

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

JANUARY 1986

OPPOSITION PRESSURES BILL WRYE

INTERCEDE began the new year with a big question mark as to when the Ontario Government intends to take action on domestic workers' rights.

Last summer, Minister of Labour Bill Wrye assured us that he would make important changes in the labour laws by the end of 1985. But immediately before the Christmas holiday, his office unceremoniously informed us that we would have to wait "until Spring".

When the Legislature reconvened the first week of January, the opposition parties at Queen's Park vigorously questioned the Minister about the delay. MP Evelyn Gigantes, Women's Issues Critic for the New Democratic Party, asked Mr. Wrye why, after he, himself, has said that the hours of work and overtime pay for domestics must be addressed, is he delaying taking action. The Minister replied:

"...We are actively addressing them - as recently as approximately one week ago. One of my senior policy assistants met again with the International Coalition to End Domestic Workers' Exploitation. The meetings are ongoing. We expect that once we have concluded addressing (the issues)...domestics around this province will find out this government is prepared to move ahead in a way that is quite satisfactory to them".

But Ms. Gigantes countered by saying:

"The Minister misunderstands

what we mean by addressing the problem. We do not mean endless chat and meetings. We mean getting some legislation before this House... In the fall the Minister promised INTERCEDE that we would have legislation before Christmas. When are we going to have the legislation?"

Mr. Wrye lamely repeated that "we are attempting to bring this matter forward" (but) "specific solutions are still under discussion".

At this point, MP Phil Gillies, Labour Critic for the Progressive Conservatives, jumped in pressing Mr. Wrye on the plight of part-time domestics who are "...among the vast pool of part-time labourers in the province who do not, for the most part, have either benefits or pensions".

Mr. Wrye replied, like a broken record, "...the matter of pensions and benefits is part of the review."

The fight continues to get the Liberal Government to act on its promise to amend the Employment Standards Act so that domestics will have the basic rights other workers take for granted.

ISAP FUNDING FOR SERVICE UNIT!

We have just heard from the office of Immigration Minister Walter MacLean that the funding criteria of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) has been amended. Services to non-landed workers are now eligible for funding, and on March 1, 1986, the Service Unit will become a regular ISAP project!

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on December 12 INTERCEDE met with the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund to discuss equality rights for domestics under the Charter of Rights
- * on December 12 INTERCEDE attended an invitational screening of THE COLOR PURPLE, based on Alice Walker's prize-winning novel
- * on January 18 Judith Ramirez participated in a day-long meeting of the Immigrant & Visible Minority Women's Action Committee

Coming up soon...

- * on January 27 the first organizing meeting of ARTS AGAINST APARTHEID will be held at City Hall, Committee Room 4, at 7:30pm
- * INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 3 - 5PM, at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to DELIA ONATE who is engaged to be married
- * happy birthday to LINDA CORPUZ and LUZ INEZ
- * and our warmest best wishes to our new landed immigrants: UNA JOHNSON and DEBRA JOHN, from the West Indies; EVANGELINE DARAN, ELSIE MARTINEZ and ELISABETH DE VERA, from the Philippines

That's all for now, folks!

- Columbia Diaz

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

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

As of January 1, 1986, there is a change in your net salary. Your income tax deduction is rising, your Canada Pension is dropping, and your Unemployment Insurance premium remains the same.

Please note: your income tax is calculated after deducting your CPP and UIC contributions from your gross pay.

If you are a foreign domestic earning the legal minimum of \$827.50 gross monthly pay, these are the new figures:

Monthly	\$ 827.50	Gross Pay
	238.00	Room & Board
	81.00	Income Tax
	11.15	Canada Pension
	19.45	Unempl. Insur.
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	477.90	NET PAY
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If you are landed, the new legal minimum under the Ontario labour laws is \$757.00 gross monthly pay with these deductions:

Monthly	\$ 757.00	Gross Pay
	238.00	Room & Board
	65.70	Income Tax
	9.88	Canada Pension
	17.79	Unempl. Insur.
	<hr/>	
	425.63	NET PAY
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For more information or assistance contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT 977-3467
REVENUE CANADA 869-1500

- Desiree Hipplewith

JOIN INTERCEDE
\$5 Year

SUPPORT THE GROUP THAT SUPPORTS YOU

Domestics' future at whim of employers, government

BY LINDA HOSSIE
The Globe and Mail

On the final day of her last job, Rose Pierre, a domestic worker, fled her employer's house, bleeding and trying to escape a slapping and shoving attack by the woman for whom she worked.

Ms Pierre called police so she could remove her few belongings from the house, and is still trying to get \$1,300 in back wages.

The incident has jeopardized the 42-year-old woman's status in Canada, and she may have return to Grenada and to farm work.

"It will kill me," she says of the heavy work "toting a load of cocoa and banana.

"I'm prayin' to God for good news to come through. I'm tryin', here, I'm tryin' to please them in all things."

The people to please are Canadian immigration officials. They have the power to give Ms Pierre status as a landed immigrant in Canada, but show little inclination to do so.

Domestic workers are brought by the thousands every year to Canada. By 1984, more than 15,000 had entered the country, every one of them dependent on the benevolence of both employers and immigration officials.

For many, the hope of kindness is a hollow dream. What they find instead is pettiness, insensitivity, poverty and disillusionment.

"There is an incredible amount of loneliness, especially for the women who have just arrived," says Judith Ramirez, co-ordinator of Intercede, an advocacy group for domestic workers.

"Many of them suffer more than most of us can even imagine because they've just been separated from their families and they're very busy working for their employers. They don't have time to go to parties and meet people.

"I think there's a lot of anguish. It's something that I think happens very routinely."

Ms Pierre had a sister to welcome her when she arrived in Toronto in 1981, so she suffered less loneliness than some.

But she encountered other, familiar problems — working for months without pay, with only a few hours off a week, and with insufficient food for a proper diet.

A tall, statuesque woman with hair firmly clipped into place, Ms Pierre smiles broadly and quietly wrings thick, work-toughened hands as she answers questions. Her hesitant voice carries a Caribbean lilt, and her glance heads straight for



Judith Ramirez, left, and Rose Pierre: Trying to please Canadian immigration officials.

the floor when she encounters an unexpected remark or inquiry.

The woman wants passionately to live in Canada and work caring for old people.

But last year she was denied status as a landed immigrant. Only because her employer asked for a special extension was Ms Pierre allowed to stay on, and only on the condition that she continue working at the same job.

Now that she has left the woman's employ — or been driven from it — Ms Pierre remains in Canada only to settle an assault charge and a claim for back wages.

Ms Pierre has failed to convince immigration officials that she can be self-sufficient. She has four children in Grenada, three of whom are still dependents.

"The pressure comes when it's time for the immigration assessment for self-sufficiency," Ms Ramirez says.

"That's when it can kill you to have more than two or three children. You have to be able to prove that you can support them."

Not every domestic worker runs into assault on the job, but horror stories are easy to come by among the women who travel to Canada to do the job that Canadians won't do.

A problem reported by virtually every domestic worker is unpaid overtime. Under immigration auspices, domestic workers and their employers sign contracts setting out agreed wages, duties, hours of work, free time and vacations.

But no enforcement mechanism exists to ensure the contracts are kept, and domestic workers say they routinely work 14-hour days at the insistence of their employers.

If a domestic worker complains about working conditions, the Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission will help her find a new job, but Ms Ramirez says that "it's very disruptive to change jobs and you never know whether you're going to be any better off."

Ms Ramirez selects a sample of 10 abuse sheets — complaint forms in Intercede's current file — and finds domestic workers reporting 65, 84 and 90 hours of work a week.

"It just shows how routine it is to overwork a live-in domestic worker," she says.

"The employers put forward this whole view of the relationship as being a family relationship. They take the domestic worker to Florida with the family and they think that's treating her like family.

"But, come next summer, when the domestic asks for her two weeks' holiday, they say, 'What do you mean?' They can't distinguish between on-work and off-work."

Linda Lising, who comes from the Philippines and who worked for almost five years as a domestic worker in Toronto, calls such family trips "forced holidays."

Families take domestics with them when they go to the cottage in the summer, she says, "and you have to stay there for three months.

"Or they take you with them and

they're going to give you to a sister or someone else, where you will do the work.

"You know, these domestic workers don't want to have to fight. They are scared because they're still applying for their landed status."

Ms Ramirez says: "You're dealing with a whole area of work where there's such a legacy of intimidation. It's not idle paranoia."

Last year, Ms Lising gave shelter to a woman from the Philippines who had been imprisoned by her employers for 10 months.

The employers brought the domestic worker with them when they moved to Canada. But they did not have proper immigration papers for her so they were afraid to let her out of the house.

The woman drew attention to her plight by tapping on the window at people who passed the house, Ms Lising says. One passer-by worked for a domestic workers' agency and realized what was going on. The

agency made sure that the woman was freed.

Domestic workers' problems are compounded by their special status under provincial labor laws. Until this year, domestic workers had a lower minimum wage under the Labor Standards Act than other workers.

In March, after a four-year fight, domestic workers won inclusion under the regular minimum wage provisions of the act. Domestic workers who are landed immigrants in Canada are now entitled to \$4 an hour.

Under the contracts supervised by the federal Government, foreign domestic workers in Ontario earn a minimum of \$827.50 a month, \$238 of which is deducted for room and board. The rate varies in different regions of the country.

But because their hours of work are not similarly controlled, either by provincial or federal governments, the actual pay for a domestic worker can drop as low as "a paltry \$1.47 an hour," say briefing notes Intercede prepared for Ontario Labor Minister William Wrye.

"The grim reality is that the standard minimum wage remains completely out of reach for the vast majority of live-in domestic workers."

Intercede wants Mr. Wrye to insist that employers keep records of the hours actually worked, to ensure that minimum employment standards are met.

They also want formal job descriptions for babysitters and domestic workers since "Intercede hears many complaints from women who were hired as live-in babysitters but who are expected to perform all the duties of a domestic in addition to caring for the children."

And they want the province to lift a section of the Labor Relations Act that prohibits domestic workers from forming unions.

"You should not create a subclass of workers because they're women and they're black and they're coming from a dispossessed part of the world," Ms Ramirez says. "It comes down to racism and sexism."

(Karen Bell, a Labor Ministry

spokesman, says the Government is concerned about the problems and Intercede's requests are under review.)

Even when domestic workers win a round, they have difficulty savoring much of the sweet taste of victory. In April, domestic workers became eligible for workers' compensation benefits for injuries received on the job.

But only about 1 per cent of Ontario's 75,000 domestic workers are actually covered because most employers have not bothered to register with the board.

There are similar problems at the federal level, especially with training programs for domestic workers to improve their job skills.

Under existing arrangements, the federal Government pays nothing toward such training, but asks employers to provide money and time off each week for classes or workshops.

But the Government does not monitor compliance with the scheme, and in cases where employers burden domestic workers with excessive workloads, training courses may be hopelessly interrupted.

This article on domestic workers' rights appeared in the GLOBE & MAIL on January 1, and has since appeared in local newspapers across the country.

MEET INTERCEDE'S NEW PRESIDENT!

The Steering Committee elected at the last Annual General Meeting has set up an Executive Committee and, for the first time, INTERCEDE has a president.

Eulene Boyce, a former domestic worker from the Caribbean, was elected to the new position. She is uniquely suited to serve INTERCEDE in this capacity.

Ms. Boyce came to Canada in 1979 under the Foreign Domestic Program. She joined INTERCEDE in the early days of the 'landed status' campaign. She was instrumental in rallying other West Indian domestics to the cause by speaking at public meetings and to the ethnic media.

When we won the new policy in November of 1981, Eulene Boyce was a featured speaker at the St. Lawrence Centre Forum on domestic workers' rights.

Ms. Boyce was born and educated in St Joseph, Barbados. She completed secondary school and worked for many years in a lingerie factory, achieving the position of 'assistant supervisor'.

Eulene Boyce was actively involved in the 4-H Club for many years and, in 1968 she represented Barbados in an international baking competition, held in Jamaica, where she won first prize! She was also a long-time mem-

ber of the missionary society of her local church.

Ms. Boyce was one of the very first domestic workers to be landed in Canada under the new policy, in early 1982. Since that time, she has been employed with a Toronto jewellery company where she was recently promoted to 'department head'.

Eulene Boyce is the proud mother of an eleven-year-old son who now lives with her in Canada.

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Office Hours: Monday - Friday
9am - 4pm

Telephone: (416) 977-3467

Location: Cecil Community Centre
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1N6
(one block south of College St. just east of Spadina)

Services: free and confidential information and counselling on immigration, employment, human rights, and social services to all domestic workers

Please Note:

The Service Unit is open the first Saturday of every month, 11am - 2pm. We will be open, Saturday, February 1! Please phone for an appointment, or just drop-in if you're in the neighborhood!

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING SUNDAY, FEB. 2!!

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

First Class

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 Address incomplete
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 Paid sans destination
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 Returned to sender
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