

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2012



*With the support of many generous donors,
Cooper Institute responds to a variety of community needs*

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Temporary Foreign Worker Project

In 2012, changes to Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program brought new urgency to Cooper Institute's continued work on this issue. Over the year, our work included workshops, presentations, and networking with other organizations. The disproportionate effect of the weaknesses in the TFW program on women became a main focus of our research. Related to this, Cooper Institute became part of the advisory group of Justice Options for Women, which will help to ensure the inclusion of TFWs in initiatives to address violence against women in immigrant communities in Charlottetown.

A research report entitled *Changing Hands: Temporary Foreign Workers in Prince Edward Island* was produced and distributed to organizations and policy makers across the Island. The report included an overview of the continued growth of the TFW Program in PEI and across Canada. Issues of worker vulnerability and gender were highlighted, and policy recommendations were offered for provincial administration of the program.

Two clear-language documents were also produced and distributed: a document explaining the basic realities of TFWs in PEI, and a document listing

PEI organizations with services available for TFWs. The latter has been translated into Spanish and Mandarin.

Throughout 2012, presentations and community engagement workshops helped to build knowledge in the community about the systemic issues facing TFWs in the province. A consultation was held with women TFWs to gather their input into our research findings.

During the summer, the project *Building Mobility* engaged Charlottetown and area residents as they donated bicycles and participated in workshops on bike maintenance and safety for TFWs living and working in the city. This project brought a great deal of media attention to these issues and the work of Cooper Institute.

Further workshops and presentations are planned, aimed at building knowledge and engaging the community. Provincial administration and proactive policy is needed to both protect TFWs and initiate long-term social and economic rural development.



Charlottetown Bike Workshop in July

In 2012, financial support for Cooper Institute's work on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program was provided by: the Campbell Webster Foundation; PEI Literacy Alliance; PEI Interministerial Women's Secretariat; the City of Charlottetown and the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC).

PEI Food Security Network

The PEI Food Security Network (FSN) is an education and action organization committed to achieving food security/sovereignty in PEI. It is dedicated to changing community attitudes and public policy to promote: environmentally appropriate production and distribution of food; the availability of affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate food; livable income for producers; the right to food; and PEI self-reliance in food. The network is a member of Food Secure Canada. Cooper Institute has been involved in the network since it was founded in 2008. Our members participate in both of the network's working groups: *Access, Food Costing and Food Skills*; and *Sustainable Production and Distribution*.

In March the FSN presented a workshop based on *Resetting the Table: A People's Food Policy for Canada*. The People's Food Policy Project involved over 3,000 Canadians and calls for an overhaul of federal policies governing all aspects of food: where it comes from, how it is produced, and how Canadians can have access to safe and nutritious food at all times. Developing a comprehensive food policy for Canada involves engaging citizens, and pressuring all levels of government to work cooperatively. The PEI FSN adopted the principles of the Peoples' Food Policy, a policy that: provides food for all people; values food producers; localizes the food system; puts control locally; works with nature; builds knowledge and skills and emphasizes that food is sacred. Workshop participants, acknowledging the obstacles, proposed steps that can be taken to lay a foundation for a peoples' food policy for PEI.

In May, the PEI FSN held its AGM, which featured a presentation about urban agriculture and an update from Food Secure Canada. FSC was at the time involved in planning the visit to Canada by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. Also in May, two members of the PEI FSN were panellists at a forum about food security, hosted by OXFAM.

The FSN submitted a response to the PEI government's poverty reduction discussion paper, stressing the need to reinstate food-costing measures. One member of the network presented a resolution to the AGM of the Medical Society of PEI about the link between food security and health also calling for food costing measures to be implemented. The resolution was passed unanimously and was strengthened by its consistency with the Canadian Medical Association's 2012 Report Card on the health care system, which shows the significant health effects on people of lower income levels. The media coverage that followed provided welcome public engagement in the issue.

In collaboration with Cinema Politica, the FSN presented the film *FRESH* on October 16 to celebrate World Food Day, and in November, had a display booth at the ACORN Conference and Trade Show.

Haiti: Where Did The Money Go?

In May, Cooper Institute organized a Maritime tour and the Canadian premiere of the documentary film, *Haiti: Where Did The Money Go?* The film is an assessment of post-earthquake conditions in Haiti and highlights the absence of relief and of reconstruction in much of the earthquake zone.

The film's director and producer, Michele Mitchell, attended screenings in six towns and cities in three provinces. Each event included an animated question and answer period. Participants seemed aware of conditions in Haiti and expressed shock and outrage about the lack of accountability by NGOs for the millions of dollars they had received from donors. The film indicates that too little money was spent to improve living conditions of Haitian victims of the earthquake, as evidenced by the 600,000 people still living under plastic tents and in squalor.

In the media interviews and at the film showings, Michele pointed to many positive examples of assistance in Haiti, for example the organization SOIL that builds compost toilets, and OXFAM. But, she said, the record of most of the larger organizations is poor. The record of the American Red Cross, which received more money in donations than any other organization, comes under particular scrutiny in the film because, as Michele told CBC, Haitians asked her to do so. "The fact is I can't tell you what they did with the money because it's impossible to know."

Cooper Institute thanks the many individuals and organizations that supported the tour.

PEI People First

Cooper Institute supports People First members in several ways: as they participate in committees, groups and coalitions; and as they make presentations to students, the public and government. In 2012 People First published a safety guide for women with intellectual disabilities, made an in-depth presentation to the government caucus, and hosted two film nights, highlighting the advocacy work of People First, in particular through the use of theatre. Cooper Institute proudly works alongside People First members to promote the rights of men and women with intellectual disabilities. By doing so we have broadened our understanding of the unequal effects of poverty and other issues on people with disabilities.

PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

Cooper Institute and twelve other PEI organizations make up the Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI). WGLI's goal is the elimination of poverty in PEI. Its role is to change community attitudes and advocate for progressive government policies. The group addresses many sources of income: wages, Employment Insurance, pensions, Social Assistance, and sale of primary products. Most of these forms of income place many Islanders below the "poverty line".

Local media coverage is important to engaging the community in the issues related to livable income. In 2012 local papers published numerous WGLI letters and news releases about the invisibility of people on low incomes, the need for long-term solutions, the effects of EI changes, and negative impact of the HST on low income Islanders. CBC interviewed members about the minimum wage and the effect of increased rental rates on people with low incomes.

The Working Group, on its own and in collaboration with other groups, provided workshops for church organizations and other groups in areas such as: the charity and social justice models and the cost of poverty in PEI.

Attempts to contribute to credible provincial policy were especially challenging in 2012. Many organizations waited expectantly for a well-designed Poverty Reduction Strategy. Instead, the government presented their *Social Action Plan to Reduce Poverty*. The Action Plan came as a disappointment to many; it was seen to be lacking vision, a sense of direction, measurable objectives, and a means of effectively engaging the community. It represents no real break from treating symptoms with band-aid solutions. There are no real signs of dealing with root causes of poverty. People with low incomes, always living on the edge, found their situation worsening in 2012 and could see no sign of concrete policies which would improve their situation in the medium or long term. WGLI had met formally with the Minister-responsible on two occasions, had written documents, and shared insights, but did not see results proportionate to these community efforts.

WGLI joined the CUPE-led *Coalition for Fair EI* to stand with and for Islanders who are most affected by the Harper Government's merciless changes to the EI system. People involved in seasonal work or in low paying non-permanent jobs will soon become an unemployed underclass with reduced choices for providing for their basic needs. The complex new rules for EI penalize people, requiring

them to search every day for jobs that simply don't exist. They must be willing to travel far, take unsuitable jobs with miserable wages and look forward to many weeks with little or no income. Much time and energy is going into trying to get politicians to hear what is happening. Posters, petitions, letters, postcards, media releases, workshops, forums and rallies are ongoing.

The hope is that regions of Canada threatened by the EI changes will come out loud and clear against these hard-hearted policies. Provincial governments, including PEI, will have to pick up the slack by providing decent social assistance



EI Rally, Summerside, October

to the victims of EI changes. There is no sign that this will happen.

Despite all this, the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income begins 2013 with a sense of hope. New alliances and deeper commitments will strengthen people to demand the changes needed.

Cinema Politica

Cinema Politica is a network of community and campus groups that screen independent political films throughout Canada and abroad. It is based on a firm belief in the power of art, not only to entertain, but to engage, inform, inspire, and provoke social change. The PEI collective includes Cooper Institute, WUSC, CUPE PEI, the Sierra Club (Atlantic), and the UPEI Diversity Office.

In 2012, films were screened at UPEI, Holland College and Murphy's Community Centre. In the summer months outdoor screenings were held in downtown Charlottetown. A wide array of topics was covered: labour (Class Dismissed; how media portrays the working class); environment (Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai); culture (DetermiNation Songs). Cinema Politica partnered with various groups, including the PEI Food Security Network, the Campus alliance for Reproductive Justice and the Stop Plan B organizers, in hosting the screenings. The group hopes to widen its membership and continue to show "films that make you think" in 2013.

Organizational Development and Support

Over the past year Cooper Institute has worked with and supported many organizations in various ways:

Société St. Thomas d'Aquin

- one member's involvement & leadership

Parkinsons Society

- two members involved as primary organizers

International Women's Day 2012

- organization of celebration

Breaking the Silence

- members involvement; support for delegates

PEI Humane Society

- facilitation of strategic planning session

Friends of North Shore Communities

- facilitation of 2 community workshops

P.E.I. Supported Decision-Making Coalition

- planning, presentations to policy-makers

PEI Public Transit Coalition

- coordination of meetings, media

Save Our Seas and Shores Coalition – PEI

- organization of events, communication

Stop Plan B

- workshop on non-violent civil disobedience

Women's Network of PEI

- participation in planning; anti-oppression workshop; project advisory committee

Voluntary Resource Council

- fundraising; orientation workshop; board

Public Transit Coalition

- organization, administrative support

Justice Options for Women

- advisory committee

National Farmers Union

- food sovereignty workshop; Lands Protection Act submission; national convention; preparation of information resources; ongoing leadership (2 members)

PEI People First

- support for members to participate in various committees; administrative support; preparation of reports, proposals and presentations

Window on the South

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

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation- participation in events; organizing meetings

Latin American Mission Program (LAMP) - Daniel O'Hanley Memorial Lecture; Lenten Mission Education Program (with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI – "By What Right")

Haiti – organization of the Atlantic Canadian tour of the film, *Where Did the Money Go?*

World Day of Prayer – presentation at St. Michael's Church, Iona as part of the 2012 program, *Let Justice Prevail*, designed by women in Malaysia

Cooper Institute Funding

Support for Cooper Institute's work in the community comes mainly from private sources. Some of these are foundations; we also receive fees for services, from other organizations, the amount depending on their ability to pay. We are especially thankful to the many **individual donors** who make generous contributions every year.

Cooper Institute invites other 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 the 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

Selvi Roy

Debbie Theuerkauf

Ann Wheatley



Missing from the photo: Irene Doyle, Marie Hendricken, Andrew Macdonald and Adam MacIsaac

Temporary Foreign Workers; Action Needed

In 2012 the federal government introduced several policy changes that clearly demonstrated how Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) is designed to exploit cheap foreign labour. The changes include: making it legal for temporary foreign workers (TFWs) to be paid less than Canadian workers and disallowing Temporary Foreign Workers from accessing EI programs for parental or compassionate leave.

At the same time, across Canada, several tragedies and scandals have reached the headlines, ranging from multiple deaths due to unsafe transportation or working conditions to industry creating jobs tailor-made to exploit vulnerable foreign labourers.

Employers often recruit temporary foreign workers because they are easily exploitable and will work for less pay, under harsher conditions, and with fewer complaints. Unfortunately the TFWP is set up to create a low-wage, low rights workforce that undermines Canadian labour standards and allows for vulnerable workers to be exploited, with limited recourse.

In PEI communities, increasing numbers of TFWs are employed in farming operations and fish plants, as well as in a growing number of other low-income jobs.

PEI employers with a history of exploiting local workers are more likely to abuse foreign workers. Although on paper TFWs have access to the same complaint procedures as Canadian workers, in practice this is not the case. There is nothing to protect TFWs from dismissal and subsequent repatriation. Since most TFWs are living in housing provided by their employers, dismissal means homelessness. Since TFWs are granted only employer-specific work permits, they cannot simply find a new job without enduring several months of unemployment waiting for their applications for another permit. The situation is worse because they lack language skills, knowledge of the Canadian system, and community and familial connections in PEI.



In PEI Temporary Foreign Workers are often employed in fish plants

Due to these vulnerabilities, and because many TFWs are in debt as a result of the recruitment process, they rarely report exploitative working and living conditions. TFWs cannot be expected to police their employers' use of this program – this would put them at great personal and economic risk. Pro-active public policy is required to improve employment conditions for all PEI workers and to prevent abuse of TFWs.

Associations, churches, unions, municipalities, and other institutions are increasingly being called upon to pick up the slack – often without the information or resources to do so. There is currently no provincial administration of the Temporary Foreign Worker program, no tracking of who is employing TFWs, and no one department or organization responsible for their wellbeing. In this vacuum, PEI organizations, front-line health workers and citizens must educate themselves about the TFWP and identify employers of TFWs in their community. PEI's policy makers must be made aware of the need for provincial administration and the improvement and enforcement of labour standards. Greater networking among groups who deal with TFW issues could build momentum for policy change.

There is a dire need in this province for full time staff responsible for the wellbeing of temporary foreign workers. PEI would do well to follow in the footsteps of provinces such as Manitoba and Nova Scotia and pass a "Workers Recruitment and Protection Act". Such an Act would require employers to register with the government before hiring TFWs, pay an equal wage to TFWs, provide pro-active protection against abuse, license recruitment agents and make them liable for compensation in the case of abuse.

In terms of protecting the rights of temporary foreign workers in this province, public policy is sorely lacking. PEI's labour code needs to be amended to extend protections to farm workers and domestic workers. It has also been suggested that interviews and health checks be conducted with TFWs before they leave the province. In addition, an official provincial policy is needed to penalize employers found to have committed labour abuses and to prevent them from hiring Temporary Foreign Workers in the future.

Land Grabbing: PEI's Tainted History

The unappealing term “land grab” is a recent addition to the English language. In current usage, it specifically refers to the pursuit of land as an investment instrument. In general terms, it refers to various forms of conquest and occupation.

Many Islanders are troubled about the present-day challenges to landholding patterns as exemplified by various assaults on the Lands Protection Act. In the debates that arise, people have a tendency to ignore the history of the land as seen in two earlier land grabs and the ensuing courage and resistance of Islanders.

The first land grab is part of Mi'kmaq history. The Mi'kmaq have lived on the island for more than 10,000 years, as fishers, hunters and gatherers and to this day consider the land as Mother. Land *ownership* is foreign to them. The first Europeans, the French settlers, later known as Acadians, arrived in 1719. They also were not cultured to private land ownership. They lived peacefully with the Original inhabitants of the Island. That is until the British, at war with the French, defeated them, and deported the Acadians in 1755. The British claimed “ownership” of the Island. They of course presumed that they were grabbing the land from the French, whom they had defeated. *The Mi'kmaq were not defeated.* To this day, many Islanders, when they gather, remind themselves that they are in Mi'kmaq territory.

The second land grab, perhaps a formalizing of the first, was executed in 1766, when British Captain Holland divided the island into 67 parcels of land and gave them to absentee British landowners. Tenant settlers, mainly of British descent, farmed the land and paid exorbitant rents for over one hundred years. The painful and courageous struggle between the agents of the British landlords and the tenant farmers is a colorful part of Island history.

The third land grab is happening today, in the context of a global land grab movement that includes other parts of Canada. One aspect of this land rush is that huge investment companies are offering land as the best option for future wealth. Of course the investors prefer the convenience of having the land already consolidated in large parcels. It will be difficult for PEI to fend off the threat of the current land grab drive.

Many Islanders have a vibrant cultural memory of past land struggles, especially those during the era of absentee landlords. However, a high percentage of the population is separated from the land. It is necessary to revive our connections and to be convinced that it is in the public interest to maintain regulated land tenure so as to transfer land to future generations. It is not in the public interest to allow the continuing consolidation of holdings. Early in 2013, Islanders will have an opportunity to stand up for the spirit of the Lands Protection Act, which controls the size of land holdings. The Horace Carver Commission will be calling for submissions. He should expect masses of people to speak in favor of keeping landholding sizes as they are under the Act.

NO! NO! DON'T SELL P.E.I.

Lyrics by Rev. Andrew P. Macdonald first sung on the occasion of LAMP's submission to the Select Standing Committee Hearings (1981) about the proposed PEI Lands Protection Act Dedicated to the National Farmers Union

Chorus:

**No! No! Don't sell P.E.I.
It's our homeland; it's our heritage
And we want to make it free.
No! No! Don't sell P.E.I.
It's a gift of the Almighty
Made for sharing equally**

When Acadians came and lived here
They tilled and cropped the soil
It gave food and clothing, shelter
And rewarded all their toil.
But the British came and drove them out,
And sent them far away.
Ils sont exiles de l'Ile St. Jean
Bannis de ses foyers.

Just think! When the King of Glory comes,
On that dire and fateful day,
He'd be told the Island's Irving-owned,
And if he wants it, he must pay!
But the earth would be so mined-out,
That it's just a pile of sand,
And the Lord himself couldn't grow a thing
If he *could* buy back the land!

When the Micmacs walked our Island
Back in those days of yore;
They loved and they respected
Every hill and field and shore.
They preserved it for this day of ours
For their children and for us.
The land was only to be used,
And handed on “in trust”.

When the British lotteried P.E.I.
To landlords far from here;
Tenant farmers raged against
their plight for full 100 years.
It was only a determined fight
That got the Island back.
Shall we return to serfdom now
Or halt the invading pack?

So, let the legislators make the laws
To stop this present threat
Of corporate speculators,
Buying all the land they get.
Let the Premier and his ministers,
Not have to take the rap
For allowing themselves to fall into
A multinational trap!