

COOPER INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT 2017



With the support of many generous donors Cooper Institute has been active in the community for 33 years.

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Social Justice Symposium 2017

Cooper Institute's annual symposium in honour of Father Andrew Macdonald was held in March. Seventy-five people packed in to Milton Hall for an afternoon of presentations and discussion about climate change and food sovereignty. Dr Nettie Wiebe was our guest speaker in 2017. Nettie farms with her family in Saskatchewan. She has written extensively on food sovereignty, women's equality, human rights, and peace and has served in the leadership of the National Farmers Union. Here are some excerpts from her talk, "Nurturing human and ecological communities in stormy times":



The current food system is environmentally unsustainable and it is unjust. It is not feeding the hungry people of the world, despite the push for more industrialization and GMOs to respond to crisis. As the number of family farms decreases, and as corporate concentration and control over food increases, there is a loss of democracy in the food system. Land is taken out of the hands of family farms and placed in the hands of corporations. Monoculture and intensive large-scale production is intensifying, using more water, pesticides and herbicides, more diesel fuel and chemical fertilizers. It is a huge contributor to climate change, soil degradation, water pollution, and ecosystem destruction.

In 1996, La Via Campesina introduced the concept of Food Sovereignty. It's about taking back the food system from corporate agribusinesses and financiers and placing it back in the hands of small-scale farmers – the people who grow food, care for the land, feed families and communities. Food is for nutrition; it should not be treated as a commodity for trade and profit. The focus should be on producing culturally and ecologically appropriate food for local communities.

Agro-ecology is about working with nature, enhancing biodiversity, respecting and integrating traditional knowledge and methods of food production. It is more than a technique. It is about valuing and working with nature. It is about changing not just our methodologies, but also our relationships. Agro-ecological production is just as productive as high-input monoculture, if all farm products are counted. And it is ecologically sustainable.

We need to understand ourselves as not just producers of commodities. We have a huge responsibility to respect and cherish the biodiversity around us, to understand ourselves as living communities of human beings among other communities, and recognize interdependence rather than domination.

We are in an oppressive political climate, and this is hard. But, if we change our relationships with other beings and ecosystems, we have a good chance of mitigating and sheltering each other during the climate storming. We need to begin to see ourselves as

part of the kinship group – all our relations. Solidarity with each other, and with other ecological communities will help us to understand ourselves better and change the way we live in the world and what we eat. This is about relationships: how we relate to each other, and how we see ourselves in relationship with the natural world. **Warmer more loving relationships will lead us to a cooler, calmer climate.**

For a full report of the 2017 symposium, visit our website, www.cooperinstitute.ca.

Climate Change & Food Sovereignty

Cooper Institute's
Social Justice Symposium 2017

Saturday, **MARCH 11** · 1-4 pm
MILTON COMMUNITY HALL

Guest Speaker: **Dr. Nettie Wiebe**

PEI Working Group for a Livable Income

The PEI Working Group for a Livable Income (WGLI) has for fifteen years spoken out about issues relating to the reality of people in PEI living on low incomes. WGLI is a network of ten community-based organizations, one of which is Cooper Institute, and individual members. We believe that every person has the right to a livable income which we define as having enough to pay rent or mortgage and monthly utility bills, to buy nutritious food and medicine, transportation, to continue learning, to access child and eldercare, to participate in the community, and to cover emergencies. A livable income supports people to live in good health and in dignity. From its beginning, WGLI has seen that charitable programs or stop-gap, piecemeal government and community measures, though necessary, cannot be the ongoing way of providing livelihood for people. All programs need to be redefined in terms of human rights.

Basic Income Guarantee

Addressing livable income as a human right means that there must be a long-term goal of establishing a system of guaranteed, livable income for all Islanders, a system called Basic Income Guarantee (BIG). For the past five years, one of our main goals has been to engage government and the community in finding ways to establish a BIG experimental program in PEI.

Generally, work with the community is straightforward: people are interested and are eager to know more about BIG. They worry about how it would be administered. They want to be able to answer critics, including those who claim that BIG might take away incentives to work. They wonder about how BIG would be financed and if they can trust governments to provide sufficient commitment and continuity.

Concerning how governments have dealt with BIG in 2017, there were at first high hopes, followed by distressful disappointments. The year began on a high note in that the Legislative Assembly at the end of 2016 voted unanimously that the PEI Government would “pursue a partnership with the federal government for the establishment of a universal basic income pilot project in Prince Edward Island”. Motion 83 was a re-confirmation of the commitment of all four political parties to BIG in the 2015 provincial election campaign.

A positive moment during the year was when the political parties agreed to sponsor forums on BIG in four electoral districts. The four politicians who participated showed the capacity of MLAs to cooperate across party lines and to participate with a community-based organization on an issue that matters to the people.



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In our early communications with the provincial officials it appeared that attempts were made to engage the Federal Government. WGLI played a role in this also by making contact with the Island MPs, two of whom took a strong public position in favour of BIG for PEI. In our latest conversation with the Province in July about the BIG PEI experiment, it appeared that a process with the federal counterparts was underway. Then a few months later it became apparent that all attempts with the Federal Government had failed and that the Province was not continuing that conversation. BIG was obviously not a high PEI Government priority.

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Federal Minister of Families, Children and Social Development publicly stated that the federal government is not funding a basic income pilot in PEI (or anywhere in Canada). To PEI, the federal government has offered data and advice, but not funding or more meaningful partnership.

Finally, no report of this process was made to the 2017 Fall Legislative Assembly, a requirement which was attached to the original Motion #83. This is a serious breach.

Now the challenge for the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income is to keep alive the community’s hope that PEI could become a testing ground for a full-fledged experimental program of BIG. We are aware that a province-wide PEI experiment cannot go ahead without federal support and partnership. Our work plan will continue as previously decided, but we will respond to this new context. We will be ready for 2019.

Other Livable Income Issues

Early in 2017, the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income made an in-depth submission to the Federal Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development, and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, contributing to the Study of Poverty Reduction Strategies.

The Working Group participated in a policy consultation concerning poverty in PEI, which was

destined to provide background for PEI's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Some of the dialogue centered on routes to poverty in PEI identified as: generational; transitional (illness, ability/disability, violence, family breakup); and marginalization. Another PEI phenomenon discussed was of the high percentage of people "living on the edge", just one paycheque or one minor emergency away from diving into poverty.

A major challenge to the improvement of the life of people living below a livable income is that successive governments make "growth of the economy" their highest priority, still believing in the trickle-down effect increase in the GDP. Those who have the ear of governments with this mindset are the minority who benefit from this kind of "flourishing economy". There seems to be no understanding of the voice of the majority, those who live on low incomes, and who are the real contributors to the economy while not enjoying many of its benefits.

In 2017, the Working Group for a Livable Income placed emphasis on the lack of affordable, safe, decent housing in PEI and committed to making that one of our ongoing issues.

In response to an invitation of the PEI Employment Standards Board, WGLI made a submission about minimum wage. Once again we expressed that we cannot endorse the concept of "minimum wage". Minimum wage, while it provides a standard to prevent outright abuse of workers, merely provides a minimum and has an anchor effect on all wages. We emphasized the vulnerabilities fostered by minimum wage, especially for women, new immigrants, and migrant workers. We reiterated our conviction that the current Employment Standards Act is inadequate for today's reality and that the Employment Standards Board must recommend to the PEI government that the Act be opened up for serious consultation, public scrutiny, and substantial revision.

PEI Coalition for Proportional Representation

Cooper Institute, one of the twelve organizational members the Coalition for Proportional Representation has been actively involved over the past year working for proportional representation (PR). The Coalition has hundreds of individual members and many new supporters. There remains a sense of disbelief that the PEI government choose to ignore that the majority (52.42%) of voters in the 2016 plebiscite supported Mixed Member Proportion Representation (MMP).

In the early days following the PR win, the coalition mounted a campaign, Honour the Vote, to urge the Government to change its position. Many new voices came out in the various media expressing community

discontent with what some characterized as undemocratic position of the Premier and government. The Coalition presented the policy-makers with a model for running the next election (presumably 2019) as Mixed Member Proportional. This involved the tried and tested New Zealand experience of going forward with MMP for a couple of elections and then going to the electorate to vote on the level of approval or disapproval of the new system. The Premier rejected the Coalition's solution.

The Premier's response to Honour the Vote came out as a motion (#80) in the Legislative Assembly proposing three specific elements: that the Assembly "consider" a specific Referendum on Democratic Renewal Act which will "bind" the government to the results of the referendum; that MMP would be one of the two referendum options; and that the Legislative Assembly would be responsible for deciding the second referendum choice.

In mid year the Coalition for Proportional Representation adapted its slogan to "Honour the Voter", putting emphasis on the need for governments to have ongoing respect for the voice and choice of voters, that is, the PEI citizens.



A concern for the Coalition is Premier Wade MacLauchlan's request of the province's electoral boundaries commission to create a map showing how MMP would look in Prince Edward Island. The map will show people that PEI would have 18 electoral districts, instead of the current 27 as would happen with MMP. While it will be an important educational tool, the Coalition feels that this action could be interpreted as a visual, playing into fears already promoted by opponents to MMP, that the rural communities could lose representation. The map cannot show that each voter will not only have their district representatives, but will also have access to any of the 9 provincial representatives, elected to provide the desired proportion of seats based on the popular vote.

A final worry: though rumours cannot be confused with fact, it is discomfoting that rumours about a possible early election are flying about with no persons of authority denying them. In fact these latter seem to be fuelling the rumours. It is clear that an early election would sabotage preparations for the proposed referendum. An early provincial election could deny Islanders the time and the right to fully understand the referendum option. This could be the most undemocratic move yet.

PEI Food Security Network

Cooper Institute is a founding member of the PEI Food Security Network (FSN) and continued to offer our support in 2017. The mandate of the network is to engage community and influence public policy that supports environmentally sustainable production and distribution of food, availability of affordable, healthy food, and livable income for producers.

In April, the FSN made school nutrition the focus of its annual meeting. A dynamic panel of speakers talked about their individual initiatives to bring healthier, locally produced food into Island schools. The presentations by Bev Campbell (chef at Queen Elizabeth Elementary School, Sarah Bennetto O'Brien, (PEI Handpie Company) and Kyle Panton (chef and farmer) sparked an interesting and wide-reaching discussion of what's possible. At the same time there was agreement that a system-wide commitment is needed.

In August, members of the FSN took part in one of the federal government's public consultations on a national food policy. Among the issues that were raised were: the need to line up poverty reduction strategies with food policy in order to end household food insecurity, and to invest in projects to pilot Basic Income Guarantee; supports for new farmers; ensure that international trade agreements do not undermine public programs that enhance sustainable livelihoods and food sovereignty; recognition of the role of migrant workers in the food system and the need to protect their rights.



Let's Talk Food

In November, with the City of Charlottetown, and with the support of the United Way of PEI, the FSN hosted "Let's Talk Food". The event was designed to gather people together to share their experiences and knowledge, and develop a shared vision to inform policy and collective action to create a healthy food system. The 80 participants included primary producers, preparers of food, people from faith communities and community organizations, people involved in food innovation, educators, students, government representatives, food activists and volunteers.

The agenda was based on open space technology, which gave participants the opportunity to identify topics that were of particular interest to them, and convene discussion groups. Over the course of the day, over 30 topics were discussed, including school



nutrition, soil health, food waste, livable income for producers, marine ecosystem health, and challenging the myth of "cheap food". Out of those discussions emerged some broad themes and ideas for action.

Among those ideas: a food charter and food policy council for the City of Charlottetown; a virtual food hub to connect food security projects and programs; a school nutrition program; research and highlight successful programs that introduce students to food production, and provide students with healthy, locally produced food; highlight success stories of farmers who are farming organically and improving soil health; create more public awareness of the role of migrant workers in the food system; get more locally produced, healthy food into Island institutions.

Cinema Politica

Cinema Politica provides an avenue for documentary films to be shown, as a starting point to discuss a wide variety of social and environmental issues and ideas. In 2017 we partnered with several new organizations to show some beautifully made and thought-provoking films. Among our co-hosts were the PEI Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights, the UPEI Environmental Society, the Seed Exchange, Breaking the Silence and the Black Cultural Society of PEI.

Films were shown as part of International Development Week and Black History Month.

Information about upcoming films can be found on Cinema Politica Charlottetown's facebook page. More and more, audience members are using the Facebook events to post information and items of interest following the screening. This serves to expand the post-film discussion.



Migrant Workers

In 2017, Cooper Institute continued to address the barriers faced by migrant workers in PEI, and to support workers to reach their goals. We established new connections with workers and learned about the issues that are most important to them. We organized a second public forum and participated in several community events. We continued to support the PEI Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights. Finally, Cooper Institute continues to cultivate connections with other relevant organizations in Canada.

Outreach, Advocacy, & Education



In 2017, Cooper Institute connected with seven new groups of seasonal agricultural workers and two new groups of fish plant

workers from Mexico and China. We also continued our work with Filipino workers. We had several meetings with all of the groups and listened to their experiences.

From these consultations, we learned the issues most important to workers are: health care, housing, taxes &



deductions, worker rights, and paths to immigration. In collaboration with other community organizations, we held six educational workshops about advocacy, labour rights, the Canadian tax system as well as CPP and EI deductions. To work toward addressing issues such as limited access to health care, poor housing conditions, and paths to immigration, and we continue to problem-solve around policies that perpetuate these issues.

PEI Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights

The PEI Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights helped to organize our forum in March and continued to grow and be active throughout the year. A new initiative was to facilitate the participation of Migrant Workers on PEI as members of the Action Team, increase workers' access to a platform for self-advocacy.

Public Outreach

The PEI Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights launched its Facebook and Twitter pages on May 1st in honour of International Workers' Day with an open letter, published in local media. The team organized a screening of the documentary film "Migrant Dreams", and "In the Shadows of Borders" with guest speakers, and held booths at three DiverseCity Multicultural Festivals, and Farm Day in the City.

Rights, Faith and Policy, A Public Forum

Cooper Institute and the Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights, with support of organizations including KAIROS, UFCW and Migrante Canada, organized a full-day forum that was held in March. Attended by more than 70 people, the forum followed three streams of discussion topics; 1) Faith, 2) Policy, and 3) Community Solidarity. A panel of speakers included a worker from a local fish plant, a social justice lawyer, and representatives from KAIROS and Migrante Canada. The event received much media attention. A complete Forum Report is available on our website.

National Solidarity & Collaboration:

Throughout 2017, we took part in monthly conference calls with the national Coalition for Migrant Workers Rights, participated in a forum organized by the Canadian Council for Refugees and Coalition for Migrant Worker Rights. We organized a meeting for Filipino workers with a representative of the organization Migrante Canada. With several migrant workers based in PEI, we participated in the Interfaith Roundtable on Migrant Justice organized by KAIROS in Fredericton. Finally, in 2017, Cooper Institute began working with a law student from the University of New Brunswick to collaborate on research comparing legislation pertaining to migrant workers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, with a view to making recommendations for PEI legislation.

Josie Baker's Big Move, Welcoming Paola Soto Flores

While we couldn't have lost Josie to a better place, we were still pretty sad when Josie moved to take on the new Executive Director role at Tatamagouche Centre. Over the seven years that Josie was with us, she was an ardent defender of the rights of migrant workers. She oversaw countless projects, developed relationships with workers from across the Island, and made sure that their voices were heard. Stepping into the coordination role is Paola Soto Flores, previously involved in the Action Team for Migrant Worker Rights. As you can see from our report, Paola has embraced her new role with passion, empathy and creativity.

Seeds of Community

Seed sovereignty is a critical aspect of food sovereignty. Seed production is one of the most consolidated aspects of the food system, controlled by just one or two mammoth corporations.

In 2017 Cooper Institute continued to support the PEI Seed Library and the PEI Seed Alliance. Cooper Institute is grateful to the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security for its support of this work. Seedy Saturdays and Sundays in Summerside, Charlottetown and Montague, offered an opportunity for seed savers to gather and share seed. The events included the screening of “The Sower”, a documentary illustrating the beauty and importance of saving seed.

Charlottetown Housing Issues

Thanks to Cooper Institute member Debbie Theuerkauf, we had the great pleasure to host Kathleen Mawhinney, a UPEI nursing student as an intern in the fall of 2017. Kathleen was a perfect fit for Cooper Institute, bringing with her a fresh outlook and a firm grounding in social justice. She spent her time researching affordable housing issues in the City of Charlottetown, leaving us with an excellent report, which she presented to Mayor Clifford Lee and the Chair of the City’s Planning Committee, Greg Rivard.

This is important at least in part because in Charlottetown, almost half of households are rental, as opposed to the national average of 30%, and of those households, 41% spend over 30% of their income on shelter, the standard by which housing is considered to be affordable. Almost 20% of Charlottetown renters spend over half of their income on shelter.

As a nursing student, Kathleen made clear connections between housing and health, pointing to nurses’ ethical mandate to advocate for policies that address health concerns, including socioeconomic factors such as safe, affordable housing.

Numerous reports have highlighted the poor condition of affordable housing in Charlottetown, and the need to enforce housing codes, and yet to date this has not been done.

Kathleen made several clear recommendations in her presentation to Mayor Lee, including bylaws to maintain a balance between preservation of affordable housing and redevelopment and research into specific housing needs in the city. Although housing interventions at the municipal level are not a panacea for problems of poor health, low income and housing insecurity, Kathleen concluded, they do present an opportunity for the City of Charlottetown to support the health and wellbeing of its residents. Cooper Institute intends to follow up on Kathleen’s work in 2018.

Supported Decision-Making

Supported Decision-Making is an alternative to guardianship, a process that takes away an individual’s rights and denies them legal personhood. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities compels governments to develop supported decision-making legislation as a means of protecting the right of vulnerable people to make decisions for themselves, with the support they need.

The PEI Coalition for Supported Decision-Making, of which Cooper Institute is a member, is comprised of groups advocating for the rights of seniors, adults with intellectual disabilities, people with brain injuries and people with autism. Members of the coalition have engaged community and government in discussions about supported decision-making since the 1990s.

In May, Cooper Institute received a grant from the Community Foundation to organize a forum on Supported Decision-Making. Joanne Taylor from NIDUS, the organization overseeing supported decision-making legislation in BC, was our guest speaker. She said, Supported Decision-Making is about getting the help you need to exercise your rights. It’s very much about **relationships**. It’s important that the people who become supporters are able to listen, be objective, or at least recognize their bias, focus on the individual whose agreement it is, be available and show empathy and kindness.

In PEI, despite some promising communication and collaboration with government in recent years, efforts to implement supported decision-making legislation appear to have slowed down. The coalition persists, however, and looks forward to the day when every person will have the support they need to exercise their right to self-determination.

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 unions.

In 2017, we made several written submissions, regarding the NAFTA negotiations and China-Canada Trade. We continued to advocate for a new kind of trade agreement, one that puts the interests of people and communities ahead of the interests of the transnational corporations. In November, we met with the provincial trade negotiator, to make the case for public consultations on NAFTA and any future trade agreement. This is something that has been sorely lacking – typically the corporate sector is consulted to the exclusion of citizens. To date we have had no response from government.

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

Partners for Change

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 labour, and 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 equitable solutions.

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. These books are available to any interested person.

Connect with Cooper Institute

You can find us on FaceBook, or visit our website – www.cooperinstitute.ca. Better still, come and visit us at 81 Prince Street in Charlottetown!

Fundraising Committee Launched

Two prominent supporters of Cooper Institute's work in the Island community, Des Duffy and Rick Gallant, encouraged Cooper Institute to form a Fundraising Committee. The committee was launched in December, 2017 with the two original supporters plus a well-known fundraiser, Edna Reid, along with Irene Burge and Marie Burge of Cooper Institute.

It was decided that the committee would be a promotional voice to raise the profile of Cooper Institute and be a team of campaigners soliciting financial support for the work of Cooper Institute with Islanders. In particular the first goal of the Cooper Institute Fundraising Committee is to raise enough money annually to cover the cost of running Cooper Institute's programs with priority on livable income for the staff (who currently volunteer over 50% of their work time). Another goal is to encourage donors, preferring long-term sustainability donations, to contribute and/or make bequests to the Cooper Foundation.

At the beginning of this new endeavour we thank again our ongoing donors who over the years make many generous donations. We invite other interested people to donate. Almost one third of the funding for our work in the community comes from private sources. The Cooper Institute Fundraising Committee encourages long-time donors to continue with their generosity and is seeking to expand the Institute's financial capacities.

Donations can be made by using the "donate" button on our website. Contributions can also be made 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 (Registration #10114 4541 RR0001).

Members of the Cooper Institute Collective:

Paola Soto Flores

Maureen Larkin

Irene Burge

Leah MacLeod

Marie Burge

Reg Phelan

Joe Byrne

Selvi Roy

Eddie Cormier

Debbie Theuerkauf

Irene Doyle

Ann Wheatley



CLOSING THOUGHTS

Reflections on Minimum Wage

It seems that every time there's an announcement that the minimum wage is going up, business owners come out swinging, and, at least in the opening salvo, they have no trouble gaining media attention. The familiar refrain is that a higher minimum wage costs jobs, discourages investment and is bad for the economy. On closer examination, however, the evidence behind those dire warnings is at best, slim.

In reality minimum wage increases tend to result in a small percentage of teens losing their jobs, while adult workers are minimally affected. David Green, UBC Professor of Economics, conducted a thorough study of the BC government's review of the 28% raise in minimum wage in 2011. He found a small decline in employment for workers. And when Alberta started to raise its minimum wage in 2015, jobs in its low-wage service sector actually grew, as did the rest of its economy.

While we are often warned that higher minimum wages will ruin the economy, the opposite may be true. Higher wages can be good for the economy. That's because lower income earners tend to spend any extra money locally, including on food and accommodation. As their wages go up, there is an overall increase in consumer spending, more money circulating in the economy.

Some companies find that they actually gain by paying higher wages, in terms of employee retention and lowered costs of recruiting and training new employees. There is a greater possibility of happier workers and a more productive workforce. A PEI worker commenting on minimum wage puts it this way: "I am a unionized worker making \$19.00 an hour, working in the public sector. I enjoy my job and the people I work with. But if I was working for minimum wage (\$11.25 on PEI), I would not be happy. I would have a lot of resentment for my employer."

When Ontario raised the minimum wage to 14.00 this year, a number of businesses, most notably a few Tim Horton's franchises, announced that workers would no longer be paid for breaks, and that some of their benefits would be cancelled. The public was quick to show its outrage and rallied to support the low-wage earners who were targets of this mean-spirited but, unfortunately, legal action.

This debate has legitimized workers aspirations. It demonstrates the need for higher employment standards to protect the rights of non-unionized workers. And it highlights the importance of organized labour as a means of achieving better working conditions and protections for workers.

We must challenge the anti-worker bias that shows itself in our society. While it was positive to hear some business owners supporting the workers and speaking in favour of a 15.00 wage, there is still a lot of resistance to workers having more power and a larger share of the wealth generated by businesses. Ironically, at the same time that the raise in minimum wage took effect in Ontario, we heard that the top 100 CEOs in Canada made an average of \$10.4 million in 2017, 8% more than in 2016. By 10:47 a.m. on January 2 this year, those 100 CEOs had earned on average \$49,738. The average worker in Canada would have to work full time, all year, to earn that amount. The inequality evident in these numbers is shocking.

Raising the minimum wage is a way of distributing wealth. But fifteen is not a magic number – it's just a start, and with its implementation, Ontario has raised the profile of workers and the right to a decent income based on the hours you work.

For years, Cooper Institute, as a member of the PEI Working Group for a Livable Income, has challenged the concept of minimum wage and suggested that in order to eradicate poverty we must change our thinking. Instead of calculating just how little we will tolerate workers being paid, we should be aiming for a livable wage – one that offers dignity to all workers.