

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

MARCH 1986

INTERCEDE MEETS WITH FEDERAL MINISTERS

On March 10 INTERCEDE participated in a lobby effort organized by the Immigrant & Visible Minority Women's Action Committee in Ottawa. The Committee was formed last June following a national consultation initiated by the minister of multiculturalism.

In a meeting with Minister of Employment and Immigration Flora MacDonald, INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez raised the issue of abuse of foreign domestics' rights. She stressed the fact that there is no monitoring of the employer's compliance with the terms of the contracts they sign in order to employ foreign domestic workers. As a result, she said, "employers are getting away with murder".

Ramirez cited a recent example of a domestic whose employer refused to give her time off to go to school, and who, as a result, did not qualify for landed status. The contracts, signed through the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, stipulate that an employer must provide three hours off per week and \$20 per month toward upgrading courses. But, because there is no monitoring or enforcement, employers feel they can ignore this and other important provisions in the contract.

Ms. Ramirez asked the Minister to at least issue instructions to the local Canada Immigration Centres to notify employers in writing of their obligation to provide time off and financial assistance at the time the domestic undergoes her 'first assessment'. Ms. MacDonald replied that

this suggestion 'sounded reasonable' and she asked the officials present to 'follow it up'.

In another meeting, with Minister of State for Immigration Walter McLean, the matter of domestic workers' rights was raised again. Ms. Ramirez expressed concern about the arbitrary introduction of 'release letters' from employers, by at least one CIC in Toronto. What this means is that a foreign domestic is not permitted to change jobs unless her employer signs a letter saying that (s)he agrees to it! This is a serious infraction of the domestics' right to leave an employer who may be exploiting her.

Mr. McLean asked his policy advisor Dennison Moore to look into the situation and INTERCEDE was assured that 'something will be done'.

Ms. Ramirez also requested detailed statistics on the Foreign Domestic Program for the year 1985, and the Minister asked his policy advisor to make the information available immediately. INTERCEDE has been monitoring the Program since it was first introduced in November of 1981.

Other members of the Immigrant & Visible Minority Action Committee spoke out on issues ranging from the inadequacy of language and skills training programs to the need for public appointments of immigrant and visible minority women. The group will continue its lobby efforts until this coming June when Multiculturalism Minister Otto Jelinek reconvenes the group of immigrant and visible minority women who met last year.

COCO'S CALENDAR

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Recent happenings...

- * on February 25 members of INTERCEDE joined the Filipino community at a rally to celebrate the victory of President Cory Aquino
- * on March 7 INTERCEDE attended a 'Pay Equity Breakfast' at the Royal York Hotel sponsored by the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues
- * on the occasion of International Women's Day, INTERCEDE attended a reception at the Columbus Centre hosted by Walter McLean, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
- * on March 10 Judith Ramirez participated in a lobby effort in Ottawa organized by the Immigrant & Visible Minority Women's Action Committee

Coming up soon...

- * INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 3-5PM at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street. For more information call us at (416) 977-3467

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * a very happy birthday to ELISABETH ALCANTARA, BETH INEZ, and FELY GALLEN...many happy returns!
- * a warm 'welcome back' to LEE KIM TJOE who is back in Toronto after returning home to Indonesia for several months
- * and congratulations to our new landed immigrants CRESENCIA CANTOR, PATRIA JUBILO and NELIA ALZATE, from the Philippines...good luck from all of us!

That's all for now!

- Columbia Diaz

As we announced in last month's newsletter, the federal government is now charging 'processing fees' for immigration documents. If you are a foreign domestic worker you will now be required to pay:

- \$50 for a new work permit
- \$125 for an application for landing (your own and anyone you sponsor)
- \$25 for a request to verify or amend your landing record

Please note that there is no charge for an authorization to study in Canada. If you are enrolling in an upgrading course of any kind, you will not be required to pay a fee for the 'student permit'.

When you go in to your local Canada Immigration Centre to get a new work permit or file your application for landing, take cash or a certified cheque with you. You will be asked to pay on the spot - no credit is available and no personal (uncertified) cheques will be accepted.

For further information contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT 977-3467

DUE TO POPULAR DEMAND INTERCEDE IS RUNNING A SECOND INCOME TAX CLINIC ON SUNDAY, APRIL 6, 3 - 5 PM, AT THE CECIL COMMUNITY CENTRE. THE CLINIC IS FREE OF CHARGE TO ALL DOMESTIC WORKERS. PLEASE REMEBER TO BRING YOUR T-4 SLIP OR WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ASSIST YOU !!

Down with the new immigration fees!

NEW IMMIGRATION FEES UNDER FIRE

The new 'processing fees' announced last month by Minister of State for Immigration Walter McLean have come under fire from the Canadian Helsinki Watch Group, a group of constitutional and human rights experts.

On March 15, 1986, the Globe & Mail reported that the Watch Group, which monitors observance of human rights accords, has asked Walter McLean to remove the \$125 visa application fee for those sponsoring immigrants coming to Canada to join family members.

The Watch Group has written to Mr. McLean urging him to rescind the fee before an international conference on the Helsinki Accord is held next month in Berne, Switzerland.

The accord provides that participating countries 'will lower where necessary' the fees charged to applicants wishing to be re-united with family members to ensure they are at a 'moderate level'. According to Winnipeg lawyer David Matas, co-chairman of the Watch Group, the \$125 fee is neither 'moderate' nor is it 'a lowering of the fees'.

As the fees currently stand, any foreign domestic worker who is granted landed status in Canada and wishes to sponsor her children or spouse would have to pay the \$125 processing fee for each family member, regardless of whether they are accepted or not!

INTERCEDE is completely opposed to the imposition of these new fees, especially where foreign domestic workers are concerned. They are an additional financial burden on women who can ill afford to pay. We have written to Flora MacDonald, Minister of Employment and Immigration, and Walter McLean, Minister of State for Immigration urging the immediate removal of the fees.

ANOTHER STRONG YEAR FOR SERVICE UNIT

The INTERCEDE Service Unit has just ended its second full year of operation, and the news is very good! From March 1985 to February 1986, the Unit handled a total of 1,698 calls - an increase of 42% over last year!

As well, the total number of 'new people' served stood at 926 - an increase of 20%. A total of 843 domestic workers were served, which represents an increase of 13% over last year.

Staff also handled 100 in-depth cases of foreign domestic workers seeking landing in Canada. Of these, 49% were accepted, 47% are still pending, and 4% were referred or withdrew. Not a single case handled by the Service Unit was rejected for landing!

In addition, staff also handled 39 cases of foreign domestics who came to us after they were initially rejected for landing. Of these, 36% were accepted for landing following our appeals on their behalf. Another 33% are still awaiting decisions by Immigration; 26% were referred to lawyers or withdrew; and only 5% were rejected a second time.

The Service Unit opened its doors in March, 1984, with two full-time counsellors. It is the only community-based service in Canada designed especially to meet the needs of foreign domestic workers. Staff work very closely with the community and officials of the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance under the Foreign Domestics Program.

The Service Unit has been funded through 'special grants' authorized by the minister of immigration because services to 'non-landed' workers were not eligible under the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program. Recently, however, the funding criteria have

SERVICE UNIT...con't

been changed to allow for the inclusion of services to foreign domestic workers. This is a tremendous step forward and one which INTERCEDE has been lobbying for since 1983.

Because of the changes in ISAP funding criteria, the Service Unit will become a regular ISAP project as of April 1, 1986. As such it will be eligible for re-newed funding from year to year.

INTERCEDE wishes to thank all its friends and allies in the community who supported the work of the Service Unit and helped convince government that it is a necessary and worthwhile endeavor. We look forward to another strong year in 1986-1987 !

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT
c/o Cecil Community Centre
58 Cecil Street
Toronto

(one block south of College, just east of Spadina)


HOURS: Monday - Friday 9AM - 4PM
First Saturday of the month:
11AM - 2PM

All services are confidential and completely free of charge!

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING ON APRIL 6 !!

DOMESTICS CROSS CULTURAL NEWS
c/o INTERCEDE
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5T1N6

First Class



INTERCEDE INCORPORATES

INTERCEDE has a new governing body. Members of the 'old' Executive Committee and other senior members of the Steering Committee have formed a corporation to carry out the following objectives:

1. conduct research on domestic workers' rights and work with all levels of government for changes in policy and legislation
2. foster public awareness of domestic workers' rights
3. provide counselling to domestic workers on immigration, employment, human rights and social services
4. publish educational materials and conduct educational workshops
5. organize social and cultural events
6. network with other organizations with similar objectives

The new Board of Directors is made up of the 'old' Executive Committee members:

Eulene Boyce, President
Columbia Diaz, Vice-president
Lynette Munian, Treasurer
Cathy Gilbert, Secretary

as well as senior members of the organization Barbara Jackman, well-known immigration lawyer; Judith Ramirez, a founder of INTERCEDE; and Debra Boyce, long-time member of the group.

The composition of the new Board of Directors reflects the long tradition at INTERCEDE of including a majority of domestic and ex-domestic workers on the governing body.

