

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**LABOR EXPERIENCES OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN IN THE PAST**

In the 19th century, the first significant migration of Asians to America created a precedent in America's policy of dealing with a non-white population. This migration was the result of natural disasters, famines and the social, economic and political consequences of Western exploitation and colonialism that existed on these Asian lands. Arriving at the time of industrial expansion westward, they became a model of labor exploitation of a free, mobile but controlled non-white group. Though Asians have contributed to the development of this country, demonstrated by the building of the Central Pacific and by turning vast waste lands into rich agricultural fields, they have often been the scapegoats for America's economic problems.

Competition for jobs, economic depression and racism had led to the hatred and fear of Asians; which often resulted in violence, death and incarceration. In 1885, 30 Chinese were massacred by white miners in Rock Springs, Wyoming. In 1886, the entire Chinese population of Eureka, California and in Tacoma and Seattle, Washington were driven out and their homes burned to the ground. In 1942, white farmers helped rally the cause for the internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans into concentration camps.

Leaders of organized labor, combining the rationale that Asians threatened the entire union movement along with the ideology of Caucasian supremacy, have played a significant role in the passage of legislation for the legal persecution of Asians. Their influential role in American society had led to such legislation as: The Chinese Exclusion Acts (1882, 1892 and 1903), which suspended migration of Chinese laborers and their families; the California Alien Land Bills (1913 and 1920) which denied Japanese the right to own land; and the Immigration Act of 1924, which barred further immigration of the Japanese and Chinese to America, with the establishment of the quota system.

This brief glimpse of Asian American history is only a part of our past, but its effects and consequences are still felt by Asians in America today. Because of this historical past, Asians have been forced into limited areas of occupations such as in the agricultural and service industries; the prevalence of laundries, restaurants and garment factories in Chinatown is only an example of this. Contrary to the myths of assimilation and the "success stories" of Asian Americans, many of our people are still forced to live in the ghettos of Chinatown, Little Tokyos and Manilatowns, where proper housing, health care, education and economic opportunities are limited. With a knowledge of this past, the understanding of the conditions we face today and the struggle we must undertake for our rights as a people, become clearer.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**JOB MARKET TODAY AND ASIAN AMERICANS**

Contrary to what many people are led to believe, the Chinese in New York City have not "made it," but in fact are one of the oldest and most neglected minority groups in New York City. The 1970 United States Census information shows that the income for the Chinese families is far below that of the average New York City family. While the median income for the New York City families was \$9,682, the median income for Chinatown area families was approximately \$5,500. Twenty-two per cent of the area families were below poverty level, almost twice that of the New York City percentage. This inequity of living standards was further aggravated by the fact that the median income of the Chinese family in New York City as a whole was \$7,800 and the average family consisted of 5.2 persons which was significantly larger than the average New York City family of 3.4 persons. When compared with the Blacks in New York City, the Chinese were practically on the same level. The average Black family of 5.4 persons had a median income of \$7,100.

The job market in Chinatown is also very grim. Over 65% of the non-white labor force were either in the garment or restaurant industry. The Chinese garment workers in Chinatown were stated to be the most exploited group of workers in New York City by the Division of Hours and Wages. Because of the fierce competition in the restaurant business in Chinatown, restaurant workers usually work 60-70 hours a week. The necessity for both parents to work tends to weaken the family as a social unit. There is little room for self-improvement and little opportunity for economic advancement.

The future situation in Chinatown can only become worse as the garment and restaurant industries cannot support the livelihood of its growing population. Hiring Chinese workers to work on construction projects which are located within our own community is only just, and a step toward more equitable employment opportunities for our people. According to the 1970 census figures, construction craftsmen comprise only three one-thousandths of the non-white labor force in Chinatown. Looking at union membership nationwide, for example, only one one-thousandth of the plumbers are Asian Americans. Considering the proportion of Asian Americans in the U.S. population as a whole, there should be ten times more Asian Americans in the union. The mainstream American job market with its long history of discrimination must open its door to Asian Americans as well as other minorities if the ideals of democracy is to work.