

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

MAY 1987

NAC SUPPORTS CHARTER CHALLENGE

Last month INTERCEDE and the Women's Legal Education & Action Fund (LEAF) launched a court challenge against the Ontario government for excluding domestic workers from the overtime provisions of the Employment Standards Act.

On May 8 - 11, 1987, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) held its annual meeting in Ottawa, and it passed a resolution supporting the fight of Ontario domestics for overtime pay.

NAC is the largest lobby group for women's rights in Canada. It represents 500 groups and four million women across the country.

Approximately 600 delegates converged on Carleton University for NAC's annual meeting, including the YWCA of Metro Toronto, a long-time ally of INTERCEDE's.

As part of the YWCA's commitment to equality for all women in Canada's multicultural society, it put forward the following resolution on behalf of Ontario's 65,000 domestics:

Be it resolved that, in this crucial pre-election period, NAC support the LEAF Charter Challenge of April 1987 by urging the Ontario government to extend overtime provisions under the Employment Standards Act to domestic workers.

Background:

Domestic workers are discriminated against as they are mostly women, performing tasks such as housekeeping and child-

care which are still largely regarded as women's work. As strangers in a foreign land, hidden away in private homes and working long hours with little pay, domestics need the women's community to rally to their support.

A number of delegates spoke out in support of the resolution, including noted feminist economist Marjorie Cohen. It was passed unanimously.

The addition of NAC's powerful voice to the uphill fight for overtime pay will help INTERCEDE convey to the Peterson Government that the legacy of discrimination against domestic workers must come to an end.

There is a strong consensus in the community that equal labour rights for domestics should not require a long and costly court battle. The Ontario government should make good on its promise to grant domestics the standard overtime protection other workers take for granted.

In this lead-up period to the provincial election, the support of groups like NAC, the YWCA, the New Democratic Party, the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, the Ontario Federation of Labour, the Congress of Black Women and others, will help get the message through to David Peterson that his government has failed Ontario's domestic workers.

- Shirin Perston
Member, YWCA Social
Action Committee &
INTERCEDE Board of
Directors

COCO'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on May 15 Judith Ramirez was a guest on CFRB radio for a 1-hour talk show. The switchboard was jammed with calls from domestics eager to say their piece!
- * on May 6 Board member Mary Mouamar attended a reception hosted by the Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants & Refugees
- * on May 7 INTERCEDE President Clementina Martinez attended a fundraising dinner for the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)

Coming up soon...

- * INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 3 pm, at the Cecil Community Centre
- * On SATURDAY, JUNE 6, the Service Unit will be open from 10 am - 2 pm. Call me for an appointment at 591-1625!
- * on SATURDAY, JUNE 13, you're invited to the Philippine National Day Picnic at Seton Park, 10 am - 6 pm. Fun & games for everyone!

AND CONGRATULATIONS...

- * to our new landed immigrants LOURDES RAMIREZ, ELEUTERIA LUSUEGRO from the Philippines, AMALIA HUCK from Argentina, and WESLEY WALTERS from the Caribbean!
- * to LITA VELASCO who recently gave birth to a bouncing baby girl
- * and, finally, our deepest sympathy to OFELIA GASCON for the death of her mother

- Columbia Diaz

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

If you are a foreign domestic worker who has been employed for at least 12 months with the same employer, you are legally entitled to 17 weeks pregnancy leave.

Your employer is required to give you pregnancy leave once you qualify for it. You must give your employer written notice with a medical certificate from your doctor two weeks before you start your leave. Yours letter must state the estimated date of delivery.

Your pregnancy leave may begin at any time during the 11 weeks prior to the estimated date of delivery. You may shorten your leave if you wish, but it can only end six weeks after the actual date of delivery, unless you provide a doctor's certificate.

When you are ready to return to work, your employer is legally required to give you your job back with the same wages. If there has been an increase in the pay rate you are entitled to it.

Your employer is not required to hold your job open for you unless you have worked a full 12 months before your pregnancy leave. However, if you have worked for at least 20 weeks you can receive 60% of your wages while on pregnancy leave from the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

To receive UI benefits during pregnancy leave you must take in your record of employment and your medical certificate to the office nearest you.

For more information and assistance please contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 591-1625

- Joan Ann Gravesande

STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS

HOW DO FOREIGN DOMESTICS COPE?

Recently INTERCEDE appeared before the Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants & Refugees to shed light on the situation of foreign domestic workers in Canada.

The Task Force was appointed last year by the Secretary of State - Multiculturalism and Health & Welfare Canada, and is headed by Doctor Morton Beiser.

On May 6 - 7, 1987, the Task Force held public hearings at the Westbury Hotel, in downtown Toronto, and heard from twenty groups such as the Multicultural Health Coalition and New Experiences for Refugee Women.

Speaking for INTERCEDE, co-ordinator Judith Ramirez charged that the very structure of Canadian immigration policy creates a stressful style of life and work for the average live-in domestic. "The first few years are like an endurance test", she said.

Ramirez outlined the fact that foreign domestic workers must live with their employers, must get Immigration's permission to change jobs, are not protected against long hours of unpaid overtime, are doing a job held in very low esteem, and work in isolation from others. All this in addition to the normal stresses of being in a foreign country far away from home and loved ones.

The result for many domestics, especially in the first year, is

- * intense feelings of isolation
- * feelings of powerlessness, frustration and humiliation
- * a sense of Canadian society as being unfriendly and even hostile

Ramirez said that most foreign do-

mestic workers do not look to the medical establishment, or even to community-based programs to help them confront these hardships. "They rely mainly on friendship and kinship networks", she said. "Most turn to others of the same ethnic or racial backgrounds".

Ramirez stressed the need for more awareness of the "obstacle path" faced by the thousands of foreign domestics seeking permanent residence in Canada. "Too many get help only when they have reached a crisis point, when they can no longer cope because of physical or emotional exhaustion".

Asked by Task Force member Doctor Cristina Lee about the empowerment of domestic workers through groups such as INTERCEDE, Ramirez replied that "in the 1980's many more domestics are coming forward to fight against unjust conditions than in the past".

LILIA HERMITANIO FUND DRIVE

INTERCEDE is pleased to announce that the fundraising dance held on May 2 by the Lilia Hermitanio Trust Fund was a roaring success!

Emily Abaja and other Filipina domestic workers launched the Drive, with the support of the Melisa Mendoza Trust Fund, to raise money for Lilia Hermitanio, a domestic worker with serious medical problems.

The dance attracted a large crowd of supporters and well-wishers to the Cecil Community Centre. Among those present were Ruben Cusipag, editor of BALITA, and Frank Pagulayan, of the Melisa Mendoza Trust Fund.

According to Ms. Abaja, total expenses for the dance came to approximately \$750 and total revenue from ticket and liquor sales came to \$1,900. One hundred per cent of the profit, \$1,150 approximately, goes to the Fund Drive.

Congratulations Emily Abaja and friends for a job well done!

MAYWORKS SKIT A BIG HIT!

On May 3, 1987, INTERCEDE's monthly meeting featured a lively performance of the skit "A Day in the Life of a Domestic Worker".

The performance marked the week-long Mayworks Festival of workers in the arts, an annual Mayday event sponsored by trade unions and government.

Working in collaboration with INTERCEDE and the Carlos Bulosan Cultural Workshop, a group of domestics and ex-domestics had met to write and rehearse the skit. It included four vignettes: waiting in line at the immigration office, working in the employer's home, being interviewed at the employment agency, and meeting with other domestics at the Cecil Centre.

The scenes in the skit were both poignant and humorous and were well received by the audience of 250 domestic workers and community supporters.

Congratulations to all the participants: Nollie Repolleza, Leticia Aguilar, Lucy Gonzaga, Gina Hayden, Rose Fungo, Amelia Huck, and Cindy Prince.

Special thanks to Carmencita Hernandez and Clementina Martinez for

their direction and support. We all enjoyed taking part!

Members of the group performed the skit again on May 9 for the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto at a Mayworks events held at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.

INTERCEDE is happy to announce that the participants have formed a permanent group called D.A.R.E. or Domestics in the Arts who Reject Exploitation.

Join D.A.R.E.! You'll have fun!

For more information contact me or Joan Ann at 591-1625.

- Gina Hayden
INTERCEDE volunteer

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place: Cecil Community Centre
58 Cecil Street
Toronto, Ontario

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

Telephone: (416) 591-1625

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

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

Place
Stamp
Here

First Class

NEXT INTERCEDE MEETING ON JUNE 7!