediate.

CAAAV initiated its first worker organizing project in the taxi industry, where Asians are a very visible part of the workforce. Clearly, the dangerous conditions and low pay have contributed to making cab driving an occupation for immigrants—91% of new drivers are immigrants and almost half of them are South Asian, the focus of CAAAV's Lease Drivers Coalition (LDC). This issue of the CAAAV Voice focuses on the taxi industry, so our readers can better understand the complex issues facing the drivers we organize.

Studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Labor show that the highest rates in the nation of homicides on the job occur against cab drivers. Passively watching

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## New York City Incidents

### COP BULLET ENDS TEEN'S LIFE

On the morning of March 24, 16-year-old Yong Xin Huang was playing with two of his buddies in the fenced in yard of his friend's home in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. They were playing with a BB gun when a

neighbor became alarmed and called 911. Shortly after the police arrived Yong Xin lay dead in a pool of blood. The police claim that Yong Xin had turned and tried to fight and that the officer's gun discharged accidentally. However, witnesses say that Yong Xin did not struggle with the police and that in fact he and his friends were facing a building with their hands on the wall. An independent autopsy report confirms that Officer Steven Mizrahi shot Yong Xin in the back of his head

at point-blank range with a Glock 9-mm. semiautomatic. The City Medical Examiners Office has refused to release their autopsy report.

Yong Xin was an honor student at Robert F. Wagner Junior High School in Manhattan. The youngest child and only son of the Huangs, he is deeply mourned by his parents, three sisters and the extended family.

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Members of Huang's family are outraged by the official police account and the fact that Officer Mizrahi remains on police payroll, on "sick leave." The family has retained the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund to represent them. The Brooklyn District Attorney is taking the case to grand jury hearings beginning April 27, where it will be decided whether criminal charges will be filed against Mizrahi.

CAAAV has met with the family and offered its support in bringing this case to justice. We will be coordinating a letter and petition campaign in the community calling for the immediate suspension of Officer Mizrahi and the prosecution of Mizrahi for Yong Xin's murder.

The Huang family joined CAAAV at a mass rally at Police Headquarters on April 25 to demand an end to police brutality. Surrounded by other families of police murder victims, Joyce, one of Yong Xin's sisters, said, "My family cannot understand why [Yong Xin] was killed by a police officer who is supposed to save people's lives...It is the police officer who shot my brother in the back of the head who did not respect my brother's life. We want justice for the senseless murder of our brother...Does anyone understand the pain, hopelessness and anger our family feels?"



Joyce Huang (center), speaking at Police Plaza rally.

PHOTO: EDDIE KOCHIYAMA



Protestors blocking the Manhattan Bridge.

PHOTO: WAYNE LUM



Police arresting peaceful demonstrators.

PHOTO: WAYNE LUM

## Other Incidents

### Lower East Side, Manhattan, 1/95

On March 27, 1995 two Bangladeshi students MS and MM were declared guilty without a discharge of trespassing in the housing project at 75 Stanton Street. The two students were looking for a friend, but happened to be in the wrong building of the project. CAAAV believes that they were the

On April 25, rush hour traffic was disrupted by coordinated protests against Mayor Giuliani's devastating budget cuts and police attacks which target the poor, working people, immigrants and people of color. While hundreds demonstrated in simultaneous rallies, 185 were arrested in peaceful takeovers of two bridges and two tunnels. CAAAV and the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights coordinated both a Police Plaza rally against police brutality, racist and homophobic violence, and the Manhattan Bridge action, where 25 were arrested. Other actions protested the cuts in public health care and AIDS care, public education at all levels, decent jobs and housing.

victims of a prejudicial process by the police.

### **Elmhurst, Queens, 1/31/95**

On January 31, 1995, a male nurse sexually abused and attempted to rape EH, a patient at Elmhurst Hospital. When she reported the attack to hospital authorities, they ignored her and trivialized her charges. Hospital police visited her, but made no report. The Queens Special Victims Squad (112th Precinct) is currently investigating the case. Meanwhile, CAAAV is spearheading a letter-writing campaign involving Asian community groups and women's organizations. CAAAV is demanding that the Queens District Attorney Richard Brown conduct a thorough investigation of the charges and prosecute the perpetrator.

### **Greenpoint, Brooklyn, 1/17/95**

On January 17, 1995, Pakistani livery driver MA was assaulted and arrested by Officers Marsh and Kopak of the 84th Precinct. These officers have a long history of harassing Pakistani cab drivers. MA has a civilian complaint pending against Officer Marsh from a previous incident. During this most recent incident, Officer Marsh said he wanted to teach MA a lesson for filing the complaint against him. He stated that the

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## **CANAL STREET VENDORS FIGHT HARASSMENT**

On March 6, 1995, over 200 Chinatown vendors and supporters marched down Broadway towards City Hall. They were demonstrating their defiance against an oppressive city government that has targeted their community for over one year. The protest march, the result of organizing efforts by CAAAV's Southeast Asian Organizing Collective and the Ad-Hoc Committee of Chinatown Vendors, marks the beginning of a long and tough struggle against increasingly racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-working class city and state governments.

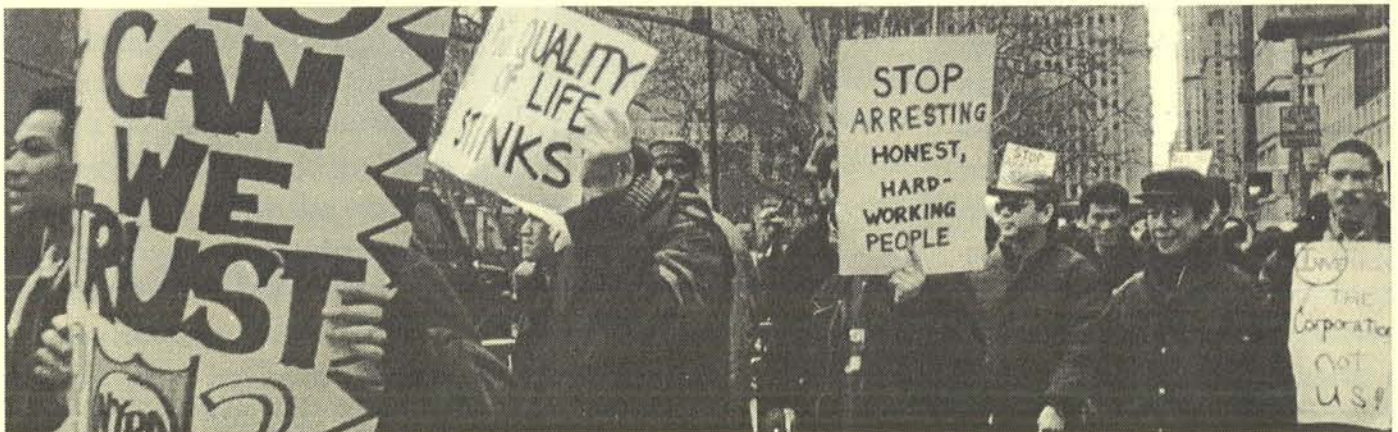
The vendors in Chinatown attract many tourists who are looking for inexpensive novelties and other souvenirs, including imitations of brand name products. For many years, different city, state, and federal agencies have been at work to harass and criminalize these vendors, using them as scapegoats for their own political gains. Recently, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, invoking his Quality of Life program, has joined forces with the Manhattan District Attorney, the NYPD, Federal Marshalls, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and private investigators from multi-billion dollar corporations such as Rolex and Warner Brothers. Portraying the vendor community as part of organized criminal rings that defraud consumers, these agencies conduct their harassment, confiscations, assaults and arrests against a hardworking, working-class people

with little means to defend themselves against such discriminatory attacks.

Police and private investigators routinely converge on the street vendors and shop owners. They confiscate their merchandise and money without a warrant and without issuing receipts. The people who get arrested often do not know who is arresting them or why they are being arrested. Some are jailed for as long as two days and then pressured by the D.A.'s office to plead guilty to charges of selling contraband on the sidewalk (stoop violation law) and various serious felonies. Vendors often pay heavy fines and forfeit the right to demand the return of their cash and merchandise, including illegally confiscated goods that are clearly not in violation of any trademark laws.

The legal basis for actions against the vendors is questionable. According to John Yong, an attorney who has represented other vendors in similar situations, the police cannot confiscate imitation goods, such as watches, handbags, and scarves, when there is no representation by the vendors to the consumers that the product is genuine. In court prosecutors must also prove that the vendors act with the intent to defraud. Regarding accusations that federal trademark laws are violated, it is the manufacturers of the imitation goods, not the vendors, who are culpa-

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as crimes against drivers escalated to nearly 60 reported robberies and 1 murder per week, the city, the police, and the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) have done little to protect the livelihood or the lives of drivers. The police are aggressively hostile to drivers and often ignore a driver's story in cases of farebeating or other disputes with riders. Encounters with the police often escalate to racist and anti-immigrant slurs and physical assaults against the drivers. TLC tickets are adjudicated in kangaroo courts. Through LDC's campaigns for driver safety, against police brutality and harassment by TLC inspectors, and against fare increases and other TLC policies which would unfairly burden the drivers, South Asian drivers have begun to assert their demands for decent work conditions and safety on the job.

For CAAAV, the end to abuse stemming from racism at schools, in neighborhoods, or on the streets is only one part of the struggle. In order to confront the most pervasive form of racist abuse affecting our communities, we will be expanding our efforts to organize Asian immigrant workers in these oppressive marginal industries.

### BEHIND THE WHEEL AND UNDER THE GUN

Cab driving has the highest rate of on the job homicide nationally with New York City well ahead of other urban areas. The city has only responded with half-hearted measures - regulations for bulletproof partitions and trouble lights with flashing signals that are just as likely to be seen by the assailant as a passing police officer. The police and the TLC have been dragging their feet on instituting radio tracking devices, a system LDC has been advocating for three years, for cabbies in distress. In February, however, Mayor Giuliani announced—with great flourish—

that the police are committing 212 patrol cars to using the tracking devices to find stolen cars.

Abandoned by the city, drivers have developed their own strategies to protect themselves. Many drivers have formed Citizens' Band networks. A call over the CB from a driver in trouble will bring fellow drivers to his aid. There have been many instances where this system has averted disaster or at least helped bring the assailants to

Not only do the police fail to protect cabbies, the police, who interact with drivers daily, are themselves a threat to drivers. Under the Giuliani administration, cases of police brutality against taxi drivers—as against immigrants, poor people, and people of color in general—have sharply increased. The attitude of many New York police officers is clear in the words of the officer who beat and arrested CAAAV/LDC staff organizer Saleem Osman: "There's no black mayor in

# FOCUS ON CABBIES

justice. One much-publicized, controversial strategy used by some drivers, who base this practice on their own experiences and collective cabbie wisdom, is avoiding passengers who they think might be farebeaters or criminals. Some drivers rely on racist assumptions about people, especially black men, learned from racist U.S. cultural imports to their homeland, mainstream American media, and longstanding practices within the industry; even though many drivers report instances of being robbed at gunpoint by well-dressed white men. Thus, in reality, identifying problem passengers by physical appearance or race-based generalizations does not assure safety for the driver, but certainly antagonizes innocent rejected customers. Drivers in LDC are seeking non-racist, effective ways to protect themselves on the job. LDC also continues to demand that the City and the NYPD commit resources to driver safety.

New York anymore — you better watch out."

### TLC RUNS ON PRESUMPTION OF GUILT

The Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) pulls in millions of dollars each year from fines and charges levied against yellow cab drivers. Many drivers can tell stories of being randomly stopped by TLC inspectors who will search until they can find anything — if not several things— for which they can issue a ticket. They can be charged for something as minor as a broken spring under the car seat. Often inspectors will descend upon a popular drivers' rest location such as the intersection of Houston and Lafayette, where hundreds of Pakistani drivers congregate while changing shifts. Ticketing, with fines ranging from \$50 to \$1000, makes money for the city. Moreover, drivers are doubly penalized. Aside from being fined, they lose money

waiting for hours in TLC court.

Although the vast majority of drivers are immigrants, translators are not allowed for the drivers when they appear before the TLC judges. In those situations where the driver must defend himself against accusations by an inspector or passenger, lack of fluency in English is a huge disadvantage. Since most TLC judges often exhibit racist or xenophobic tendencies, stories told by inspectors and passengers are invariably accepted. In effect, drivers are presumed guilty until proven innocent.

### WHO PROFITS FROM THOSE RACING METERS?

Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of taxi drivers are not independent businessmen who drive their own cars. In fact, most drivers own nothing and are not guaranteed any income at all. On a lucky day, they might end a twelve-hour shift with \$80-90 in their pockets. More likely, they end up with \$50. And if the car breaks down

or there are not enough passengers, they can end up losing money after having paid a lease of \$80-100 at the beginning of the shift plus \$20-25 for gas.

A medallion is required in order to operate a yellow cab. The city has not issued new medallions since 1937. In the 1970's and 80's, speculation on medallions, much as in the real estate market, more than tripled the price of a medallion to about \$200,000, an unattainable amount for most drivers. Most drivers lease the medallion and usually the car from a garage, medallion owner or a broker, a middleman who manages medallions for owners.

Leasing began in 1979. Prior to that time, a driver was guaranteed some income, earning a fixed percentage of his daily take while garages bore the costs of gas, repairs, and even some benefits. In 1979, the large garage owners convinced the Taxi and Limousine Commission to change the system so that the vast majority of drivers must pay a set lease price before they take out the cab. In addition, the driver is responsible for gas

and often for repairs. While lease prices have increased 11% since 1990, money on the meter, out of which the driver must pay all his expenses, has stayed the same. The average annual income for cabbies has fallen to about \$19,000 per year. In contrast, the owners and brokers enjoy a steady income, making as much as \$1000 a week from a single cab.

### TAXI UNION BETRAYS THE DRIVERS

The formation of the NYC Taxi Drivers Union in 1966 was a major victory for yellow cab drivers. At the union's peak, of the 12,000 medallions on the street, 7,000 were owned by 60 garages organized by the union. The threat of union organization forced large garage owners to offer free medical and hospital insurance to all drivers working at least 3 months. With the first contract, drivers won the continuation of employer paid health insurance, a pension available after 25 years of full time employment, paid

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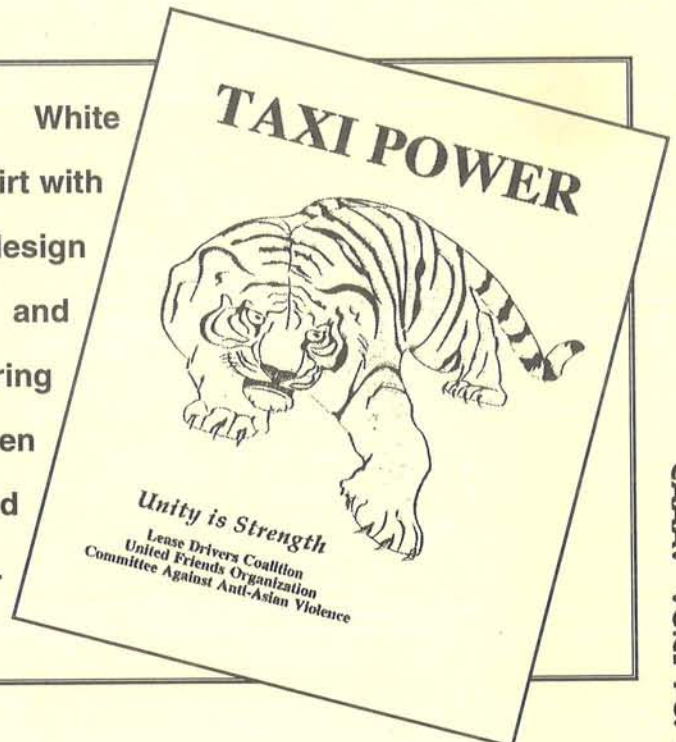
*ride in style ...*

**Show Your Support  
for the  
Lease  
Drivers  
Coalition**

Summer  
Sale Price  
\$5.00  
plus  
\$2.00  
Postage &  
Handling

White  
T-shirt with  
gold design  
and  
lettering  
on green  
background

Sizes: M-L-XL



### TRAGIC BUS DEATH STILL UNSOLVED

U.S. is a country only for white people and yelled, "You Paks — you're not allowed to drive in our patrol area! You sand niggers have to go back to Pakistan!" The two officers dragged MA out of his car, assaulted him, and threw a lit cigarette at him.

#### **Soho, Manhattan, 7/16/94**

On July 16, 1994, Pakistani yellow cab driver AM was driving on Houston Street when he got into a traffic dispute with four young people in a car. As AM stepped from his car to try to calm the situation, one of the youths struck AM in the face with a baseball bat.

AM went to a passing police officer and pointed out the youth and the car, but the police officer only called an ambulance and refused to take any other action. AM was hospitalized for a week and had to undergo major surgery on his left eye.

#### **Manhattan, 2/13/94**

On February 13, 1994, SZA, a Pakistani, was in his cab at the end of his shift with his off-duty light on. A white couple climbed into his cab and asked to be taken to Brooklyn. SZA indicated he was off-duty and offered to take the couple to the gas station where he was to change shifts so they could easily get another cab. The man became angry and hit SZA in the back of the head. He then got out of the cab and began to strike the driver's side window with his hand, breaking it and injuring SZA in the face.

When the police came to the scene, SZA told them what had happened and said he believed the man was drunk. After speaking to the assailant, the police arrested SZA instead and held him for 32 hours, charging him with assault and reckless endangerment. The cab—his only means of livelihood was impounded for 16 days.

A gentle well-meaning suggestion to a fellow bus passenger cost 65-year-old Mariko Westbrook her life. On December 29, 1993, Mrs. Westbrook, a former Japanese war bride divorced from an African American G.I., boarded a bus in Newark, where she had lived since coming to the U.S. She noticed a young woman and a little girl, who was swathed in scarves up to her eyes. A mother of two grown children, Mrs. Westbrook smilingly suggested to the woman that the little girl, about 4 years old, might be a bit more comfortable if her scarves were loosened. This enraged the woman who cursed her and told her to mind her own business. Mrs. Westbrook replied gently that she considered all children her children.

The remark further infuriated the woman, who was about 5'6" and weighed about 200 pounds. She began to pound Mrs. Westbrook on her face. Although the driver was opposite them, neither he nor the other passengers came to Mrs. Westbrook's aid. After more than two dozen blows, Mrs. Westbrook managed to edge to the door, whereupon the attacker delivered a final kick that sent her flying headfirst to the pavement. Passersby called the police. In the commotion, the woman and child quickly left unnoticed. Mrs. Westbrook died three days later.

The devastated son and daughter of Mrs. Westbrook, Peter and Vivian, solicited the aid of Attorney Stephen Weinstein to locate the assailant who still remains at large. Attorney Weinstein called the beating "egregious and savage," and noted that, without the identity of the woman, a criminal trial cannot be held. He stated, however, that both the bus driver and bus company will be held accountable in a civil suit for carelessness, negligence and irresponsibility.

Anyone who can provide information about this tragedy is urged to call Attorney Weinstein at 201-267-5200.

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### SEX WORKERS ORGANIZE IN SOUTH KOREA

In February, CAAV's Korean Community Organizing Committee co-sponsored part of a nationwide tour to publicize the conditions of women and children living in camptowns surrounding the U.S. military bases in South Korea. These camptowns are "entertainment zones" for U.S. soldiers, where prostitution, though ostensibly illegal, is controlled and regulated by the South Korean government. With outraged voices, former sex worker Kim Yon Ja, feminist writer and playwright Ahn Il Son, and Korean adoptee Irene Soon Mi Bellis described how militarism, economic exploitation, and physical abuse rub shoulders in these territories, sanctioned and regulated by the Korean government.

One of the largest of these places is known as "America Town" and was home to both Ms. Kim and Bellis. In America Town, as

in the other camptowns, women must carry "V.D. cards" to present to soldiers and the military police, are required to be checked weekly at special government health centers for sexually-transmitted diseases and, if diagnosed, are forcibly quarantined. Tragically, while there are numerous cases of women being abused, beaten and even murdered by U.S. soldiers, the soldiers are rarely charged, much less given over to local authorities for questioning. Under the Status of Armed Forces Agreement, U.S. soldiers who commit crimes against Koreans are usually protected from prosecution in the Korean courts.

The sponsorship of the Korean government combined with the privileged position the U.S. military holds in Korea has lead to

## D'AMATO PLAYS RACIST BUFFOON

On April 4th, Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York crossed the line again with his "humor" on the nationally syndicated "Imus in the Morning" show. Mocking Judge Lance Ito using a phony Japanese accent, D'Amato called the third-generation Japanese American "little Judge Ito . . . with the wet nose" and accused him of "making a disgrace of the judicial system."

CAAAV joined other Asian American groups in a swift and angry response. In the two days following D'Amato's racist performance and half-hearted apology, CAAAV members Marji Fujiki, Chris Iijima, Kazu Iijima and Mini Liu, and staffer Saleem Osman protested D'Amato's comments on CBS, ABC, channel 11, New York 1, several radio programs, and in the *Daily News* and *El Diario*.

While the media drama focused on "outrageous Alfonse's antics" and his difficulties controlling his mouth, CAAAV was more concerned with what D'Amato *does* control, which is political power. Senator D'Amato is a leading Republican politician. He was the force behind the nomination and election of George Pataki as governor of New York. He is the chairperson of the Senate Banking Committee and an important supporter of presidential candidate Robert Dole, who is staking out his own conservative platform. This year's Republican Congress is pushing through its "Contract" on America's working class, poor and immigrant people, and, particularly, people of color. Here in D'Amato's home state, Governor Pataki is slashing the budgets of a wide range of services and State Senator Padavan has introduced anti-immigrant legislation similar to California's Proposition 187. D'Amato's public airing of his personal bigotry stands as a reminder of the dangerous anti-Asian and anti-immigrant trends in this country.

## OUR READERS WRITE

### ON OKLAHOMA & SCAPEGOATING

Moments after the bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the news media, politicians and Americans in general came to an immediate conclusion that the bomb was planted by some "Arab or Middle Eastern Terrorist." With absolutely no evidence, journalists and politicians began calling for the closing of borders to "those people" or "those foreigners" who have come here to "destroy democracy" and "terrorize the American people". With absolutely no evidence, even before the dust of that terrible blast settled, all persons of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent became instant suspects. Law enforcement agencies put out an all points bulletin to keep a look out on Middle Eastern and South Asian communities across America. Innocent people were harassed, detained and arrested solely on the basis of race.

One such example occurred when a taxi inspector went on the Imus radio show the following morning and stated that "we should start taking bats to all the towel heads" as a show of outrage.

Almost as devastating as the car bomb which blew the face off the Federal Building is the bombshell which flew the face off the white racists of this country when it was revealed that the suspects in this case are in fact white Americans. Right wing, white supremacist Americans. Good old rednecks from America's heartland. No doubt there were a whole lot of white folk who were mighty disappointed that this bombing had nothing to do with Middle East politics and everything to do with the proliferation of white racist militia groups growing in America.

Over a hundred people, many of them children, were senselessly killed in the explo-

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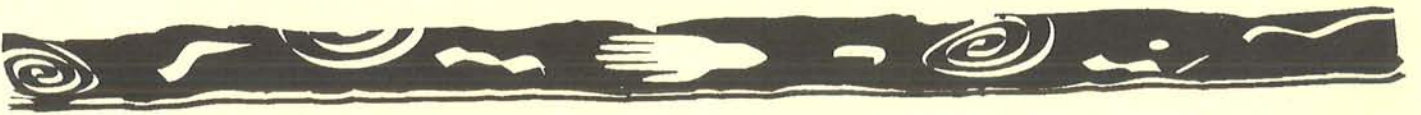


PHOTO: WAYNE LUM

CAAAV joined Asian American students at the March 23 protest against Governor Pataki's cuts to NYC schools, which brought out 20,000 CUNY and other students.



Almost 200 supporters hit the dance floor to the sounds of bhangra, hip hop, reggae and soca at CAAAV's "Dance Left of Center" on April 8. DJ Rekha of Sangam Sounds kept the crowd dancing. Thanks to Rekha, the Mao Mao Restaurant in Tribeca and all our supporters for making the fundraiser party a resounding success.





vacation, some protections against arbitrary firings, and an increase in drivers' commissions from 44% to 47% off the meter.

Today working conditions for most drivers are very similar to those existing before the union — no health insurance, pension, paid vacation, or job security. With the third contract and a fare increase requested by the owners in 1971, the union leadership started to buckle. A Taxi Rank and File Coalition was formed to oppose the lack of union democracy and the give backs, including decreasing commission percentage, increasing driver contributions for the benefits package, and productivity clauses. Despite the anger and determination of the drivers, they ultimately failed to stem the tide.

In 1979, the union acquiesced to the institution of lease driving. In addition to the financial loss this practice has meant for drivers, leasing has severely weakened the union's bargaining position. The National Labor Relations Board has the option to rule that drivers are independent contractors, which would deprive drivers of claiming protections normally given employees. Conceivably, if the garage owners refused to bargain with the union, the NLRB could decide, as it has in other cities with leasing, that drivers are not a legitimate bargaining unit. In addition, the union base has been eroded over the last 20 years, as medallions have become increasingly valuable and have been sold by large garage owners to brokers and small, nonunionized garages. At present, there are only 1,600 unionized medallions owned by less than 20 garages.

Today, the union does not challenge the owners but, in fact, often supports their demands. Meanwhile, with the give backs and economic changes in the taxi industry over the last 25 years, driver turnover is very high, which makes a strong rank and file movement in the union less-likely. LDC, by starting with the potential strength of the large number of South Asian cabbies, represents a fresh and vibrant approach to driver organizing.

(SEX WORKERS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6)

forty years of institutional and physical violence against the sex workers and their children. Grassroots organizing, however, among the women who work in these camps and the growing national women's movement has led to protests against conditions, prosecution of G.I. crimes, outreach to other sex workers in Asia, and the establishment of shelters.

# Farewell Kwong



On March 17, well-wishers came out to a good-bye party for Kwong Hui who left the CAAAV staff after 2 years. After an evening of good food and dancing, the party ended at a bowling alley in the wee hours of the morning. Kwong is now working at Chinese Staff & Workers Association.



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# C A M P A I G N S FOR

# J U S T I C E

## Jing Fong—A Model Of Exploitation

To protest slave labor conditions and disregard of labor laws in Chinatown, the Chinese Staff and Workers Association and the March 13th End Slave Labor Committee, a broad coalition of worker, student, civil rights and feminist organizations formed after last year's victory rally at the Silver Palace Restaurant, have launched a picketing and boycott campaign, which targets the Jing Fong Restaurant at 18 Elizabeth Street as a leading culprit.

Jing Fong is the largest restaurant in Chinatown. Its exploitative policies set a standard followed by other restaurant managers. Jing Fong systematically deducts 30% of the workers' tips, which is a flagrant violation of New York State labor law and docks additional tips as a punitive tool. The restaurant imposes a 70+-hour work

week at a wage of 75 cents per hour with no overtime pay, holidays, or benefits. Management restricts more than three workers from assembling in order to prevent any attempts to organize against these conditions and has fired workers who protested these practices.

Three times a week, workers and their supporters form a picket line in front of Jing Fong to urge passersby to boycott the restaurant until management recognizes their demands—to stop taking the workers' tips; to pay time-and-a-half for overtime; to repay over a million dollars in stolen tips and withheld overtime pay; and to reinstate the fired workers with back pay.

Individuals and organizations are urged to observe the boycott of the Jing Fong Restaurant and to support the workers by joining the picket line. For picket schedules and further information call Kwong Hui or Alex Fong at CWSA, 212-619-7979.

## Women Construction Worker Victorious

Deng Yu Xiu (Sue), the first Chinese immigrant woman apprentice carpenter, was fired without cause by the supervisor of the construction company to which she was assigned, but she refused to quietly accept the unjust dismissal. With the support of the Chinese Construction Workers Association, she achieved a remarkably speedy victory.

On November 31, 1994, Deng and a white male carpenter reported for work at a new public library site at 34th Street. The supervisor hired the man and order Deng to return to the Foley Square site where she had been working for two years. She was allowed to work only after insisting that she had been assigned to the library site, but suffered an injury on her first day. After recov-

ering, she returned to work, but was told to pack her tools and leave a week later without an explanation.

Protesting the sexist and racist discrimination, CCWA tried to meet with the general contractor, the A-J Contracting Co., Inc., which is a recipient of government funding and subject to affirmative action and equal opportunity requirements.

CCWA then mobilized the Asian American community, as well as women's groups and other people of color, in support of Deng and against discrimination facing all workers. The picket held on January 23 at the construction site attracted 100 supporters. On the day immediately following the rally and picket, Deng was fully reinstated with six weeks' back pay! A-J Contracting also notified their subcontractors about the importance of minority hiring.

## Consortium of Independent Workers' Centers Formed

Over the last 15 years, a new form of organizing the American working class has taken root with the development of the "workers' center." Last year workers' centers from around the country joined to form the Consortium of Independent Workers' Centers.

Differing from traditional trade unions, workers' centers organize all workers—regardless of their particular jobs—in a given community around both workplace and community issues. Thus, they have the potential to deal with the full range of issues facing workers, including

209 WORKERS DIE IN A FIRE AT A BANGKOK THAILAND FACTORY THAT MAKES TOYS FOR U.S. COMPANIES.



issues of class, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation. Workers' centers project an independent vision, a vision that workers can fight for what they need in organizations that they run themselves. In this period of increasing attacks by government, business and media, workers' centers are rejecting the "common sense" ideology that it's pointless to fight back.

Workers' centers in the New York area include Chinese Staff and Workers Association, the Latino Workers' Center (CAAAV's next-door neighbor), SAKHI for South Asian Women (its Domestic Workers Project), the Workplace Project (which organizes Mexican day laborers on Long Island), and the Cooperativa, which organizes Mexican and Central American farmworkers in upstate New York. Other centers in the Consortium organize Chinese and Korean workers in California, white and African American women in Appalachia and North Carolina, Haitian farmworkers in Florida, and Chicana and Mexicana garment workers in Texas. In addition, CAAAV's Korean Community Organizing Committee, which has developed a constituency of workers through its English classes, is exploring how to utilize the experience of existing centers in expanding its organizing efforts. In all centers the leadership and majority of the membership are women. Some centers are predominately women.

The Consortium aims to strengthen ties among existing centers and to help start new ones. CSWA, for instance, is starting a new

center in Brooklyn, where thousands of garment workers work in conditions even worse than those in Manhattan sweatshops.

For more information on the Consortium, contact CSWA.

### Garment Workers Cite Occupational Health Problems

Garment workers often toil ninety hours a week in factories polluted by fabric dust. They perform heavy, repetitious work, which often results in carpal tunnel syndrome, breathing difficulties, and back and leg injuries. In response to these problems, a community forum on occupational and women's health was sponsored by the Women's Empowerment Project of the Chinese Staff & Workers Association in late October. This forum launched a campaign to raise awareness of the health hazards faced by garment workers and to organize to change these oppressive conditions. Two speakers from the Bellevue Occupational Health Department spoke of resources available to garment workers, who tend to ignore their injuries. Many women in the audience spoke of their deteriorating health. One of them, Susan Chan, had worked 14 hours a day for seven months without a day off and incurred disabling back, arm, thigh and leg injuries.

Call Susan Chan at CSWA for information regarding the campaign on occupational and women's health.

## OUR READERS WRITE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

sion. Let's hope that our government puts as much energy and effort on cracking down on these racist militias as they have in inciting the American people into making assumptions based on race against people of color and immigrants—especially people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent.

EDDIE KOCHIYAMA

*The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect CAAV's position. Voice readers are invited to submit opinion pieces, 250 words or less, which will be printed as space permits*

(VENDORS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

ble. Finally, the stoop law is being applied selectively to Chinatown and not neighboring Little Italy, where Italian restaurant owners and vendors have long been setting up tables and stalls on the sidewalk.

CAAAV will assist Chinatown shop owners and vendors in organizing themselves for protection against continuing injustice and discrimination. CAAAV hopes to aid them in building alliances with other Asian American groups and other communities of color.



**PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE  
YOUR MIND IS...**

**Join CAAAV in:**

**Fighting racial violence and police  
brutality; demanding accountability from  
the criminal justice system**

**Organizing Asian immigrant cab  
drivers to challenge the racist and  
exploitative taxi industry in New York City**

**Empowering Asian immigrant women  
workers in marginalized industries**

**Developing youth leadership in low-income  
and refugee Asian communities**

**Publishing the CAAAV Voice, a unique voice  
in the Asian American community**

.....  
*Hard times demand real and material support!!  
Your financial support for our office, our dedi-  
cated five-member staff, and our rising operating  
costs to match our expanding work will add  
strength to CAAAV's struggle against the growing  
forces of oppression and hate.*

Support CAAAV today!

YES! I want to take a stand with CAAAV. Here  
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*\*These donations will be acknowledged in future issues of the CAAAV  
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