

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

March 1992



NEW ADMISSION CRITERIA TO DOMESTIC PROGRAM SHUTS OUT MOST WOMEN OF COLOUR

The Honourable Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Employment and Immigration, officially confirmed that the Foreign Domestic Movement program (FDM) is not dead. But he announced changes on January 30 that would require applicants to have "the equivalent of a Grade 12 education", to complete "six months full-time training in a field or occupation related to live-in care" and "speak either English or French".

In INTERCEDE's February 2 meeting, workers said that these new requirements will have the effect of excluding women from the Caribbean, the Philippines and other countries of the Third World who currently make up the majority of applicants to the FDM.

The FDM will continue to allow foreign domestic workers to apply for permanent residence after two years of temporary status as live-in domestics. But the women were angered by the stricter eligibility criteria.

They found it ironic that on one hand, foreign domestic workers will continue to be given the opportunity to apply for landed status, but at the same time the criteria to enter the FDM would exclude women of colour like them.

Toni Schweitzer of Hoppe, Jackman Law Offices commented that the new policy will facilitate entry of nannies from Europe, in particular Great Britain, because they have access to the education and training required. Schweitzer added that the education and training criteria is being proposed as a law, not just an Immigration guideline.

"In effect, black women and women of colour are being shut out of the program," said Joan Grant-Cummings, Board member of INTERCEDE, "because women from

the Caribbean, the Philippines and other countries who want to enter Canada as domestic workers don't ordinarily have access to the education and training specified as new criteria to enter the FDM."

In their second march on Tory headquarters on Richmond Street within a month, about 250 domestic workers and their friends protested the racist implications of the new FDM requirements and called for their withdrawal. They again called for an end to discrimination against foreign domestic workers by allowing them entry to Canada as permanent residents.

"We know that those of us who are already here in Canada in the FDM program will not be affected by the new entry rules. But how about the women who are still coming in? We are marching for them, protesting this racist policy against them!" said one of the marchers.

INTERCEDE president, Pura Velasco, stated that "to expect a highly educated domestic worker to do a low status job that gets low pay and hardly much protection is reprehensible." She added that if the government wants to meet the demand for domestic labour, the qualifications required should be appropriate, that labour should be given value and the women who want to perform that labour should be able to enter Canada as immigrants.

"I don't think I ever needed a Grade 12 education, any training, nor fluency in English or French "to wash the walls and clean the toilet", declared a domestic worker from the Caribbean who just received an open employment authorization after two years in the FDM.

Our next monthly meeting will be on Sunday, March 1, 1992 from 3 - 5 pm at Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.

We will discuss proposed changes to the Ontario Labour Relations Act and continue discussion about the new eligibility criteria in the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program.

2-3 pm - processing of membership applications and renewals for 1992.

All members with ID numbers 1138 to 1313 who don't renew and get new ID numbers will be dropped from the list of members.

CLASP Legal Clinic will be available.

An open permit means she can now legally work outside live-in domestic work while waiting for approval of her permanent residence status, an approval that now takes more than two years for some.

The Immigration Minister justifies the new criteria as ensuring "that those entering the Canadian labour market are equipped to function in a competitive environment." Valcourt further announced that improved counselling and information tools will be available to assure that domestic workers and their employers are aware of their rights and obligations under the FDM and that he will "examine" the level of protection domestic workers have in provincial labour and employment standards.

In a meeting on February 1 called by Glenda Simms, President of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, representatives of domestic workers' organizations from across Canada including INTERCEDE, opposed the new criteria as discriminatory against black women and women of colour.

Meanwhile, INTERCEDE has been among those invited to appear before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration on February 26 to give our position on the proposed FDM criteria.

FDM changes opposed as racist, discriminatory

Government, labour, women's, community and other organizations have addressed letters to Valcourt opposing the proposed changes to the FDM.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission, through its vice-chairperson Fran Endicott, has warned that the new policy violates Canadian human rights principles and urged Immigration to review the program and make it "fair, equitable and accessible" to all.

"We must be very careful that Canada does not institute an immigration policy that is discriminatory,

some would even say racist", said Endicott, pointing to " 'dark periods' in Canadian immigration history, such as the early 20th century when a head tax was imposed on Chinese families who wished to immigrate to Canada."

Margaret Mitchell, Member of Parliament, Vancouver East, raised her concerns to Hon. Gerry Wiener urging him to "address the racist nature of these new regulations to the FDM program with Minister Valcourt and within the Government."

The Canadian Labour Congress' Executive Vice President Nancy Riche said that if the government truly wants to improve protection of domestic workers, it should "forcefully demand that domestic workers have the protection of current provincial labour and employment standards including the right to organize" and ensure their "unfettered right to leave abusive employment situations without fear of deportation."

Bob White, President of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) urged Minister Valcourt to withdraw the new rules saying:

"Is it not ironic that Canada has the most lax rules when it comes to business immigrants, but the toughest when it comes to domestics? What hypocrisy!

"Is it not outrageous that many employers have had to remove unjustifiable Grade 12 entry requirements under Canadian Human Rights laws and employment

We wish to thank the Employment and Immigration Canada (Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program); Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Women's Program); Ontario Ministry of Citizenship; Ontario Women's Directorate; the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto (Community and Social Services); and the City of Toronto Grants Review Board for their continuing support.

TO ALL SUBSCRIBERS

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IF NO RENEWAL SUBSCRIPTION BY END OF MARCH, WE'LL REMOVE YOUR NAME FROM OUR MAILING LIST.

RENEWAL SUBSCRIPTION : (only until December 1992)
 NEW SUBSCRIPTION : CHANGE OF ADDRESS :

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

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equity initiatives, yet your government now suggests that a Grade 12 is necessary to clean the toilet bowls and feed the children of those who can afford to employ domestic labour? What nonsense!

"How can you proclaim that Canada is a tolerant society when our own government practises such overt racism?"

In a prepared statement, the Toronto chapter of the Congress of Black Women of Canada expressed outrage at the proposed admission rules and viewed them "as yet another form of systemic and institutional racism and sexism perpetrated against black women and women of colour."

The statement further states: "Any Canadian citizen is seen to be capable of babysitting or housekeeping, regardless of education, training or language capability" and "it is systematic discrimination when credentials are requested for a job to which the credentials are not relevant to the tasks and responsibilities that the job entails."

"Grade 12 education and six months of formal training are not relevant to the everyday tasks of domestic workers."

The Workers Information and Action Centre (WIACT) has submitted a resolution to the Toronto City Mayor's Committee on Race Relations and the City Status of Women Committee seeking support to reverse the new FDM policy.

Ratna Omidvar of Skills for Change, a community agency "seeking to empower immigrants to participate more effectively in the workplace and Canadian society", denounced the new restrictions in the FDM as "elitist, sexist and racist" and the French/English admission criteria as showing a "complete lack of understanding of our multi-cultural and multi-lingual society."

The maintenance of mandatory live-in status as a "system of indentured service during which women workers are vulnerable to abuses" was criticized by Deirdre Donnelly, director of an employment agency, Pick A Nanny.

"The new requirements violate much of what I cherish and stand for as a Canadian," objected John Howe of Toronto. "Canada is effectively penalizing those applicants who were born in countries where the required educational infrastructure is inaccessible or non-existent," he said.

From the Philippines, migrant workers organizations also wrote to Immigration: Center for Overseas Workers, Council of Organized Social Service Agencies in Mindanao, Paglilingkod Batas Pangkapatiran Foundation Inc..

Kanlungan Centre Foundation expressed deep con-

cern over the prolonged temporary status and the strict guidelines that commit domestic workers to a "bonded" situation, exposes them to abuse, exploitation and racist treatment and "forces them to accept this condition for fear of jeopardizing their legitimate stay in Canada".

The following organizations sent copies of their protest letters to INTERCEDE: Collectif des femmes immigrantes du Quebec, Immigrant Women's Health Centre, Equal Opportunity Toronto Board of Education, Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, Jesuit Centre, Cross Cultural Communication Centre, Sexual Assault Support Centre of Ottawa, Metro Action Committee on Public Violence against Women and Children, Ann Rowan, Executive Committee Member of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, Wendy Hunt of Penetanguishene, Sudbury Multicultural Folk Arts Association, and more.

ANNOUNCING INTERCEDE'S VIDEO DROP-IN SERIES

Film : "MAIDS AND MADAMS"

Saturday, March 7, 1992

1-3 pm

George Brown College

Room 585C

200 King Street East (King Subway)

Refreshments provided. To register, call Carol 324-8751

AN APPEAL FOR SUPPORT

Domestic workers are among the lowest paid and have the least regulated jobs among women workers in Canada.

We come here to seek jobs and better opportunities because of poverty, unemployment, economic and political problems in our homeland.

For us, Canada is a haven. It promises a brighter future for us and our families.

We come under the Foreign Domestic Movement (FDM) program. While this program gives us the opportunity to become permanent residents in Canada, it is still discriminatory for thousands of women across Canada who are accepted under conditions of bonded labour. We are exposed to abuses and threats from our employers. We work like indentured servants, endure loneliness, long working hours, low wages, culture shock because we want to be part of this country.

We know we are here because we are needed. We fill the need of women who go out to work and cannot care for their children, or their elderly, or their homes.

Yesterday I learned that the FDM will be changed, that to be a domestic worker in Canada, she must have a Grade 12 education, six months of full-time training and that there will be a 12-week moratorium on the FDM.

APPEAL FOR DONATIONS *We would appreciate donations from friends, supporters.*

What the government is up to I don't know. But we are asking you women to support our struggle to be equal with you and with other workers in Canada. Tomorrow, February 2, we are going to march again for an improved FDM. We need your support.

By : Sherry Lacson, a volunteer facilitator of INTERCEDE who made this appeal to Women Working for A Healthy Planet at the Algonquin Island on February 1. We would like you, reader, who have not yet written Minister Valcourt, to do so today and give your opinion about his proposed changes to the FDM.

REGISTER FOR

INTERCEDE ANTI-RACISM WORK-SHOPS

Sunday, March 15, 1992

1-5 pm

Centre for Christian Studies

77 Charles Street

(Bay Subway, south of Bloor, West of Bay)

Register with Eva 324-8751

QUESTION & ANSWER

I arrived on December 2, 1991 under the FDM program. I came from Singapore where I worked as a live-in babysitter for three years. Will I be required to have a grade 12 education in order to qualify for permanent residence after two years?

The new FDM policy requiring Grade 12 or equivalent for eligibility in the program should not apply to you because you were accepted before the new criteria were announced.

I will complete two years in the FDM on February 27, 1992 and I would like to file my application for permanent residence. But I have not received a new employment authorization that I applied for since January 27 and my current authorization will expire on February 5. What should I do?

Go ahead and file your application for permanent residence and mail it after February 27.

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c/o INTERCEDE

489 College Street., Suite 4

Toronto, Ontario

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FIRST CLASS

REMINDER TO MEMBERS AND SUBSCRIBERS

Some 100 newsletters on average are being returned because addressees have moved. This is a waste of \$48 in postage every month. Please call us immediately if you are changing address or you want your subscription stopped.

Enclose a note that you have already applied for a new employment authorization since January 27 and that you will send a copy of this as soon as you receive it.

I will be finishing a Business Certificate course. I have been a practising accountant before I came under the FDM. Is this an equivalent of a Grade 12 education?

We believe you will be assessed for permanent residence under the old criteria of the FDM. Meanwhile, we still have to confirm whether Grade 12 equivalency would mean 12 years of elementary, secondary and post-secondary education put together.

In the new FDM policy that requires Grade 12 education, do the criteria in the old policy no longer apply?

The implementation of the new policy is something INTERCEDE does not yet know. Watch for future newsletters for clarification on the new policy.

VOLUNTEERS FOR OFFICE WORK NEEDED

Learn clerical skills. Practice your computer skills. INTERCEDE will certify your work experience after 24 full-day work or 192 hours.

register now for training on

Monday, March 23, 1992 from 10 am to 5 pm

Call Eva 324-8751

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

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Telephone : (416)

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