

“DOMESTIC WORKERS NEED YOUR SUPPORT!”

TORONTO, 1981

Dear friends,

As you are probably aware, every year the Federal government has to “import” about 10,000 temporary workers—mostly from Third World countries—to do live-in domestic work. This is because the wages are kept too low, and the hours too long, to attract Canadians or permanent residents to do the work. The only way the Employment & Immigration Commission can meet the great demand for live-in domestics is by bringing in women who have no rights either to do different kinds of work or to stay in Canada permanently, and by closing their eyes to the countless non-status women who have little choice but to do domestic work.

As a result of initiatives by domestic workers, supported by organizations such as INTERCEDE of Toronto, the Montreal Household Workers’ Association, the Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant Services Organization, and Labour Advocacy and Research Association of Vancouver, the Immigration Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, has been forced to admit that the temporary work permit system is unjust and has promised changes.

His *public* statements led us to believe that the point system would be revised so that women presently working in Canada as temporary domestic workers, as well as women wishing to come to Canada as domestics, could get landed status.

His *private* actions are a different story. He has made changes that are making things worse than ever. In order to apply, a woman now needs a certificate from a homemakers’ or nannies’ school as well as job experience—qualifications that West Indians and Filipinos, who make up the vast majority of temporary domestics, do not have. In other words, Mr. Axworthy’s promised improvements mean that a select group of nannies from the U.K. and northern Europe will get landed status, while black and Asian women continue to be as little more than, as one domestic worker put it, “sophisticated slaves”.

The Minister needs to be told that slavery days are over, and to do this your help is needed. Please write a letter to Mr. Axworthy, saying that all domestic workers, whether on temporary work permits or without status, should be able to apply for landed status on a point system that recognizes both the demand for domestic workers in Canada, as well as their work experience . . .

The domestic workers have already gotten hundreds of letters signed, but we need thousands more to let the Minister know that the Canadian public will no longer tolerate racist immigration policies.

As the slogan of the domestic workers in Toronto goes, “If we’re good enough to work here, we’re good enough to stay”. Thank you for your support.

Yours truly

Frances Gregory

Coordinator, INTERCEDE

Source: International Coalition to End Domestic Exploitation (**INTERCEDE**), *Circular* (Toronto: August 1981). From *Canadian Women's Issues: Bold Visions*, Ruth Pierson and Marjorie Cohen eds., Volume II (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1995). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.