

CONDEMNING AND COMBATING ANTI-ASIAN RACISM

As our nation roils in response to state-sanctioned violence and a pandemic that has disproportionately harmed communities of color, we must acknowledge that the structural injustices brought to light by these crises are deep and multilayered.

More than 2 million Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are essential workers; yet on top of increased exposure to COVID-19, these workers also are facing increased xenophobia and racial discrimination in the workplace and in society. Acts of violence and harassment against Asian Americans have become so rampant that our brothers, sisters and friends at the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) and a coalition of 188 co-signed organizations submitted a [letter](#) to the White House, the Department of Justice and the FBI urging them to publicly recognize and denounce the escalating racist attacks and discrimination against the Asian American community in the wake of rising concerns over COVID-19.

Under an anti-immigrant and racist administration that has shown incompetence in dealing with the outbreak, it is no surprise that Chinese Americans are being scapegoated. Time and time again, people of color and immigrants become targets during times of fear and economic hardship.

As a labor movement, we must acknowledge our own painful past on this and other racial justice issues. In 1882, then-American Federation of Labor (AFL) President Samuel Gompers pushed for the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, citing the dangers of “Asiatic” men in an essay published by the AFL and submitted as Senate testimony. Fear among White workers propelled this legislation, the first to bar an entire race from legally entering the United States. Again in 1982, major layoffs in the Detroit auto industry, coupled with anti-Japanese rhetoric from auto executives, union leaders and politicians, led to the murder of Vincent Chin, by two autoworkers who believed him to be Japanese. We know all too well the dangers of xenophobic rhetoric and the pattern of xenophobia as a distraction.

Instead of providing real solutions that address the pressing needs of working people and our communities, President Trump and some of his followers are invoking a continuous history of anti-Asian exclusion and violence, reviving deep animosities and stoking fears about the AAPI community. We condemn this anti-Asian rhetoric that is only hurting our nation more during this pandemic.

We know that strong communities, families and unions are what will bring us through the COVID-19 crisis and help spur real recovery. That means enacting America’s Five Economic Essentials and passing an Essential Workers Bill of Rights and the Paycheck Guarantee Act. It

also means repealing Trump's restrictive immigration orders, reuniting families so they can care for one another, expanding relief to workers regardless of immigration status and releasing folks from detention centers, which are hot spots for virus spread.

We commit to solidarity with all our AAPI brothers, sisters and friends during this time—those on the front lines, those who have been laid off, those who are not receiving federal or local relief because of language or immigration status barriers, those held in detention centers and prisons, those who are separated from their families, and those who are afraid of being torn away from their families. We urge affiliates and locals to work closely with APALA in addressing anti-Asian racism.

Only through unity will we recover from this crisis and begin to mend the wounds caused by physical and structural violence and racism.