RCP attacks Chinese community paper

Members of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) carried out this attack (right) on the offices of the San Francisco Journal, a weekly newspaper serving the Asian community. The RCP defaced the windows of the newspaper office with anti-China slogans attacking Deng Xiaoping the day of his arrival in Washington, D.C., Jan. 29. The attack followed an RCP march through Chinatown.

A few days earlier, RCP goons also attacked China Books and Periodicals in San Francisco and Unidos Books in L.A.

Los Angeles—In the third week of UFW strike activities against 11 lettuce growers in the Imperial Valley, farmworker Rufino Mijangos Contreras, 28, of Mexicali, Mexico, was shot and killed Feb. 19. Contreras was murdered by a foreman on the Mario Saikhou ranch during day-long confrontations between strikers, police and scouts at several struck ranches.

In a spontaneous show of sympathy, hundreds of non-striking farmworkers walked off their jobs on Feb. 12, shutting down broccoli, carrot and other harvesting. It was rumored that another sympathy stoppage would be held on Feb. 14.

UFW spokesmen have shown no indication of discouraging picketing and will expand the strike as planned. Strikers interviewed by The Call said the murder would not intimidate them.

“We would never have started the first place if we were afraid of shooting,” one striker explained.

In other strike news last week, more than 1,000 people, including Chicano students from the MEXCHA chapter at San Diego State.

As we go to press reports indicate that three suspects were being held in the killing of Mijangos.

It was a nightmare. Flames were roaring about 15 feet from us, and window panes were exploding and electric wires were burning and popping all around us.

This is how one Kerr Bleaching and Finishing Co. employee described the blaze that demolished the 90-year-old fabric dyeing plant in the early morning hours of Jan. 31, leaving 450 workers jobless. Seventy-five third shift workers in the plant narrowly escaped with their lives. Fifteen employees were treated for injuries, several of whom were forced to jump from the building to flee the flames.

Faulty Protection

According to witnesses, the fire first broke out in the dyeing room, with an explosion loud enough to be heard eight miles away. As employees scrambled to escape, they found that the fire alarm did not work, the sprinkler system didn't operate properly, and a fire escape from a fourth-floor window ended on a third-floor roof with no other way down.

Barbara Lawing, a supervisor on the 4th floor, described the scene to the local media:

"Flames and smoke were coming up the steps and we had to go back. Then we ran to the fire escape."

"We started down the steps," she continued. "But after I had gone down four or five steps, I couldn't find any more steps and it was dark and the smoke was so thick I couldn't see anything.

Lawning and 10 co-workers landed on a third floor roof where they huddled in a corner. One frightened woman jumped from here, breaking her ankle and cracking her heel. The others were rescued by firefighters with ladders.

One company official tried to pass the fire off as nothing to get upset about. "We have fires all the time," he told newsmen. (Kerr works with flammable fabrics and chemicals.)

No Inspection

Concord city officials have admitted that they never inspected the plant and the last OSHA inspection was in 1976.

OSHA spokesmen, Al Weaver, said that even though Kerr is a five-story building, OSHA rules do not require it to have fire escapes outside the building.

While company and city officials claimed to be "concerned" about the tragedy, no one—neither the city of Concord, nor the nearby Cannon Mills monopoly, nor Kerr itself—has stepped forward with jobs for any one of the 450 jobless workers. In this one-industry area, the loss of 450 jobs is a real blow to the community.

All in all, the Kerr fire showed that, in many ways, the unsafe conditions which existed at Triangle Shirtwaist in 1911 continue to bring suffering to workers in garment and textile-related sweatshops today.