

Crackdown On Child Labor

By CRAIG McGUIRE

Two Corona manufacturers were among the city's hardest hit by fines handed down last week by the State labor department for violating child labor and other state labor laws.

On July 15, Commissioner John Hudacs announced that the Labor Department has ordered 120 New York City businesses to pay \$67,425 in penalties.

"These orders are the result of periodic sweeps conducted by labor department investigators," said Labor Department spokesman Mark Molisani. "We target an area with a cluster of factories, often with large immigrant communities where employers are more likely to take advantage of the workers."

While violators are spread throughout the borough, Molisani said Long Island City, Corona, Flushing and Richmond Hill are consistent trouble spots.

In Corona, investigators uncovered two garment factories which employed children as young as nine years old, with some working in prohibited occupations and operating dangerous machinery. The two businesses which topped the Labor Department's most wanted list in Queens were *Finest Lady's Sportswear, Inc.*, and *Pretty H Fashion, Inc.*

Both facilities operated in the same building at 96-18 43rd Ave..

Finest Lady's Sportswear was fined \$1,250 for employing minors under 14, for failing to provide evidence of the age of two minors and for failing to conspicuously post a schedule of work hours

and meal time allowances.

According to documents released by the State Labor Department, two children, ages nine and 13, were employed as floor workers, and two other minors were employed as sewing machine operators, from January 15, 1993 through May 15, 1993.

Pretty H Fashion, Inc., was fined \$1,500 for similar infractions including the illegal employment of two children, aged 12 and 14, as floor workers in its factory.

When contacted, a man who at first claimed to be the manager of both operations, became hostile and then quickly said that both *Finest Lady's* and *Pretty H Fashion* were no longer in operation.

Molisani said he had received no

information that either *Finest Lady's Sportswear* or *Pretty H Fashion* had gone out of business.

Both Hsiao Lei Hsia and Lee Huagu, the owners of these operations, did not return numerous phone calls from the *Tribune*.

The Labor Department returned to the site recently and cited *Pretty H Fashions* for book-keeping infractions, said Molisani.

While the violations occurred in November 1993, the orders were not issued until May 13, 1994. Businesses have 60 days to pay the fine or appeal to the state Industrial Board of Appeals.

Some business owners say they do not understand the laws.

"We paid our fines immediately"
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This Corona factory houses two garment manufacturers hit hard by the state Labor Department for child exploitation