

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

SEPTEMBER 1985

INTERCEDE MEETS NEW LABOUR MINISTER

On August 29, 1985, INTERCEDE paid a visit to the new Ontario Minister of Labour William Wrye. Our delegation was led by INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez and domestic workers Barbara Donaldson, from the Caribbean, and Linda Lising, from the Philippines.

The community was represented by Shirin Perston, of the YWCA's Social Action Committee; Angela King, of the Congress of Black Women of Canada; Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues; and Roxane Kalimootoo, of the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO).

For over one hour we spoke to the Minister and his Special Assistant Mordechai Ben-Dat about the woefully inadequate coverage of live-in domestic workers under Ontario labour laws.

High on our agenda was the pressing need to regulate the hours of work of live-in domestics. At present, they are only guaranteed 48 hours off per week, which means a live-in domestic can be working or on call to her employer for the remaining 120 hours! This makes a mockery of her \$4.00 per hour wage rate, or \$176.00 per week, which is, of course, based on the standard 44-hour week. It means that a live-in domestics' actual pay rate can be as low as \$1.47 hour - and be perfectly legal!

We also urged the Minister to lower the room & board deduction allowed for employers of live-in domestics. In Ontario an employer is permitted to deduct \$20.00 per week for room

and \$35.00 per week for board, for a total of \$55.00 per week. This rate is much higher than other provinces with the same minimum wage of \$4.00 per hour. Manitoba allows a maximum deduction of \$40.00 per week - or 38% less - and Quebec allows a maximum of \$32.90 per week - or a full 67% less than Ontario. INTERCEDE has recommended a maximum deduction of \$35.00 per week for room & board.

We further urged the Minister to include babysitters, companions, and part-time domestics under the Employment Standards Act who, at present are exempt from the minimum wage, vacation pay, statutory holidays, etc.

And finally, we strongly objected the current provision in the Labour Relations Act which explicitly bars domestic workers from forming unions. INTERCEDE believes that denying domestics the historic right to unionize is arbitrary and unjust.

The Minister readily acknowledged that live-in domestics, in particular, are wide-open to exploitation. He said that he would study our recommendations further and commended INTERCEDE for our work on behalf of domestic workers' rights.

WILL YOU TAKE A STAND?

On Sunday, September 8, 1985, a letter-writing campaign to the Minister of Labour was launched at the INTERCEDE members' meeting. The "open-letter" to William Wrye supports our recommendations and is being circulated across the province.

Enthusiasm ran high at the meeting as Steering Committee member Barbara Donaldson reminded everyone that "the

LILIBETH'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on August 21 INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez was a guest lecturer at the HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH & EDUCATION CENTRE in Ottawa
- * on August 24 INTERCEDE attended the beautifully successful birthday dinner for HARRY GAIREY, patriarch of Toronto's Black community
- * on August 30 Judith Ramirez was interviewed on CBC's "As It Happens" on the abusive treatment of foreign domestic workers
- * on September 1 the Philippine-Canadian Ladies Circle sponsored a fundraising event for SHAWN BELON, a child of Filipino-Canadians who has a liver ailment

Coming soon...

- * INTERCEDE's next monthly members' meeting is scheduled for Sunday, October 6, 3 - 5 pm, at 58 Cecil Street. Everyone welcome!
- * on October 16 there will be a public forum on Toronto's mayoralty race at the ST LAWRENCE CENTRE, 8 pm. Come hear Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton and Alderman Anne Johnston. Admission free

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Tessie Casison who just gave birth to a bouncing baby boy!
- * to Linda Lising for her new job as an inventory accounting clerk
- * to our new landed immigrants CHRIS COURBASSON, from France; JACKIE CUMBERBATCH and PATRICIA MAPP-OTTELEY, from the Caribbean; JULIET BUENAFE, ELENA DY, ELVIE TOLENTINO, and PATRICIA FIGUEROA, from the Philippines

- Beth Udasco

Minister will act if he sees that enough people care". Another Steering Committee member, Linda Lising, said that we have a good chance of getting the changes we want because the new Minister seems quite sympathetic to our concerns.

Attached to this newsletter is a copy of the "open-letter" to William Wrye. We ask everyone to take a few moments to read it, sign it, and mail it in today! We are confident that together we can change the laws of this province and give domestic workers the protection they have been unjustly denied.

TAKE A STAND WITH INTERCEDE!

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

If you are starting a new job or renewing your work permit with the same employer, be sure you check the contract issued by the Canada Employment Centre.

The contract is a written agreement between you and your employer outlining your duties, hours of work, rate of pay, etc. Read your contract carefully, and if you agree with what it says, then be sure to sign it, along with your employer.

If your employer does not live-up to what is in the contract regarding your pay, weekly time off, vacation pay, statutory holidays, etc. you have a legal right to make a complaint to the Employment Standards Branch. They have the power to investigate your complaint and order your employer to give you whatever is specified in the contract.

For more information and assistance in making a complaint contact:

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416)977-3467

-Desiree Hipplewith

Newsletter Committee:
Desiree Hipplewith, Lynette Munian,
Judith Ramirez, Pamela Skeete, Sonia Thomas, Daphne Tucker, Beth Udasco

COMMUNITY SPEAKS OUT ON LABOUR LAWS

The YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto prepared the following statement for the recent meeting between INTERCEDE and the Minister of Labour:

"...The YWCA of Metropolitan Toronto is in full support of INTERCEDE's current lobbying efforts to have a limit set on the number of working hours per week. The labour laws provide for a \$4/hr. minimum wage and 48 hours off per week. However, with no limit on the number of working hours, it is possible for a worker to be on call for all of the remaining 120 hours of the week, which reduces the minimum rate to \$1.47/hr. This not only creates continued exploitation in terms of hours and wages but also makes it difficult to meet immigration standards. In order to acquire landed status, they may be judged on areas such as upgrading while in Canada, and development of community ties to determine their self-sufficiency. If they have not had the time to do either of the above, they could be penalized at the federal level because the provincial level has failed to protect these workers in the same way as other workers are protected.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that in Ontario there are 233,000 children under the age of 6 with mothers in the work force in Ontario. With only 58,582 full-time licensed daycare spaces, of which only 33,500 are subsidized (12,250 in Metro Toronto), it is evident that domestic workers provide a much needed in-home daycare service. Their work in the home allows other people (mostly women as mothers are the ones still held mainly responsible for children) to be productive members of society out of the home as well, both in terms of paid work and volunteer work.

It is time that women's work in the home be valued at its true worth - rearing a new generation to continue the productivity of our nation in the future, and allowing other peo-

ple the time and energy to be currently productive in a variety of ways. Since INTERCEDE's formation, many favourable legislative changes for domestic workers have come about through the group's thorough and dedicated work. We urge you to draw upon the expertise of INTERCEDE and other involved groups and to quickly adopt INTERCEDE's recommendations for ending the exploitation of domestic workers..."

Recently Executive Alderman Anne Johnston (Ward II), wrote to William Wrye saying:

" I have been a long time supporter of the work done by "Intercede"...

Judith Ramirez is an excellent lady who has met with you recently with her concerns and those of the steering committee regarding the Ontario law for live-in domestics. She has told me that you acknowledge that the present law is inadequate in that live-in domestics can be open to exploitation.

The result is that a woman can earn as little as \$1.47 per hour. That same woman, working for example at City Hall or Queen's Park, would be paid overtime after she has put in her regular working hours.

The Employment Standards Act should be amended to include the principle of overtime for these women. I also feel that they should have the right to unionize. It is well known that most domestics are women and members of visible minorities.

You would be righting a great wrong if you would take the steps to plug in the loopholes in the Act."

JOIN INTERCEDE

\$5 Year

SUPPORT THE GROUP THAT SUPPORTS YOU!

Mail your letter to Queen's Park now!

AVELINA VILLANUEVA LANDED!

Avelina Villanueva is a domestic worker from the Philippines who came to Canada in 1981. She was refused landing in July, 1984, and ordered to leave the country by August 9, 1985.

Immediately after getting the bad news, Ms. Villanueva contacted the Service Unit and Columbia Diaz got involved with her case. A plan of action was made which resulted in Ms. Villanueva completing two dressmaking courses at Seneca College and two academic upgrading courses at the Scarborough Board of Education.

As her new counsellor, I contacted the Canada Immigration Centre at 130 Bloor Street West, and was told that Ms. Villanueva would be granted another assessment.

Shortly after the re-assessment interview, the original decision to refuse landing was reversed and Ms. Villanueva was accepted for permanent residence in Canada.

Congratulations, Avelina!

- Beth Udasco

FAREWELL TO BETH!

At the end of this month, Beth Udasco's term of service with INTERCEDE will come to an end. She has been replacing Columbia Diaz who has been away on maternity leave. Beth has done an excellent job and we wish her well in her future endeavours!

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT 977-3467 !

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

First Class

IMMIGRATION DECISION REVERSED!

A domestic worker from the Caribbean, who prefers to remain anonymous, visited the Service Unit very recently.

At her second assessment interview, the immigration officer discovered that she had gone to school for six months without a student authorization. In so doing she had violated the immigration law, even though she had been unaware of the requirement.

Her file was then transferred to the Enforcement Office at 480 University Avenue, in Toronto, for a hearing. The final decision was scheduled to be made on September 9, 1985.

She came to INTERCEDE on August 26, just two weeks before the hearing date! After interviewing her, I immediately referred her to a reputable immigration lawyer, Max Walport, who took her case in hand.

On the hearing date, Mr. Walport defended the domestic worker on the basis that she had made an honest mistake and was in no way trying to "get away" with something. The adjudicator, after consulting the immigration officer, decided to reverse the original decision. Our client was given a Ministers' Permit and re-instated on the Foreign Domestic Program. Better late than never!

- Desiree Hipplewith

!!REMINDER!!

The next monthly members meeting is set for Sunday
OCTOBER 6, 3 - 5 pm, at
Cecil Community Centre.

Place
Stamp
Here