

# Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

OCTOBER 1986

## FULL HOUSE AT INTERCEDE AGM!

One-hundred and seventy-five people came out to help INTERCEDE celebrate its first annual general meeting since incorporating this year as a non-profit organization. The event was held at the Cecil Community Centre on the sunny afternoon of Sunday, October 5, at 3:30 pm.

Presiding at the meeting was Carmen-cita Hernandez, of Kababayan Community Centre, who is also a member of INTERCEDE's Community Advisory Board. The meeting began with INTERCEDE President Eulene Boyce presenting the members of the newly-elected Board of Directors (see page 4).

The annual report was then presented by INTERCEDE Co-ordinator Judith Ramirez, who underscored key gains in the past year:

- \* permanent funding for the Service Unit through the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP)
- \* a 42% increase in service delivery in the second year of the Service Unit's operation
- \* abolition of the 'release letters' through our monitoring of the Foreign Domestic Program
- \* a province-wide campaign to limit the hours of work of live-in domestics and grant all domestics the right to unionize

The highlight of the afternoon was welcoming Dr. Dan Hill, Ombudsman of Ontario, as our guest speaker. Dr. Hill is a distinguished human rights advocate who, as Director and then Chairman of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, struggled to get legislation to protect domestic workers.

In his opening remarks Dr. Hill said:

" (INTERCEDE) is a group that is close to my heart. All my life I have worked for the disadvantaged in our society, through education and human rights activism. You at INTERCEDE cut across so many of the groups I have been privileged to serve - immigrants, workers, women, and women of colour. I am elated at what you have been able to accomplish over the past years, and I extend my warmest congratulations to Judith Ramirez and all of you here today for your wonderful work. "

Dr. Hill described his role as Ombudsman as 'the advocate of last resort'. He explained that his office has the power to deal with provincial complaints relating to any office, agency, or board of government, but not those which come under federal or municipal jurisdictions (see page 2). He gave examples of recent cases his office has handled, including that of a battered wife with complicated housing problems.

At the end of his speech, Dr. Hill invited INTERCEDE to visit the Ombudsman's Office and meet with his senior officials to discuss priority issues such as greater protection for live-in domestic workers under the Ontario labour laws.

Among INTERCEDE's special guests at the meeting were Mrs. Donna Hill, wife of Dr. Hill; Harry Gairey, patriarch of the Black community; and Bob Parkes, of the Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program.

INTERCEDE thanks the community for its steadfast support in the past year. It was particularly exciting to have so many of you come out to help us celebrate our first 'official' annual general meeting!

Special thanks to our staff, Beth Udasco and Joan Ann Gravesande, for organizing a perfect afternoon.

## LILIBETH'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- \* recently the Kababayan Community Centre held its annual general meeting & INTERCEDE was there
- \* on October 7 we attended a meeting called by Father Massi Lombardi to discuss a race relations institute
- \* on October 17 Joan Ann Gravesande attended the conference on 'Equality of Access to Power for Women' in Ottawa
- \* Judith Ramirez just attended the national 'Post-Nairobi Conference' held in Toronto

Coming up soon...

- \* INTERCEDE's next monthly meeting is set for Sunday, November 2, 3pm, at the Cecil Centre. We'll be celebrating the 5th anniversary of the landed status program!

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- \* to member Sarah Jane George on her recent marriage
- \* to Coco and Dards on the birth of their baby girl, Karen Ursulla Diaz
- \* to member Veronica Scott who was just granted a Minister's Permit to continue working in Canada
- \* to Guillermina Aviles, Herminia Alas-as, Cristeta Medran, Victoria Solarmillo, and Enriquita Tinguha who celebrated their natal days... many happy returns!
- \* to board member Lynette Munian our deepest sympathy for a death in the family
- \* and to our new landed immigrants: Marcelia Maitland & Joyce Stanford, from the Caribbean; Gloria Medina & Guia Rada from the Philippines... congratulations from all of us!

Tune in again next month!

- Beth Udasco

## KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

If you are a domestic worker you should know how to use the office of the Ombudsman of Ontario. 'Ombudsman' is a Swedish word that means 'protector or defender of citizen rights'.

The Ombudsman's Office handles any complaint from a citizen regarding a department, agency, or board of the provincial government. For example, it can investigate complaints about human rights, health and social services, workers' compensation, OHIP, family benefits, etc. However it cannot help you with federal matters such as immigration, unemployment insurance, or with municipal matters such as general welfare.

If you have a complaint involving a provincial matter, you must use up all available remedies before going to the Ombudsman. Contact the head of the organization if you get no solution by speaking to those having less authority. If that fails, contact your MPP (as your elected representative he or she has a duty to assist you).

Should all these efforts get you nowhere then it's time to approach the Office of the Ombudsman. Your complaint will be investigated and, if found to be valid, it will be taken to the highest level for a just resolution.

No one is turned away from the Ombudsman's Office. It is staffed with 122 people across Ontario who speak a total of 24 languages. All services are free of charge and confidential. You can write, call or visit them at:

Ombudsman's Office  
125 Queens Park  
Toronto, Ontario M5S 2C7  
Tel. (416) 586-3300 (24 hours a day)

For more information you can also call:  
INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT 591-1625  
(Mon - Fri 9:00am - 4:00pm)

- Joan Ann Gravesande

### GOOD NEWS FOR TJOE AND NELMIDA!

Last month we featured an article from the Toronto Star about two foreign domestics, Lie Khim Tjoe and Herminia Nelmida. Both women have been unable to work for several months because the local Canada Immigration Centre would not give them new work permits. Neither woman had been able to get a 'release letter' from her previous employer.

INTERCEDE appealed to the regional office of Immigration, citing the failure of both employers to live up to the terms of the agreements they signed. Both women were working over 12 hours per day, and one of them was getting much less time off than is guaranteed her under the law.

Initially, regional officials responded to our appeal by saying that neither women had been refused a new work permit only because she had not gotten a 'release letter'. But after a second submission on their behalf, INTERCEDE received a letter from David Conn, Director General of Immigration, saying:

"...there is sufficient contradictory information to warrant giving Ms. Nelmida and Ms. Tjoe the benefit of the doubt. "

At press time, both women have validated job offers from prospective employers and are in the process of getting their new work permits!

Congratulations Lie Khim Tjoe and Herminia Nelmida, and the best of luck to both of you!

### INTERCEDE MEETS WITH YVETTE SOUQUE

On October 10 INTERCEDE Co-ordinator Judith Ramirez met with Yvette Souque (Knott), recently appointed by Immigration Minister Gerry Weiner to monitor the Foreign Domestics Program.

The ninety-minute meeting took place at the INTERCEDE office and covered

a wide range of issues, including:

- \* the rise in the number of domestics rejected for landing
- \* the wage freeze for foreign domestics in Ontario
- \* the failure of many employers to comply with the terms of their agreements
- \* the introduction of arbitrary measures such as 'release letters' at local immigration offices
- \* the new immigration processing fees
- \* the tragedy of non-status domestics

Ms. Ramirez appealed to Ms. Souque to take an active hand in monitoring the Foreign Domestics Program. Ms. Souque is a well-known community activist from western Canada, who is no stranger to the struggles of immigrants and refugees. She assured INTERCEDE that she will "work closely" with us and see that critical issues are brought to the Minister's attention.

### MORE FROM DR. DAN HILL

We share with our readers some more highlights from the speech of Dr. Dan Hill, Ombudsman of Ontario, at our annual general meeting:

" I know you have frequently suffered racism and sexism, and that you are at great risk of exploitation in the labour market. Until you have the option of forming unions, and until you have full protection under the labour laws, it is even more important that you find out exactly what rights you do have, and that you protect those rights by laying claim to them through a formal process. "

" ...I would like to remind you that your struggle to have the dignity and worth of domestic work recognized in law is being echoed by many, many other groups. The issue of day-care workers and the issue of homemaker's pensions are just two examples. Like you, these people perform a skilled and valuable service, much in demand, that deserves to be recognized as

'real' work. "

" I know you've probably got worries that have nothing to do with working. You've got children and husbands with troubles of their own. I'm sure it's hard sometimes to believe that going to another meeting, or sitting down to write another letter, is really going to make any difference in your life. "

" What I hope for you is that this good fight you're fighting can be, not just another tough job you have to do once your working day is over, but a source of joy and strength. I look forward to assisting you with your endeavours. "

SERVICE UNIT

Location: Cecil Community Centre  
58 Cecil Street  
Toronto (1 block south of College, just east of Spadina)

Office Hours: Monday - Friday  
9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Tel. : (416) 591-1625

We help domestic workers with immigration, employment, human rights and social service problems. All our services are confidential and completely free of charge.

MEET INTERCEDE'S NEW BOARD !

Immediately prior to the public meeting on October 5, a business meeting was held for voting members only. Approximately forty-five people attended and worked their way through a lengthy agenda which included: ratification of by-laws, financial reports, membership reports, and the election of the new Board of Directors.

The Nominating Committee had prepared a 'slate of candidates' based on the nominations made by voting members. INTERCEDE President Eulene Boyce introduced all the nominees who were then voted in by acclamation.

The members of the Board of Directors of INTERCEDE are:

Domestic & ex-domestic workers

- Eulene Boyce (Barbados)
- Lynette Munian (Guyana)
- Avril Higginson (UK)
- Avelina Villanueva (Philippines)
- Patricia Yuen (Malaysia)
- Debra Boyce (Barbados)
- Clementina Martinez (Philippines)

Community representatives

- Barbara Jackman, immigration lawyer
- Lillian Allen, poet
- Cornelia Soberano, law student
- Shirin Perston, YWCA activist
- Mary Mouammar, Arab community activist
- Catherine Gilbert, law student

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Service Unit Open Saturday  
November 1 10am-2pm

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

Place  
Stamp  
Here

First Class

Next meeting on November 2!