

Monday 3rd March 2008 saw the first mass rally of the Chinese community in Britain. People came as far as Wales and North East to attend the rally. Around 1000 people packed the main hall in Friends House on Euston Road London. Both Chinese employers and workers were presented in large numbers.

The rally kicked off with a passionate speech from the CICC Chair, Mr Yip-Fai Liu. He reminded everyone that since New Labour came to power there had been 5 changes of immigration rules. He criticised current immigration policies and all the high profile immigration raids, which are making life impossible for employers and workers alike. Far from resolving the problem of immigration and undocumented migrant workers actions by BIA have spread fear and uncertainty throughout the Chinese community. “Chinese employers are being criminalised by these immigration raids.” Said Chair Liu. He questioned the sincerity of politicians in matters concerning our community, “Where are the politicians when we needed them?” He asked. The Chair ended his speech urging the policy makers to work with us - to find a practical way forward”. He called on the Chinese community to stand unity and fight.

Vice-Chair of CICC, Bobby Chan, also spoke and highlighted some of the problems arising out of current immigration changes and the government's 'Stop Illegal Working' Campaign had driven many Chinese restaurants and takeaways are closed or scaled down their business in fear of braking the law on employing illegal workers. Mr Chan reported of rumours of so call legal “loop hole” on the market claim to be able to offer temporary protection, These “solutions”, he warned, will cause more problems in the long run to the individuals and the business concerned in that to the employers by joining such scheme may loss their statutory defence and could become 'facilitate illegal immigrant to remain'; to the workers joining the scheme may loss their right to claim BIA schemes to regularise their status. He warned employers and workers not to be fooled by such schemes. If people decided to take the risk and join the scheme they must demand written Client Care Letter from those offered such scheme before handing over large sum of monies to them.

CICC had invited all three London Mayoral candidates. Ken Livingstone and Boris Johnson sent their apologise, and only Lib Dem candidate Mr Brian Paddick was able to attend. In his well-received speech Mr Paddick criticised the Government attitude to the “long stand community” in face of the EU enlargement. He also said that the high profile immigration raid with the media in attendance are simply “not on”. In the Q&A session that followed many people expressed their concerns with the current situation. One brave individual worker spoke of the impossible situation he is in: He wants to work but is unable to work. The rule changes have made him illegal in the eye of the law. His plead of “I want to work” drew applause and support from the crowd.

Mr Xu (he is facing a £480,000 fine after he and his wife was found guilty for employing 4 undocumented workers) also spoke at the rally. He reminded people of the unfairness of the law and that our community must join together and fight to change this unfair law.

CICC Co-ordinator, Mr Jabez Lam said CICC believe the root problems are confusing

immigration system and labour shortage in Chinese caterings. He said the solutions to the labour shortage problems are:

- Allow migrant workers already in UK to work,
- Allow Chinese catering to bring in migrant workers through work permit, and
- To train Chinese catering skills in UK

Mr Lam made a presentation on CICC's work programme and targeted outcomes. He call upon participants to complete the Skills and Contribution questionnaires to assist CICC to agrue the case for Chinese chef and catering professionals to be recognised as skill workers for work permits. He ended the speech by quoting Deng Xiaoping said “survival is a basic human right” and called upon the Home Secretary to respect Chinese community's basic human right of survival and halt the 'Stop Illegal Working' political campaignthat threatening our basic survival.

At 4 pm the meeting adjourned and 30 people boarded a special bus for the Home Office. Over 1000 rice bowls, collected from the rally, and a petition signed by 600 businesses attended the rally was delivered with a letter to the Home secretary. ***Our petition reads:***

***“We the undersign urge the Home Secretary, Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP, to immediately review the immigration raids by Border and Immigration Agency on UK ethnic businesses. We further urge the Home Secretary to work with the Chinese community to resolve the problems of undocumented workers and skilled shortages in British Chinese business, and to prevent Chinese catering business from an economic melt down”***

Two officials from the Home Secretary’s private office accepted the petition and the letter on her behalf.

Our rally was well reported by all the Chinese media. BBC London and BBC online also carried the story. The following days CICC office received many calls from around the country. Many want to know what action we shall be taking next. On Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> March CICC General Committee members will meet to discuss our next action. We shall be announcing our next action on this web site.