

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2010

With the support of generous donors, Cooper Institute
has responded to many community needs



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Major Programs

- ◆ PEI Working Group for a Livable Income
- ◆ Domestic Fair Trade for Food
- ◆ PEI Food Security Network
- ◆ Temporary Migrant Worker Project
- ◆ PEI Public Transit Coalition
- ◆ STEPS for Women
- ◆ Current Issues: Opinions

PEI Working Group for Livable Income

Cooper Institute is one of the co-ordinating organizations of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income. This coalition was established in 2002 and includes ten other community-based organizations: Actions Femmes de l'Î.-P.-É.; ALERT; CUPE PEI; PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women; PEI Council of People with Disabilities; PEI Federation of Labour; PEI People First; Société Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin (SSTA); Women's Network PEI; and Saint Vincent de Paul Society.

In 2010, the Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI) addressed essential issues related to livable income for all Islanders. The key concerns of 2010 were: differentiated "two tier" minimum wage as part of new legislation; pensions and retirement programs and the PEI Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The Working group presented a letter to the Minister of Community Services, Seniors and Labour concerning the passing of legislation which enabled the introduction of differentiated minimum wage in PEI. Differentiated minimum wage has the potential to disadvantage youth, women and others beginning participation in the work force. WGLI also expressed concern about the undemocratic process involved, i.e. a public consultation was held after the Act had passed, and the Government defeated a motion of its own Standing Committee to remove differentiated minimum wage from the Act.

With regards to the issues of retirement income and pensions, WGLI endorsed the June, 2010 proposal of the Canadian Labour Congress to double the CPP benefits, noting that most OECD countries have higher public pensions than Canada. WGLI notes that discussion of CPP

excludes the sector of low income people whose inadequate incomes are insufficient to provide anything but a miserable retirement. Furthermore, the discussion of private pensions is absurd for low income people. Promoting a culture of saving in this sector is like a cruel joke. A large percentage of the PEI population lack livable income either before or after retirement.

Through general submissions to Minister (and staff) of Community Services, Seniors and Labour, and to the Standing Committee on Health, Social Development and Seniors, WGLI emphasized the need in PEI for a system-wide poverty reduction strategy based on a social justice model rather than on charity. The Working Group also placed emphasis on the need for the PEI Government to exercise its lobbying capacity with respect to Federal policies especially relating to Employment Insurance and pension reforms.

The Working Group for a Livable Income welcomed the Fall 2010 Speech from the Throne promising action on poverty reduction and the Government's intention to discontinue its clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement. WGLI also notes that the Standing Committee on Health, Social Development and Seniors indicates an openness to the messages about a social justice perspective on poverty reduction, rather than a charity model.

During the year, the Working Group formed two sub-groups whose tasks are: to research the realities and proposed policy changes relating to the connection between low income and health; and to research the need for more effective Employment Insurance programs.

Domestic Fair Trade for Food

The final phase of the Domestic Fair Trade project was completed in March, 2010. It was a project of the National Farmers Union with financial support from the PEI ADAPT Council. Twenty two consultants developed a plan which includes a vision statement, values, goal and objectives, and a work-plan.

The vision statement includes the following: producers and consumers engaged in a system for trading food products that is based on trust, mutually beneficial relationships and respect for the environment,

and which results in: a livable income and safe, healthy working conditions for producers, farm workers and other food workers; and access to good quality, affordable food for consumers.

The Plan identifies underlying values for a system of fair trade for farm products. The values are in the following categories. **Economic values** (producers rights to dignity and a livable income; rural development featuring primary producers; food sovereignty emphasizing local food; direct trade between producers and eaters; shared economic risks). **Ecological Values** (farming practices which protect and improve land, water and air quality; healthy, adequate food for eaters; humane treatment of animals; small-scale family farming as a predominant unit of production). **Socio-democratic values** (the right of all people to safe, affordable, good quality food; control of the food supply by those who produce it; cooperation rather than competition; transparency at all levels; engagement of consumers and producers at all levels of the food system; the rights of workers in the food system to fair wages and workplace standards that promote good health and economic well-being; healthy and sustainable rural communities; on-going equal access to capacity-building and knowledge acquisition for producers; on-going citizen formation and learning).

The objectives outlined in the Plan include the recognized components of a domestic fair trade system. These involve the creation of the following processes and practices: fair trade standards, certification and labelling; mechanisms for setting prices; marketing relationships based on fairness and transparency; mechanisms for negotiation between producers and purchasers; public engagement; and a functionally democratic organizational structure. Each of these objectives is further developed into concrete actions and a coherent design for the implementation of the objectives.

As a follow-up to the Plan, Cooper Institute has developed a three-year project, to begin in 2011, pending funding approval. The project, **Maritime Region Pilot Project: Initiation of Domestic Fair Trade in Two Food Products**. This project will concentrate on fair trade for beef and vegetables (not including potatoes). It will pilot fair trade arrangements in these two products matching producers and food users in selected communities of the three maritime provinces.



PEI Food Security Network

Cooper Institute was the host organization for the Food Security Network for most of 2010. This involved maintaining communications and taking a lead role in the organization of several community workshops.

The first workshop, *Making it fair; a closer look at fair trade and sustainable food systems* was held in May. Guest speaker Scott Sinclair (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives) spoke about fair trade, free trade and buy local food policies. Information about the Cooper Institute/National Farmers Union Domestic Fair Trade project was presented, and workshop participants had an opportunity to discuss in small groups some of the benefits of and opportunities for domestic fair trade. The day also included a presentation on, and a discussion of, an interactive “Food Counts” workshop aimed at identifying key indicators of food security, presented by Irene Novaczek and Jake Bartlett of the Institute of Island Studies.

The second workshop, *Farming and Fishing; the current scene, root causes and action planning*, was held in November. Irené Novaczek and Pamela Courtenay-Hall of the Institute of Island Studies at UPEI were guest speakers; as well, Jake Bartlett presented data related to the “Food Counts” project. The latter part of the day was focussed on identifying some actions to be undertaken by the Network to address some of the farming and fishing issues that had been identified earlier in the day.

The Food Security Network hosted two other events, both with a focus on fair trade. The first, a youth event at a local coffee shop, was organized by two Katimavik participants and included music, food, video, and speakers. The second event was a public showing of the film “Buyer Be Fair”. Held at City Cinema, the event attracted a great crowd, most of whom stayed for a discussion afterwards.

In November a Cooper Institute representative attended the annual meeting of Food Secure Canada in Montreal, where she made a presentation about the domestic fair trade project. The representative continues to be the PEI “animator” for the People’s Food Policy Project (PFPP), a broad network of eaters, farmers, community workers, academics and others. In the fall of 2010, the PFPP, which has devoted the past two years to the formation of a made-in-Canada food policy, launched a series of “kitchen table talks”, inviting neighbours and friends to gather in their homes and other places to come up with ideas about how to develop the first Canadian Food Policy. In PEI, fifteen events were held in various locations.

Over the course of the year Cooper Institute participated in several networking meetings (by telephone) of groups who are working on food security in various locations in each of the provinces and

territories, and in August, attended a 3-day meeting associated with a 5-year CURA project about community food security in Nova Scotia.

For more information about the Food Security Network, check website: <http://peifoodsecurity.wordpress.com>.



Workshop Participants: Margaret Prouse, Sophie Tang, Flora Thompson & Akbar Sadat

Temporary Foreign Worker Project

Cooper Institute began work in September, 2010 on an action research project on temporary foreign workers in PEI. This one-year project will research the employment, worker well-being, and the influence of temporary foreign worker programs on the PEI community. Temporary foreign workers, their employers, communities, and individuals working in the public, private, and community sectors which administer the temporary foreign worker programs will be engaged to inform and shape the project.

The main goal of this project is to examine and understand the relationships and realities surrounding the employment of temporary foreign workers. The research will be done against the background of issues of food sovereignty, labour justice, and cultural diversity. Cooper Institute also plans to connect with national advocacy and research groups to place the PEI experience in the context of practices across Canada.

The majority of temporary foreign workers in PEI are in low-skilled jobs in agriculture and food processing plants. Low-skilled and agricultural temporary foreign workers generally earn little more than minimum wage, and are easily marginalized and exploited. One aspect of this is that employers can have them deported or not recommended for future work in Canada. The temporary foreign workers in these programs are also restricted from becoming permanent residents of Canada. Employers are vulnerable to the forces of the global market, but they also have a great deal of power over foreign labourers.

The increasing use of temporary foreign labour in agriculture suggests a labour shortage for seasonal and low-skilled work. The causes of this are complex and strongly tied to the economic forces causing out-migration from rural communities. The final report of this research project will highlight recommendations for community involvement, policy changes and enforcement of regulations.

Cooper Institute has developed and submitted a funding application for this project to the Community Development Program of the Rural Secretariat. If funding is available, work on this project will continue in the spring of 2011.



Temporary foreign workers harvesting Canadian crops.

PEI Public Transportation Coalition

The Public Transit Coalition, of which Cooper Institute is a member, held its annual meeting in March with guest speaker Dr Ed MacDonald, who made an engaging presentation about the history and importance of public transit in Prince Edward Island.

In June, the Coalition was invited to make a presentation to the Liberal caucus. Members took the opportunity to advocate once again for the establishment of a provincial transit authority. Although the presentation was very well received, there has been no indication that the government intends to implement Island-wide public transit or establish a transit authority.

In the fall and winter of 2010, the City of Charlottetown initiated an evaluation of its transit system. Members of the Public Transit Coalition participated in the evaluation in several ways, advocating for the development of service standards, evaluation methods, effective marketing strategies, as well as opportunities for ongoing public input into the system design.

STEPS for Women

A Cooper Institute staff person is participating in the *STEPS for Women* training program in interest-based conflict resolution, along with 23 other women from organizations that work with vulnerable women in PEI. The goal of the training, which is taking place over a two-year period, is to obtain a certificate in conflict resolution. Each participant will also lead a project to pass on interest-based skills to vulnerable women. The Cooper Institute representative will be working with a woman from People First, who is also taking the course. The STEPS project is funded by Status of Women Canada.



Issues Workshops and Presentations

Cooper Institute participated in the following activities on issues that affect Island communities:

- ➔ public presentation on *Proroguing Parliament: effect on Democracy*
- ➔ consultation with the **National Farmers Union** and participation in District and Regional Conventions
- ➔ presentation, *Haiti: Before the Earthquake-After the Earthquake* to **York United Church**
- ➔ keynote address, *Resilient Communities: The Art of Bouncing Back and Bouncing Forward* to the **Sixth Atlantic Summer Institute on Healthy and Safe Communities**
- ➔ workshop, *Social Justice Lens for Work with People with Disabilities* for the **PEI Council of People with Disabilities**
- ➔ presentation on *Rural Community Development* to the **Sisters of St. Martha**.

Organizational Development and Support

Over the past year Cooper Institute staff/Collective provided organizational skills and/or support to the following groups:

Société St. Thomas d'Aquin - participation in Annual General Meeting. One member is involved in all major issues of the organization

Weekly Silent Peace Vigil -

Family Immigration Support - assisting in translation and transportation of recent immigrant families; supporting immigrants to bring other family members; supporting candidates in their application for residency process; and moral support for an Uzbeki woman refugee in Japan

Parkinsons Society - participation in events. One member of the Collective is a primary organizer

Inclusion and Empowerment in the Social Economy - participation in meetings

Wheatley River Improvement Group - organizational support and assisting with programs

PEI People First - ongoing organizational support; presentation on livable income at annual conference

PEI Watershed Alliance - organizational support

International Women's Day 2010 - participation in organizing a celebration at the Guild on March 8.

Window on the South

Cooper Institute collaborates with various organizations in activities which bring the voice of People from the South to the PEI/Canadian consciousness and vice versa.

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation - Participating in PEI members' educational and promotional events, the AGM, breakfast meetings and participating on the Board membership committee

Friends of Mohamed - assisting in the completion of the campaign to purchase and maintain myoelectric hands for Mohamed Mara from Sierra Leone

Latin American Mission Program - helping to organize the Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture; designing the Lenten Mission Education Program and assisting in the orientation/debriefing of a LAMP missionary to the Dominican Republic

Canada World Youth (Indonesia-Canada) - presenting workshops on: Food Sovereignty as it pertains to both participating countries; watershed issues. Providing general support

Haiti - writing a three-part-series opinion piece for local newspapers; presenting an historical overview and current situation at an ACIC breakfast meeting.



Haiti

January 12, 2010 &

January 12, 2011

Goodbye and Thanks to Former Members; Welcome and Thanks to New Members

Susan Fitzpatrick who joined Cooper Institute in 2008 and worked on the Fair Trade program, moved to Yellowknife in February of this year. We wish you success, Susan and Byron. This year two new and wonderful members joined the Cooper Institute Collective: Josie Baker and Debbie Theuerkauf. Josie, after working in many creative development programs in Montreal returned to PEI in 2008 to work with Katimavik. Debbie is an RN working with the PEI School of Nursing as a Clinical Nursing Instructor.

Cooper Institute Funding

Cooper Institute's work in the community is funded mainly from private sources: e.g. project funding from foundations; and fee for services arranged with organizations, depending on their ability to pay. We are especially thankful to the many **individual donors** who make generation contributions each year.

Cooper Institute invites more interested people to donate. This can be done through in the following ways:

pre-authorized monthly donations; an annual contribution; a memorial for a deceased family member or friend; and/or a bequest in your Last Will and Testament. Cooper Institute is a charitable organization. (#10114 4541 RR0001)

Members of Cooper Institute Collective:

Josie Baker

Irene Burge

Marie Burge

Joe Byrne

Eddie Cormier

Irene Doyle

Marie Hendricken

Maureen Larkin

Andrew Macdonald

Adam MacIsaac

Leah MacLeod

Reg Phalen

Debbie Theuerkauf

Ann Wheatley

Temporary Foreign Workers in Prince Edward Island: Costs and Benefits

Since 2004 there has been a dramatic rise in the employment of temporary foreign workers in seasonal labour in PEI. Agriculture and food processing industries, through the province, have employed workers from Mexico, Guatemala, Russia, Thailand, China, and the Philippines, among other places. Two programs govern these categories of workers. The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) brings workers to Prince Edward Island from Mexico and certain Caribbean countries to work for up to eight months in agriculture-related employment. The other program that provides temporary foreign workers in fish and potato plants, trucking companies, fast food, and sometimes agriculture are in a category called “NOC C&D” – referring to workers considered to be “low skilled.” Temporary foreign workers are expensive for the employer, but provide a high return since they are a secure source of labour and they work long hours, often without receiving overtime pay.

There are two main areas of concern regarding the temporary foreign worker policies for PEI: exploitation of workers, and the potential for harm to local economies.

Canada's temporary foreign worker programs and their well-documented violations of human and labour rights are not surprising when Canada's history of racist labour and immigration policies is considered. Canada's temporary foreign worker programs have been described as a continuation of Canada's history of exploitative labour practices towards vulnerable, racialized populations such as the Chinese workers who built the railroads. Policies prevent these workers from being eligible to become Canadian citizens, effectively ensuring that they stay vulnerable and disposable. The policies also ensure the racial and cultural homogeneity of rural communities.

Foreign worker programs are not protective of the rights of workers. Employers have a great deal of power to deport workers or recommend against their future return to Canada. Workers cannot risk complaining about abusive labour practices, unacceptable living conditions or long work hours without risking their future employment. Although regulation is more stringent with the SAWP program, there is a significant lack of enforcement in PEI to ensure the wellbeing and rights of the NOC C&D program workers. There is insufficient inspection of worksites, pay records, and accommodations. There is a clear policy dictating what can be deducted from workers wages for expenses such as travel and accommodation, but it is not well regulated.

Community members often form friendships with temporary foreign workers. In an attempt to fill the gaps in the program, local residents have started to provide transportation, access to social services, advocacy, language training, and sometimes even housing. Workers who return to communities year after year, form close bonds with Islanders, and become integrated into their communities. Community members recognize the strong work ethic of temporary foreign workers, and realize that most of them have families with young children at home.

Temporary foreign workers bring significant economic and cultural benefits to the communities that host them. These rural communities depend on agriculture and the fisheries for their survival. Aging populations, low minimum wage rates that contribute to out-migration and limit opportunities for local employment mean that such communities are in a troubling state of decline. Local employment of temporary foreign workers has the effect of keeping local industry active, and local businesses and rental properties enjoy increased income. These economic and cultural benefits could become long term if workers were allowed to become permanent residents of this province.

Some employment sites, such as fish plants, are infamous for traditions of labour abuse and unreliable work. This results in the degradation of the domestic labour pool as the aging work force is not being replaced by the next generation. Rural communities pay a high cost as their population is declining and along with it, local businesses, schools, and other community institutions. Rather than replacing local exploitable labour with foreign exploitable labour, industry needs to be held accountable for labour standards, adequate income, paid overtime.

If labour rights were respected, and regulations monitored, then both local and foreign workers and communities would benefit. Rural communities would benefit from the increased number of young families to support businesses and rural schools. The racist immigration policies must be changed to allow both workers and rural communities to enjoy the full benefits of positive partnerships arrangement.

Making It Fair: A closer look at fair trade and sustainable food systems

The issue of Food Security is gaining interest in PEI. People have become more concerned about the massive exit of small-scale farmers, the toxicity of some farm practices and the unavailability of healthy food. They are also looking for ways to support sustainable food production. Even though national and international trade agreements have negatively affected all aspects of the food system, many people are looking for new ways to develop more self-reliant, fair, secure, and local food systems.

The key elements of **free trade** ideology as they pertain to agriculture and food are: fully open domestic markets, promotion of lowest-cost production (wherever that occurs) thus displacing local producers, the elimination of agricultural export subsidies, restricting government domestic support for producers, and removal of limits of foreign ownership of land.

In practice, global trade rules have been designed to facilitate a small group of global agri-businesses and giant retailers having full access to every aspect of the food system. This arrangement, which relies on large-scale production of cheap goods, displaces small-scale and peasant producers, and considers them to be obsolete and inefficient. However, the majority of people in the Global South still depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (50-80% in developing countries compared to less than 5% in developed countries). Small-scale agriculture plays a vital role in providing food for the populations. Approximately three-quarters of those surviving on less than \$1 a day (1.3 billion), live in rural areas in developing countries. So any credible initiatives for food security must address the viability of these small-scale farmers.

However, the opposite has happened. The many existing free trade agreements have been instrumental in destroying rural livelihoods in the Global South. A prime example is what happened in Mexico after NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). Small peasant producers were pitted against highly mechanized, industrialized, and subsidized US corn producers. A whole range of state supports for corn producers and consumers were dismantled. As a result, Mexican corn prices have dropped, while the price of tortillas has risen. The ones who benefited were the intermediaries, processors and distributors, while consumers and small farmers have suffered, with over a million forced off the land.

The Fair Trade Movement, meanwhile, has emerged to remedy some of the problems in the global food trading system, especially the plight of small producers and the power of the middlemen who dominate profit-making in the food system. The overall goal of the Fair Trade Movement is to enable producers to receive a 'fair price' for their product. It also attempts to move the farmer closer to the consumer, thus cutting out the middlemen and retaining more of the wealth in the farmers' hands. In Canada there are examples of national programs that could be seen as steps toward a Fair Trade System, namely the *Canadian Wheat Board* and *Supply Management Systems* (dairy, eggs, and poultry).

These two exemplary farm policies are under constant threat from trade treaties and corporate agri-food interests both at home and abroad. The key features of supply management are: a mandatory quota system that matches supply to demand, the control of imports, and no dumping of surplus product in global markets. Farmers in supply managed sectors tend to have access to more stable income, calculated on a cost of production basis.

Buy Local Campaigns is another strategy which contributes to promoting food security. Governments can develop purchasing policies which could help in achieving food security. There are some threats but Government purchasing—at the provincial and local level—is one of the few remaining areas where governments have considerable flexibility under international trade treaties. Cities and local governments in many regions are adopting policies to support local food production. For example the city of Toronto adopted a buy-local food purchasing policy in 2008. That policy commits Toronto City Council "to progressively increase the percentage of local food being served at city-owned facilities." According to one city councillor, no objections were raised, even though Ontario and its municipalities are bound under the AIT (Agreement on Internal Trade).

One of the most insidious aspects of trade treaties is the chill effect. Innovative policies are pre-empted or never even attempted because of concerns or arguments that they would not comply with free trade treaties such as the Atlantic Provinces Procurement agreement. However, treaties can be crafted in a way that minimizes or even eliminates the threat of a successful trade challenge. It appears that our own governments enter into such treaties to give themselves an excuse not to act. Governments bind themselves to trade treaties, and convince citizens that there is no room for fair trade action.

Canadians should strongly defend our existing fair trade/orderly marketing systems. While today they are under attack, if we can preserve them just a while longer, their worth will once again be recognised. A fair trade system will enable primary producers—both North and South—to receive their cost of production and make a decent living. It will also help local economies to thrive. It can ensure that people have access to good quality, locally-grown food.