

# Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

MARCH 1988

## CONFERENCE ON WOMEN AND POWER

On March 13-15, 1988 INTERCEDE attended a 'Symposium on Women and Power' sponsored by the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Held in Ottawa, the event included organizations from all across Canada such as the YWCA, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), Canadian Labour Congress (Women's Bureau), and the Canadian Federation of University Women.

Council President Sylvia Gold opened the conference by urging the women present to look critically at questions such as 'Women's Economic Power', and 'Can Women Change Politics?'

Much of the conference centred on women in the political system at all levels of government. Barbara McDougall, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, said that as more women enter politics they will move from merely having some influence to actually having decision-making power in government.

Judith Ramirez, INTERCEDE Co-ordinator, led a workshop on 'Women's Power from Outside'. She spoke about how even the most powerless groups in society can bring about social change if they organize their power. She cited the struggle of foreign domestic workers in 1980-81 for landed status which resulted in a new immigration policy, and the present fight of domestics in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec for better labour laws.

Following the workshops everyone at-

tended a plenary session with a Round Table which included Monique Begin, former Cabinet Minister in the Trudeau Government; Barbara McDougall, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues; Alexa McDonough, leader of the New Democratic Party in Nova Scotia; and Judith Ramirez of INTERCEDE.

Ramirez appealed to the leaders of the mainstream women's movement to recognize the fact that three million immigrant and visible minority women live in Canada and are denied many rights, such as subsidized language training.

Yolene Jumelle, of the Congress of Black Women of Canada, pointed out from the floor that there were no visible minority women among the speakers, although a number of groups such as the Congress, the Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Quebec and the National Organization of Immigrant & Visible Minority Women were present at the conference.

Ramirez proposed that at future conferences the Advisory Council ensure the equal participation of immigrant and visible minority women, and the plenary responded with applause.

The symposium ended with a keynote address by Doris Anderson, well-known writer and activist. She said that women's fight for equality entails a social transformation comparable to the industrial revolution. She urged women to pass on their experience in building power so the next generation of women will not have to 're-invent the wheel'. Her fondest hope, she said, was that her granddaughter would someday come to Ottawa not to talk about power but to exercise it.

## COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- \* on March 8 INTERCEDE had a booth at the Ontario Women's Directorate's Open House
- \* on March 5 Judith Ramirez spoke at a conference on racism and immigration policy sponsored by the Law Union of Ontario at Queen's
- \* on March 23 INTERCEDE attended the Urban Alliance on Race Relation's Award Dinner to honor Bromley Armstrong & Lilian Ma
- \* on March 25 we met with the Women's Directorate to discuss the overtime Charter challenge

Coming up soon...

- \* the Service Unit will be open on Saturday, April 9, 10am-2pm. Please call 591-7036 for an app't !
- \* INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for Sunday, April 10, 3pm. For information please call 591-1625!

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- \* to our new landed immigrants ELOISA GONGAZA, from the Philippines, and CATHERINE HOPPER from England
- \* Happy Birthday to MARIA REYES & ELOISA GONGAZA...many happy returns
- \* best wishes to our President CATHY GILBERT and MARVIN MOSES who just completed their bar exams
- \* special congratulations to board member JACKIE HAREWOOD who is landed and looking for secretarial work
- \* our sympathies to ENCARNACION AMARADO on her recent loss

Tune in again next month!

- Columbia Diaz

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

If you are a foreign domestic worker seeking landing in Canada, Immigration will interview you at the end of your first year and then again, at the end of your second year. If you qualify under the "assessment criteria" you should be landed by the end of your third year in Canada.

The criteria include such things as employment history in Canada, language & skills upgrading, financial management, and integration into the community.

Here are some tips on how to deal with employment problems so you do not end up with a negative job history:

- \* Living in with your employer can lead to problems like long hours, lack of time off, etc. Before the situation gets out of hand, discuss your concerns with your employer.
- \* To protect yourself, keep a record of your hours of work, wages paid, and any attempts to discuss problems with your employer.
- \* If, in spite of your efforts, the situation does not improve, report it to Immigration and ask that it be noted in your file.
- \* Whenever you contact Immigration always write down the name of the officer you speak to. You will need it for future reference!
- \* If you are fired, report it to Immigration immediately and advise them of the reason(s) from your point of view.
- \* If you are fired contact INTERCEDE immediately so we can help you if permission to seek a new job is denied by Immigration.
- \* Before quitting your job always contact INTERCEDE for advice and assistance in reporting it to Immigration.

- Joan Ann Gravesande

## PLIGHT OF A SRI LANKAN DOMESTIC

In 1986 Sally Beebee left her native Sri Lanka to work as a domestic for a professional couple in Saudi Arabia. She left behind her husband and two children.

It soon became obvious that her employers had no intention of paying her directly. Instead, from time to time they showed her copies of cheques they claimed had been sent to her husband! She worked eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, but she was willing to make the sacrifice to help her family back home.

In December of 1986, Ms. Beebee was brought to Canada by her employers on their work permit. Her situation did not change. She still worked punishing hours and her pay was still sent to her husband. Her employers became more demanding and controlling - they never allowed her to leave their home without one of them. A pattern of physical abuse which had begun in Saudi Arabia continued here in Canada.

Several weeks ago, Ms. Beebee's employer asked her to bring a pair of earrings to her. When she was unable to locate them, her employer assaulted her physically. Ms. Beebee ran out into the street crying and stopped a man who took her to the police station. She was then taken to an emergency shelter for women.

Shortly after, the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre became aware of her plight and referred her to INTERCEDE's Service Unit. We arranged for the police to accompany her to her employer's home to pick up her belongings.

As her counsellor, I am also assisting her to make a claim with the Employment Standards Branch for back wages. The cheques sent to her husband in Sri Lanka covered only a fraction of what she earned in the past fifteen months. In the meantime,

Immigration has authorized Ms. Beebee to look for a new job. She continues to live in the emergency shelter as she slowly puts her life back together.

- Joan Ann Gravesande

## DIALOGUE WITH DIPLOMATS

INTERCEDE has recently initiated contact with a number of foreign consulates in Toronto to discuss domestic workers' rights. The effort is aimed at diplomats whose countries send women to Canada under the Foreign Domestic Program.

The first meeting was held this month at the Barbadian Consulate on Queen Street West. Consul General Lolita Applewhait and Vice-Consul Patrick Gollop met with INTERCEDE's delegation which included Co-ordinator Judith Ramirez, Counsellor Joan Ann Gravesande and Board Member Jackie Harewood.

The hour-long discussion centred on how to make Barbadian domestics aware of their rights in Canada, and how to determine if those who wish to apply for entry back home are given a fair chance by Immigration officials.

Ms. Applewhait expressed the Consulate's desire to work more closely with INTERCEDE through information-sharing and mutual referral of clients.

## CONDITIONS CRITICAL!

Acclaimed dub-poet Lillian Allen has just launched her second solo album, 'Conditions Critical', to enthusiastic response.

INTERCEDE attended the record launch this month at the Silver Dollar to celebrate Lillian's continued success. She played to a packed house of over five hundred people! Backed up by a

Conditions Critical...con't

full band, Lillian's powerful voice filled the room with new verse. In 'Why do we have to fight?' she says:

No change without struggle  
No one in power ain't giving up  
nothing  
You born, you live & then you die  
in between you dodge the dubious  
lie...

A woman's work is not recognized  
if she be black make it doubly-  
dized

without a man she's in nothings  
land  
Why do we have to fight for a pla-  
ce to live?

This is the society our toil has  
built

Lillian Allen is well known to INTER-  
CEDE's members and friends. She served on our Board of Directors until last fall, and we proudly salute her new album. For your copy of 'Conditions Critical' write to:

Verse to Vynl  
P.O. Box 311, Station E  
Toronto, Ontario M6H 4E3

NEW INTERCEDE BUTTON!

To celebrate International Women's Day, INTERCEDE launched a beautiful red button you can show off on your lapel! In bold white letters, the button reads 'DOMESTIC WORKERS, PROUD & STRONG!' Buy your button for only \$1.00 and get one for a friend! Available at the INTERCEDE office and at the monthly meetings!

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place: Cecil Community Centre  
58 Cecil Street  
Toronto, Ontario

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

Telephone: (416) 591-1625  
591-7036

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

A free and confidential legal clinic is also held at our monthly meetings.

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c/o INTERCEDE  
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First Class

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING ON APRIL 10!