

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestic Workers' Exploitation

AUGUST 1984

ONTARIO LAGS BEHIND!

The worst deal for domestic workers is found right here in Ontario. The labour laws of this province lag behind those of British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec!

Of these four provinces, only Ontario legislates a below-standard minimum wage for domestic work. As of October 1, 1984, the rate will be \$3.50 per hour as compared to \$4.00 for other workers. The other provinces do not single out domestic workers for second-class treatment; they are paid the standard minimum wage of \$4.00 per hour in Manitoba and Quebec and \$3.65 per hour in British Columbia.

The province of Quebec is the standard-bearer for fair treatment of domestic workers. All full-time domestics are entitled to overtime pay (time and 1/2) and their hours of work are regulated by law - a maximum of 53 hours per week for live-in domestics and 44 hours for day workers.

In Ontario, there is no regulation of a domestics' hours on the job and, therefore, no overtime pay. Even worse, the lack of regulation means that a domestics' already lower minimum wage is further reduced by long hours. It is legally possible for a domestic to work or be on call to her employer for up to 120 hours per week! The result is that her real wage rate drops to a scandalous \$1.23 per hour!

Under Quebec law, room and board (\$30wk) cannot be deducted from wages (\$134wk), whereas in Ontario, room and board (\$54wk) can be deducted from wages (\$147wk). The result is that gross pay (before other deductions) is \$134 per week in Quebec and only \$93 per week in Ontario! The difference is a full \$41 per week.

INTERCEDE is currently lobbying the Ontario government to introduce immediate changes in the Employment Standards Act

to bring domestic workers up to the standard minimum wage, regulate their hours of work, and grant them overtime pay.

The province-wide letter-writing campaign to Ontario Labour Minister Russell Ramsay is proceeding very successfully. Later this month, INTERCEDE representatives will meet with Deputy Premier Robert Welch, Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs, and Glenna Carr, Executive Director of the Ontario Women's Directorate, to discuss the recommendations in our brief "Upgrading the Status of Domestic Work in Ontario".

For more information about what you can do to help domestic workers win their rights, contact:

INTERCEDE
348 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1S4
Tel. (416) 929-3240

CROSS CULTURAL LEARNER CENTRE
533 Clarence Street, London, Ontario N6A 3J7
Tel. (519) 679-6281

OTTAWA-CARLETON IMMIGRANT SERVICES ORGANIZATION
425 rue Gloucester Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 5E9
Tel. (613) 238-4256

STOP PRESS!!!STOP PRESS!!!STOP PRESS!!!

INTERCEDE has just received a long letter from Ontario Labour Minister Russell Ramsay which says, in part:

" Your public letter of June 15th expressing concern about the status of domestic workers in Ontario has been brought to my attention. In the letter, you state that you have not heard from me since the meeting last November when you presented your brief. I was distressed to discover that I had not written to you subsequently because the submission was a thoughtful one and raised pertinent issues concerning the protection of

domestic workers under Ontario's labour laws. I want to assure you that since our meeting the Ministry has been actively involved in this subject."

" Your brief raised several important concerns that in our view warranted detailed examination. The Ministry concluded that in order to carefully examine the feasibility of improving specific elements of the employment standards protection given domestics, more information about their prevailing wages and working conditions should be obtained directly from domestics and their employers."

" To this end, the Ministry hired a consulting firm...to collect the required information for the purposes of undertaking a comprehensive review of the present regulations for domestics."

..." I expect to receive the consultant's report in a couple of months. Based on this study, the Ministry will be reviewing the employment standards for domestics, including areas of concern such as wages, room and board, time off, etc. mentioned by you in your brief. If areas of potential improvement are identified, consideration will be given to formulating additional protection."

..." I apologize for not being in touch with you earlier. However, I assure you of our serious and continuing interest in the matters you raised concerning domestic workers."

JOIN INTERCEDE

\$5 Year

SUPPORT THE GROUP THAT SUPPORTS YOU

Newsletter Committee:
Columbia Tarape Diaz, Desiree Hipplewith,
Lynette Munian, Judith Ramirez, Pamela Skeete, Sonia Thomas, Daphne Tucker

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on July 11, SERVICE UNIT staff held a very productive meeting with officials of the Canada Immigration Centres at 480 University Avenue and 1243 Islington Avenue
- * on July 16, INTERCEDE attended a farewell reception for Dr. Wilson Head, past president of the National Black Coalition of Canada, who is going to B.C. for a one-year teaching appointment
- * on July 25, Judith attended an all-day workshop on contract compliance sponsored by the Mayor's Committee on Community and Race Relations

Coming up soon...

- * come to the second session of the INTERCEDE SUMMER SPEAKERS SERIES featuring Jean Augustine, speaking on "How to Achieve Your Goals". August 12, at 58 Cecil Street, 2 - 5 pm
- * everyone welcome to the THANKSGIVING PARTY sponsored by the Philippine-Canadian Ladies Circle, on August 12 at St. Basil's Church, 6 - 9 pm.
- * on August 22, INTERCEDE meets with Deputy Premier Robert Welch and Glenna Carr of the Ontario Women's Directorate
- * on August 26 join the Annual Filipino Religious Pilgrimage to Midland, Ontario. For information contact Linda Lising at 449-3828

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to our new landed immigrants: TERESA LOPEZ (Portugal), MOLLY ADAMS (Trinidad), ADELINA JACINTO, LUIS VILLASAYA, and TRINIDAD VILLASAYA (Philippines)...welcome aboard!
- * a special welcome to EULENE and DEBRA BOYCE's mother who is visiting her daughters from Barbados
- * greetings to all members from MARION THOMSON, former Steering Committee member, who is now back in Britain, and from EFFIE HENRY who just moved out to Vancouver...we miss you both!

Tune in again next month!

- Columbia Tarape Diaz

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Under Ontario law, domestic workers who believe they are not receiving the minimum standard wages, time off, public holidays, vacation pay, etc. may file a complaint with the Employment Standards Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

In the case of a wages complaint, if the investigating officer finds that the employer has failed to comply with the regulations, (s)he may calculate the wages due the domestic worker to a maximum of \$4,000 for a two year period.

If the employer fails to comply with the regulation, prosecution could result. The law forbids the employer from retaliating against an employee who seeks enforcement of her rights under the Employment Standards Act.

If you want to file a complaint, contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 929-3240
EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS (416) 965-5251

- Cecilia Grave

SPEAKERS SERIES EXCITING!

On Sunday, July 8, INTERCEDE members and friends participated in a lively discussion with our first guest speaker, Stacey Michener, of the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre.

Speaking on "Violence Against Women", Stacey emphasized the need to explode the myths about rape and sexual assault.

"Myths", she said, "are based on mistaken assumptions, beliefs, and attitudes".

Among the most common, she cited: that only young attractive women are raped, that most rapes happen in dark alleys, and that the rapist is usually a stranger with a knife or a gun. The truth about rape is very different! Stacey quoted studies and statistics to show that:

- any woman is a target for rape; regardless of her age, appearance, lifestyle, character, ethnic/racial origin, or place of residence
- half of all rapes occur in the home; the victim may open the door to a neighbor, serviceman or friend, or the rapist may break in
- in over half the rapes committed, the

woman knows her attacker; the rapist may be a neighbor, a colleague at school or work, an acquaintance, or a "friend of a friend"

Stacey then stressed the importance of preventing rape by women protecting themselves and learning how to fight back. She encouraged everyone present to consider taking a self-defence course, to talk openly about rape, to work for changes in the law, and, finally, to support the work of the Rape Crisis Centre in their community.

The Toronto Rape Crisis Centre operates a 24-hour crisis line and provides free confidential counselling to women who have been sexually assaulted. Their trained staff also accompany women to hospitals, police stations and to the courts. For more information call:

TORONTO RAPE CRISIS CENTRE
964-8080 (crisis line)
964-7477 (business line)

- Desiree Hipplewith

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE OFF TO GREAT START!

At the July monthly meeting, the women present decided to launch a special one-month membership drive to reach out to domestics who may not know about INTERCEDE.

The drive will get underway, officially, at the August 12 monthly meeting. The goal is to add fifty new members by our target date of September 9, 1984.

The Membership Committee is made up of Desiree and myself (Service Unit staff), Cecilia Grave (Membership Secretary), Linda Lising and Elvira Boncato (Philippines) with positions still open for women from the Caribbean and Britain.

First prizes will go to those who sign up 10 or more new members; second prizes for 7 or more; and third prizes for 5 or more. All winners will be announced on September 9!

Since we decided to launch the membership drive last month, many women have called the INTERCEDE office for information. Thirty (30) membership forms have been mailed out and we have already registered 8 new members!

Support the group that supports you!

- Columbia Tarape Diaz

INA FRASER SPEAKS OUT

Last fall, Ina Fraser became the first foreign domestic worker to file a complaint against her employer before the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Originally from Jamaica, Mrs. Fraser had worked in Toronto for the same family since 1977. On June 7, 1983, she was racially insulted by her employer and fired on the spot.

The Human Rights Commission ruled that racial discrimination could not be proven, because there were no witnesses, but ordered the employer to pay Mrs. Fraser \$1,000 compensation for the "inconvenience" caused by the firing, and to provide a letter of recommendation for future employment.

The ruling was an important victory for foreign domestics in Ontario, but the near-impossibility of "proving" racial discrimination in a private household was made shockingly clear. Ina Fraser has this to say about her experience:

" First of all, domestics are not highly looked upon to be anything worthwhile here in Canada, and because of that our rights are at the lowest level, if at all there is any. For instance, in a case like mine, taking it to what they call Human Rights (I would call it Human Wrongs), one has to have witnesses to prove that the insults are true. Now in a private home where on earth would a domestic worker be able to get that evidence? Because there is none of such, one is just to take it or leave it, so where does this so-called human rights come in?

" Well, we are only human beings just like them, all doing different types of jobs and doing them pretty well."

" The simple reason for us not having rights is that most of who is forming their laws is doing it to suit themselves due to the fact that they too hire domestics and is under paying them the same way others do, also treating them like dirt. Therefore if it was equal for all, it would certainly have an affect on them also. For this reason, we have no right to \$5 or \$6 per hour and no union to represent us."

" I could go on and on, but my pen will go dry, and also papers fail, but let me say to those of you that are still in this work: don't give up, don't settle for less, seek out your rights in which you believe, don't let them trample you under their feet, stand up and fight with words, not bad words, but the good ones the best way you know how. Never let these people think that we are only domestic, and we are foolish. Ask questions about the job before taking it for there is a lot to know. Don't be afraid. Speak out.

" I hope these sayings will bring someone's attention to what domestics is going through, and what human rights should be, also how valuable human labour is and should not be taken for granted."

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Next INTERCEDE meeting: Sunday, September 9!
Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil St. 2 - 5pm

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT HOURS
Monday - Friday 9:30am - 4:30pm
Tel. (416) 929-3240
Evenings and week-ends, leave a message on the machine and we will return your call!

DOMESTICS' CROSS CULTURAL NEWS
c/o INTERCEDE
348 College Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1S4

Place
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First Class