

have not been keen to retrain their workers — especially older Italian women workers. Instead, businesses have been pressuring the government to change its immigration policies in favour of skilled workers. The government has enthusiastically complied — it means less spending on government retraining programs. This has resulted in a massive loss of jobs: for example, the textile industry (which employs 160,000 workers, many of them immigrant women) has lost over 40,000 jobs in the last 10 years, and many more jobs are threatened. The trade union movement in Canada is demanding that workers have control over the introduction of new technology in the work place and that workers whose jobs are eliminated be assured new jobs.

The question of job loss for immigrant women is even more serious today as the government of Canada pursues a policy of Free Trade with the United States. Essentially, Free Trade means that goods would flow back and forth across the border as though Canada and the U.S. were one country. A study by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Technology of Ontario shows that at least 552,000 Ontarians could lose their jobs — 281,000 of these will be lost in the manufacturing industry. Forty-three percent of women work in the processing and manufacturing sector; many of these are immigrant women (Statistics Canada). The Federal Government's Macdonald Commission, a conservative body, estimated that nearly 1 million Canadians will lose their jobs due to Free Trade (there already exist 1.5 million unemployed people in Canada). In Ontario women constitute 46 per cent of all unemployed workers. Free Trade will only worsen the situation.

In addition to increasing unemployment, Free Trade will result in the weakening and eventual loss of all government social service programs, such as unemployment insurance, paid maternity leave, worker's compensation, medicare, family allowances, etc. Many women have had to depend on these programs for their livelihood. Women's organizations have joined with the labour movement in their opposition to Free Trade.

Italian immigrant women in Canada have been exploited and oppressed — both as women and as workers. They have also fought back: more and more immigrant women are organizing into unions and are becoming more crucial in the struggle for workers' rights. Italian women played a significant role in the Lancia-Bravo strike, the fight against contracting out at Villa Colombo, the

general protest in Toronto's clothing industry, and the struggles of the Union of Injured Workers.

The women's movement is articulating the problems facing immigrant women and demanding an end to their discrimination. People's coalitions of labour, women and community groups around issues of equal pay for work of equal value, affirmative action and Free Trade are also incorporating issues affecting immigrants. But it is primarily due to the efforts of immigrant women themselves that attention is being paid to their cause. And it is through their unity with other groups that their issues can be resolved.

My heart is
the shape of
a maple leaf.
It throbs
red, red.
Oh Canada, Canada
can you feel me
beating for you?

Anita Keller



Woman outside her house in Little Italy

Photo: Charisse de Freitas