

# Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

JULY 1988

## DOMESTIC WORKER SPEAKS OUT

In response to the recent article in the Toronto Star, 'The Difficulties with Domestics' (June 21, 1988), INTERCEDE has received a letter from a foreign domestic who worked for one of the employers quoted extensively in the article, Christine Adamson-Wolman.

"We have no protection against these domestics", Adamson-Wolman told the Toronto Star. "The written contract they sign means nothing to them. They leave us as soon as they find a better job." Ms. Adamson-Wolman is the mother of two pre-schoolers and is currently sponsoring her sixth foreign domestic.

Larina Malacaman is one of the six foreign domestics who has worked for Adamson-Wolman. In her letter to INTERCEDE she says:

I worked for her as a domestic for one year and nine months and left with bitter memories. I lasted longer than anyone.

I was expected to do all the housework, all the cooking, laundry, etc. and take full responsibility for her two very young children. I did these jobs as best I could.

When Christine Adamson-Wolman took her real estate course, my days off and all my plans had to change to accommodate her schedule. I did it for the sake of her children and for her.

During this time, the children were car pooled to school. . . . sometimes I had to pick up five children by cab and take each of them home. . . and at times, I had to take the children by bus then transferring to the streetcar in the busy hour of the day and in the heavy snow. This took much time and made it very difficult for me to get home and prepare the meals on time. This was very stressful and I certainly had no time to talk on the telephone or watch television as Christine Adamson-Wolman implied in the article.

I realized I would have to give my notice because the situation was unbearable and I didn't even have time to eat. . . she became very angry and ordered me to leave that night. . . the worst thing that happened was that when I went back to pick up my remaining clothes in her house, my things were already packed in garbage bags and were outside the house.

Christine Adamson-Wolman is one of the employers who told the Toronto Star that the written agreement signed by foreign domestic's should be 'locked in' so they cannot legally move on to other jobs. In our reply to the article (7/11/88) INTERCEDE Co-ordinator Judith Ramirez said:

As in other occupations, high turn-over in domestic work is due to low pay and poor working conditions and not to 'lack of commitment.' Requiring foreign domestics to be 'locked in' to to their jobs on penalty of deportation would mean sanctioning a system of indentured servitude.

COCO's CALENDAR

Recent happenings. . .

- \* on July 8 INTERCEDE was part of a community delegation that met with Minister of Employment and Immigration Barbara McDougall to discuss language training for immigrant and visible minority women
- \* on July 8 Joan Ann Gravesande attended a workshop on immigration policy for refugees sponsored by the Chinese Interagency Network
- \* on July 14 Judith Ramirez was a guest on CFRB's open line radio show. . . many domestics called in and spoke out against long hours and low pay

Coming up soon. . .

- \* the big CARIBANA parade on Saturday, July 30, along University Ave.!
- \* the Service Unit will be open on Saturday, August 6, 10am - 2pm. Please call for an appointment at 591-7036 or 591-1625.
- \* INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for Sunday, August 7, 3-5pm at the Cecil Centre, 58 Cecil St. Come hear Karl Oliver speak on police protection for foreign domestics (see page 4).

AND CONGRATULATIONS !

- \* to board member Lynette Munian who recently graduated from Humber College in early childhood education, and who is now working at Swallow's Daycare Centre
- \* Happy Birthday to Emeeh Basilio and Yolanda Gracia
- \* Happy Birthday Soledad Daneel

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

On July 1, 1988 the deductions for income tax changed and you should receive more net pay. What follows is a calculation for live-in domestics who earn the minimum wage and work a maximum of 44 hours a week with no overtime.

Monthly: (12 pay periods a year)

Gross Wages*	\$ 867.53
Deductions:	
Room and Board	247.00
Income Tax	79.60
Canada Pension Plan	13.02
Unemployment Insurance	<u>20.39</u>
Net Pay:	\$ 507.52

Bi-Weekly: (26 pay periods a year)

Gross Wages*	\$ 400.40
Deductions:	
Room and Board	114.00
Income Tax	36.75
Canada Pension Plan	6.01
Unemployment Insurance	<u>9.41</u>
Net Pay:	\$ 234.23

\* Gross wages are based on a 44 hour week.

Joan Ann Gravesande

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AND Happy Anniversary to Zenia and Eurebio Aquintey!

Tune in again next month!

- Columbia Diaz

## GETTING THOROUGH TO SORBARA

Scores of domestic workers and their community supporters are responding to INTERCEDE's letter-writing campaign which calls on Minister of Labour, Gregory Sorbara to grant stronger protection against unpaid overtime. Many are using our 'open letters' (attached), but some are writing their own. Here is a letter written to Mr. Sorbara by Karen Wheeler of Toronto:

I am writing to express concern at your apparent refusal to consider a change in the Employment Standards Act to increase protection for domestic workers in regard to unpaid overtime.

As you must be aware, the temptation to exploit workers in live-in situations is great and the willingness to compensate them fairly is small. Workers are also disempowered relative to their employers in this work situation; they are dependent on the decency of their employers to an extent unknown to most of us to preserve not only their jobs but their rights to remain in Canada. Therefore, insisting that what employment rights domestic workers do have be recognized is often a matter of some risk for the individual domestic.

I urge you to consider revising the Act so as not to permit lieu time in place of paid overtime.

If you have not written to the Labour Minister yet, please use the attached letter and do so today! The push is on to get through to Mr. Sorbara on domestic worker's rights. He needs to hear from hundreds of us, so please write in and circulate our open letter to your friends. For more copies call us at 591-7036 or 1625.

## INTERCEDE CRUISE A SUCCESS!

Sunday, July 24 was the big day! Weeks of planning were over, one hundred tickets were sold, and two big tour buses full of domestic workers were headed to Midland for the long-awaited cruise of the 30,000 islands!

All the way to Midland, one bus was quiet and sleepy while the other was alive with song: domestics from various parts of the Philippines took turns singing their favorite regional songs in their native dialects. It was great fun trying to understand what the songs were saying!

In Midland, everyone came alive at the sight of the beautiful buffet lunch awaiting them at the Driftwood Restaurant. The buffet featured a large array of cold salads as well as chicken, veal cutlet, and Bavarian sausage. Many returned for seconds! The friendly proprietor chatted and posed for photographs with many from our group. To thank him for the lovely lunch and excellent service, a collection was taken by board member Cornelia Soberano.

The cruise aboard the 'Miss Midland' lasted nearly three hours; although the weather was damp and rainy, the mood was festive. Programming Committee member, Joyce Stanford, a former domestic worker from Jamaica, was outfitted in a captain's uniform complete with an official-looking hat!

Lynette Munian, INTERCEDE vice-president and member of the Programming Committee kept things running smoothly with the help of staff member Columbia Diaz. "Guiding one hundred people through a day of activities takes work and the Committee did a great job", said INTERCEDE President Catherine Gilbert.

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BOAT CRUISE Cont'd

"It was a real adventure", she added, "especially for some of the domestic workers who had never been outside Toronto before."

INTERCEDE is pleased that our first summer outing was such an unqualified success. Special thanks to staff member, Joan Ann Gravesande who works with the Programming Committee.

POLICE PROTECTION FOR DOMESTICS

On Sunday, August 7, 1988, INTERCEDE will be holding a special educational on the subject of police protection for foreign domestic workers. The session will be part of our regular monthly meeting held in the auditorium of the Cecil Community Centre.

Our featured speaker will be Karl Oliver, a twenty-three year veteran of the Toronto police force. Mr. Oliver has worked in the fields of family crisis, immigrant settlement, and youth. In the course of his distinguished career, Mr. Oliver has won the Canadian Citizenship Award for Multiculturalism, the Chief of Police

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

FIRST CLASS

award for outstanding work in multiculturalism, and a volunteer award from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

We look forward to a very informative session which will answer the question many foreign domestics have: 'What can the police do for me?' All domestics are welcome to attend on Sunday, August 7, 1988 3-5pm, at 58 Cecil Centre (1 block south of College, just east of Spadina.) See you there!

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place: Cecil Community Centre  
58 Cecil Street  
Toronto, Ontario

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

Telephone: (416) 591-1625  
591-7036

Free and confidential counselling to all domestic workers on immigration, employment, human rights and emergency social services. A free legal clinic is also held at our monthly meetings.

Call us today for an appointment!

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING AUGUST 7!

Mr. Gregory Sorbara  
Minister of Labour  
Government of Ontario  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Mr. Minister:

I am writing to you as the new Minister of Labour and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues.

The new overtime regulations are supposed to protect live-in domestic workers from unpaid overtime: they are not doing the job. I believe that lieu time is a loophole for any employer who wants to avoid paying a live-in domestic the money she is owed for working overtime.

It is next to impossible for most domestics to negotiate for time and a half rather than lieu time. They simply do not have the bargaining power to do so. Domestics are again left vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

To add insult to injury domestic workers are denied the right to unionize. How can that possibly be justified?

Today the vast majority of domestic workers are: a) women, and b) members of visible minorities from Third World countries. Under present labour laws they are relegated to an inferior position; in violation of their rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

I call on you to take immediate action to end the racism and sexism now sanctioned by Ontario law.

I strongly support the recommendations made to you by INTERCEDE (Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights) and the Ontario Federation of Labour, and urge you to:

1. Meet with INTERCEDE to negotiate changes in the overtime regulations.
2. Grant domestic workers the right to unionize under the Labour Relations Act.

Respectfully,

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

I am: a domestic worker ( ) community supporter ( ). CHECK ONE.

Place  
Stamp  
Here

Mr. Gregory Sorbara  
Minister of Labour  
Government of Ontario  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, Ontario

First Class