

# Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

JULY 1984

## A NIGHT TO REMEMBER!

INTERCEDE's "Swing Into Summer" dance drew a full house on Saturday, June 30, at the Cecil Community Centre. Members and friends arrived in a partying mood and danced up a storm to the music of DJ Victor Russell! Sounds of reggae, calypso, funk, rock and soul filled the large auditorium, drawing the culturally diverse crowd of West Indians, Filipinos, Europeans and Canadians on to the dance floor together.

A special performance by Jamaican-born dub poet, Lillian Allen, brought the struggle and the courage of domestic workers into sharp focus. A former domestic herself, Lillian told the enthusiastic crowd that whenever anyone tells her to "go back where you came from" she answers "Canada is my home now, and I'm staying right here to fight for my rights".

The evening's entertainment also included an exciting performance by domestic workers from the Philippine-Canadian Ladies Circle of the PANDANGGO SA ILAW and TINIKLING dances.

Among INTERCEDE's special invited guests was Dan Heap, Member of Parliament (Spadina), who presided over a brief ceremony to congratulate domestic workers landed in Canada under the new immigration policy. It was a proud moment for the women who lined up on the platform to the sustained applause of the crowd.

Also in attendance were: Harry Gairey, distinguished fighter for minority rights; James Dudley, of the Movement of Minority Electors; Ruben Cusipag, editor of BALITA; William Doyle-Marshall, an editor of SHARE; Pamela Harris, feminist photographer; and Judith Merrill, writer and activist.

The evening's festivities ended with a spirited draw for door prizes. Six lucky people went home with beautiful gifts donated by local merchants. INTERCEDE thanks all its members and friends for helping us "Swing Into Summer" in style!

## PRESSURING QUEEN'S PARK

The push is on for domestic workers' rights in Ontario! To support INTERCEDE's call for immediate changes in the labour laws, a petition is now circulating throughout the province. Addressed to Labour Minister Russ Ramsay, it says, in part:

Domestic workers perform a skilled and valuable service and they deserve to be fully recognized in the ranks of legitimate workers.

Today the vast majority of domestic workers are women, many of them from Third World countries. Under present Ontario laws they are treated as second class citizens with fewer rights than other workers.

I call on you to take immediate action to upgrade the status of domestic work and end the sexism and racism now sanctioned by Ontario law.

INTERCEDE met with Mr. Ramsay in November, 1983, and we argued strongly for the inclusion of domestic workers in the standard minimum wage and hours of work and overtime provisions of the Employment Standards Act. We also called on the Minister to grant domestic workers the right to unionize under the Labour Relations Act.

INTERCEDE has just learned that Mr. Ramsay has commissioned DEMAND Research Consultants to prepare a study on the "prevailing wages and working conditions of domestics" across Ontario.

We urge all our members and friends to communicate your support for INTERCEDE's recommendations to Queen's Park. For copies of our petition contact:

INTERCEDE

348 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1S4

CROSS CULTURAL LEARNER CENTRE

533 Clarence Street, London, Ontario N6A 3J7

OTTAWA-CARLETON IMMIGRANT SERVICES ASSOCIATION

425 Gloucester Street, Ottawa, Ontario  
K1R 5E9

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- \* on June 9 Judith and I attended the PHILIPPINE NATIONAL DAY PICNIC at Seton Park ...it was packed with people having a wonderful time! Many signed our petitions to Queen's Park.
- \* on June 22 INTERCEDE attended an invitational meeting with Multiculturalism Minister David Collette to discuss the federal report "Equality Now"
- \* a recent SHARE interview with Judith on the sexual exploitation of non-status domestic workers was carried in major newspapers in Jamaica and Trinidad...she was also interviewed on the subject by CJOB radio in Winnipeg, Manitoba
- \* on June 31 a busload of domestics from the PHILIPPINE CANADIAN LADIES CIRCLE went on a religious pilgrimage to Our Lady of Fatima in Youngstown, Ohio
- \* Judith was recently elected to the Board of Directors of the URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

Coming up...

INTERCEDE SUMMER SPEAKERS SERIES

- July 8 "Violence Against Women"  
by Stacey Mitchener  
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre
- August 12 "Achieving Your Goals"  
by Jean Augustine  
Principal, St. Felix School

The speakers are part of our monthly Sunday meetings, held at Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, 2 - 5 pm.

Newsletter Committee:

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

A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL MEMBERS WHO HELPED ORGANIZE THE SWING INTO SUMMER DANCE !!!

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- \* to our new landed immigrants this month: LUDY ALULOT, EASTLYN FORBES, SAY HOILETT, PURLA TAYLOR, and EVELYN YOUNG...welcome to the growing ranks!
- \* to Steering Committee member CATHY GILBERT who was recently married...best wishes from all of us!
- \* to our co-ordinator JUDITH RAMIREZ who was just awarded a Civilian Citation by the Board of Commissioners of the Police for her work on the TASK FORCE ON PUBLIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

That's all for this month, folks!

- Columbia Tarape Diaz

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JOIN INTERCEDE

\$5 Year

SUPPORT THE GROUP THAT SUPPORTS YOU

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KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Under Ontario law a domestic worker must receive at least TWO WEEKS PAID VACATION for each year of employment. This time may be substituted, with the agreement of employer and employee, for not less than 4% of the employee's gross earnings. Gross earnings include the value of room and board. The two weeks vacation can be either one period of two weeks or two periods of one week each. If the employee continues to live in during the vacation, the employer may deduct room and board from the vacation pay.

Regardless of the reason for termination, where employment ends before completion of a working year, the employee must receive 4% of any earnings on which she has previously not received vacation pay.

If you have any questions or complaints call:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 929-3240

- Cecilia Grave

BOOK REVIEW

"Silenced"  
by Makeda Silvera  
Williams-Wallace Publishers  
\$6.95

The book "Silenced" by Makeda Silvera does not shut out the horrible experience faced by working class West Indian women living and struggling as domestic workers in Canada. It confronts that experience head on.

Moreen, Julie, Angel, Savitri, Hyacinth, Molly, Myrtle, Irma, Primrose and Gail all have one thing in common - their lives are centered around people who cause them to feel waves of rage, humiliation, depression, and the weight of broken dreams. Their only comfort is on Sunday at church where they escape from their own private pain.

For most of these women, their relationship with their employer is like a time bomb which might explode at any time because of the deplorable conditions in which they exist. To many a domestic in Canada, silence is golden: the only way to survive is to rebel inwardly and refuse to submerge your personality to your employers'.

Slavery has been abolished. That moment came as a great beam of light to millions of Black slaves who had endured the flames of injustice. But one hundred years later we still face the tragic fact that domestic workers are not free. The daily life of a Black domestic is still crippled by injustice and discrimination.

The only way to break the dreadful silence is for every domestic worker to be conscious of her rights and to fight to exercise them without fear of losing her job. Makeda Silvera has given us a deeply disturbing book. Read it if you care about justice.

- Desiree Hipplewith  
- Phillip Klass

Desiree is a former domestic worker from Guyana who now works with INTERCEDE. Her brother, Phillip, is an arts and science student at the University of Toronto.

NEW STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTED

On Sunday, June 3, 1984, INTERCEDE held its Annual Members Meeting at the Cecil Community Centre. Co-ordinator Judith Ramirez opened the meeting by reading the Annual Report and describing the past year as "full of hard work and some very real gains".

Financial reports were then presented by Treasurer Lynette Munian and Service Unit Bookkeeper Desiree Hipplewith. The report of the Membership Secretary followed, presented by Cecilia Grave. A brief question and answer period was then put to good use by the membership.

Approximately seventy-five members were present and they elected the new 1984-1985 Steering Committee. It includes the following new people: Linda Lising, Philippines; Beverley Wilson, Barbados; Pamela Skeete, Barbados and Cathy Gilbert, from CLASP. Continuing from last year are: Avril Higginson, UK; Dulcie Ledgister, Jamaica; Eulene Boyce, Barbados; Daphne Tucker, Jamaica; Lynette Munian, Guyana; Cecilia Grave, Portugal; and community representative Barbara Jackman, Law Union of Ontario; Judith Ramirez, CASH; Joyce Fraser, Black Women's Sisterhood; and Columbia Tarape Diaz, from the Filipino community.

The highlight of the afternoon was hearing from our two special speakers, Harry Gairey, long-time crusader in the Black community, and Chai Chu Thompson, of the Ontario Coalition of Visible Minority Women. Both emphasized the need to stand up and demand justice. Mr. Gairey inspired everyone with his generous praise of INTERCEDE's work and his likening it to the drive to organize Black railway porters in the 1940's. Chai Chu Thompson spoke eloquently of the need to fight racism and sexism together as "two wings of one bird".

At the close of the meeting, a grateful membership presented a special plaque to Susan Woolner, co-ordinator of the monthly CLASP legal clinic, for the invaluable contribution made by the Osgoode Hall law students to the cause of domestic workers' rights.

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Copies of the 1983 - 1984 INTERCEDE Annual Report are available free of charge. Write to us at 348 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1S4, or telephone (416) 929-3240.

SERVICE UNIT THRIVING!

During the first three months of the Service Unit's operation, March to May 1984, our counsellors have handled 283 inquiries from domestics, employers and institutions. Fifty-two per cent (52%) of these occurred since the official opening on May 6!

A total of 162 domestic workers were counselled during this time, 78 of which came to the Service Unit for face-to-face interviews. Of these, 30 received in-depth pre-assessment counselling; 23 were rejected for landing and their cases are being reviewed; and 25 received general counselling about their rights and obligations.

Of the total number of domestic workers counselled, 53% were from the Caribbean, 26% were from the Philippines, 17% from Europe and South America, and 5% from the UK.

Of the total number of people dealt with, 86% were in Canada on temporary work permits, while 14% resided here permanently. The vast majority, 86%, approached the Service Unit on immigration matters relating to the foreign domestics program.

In addition to our Service Unit counselling, 30 domestic workers were seen at our monthly CLASP legal clinics, bringing the three-month total to 192 domestic workers assisted.

All INTERCEDE services are free of charge.

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT  
348 College Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5T 1S4  
Tel. (416) 929-3240

Evenings and week-ends leave a message on machine and we will return your call.

NOTICE TO ILLEGAL DOMESTICS!

If you have been in Canada at least five years continuously without status, you have until August 31, 1984, to apply for landing. The Long Term Illegal Migrant Program, which came into effect in June, 1983, allows non-status people to come forward anonymously, that is, without giving your name.

The way it works is that you contact a non-government group like INTERCEDE, not immigration. After we ask you all the necessary questions, we put your case forward to immigration officials, without using your name or any information that could identify you.

If immigration approves your application, they issue an "approval in principle" letter which we pass on to you. You then go in to immigration and they verify all information. If there are no problems, you are accepted for landing.

This program ends on AUGUST 31, 1984, so if you think you might qualify for landing, call one of these non-government community groups immediately:

- INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 929-3240  
- Judith Ramirez
- CLASP (416) 667-3150  
- Susan Woolner
- CENTRAL TORONTO COMMUNITY LEGAL CLINIC (416) 363-0304  
- Rob Adamson
- YORK COMMUNITY SERVICES (416) 653-5400  
- Bob Armstrong

All the above groups provide services free of charge!

DOMESTICS CROSS CULTURAL NEWS  
c/o INTERCEDE  
348 College Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5T 1S4

Place  
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FIRST CLASS