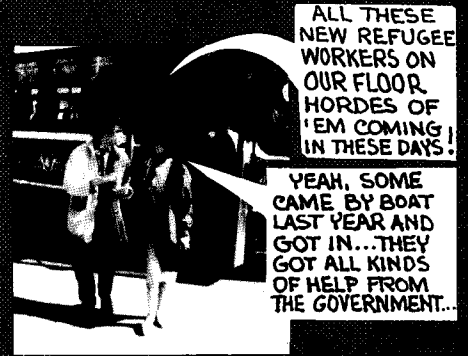


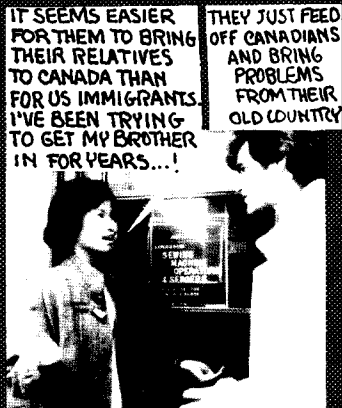
# The **PRESSURE** is on...!

A Photo-story about Refugee & Immigrant Women Workers



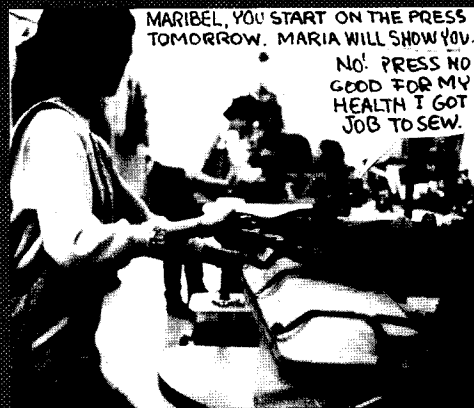
ALL THESE NEW REFUGEE WORKERS ON OUR FLOOR. HORDES OF 'EM COMING! IN THESE DAYS.

YEAH, SOME CAME BY BOAT LAST YEAR AND GOT IN...THEY GOT ALL KINDS OF HELP FROM THE GOVERNMENT...



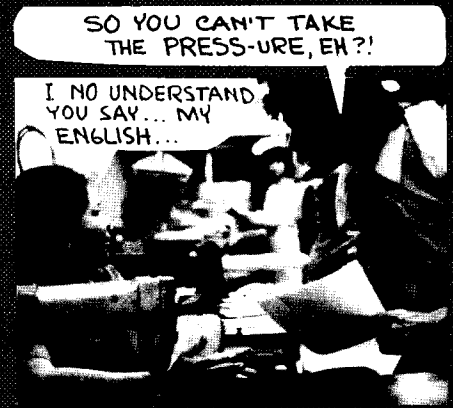
IT SEEMS EASIER FOR THEM TO BRING THEIR RELATIVES TO CANADA THAN FOR US IMMIGRANTS. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO GET MY BROTHER IN FOR YEARS...!

THEY JUST FEED OFF CANADIANS AND BRING PROBLEMS FROM THEIR OLD COUNTRY



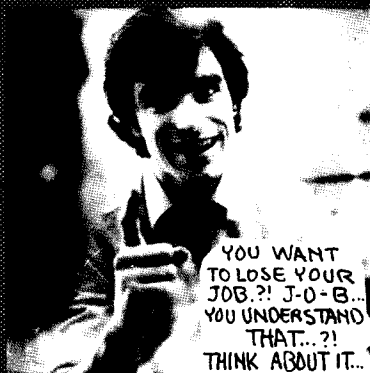
MARIBEL, YOU START ON THE PRESS TOMORROW. MARIA WILL SHOW YOU.

NO! PRESS NO GOOD FOR MY HEALTH I GOT JOB TO SEW.



SO YOU CAN'T TAKE THE PRESS-URE, EH?!

I NO UNDERSTAND YOU SAY... MY ENGLISH...



YOU WANT TO LOSE YOUR JOB?! J-O-B... YOU UNDERSTAND THAT...?! THINK ABOUT IT...



COFFEE BREAK! VAMOS AL BAÑO!



YOU WERE VERY BRAVE TO SAY NO TO THE FOREMAN!

I DIDN'T WANT TO WORK ON THE PRESS EITHER, BUT I WAS ALWAYS AFRAID ...



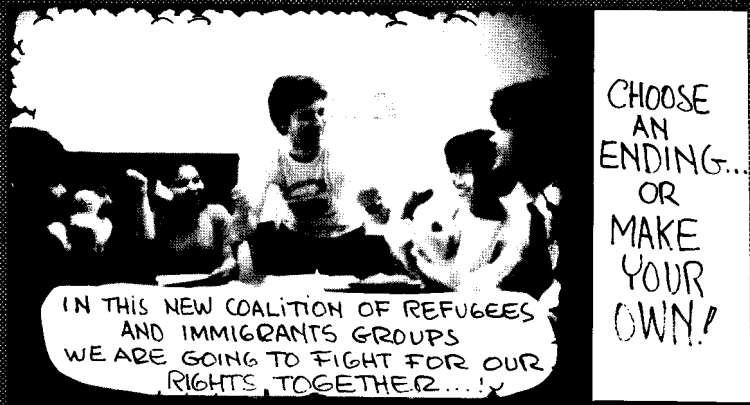
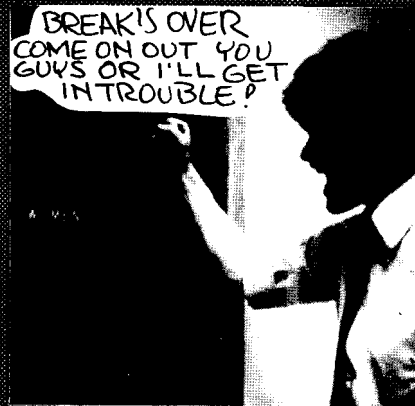
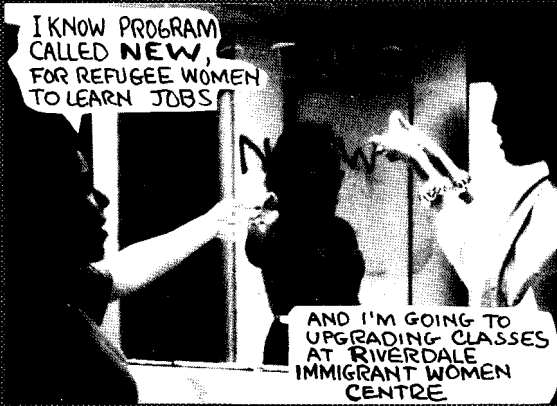
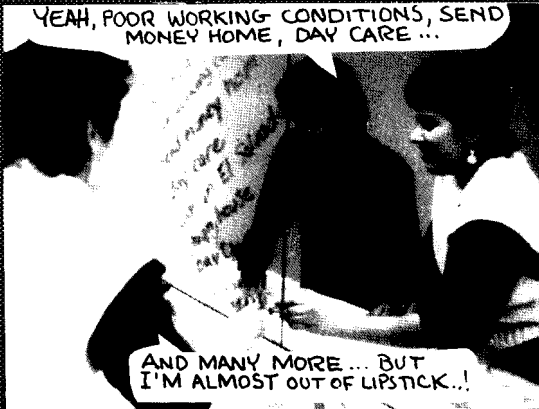
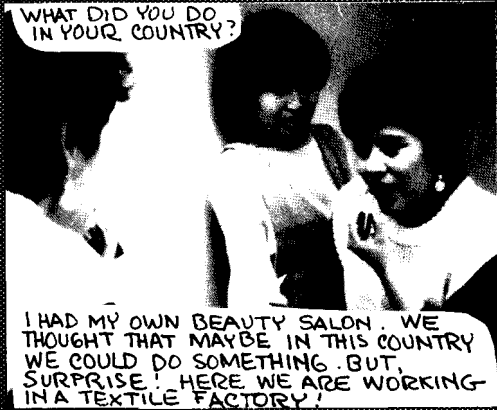
ME TOO...! BUT TORTURE HURT MY BACK... I NO CAN WORK PRESS



HOW DID THAT HAPPEN...?

THE WAR IN EL SALVADOR WE ALL HAD TO LEAVE... IT WAS TOO DANGEROUS!

AND MY CHILDREN ARE STILL THERE ... WHEN WILL I SEE THEM AGAIN...?



# The Stories Behind the Story

*Photographs and arrangement by Deborah Barndt*

We produced the preceding photo-story in early 1987 in *The Moment*, an educational and organizing tool for groups working on critical Canadian issues. The issue focused on the refugee policy crisis, as Canada began closing the door to refugees. We wanted our story to do three things:

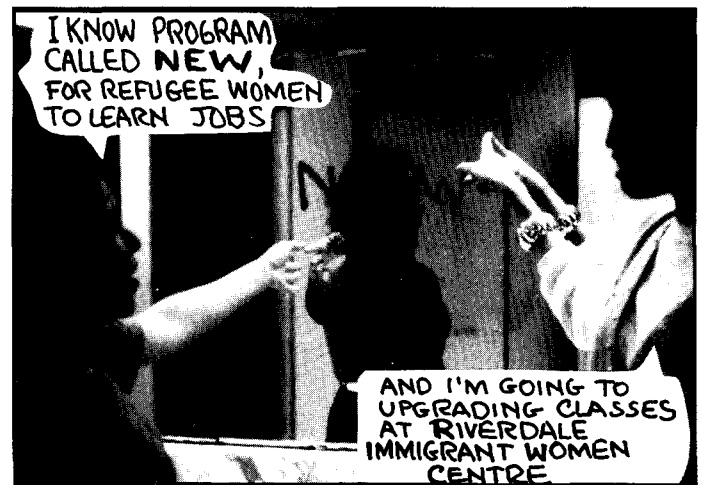


- to recognize and challenge the stereotypes Canadians have of refugees;
- to show the common experiences of refugee and immigrant women workers;
- to offer a sense of hope through organizations working for change.

First we contacted two groups in our Riverdale neighbourhood who work on these issues. From them, we got four participants for the project.

Maria, a Chinese community worker from the Riverdale Immigrant Women's Centre, and Marina, Guadalupe, and Maribel, El Salvadorean refugees from an employment training program of NEW Experiences for Refugee Women.

We also invited Doug, a native-born Canadian factory worker and actor from a neighbourhood theatre group.



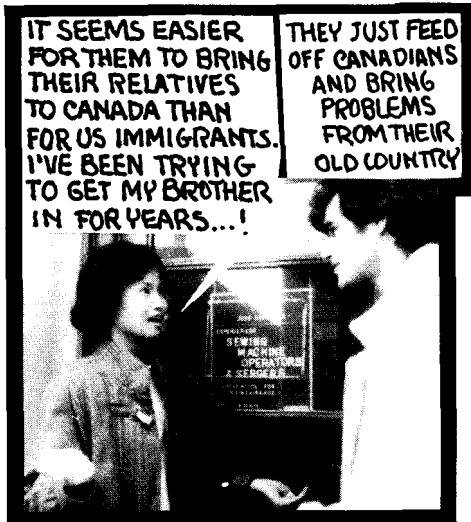
They were all involved in five steps of the process:

1. a workshop on refugees at a Riverdale Community meeting;
2. role plays and interviews about their own stories as refugees and immigrants;
3. a check of the storyboard and script we developed from the stories;
4. the actual shooting of the photos;
5. a party launching the finished product— hot off the press!

The photo-story was based on the experiences of the five actors. Yet in the synthesis, much of the rich detail of their stories was lost. In the next three pages, we reproduce parts of the original interviews, together with the corresponding photos.

## What Canadians Think

*First we asked Doug, a native-born Canadian, and Maria, a Canadian immigrant, to role-play a conversation reflecting stereotypes Canadians have of refugees:*



Doug: People come to Canada and bring their problems from their old country — religious problems, things from ancient history that don't apply in this country, and they're still battling them out. This clan is against that clan, etc.

Are they taking our jobs or just taking our tax money? Either way they're coming to feed off Canadians instead of to establish themselves as workers in our workforce and take our way.

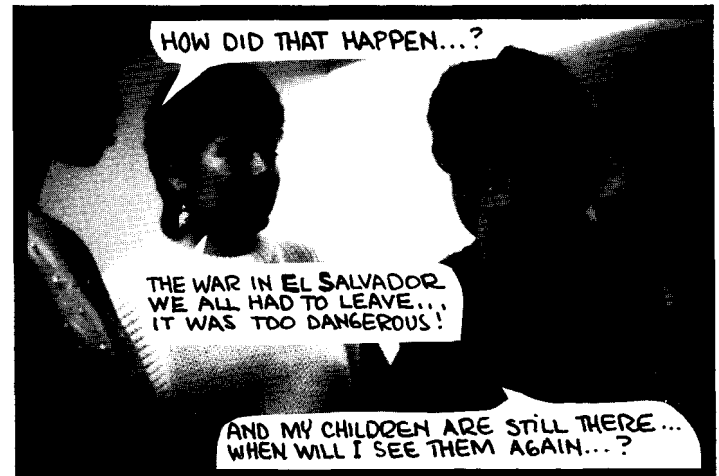
Maria: And it's much easier for the refugees to sponsor their parents to come over to Canada. We immigrants have to wait so many years and we have to meet so many requirements before we can sponsor our relatives to come.

For refugees, if they are sponsored by the government, the government supports them financially. While we immigrants have to wait so many years before we can get welfare.

### Why We Came

*Then we asked the three Salvadorean refugee women, Guadalupe, Marina and Maribel, to tell us why they had to leave their country:*

Guadalupe: In my country, there are three forces, the government, the people, and the extreme right.

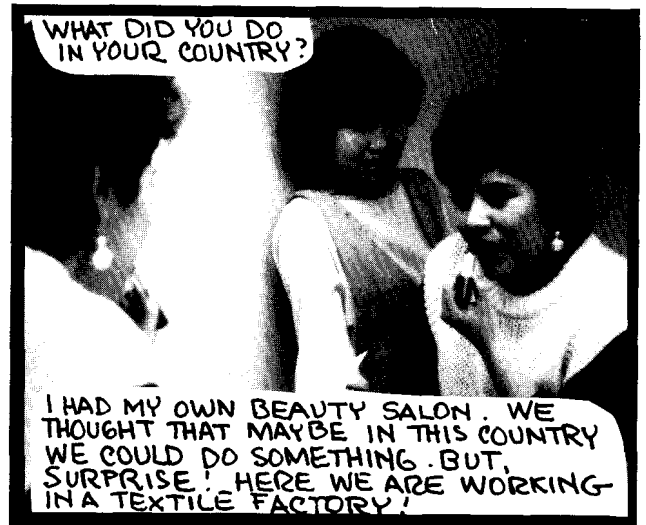


My husband studied business administration in the National University. It's difficult to be a student in my country, because when you study, you begin to understand the whole situation. One day my husband received a warning, so he didn't go. Two students were killed that day.

My brother was studying to be a priest. He worked for a time with Monseignor Oscar Romero and base Christian communities. One day he was standing at a bus stop. A child fell down. He ran to help her. A bomb went off at the bus stop. He was the only one waiting there. It was meant for him.

Guadalupe: I had my own business in my country.  
I had a little beauty salon.

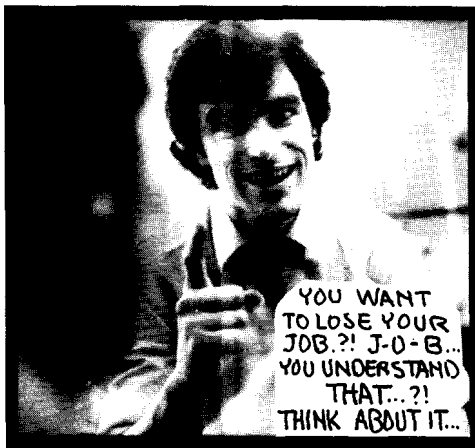
Marina: I was studying to be a lawyer. But the political problems were too hard. Due to the war in El Salvador, we had to leave and come here.



We know this country is a democratic country. In our country, we had no hopes for our children. We felt that maybe in this country we could do some kind of different work. But what a surprise for us: when we come here, we have to work cleaning houses and in factory jobs!

### What Common Experiences We Have

Maria: Often immigrants and refugees like us don't know where to seek help. We don't know the law.



The manager takes advantage of us. He doesn't pay overtime when he knows he's supposed to pay. He knows we cannot go anywhere to seek help.

We have low income jobs. If we lose the jobs, it's even worse, we don't have enough money to raise the family. So we cannot risk losing the job. We just hang on.

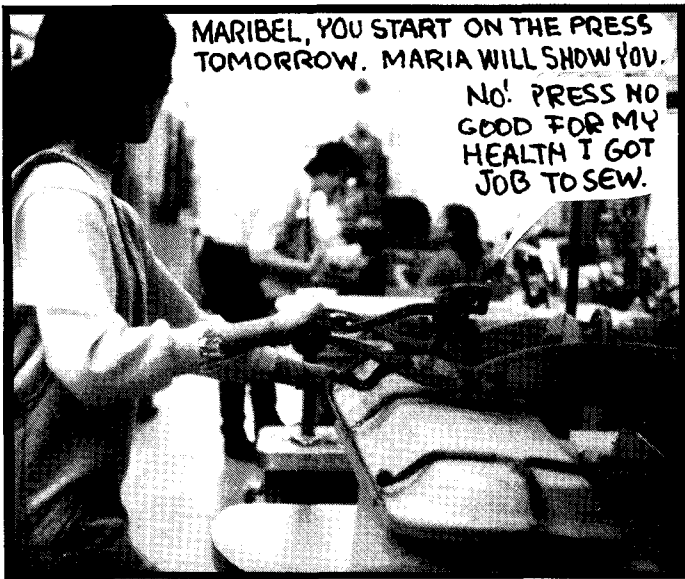
Marina: It's difficult for us to get good jobs, because we cannot speak English well.

Guadalupe: It's hard to study English after work, because I have three children, I clean my house and work hard.

Maria: And also the mental stress... all this stress. There is the problem of racial prejudice. If you have children going to school, these children will be called names by the other children.



## What We Can Learn From Each Other



Maribel: It was my first experience in a factory; I never worked in a factory before. My first day, the foreman shouted at me. He spoke very fast and told me a lot of words I didn't understand.

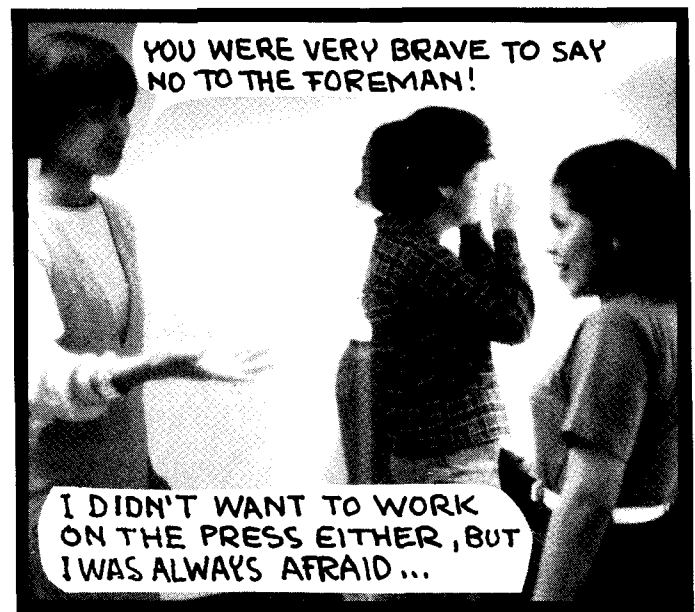
The next day, he asked me: "Why didn't you finish the work?" I tried to speak with him. Because this is the problem: people don't talk back and he gets stronger. I came, how can you say it, face to face. I said: "I'm sorry, but I didn't have time. I didn't stand up from my chair. I worked and worked."

Then he gave me another kind of work — on the press with the iron. So I went to speak to the boss. I said: "When I started work, I worked on the sewing ma-

chine. But I never did that work with an iron." He asked me: "Why?" I said: "Because this is very dangerous for my health. I take care a lot of my life."

Even though my English is not good, I try to speak and I try to explain my ideas. Other workers, if they don't speak English, they feel very afraid. When the boss speaks to them, they always just put the head down and don't say anything.

*Perhaps Doug, the Canadian, learned as much as anyone from this experience. After listening to the immigrant and refugee women's stories for two hours, he began to think about his own story:*



Doug: Everyone here actively knows of their roots. And me, being a typical Canadian, I don't know, I just thought I was here. Apparently my grandfather came from Scotland...I don't know my history. I'll have to go find out!

The Moment is published three times a year by the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice. The Winter 1989 issue focused on women and the economy; the Spring 1989 issue is on the new refugee law. Single copies \$3, orders of 10 or more \$2/each. Contact: Christine Almeida, The Moment, 947 Queen Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4M 1J9, (416) 496-1123.

