

# Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

monthly newsletter of the International Coalition to End Domestics' Exploitation

MAY 1986

## LEAF SPEAKS TO INTERCEDE MEMBERS

On Sunday, May 4, approximately seventy-five domestic workers attended the monthly members meeting eager to hear from special speaker Gwen Brodsky, litigation director for the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF).

LEAF and INTERCEDE are working together to mount a court challenge to the Ontario labour laws under the new Charter of Rights.

At issue is the exclusion of domestic workers from the hours of work and overtime provisions of the Employment Standards Act. Live-in domestic workers have no protection whatsoever - they work up to 120 hours per week without a cent in overtime pay.

Because most workers are protected by the law and because most domestic workers are women, there are grounds to argue that the present law discriminates against domestics as workers and as women. Because so many live-in domestic workers are members of visible minorities, there may also be grounds to argue that there is racial discrimination.

Gwen Brodsky spoke about the resolute fight of Canadian women in 1981 to ensure that the wording of the new Charter would offer women more protection than the Canadian Bill of Rights.

The key issue was including "equality under the law" as opposed to only "equality before the law". The problem with "equality before the law" was that it had been interpreted by the courts to mean only

that women should be treated equally in the administration of justice. The law itself might discriminate against women as long as the law was applied in the same way to all women!

Ms. Brodsky recounted the famous case of Stella Bliss (1978) who was denied regular UIC benefits because she was pregnant. The case went to the Supreme Court of Canada on the grounds that it was discriminatory to apply more stringent rules to pregnant women than to other workers. The court in its wisdom ruled that there was no discrimination against Stella Bliss because if men got pregnant they would be denied UIC benefits too!

Ms. Brodsky stressed that although the new Charter of Rights does guarantee women equality under the law, test cases have to be fought and won in the courts. "Equality is still a promise, not a reality", she said.

A number of domestic workers present volunteered to testify in court when LEAF and INTERCEDE are ready to challenge the Ontario labour laws. At that time we will need many domestic workers who can document the long hours and low pay. It will be essential to building a strong case in court.

The meeting ended with a sense of excitement that INTERCEDE's fight for domestic workers' rights is now part of an important new era for women's rights in Canada.

---

DOWN WITH THE NEW IMMIGRATION FEES !!  
PROTEST BY SIGNING OUR OPEN LETTER TO  
IMMIGRATION MINISTER WALTER MCLEAN !!

---

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- \* on April 21 INTERCEDE met with Dan Heap's constituency office to plan a public forum for Chinese temporary workers
- \* on May 14 Judith participated in a meeting of the Immigrant & Visible Minority Women's Action Committee to review the results of a lobby of federal cabinet ministers
- \* on May 22 INTERCEDE attended a dinner meeting sponsored by the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues to hear from representatives of immigrant & visible minority women

Coming up soon...

- \* INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 3 - 5 PM, at the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street
- \* the INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT will be open on SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 10AM - 12:30PM. Call us for an appointment at (416) 591-1625

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- \* welcome back to Avril Higginson who has just returned from an extended trip to Europe, the UK, and Egypt
- \* happy birthday to Ursulina Langit and Norma Gelua...many happy returns!
- \* special congratulations to our own Judith Ramirez for the YWCA's 'Woman of Distinction' award
- \* and to Lillian Ma, of the Immigrant & Visible Minority Women's Action Committee, who was just appointed to the Ontario Human Rights Commission
- \* and finally, our warmest best wishes to our new landed immigrants Leny Dabu and Ursulina Langit

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

Recently INTERCEDE has had a number of complaints from foreign domestic workers about sexual harassment from employers. If your employer makes unwelcome sexual advances you have the right to protect yourself by making a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

The Human Rights Code specifically says that "every person who is an employee has a right to freedom from harassment in the workplace because of sex by his or her employer or agent of the employer or by another employee".

Sexual harassment can be anything from your employer making sexual comments about you to his threatening to fire you if you reject his advances. But in order for your complaint to be considered 'valid' there has to be repeated harassment and you have to make clear to your employer that his advances are unwelcome.

If you make a complaint, the Human Rights Commission has the power to investigate it and decide, through a Board of Inquiry, whether sexual harassment has taken place. If your complaint is upheld, your employer can be ordered to make amends, including financial compensation.

For more information contact:

Ontario Human Rights Commission	965-6841
INTERCEDE	591-1625

---

INTERCEDE HAS NEW PHONES!

591-1625
591-6351

---

THE CLASP LEGAL CLINIC IS BACK AS OF SUNDAY, JUNE 1

---

MORE SUPPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY

Last month we reported the recent re-organization of INTERCEDE under a new Board of Directors and our incorporation as a non-profit organization. We are in the process of consolidating our work and expanding our funding base. In recent weeks, individuals and community organizations have continued to express their support and urge us on in our work:

" We are familiar with the excellent counselling and support work done by Intercede with and for domestic workers...who are among the most vulnerable and exploited members of our society...

We sincerely hope that Intercede will be able to continue with its important work. We understand that the organization has now adopted a more formal structure, and we see this as a positive step. "

Frederika Rotter  
PARKDALE COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES INC.

" The Arab Community Centre of Toronto has been one of the first supporters of Intercede since its inception. We are very much aware of the dedication and commitment it took to establish the service unit; without the tireless efforts of individuals like Judith Ramirez, Intercede would not have reached the recognition that it has today. "

Khaled L. Mouammar  
ARAB COMMUNITY CENTRE OF TORONTO

" The International Association of Filipino Patriots, Kababayan Community Centre, and the Philippine National Day Alliance have worked with Intercede on the issue of foreign domestic workers since 1979...We conti-

nue to support Intercede, its objectives and activities...Intercede has indeed proven itself to the Filipino-Canadian community. "

Frankie Legaspi  
1986 PND CO-ORDINATOR

" The advocacy work performed by Intercede on behalf of domestic workers is valuable ..."

Janice Dembo  
TORONTO MAYOR'S COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY & RACE RELATIONS

" ...I have heard a great deal within the community about the wonderful work that you are doing for domestic workers in Canada... there is no other organization within the community to provide a support and counselling system to domestic workers...keep up the good work. "

Mendel M. Green  
GREEN AND SPIEGEL

" The YWCA of Metro Toronto has worked with Intercede since it was established in 1979. We support its direct work with domestic workers, which enables them to function more effectively in the larger society, to understand and insist upon their rights, and to establish supportive links with others.

Ellen K. Campbell  
YWCA OF METROPOLITAN TORONTO

" There are no other organizations that I am aware of that perform the functions of INTERCEDE...I wish to add my support to that of others in your endeavour to attain funding for your programs. "

Maria Minna  
COSTI-IIAS IMMIGRANT SERVICES

" As a minister of a congregation of which some members are foreign domestic workers, I have followed with interest the worthiness of the work of INTERCEDE..."

The Rev. Godfrey Catanus  
COMMONWEALTH AVENUE  
BAPTIST CHURCH

YWCA HONORS JUDITH RAMIREZ

On May 15 the YWCA of Metro Toronto held its annual "Women of Distinction" awards dinner. Six women are honored every year for outstanding achievement and presented with an "Aggie" - a statue commemorating the YWCA's founder, Agnes Blizard.

This year's winner in the "Business/Labour" category was INTERCEDE's co-ordinator Judith Ramirez. In announcing her as one of the recipients of the prestigious award, the YWCA said:

" Thousands of immigrant women and domestic workers can thank Judith Ramirez, 39, of Toronto for their improved pay and status.

Her commitment to the least visible, least protected and most isolated women in Canadian society began with her involvement in the Wages for Housework campaign. That led to her founding of Intercede, to assist domestic workers from third world countries to find fair wages and decent working conditions... She won changes in the law, allowing domestic workers to apply for landed immigrant status from within Canada, and to get minimum wages, vacation pay, days off and the

right to re-training... She has been called an 'excellent strategist and organizer'. "

In accepting the award, Ms. Ramirez said that it recognized not only her personal achievements but "...the thousands of immigrant and visible-minority women who are the main protagonists in the fight for equal rights. If my work with INTERCEDE has been successful", she said, "it is because domestic workers across Canada have had the guts to stand up and fight against exploitation".

Other winners included Chaviva Hosek, of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and writer/broadcaster June Callwood.

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Hours: Monday - Friday, 9am - 4pm

Location: Cecil Community Centre,  
58 Cecil Street, Toronto  
(one block south of College Street, east of Spadine Ave)

Telephone: (416) 591-1625

Free and confidential counselling to all domestic workers. Call us anytime for an appointment!

---

NEXT MONTHLY MEETING SUNDAY, JUNE 1 !

---

---

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

Place  
Stamp  
Here

First Class