

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Migrant workers launch campaign and class action lawsuit alleging violations of fundamental human rights at the Montreal airport

The Immigrant Workers Centre (IWC) and a group of migrant workers will hold a press conference at 10:30 am on Wednesday, October 4th at the office of the IWC at 4755 Van Horne, room 110.

At this press conference, the IWC and a group of migrant workers will discuss the situation that gave rise to a class action lawsuit that was filed this morning. The IWC and the workers are suing a placement agency operating under the name Trésor and its client company Newrest, a multinational that provides catering services to major airlines at the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport. This lawsuit has been filed by the law firm Trudel Johnston & Lespérance on behalf of hundreds of workers seeking damages for the violation of their human rights.

“According to the stories many workers told us, Newrest and Trésor have deprived hundreds of migrant workers of their basic human rights”, says Benoît Scowen of the IWC, the organization acting as the representative of the workers before the Superior Court. “If you have flown out of Pierre Elliott Trudeau Airport in the past two years, your airplane food may have been prepared by a migrant worker experiencing serious abuse.”

The class action alleges that the defendants have exploited a 2020 change in federal immigration policy which allows people already in Canada with visitor visas to apply for a work permit through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Trésor incited people to come to Canada on visitor visas and encouraged those who are already in Canada to stay with the promise of stable work. Representatives of both Trésor and Newrest led these workers to believe that they were able to work under a visitor visa during a “probation period” and while their application for a proper work permit was being processed. In reality, most workers never received valid permits at all.

“After seeing an ad on Facebook, I called Trésor and was told I had to fly to Montreal on a visitor’s visa,” explained Helena (not her real name), a 39 year old woman from Mexico who cares for five children and her elderly mother. “Trésor promised me that once I arrived, they would quickly secure my contract and work permit at a major company. They sent me to Newrest and told me to start working immediately. I believed my permit was being processed and that I was able to work. Gradually, I realized that there was no permit coming — but both Newrest managers and Trésor representatives pressured me to continue working under any conditions they imposed with the threat of firing me and canceling my permit application if I refused. I was manipulated into working for eight months without a permit and I was fired after trying to stand up for my rights.”

The IWC is committed to assisting every worker who has been a victim of this scheme. There are mechanisms to regularize their immigration situation and pathways to ensure that vulnerable workers can receive protection if they come forward. In light of this scandal, the IWC is also renewing its calls for the federal government to abolish the closed work permit system and follow through on the program to regularize the hundreds of thousands of people in Canada living without immigration status.

The IWC has made the office of the Minister of Immigration and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada aware of the situation described in the class action. The Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité au travail has also been alerted to the potential violations of the law and has been called to do investigations into both Trésor and Newrest.

The IWC was founded in 2001 as a labour education and campaign center for vulnerable immigrant and migrant workers in Quebec.

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