

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

AUGUST 1986

INTERCEDE PROTESTS 'RELEASE LETTERS'

INTERCEDE has recently written to officials of the Canada Employment & Immigration Commission to protest the use of so-called 'release letters' at a local immigration office in Toronto.

At issue is the fact that foreign domestic workers are being denied the right to seek new employment if their former employers refuse to give them 'release letters' saying that their services are no longer required.

If a domestic worker cannot produce such a letter when she reports to the Canada Immigration Centre - even if she left her employer for a legitimate reason - she is being told that she can remain in Canada until her visa expires but cannot work.

INTERCEDE has protested the arbitrary imposition of these 'release letters' because they give the employers a virtual veto over the foreign domestic's right to work in this country. All any employer has to do is deny the domestic's account of abuses suffered, refuse to grant the letter, and the domestic loses her right to employment.

This situation turns the clock back to pre-1981 days before foreign domestic workers won the right to change jobs, with the assistance of the Canada Employment Centres. It creates a captive labour force and allows employers and immigration officers to penalize a domestic worker for reporting abuses. In effect, it forces foreign domestic workers to accept exploitative conditions as a price for working in this country.

A DOMESTIC WORKER SPEAKS OUT!

Recently the Service Unit handled a complaint from a foreign domestic worker who was refused permission to find a new job because her former employer would not give her a 'release letter'.

Elke Weltle came to Canada from Germany in December 1985, to work for a family in Thornhill. After failing in her attempts to resolve problems with her employers, she gave them three week's notice last June and left. She has been unable to work for the past three months because the employer refuses to give her a 'release letter'.

INTERCEDE appealed to immigration officials on her behalf and arrangements have now been made for her to go to Buffalo, New York, and re-enter Canada under the Foreign Domestic Program.

Ms. Weltle has this to say about the experience:

" I was very unhappy with my employers because they were very cold and hardly ever talked to me. I tried to adjust but things would go wrong because they just ignore me".

" Dealing with Immigration was also hard - I went in two or three times to discuss my problem and the last time they call the employer and from that moment on they were against me".

" This experience has been very hard for me emotionally. I had to go to an emergency hostel because I have no place to stay and it was chaotic there. I lost a lot of weight and I felt so empty because I cannot work. I feel that I wasn't asking much - just the right to do what I came here to do".

COCO'S CALENDAR

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Recent happenings...

- * we've used the summer months to meet with community representatives from groups like COSTI-IIAS, Scarborough's TROPICANA, the CENTRE FOR SPANISH SPEAKING PEOPLES, the ONTARIO COUNCIL OF AGENCIES SERVING IMMIGRANTS (OCASI), and others
- * on August 18 Judith met with Victor Malarek, of the Globe & Mail, to talk about foreign domestics for his upcoming book on immigration
- * on August 19 INTERCEDE was part of a delegation that met with Barbara MacDougall, the new federal minister responsible for women's issues

Coming up soon...

- * INTERCEDE next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 3 pm, at 58 Cecil Street, Toronto. There will be an educational on 'How to exercise your rights under workers compensation'.

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Elsie Suares who recently got married
- * to Board member Debra Boyce for her recent promotion at work
- * to Zorina Singh for the birth of a bouncing baby girl
- * and best of luck to our new landed immigrants: Jutta Schaff from West Germany, Debbie Lam from Hong Kong, and Perla Cortez from the Philippines
- * good-bye & good luck to Rosemund Warrington who went back home to Barbados

So long for now!

If you are a live-in domestic and you are injured while working, you are protected under the Workers Compensation Act of Ontario.

If you undergo an injury which requires health care, you must notify your employer immediately. (S)he will fill out a Treatment Memorandum (Form 156) and file it with the Workers Compensation Board.

You may choose your own doctor or qualified practitioner, but once you have chosen you cannot change without the permission of the Board. Your doctor will need a copy of the Treatment Memorandum to make out a report on you for the Board.

Within three days of learning about your injury your employer must file an Employer's Report of Accidental Injury (Form 7). If your employer should fail to do so, you must complete a Workers' Report and file it with the Board to open your claim.

In the event of conflicting information from you and your employer, the Board will make further enquiries as needed. Please remember that you are covered by the Workers Compensation Act regardless of whether your employer has registered!

Your employer is legally obligated to pay you full wages & benefits for the day the accident occurs. Any other lost wages will be paid to you by the Workers Compensation Board.

For more information about how to file a claim contact:

INTERCEDE	591-1625
WORKERS COMPENSATION	927-7222

Special speaker coming up in October...check next month's newsletter!

PROVINCIAL UPDATE...

Though there is still no word from Labour Minister Bill Wrye's office about changes in the labour laws for domestic worker's rights, there are some related developments which are encouraging:

- * INTERCEDE has made a submission to the Task Force on Hours of Work & Overtime established in January by Bill Wrye. Its mandate is to review current overtime practices in the province and report their findings to the Minister along with their recommendations for legislative change.
- * in its presentation to the overtime task force, the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues called on the government to implement INTERCEDE's recommendations to limit hours of work & grant overtime pay to domestics
- * the Ontario Federation on Labour has just submitted a comprehensive list of recommendations to amend the Ontario Labour Relations Act, including the right to unionize for domestic workers who are currently forbidden to do so
- * Susan Fish, Women's Issues Critic for the Progressive Conservative Party at Queen's Park, recently met with INTERCEDE and assured us that the PC Caucus is having a full discussion on domestic's rights during the summer recess
- * Anita Martin, a senior assistant to NDP Leader Bob Rae, met with INTERCEDE this month and said that the NDP shares our concern about the delays in making changes in the labour laws...the NDP pledged to keep pressing Bill Wrye to act before the Legislature reconvenes in the fall

INTERCEDE is confident that soon we'll be able to report good news on the provincial front.

MACDOUGALL MEETS WITH IMMIGRANT WOMEN

A five-member delegation from the Immigrant & Visible-minority Women's Action Committee held a meeting with Toronto MP Barbara MacDougall, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

The delegation, which included INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez, appealed to the Minister to take a strong advocacy role in the federal government on behalf of immigrant & visible-minority women. They cited the many policy areas such as language and skills training where immediate action is necessary.

In September the Action Committee is reconvening the forty immigrant & visible-minority women who met in Ottawa in June 1985 on the invitation of the minister of multiculturalism. An assessment of the lobbying efforts of the past year is planned, as well as a further consultation with Cabinet Ministers. Among those expected to attend are David Crombie, Minister of State for Multiculturalism; Benoit Bouchard, Minister of Employment & Immigration; Gerry Weiner, Minister of State for Immigration; and Barbara MacDougall.

SERVICE UNIT GOING STRONG!

Statistics for the first quarter of the current year show that our Service Unit continues to attract a growing number of clients. In the period from March 1 - May 31, 1986, our staff handled 438 enquiries - an increase of 29% over last year!

Of the clients served for the first time, 80% were domestic workers. More people are contacting us for labour rights issues - 13% this quarter as compared to only 6% last year.

There has also been a 23% increase in the number of Filipino clients and a drop in the number of West Indians. Because these figures cover only the first quarter they may not represent long-term trends. We'll keep you posted!

HELPING DOMESTICS IN OTTAWA

Recently INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez met with staff members of the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) to discuss the situation of domestic workers in that area.

Among those present at the meeting were Yew Lee, executive director of OCISO, and Francis Henry, a counsellor who assists domestics.

A key issue in the Ottawa area according to Henry, is the failure of employer's to comply with the terms of the contracts they sign.

OCISO has publicized this problem in the community. In a recent press report Henry was quoted as saying that most domestics complain about 'poor pay, long hours, or prejudicial & unco-operative employers'. He noted that some workers are '...earning as little as \$90 a week, despite contracts to the contrary, and after being brought in as housekeepers, find themselves working from 7am to 11pm with three to four children under their wing'. Sound familiar?

If you are a domestic worker in the Ottawa area contact:

Francis Henry
Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant
Services Organization (OCISO)
18 Louisa Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 6Y6
Tel. (613) 238-4256

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT!

Service Unit counsellor Columbia Diaz is going on maternity leave next month. She will be away for four months or until the end of the year.

To replace Mrs. Diaz we have re-hired Beth Udasco who worked with us last year for five months.

Beth Udasco has been a community worker with the Kababayan Community Centre as well as a student at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. She came to Canada in 1983 from the Philippines where she had earned a degree in social work and held a position with Foster Parents Plan International.

Many of you will remember Beth Udasco from last year and we are very pleased to welcome her back!

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

The Service Unit provides information, counselling and referral services to domestic workers in the areas of immigration, employment, educational upgrading, human rights, and social services.

We are located at 58 Cecil Street, east of Spadina & one block south of College Street. Our office hours are Monday - Friday, 9:00am - 4:00 pm. All services are free and confidential. Call us at 591-1625!

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

Place
Stamp
Here

First Class

Next INTERCEDE meeting on SEPT 7!