

Women Working  
With Immigrant Women

730 Bathurst Street, Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4

Telephone (416) 531-2059

May 27th 1985.

Dear sisters,

These general background information touches on some of the problems Immigrant women face and it is to help you make the connection between the problems and what causes those problems.

I would suggest however, to those who are interested to find out more detail information to read Sheilas McLeod Amopoulos report "PROBLEMS OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN LABOUR FORCE" which you can obtain from the "Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women-Box 1541 Station B Ottawa K1P 5R5. Also you can contact the Cross Cultural Communication Centre 530-4117 which has A.V. and print material on Immigrant women.

I would also like to add my name on your speakers bureau. WWIW has a labour committee and the members of the committee will be more than happy to assist you with your work.

I believe that this will be a starting point for a long term co-operation.

Yours in solidarity,

*S. Loucas*

Salome Loucas,  
Co-ordinator.

## WHY IMMIGRATE.

The imperialist colonization can be carried out by a violent and direct involvement of troops in another country or by controlling the economy of that country. The economies of the third world countries are developed to supplement the economies of the developed countries.

This creates political and economic conditions which forces the people of those countries to immigrate - one to avoid prosecution and two, to find employment. They will go to the centres where the wealth is concentrated, wealth that had been taken away from their countries.

## ON THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION.

Looking at the history of immigration policies in Canada, we find that immigration policies and regulations are set and then changed to meet the labour needs of Canadian employers and the economic development of the country. The criteria used allows the selection of the needed skills. Residency in Canada is also designed accordingly. How secure is the residency when new developments and economic changes occur?

Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos in her report writes "Immigrants are more worried about their immigration status in Canada than their labour rights therefore they don't take any risks." That fear is well founded.

There are many dramatic chapters in the Canadian immigration history which show the immigration policies tied to the country's economic needs and cycles. During the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, it was the opening of the west to the Chinese immigrants which was later restricted with the completion of the project. At the start of the century, immigrants from the East European countries were allowed to enter Canada to meet the needs of developing the farm lands. Then immigrants with professional training were required and allowed in during the sixties. When poorly paid, unskilled labour was required the doors were open to the immigrants from the Third world countries. Today due to the economic recession, proposals are being put forward recommending immigration selection not on the basis of skills applicants possess, but rather on the amount of money applicants will bring in the country to create businesses, and as the logic goes, create jobs.

During world war 2, Canadian citizenship did not protect the Japanese Canadians and during the economic recession of the 1930's the naturalized citizens and British subject labour leaders were threatened with deportation. Socialists and "foreigners" were blamed for social and industrial unrest.

Up to this day immigrants are blamed for the economic instability. During bad economic times the Government focus moves always to setting immigration quotas instead of pursuing a full employment policy. The myth that immigrants take jobs away can be uncovered if it is said that the selection of applicants is done based on a point system. Additional points are granted if there is ~~unemployment~~ employment which has to be cleared by the manpower offices across the country meaning no permanent resident or citizen wants the job.

It is in this climate that immigrants insecurity increases and fears develop. Losing one's job and applying for UIC benefits for immigrant workers can be intimidating since permanent residents can be removed from Canada if they "willfully fail to support themselves. Organizing to improve working conditions and benefits is also intimidating since they can be subject to deportation under S.19(I)(g) which applies to non citizens who can be removed if there are grounds

to believe they will engage in acts of violence or they are members of an organization that is likely to engage in such acts of violence. Since there is always a possibility of violence on a picket line that organization can be a labour organization.

Immigrant workers right to organize and receive representation is not fully addressed. Yet they compose part of the working class of Canada and contribute to the economic and social development of the country.

#### IMMIGRANT WOMEN.

Immigrant women face additional problems because of their immigration status. A large number of immigrant women enter Canada under the family class category. The basic principle of the family class is to include close relatives of permanent residents and Canadian citizens, who are likely to be totally depended upon the sponsor or will not be joining the labour market and who wouldn't under the point selection system qualify. The family class category provides no access to social assistance (welfare) housing and no access to language training. The responsibility for the sponsoree's economic support rest on the sponsor.

Canadian employers import labour with no intention to keep it longer than their needs require. When new developments take place and the imported labour (their husband) is not longer needed immigrant families find themselves in financial hardship. This economic necessity will force immigrant women to take just any job and very often they become the sole supporters of the family.

Immigrant women are overrepresented in the sales, service, assembly line and light manufacturing industries. They do the jobs no other member of the labour force will do. This is not by choice. What forces immigrant women into those dead end, low paid jobs where often working conditions are inhuman is the lack of access to language training and lack of affirmative action programs which will meet the immigrant women's educational needs and equip them with competitive marketable skills.

#### C.E.I.C. OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL POLICIES.

The CEIC priority is to find employment for unemployed people. Training is given only to people who need the language to perform a job. Since immigrant women can find employment in places where unskilled labour is required and they do not need the language to perform those jobs, they are often denied entry into the language training programs. Also training is geared to upgrading skills already acquired. New developments the introduction of new technology and the export of industries to third world countries which is occurring mainly where immigrant women traditionally work, creates new labour market demands. Unemployment amongst immigrant women especially of the middle age is rapidly increasing. Although there are skill training programs into non-traditional jobs offered by CEIC, the entry of immigrant women into those programs is unrealistic since immigrant women lack the primary language skills and education. Another reason immigrant women do not enter those programs is that training allowances are based on the spouse income which in immigrant families is usually low and allowances do not reflect the cost of living, and because there is fear that after completion of training no jobs exist.

The unofficial policies of the CEIC and the attitudes of the CE centres councillors is to give only information when is required. Immigrant women not being able to communicate in one of the official languages and not having information in their language on available programs do not know for what to ask and how to go about asking.

The results of lack of language skills will create dependence on the husband who can abuse the wife and dependence on friends, isolation, lack of participation in social activities, health and family problems and the lack of understanding of structures and

laws make immigrant women vulnerable to the worst type of exploitation.

#### IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE UNIONS.

It is not a riddle whose interests are served when immigrant women are kept isolated from the mainstream of society and unfamiliar with the laws and unaware of their rights

In the private sectors of the economy affirmative action programs are voluntary if any. Industrial regulations are weak as the government by not interfering claims that is creating an investment climate and the Employment Standards Act either excludes or is not strong enough to protect immigrant women. In short the private sector is provided with cheap labour.

Some of the Employment Standards Act provisions that need to be improved and which affect immigrant women the most are:

Hours of work-Vacation benefits-Sub contracting provisions to guarantee successors rights  
Inclusion of Farm and seasonal workers in the Act-Inclusion of homework in the hours of work, overtime and public holidays provisions-and minimum wage.

Generally speaking, organizing immigrant women is not an attractive task to Unions. Unions inroads are made within the heavy industries which gives political influence. Other reasons is that organizing campaigns are costly because of weak labour legislation which allows the management to weaken Unions and put in place procedural delays, the task is hard and Unions have no bilingual staff resources that immigrant women can relate and talk to. Problems which arise during organizing campaigns spring also from the workers part who are divided over ethnic and racial differences promoted by the management to support his economic interest, communication problems amongst the workers and staff organizers which contribute to mistrust and fear for political involvement.

#### IMMIGRANT WOMEN AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN CANADA.

Within the women's movement immigrant women lack representation and the issues of concern of immigrant women are not addressed. Instead of removing the barriers and addressing the causes of the problems that isolate immigrant women there is the tendency to want to take care of immigrant women. They believe that leadership is for the people who can read and write and debate issues on a theoretical level is very wrong. Immigrant women proved that they can lead their struggles and their experiences can enrich and strengthen the women's movement. Also another wrong assumption is that there will be room for immigrant women to move up once the white Canadian women move in other areas and live the position they now hold for immigrant women.

A lot remains to be done if the women's movement is to represent the interests of all women.

#### HEALTH PROBLEMS.

Immigrant women being concentrated in Unorganized sectors where long hours of manual labour is required and being underpaid are victims of industrial accidents as they have to work more overtime to supplement the little they make. Knowing their skills limitations will rarely complain for the working conditions imposed on them and family responsibilities which often have to carry alone (is very usual for immigrant families to work on different shifts so one of the parents is always home) create health problems because of stressful living and working conditions. Doctors in general are not trained to take into consideration the working conditions when doing examinations.

#### FAMILY PROBLEMS.

A large number of immigrant women come either from rural areas or they were not working when they were in their own country. Family structures in many countries are different

from the nuclear structure of Canadian family. It's women mostly that suffer from this difference because they don't have the support they use to have from other members of the family. In Canada where social services are provided by institutions and not by family members (child care for example) creates adjustment difficulties. Also the family member's roles change as women join the labour market. Attitudes of first generation immigrants and second generation immigrants develop differently towards the new society which is another reason for tension in the family.

#### RACISM.

Immigrants whether visible or not experience racism because they are used as scapegoats at bad economic times. Racism if it can be put in one sentence "is a product of capitalism it exists and it is promoted by the ruling class to support that class economic interests. It was introduced by the ruling class to justify the distraction of the economies of the third world countries and the distraction of other cultures. As the working class advances and struggles to abolish exploitation racism will have no place or reasons to exist.