

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

APRIL 1986

OPEN LETTER TO WALTER MCLEAN

At a recent INTERCEDE monthly meeting the new immigration "processing fees" were discussed. Many domestic workers spoke out against them and wanted to participate in a public protest. The fees were introduced last February and impose a charge of \$50 for an employment authorization, \$125 for a landing application, and \$25 for a request to verify or amend a landing record.

In a recent letter to Minister of State for Immigration Walter McLean, INTERCEDE said:

(we) view the fees as an unjust imposition which does not take account of the fact that foreign domestic workers in Canada are still at the bottom of the wage scale...The overwhelming majority are also paying tuition fees for their upgrading courses to improve their marketable skills. As you know, without sustained efforts to upgrade themselves, they do not qualify for landing in Canada, the reason most of them are here. Many are also sending money home to help support family members, as well as saving money here to establish themselves as self-sufficient entities. As a group they can ill-afford yet another financial burden.

Domestic workers who participated in INTERCEDE's discussion of the new fees overwhelmingly voted to circulate an open-letter to Walter McLean. The letter takes direct aim at the injustice of the fees:

As foreign domestic workers in Canada we are only allowed to change employers if we loose

our job 'through no fault of our own'. So why should we have to pay \$50 just to get a new work permit?

The \$125 for our landing papers is also completely unfair. It's way too high, and we have to pay it whether we get landed or not...

We say to you 'down with the new immigration fees'! The last thing we need while we try to establish ourselves here is more expenses that cut into our hard-earned savings!

Copies of the open-letter will be circulated at our next monthly meeting on Sunday, May 4, or you can contact the INTERCEDE office at 58 Cecil Street, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 1N6, Tel. (416) 519-1625.

OUTREACH TO CHINESE DOMESTICS !

INTERCEDE has recently launched a community outreach initiative aimed at Chinese-speaking domestic workers.

One of our volunteer workers is from Malaysia and she is fluent in Mandarin. Her name is Cheryl Lim, and she has begun to contact individuals and groups in the Chinese community.

A recent notice about INTERCEDE placed by Ms. Lim in a well-known Chinese community newspaper brought many calls to our Service Unit. Ms. Lim is available for counselling on Monday afternoons, 1 - 4 pm, at our office. Call her at (416) 591-1625.

INTERCEDE will be co-sponsoring a public meeting for Chinese domestic workers with Dan Heap's constituency office.

COCO'S CALENDAR

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Recent happenings...

- * on April 4 INTERCEDE conducted a staff development session with the Chinese Interpreter Service
- * on April 16 INTERCEDE attended a special dinner sponsored by the Urban Alliance on Race Relations to honor Dr. Wilson Head
- * on April 17 INTERCEDE met with Hazel Palmer, of Caribbean Dialogue, to discuss a slide-tape show on foreign domestics in Canada

Coming up soon...

- * INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, MAY 4, 3-5PM Come and hear special speaker Gwen Brodsky, of the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund!
- * on April 26 the Congress of Black Women of Canada (Toronto Chapter) is having its annual general meeting at 56 Wellesley Street West, 9am - 6pm
- * on May 8 the YWCA is sponsoring a public forum on violence against women, at Toronto City Hall, 7 - 10pm

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Everyn Campbell who just got her landed status...finally!
- * happy birthday to Annie Baldovieso and Tessie Visconde...many happy returns!
- * and our warmest best wishes to Avril Higginson who was recently married in Cairo!

Tune in again next month...

- Columbia Diaz

If you are a foreign domestic worker in Canada, your pay rate as set out in your contract is protected under Ontario labour law.

The provincial Ministry of Labour has the power to enforce whatever pay rate is stipulated in your contract - the minimum, of course, is \$827.50 per month, before deductions.

Many foreign domestics are confused about this and think that if there employers don't pay them, there is nothing they can do because they are not landed yet.

As a foreign domestic worker you have the same right as any other worker with a contract to make a formal complaint. The Employment Standards Branch will ask you to fill out a form giving details, and they will investigate the matter. They have the power to order your employer to pay you whatever you are owed.

If you are not being paid the amount shown on your contract, don't settle for less than you're entitled to! Take action and contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 591-1625
EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS (416) 965-5251

INTERCEDE HAS NEW PHONES!

591-1625

591-6351

Get your copy of the open-letter to Walter McLean and mail it in today! Ask your friends to sign one too!

DOWN WITH THE NEW IMMIGRATION FEES

INTERCEDE RE-ORGANIZES AFTER DISPUTE

Last month the INTERCEDE Steering Committee had a serious internal dispute regarding personnel policy for the Service Unit. At stake were the issues of staff competence and accountability to clients and the community.

After the polarization occurred, six members of the Steering Committee - Daphne Tucker, Beverley Prescod, Elvira Boncato, Linda Lising, Barbara Donaldson, and Apolonia Williams - met without informing the others and appointed Apolonia's husband, Brian Williams, as the 'chairman' of INTERCEDE. Williams is a retired officer of the Employment & Immigration Commission.

The Executive Committee of INTERCEDE made several attempts to get the entire Steering Committee to meet and resolve the controversy. But the supporters of Brian Williams refused to meet, claiming that they were now the Steering Committee.

Williams took actions to disrupt the work of INTERCEDE by calling invalid 'members meetings', freezing our bank accounts, disconnecting our telephones, telling our clients the Service Unit is closed, delaying our ISAP funding, etc.

In spite of these attempts to paralyze INTERCEDE, our activities have proceeded with little disruption. However, to stabilize the situation and create a stronger legal framework for INTERCEDE, the Executive Committee decided to dissolve the old Steering Committee and membership, and incorporate under Ontario law as a non-profit organization.

As we reported in last month's newsletter, the new Board of Directors consists of all the senior Steering Committee members: Eulene Boyce, Columbia Diaz, Lynette Munian, Catherine Gilbert, Barbara Jackman, Judith Ramirez, minus Avril Higgin-

son who is out of the country. Debra Boyce, senior member-at-large was added in her place.

The new Board of Directors will be consulting other community-based groups regarding a new structure and membership policy. We will bring proposals forward at the regular monthly meetings for discussion. All of you who attend our meetings will be considered de facto members, and in the very near future, we will call an Annual General Meeting.

All of us involved in building INTERCEDE in the past seven years deeply regret the recent split. We wish it had been possible to avoid a parting of ways with the other six people. However, with the support of our friends and allies, INTERCEDE will continue to work for domestic workers' rights. We thank all of you in the community who have helped us through this difficult time:

"...We have worked with INTERCEDE since the very beginning. Ms. Judith Ramirez has been a strong pillar in ensuring that INTERCEDE serves its mandate well..."

Carmencita Hernandez
KABABAYAN COMMUNITY CENTRE

"This organization has played a very important role in the community and the continuance of it's activities will be a constant blessing to those in need of its services...(we) support the new Board of Directors of INTERCEDE."

Connie Celso - Kerr
SILAYAN COMMUNITY CENTRE

"I have great faith that the new Board of Directors, whose members have proven their sincerity and effectiveness, will continue the excellent work that INTERCEDE has been doing."

Dan Heap
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (Spadina)

"...INTERCEDE has done highly commendable work in striving to better the condition of black and other foreign domestic workers in Canada."

INTERCEDE RE-ORGANIZES...con't

...We wish you every success in your future endeavours."

Akua Benjamin
CONGRESS OF BLACK WOMEN OF
CANADA (Toronto Chapter)

"...I was pleased to learn that your organization has now established a formal legal structure. This is particularly important to ensure that the domestic workers learn other types of organizational skills, in addition to having a mechanism for continuing your very important work."

Mary Bruce
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY DIVISION
(City of Toronto)

"We are very happy to see INTERCEDE continue its valuable work under the new Board of Directors."

Aida Farrag Graff
ARAB CANADIAN WOMEN'S NETWORK

"...Under the leadership of Ms. Judith Ramirez (INTERCEDE) has made a major contribution to the lives of the many domestics whom it has helped. In many ways, it stands alone as a champion of a group of workers who have little legal and social support in this country."

WILSON HEAD

" Please accept Council's congratulations on the excellent work you have done to assist domestic workers in Ontario...We

DOMESTICS CROSS CULTURAL NEWS
c/o INTERCEDE
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1N6

First Class

pleased to see that your organization has established a more formal structure...We wish you best wishes in all your work."

Sam Ion
ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

"...We personally have worked very closely with Judith Ramirez over a period of several years and have great confidence in her skills and abilities. As well, we are confident that the newly constituted Board of Directors will continue the fine work of INTERCEDE."

Carol Tator
URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Free and confidential counselling for domestic workers. Call us anytime Monday - Friday, 9am - 4pm, at (416) 519-1625. Or come to our office at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1N6.

MEMBERSHIP REFUNDS!! - - - - -

If you are a paid-up member of the 'old' INTERCEDE and would like a refund of your membership fee, please fill out the coupon below and mail it in to us!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

RETURN TO SENDER
RENOI A L'EXPÉDITEUR

