

Boycott to Oppose Unfair Treatment of Restaurant Workers on the Upper West Side

By Miriam Rabban

Workers and supporters have called for a boycott of **Swagat Restaurant** at 411A Amsterdam Avenue between W. 79th and W. 80th Streets as part of a campaign for fair treatment of workers. The boycott extends to other restaurants with the same owners - Badshah-to-go (80 Nassau), Madam Ji (154 Bleecker,) and Rang (11-03 44th Avenue, Long Island City.)

The Three Parks Club meeting on April 12 will include a presentation from workers about their situation and what Upper West Siders can do to support them.

Employees at Swagat Restaurant allege that they work as much as 80 hours a week and earn as little as \$3.33/hour. A worker at Swagat states, "We make the restaurants run, without us, they are nothing. They want to keep workers poor while we raise them up? We say no!"

Wage theft occurs when workers are not paid all the money that they have earned, including when employers do not pay for all the hours worked, do not follow overtime and minimum wage laws, and/or make illegal deductions. Workers have reported wage theft to workers centers in New York City not only in restaurants, but also in home care, construction, nail salons, car service, and cleaning and garment industries. Immigrants, people of color, women and low-income workers are over-represented among workers subjected to wage theft.

The SWEAT (Securing Wages Earned Against Theft) Coalition has worked over years on legislation to strengthen enforcement of labor laws to address wage theft. Too often, even when workers file and win wage theft cases, they cannot collect settlements, for example when employers file for bankruptcy, close businesses and open them under other names, or move assets. SWEAT legislation would permit putting a lien on employers' assets in cases brought about wage theft so assets are available for settlements.

The SWEAT Coalition is calling for passage of the companion bills now before the State Assembly (A 46) sponsored by Linda Rosenthal and the State Senate (S 1977) sponsored by Jessica Ramos. This Coalition encourages people to contact the NYC Hospitality Alliance, an association representing restaurants and nightlife establishments in NYC, to urge its support of the SWEAT legislation; the e-mail address is info@thenycalliance.org.