

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

March 1990

(INTERCEDE)

WOMEN MUST ORGANIZE TO MAKE CHANGES

Like domestic workers, non-union workers in factories have legal rights that they have been able to organize and fight for, but those rights are often ignored or violated by employers.

Women working in factories experience abuses such as forced or unpaid overtime, racial and sexual harassment, unhealthy and unsafe working conditions, etc. When they complain, they are told to leave, so they are usually afraid to air their grievances. When they get sick, they are fired and replaced.

Their employers, who are usually male and white, display the attitude that "you're lucky to be in this country, and if you don't like it, you can go back to where you come from!" For example, a factory owner sponsored through his church, immigrant women who were subjected to the most deplorable conditions. He thought they should just be grateful for having a chance to come to this country, and fought the women fiercely when they made efforts to unionize.

Compared to the situation of domestic workers, however, factory workers have some relief in the sense that they work side by side, they eat and travel together, they can share their anger against employers with each other, and at the end of the day, they can go to their own home and family.

For the foreign domestic worker, there is no escape from the workplace, no escape from the daily power of the employer. I cannot imagine the sense of powerlessness that women as foreign domestic workers must feel. The isolation, the loneliness,

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INTERCEDE MEMBERS CAMPAIGN FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

In their meeting of February 4, 1990, INTERCEDE members launched a campaign to pressure the federal government to adopt their recommendations to grant equal rights to domestic workers.

In a petition addressed to Minister Barbara McDougall of Immigration, they declared that the FDM "special program" to meet the high demand for child care and domestic labour discriminates against them by setting unfair and difficult conditions that do not apply to any other group of women, immigrants or workers in Canada.

"We are adults who, during the two to three years before we acquire landed status, do not have the right to choose our home; rather we are required to "live-in" our employer's home. There are many problems that result from this absence of choice, the worst of which is excessively long working hours. We have no right to freely change employers; rather we have to be "released" by our current employer before we are allowed to look for another one. We are required to go to school, do volunteer work, and save thousands of dollars on our limited time and income, to prove our fitness to become immigrants. These are among the most discriminatory aspects of the current FDM program," their petition states.

Suggestions were adopted to seek the support of women's organizations, unions and other groups to back their demand to enter Canada as landed immigrants and stop the practice of indentured domestic service.

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SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 1990

International Women's Day March Assembly at 10 am, Convocation Hall, University of Toronto (take the College Streetcar to the corner of St. George and College. Look for Intercede's banner in the UofT Campus, inside or near the Convocation Hall)

The march will go to Ryerson Institute, Jorgensen Hall (on Gerrard near Yonge). A member of Intercede will speak in the "Speaker's Corner".

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 1990

INTERCEDE's monthly meeting 3 to 5 p.m at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil St.

We will discuss updates on our recommendations and CLASP will discuss some of their own recommendations for the FDM. A guest speaker will talk about what's new with OHIP. CLASP legal clinic will be open and there will be INTERCEDE Counselling.

The Press may be present and a TV crew will be filming some parts of this meeting.

Women Must Organize (cont'd)

the separation from family and friends in a new country, and even the lack of food that some of you have complained about, must be overwhelming. The demands of your employers are enormous and never-ending. I can almost hear your white woman employer say: "Oh, Dear, if you won't mind staying and looking in on the kids this evening while we go out? I'm sure you won't mind since you have nothing else to do and no friends here." But you do mind because it is your time off.

Your responsibility is greater than a factory worker who only has to watch over a machine, you have to watch over children.

It's not just the employer who has power over you. Government immigration officials have the power to deny you landed status and send you back.

But all workers, including domestic workers, can and must organize for change. There is a saying among women of South Africa that "when you have struck a woman, you have struck a rock."

When women get angry, they get organized. In the workplace, male employers underestimate our organizing skills and our capacity to seize and exercise power. In my experience, once women have overcome their fear and start organizing, there is nothing to stop them. For us, the sense of comradeship, of sisterhood is extremely powerful.

The fact that you are here, that INTERCEDE exists, that there are some laws that protect you, are testimony to your anger, your dignity and the justice of your demands and your organizing skills. I know that there are hundreds who are trapped, who do not even know INTERCEDE - just like thousands of unorganized workers in factories who do not know what their rights are. The job of organizing and reaching out to people never ends.

You should remember that you, women working

collectively, have achieved in ten years changes in the laws that took unions in this country forty years to bring about. Our unions have much to learn from you, we have much to learn from each other and we must give each other support.

Let us march side by side on International Women's Day and have our voices heard.

(excerpts from the talk given by Jane Armstrong of the Canadian Auto Workers Union at INTERCEDE's Feb. 4, 1990 meeting.)

FUTURE MEETING TOPICS

INTERCEDE members will be tackling issues and subjects that will give them information and increase their understanding about:

- * Changes, if any, in the landing criteria
- * Labour protection under Ontario laws
- * Meaning of Pay Equity
- * How to fight racism
- * Health issues affecting visible minority women
- * Tenant's rights
- * Non-traditional careers for women
- * Women's issues today
- * Multiculturalism in social services

Meetings will also be scheduled just specifically for newly-arrived domestic workers who want a general orientation to the FDM program and life in their new country.

The next several meetings will also include updates on the FDM program currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Immigration. Meetings are generally held every first Sunday of the month except when the Sunday falls on a long holiday weekend. The Community and Legal Aid Services Program (CLASP) of Osgoode Law School holds a legal clinic during each meeting and INTERCEDE counselling is usually available.

If members are interested in other topics for this year, please write your suggestions.

We wish to thank Employment & Immigration Canada (Immigrant Settlement & Adaptation Program); Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Women's Program); Ont. Ministry of Citizenship; Ont. Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metro Toronto (Community and Social Services); and the City of Toronto for their financial support.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

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INTERCEDE, 489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ontario M6G 1A5

Please send DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS to:

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Intercede Members:	FREE	Non-member Domestic	\$ 5.00
Non-Profit Organizations	FREE	Others	\$10.00

Equal Rights Campaign (cont'd)

Brenda Wall, Director of the Education and Skills Training Centre of Metro Labour Council and current Board member of INTERCEDE, assured members that unions would see the justice of their cause and support their demands.

Petitions, individual letters and organization's endorsements have been sent to Minister McDougall in support of INTERCEDE's recommendations to change the FDM. Betty Lee, president of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, reiterated that "if foreign domestic workers are good enough to work in our homes and take care of our children, they are good enough to have equal rights", echoing the slogan of domestic workers in a similar campaign for landed status in 1981: "good enough to work, good enough to stay."

"It is long past time that the Canadian Government recognized the value of the work performed by domestics," according to the Saskatchewan Action Committee, Status of Women. "Domestic workers are accorded a status much lower than that of any other type of immigrant worker...they deserve rights equal to all other immigrant workers", states Mary Louise Adams. Lydia Elizalde, a domestic worker, wrote: "the FDM program is too employer-oriented and does not take into account the sentiments of foreign domestic workers...the difficult requirements give mental and emotional stress...and lead to frustrations and regrets ...these demands curtail their human and working rights."

Laura Chapman, Acting Director of Migration and Demographic Policy of the Ministry of Immigration, together with Barbara Stewart of the Immigration Policy Section, Vasanthi Srinivasan of the Status of Women and Richard Weatherston, legal adviser, met with INTERCEDE representatives, Sedef Arat-Koc, member of the Board and Fely Villasin, Coordinator, to assure that Immigration is not considering going back to the pre-1981 policy when foreign domestic workers had no option to obtain landed status. Ms. Chapman also assured that Immigration is eager to complete the review of the FDM as soon as possible although no definite date was given. Ms. Chapman's group was in Toronto to meet with organizations concerned with the situation of domestic workers.

ORIENTATION FOR NEWLY-ARRIVED DOMESTIC WORKERS

Sunday, May 13, 1990, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Site to be announced

COCO's CALENDAR

Thank you...

- * to Carolyn Egan, member of the executive of Women Working With Immigrant Women, who came to speak at our monthly meeting about the significance of International Women's Day and the fight of women against racism and police violence, against the general sales tax and against attempts to limit their right of choice.
- * to Jean Franklin Hancher, for the yummy chocolates. Jean was placed with INTERCEDE from Osgoode Law School for two weeks.
- * to Nora Richardson of ASAP Wordpro Services Inc. for many volunteer services and for trying to attract former social workers to do volunteer counselling with INTERCEDE.

Welcome...

to Karen Serwonka, who is coordinating the March 16 training workshop and reaching out to settlement workers in far-flung points of Ontario.

Complaints department...

We have been receiving complaints about unscrupulous elements who defraud domestic workers and employment agencies that engage in irregular practices. We would like to warn our members against them. Please write us about any unpleasant experience you have had with these elements.

HOW TO CALCULATE YOUR PAY FROM JANUARY 1, 1990

	Monthly (12/year)	Bi-weekly (26/year)	Weekly (52/year)
Gross Wages	\$953.34	\$440.00	\$220.00
Deductions			
Room & Board	\$273.00	\$126.00	\$ 63.00
Income Tax	\$107.60	\$ 49.55	\$ 24.90
CPP	\$ 15.84	\$ 7.31	\$ 3.66
UIC	\$ 21.45	\$ 9.90	\$ 4.95
Net Pay	\$535.45	\$247.24	\$123.49

Note: Gross wages are based on a 44-hr. work week with no overtime. *Board is calculated at the rate of \$1.90/meal or no more than \$39.90/week. Meals not eaten at your employer's home should not be deducted from your pay. Room is calculated at the rate of \$23.10 for a private room and \$11.55 for a shared room. **Income tax deductions are based on Code 1 exemption only. If you have dependents, your tax deduction should be lower.

HELP FOR FILING TAX RETURNS

Before the end of February, your employer should give you a completed T-4 slip which should have the following information: your total gross wages for 1989, the total deductions made for Income Tax, CPP and UIC and deductions for room and board. Once you have your T-4 slip, you can file your income tax return.

But if your employer does not supply you a T-4 slip, you should go ahead and file your income tax return based on the wages you have received and the deductions your employer has made, taking care to explain that your employer did not provide your T-4 slip. It is up to Revenue Canada to deal with your employer.

If you have had more than one employer in 1989, these other employers should also give you a completed T-4 for the period you worked with them.

You can claim exemption for dependents that you are supporting. If you are supporting dependents in your country of origin, you should fill an additional form, T1E-NR; attach receipts for the money sent such as money orders, bank drafts, etc. You cannot claim exemption for parents you are supporting who are living outside of Canada.

Deadline for filing of income tax return is April 30.

For free assistance in filing your income tax returns, you may go to a tax clinic nearest you.

Call the Ontario Institute of Chartered Accountants, telephone 962-1841, ask to be connected to "tax clinics" then explain that you would want to go to the nearest tax clinic for free assistance with your income tax return.

If there is a public library near you, you can inquire if they have any scheduled tax clinics.

INTERCEDE TO HOLD WORKSHOP

On March 16, INTERCEDE will hold a one-day workshop for settlement workers of ISAP-funded agencies located in the province of Ontario but outside Metro Toronto area, who are interested to learn about, or are already, counselling domestic workers.

The day will begin with an overview of the History of Domestic Workers in Canada and a Review of the Foreign Domestic Movement program. In the afternoon, Ontario Labour Protection for Domestic Workers will be discussed. The final segment of the workshop will provide the participants with an opportunity to use the information gained from the previous sessions. They will discuss situations and problems typically encountered by domestic workers and share experiences in dealing with these situations.

This workshop will provide INTERCEDE with the opportunity of learning from other settlement workers and sharing its own experiences and work with domestic workers.

THE KABABAYAN COMMUNITY CENTRE IS OFFERING THE FOLLOWING:

PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION WITH
a representative from Revenue Canada
Sunday, February 25, 1990

2:30 p.m. at Masaryk Hall, Cowan corner Queen

FREE ASSISTANCE IN FILING TAX RETURNS ON:

Thursday, March 15, 1990 from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

at Kababayan Community Centre
1444 Queen St. West

Sunday, March 18, 1990 from 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
at Masaryk Hall (Cowan corner Queen)

Thursday, April 5, 1990 from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

at Kababayan Community Centre
1444 Queen St. West

Call for an appointment, telephone 332-3888

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

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