

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

FEBRUARY 1987

INTERCEDE APPEALS TO PREMIER PETERSON

Recently INTERCEDE wrote to Ontario Premier David Peterson to urge him to become personally involved in advancing the rights of domestic workers. We appealed to him saying:

" At present, live-in domestics are entitled to the minimum wage but can legally be on the job for up to 120 hours per week without a cent in overtime pay! This makes a mockery of the minimum wage and is a form of modern-day slavery. The vast majority of live-in domestics come to Canada from Third World countries and two-thirds of them reside in Ontario. Many of them are afraid to complain for fear of losing their chance of becoming landed immigrants. "

The exploitation of domestic workers was front-page news in the Globe & Mail recently and the subject of a hard-hitting article in the Toronto Star by noted columnist Doris Anderson. It was also featured in a special labour report by Alan Garr on the CBC National News.

On February 17, 1987, an INTERCEDE delegation met at Queen's Park with Hershell Ezrin, senior policy advisor to Premier Peterson. The delegation was led by Judith Ramirez, INTERCEDE co-ordinator, and included Mary Eberts, of the Women's Legal Education & Action Fund (LEAF), Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, Mary Mouammar, of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, and Catherine Gilbert, INTERCEDE Board member.

The purpose of the meeting was to convey to Mr. Ezrin the urgency of

including domestic workers under the hours of work and overtime provisions of the Employment Standards Act. "In any other line of work it would be unthinkable not to link wages to hours worked", said Judith Ramirez. "And it affects visible-minority women in particular because, historically, they have filled the ranks of live-in domestic help", added Mary Mouammar.

The group pointed out that the recent proposal made by Minister of Labour Bill Wrye would finally grant domestic workers the right to overtime pay. "This has been our chief demand for the past 1½ years", said Catherine Gilbert.

Ceta Ramkhalawansingh asked Mr. Ezrin to appeal directly to Mr. Peterson to take the leadership on this critical issues. She noted that Mr. Wrye's proposal has gained a great deal of support within government and that both opposition parties as well as women's groups have been pressing for immediate action.

Mary Eberts, explained that LEAF is ready to proceed with a legal challenge to the Employment Standards Act under the Charter of Rights on behalf of INTERCEDE. She expressed support for the government's policy of inviting consultation before a group launches court action but, she added, "INTERCEDE has been trying for 1½ years to get these changes and they've exhausted all possible channels."

In closing, Judith Ramirez said that INTERCEDE is prepared to wait until the end of the month for the Premier's decision. If Mr. Peterson decides not to take immediate action then the court challenge will go forward the first week of March.

Mr. Ezrin assured us that he would discuss the matter with the Premier and give us his answer in a week's time.

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on February 7 INTERCEDE participated in the Women & the State conference held at OISE
- * on February 11 Joan Ann Gravesande and Catherine Gilbert took part in an OCASI workshop for staff and board members of community agencies
- * this month Judith Ramirez was interviewed on GLOBAL TV and CBC RADIO regarding overtime pay for domestics
- * the PAX CHRISTI of Toronto recently held a Valentines Party at the Our Lady of Assumption Parish Hall attended by many domestic workers

Coming up soon...

- * INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for Sunday, March 1, 3 pm, at the Cecil Community Centre
- * the SERVICE UNIT will be open on Saturday, March 7, 10am - 2pm. Please call for an appointment! Free income tax services available that day.

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Melrose Morgan, from Jamaica, for the long-awaited approval of her landed status. Good luck, you deserve the best!
- * also to Morlett Nelson, from the Caribbean, and Melinda Guevarra & Avelina Villanueva who were just landed!
- * and HAPPY BIRTHDAY to Corazon Eleccion, Hilaria Rodico, Paz Santarin, Linda Subido, Letty Suque, and to our co-ordinator Judith Ramirez!

- Columbia Diaz

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Income tax time is rolling around again and every domestic worker should know her rights.

If you're working on a temporary visa your employer is still required by law to give you a T-4 slip by the end of February, 1987.

Upon receiving your T-4 slip check it to make sure that the information on your wages and deductions is accurate. If it is not, raise it with your employer immediately. Do not accept a T-4 slip with wrong information.

If you have been sending money back home to your spouse and/or children, you have the right to make a claim on your income tax return, provided you have receipts to prove it. Valid receipts include money orders from the bank and post office and cancelled cheques.

To make a claim for support of relatives outside Canada you must submit a one-page form called "Declaration of support of non-resident spouse and children" (TIE - NR) along with your income tax return. These forms will be available at all the INTERCEDE free income tax clinics (see below).

For further information contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT	591-1625
REVENUE CANADA	869-1500

- Joan Ann Gravesande

INCOME TAX CLINICS

Our annual income tax clinics will be held this year at the following times:

- Sunday, March 1, 3 - 5 pm
- Saturday, March 7, 10 am - 2 pm
- Sunday, April 5, 3 - 5 pm

This service is completely confidential and free of charge. Clinics will be held at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, Toronto. All domestic workers are welcome!

BILL WRYE MEETS WITH INTERCEDE

On February 3, 1987, the Minister of Labour Bill Wrye met with INTERCEDE to discuss his proposal for increased protection of domestic workers under the labour laws.

Included in the INTERCEDE delegation were Judith Ramirez, co-ordinator; Shirin Perston, of the YWCA Social Action Committee; Carmencita Hernandez, of the Coalition of Visible Minority Women; Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues; and Joan Ann Gravesande, INTERCEDE counsellor.

The Minister commended the group for "your hard work and persistence" and said that a great deal of discussion was underway in the government about domestic workers' rights. "We want to see this matter move forward", he said, "and we know that from where you sit it's not moving fast enough."

Judith Ramirez told Mr. Wrye that INTERCEDE is unable to help many exploited domestics at present because "the laws are just too weak". She expressed support for his proposal noting that it would grant domestics the right to overtime pay after 44 hours per week. "It's the least you can do for visible-minority women", said Carmencita Hernandez, "and all it takes is a stroke of your pen."

Shirin Perston and Ceta Ramkhalawansingh both stressed that mainstream women's groups all support the increased protection for domestic workers "in the present climate of pay equity."

The meeting came to a close with the Minister assuring INTERCEDE that he was personally committed to "moving forward as quickly as humanly possible."

DOWN WITH THE IMMIGRATION FEES !!

MEETING WITH WEINER A SUCCESS!

On January 31, 1987, Minister of State for Immigration Gerry Weiner visited INTERCEDE at our Cecil Street office. With the Minister were his special advisors Yvette Souque and Julie Montgomery; his chief of staff Keith Beardslly; and David Conn, director general of immigration for Ontario, and his assistant Diane Dwyer.

Representing INTERCEDE were Judith Ramirez, co-ordinator; Barbara Jackman and Cornelia Soberano, Board members; and Joan Ann Gravesande, Service Unit counsellor. The community was represented by Ellen Campbell, of the YWCA; Carmencita Hernandez, of the National Organization of Immigrant & Visible-Minority Women; Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, and Harry Gairey, distinguished crusader for minority rights.

At the top of the agenda of the 90-minute meeting was the critical issue of the immigration processing fees. The fees, which require foreign domestics to pay \$50 for each new work permit and \$125 for landing applications, have been a target of protest since they were introduced one year ago.

In the meeting we appealed to Mr. Weiner to exempt domestic workers from paying the fees, and his response was very positive. He was obviously aware of the hundreds of letters which his office has received protesting the fees. He said that our arguments were "coming through loud and clear" and that he was prepared to look into "possible alternatives, particularly for the \$50 fee". INTERCEDE has been in touch with the Minister's office since the meeting and we have been assured that the fees are "definitely being looked into".

Another matter raised with Mr. Weiner was the need for more information on who is being rejected under the Foreign Domestic Program. Judith Ramirez raised our long-standing concern that there may be an over-representation of visible-minority women among those rejected. She asked the Minister to pro-

WEINER MEETING...con't

vide the additional date which INTERCEDE has been requesting from the Immigration Commission for the past four years without success. Mr. Weiner said he is quite certain that the information can be generated and he promised to instruct his officials to compile it without further delay. INTERCEDE is anxious to analyze the data and we expect to make our findings known in the very near future.

Finally, Barbara Jackman, a well-known immigration lawyer, raised the issue of non-status domestic workers and described it as "a tragedy that can't be allowed to continue". A discussion followed about possible ways of regularizing the status of illegal domestics under the present immigration policy. Mr. Weiner said that he is "open to any reasonable suggestion" and he invited INTERCEDE to submit a written proposal.

At the end of the meeting the Minister and his officials posed for photographs with the INTERCEDE delegation. Mr. Weiner warmly congratulated Harry Gairey who was recently named to the Order of Canada. The Minister also met Rose Pierre, a foreign domestic worker from Grenada, who has appealed to him to grant her landed status in Canada.

COME TO OUR NEW DROP-IN!

INTERCEDE has recently launched a new weekly drop-in for nannies and caregivers. If you look after pre-school age children this new service is for you!

The drop-in is held every Wednesday morning, 9:30 - 11:30, at the Cecil Community Centre. A cheerful lounge area is provided where you can relax and talk to other caregivers while the children play in the toy-lending library nearby.

Don't miss this exciting new program! Registration is completely free of charge. Just call Patricia Yuen at the Service Unit - 591-1625 - and register today!

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place: Cecil Community Centre
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T 1N6

Time: Monday - Friday
9:00am - 4:00pm

Staff: Columbia Diaz
Joan Ann Gravesande

Tel.: (416) 591-1625

Free and confidential counselling to all domestic workers on immigration, employment, human rights, etc.

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS
c/o INTERCEDE
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario
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Place
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Here

First Class