

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2011

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
- ◆ Cinema Politica
- ◆ People First
- ◆ Current Issues: Opinions

PEI Working Group for Livable Income

Since 2002, Cooper Institute has been one of the co-ordinating organizations of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI), which includes ten other community-based organizations.

The main goal of WGLI is the eventual elimination of poverty in PEI through changes in government policies and changing community attitudes.

In 2011, the Working Group for a Livable Income continued to call for a (**community to**) shift of focus away from a charity model to (**ward**) one based on social justice. Some media coverage helped in this. The Guardian and Journal Pioneer published WGLI Letters-to-the-Editor and Opinion Pieces about: maintaining public pensions; the absence of poverty issues in the Provincial Election; and accompanying the Turkey Drive with political action for poverty reduction. CBC also aired a number of interviews and commentaries relating to poverty reduction.

The Working Group provided workshops or participated with other groups: workshops on the charity and social justice model to a Girl Guide troop and to two church organizations; a round-table with Senator Art Eggleton emphasizing the importance of rural areas in the understanding of poverty in Canada; an interchange with Roberto Pérez Rivero from the Foundation for Nature and Humanity, Cuba. Roberto brought lessons from Latin America where people empower themselves to take action by forming in local networks, always relating environment with all human concerns. Biodiversity is a source of wealth in the South whereas North America continues its strategy of trying to develop the economy by attracting investment and big corporations, which consistently create an ever-increasing rate of poverty. He commented that Canada and the US are looking more like Brazil, with polarized economic extremes.

WGLI members participated in Poverty Bites forum on the cost of poverty in PEI, and one member participated in a conference, *Bridges Out of Poverty*, in Indianapolis which focused on a justice model for addressing poverty.

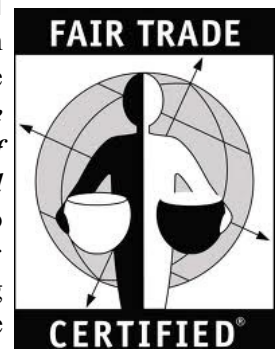
2011 was a banner year for working with policy makers. The PEI Government began to put into motion its previous commitment to create a poverty reduction strategy for the province. A great deal of time and energy, as a coalition and as individual member organizations, went into consultation with policy makers and planners. This involved face-to-face meetings, letters to the Minister and Deputy Minister responsible. WGLI identifies what appears to be a number of new points of agreement with the policy makers including: a strategy must be based on a social justice model rather than a charity model; developing a system-wide approach rather than a one-department responsibility; involving the community at a grass-roots level in developing and monitoring the strategy; understanding that economic impoverishment isolates people from their community and from democratic participation.

WGLI congratulated the PEI Government for discontinuing its long-standing clawback of the National Child Benefit Supplement. WGLI has welcomed the involvement of Sean Casey MP who brought a private members' bill before parliament, urging the enactment of a national poverty reduction strategy.

WGLI researched and developed a brochure on Employment Insurance, outlining the need for policy reform. With regard to Federal policy, the Working Group urges the PEI Government to exercise its lobbying capacity to protect the interests and rights of Islanders.

Domestic Fair Trade for Food

Activities related to the DFT in 2011 mainly involved efforts to acquire funding for the project, *Maritime Region Pilot Project: Initiation of Domestic Fair Trade in Two Food Products*. This project is designed to concentrate on domestic 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.



One anticipated potential funder, the McConnell Foundation, rejected the project seemingly on geographical grounds, given that it funded a similar three-year fair trade project based in Ontario. The project was also presented to the Ministers of Agriculture of the three Maritime Provinces. Initial replies indicated that available funds were already committed to various sustainable practices and the eat-local movement. However, some new interest has surfaced from two of the provinces. During the year, there were productive round table discussions about Domestic Fair Trade with members of the National Farmers Union and other supporters of the principles and practice of fair trade.

PEI Food Security Network

Cooper Institute is one of the lead organizations for the PEI Food Security Network (FSN). The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance acted as “host” for the Network during the past year. On August 4, 2011, the FSN was incorporated as the **PEI Food Security Network Inc.** Cooper Institute administered the creation of bylaws and the process of incorporation.

Cooper Institute was involved in organizing and implementing a variety of programs to engage Island residents in education issues and actions promoting food security/sovereignty. In 2011 these included: workshops, presentations, a stage play, production and distribution of promotional materials, engagement of policy makers, formal media coverage, and updating a website.

The first workshop, *Healthy Affordable Food For All: Where we are now and what we need to do*, attracted 53 participants from diverse backgrounds. Personnel from UPEI presented data some of which were generated by the “Food Counts” project, indicating the number of Islanders who lack access to appropriate food. A specialist in nutrition and food preparation emphasized the need for increased food skills. A key element is that many people are surviving on low incomes which do not cover basic needs and that lost food skills are harder to recover for low income people. Participants came up with many practical actions to overcome the challenge of lack of access to healthy affordable food.

At the request of an organization of urban planners, FSN organized and presented a workshop on food security. A panel of FSN members exposed a wide range of concerns around the food system and people’s access to affordable healthy food. The planners added many important aspects to the discussion. They were interested in enhancing food security through their roles as planners but frustrated with the lack of provincial policy in this area. They proposed that the same panel should be engaged again in a future workshop. It was recommended that specific groups such as teacher’s convention or other interest groups be targeted.

In May the FSN sponsored the play 'Bouffe', a colourful, hilarious, bilingual production of the Tintemarre Theatre Troupe from Mt. Allison University. The play explores many social and culinary issues related to food security.

A member of Cooper Institute, as animator of the People’s

Food Policy Project (PFPP), distributed through the PEI FSN the final statement of that project, *Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada*. This included a brochure, a news release and a pre-election challenge to the leaders of all provincial political parties to sign-on to the main positions of this national food policy. In November a Cooper Institute representative, who also represented the PEI FSN, attended Food Secure Canada planning-retreat in Orangeville, Ontario. 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 participated in an advisory capacity on a CURA project dealing with community food security in Nova Scotia.

To celebrate World Food Day, Food Security Network planned and implemented the following: interactive presentation to three classes in two high schools; showing of the video, *The Garden*; holding, in cooperation with UPEI four community pot luck suppers, one at the University, and three in small rural halls during which a UPEI video, *Who Will Grow Our Food*, was shown and discussed. For more information about the PEI Food Security Network, <http://peifoodsecurity.wordpress.com>.

Temporary Foreign Worker Project

Approximately 750 migrant labourers came to PEI this year from countries such as Mexico, China, Thailand, Russia, and the Philippines, and this number grows each year. Temporary foreign workers make up an increasingly large percentage of workers in agriculture, fish plants, and countless other jobs considered to be “low skill.” Cooper Institute has begun work on the issue of Temporary Foreign Workers in PEI. This project includes research, community engagement, and the creation of policy recommendations.

Over the past year, there were consultations with community members, employers, and temporary foreign workers across the province revealing a growing trend in the employment of temporary foreign workers. Many of these workers come to PEI year after year for seasonal work such as agriculture or seafood processing. “Low skill” and agricultural temporary foreign workers are very vulnerable as they are easily repatriated, often lack language skills, often housed by their employer, and often lack access to, and knowledge of, the provincial system.

Through the *Building for Sustainability*, *Building Community*, and *Building Bridges* projects, Cooper Institute is working to build community engagement around these workers, and awareness of the struggles they face. These community connections help to mitigate the vulnerability that these workers experience as well as help to sensitize Canadians about global economic disparities and power relationships.

The support of the Campbell Webster Foundation, LAMP, ACIC, and other groups have helped this project get off the ground. In 2012 the work will continue: gathering information; conducting interactive community workshops; developing policy recommendations, and building community involvement.

PEI Public Transportation Coalition

Members of the Public Transit Coalition were heartened in 2011, to see a new line in the provincial budget, allocating \$340,000 to bus services in the capital region and to the Summerside-Charlottetown route.

Also in 2011, a strategic review of the Charlottetown bus system identified several areas in which the service could be improved: communications (it was suggested that technology, including social media might be used to promote the system and to offer practical information about schedules and routes) and accessibility. A simplified route plan was proposed, with a focus on the routes that currently gets the most use.

Public transit in the capital region has had a positive effect; the number of people using the bus to get to work, to medical appointments, to social activities and community events in Charlottetown has steadily increased since the new system was introduced in 2005. The PEI Public Transit Coalition would like to see the benefits of public transit extended to the rest of the province, and will continue to advocate for Island-wide transit, and for a provincial public transit authority. This is seen as essential in the development of a system that truly meets the needs of people who use or might use public transit.

STEPS for Women

Supporting, Training and Enhancing Problem-solving Skills

It was with much celebration (and relief!) that after completing two and a half years of classes and practical training, a group of more than 20 women from various



community organizations, including Cooper Institute and People First, graduated with a Certificate in Conflict Resolution Studies in November.

The STEPS project provided women who work with vulnerable women an opportunity to gain skills in interest-based communication and problem-solving. The idea was that those women would pass on those skills - in their workplaces as well as in their communities - and that over the long term, they would help to empower vulnerable women to participate more fully in their communities.

One of the requirements for graduation was the successful completion of a project using interest-based processes.

Cooper Institute worked with People First on a project to increase the participation of women with intellectual disabilities in their People First group in West Prince. The project included the development of a plain-language guide to interest-based conflict resolution. A summary of the project and the guide are available on the STEPS website: www.steps.peirsac.org

Community Roots

Community Roots was a collaborative project aimed at bringing the UPEI campus and community together by offering an alternative orientation for post-secondary students. In 2011 this took the form of a weekend of workshops, panels, films, and artistic events modeled after alternative orientations at other Canadian universities. The goal of Community Roots was to connect post-secondary students with social issues and the local organizations working with them. Community Roots was coordinated by a coalition of five community and campus groups and included speakers and workshops from over 20 others. This initiative received a small grant from the ACIC Membership Collaboration Fund, and there are hopes of a new incarnation of Community Roots in the 2012-13 school year.



Cinema Politica

Early in 2011, Cooper Institute, with WUSC and the CUPE Global Justice Committee successfully applied to the ACIC Collaboration Fund for support to start a Charlottetown chapter of Cinema Politica. Cinema Politica is a non-profit network of community and campus locals that screen independent political films throughout Canada and abroad. It is based on a firm belief in the power of art to not only entertain but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. The PEI collective includes Cooper Institute, WUSC, UPEI Diversity Office, CUPE Global Justice, the Sierra Club and others. Since March, CP Charlottetown has screened a film each month, usually at UPEI, but also at locations in downtown Charlottetown. The films have been varied, sometimes serious and sometimes funny, but always thought-provoking. The post-film discussions have been lively and engaging. In the case of Gasland, the screening resulted in new public awareness about the issues associated with hydrofracking, and the organization of a demonstration and subsequent film showing. Based on a successful first year, films have been ordered for 2012 - screenings take place on the third Monday of each month, and admission is by donation.

People First

Cooper Institute supported People First Coordinator, Barb Fanning to participate in the STEPS training, and has continued to work with PEI People First in various other ways, including the organization of a conference and annual meeting in April, where the video "The PEI Freedom Tour" was launched.



In the fall of 2011, with the support from the PEI Intraministerial Women's Secretariat, and in collaboration with CLIA (Community Legal Information Association), People First organized a series of workshops about safety for women with intellectual disabilities. More workshops are planned for the new year, and the project will result in an accessible, plain-language safety guide.

Issues Workshops and Presentations

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

- ◆ presentation, *Democracy: Democratic Voice/Power to Island Peace Rally*
- ◆ consultation with the **National Farmers Union** and research for submissions; participation in Local, District, Regional, and National meetings and Conventions
- ◆ presentation, *Poverty in PEI: A Livable Income Solution*, to **St. Francis of Assisi Parish Catholic Women's League/Knights of Columbus**
- ◆ presentation, *The Working Poor -Persons on Low Wages in PEI: How do They Survive?* to the **PEI New Democratic Party convention**
- ◆ presentation, *Democratic/Collective Model of Leadership*, to the **Ignatian Spiritual Directors-PEI**

Organizational Development and Support

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

Société St. Thomas d'Aquin

- participation in Annual General Meeting; one member's involvement in all major issues of the organization

Environmental Network

- workshop on funding proposal writing

Immigrant Support

- assisting in translation and formalization of applications for permanent residency for two skilled workers employed in PEI

Parkinsons Society

- workshop on leadership and planning; participation in events; one member's involvement as primary organizer

Dandelion Festival - evaluation process

International Women's Day 2011

- participation in organizing

Breaking the Silence

- membership involvement; participation in evening on Mining

Association of Rural Community Halls

- planned and facilitated two workshops with volunteers in Montague and Kensington dealing with ways to keep these centres of cultural and social activities alive and active.

Window on the South

Cooper Institute works 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; organizing breakfast meetings

Latin American Mission Program (LAMP)- helping to organize the Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture;

designing the Lenten Mission Education Program and assisting in the orientation of a LAMP missionary to the Dominican Republic

Cuban Visitor - organizing orientation, involvements and activities for week-long visit to PEI of Roberto Pérez Rivero, director, the Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity, Havana.

Haiti - organizing a public presentation of update on Haiti by Roger Annis, Canada Haiti Action Network and writing opinion pieces for local newspapers; hosting a video showing, *Aristide and the Endless Revolution*.



January 12, 2010

January 12, 2012

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 generous 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)

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Resistance

This past spring the Cooper Institute collective decided to focus on the themes of Resistance and Democracy for the coming year. It seemed an appropriate focus, considering the recent re-election of the Conservative Government, and its continued attack on Canadian democracy.

Over the past quarter century, Cooper Institute has been involved with grassroots work for social change in many ways which could be considered resistance. Work for change within the existing power structures may take the form of electoral politics and lobbying elected officials. Many movements use these tactics, but may or may not consider them as resistance to the dominant system.

Mostly, the term resistance is associated with directly challenging the power structures of our society. This may involve organized, collective opposition and conscious, direct actions aimed at challenging these structures. Resistance involves a basic rejection of the beliefs and values that maintain the existing power structure.

Resistance is not limited to obvious expressions of dissent through protest, civil disobedience, and direct action. Rejection of oppressive ideologies and challenges to existing power structures also takes the form of creating alternatives: alternative food systems, alternative medical care, alternative energy, radical communities, self-representative language, etc. These activities may not be recognized as resistance quite as readily as would obvious expressions of dissent, but they are nonetheless forms of dissent. Activist networks and alternative-creating communities need to work together. Both forms of resistance complement and strengthen each other.

This is a frightening time in Canadian history; solidarity and alliances between groups engaged in resistance is especially important. We are living in a country that is actively criminalizing dissent. The recent G20 summit not only saw a billion dollars spent on policing but represented the largest domestic spy operation in Canadian history. The 1,105 arrests during the summit was the largest mass arrest this country has ever seen. Leading up to, and following the summit, undercover spies infiltrated community groups, activist organizations, first nations groups, and even university classrooms. The Harper Regime treats dissent as a crime, and critical thought as a threat. Despite the investigations, the court cases, and the revelation of many sordid details, the Government-sponsored crackdown was swept under the carpet. Government got away with trampling on the rights of citizens.

The current administration has locked out the media, and weakened our public broadcaster. It has prorogued parliament, disrupting democracy for their own interests, reneged on the Kyoto protocol, and passed a crime bill that will put billions more dollars, and thousands more people into prisons. It has shown contempt for First Nations peoples, Muslims, and women's groups. No matter how many alarm bells sounded during their previous term, the Harper government – a government which was held in contempt of parliament - has actually been re-elected with a majority.

It appears that many Canadians are complacent with the relatively stable democracy that has persisted throughout their lifetime. Historically, many people have been able to ignore countless atrocities without speaking out; perhaps the economic crisis will reveal the injustice of the political and economic system that has continuously benefitted the middle and upper class.

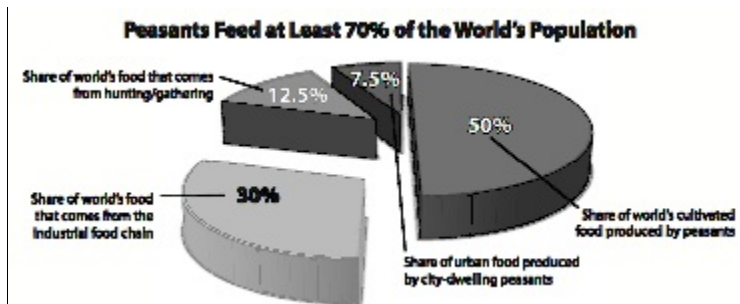
Let's hope that we are starting to come to our senses. We need a shift in thinking about work for social change. We need to challenge the view that resistance is a misguided and unfashionable throwback to the 60's. It is a tool for building a better world – and we need it desperately.

We also need groups working for social change to recognize their own work of dissent and resistance, and to build relationships of respect and solidarity. Political lobbying and direct opposition can be exhausting. They need to be grounded in flourishing alternative systems and communities that are vital, creative, and nurturing. Those building alternatives need to work together for active resistance. We must learn to recognize both the conscious and unconscious dynamics of oppression around and within us. This vital work is both personal and community-building. Time Magazine named 2011 the year of the protester. Let's hope that in 2012, and each year after, the cultural and economic tides continue to turn.

Small Scale Farming: Agroecology – Best System to Feed the World

At a recent local meeting on food security, a spirited discussion took place about the alarming disappearance of small family farms. More and more of food is produced by industrial agriculture. Governments, corporate farmers and organizations such as the International Monetary Funds (IMF) argue that only industrial agriculture will produce enough food to feed the world's population.

However, according to the research data of Via Campesina, (a global movement of peasants and small-scale farmers), small scale farmers and peasants make up more than half the world's population and produce at least 70% of the world's food (see graph). Via Campesina argues that an agroecological system of food production done by small scale farmers is the best response to present and future demands for food. (Via Campesina, Sustainable Production, pp1- 6).



Agroecology is defined as the discovery and reevaluation of the traditional methods of farming, combined with new and innovative ecological practices. It involves the interaction of diverse crops, trees and animals. In the summer of 2011, a member of Cooper Institute attended a Via Campesina workshop in Guatemala on agroecology. There were representatives from North, Central and South America.

The current food system using the agribusiness model cannot feed the world. Agribusinesses are interested primarily in making profit for themselves rather than in feeding people. Their practices of monoculture, heavy machinery, chemical inputs and transgenic seeds (GMOs), cause rapid deterioration of the best soils on the planet, by compaction, salination, erosion and loss of biodiversity. Worse still, one of the most under-acknowledged aspects of industrial agriculture is its effect on climate change. It is estimated that industrial agriculture contributes one third of all carbon emissions, and rises to 45-50% when you include long distance transport and food processing.

Small scale farmers, following the principles of agroecology, however, have a greater capacity to develop a food system to meet the demands of a global population of 7 billion. First, they realize that their most important asset is the soil and the necessity of adding organic materials to increase its nutrients. Small farmers have roots in the communities where they live. They sense the presence of their ancestors who produced food for generations. Small farms have more resilience in confronting climate change; the use of agroecological methods will actively cool the planet. Eco-farming can produce much more food with a fraction of the emissions associated with industrial agriculture.

The Cuban experience is an example of small scale farmers using agroecological methods and successfully turning their agriculture around. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the petroleum-based agriculture in Cuba was wiped out, causing a major food crisis. Gone were imported machinery parts, oil, petroleum-based chemicals and fertilizers previously used to increase productivity. Cubans found a solution. The Government, the people and scientific advisors responded quickly to the crisis. Urban land was turned into gardens of different sizes and products. To encourage more productivity and innovation, the government made other radical shifts in policy and implemented a massive educational campaign to help people deal with the complexities of organic farming. (Kerans, P. A Pessimist's Hope, Ch.7)

Havana, a city of 2 million, had a total of 1,613 separate gardens by 1995. Because chemical fertilizer or pesticides were not available, all these gardens had to be organic. Farmers worked with scientists to develop more intensive organic methods, such as new ways of improving soil fertility, of dealing with pests, and of developing new varieties of corn and beans. The Government and scientific advisers encouraged farmers to be innovative and experimental. They set up a structure for sharing ideas and garnering feedback about farming methods. All of these systemic supports helped make the experiment of going organic successful.

Other countries such as Guatemala, Brazil, Nicaragua, and Venezuela have agroecological programs that promote farmer-to-farmer programs to enhance the learning experiences. Small scale farmers have shown that they can produce food in a sustainable way and, with sufficient supports, can feed the world. However, to move in that direction, a dramatic change in attitudes and policy toward food production is needed, as well as more cooperation between scientists and farmers, greater investment in developing appropriate skill sets and in promotion of agroecological methods.