## **COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2016**





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

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## **Social Justice Symposium 2016**

Please join us for Cooper Institute's next Social Justice Symposium, on **Saturday, March 11**.

Dr Nettie Wiebe will talk about food sovereignty and climate change. Nettie farms in Delisle, Saskatchewan. She served in leadership positions of the National Farmers Union for ten years and was the first woman to lead a national farm organization in Canada. She recently retired from teaching ethics at the University of Saskatchewan. She is an active participant in public discourse on sustainable agriculture and rural communities, trade agreements, women's equality, human rights, peace, economic and environmental issues and food sovereignty. Watch our website and facebook page for more details about the symposium!

## Marie Hendricken 1935-2016

Marie Hendricken's death on October 14, 2016 left an unimaginable void in many people's lives. The loss is most painful for JP and their five children, Danny, Darlene, Cathy, Ike, Kim, and Clair, their spouses/partners, her grandchildren, and her siblings. Marie has ever been the irreplaceable heart of their home.



Marie was the heart of many families, including

the National Farmers Union (NFU). She was a farmer to her core and kept the rights of family farmers as one of her life passions. She had the capacity to work on farm policy issues with deep conviction and clarity of vision. She exposed ways that the industrial sector claims an unfair share of the wealth, leaving farm families struggling for survival.

While Marie's zeal involved her in divisive situations, she had the capacity to keep a balance between the political and the personal. She loved the people she met, whether they agreed with her or not. She condemned policies, not people.

Cooper Institute is proud to claim Marie Hendricken as one of the Institute's founders in 1984. We witnessed how much she loved us and rejoiced to be with us. We are privileged to have had her join in our work on social justice issues. One of her greatest legacies to us is her sharing of her love for the land. She experienced the land as living and was in awe of its power to produce food for people. As one of her friends said, "Marie carried the land in her soul".

Marie Hendricken was a woman of hope. In response to the question of filmmaker Don Kossick, "Where do you find hope? "Marie responded, "I find hope in meeting with people. Hope comes from people". Rest in Peace, Marie. A loving, hopeful life well-lived with and for others!

## **PEI Working Group for a Livable Income**

The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI) is a network of ten community-based organizations and a number of individual members. It was formed in 2002. From the beginning, WGLI has seen the need to address the ongoing roots of impoverishment of a large number of people in PEI. This means having a long-term goal of establishing a system of guaranteed livable income for all Islanders. This poverty elimination program is *Basic Income Guarantee*.

At the same time, WGLI urges the community and governments, in the shorter term, to develop strong poverty reduction strategies and develop policies and programs which include: *livable wages*, a *fair EI system*, adequate social assistance payments, and increases in disability pensions and Old Age Security. *Basic Income Guarantee (BIG)* 

BIG is a central program of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income. In 2016 the group had many opportunities to rally provincial and federal policy makers and the community around BIG.

A submission to the PEI Department of Finance Pre-Budget Consultation presented BIG as a rights-based investment in people. It is a sane and equitable way to relieve poverty and to enhance a sense of human dignity. Experience in many jurisdictions shows notable increases in productivity and citizen engagement.

The Working Group met with the Honourable Tina Mundy, Minister of Family and Human Services, and emphasized with her the need to work on short-term poverty reduction strategies and at the same time, build a foundation for establishing BIG as an experimental project in PEI. It is agreed that BIG can happen in the provinces only with close collaboration between the province and the Government of Canada. The time seems appropriate for this given that the Federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Jean-Yves Duclos, a veteran economist, has researched Basic Income Guarantee. He has written and spoken favourably about BIG although this program does not yet show up as a priority for the current federal government. Minister Mundy and her deputy, Teresa Hennebery, continue to be in communication with the Working Group for a Livable Income.

In summer 2016, the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income gratefully received a summer student for eight weeks under the Federal Government student job program. Her role was to expand the reach of BIG, to develop with community leaders a statement of principles for BIG; and to revise information materials.

Members of the Working Group made a case for BIG in Federal Pre-Budget (2017) Consultations. In one of these meetings the working group said: We long for the day when the Federal Government and the PEI Government will articulate their concrete plans for BIG in mandate letters to a wide range of Ministers, in the speeches from the Throne, in the budgets, and in the discourse in the House of Commons and PEI Legislature.

It was a moment of accomplishment when in December the PEI Legislature unanimously passed a motion to initiate with the Federal Government the process to establish BIG as a pilot project in PEI.



Summer student Rachel Barry created a BIG infographic

## Livable Wages

The WGLI made its annual submission to the PEI Employment Standards Board. In 2016 this was a productive and open in-person presentation. The Working Group made the following assertions: that livable income is a right of every person, not subject to concessions; that within this context, people have a right to earn a living wage; that workers have the right to actually earn "a living" (wages that cover basic human needs); that a right is a matter of social justice and cannot be assured through good will and charity; that the level of poverty, the reality of the working poor in PEI is a disgrace; that PEI can do better.

The Working Group urged the Employment Standards Board to: create a standard of excellence, rather than minimum compliance, in both wages and workplace relationships and to identify and reward employers who are obvious "excellence seekers". The ESB is expected to be a true advocate for non-unionized workers. The Working Group discussed the need to invest energy in allaying the fears of small and medium-sized businesses, based on studies that show that businesses do very well (are not jeopardized) when and where workers are paid a livable wage.

#### Working Group for a Livable Income, continued

The Working Group emphasized the need for the ESB to articulate for workers and employers the vulnerability of workers within workplaces in which employers have absolute power, and to specifically identify the groups of workers who are particularly vulnerable (e.g. women, migrant workers, new immigrants, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people). There is a glaring need to provide systems of reporting which protect a worker reporting mistreatment and/or lack of safety.

The ESB must request that the government revise the Act to reflect 2016-and-beyond new models of work, including new definitions & attitudes about work, both waged and non-waged, and the reality of technological advances that make many conventional workers redundant. And especially, a new Act must be specific about workplace abuse in all its forms and not leave employer maltreatment of workers to be loosely defined as "bad manners'.

#### **Employment Insurance**

The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income, as members of the PEI Coalition for Fair EI, witnessed some efforts on the part of the Federal Government to reverse the changes to EI that had been made by the Harper Government. The Coalition expected that the all-Liberal Atlantic Caucus, elected in part on "Scrap the Changes" promises, would put full effort into reversing the damaging effects of the Harper changes to EI. They clearly do not commit to reversing **all** of the 2012 changes and it appears they plan to leave the impact on seasonal economy as it is.

The Coalition acknowledges that the reduction of the waiting period to one week and changes in new entrant requirements do improve benefits for some claimants. However these provide only limited relief for the majority of unemployed Atlantic workers.

The Coalition wrote to each member of the Atlantic Caucus. The Island MPs have expressed unwavering support of the Coalition's demands that all changes to EI made by the former government be reversed. However, this support needs to be put into action.

Restoring the 5 weeks of extended benefits has not been reversed. This action is essential for regions where economic development depends on seasonal and precarious employment. The original two-region decision was made to gain political support and will be maintained for the same reason unless the extended benefit regulation is restored.

Also of special concern to the Atlantic is the failure to restore and make permanent the "Best 14 Weeks" Pilot Project. This is especially important in conditions where access to work may be irregular.

## **PEI Coalition for Proportional Representation**



Jane Ledwell, Marcia Carroll and Marie Burge present to federal committee on electoral reform

Cooper Institute continues its commitment to the long-term goal of the Coalition for Proportional Representation.

The Coalition, established in June 2015, is made up of twelve community-based organizations and hundreds of individual members.

After a number of community interactive learning forums on proportional representation, the main work of the past year involved a high-energy, well-organized plebiscite campaign, which was led by the PR Action Committee, a member of the Coalition. The campaign concentrated on convincing Islanders to vote for the two PR options, which appeared on the plebiscite ballot, Mixed Member Proportional Representation and Dual Member Proportional Representation.

To oversee the campaign the Coalition adopted a temporary executive model, which provided management of staff and activities along with financial accountability. Many individuals supported the campaign by contributing money and by volunteering great amounts of time, energy and ingenuity to the various functions characteristic of any campaign.

The results of the plebiscite represented an historical victory for PR in Prince Edward Island with Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) earning 52.42 % of the votes (19,418 voters). Although voter turnout was low (36.46%), and given that there was no voter turnout threshold established preplebiscite, many people are shocked that the PEI government decided not to honour the vote.

The Coalition for Proportional Representation, no longer in campaign mode, is carrying on its advocacy and community engagement for the establishment of MMP as a way of electing MLAs. In the months to come the Coalition will continue to define its goals, objectives, and structure in order to accomplish making PEI a proportional representation province.

## **PEI Food Security Network**

The PEI Food Security Network (FSN) is an education and action organization committed to achieving food sovereignty in PEI. It is dedicated to changing community attitudes and public policy to promote environmentally sustainable practices for the production and distribution of food, the availability of affordable, healthy food, livable income for producers and PEI self-reliance in food. Cooper Institute has been an active member since the network was formed in 2008.

Over the course of the year, the FSN continued to work within several coalitions to advance food sovereignty in PEI. These included Trade Justice PEI and the Migrant Workers Action Team.

The Food Security Network made a written submission to the House of Commons International Trade Committee, outlining its concerns about the TPP's promotion of industrial agriculture, and how that would exacerbate the harmful environmental effects of potato monoculture in this province. The FSN also pointed to the TPP's certain interference with supply management and subsequent losses to our dairy farmers, and to the effects on democracy and the environment of the Investor/State Dispute System.

At a rally for migrant workers' rights, the FSN spoke in support of changing policies to respect workers' rights – in PEI many migrant workers are employed in agriculture and fish processing, and make significant contributions to our food system.

In April, the FSN's annual meeting featured a panel discussion that included farmers Lorna McMaster, an active and founding member of the PEI Seed Alliance, Soleil Hutchinson, farmer and distributor of "Good Food Baskets", the goal of which is to supply a variety of good food to Islanders year round and complement the efforts of other producers, and Travis Cummiskey, a fourth-generation farmer who spoke of the challenges of maintaining the history and tradition of the family farm, at the same time adapting to new economic and environmental realities. Doug Campbell, district director of the NFU, spoke of the need to protect family farms as the backbone of our economies and as a necessity to achieving food sovereignty.

At the same AGM, Anne Mazer presented the results of her work tracking community food efforts of people across PEI. She talked to people engaged in over 60 projects such as food banks, soup kitchens, and community meal programs. The amount of volunteer time and energy going into such endeavours was overwhelming, and illustrated how, in the absence of government policy, we have become so completely

dependent on charity to solve household food insecurity.

In the summer, members of the FSN met with PEI Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Alan MacIsaac to discuss the government's intention to develop a local food act for PEI. The Minister was not able to shed much light on the process to date or on any proposed content, but he was encouraged by the FSN to consult widely with community and articulate a clear vision, goal and principles for the Act.



Anne Mazer and Morgan Palmer: a small map with a big problem

#### Cinema Politica

Cinema Politica brings together many different community organizations with an interest in using art and film as an inspiration to discuss a wide variety of

social and environmental issues and ideas. This Town is Small, Council of Canadians (PEI), Island Peace Committee, Citizens' Alliance of PEI, WUSC, Holland College Green Machine, Don't Frack PEI, and the University of Prince Edward Island hosted films in 2016



Those films were about the environment and the people striving to protect the environment, climate change, war and peace, migrant workers rights and indigenous rights. The films took us to Egypt and Palestine, South America and the Pacific, and across North America, with stops in New Brunswick, Labrador and Nunavut.

Films were shown as part of International Development Week in February, Black History Month, Earth Day in April, Social Justice Week at UPEI.

A highlight was the First Peoples, First Screens series of three events featuring documentaries made by indigenous filmmakers. Eliza Knockwood, Mi'kmaq filmmaker from Abegweit First Nation was present to introduce the films and facilitate discussions.

## **Migrant Workers**

2016 was a busy year for Cooper Institute's work for Migrant Worker Rights in PEI and in Canada. Cooper Institute continued the work of supporting migrant workers in PEI to meet their personal goals and to address the barriers to democratic participation they face. Migrant workers in the fisheries created messages for policy makers, expressing their desires for policy change. There were meetings with policy makers, a brief submitted to the federal committee reviewing the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, and letters sent to federal policy makers expressing concerns about issues including the 4-year rule, 180 day non-renewable work permits, employer-tied work permits, barriers to permanent residency status, and access to health care.

## Equal in Dignity-Equal in Rights Forums

Two national-scale forums took place in the Maritimes, in Fredericton, NB and in Charlottetown, PEI, organized in collaboration with KAIROS.

Cooper Institute was instrumental in organizing the Charlottetown event, which brought together migrant workers, policy makers, activists, service providers, faith communities, and other community members. The day-long forum included speakers from Justicia for Migrant Workers, Migrante Canada, UFCW, local fish plants, and KAIROS. This event was made possible with the support of CUPE, UFCW, Council of Canadians, Latin American Mission Program, Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada, the PEI Presbytery of the United Church and the Mennonite Central Committee. Migrant workers from PEI were a strong presence at both events, contributing to the building of a cross-Canada movement for migrant worker rights.



Josie Baker, Zenaida Angeles, Jesson Reyes at Charlottetown forum

Following this forum, a community group, the Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights, was formed to raise awareness in the community about migrant worker rights issues in PEI and across Canada. This team held a People's Assembly as part of a nation-wide day of action on migrant worker rights,

conducted outreach to agricultural workers, held a booth at Farm Day in the City in solidarity with the Ontario-based "Harvesting Freedom" tour, and helped organize the Charlottetown screening of *Migrant Dreams*.

## Migrant Dreams Film Tour

In October, Cooper Institute organized a 5-day film tour of the Maritimes, screening the new Canadian documentary, *Migrant Dreams*, in Charlottetown, Fredericton, Antigonish, Shediac, and O'Leary. The film was accompanied by Josie Baker of Cooper Institute and by guest, Tzazna Miranda Leal of Justicia for Migrant Workers.

The film and subsequent discussions helped to build knowledge, engagement, and regional networks surrounding this issue. The film tour was organized in collaboration with Breaking the Silence, the Maritime Conference of the United Church of Canada, NFU NB, KAIROS, the Antigonish International Film Festival, Shediac Bay Community Church, No One is Illegal Fredericton, and with support from ACIC, CUPE PEI, and UFCW.



Workers made a presentation to MP Robert Morrissey

#### Legal Information for Migrant Workers

Migrant workers' lives and status in Canada are constrained and shaped by a complex combination of federal and provincial laws and policies.

Since a comprehensive guide did not exist, and migrant workers and service organizations had difficulty finding information about relevant programs, supports and regulations, Cooper Insitute created the *Guide for Migrant Workers: Living and Working in PEI*. This guide relates to the low-skill stream of the temporary foreign worker program, which hires women and men in various industries. This work was made possible with the support of the Interministerial Women's Secretariat and the Law Foundation of PEI.

The Campbell Webster Foundation continues to make possible Cooper Institute's work with Migrant Workers.

#### **Seeds of Community**

In 2016 Cooper Institute continued to develop the PEI Seed Library and supported the formation of the PEI Seed Alliance. Cooper Institute is grateful to the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security for its support of this work.

#### Seed Libraries

In partnership with PEI public libraries, Cooper Institute coordinated public access to seeds across PEI. In 2016, Seedy Saturdays and Sundays were held in several communities, offering an opportunity for seed savers to gather and share seed. The surplus seed from Seedy Saturdays was packaged by youth volunteers at the Confederation Centre Public Library and distributed free of charge to gardeners in the springtime.

In the spring, Kim Delaney, a seed farmer in Ontario, visited the island and offered a Train-the-Trainer session for community members interested in sharing seed saving techniques in their communities.

Several libraries also hosted public Seed Saving workshops this spring and fall. The libraries which participated in this program included: the Confederation Centre Public Library, the Summerside Rotary Library, the Montague Rotary Library, the Souris Public Library, and the Breadalbane Public Library.



Kim Delaney led an advanced seed saving workshop in April

#### PEI Seed Alliance

In 2016 the PEI Seed Alliance came into being, a collective of small farmers committed to growing and sharing high-quality seed. Cooper Institute supported the work of this collective. The PEI Seed Alliance launched its first selection of PEI-grown seeds for sale to the public (featuring beautiful packages) which were sold at Seedy Saturdays, at Charlottetown and Summerside Farmers Markets, and at the Voluntary Resource Centre.

In April, the PEI Seed Alliance brought Kim Delaney of Hawthorn Farm in Ontario to PEI to offer a well-attended training in advanced seed saving at the Farm Centre.

The Alliance also commissioned Sheldon MacQuarrie to convert a chipper-shredder into a bean thresher, which will be available in Western PEI for use by homesteaders and small farmers.

#### **Partners for Change**

Partners for Change is a coalition of advocacy groups including PEI People First, PEI Association for Community Living and PEI Citizen Advocacy as well as individuals and service agencies who share a concern about the ongoing institutionalization of adults with intellectual disabilities and the denial of their right to decide for themselves where and with whom they will live. Cooper Institute is a supporter, and a member of Partners for Change.

The highlight of 2016 occurred very close to the end of the year, in December, when Partners for Change presented a session about "Rights, Advocacy and Risk Management" to close to forty managers at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The presentation, which was well received, was the culmination of several months of face-to-face meetings between members of PFC and staff of Health PEI and the Departments of Health and Family/Human Services. The meetings had been organized in response to several situations in which individuals with intellectual disabilities were hospitalized for extended periods – up to a year and a half – in part because they refused to be moved to nursing homes or community care facilities.

#### **Trade Justice**

Trade Justice PEI includes Cooper Institute, Breaking the Silence, the PEI Food Security Network, National Farmers Union, ECO-PEI, Council of Canadians (PEI) and several labour unions.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership drew much attention in 2016 as the federal Standing Committee on International Trade embarked on a cross-country tour to hear from Canadians. In PEI several groups including Trade Justice, the NFU, Sierra Club, ECOPEI and the PEI Health Coalition, made presentations to the committee. Others submitted written presentations. Our groups continued to voice concerns about the investor-state provisions, impacts on agriculture and supply management, and increased drug costs.

A public event in April featured panelists Scott Sinclair (CCPA), Randall Affleck (NFU) and Megan Sali (OpenMedia). It was a very well attended event, allowing people a chance to have their questions answered about the trade deal.

Late in 2016, CETA was signed. But not without some last-minute stalling by the Belgian region of Wallonia. Mainstream media were notably biased in their coverage, framing Wallonia's refusal to sign the deal as a tremendous disaster and breathing a collective, audible sigh of relief when finally the deal was signed. Trade Justice PEI wrote many op-eds and media releases to present an opposing view.

## **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)

**Breaking the Silence** 

P.E.I. Supported Decision-Making Coalition

**Voluntary Resource Council** 

**National Farmers Union** 

Save Our Seas and Shores PEI

**PEI People First** 

**Atlantic Council for International Cooperation** 

**Latin American Mission Program (LAMP)** 

**Canadian Council for Refugees** 

Don't Frack PEI

#### **About Coalitions**

Cooper Institute is fortunate to be able to carry out our work in collaboration with many groups and people who are also committed to social justice. This style of work promotes cooperation and provides opportunities for sharing knowledge and strategies.

It is an environment in which we learn with, and from, each other. And it is an efficient use of time and energy. In this way we are privileged to work with organized and non-organized labour, including migrant workers.

We are united with equality-seeking women, who fight for reproductive rights for women. We are with people with disabilities seeking fairness. We are with environmentalists and with food producers who value the ecosystem and who work toward people-centered food systems. We appreciate and thank all our associates. Together we can contribute to the creation of new and just solutions.

#### **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: preauthorized 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)

#### Members of the Cooper Institute Collective:

Josie Baker Maureen Larkin
Irene Burge Leah MacLeod
Marie Burge Reg Phelan
Joe Byrne Selvi Roy

Eddie Cormier Debbie Theuerkauf Irene Doyle Ann Wheatley Marie Hendricken



Photo credit: Nick Arsenault

Missing from photo: Selvi Roy

## **Cooper Institute Lending Library**

In our office on the second floor of the Voluntary Resource Council, you'll find several shelves full of books on every imaginable social justice issue or theme. We have books on food sovereignty, agriculture, economics, peace, women's rights, trade justice, Latin America, poverty . . . and we have books on community development, activism and resistance. These books are available to anyone who has an interest. Come and visit us!

## **Connect with Cooper Institute**

You can find us on FaceBook, or visit our website – <u>www.cooperinstitute.ca</u>. Better still, come and visit us at 81 Prince Street in Charlottetown. Drop-ins welcomed, encouraged even!

# **CLOSING THOUGHTS Proportional Representation**

"The genie is out of the bottle"

The plebiscite on electoral reform of November-December, 2016 represents a sea change for the future of politics in PEI. There is no turning back. It appears that Island residents are progressively moving, though with judicious caution, toward proportional representation. The majority vote (52.42 %) for Mixed Member Proportional Representation (MMP) represents Islanders' growing preference for new ways of electing politicians. It represents also new expectations about how political parties function as policy makers. Evidence of the depth of voters' convictions was seen in the furor in the formal and social media when the PEI Government made it clear that the majority vote would not be honoured.

The low voter turnout (36.46%) is given as the main reason for not honouring the vote. True, just considering percentages it seems a bit low. However in real numbers, it means that the government feels justified in turning its back on 19,418 honest and aware Islanders. That is a significant number of people and could be a force to be reckoned with. Lucky, they are gentle Islanders.



The point is raised over and over again that people did not understand what the plebiscite was about. One would not dare say that to, or about, any of the 19,418 citizens who voted for MMP. However, not every Islander had the opportunity to spend the time and energy with others educating themselves. A lot of taxpayer money went into the formal process of giving out information about what the five options on the ballot meant. Not many people going cold into one of those sessions would be able to grasp the meanings of all the choices. There was strong opposition to PR from the two mainline parties. The only real voice for PR was the Coalition for Proportional Representation, which did massive community engagement thanks to thousands of hours of volunteer time and finances donated mainly by supporting individuals and organizations. It was noted by a number of well-versed citizens that many of the MLAs who spoke in the Legislature about PR seemed not to have had enough opportunity to come to an acceptable understanding of all the choices.

The Coalition for Proportional Representation sees a number of ways that the Government could put MMP into effect right away, up and ready for the 2019 election. It would mean policy makers having a change of mentality about PR being irreversible once it is enacted. It is disingenuous to claim that we must be sure before we embark on MMP, claiming that once it is in place it will become permanent. The example of New Zealand is confirmation of this, having held a number of elections with MMP and then putting it to a binding referendum. Another caution one hears bandied about is that we need to wait until everybody understands it. However, it is a common expression, "we learn to do by doing". So let's do it and learn. No harm done.

The challenge for PR supporters now is to build on the developing consensus about the value of Mixed Member Proportional for the future of the whole Island community. The responsibility for establishing forward-looking electoral and governing processes does not belong primarily to governments or political parties. It belongs to the wide population of PEI. Ordinary people will take ownership of this process. How the population is governed and how policy makers are elected, most of all, affects the every day residents of the Island.

The will of the people is stronger than ever. The movement for PR in Prince Edward Island is not going away. Sooner or later, Mixed Member Proportional Representation will be firmly established in PEI.