

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

AUGUST 1985

WAGE RIP-OFF IN ONTARIO!

Thousands of foreign domestic workers have been shortchanged to the tune of \$118.75 per month, compliments of the Canada Immigration Commission.

The Ontario minimum wage for domestics rose to the standard \$4.00 per hour on March 1, 1985. According to federal immigration policy, employers of foreign domestic workers are required to pay "25% above the local minimum rate". In Ontario the monthly minimum wage now stands at \$757.00 which means that the rate for foreign workers should be \$946.25 per month.

However, immigration officials have been approving work permits for foreign domestics at the old rate of \$827.50 per month, or at a loss of \$118.75 per month to each domestic! Over the last five months that comes to a total of \$593.75 in lost wages.

In a recent article in Toronto's Black community newspaper CONTRAST, an Ontario immigration official was quoted as saying that an average of 800 work permits are approved every month, which means that 3,200 domestic workers have lost a total of \$380,000 in the last four months!

The Canada Immigration Commission is violating its own policy and blatantly refusing to implement the required wage rate under the Foreign Domestics Program. INTERCEDE initially inquired about the lower rate last spring and we were assured that "it was just a normal delay". When weeks passed into months, we raised the matter with Mr. Dennison Moore, special advisor to Immigration Minister Flora MacDonald.

He assured us that he would investigate the situation and urged INTERCE-

DE to document our complaint in a letter to the Minister. In July we made a formal submission to Flora MacDonald and called on her to rectify the situation immediately.

In the past, the Minister has taken a personal interest in the Foreign Domestics Program and in INTERCEDE's advocacy of domestic workers' rights. We are confident that Flora MacDonald will not allow this irresponsible rip-off to continue, and we urge her to act without delay so that Ontario's foreign domestics are paid the money they are legally entitled to.

BUSINESS IS BOOMING!

During the first quarter of 1985-1986 a record number of cases were handled by the INTERCEDE Service Unit. From March 1 to May 31, counsellors Desiree Hipplewith and Beth Udasco dealt with 340 inquiries. This represents a 34% increase in cases as compared to the same period last year!

These figures represent service to a total of 182 domestic workers - up from 162 during the first quarter of 1984-1985. In addition, our monthly legal clinic assisted a total of 16 domestics, bringing the grand total to 198 domestic workers counselled.

Of the total number of people who approached the Service Unit, a full 77% were domestics from Third World countries. The overwhelming majority of inquiries concerned immigration problems - 81% - and a full 86% of clients were in Canada on temporary work permits. What this means is that our Service Unit remains fully on target in meeting its stated objectives!

LILIBETH'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on July 17 INTERCEDE attended a meeting at Queen's Park with NDP leader Bob Rae and representatives of the Black community in Toronto
- * on August 14 INTERCEDE attended a meeting of the Task Force on Contract Compliance which voted unanimously to recommend that the City of Toronto adopt a policy of contract compliance

Coming soon...

- * on August 29 INTERCEDE will be meeting with Ontario's new Minister of Labour Bill Wrye to discuss changes in the labour laws affecting domestic workers
- * INTERCEDE's next monthly members meeting is set for SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 3 - 5 PM, at the Cecil Community Centre. For more information call us at (416)977-3467
- * on September 21 Cecil Community Centre is hosting a day-long open-house with the theme "Mid-Autumn Festival"...everyone is welcome!

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Immigration Officer Donna Hecker who just gave birth to a healthy baby boy!
- * to long-time member Debra Boyce for her promotion to 'senior accountant'
- * to our new landed immigrants: REBECCA SMILE, BRENDA CLARKE, and MARRIETTA ALENXANDER from the West Indies; CONCHITA FONTEJON, ROSE MADAYAG, TERRY ATMOSFERA and TESSIE VISAYA from the Philippines...good luck to you all!
- * and a very warm welcome to Marion Thomson who is back in Canada from the UK for a visit!

- Beth Udasco

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Under Ontario labour law domestic workers are entitled to written notice from their employers prior to termination of services.

If you have worked for over three months but less than two years, you are entitled to one week's notice. If you have been working for two to five years, you are entitled to two week's notice.

Your term of employment ends when your notice of termination expires. If your employer terminates your services without a written notice, you have the right to request notice or be paid for the equivalent amount of time.

You are also entitled to any wages and vacation pay for any time worked until notice of termination.

For more information contact the Ontario Ministry of Labour's Employment Standard Branch at:

Toronto	416-965-5251
Scarborough	416-750-3557
Mississauga	416-273-7800

- Desiree Hipplewith

JOIN INTERCEDE

\$5 Year

SUPPORT THE GROUP THAT SUPPORTS YOU!

Newsletter Committee:

Desiree Hipplewith, Lynette Munian, Judith Ramirez, Pamela Skeete, Sonia Thomas, Daphne Tucker, Beth Udasco

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

to our distinguished friend Harry R. Gairey who is celebrating his ninetieth birthday this month!!

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTED

The INTERCEDE Steering Committee is made up of fourteen people, eight of whom must be domestic or ex-domestic workers, and six of whom are community representatives or associate members. The Steering Committee is elected yearly at the Annual General Members Meeting.

On Sunday, July 7, 1985, INTERCEDE held its Annual Meeting and three new domestic workers were elected to the Steering Committee: Barbara Donaldson, Elvira Boncato, and Apolonia Williams.

The full Steering Committee for 1985-1986 is made up of the following duly elected members:

Domestic Workers

Eulene Boyce*	Barbados
Lynette Munian	Guyana
Avril Higginson*	England
Linda Lising	Philippines
Columbia Diaz*	Philippines
Daphne Tucker	Jamaica
Beverly Wilson	Barbados
Elvira Boncato	Philippines

Alternates

Barbara Donaldson	Jamaica
Apolonia Williams	Philippines

Community Representatives

Joyce Fraser, Black Women's Sisterhood
Barbara Jackman, Law Union of Ontario
Jane Horsley, CLASP
Judith Ramirez, CASH

Associate Members

Cathy Gilbert, lawyer
Alison Kerr, feminist organizer

* former domestic worker

ANNUAL MEETING INSPIRED BY SPEAKERS

INTERCEDE members and friends had the pleasure of welcoming two special speakers to the Annual General Members Meeting held on July 7 at the Cecil Community Centre. Akua Benjamin, President of the Toronto Chapter of the Congress of Black Women of Canada,

and The Rev. Dan Heap, Member of Parliament (Spadina), addressed the gathering with feeling and commitment on the struggle of immigrant and visible minority women workers in Canada.

Akua spoke forcefully about the need to combat both racism and sexism because they are jointly responsible for drastically limiting the opportunities of visible-minority women in this country. She called for more informal networking among sisters, as well as for strengthening groups like the Congress and INTERCEDE which publicly call attention to the injustices in Canadian society.

Dan spoke out against the current wage rip-off in Ontario which is denying foreign domestics the wage rate they are entitled to by law. He called it a "blatant injustice" and pledged that he would "work together with INTERCEDE to see that this abuse comes to an end immediately".

The members applauded the speakers enthusiastically and engaged them in a spirited exchange. In her official "thank you", Eulene Boyce, senior member of the Steering Committee, expressed gratitude to Dan Heap for his long-standing support of domestic workers' rights. She also echoed Akua Benjamin when she challenged all the women present to "stand up and be counted as INTERCEDE enters another year of life".

After the meeting was adjourned, everyone joined in for a "social hour" of refreshment and informal conversation.

CALLING WEST INDIAN DOMESTICS!

A research team affiliated with the Department of Sociology, at the University of Toronto, is interviewing West Indian women working as domestics in Canada. The team hopes this study will help raise awareness of the working and living conditions of immigrant women in Toronto. The project is funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The names of all participants will remain strictly confidential. If you are interested in being interviewed, please

contact research assistant Kathy Gar-
rat at (416)978-7195 or 537-9357. Or
you can write to:

Dr. Abigail B. Bakan
563 Spadina Avenue
Department of Sociology
University of Toronto
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1

LETTER FROM EFFIE HENRY

As many of you will remember, Effie
Henry was a member of INTERCEDE for
a long time before moving with her
employer to Vancouver, British Colum-
bia, last year. Last month we recei-
ved the following letter from her:

" Dear Judith, staff and members.
Good day. I am very happy to
tell you that I have just get
my landed today. I have just
return from the immigration.
I have waited one year and
five months! Judith, thank you
and INTERCEDE very much, beca-
use if it had not been for you
I would not have got accepted.
If I do not get the chance to
return back to Toronto I will
always remember you all. But
I know that one day I will re-
turn. If you are seeing Francis*
please give her the good news
for me. I will always be a part
of INTERCEDE.

Thanks again, you are the
greatest."

* Frances Gregory was INTERCEDE's co-
ordinator from 1979 - 1982.

MOVIE "MARIA" A HIT

At INTERCEDE's last monthly meeting
on August 3, we had a special treat
for those who turned up in the middle
of the long Caribana week-end! It was
the National Film Board's acclaimed
film MARIA, about immigrant women
who are fighting for their rights in
Canada.

MARIA is a fictionalized version of
an actual union organizing campaign
in a Toronto garment factory in the
early 1970's. Focusing on Maria, a
first-generation Italian-Canadian, the
film illustrates the many difficulties
ethnic workers in Canada face: the
language barrier, exploitation and in-
timidation by employers, and the un-
responsiveness of labour legislators.

The movie touched off a lively, and
sometimes angry, discussion among the
domestics who saw it. They spoke about
what their rights are, how they can
best express their needs, and how they
can win recognition for their impor-
tant contribution not only to their
individual employers but also to Cana-
dian society as a whole.

- Beth Udasco

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

The time for INTERCEDE's monthly mem-
bers meeting is changing to 3 - 5 pm,
starting on Sunday, September 8!

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

Place
Stamp
Here

First Class