

Conclusion

But immigrant women are not passive victims of the legal, economic and social processes which affect their lives. Along side the feminist movement, immigrant women, including domestic workers, have organized and are demanding for their rights to equal treatment. Their efforts have led to changes within Canadian institutions.

For example, as a result of agitation by ethnic communities, immigrant women and other human rights groups in 1986, the federal government has set aside special funding for English language training for immigrant housewives. Childcare is provided as part of this special grant program. English classes funded under this program are run by community organizations. However, while this is one avenue of free language training for immigrant women who are full-time homemakers, it is inadequate to address the labour market needs of immigrant women.

Another gain made by women who are in Canada on temporary work permits as domestic workers is the Foreign Domestic Worker (FDW) program. Whereas prior to 1981, women on work permits were forced to return to their home countries after two years, they are now able to apply for landed immigrant status after the two-year period if they can prove self-sufficiency. This change is the result of years of lobbying and organizing efforts by groups such as INTERCEDE, a Toronto-based organization advocating on behalf of domestic workers.

As immigrant women become more strident, however, other forces are at play to undermine the gains they have made in the past two decades. For example, there is a recent legislative proposal that nannies entering the country should have a minimum of Grade 12 education. This legislation, if passed, would prohibit many women from the "Third World" from coming to Canada as domestic workers, thereby rendering the FDW racist in the way in which I described systemic racism above.

The free trade agreement between Canada and the U.S. while promoting trading relations across borders, may have detrimental effects on women. According

to Marjorie Cohen, a leading feminist economist, the sectors affected the most are manufacturing (especially the garment industry) and the service sector. These are sectors in which immigrant women are concentrated. Although it is impossible at this stage to assess the direct impact of free trade on these sectors, we know that there have been bankruptcy and plant closures in the textile and garment industry which are affecting the livelihood of immigrant women.

It is important to see that the experiences of immigrant women are continually transformed in response to changing legal, social, political and economic realities. This requires that immigrant women organizing be dynamic and constantly attentive to changing economic and government priorities, because they both pose limits on and create new possibilities for immigrant women's livelihood.

References

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Taken for Granted

Just because I have breasts
does not make me a shopping
list.

My two front teeth are
aligned,
I sing alto
sometimes tenor.

Just because I bleed
does not mean ironing's in
my blood.

I have a closet full of shoes
and sometimes go barefoot.

Just because of my pubic hair
doesn't mean I take phone
messages,

or the dial tone
that rings all night is for me.

Just because I nag,
doesn't mean you stop
listening.

Just because of the extra
entrance
doesn't make me a doormat.