

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS

monthly newsletter of the Toronto Organization for Domestic Workers' Rights

October 1991

(INTERCEDE)

SEVEN NEW BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED AT AGM

A fair representation of INTERCEDE membership was assured at the Annual General Meeting, September 8th, when seven new Board members were elected. They are: Ellen Benigno, Ginger Chung, Deepa Chakraborty, Joan-Grant Cummings, Lorna Hillman, Zenaida Reyes and Enid Singh. Five are or were domestic workers and two come from the non-profit community. Among the seven are Chinese-speaking, South Asian, Filipino and Caribbean women.

They replace outgoing Board members of 1990-1991: former president Mary Jarrell, Annie Wong, Rosemary Seymour, Andrea Timoll, Sedef Arat-Koc, Thelma Coolen and Maria Ramos.

INTERCEDE president Pura Velasco introduced the guest speaker, Mr. Brendon Morgan, and presented him with a petition addressed to the Minister of Labour. Morgan, Special Assistant on Policy of the Ontario Minister of Labour, spoke on behalf of Minister Bob McKenzie who sent his regrets but promised to come to INTERCEDE's November 3 meeting. Morgan assured those present that the Labour ministry is reviewing the Employment Standards Act and the Occupational Health and Safety Act and that at this time, review of union rights in Ontario is in a "fairly advanced" stage.

A former law student with CLASP, that holds a monthly clinic at INTERCEDE meetings, Morgan emphasized that domestic workers have a strong ally in the Ontario government that is looking at ways to stop their continued exploitation and lack of protection.

STORY OF A DOMESTIC WORKER FROM INDIA

I came to Canada under the FDM in June 1990, sponsored by Mrs. Verma who, like me, comes from India. I spent a year of difficulties and problems and I want to let my friends, other domestic workers from India, know about my story.

You may also be in a similar situation with your employer but are unable to tell anyone because of pressures: of losing your job, of being deported. But friends, it is an injustice to be ill treated, to suffer cruelties, to be taken advantage of by your employers. You must make them aware of your rights. You are not slaves, you are human beings like them.

Domestic workers have heavy responsibilities, looking after the home and taking care of children. **Your employers should realize that you are an important person to their family and they need you as much as you need them...and give you your due rights.**

I have gone through so much sufferings before I learned about my rights through INTERCEDE, through whose help I learned and achieved a lot.

My experience with my own Indian employers has been bad. I know there are good employers out there, but it has been a big shame how Indian domestic workers have been treated by their own compatriots.

I came to Canada through Mrs. Roshan Arora, whose daughter Mrs. Shipra Rama is a Canadian citizen. Mrs. Arora has been recruiting domestic workers from India for Indian families here but I am not sure she is doing so legally as I don't think

***Come to INTERCEDE monthly meeting on
Sunday, October 6, 1991, from 3-5 pm at Cecil Community Centre,
58 Cecil Street. We will prepare for our meeting with the
Minister of Labour next month.***

CLASP Legal Clinic and Mobile Health Unit will be open.

New member applications from 2 - 3 pm only.

Board Members (cont'd from p.1)

A skit about domestic workers' labour rights was presented by facilitators, Zeny Reyes, Eva Jacob, Ellen Benigno, and Magda Ibe, and inspired participation from the audience. Irma Charles opened the program with a poem about Calypso Rose, a well-known poet of her country, Trinidad and Tobago. Newly-elected Board member, Ginger Chung, Jess de Francia and young Tara Nadal sang to their listeners' delight.

Domestic Worker from India (cont'd from p.1)

she is a licenced employment agency recruiter. She is recruiting young women from India and taking payment from both the domestics and their employers, she misleads the women with promises of good salary and a bright future.

These women from poor families borrow money on interest, sell their ornaments and even mortgage their houses to be able to come to Canada. Once here, the promises turn out to be empty. The domestic is underpaid, getting less than minimum wage, made to work overtime, usually from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. or when there are parties, up to 2 or 3 in the morning. Even if she finishes at these hours, she starts work the next day at the usual time. There are no weekends for her, in fact weekends mean more work while her employer needs to rest from the workweek and wishes to eat special food.

The employers never think that she too has had a hard workweek, that she needs to rest and go out too. When relatives of the employers have parties, that's added work for the domestic worker who is sent over to help in the preparations. But no one bothers to ask her if she has eaten.

Many Indian domestic workers have to go back to India after 3 to 5 years because they have no savings and don't have a chance to do any

upgrading (requirements of the FDM). Their Income taxes, CPP or UIC are not remitted to the government. They don't get their social insurance cards nor OHIP. Because these women don't fulfil Immigration requirements, they are sent back and the employer can then sponsor another woman from India and the same situation gets repeated all over.

If the domestic finds out about her rights and the laws and asserts them, she is immediately sent back without any notice, often brought direct to the aircraft. On the other hand my fellow domestic workers would often not say anything for fear of being sent back to India by their employers. They're afraid to be sent back because they still have loans to repay or they have to support their families. So they quietly bear the injustice done to them.

I mustered enough courage and left the Verma family when I could no longer bear my suffering. They tried their level best to force me back to India but "God is great", he helps those who help themselves.

Today, I'm still here with the help of INTERCEDE. And I have just been elected to its Board of Directors. It is my sincere request and honest advice to you all my friends: don't be frightened and scared to fight for your rights until you achieve them. Never feel that you are alone, there are many of us who have also suffered like you. If you stand up for your rights, one by one, all will follow. Only then will this injustice to domestic workers end. Have faith in God and INTERCEDE will help you in the best way they can.

by DEEPA CHAKRABORTY

(Author insists to name names in order to let other domestic workers from India avoid dealing with the same people)

We wish to thank the Employment and Immigration Canada (Immigrant 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.

RENEWAL SUBSCRIPTION: (only until Dec. 91)

NEW SUBSCRIPTION:

CHANGE OF ADDRESS:

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

Please send DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS to:

MEMBER ID NUMBER:..... NAME:.....

ADDRESS:

CITY/PROVINCE:.....

POSTAL CODE:..... TELEPHONE:.....

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

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

DOMESTIC WORKERS FROM THE CARIBBEAN MEETING

**on Sunday, October 20, 1991
3-5 pm at INTERCEDE**

489 College St., Room 402

(Bathurst Subway, then take bus 511 to College corner Bathurst)

Confirm your attendance by calling 324-8751

FACILITATORS WORKSHOP

First of Series

Sunday, October 27, 1991

Call early to register, 324-8751

10 am - 5 pm

INTERCEDE, 489 College St, Rm. 402

**USE OF PASSPORT TO
BORROW MONEY**

INTERCEDE recently received the following press release from the Philippine Consulate General:

"It has come to the attention of the Consulate General that Philippine Passport is being used as a guarantee or collateral in securing a loan.

"The Consulate General wishes to remind all concerned that the use of Philippine passport is solely for identification and travel purposes. It is issued to a citizen but remains a property of the Philippine Government.

"Both those who offer and accept the passport as collateral in a loan are advised that by doing so they are committing an illegal use of a Philippine government property and that they will be answerable to existing rules and regulations. It can create obstacles to their subsequent application for a new passport or entry visa to the Philippines."

Domestic workers in dire financial straits are known to be victims of usurers who lend money and keep their passports for collateral. These workers have been unable to show their passport to Immigration when they needed to renew their employment authorization. As a result they have not been able to work and because they could not

work, they have not been able pay back their loan.

INTERCEDE emphasizes that domestic workers must keep their important documents secure and not entrust these to anyone, neither their employer, nor their employment agency, much less a loan shark.

**COMBINED FIRST AID AND
CPR CLASS**

October 27, 1991

10 am - 5 pm

**DISCOUNTED FOR
INTERCEDE MEMBERS**

**Call Tel. No. 967-4244 ext. 64
for the course number;**

Enrol and mail your cheque to:

St. John Ambulance
46 Wellesley St. E.
Toronto, M4Y 1G5

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Canada Immigration Centre	973-4444
Educ & Skills Training Ctr, Labour Council	971-5893
Employment Standards Enforcement	326-7160
Immigrant Women's Health Centre	367-1388
Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre	656-8933
OHIP	Toronto 482-1111
	Scarborough 1-800-263-3814
	Mississauga 275-2730
Ontario Human Rights Commission	326-9511
Revenue Canada (Taxation)	869-1500
Toronto Rape Crisis Centre (24-hour line)	597-8808
Unemployment Insurance	730-1211
EMERGENCY HOUSING	
Nellie's Hostel	461-1084
Evangeline's	762-9636

LEGAL SERVICES

Parkdale Community Legal Services	531-2411
CLASP (Osgoode Law School) Legal Clinic	736-5029
Kensington-Bellwoods Community Legal Serv.	363-0304
Metro Tor. Chinese & SE Asian Legal Clinic	971-9674
Toronto Workers' Health & Safety Legal Clinic	971-8832

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Place:	489 College St., Suite 402, Toronto, Ont
Time:	Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Telephone:	(416) 324-8751

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FIRST CLASS