

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2014



With the support of many generous donors Cooper Institute has been active in the community for 30 years.

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Thirty Years Old!

In May 2014, Cooper Institute and friends met to celebrate thirty amazing years, working in and with the community. Since 1984 Cooper Institute has identified with the struggles of many Islanders to access a decent living. It has made a specific identification with movements which protect the land and waters and with farmers and fishers who respect the ecosystem as a source of life. The major themes growing out of work with other Islanders and with the Global South has inspired Cooper Institute to express all its endeavours within the context of democracy and resistance. Cooper Institute has thrived thus far because of the strength of faithful friends, both individuals and organizations. Work in healthy coalitions is a particular blessing. Of special note in the thirtieth anniversary was Irene Burge's compilation of 10 scrapbooks of media coverage over the years. It was also the occasion to honour Reg Phelan on the publishing of his book, *Islanders and the Land*. As well it was another opportunity to sing Andrew Macdonald's song, *No, No, Don't Sell PEI*. Cooper Institute looks forward with hope to many more years as a social justice institution in and with the PEI community.

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Social Justice Symposium

When Andrew Macdonald, one of the founding members of Cooper Institute, died in 2013, the Cooper Institute collective decided that an appropriate way to remember our friend and honour his passion for social justice would be to organize an annual social justice symposium. We started the series in 2014 by inviting Chandra Pasma to speak about Basic Income Guarantee. Chandra lives and works in Ottawa, and is a social policy analyst with a special interest in income inequality, gender and work. She has written extensively about basic income guarantee. And so it was that on a

Saturday in mid-September, eighty people packed in to hear Chandra and a panel of three local speakers, Marie Burge, Marcia Carroll and Jane Ledwell speak about basic



Father Charlie Cheverie, shown here with Joe Byrne, was one of the performers at the BIG Concert for Social Justice

income in the context of work, democracy, gender equality and disability rights. An interesting and wide-ranging discussion followed the presentations, highlighting the excitement and sense of optimism about basic income as a means of addressing income inequality and of reinvigorating democracy. As this was the inaugural symposium, and given Andrew's love of music, a concert was held the evening before, with performances by members of the Queen's County Fiddlers (of which Andrew had been a faithful member), Teresa Doyle and son Patrick Bunston, Patricia Richard, Caroline Bernard and Louise Arsenault, the Singing Fathers, the (Andrew's) Nieces, and Dion Bernard. In closing, Tony Reddin and Irene Larkin led everyone in singing Andrew's song, *No, No, Don't Sell PEI*.

PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

The *PEI Working Group for a Livable Income* (WGLI) since its founding in 2002 is a coalition of community-based groups and interested individuals. From the beginning WGLI has promoted, with government and community, a solution to persistent poverty within a social justice framework. Charity is necessary, but it cannot be the basis of public policy. Social justice policy addresses the personal and collective rights of people. Everyone has the right to an income which is adequate and which is provided in an environment of respect. Charity attempts to reduce poverty; social justice aims to eliminate poverty. The WGLI addresses the concerns of people depending on a variety of sources for their income: wages; employment insurance; disability supports; pensions; social assistance. It is recognized that some groups are doubly disadvantaged in the inequality of incomes, e.g. women, youth and students, Aboriginal people; family farmers, fishers, small-scale family business owners, and many new immigrants.

Basic Income Guarantee: As a long-term action plan to eliminate poverty, the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income has taken on the challenging task of developing a proposal for Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), hopefully to be piloted in Prince Edward Island. BIG-PEI is part of a national and international movement for universal guaranteed income, which has a long history in many countries of the world, with experiments in Canada, the United States and many countries in Europe and elsewhere. Over the past year the WGLI has presented information about BIG to many organizations and local community forums. The group received priceless feedback in the form of suggestions and new questions which need to be answered to create a solid base for the establishment of BIG. In the end, only governments, cooperating across jurisdictions have the authority to implement policy to launch BIG as an overall social program. One recurring worry which the working group heard, especially in the community forums was whether or not governments could be trusted to move ahead on this without destroying what little income support people now have. This is a little disconcerting. On the other hand a recurring theme in the communities was: *It's about time; the time is right; what we have now is not working for people.*

Fair Employment Insurance: The WGLI continued to work with groups in the *Coalition for a Fair EI*. Several community-based actions highlighted the anxiety of many PEI workers whose livelihoods were seriously affected by changes to the EI program made through Federal Government's 2012 & 2013

budget implementation bills. PEI residents felt the effects in the following ways: many more people do not qualify for EI; claimants get fewer weeks; claims are cut off or delayed; working while on EI is not worthwhile; claimants have little access to an appeal process; people are afraid to speak out; families and communities are devastated by the loss of members to the West. Another blow came with the announcement of two deceptive EI zones for PEI. The "capital region", includes a large swath of rural PEI, all of it in Queens County. This created disunity and unequal access to EI depending on where one lives.

The theme of the Coalition for Fair EI, *Scrap the Changes*, refers especially, though not exclusively, to the 2012-2014 changes. In all the forums which the Coalition organized across the Island, people made it clear that the dismemberment of the EI program began with earlier governments. Early in the year the Coalition expended a lot of energy preparing for the Atlantic Premiers' Panel on EI, the report of which was a sorry response, given the incomparable effort made in PEI to have community involvement.

The PEI Coalition for Fair EI has joined with other groups concerned with diverse federal policy issues and developed two forums on **Engagement in Election Processes**.

Coalition for Protection of PEI Water

The coalition was formed early in 2014. It brought together many grassroots organizations which found a need for a vehicle to discuss and express concerns about threats to water in PEI. Many of the groups already had a history of defending land and water from impending and ongoing encroachment of industrial and urban interests. These interests have often tended to expect that on principle they are entitled to abuse the land and water with impunity. A mixture of the creativity and scientific capacity of the coalition and the spontaneous outrage of the community resulted in a great outpouring of concern about the proposed lifting of a decade-long moratorium on the drilling of high capacity wells. Many individuals and groups made presentation to the PEI Legislature's Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environment, Energy and Forestry. There was a major outpouring in the media of strong positions in favour of protecting PEI water and opposing high capacity wells. In spite of the strength of big potato interests and the fact that they had the willing ear of government, the moratorium was not lifted—for now. The Coalition will continue to monitor the PEI government's attempt to design a Water Act, insisting that government utilize at every step of the way a process of wide community engagement.

PEI Food Security Network

The PEI Food Security Network (FSN) is an education and action organization committed to achieving food security/sovereignty in Prince Edward Island. It is dedicated to changing community attitudes and public policy to promote: environmentally appropriate practices for the 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. Cooper Institute has been an active member since 2008. Three working groups carry out the activities of the FSN: Food Access, Food Costing and Food Skills; Sustainable Production and Distribution; and Communications.

In 2014, the FSN hosted two workshops. The first, held in February, highlighted Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) as an option for sustainable production and distribution. PEI CSA producers displayed their offerings, shared their knowledge and heard the experiences of CSA customers. After presentations and discussion, over 80 participants were served a meal featuring CSA winter products.

The second workshop, in March featured presentations about local and global food security projects carried out by PEI groups. Representatives of Farmers Helping Farmers, the PEI Food Exchange, the NFU International Committee, and the Island Food Skills Initiative all made presentations.

In honour of 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming, the FSN annual meeting featured a screening of Mille Clarke's documentary about organic farming in PEI, *Island Green*, and a talk by Sally Bernard, organic farmer from Freetown, PE.

Two members of the Production & Distribution group made presentations about food sovereignty to high school and UPEI classes.

The Network published several letters to the editor and Op-Eds in response to news releases about levels of food insecurity in PEI and about the need to look beyond a charity response. The FSN provided input as a provincial wellness strategy was being developed, and was consulted as the Department of Community Services and Seniors considered changes to food rates for recipients of Social Assistance. With the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income, the network organized a meeting with Department staff to outline community concerns about the plan to increase rates.

In November, 12 Islanders attended the Food Secure Canada Bi-Annual Assembly in Halifax. Following the assembly, those individuals organized a follow-up meeting to share what they had learned and been inspired by.

Save Our Seas and Shores PEI

SOSS-PEI is a coalition of groups which, with counterparts in other Atlantic provinces, Quebec and First Nations communities, are working to keep the Gulf of St. Lawrence free from exploration and drilling for oil and gas. The PEI chapter includes representatives of ECO-PEI, Sierra Club, Cooper Institute, and the PEI Fishermen's Association.

In conjunction with the Sierra Club Atlantic, SOSS-PEI organized two "Blue Whale Campaign" public awareness/fund-raising events in 2014. Both events offered a chance to highlight some existing threats to the health of the Gulf such as climate change, excess nutrients and invasive species and to consider the perils that oil and gas exploration would bring to the already fragile Gulf ecosystem. Thanks to Colin Jeffery for his stellar work on these events.

On World Ocean's Day (June 8th), SOSS-PEI held a picnic at the beach and workshop on seaweed identification and use, led by biologist and SOSS member Irené Novaczek.

SOSS-PEI continued to publish articles and letters to the editor about the Gulf. In 2014, an alliance of Innu, Maliseet and Mi'kmaq Nations announced they would be working within other coalitions to prevent drilling in the Gulf. Troy Jerome, from the Mi'gmawei Mawiomí Secretariat attended the second annual SOSS inter-provincial planning session (in Halifax) at the end of October, and made a powerful presentation outlining the concerns of First Nations and a strategy for addressing the threat of drilling in the Gulf.

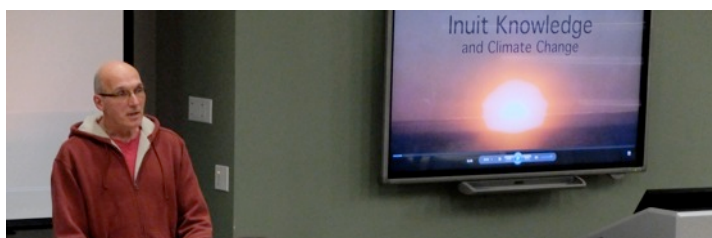
SOSS-PEI continued to ask municipalities to pass resolutions asking the PEI government to put a moratorium on drilling, and to collaborate with other provinces to develop a comprehensive management plan for the Gulf. Members of Bonshaw Community Council presented a resolution to the PEI Federation of Municipalities in April, but it was not approved.



Irené Novaczek led a seaweed workshop in June

Cinema Politica

Cinema Politica hosted 10 film screenings in 2014, partnering with This Town is Small, UFCW, Island Peace Committee, Citizens' Alliance of PEI and others. One of the highlights was the presentation of Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change, with guest speaker Mark Sandiford, in collaboration with the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter. The documentaries – which in 2014 were about resistance, immigration, feminism and activism – have provided opportunities for people to take a break, be entertained, and engage in a thoughtful discussion of the topic at hand.



Gary Torlone, of the Sierra Club introduces a Cinema Politica film

Don't Frack PEI

Don't Frack PEI, of which Cooper Institute is a member, is dedicated to creating an informed opposition about the necessity of PEI banning hydraulic fracturing (fracking) for natural gas. This opposition is based on the negative experiences in communities where fracking is practised and on scientific data relating to the processes used in horizontal drilling. Two areas of concern to PEI are: the high water usage in the drilling process and the unavoidable contamination of the water table and the wider environment. Approximately 2 to 9 million gallons of fresh water are needed to frack one well--and a well can be fracked up to 20 times. The cocktail of chemicals including naphthalene, benzene, and radium are pumped under tremendous pressure into fragile shale. Studies of regions where fracking is prevalent have found that the process contaminated the water table. Many of the chemicals are associated with skin, eye, and respiratory problems, harm to the gastrointestinal system, and affecting the brain and nervous system.

Don't Frack PEI insists that there is no reason why PEI should continue on its destructive path of dependence on fossil fuels. With an increased level of imagination and political will PEI could become users of renewable energy sources – sun, wind, water and geothermal energy.

In Focus

The InFocus project is a pan-Canadian project of the Canadian Association for Community Living and the DisAbled Women's Network. Its ultimate goal is to develop strategies to ensure that people with disabilities can be safe and healthy in their communities. The project does that by exploring the issues of violence and abuse, and access to health care from the point of view of men and women with disabilities, and bringing together individuals, service providers and advocates. In PEI, Cooper Institute is the lead organization for the project. The PEI steering committee includes representatives of the PEI Council of People with Disabilities, Family Violence Prevention Services, PEI People First, the PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre and DAWN Canada.

There were two parts to the project in 2014. Early in the year an on-line survey was conducted, in order to gain a better understanding of different kinds of abuse among men and women with disabilities and the barriers that they may face in getting help when they have been abused. It was clear from the survey that people with disabilities are experiencing a wide range of abuse, from financial to physical and sexual abuse, and that they face some significant barriers in getting access to help once they have been abused. Service providers who responded to the survey also pointed out some gaps and ways in which their programs, facilities and outreach might be improved. The results from the surveys and from the focus groups held at the end of 2013 across Canada have been used to develop workshops that will be held in March, 2015.

In April of 2014, the focus of the project was access to healthcare. Workshops were held with individuals and with people working in various areas of healthcare. The workshop for healthcare providers was particularly well attended. Participants were there to gain a better understanding of challenges faced by people with disabilities in getting access to healthcare, and to consider some ways in which they might address some challenges that people might face.



Trisha Clarkin & Ann Wheatley led workshops on healthcare

Seeds of Community

In 2014 Cooper Institute continued its Seed Sovereignty work through the *Seeds of Community* initiative. This project continued to build community engagement through the creation of seed libraries in local communities across PEI, using the PEI Public Library System.

Many free packages of seeds were provided through public libraries and local events to gardeners, and a number of workshops were held across PEI at local libraries with community groups to build skills and awareness of seed sovereignty issues and seed saving techniques.

Community Seed Libraries are wonderful initiatives for gardeners to participate in networks of community sharing and to make seed more affordable for low-income gardeners. Unfortunately the quality of seed available through community networks is not sufficient for small farmers, as germination and genetic consistency cannot be guaranteed.

In 2015, Cooper Institute will be working on a second tier of the community seed saving work by facilitating a network of small farmers to increase and improve their seed saving practice in order to build local capacity and increase local seed security.

In the fall, Cooper Institute members were fortunate to attend both the ACORN Conference and the Food Secure Canada Conference held in Halifax, as well as the Nation Farmers Union Convention in Saskatoon, where issues of seed sovereignty were on the table.

Cooper Institute thanks the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security for their support of our work.



A seed exchange, held at Confederation Library, attracted gardeners and farmers

Temporary Foreign Workers

2014 was a tumultuous year for migrant workers in Canada, and in PEI's food service and fishery sectors in particular. Cooper Institute forged stronger connections and engaged in coalitions and organizations concerned with migrants' rights across Canada. In PEI, Cooper Institute has been working to support and accompany migrant workers in their leadership initiatives.

In January a group of over 30 migrant workers drafted a letter to the federal government asking for policy changes to improve their lives. 2014 saw a number of drastic changes to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, all of which had the effect of increasing the vulnerability and precariousness of employment and status. Following the federal government's "overhaul" of the program, document was produced in collaboration with the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, outlining the extensive impacts of the changes on migrant workers in PEI. Three workshops were held in the province to spread the word about these changes and to consult those affected about what kind of response would be appropriate.

In August, a group of migrant workers met for



Migrant workers attended a workshop in Summerside leadership training on self-advocacy techniques and identified some actions they would like to take. Powerful statements emerged from this meeting, and an open letter and a petition were crafted in the weeks that followed. As seasonal industries came to an end this fall, the precariousness of the workers' status in Canada became more acute. Ongoing meetings and check-ins for support of migrant workers continue.

Cooper Institute hosted Cinema Politica screenings of the film, *The End of Immigration* in Charlottetown, Wellington and Summerside. The film discusses the TFW Program and the migrants caught up in it in the context of Canada's privatization of immigration through the use of temporary foreign workers.

Thanks to the Interministerial Women's Secretariat and the Campbell Webster Foundation for their support.

Organizational Support

Members of the Cooper Institute collective work with and support many organizations in various ways:

Société Saint-Thomas d'Aquin

Parkinson Society Maritime Region (PEI)

International Women's Day 2014

Breaking the Silence

P.E.I. Supported Decision-Making Coalition

Voluntary Resource Council

National Farmers Union

Partners for Change

PEI People First

Atlantic Council for International Cooperation

Latin American Mission Program (LAMP)

Council for Health Improvement through Research and Practice (CHIRP)

ALERT

Canada World Youth

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. We estimate that almost one third of our income is from private donors.

Cooper Institute invites other interested people to donate. This can be done in the following ways: pre-authorized monthly donations; an annual contribution; a memorial for a deceased family member or friend; a bequest in your Last Will and Testament. Cooper Institute is a charitable organization. (Charitable Registration #10114 4541 RR0001)



Selvi Roy and Father Eddie Cormier
celebrate Cooper Institute

CHIRP

CHIRP stands for Council for Health Improvement through Research and Practice. It was incorporated (PEI) in 2013 as a not-for-profit organization. Its founder is Dr. Murray Rusk.

CHIRP's main goal is to bring together people who are doing ground-breaking research and those who are using innovative therapies and practices. New progressive developments in research and therapies are happening so rapidly that researchers and practitioners cannot keep up with them.

CHIRP responds to the need for forums to highlight health-related breakthroughs which have the capacity to make contributions to the advancement of health in all its aspects.

CHIRP organizes seminars, workshops, and congresses and maintains a website to bring people together and open up avenues for safe and intelligent dialogue. One area of special interest is the growing research and practice in energy medicine, which supplements "conventional" healthcare.

Members of the Cooper Institute Collective:

Josie Baker
Irene Burge
Marie Burge
Joe Byrne
Eddie Cormier
Irene Doyle
Marie Hendricken

Maureen Larkin
Leah MacLeod
Reg Phelan
Selvi Roy
Debbie Theuerkauf
Ann Wheatley



Photo credit: Nick Arsenaault

Missing from photo: Selvi Roy

Protecting PEI Water

When the PEI Potato Board and Cavendish Farms took aim at Prince Edward Island's moratorium on high-capacity wells in 2013, they may not have taken into account just how deeply Islanders care about their water and how vigorous they would be in defending it. The request, which was based on the potato industry's self-declared need to use irrigation to be competitive in the global french-fry market caused an immediate public reaction. From across the province, Islanders expressed their outrage in letters to the editor and attendance at public meetings. The P.E.I. Government's Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environment, Energy and Forestry received an unprecedented number of written and oral submissions on the subject and saw unusually large numbers of interested Islanders attend its hearings.

The potato industry's claim to what is essentially a common resource – water – gained very little public sympathy. Their cause was certainly not helped when the president of Cavendish Farms, Robert Irving, threatened to “downsize the company's operations and investments in P.E.I.” if it did not get what it wanted – unfettered access to Island groundwater.

Prince Edward Island needs better policy tools to protect water and to prevent its exploitation by any one sector. The request to lift the moratorium drew attention to the problems inherent in an industrial model of agriculture which promotes monoculture of a crop that relies on large inputs of chemicals, depletes soil of organic content, and has been linked to regular incidents of run-off, siltation and fish-kills.

The moratorium on high-capacity wells was put in place in 2002, in response to drought conditions. In more recent years, the vulnerability of our water supply has become evident as streams in the Winter River watershed, from which Charlottetown's water is taken, have dried up – an indication of environmental stress that will only get worse with climate change.

Water quality as well as quantity is a cause for concern – yearly fish-kills, high Nitrates levels, run-off, siltation and sedimentation, and anoxic estuaries are well documented symptoms of the ways in which we have abused our land, our forests and our soil and put our water at risk.

Across the province, groups are taking action to address these symptoms. Years ago, the Government of P.E.I. handed the responsibility for taking care of rivers and streams to community-based watershed groups. With limited and inconsistent government support, groups have developed and implemented community-based watershed plans aimed at cleaning up rivers and streams, protecting water quantity and quality and enhancing wildlife habitat. They have worked hard to develop public awareness of the issues affecting watersheds and they have engaged community members in efforts to address those issues. And they have never stopped demanding improved public policy to address the root causes of the environmental degradation that they witness, practically on a daily basis.

In June 2014, after hearing 29 presentations and receiving 16 written submissions from concerned Islanders, the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environment, Energy and Forestry submitted its report, recommending that the moratorium on high-capacity wells be maintained for the time being and that a provincial water policy be developed, using a process that included widespread public consultation. Shortly thereafter, Environment Minister Janice Sherry announced that her government would act on that recommendation.

An effective water act would be based on a set of values, including: water as a common resource; access to adequate quantities of clean water as a fundamental human right; and water as a public trust. A water act should be aimed not only at protecting water for human consumption but also at promoting the environmental health of our watersheds, including all of the living things that depend on them. If the proposed act is to have effect, regulations will need to be developed in tandem with the act itself, and there will need to be a commitment of resources to properly enforce those regulations. This is not the time for short cuts. In Prince Edward Island and in every other place on earth, our health, our communities, our economy and ecosystems all depend on water – clean water, in good supply.



Standing Committee hearings drew large crowds

Proportional Representation for Canada: Long Over-Due

According to political parties which tend to benefit from absolute majorities, the Prince Edward Island 2005 plebiscite on Proportional Representation (PR) sent this issue to its eternal rest. In spite of wonderful research done, Islanders were told over and over again that they are incapable of understanding proportional representation. The organization and irregularities of voting day (November 28, 2005) would shock many international election monitors.

It is understandable why the two main parties did everything possible to undermine the plebiscite preparation and the actual voting process. First-Past-the-Post (reference to horse racing) ensures that the politician in each riding is elected by the largest group in each riding. The party that has the highest number of candidates elected in this manner forms the government, a single party majority, with fully unhindered decision-making power, and with their opposition always having minority voice. The situation is that a party can, and often does, take power, even though the party has not received the support of the majority of voters.

Here is an example the past five PEI general elections:

| Historical Percentages of Provincial Popular Votes, Number of seats: 1996-2011 Elections | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Progressive Conservatives | | Liberal | | New Democratic Party | | Green Party | | Island Party | |
| | % Popular Vote | # Seats Won | % Popular Vote | # Seats Won | % Popular Vote | # Seats Won | % Popular Vote | # Seats Won | % Popular Vote | # Seats Won |
| 2011 | 40.16% | 5 | 51.38% | 22 | 3.16% | 0 | 4.36% | 0 | 0.9% | 0 |
| 2007 | 41.35% | 4 | 52.93% | 23 | 1.96% | 0 | 3.04% | 0 | | |
| 2003 | 54.0% | 23 | 42.4% | 4 | 3.0% | 0 | | | | |
| 2000 | 57.6% | 26 | 33.6% | 1 | 8.4% | 0 | | | | |
| 1996 | 47.2% | 18 | 44.6% | 8 | 7.8% | 1 | | | | |

Note: in the 2011 election one independent candidate also ran

In this system there is a high percentage of “wasted votes”. In 2011 for example, 29,950 votes (40.16 %) did not count in the decision of who would govern. If elections honoured the actual vote of Islanders, the legislature would have had the following make-up: Lib, 14 seats; PCs, 11 seats; NDP, 1 seat; and Greens, 1 seat. What different, enlightened policies could have been enacted!

Proportional Representation, however, goes beyond the popular vote. There are a number of varieties of PR, none of which is perfect. They all, however, provide for the inclusion of the voice of diverse sectors of society which are often not well represented by party politics alone, such as women, youth, cultural and ethnic interests, sexual and gender diversity, people with disabilities, and the elderly.

In a world where approximately 81 countries use forms of PR when electing their governments, old and new democracies alike, Canada is an electoral dinosaur.

Ten years after the plebiscite fiasco, a new generation, mostly oblivious of the event, is amazed at the electoral backwardness of our country, PEI included. There are new voices. Many of them are either first-time voters or citizens who have already opted-out of the voting scene. They recognize that the current “first-past-the-post” system assures that the two traditional parties vie with each other for a chance at the helm. Some even express this unkindly as “taking turns at the trough.” Most discerning people recognise that these parties have roughly the same economic, social and political motivations and goals – goals best served by a system which does not count all votes, nor take into consideration the views of a wide range of people.

New and emerging Canadian voices are demanding the following: that 2015 elections be the last ones based on First-Past-the-Post; that immediately after the elections, all political parties establish tried-and-true Proportional Representation electoral policies; that the citizens be fully engaged in developing forms of electoral processes which not only provide good government, but which also enhance full democratic engagement between elections.