

Domestics' Cross-Cultural News

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

SEPTEMBER 1986

'RELEASE LETTERS' ABOLISHED!

Last month we reported that INTERCEDE had written a letter protesting the use of 'release letters' at local immigration offices in Toronto. Foreign domestic workers who wanted to change employers were being told that they could only do so if their employers agreed to let them go. Any domestic who could not present a 'release letter' was denied the right to a new work permit with another employer.

INTERCEDE objected to this practice on the grounds that it gave the employer the power to keep a domestic in an exploitative job by simply refusing to issue the required 'release letter'. And it gave employers a virtual veto over the foreign domestic's rights to work in Canada.

On September 12 we received a reply from the director general of Immigration, David Conn, saying that:

'...requiring domestics to present release letters would not appear to be appropriate. They are not a requirement of the program...I have therefore instructed the Toronto Administrator to ensure that such letters no longer be requested...'

In a meeting on September 22 with Minister of State for Immigration Gerry Weiner, INTERCEDE co-ordinator Judith Ramirez stated our concern that 'release letters' are also being used in other parts of Canada. The Minister assured INTERCEDE that he found such a practice 'objectionable' and that he would take action to prevent it 'anywhere in Canada'.

INTERCEDE is pleased that officials in the regional office of Immigra-

tion acted without delay in putting an end to this unjust practice. Our concern now is that domestic workers who were refused 'release letters' will now be granted new work permits (see page 3).

MINISTER'S OFFICE TO MONITOR-FDM

Minister of State for Immigration Gerry Weiner attended a recent consultation in Ottawa with immigrant & visible-minority women from across the country.

The women told Mr. Weiner that inadequate monitoring of the Foreign Domestic's Program has led to 'serious and persistent problems'. They described the year-long battle with 'release letters' in Toronto and the blatant failure of many employers to comply with the terms of their contracts.

They also pointed out that the rate of rejection for landing has been rising steadily since the Program's inception in 1981. In 1984 it was 7% and in 1985 it more than doubled to 15%!

Judith Ramirez spoke for the group when she said that 'a senior person in your office has to mind the shop, otherwise abuses creep in which never get resolved'.

Mr. Weiner responded by saying that his newly-appointed advisor on NGO's and refugees, Yvette Knott, would be put in charge of monitoring the Foreign Domestic's Program.

INTERCEDE welcomes this appointment and we look forward to working very closely with Yvette Knott.

LILIBETH'S CALENDAR

Recent happenings...

- * on September 18 Judith Ramirez spoke to the YWCA's Social Action Committee on how to do effective Lobbying
- * on September 22 INTERCEDE participated in a national consultation of immigrant & visible-minority women in Ottawa. The meeting was convened by Minister of Multiculturalism David Crombie

Coming up soon...

- * on September 27 the Cecil Community Centre will hold its annual OPEN-HOUSE with the theme 'Year of the Tiger'. Everyone is welcome!
- * on Sunday, October 5, INTERCEDE will hold its Annual General Meeting at the Cecil Centre. There will be a business meeting for voting members only at 2pm and a public meeting at 3:30pm to which everyone is invited...guest speaker will be Dan Hill, Ombudsman of Ontario

...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

- * to Josie Morales who recently married Darryl Eiboff in Vancouver
- * to Norma Malicdem on her forthcoming marriage to Robert Haley
- * Happy natal day to Fely Cacho... many happy returns!
- * and our warmest best wishes to our new landed immigrants: Mary Purog and Pat Laongayan, from the Philippines
- * welcome back to all our members & friends who went home on their summer holidays

See you all on October 5!

- Beth Udasco

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

On October 1, 1986, the minimum wage in Ontario will increase to \$4.35 per hour. This means that the monthly minimum for live-in domestic workers will rise from the present \$757.00 to \$823.00 (gross). This is how you calculate your pay:

Ontario Minimum

Monthly (12 pay periods):	\$823.00	Gross
Your employer can deduct:	238.00	Rm/Brd
Your employer must deduct:	11.06	CPP
	19.34	UIC
	82.65	Tax

That leaves you with: 471.95 Net

If you are a foreign domestic worker the immigration minimum remains the same at \$827.50 per month. This is how you calculate your pay:

Immigration Minimum

Monthly (12 pay periods):	827.50	Gross
Yours employer can deduct:	238.00	Rm/Brd
Your employer must deduct:	11.15	CPP
	19.45	UIC
	82.65	Tax

That leaves you with: 476.25 Net

Remember these are only the minimum rates your employer is required to pay by law. If you are experienced and have special skills, you can negotiate a higher pay rate. If you have any questions contact :

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT (416) 591-1625

- Joan Ann Gravesande

OUR TELEPHONE NUMBERS!

Counselling line	591-1625
Business line	591-6351

Domestic workers praise rule change

Job freedom could become guaranteed

By Kelly Toughill Toronto Star

A rule forcing foreign domestic workers into a legal unemployment limbo has been scrapped because it flouts federal policy, says an immigration official.

The regulation, which stipulated the workers have a release letter from a former employer before switching jobs, was fought for a year by Toronto activist Judith Ramirez.

But she warns that those it affected still may not get new permits.

"That's music to our ears, but if the pending cases aren't reversed, I'll wonder if we won anything," Ramirez said when she learned immigration officers were no longer allowed to ask for the letters.

Immigration official Joseph Carelli said his office ordered the practice stopped because it went against federal policy that allows foreign domestic workers the right to change jobs if abused by their original employers.

No guarantee

Under the controversial rule, a former employer could virtually assure a domestic worker would never get another job simply by refusing to hand over the required letter.

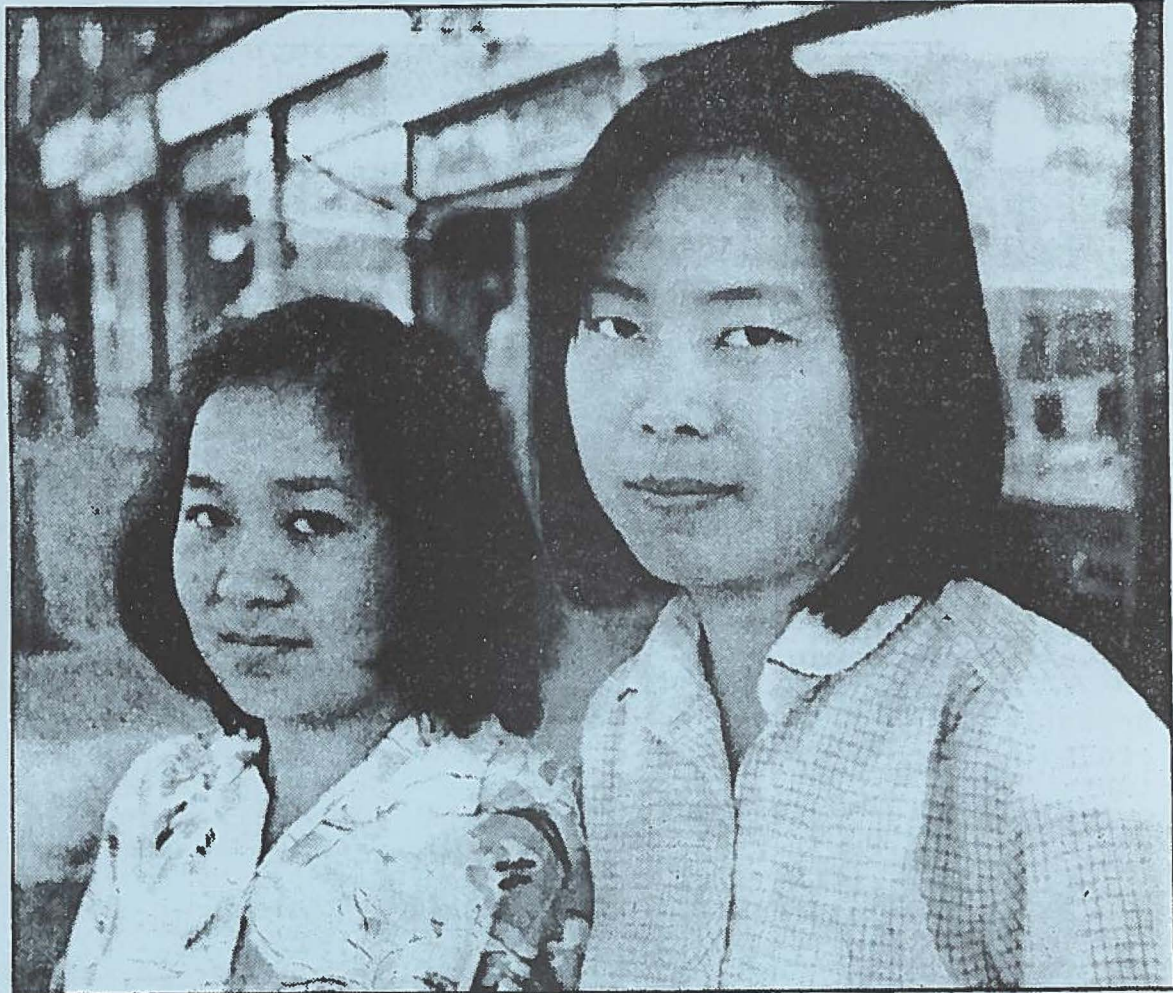
Only one immigration office had adopted the letter policy, he said, but it handled most of Metro's 7,000 foreign domestic workers. There are 16,000 workers in Canada under the special program.

But those promised permits if they could get letters aren't now guaranteed them because the rule was scrapped, Carelli said.

"Permits depend on whether people left with good cause," he said. "Policy is one thing, specific cases are another. They are separate issues."

Lie Khim Tjoe, 23, from Indonesia, and Herminia Nelmda, 25, from the Philippines, are two of 10 women who asked Ramirez for help with the problem.

Tjoe and Nelmda have been out



DICK LOEK/TORONTO STAR

Unemployed domestics: Herminia Nelmda, left, and Lie Khim Tjoe sought help after they quit their jobs as domestic workers. A recently overturned ruling required them to get a release letter from their former employers before they could get another job. They hope the change helps them get new jobs.

of work since early July — forced to live with friends while immigration officers reviewed their cases.

Nelmda had \$300 when she was told to leave the Willowdale home of her employer near midnight on July 7. Both she and Tjoe have been offered jobs, but can't take them without new work permits.

Both say immigration officers promised them permits if they could get letters from their employers that stated they left through no fault of their own. This, they say, is impossible.

Nelmda said she left because she was forced to work 13-hour days, not allowed to have visitors and banned from using the phone. When she gave notice, she was told to leave immediately — that night,

she said.

Tjoe says she left because she wasn't given time off, was forced to work 12-hour days and then had to babysit the children till past midnight.

"Domestic workers' right to change employers was made null and void by the release letters," said Ramirez. "It gave employers the right to veto domestic workers' right to work in Canada."

Tjoe and Nelmda still must prove they had good reason to leave, Carelli said.

The two women — who both earned a net monthly salary of \$470, plus room and board, when working — now spend their days talking with friends, watching television and doing volunteer work.

Tjoe spends several hours a week with patients of Toronto Grace Hospital; Nelmda shows the residents of Baycrest Centre how to bowl.

Both had hoped to make Canada their permanent home. But Tjoe has until January to solve her immigration problems and Nelmda until March. Then their visas run out and they must return home.

Ramirez said her organization will continue to plead the case for the two women.

"These two cases are very clear cut," she said. "They are both open and shut. They were told if they got release letters, they would get work permits. Now immigration is muddying the waters."

INTERCEDE has appealed the cases of Herminia Nelmda and Lie Khim Tjoe, above, to the regional office of Immigration. We are still awaiting the results of that review and, in the meantime, both women are unable to work.

INTERCEDE WELCOMES DR. DAN HILL

Dr. Dan Hill will be the guest speaker at the INTERCEDE Annual General Meeting on Sunday, October 5, at the Cecil Community Centre.

Dr. Hill has a distinguished record in the area of human rights. He was the first director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission from 1962 - 1971, and served as its chairman until 1973. He has been an adjunct professor at the University of Toronto and an advisor to the president on human rights issues.

Educated in three countries, Dr. Hill graduated from Howard University in Washington, DC; he attended the University of Oslo, in Norway; and he received his M.A. and Ph.D at the University of Toronto.

Dr. Hill also has an extensive background as a private consultant in the field of human rights. He has worked with the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services and the Commission of Inquiry on Equality in Employment.

INTERCEDE is very pleased to welcome Dr. Hill as our guest speaker this year, and we warmly invite our friends and supporters to join us for our Annual General Meeting, at 3:30 pm, in the auditorium of the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street.

NEW SERVICE UNIT COUNSELLOR!

INTERCEDE is happy to announce a new addition to our staff. Joan Ann Gravesande was recently hired as a counsellor to assist domestic workers from the Caribbean.

Ms. Gravesande came to Canada two years ago from Guyana. While in Guyana she worked for the Ministry of Education and the community-based Human Rights Association. She was also instrumental in founding the organization Women Against Terror which assisted victims of political violence. Her community work experience includes co-ordinating day-care services, forming co-operatives, and organizing educational programs in economic development.

Since arriving in Canada, Ms. Gravesande has worked with refugee women, assisting them with immigration procedures and settlement issues.

Joan Ann Gravesande is married and has a six-year old daughter.

INTERCEDE SERVICE UNIT

Open Monday - Friday, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Located in the Cecil Community Centre, 58 Cecil Street, Toronto (south of College and east of Spadina).

All services are confidential & free of charge. Call us at 591-1625!

DOMESTICS' CROSS-CULTURAL NEWS
c/o INTERCEDE
58 Cecil Street
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First Class