

Workers' Action Centre Annual Report 2014/2015



Passing of Ontario's new temporary worker laws good news for Scarborough man

Scarborough Mirror, November 05, 2014

"(As temp workers) we have been stuck in between two employers, afraid to ask for any of our rights or even to take an unpaid day off when we are sick" - Justin, WAC member

Labour minister vows to do more to help precariously employed

Toronto Star, March 31, 2015

The (Ontario Labour) Minister pointed out a review of the Employment Standards Act is underway with a "view particularly to the changing workplace, which is exactly the precarious workers the Workers' Action Centre is talking about in their report."

Liberals introduce law to protect vulnerable workers in Ontario

Toronto Star, July 16, 2014

"This is a great victory for Ontario workers." - Lilliane, WAC member

安省25團體 促最低時薪漲至14元

World Journal, June 19, 2014

西蒙, "提高最低工資標準將能增加勞工的積極性, 並帶動消費, 刺激經濟發展" Simon, WAC member

Ontario's minimum wage jumps to \$11 an hour Sunday

The Record Kitchener/Waterloo, June 04, 2014

"The cost of everything has gone up so much. My rent has increased, transportation has increased, food has increased. Even the cost of stamps at the post office," - Angel, WAC Member

Ontario to review labour laws for 'gaping holes' when it comes to precarious work

Toronto Star, Feb 17, 2015

"The province urgently needs stricter regulations governing erratic scheduling and stronger provisions on equal pay for temporary and part-time workers." - Deena Ladd, Coordinator



For more "WAC in the News", visit www.WorkersActionCentre.org

Organizing for Fair Employment

The Workers' Action Centre

is a worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low wage and precarious work – through education, support, leadership development, research, policy analysis, advocacy and community action. Our work is guided by these principles: maximum involvement of the people affected, developing leadership among workers, shared learning and action for change.

Over the year - through our campaigns, awareness building and public education work - we have been reaching out and connecting with community groups and activists in cities across Ontario. We have been sharing our experiences, learning and resources to help develop and strengthen local capacity to protect workers' rights and support anti-poverty initiatives. We will continue to work with our union and coalition partners on initiatives such as Good Jobs for All, the Ontario Common Front, Health Providers Against Poverty, Caregivers Action Centre, Raise the Rates, \$15 & Fairness Campaign, Chinese Interagency Network and the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change, to bring forward the issues facing workers in low wage and precarious work, and our collective fight for fairness and dignity.

WAC is proud to be an advocate for change, and thus is not a registered charity. That is why we need your support. A contribution to WAC will support our fight for fair wages and decent jobs for all workers in Ontario. Please consider making a one-time gift or becoming a monthly supporter. If you are a union member, please ask your union local to lend its support. Contact us to see how you can help.

**Together we can make
change HAPPEN!**

Protecting Workers' Rights



Workers' Rights Information Phonenumber: Provided over 1000 workers with information, support and/or referral with a workplace issue in English, Spanish, Tamil or Mandarin.



Info Sessions & Support Clinics: By attending one of our 49 sessions, either at our downtown Toronto office and Scarborough community location, 336 workers received one-on-one support and follow up with their workplace problem.



Community Workshops: Over 900 workers attended one of our 47 workshops to learn more about their employment rights, hosted by 28 community partner agencies in the GTA.



Frontline Trainings: 25 community agency staff in the Sudbury area had the opportunity to discuss the issues and challenges facing workers in low wage and precarious work, and to share strategies to support workers in their communities.



Workplace Rights Educational Materials: Thousands of factsheets and booklets (in multiple languages), providing accessible information on workers' rights and legislation, were distributed through workshops, community events and online. In 2014-15, a new factsheet was added – "Undocumented? No Status? No Work Permit? Know Your Rights!".



Online & Social Networking: We had over 20,500 Web visitors, 2,146 E-Alert bulletin subscribers, 1,798 twitter followers (re-tweeting our message to 32,300), 1,468 Facebook "likes", and 900 "Workers' Rights on the Frontline" e-bulletin subscribers in the past year. They were kept up-to-date with resources, information and analysis on issues affecting workers in low wage and precarious work. Join our online community!

Community outreach by WAC members at Dufferin/Bloor in Toronto, May 2014





LEFT: WAC members cast their vote at the WAC Annual General Meeting, September 2014

BOTTOM: Some of our amazing WAC Advanced Leaders

WAC Members Take the Lead

A dynamic committee of members took on the task of reviewing WAC's leadership development programs. By early 2015, our new education and training programs were up and running. These programs begin with our WAC Education Program, a four-part series aimed at giving members a foundational understanding of WAC and Canadian Labour History, Basic Employment Standards, How the Government Works and Anti-Oppression. Members who attend all four become eligible for our Advanced Leadership Training Programs. We had an overwhelming response to our first four-part series and will continue to strengthen it with our members' input.

28 graduates of our leadership training became eligible to apply for our Senior Leader Intern positions. The first 5 committed Senior Leaders blazed the way forward in 2015, enthusiastically taking on these new positions. Amelia and Gary focused on developing and building our community organizing, Lorraine took on the coordinating role of the member newsletter, and Helena and Weiguang have been focused on ensuring the full participation of our Spanish and Chinese speaking members. Kudos to our hard working team!

In August 2014, 8 WAC members headed to Ottawa to the People's Social Forum to "embrace ideas, find inspiration and plan for action" as one member put it. WAC presented a workshop on how to build the minimum wage campaign in communities across Ontario and Canada. Members shared our ideas with many of the 3000 attendees about community organizing and movement building.

Members took the initiative in so many ways to spread the word, connect people to WAC and ensure that our WAC community stays connected, supported and involved. WAC Leaders co-facilitated over 60 community workshops bringing workers rights information to multiple communities. Members attended conferences, visited local MPP's, supported rallies, and worked info tables and community fairs - getting the word out the issues facing workers in precarious employment. There is no doubt that WAC members are some of the most committed, passionate and courageous advocates of change out there. When we talk about leadership, WAC members take the lead!

MEMBERS IN ACTION

10
meetings with
government
representatives

14
media interviews by
members

40
members events &
organizing meetings

54
members attended
a WAC leadership
training program

60
workers' rights
workshops
co-facilitated by
WAC Leaders





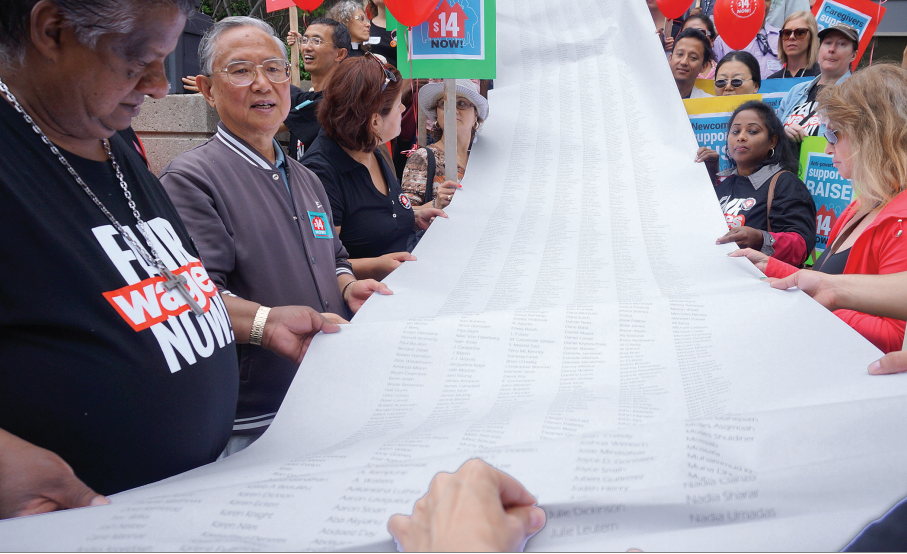
WAC members getting the word out on the **Fight for \$15 & Fairness** campaign at International Women's Day, March 2015

The Fight for Fairness & Decent Work Continues!

The 2013-14 *Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage* was successful in winning a modest increase to Ontario's minimum wage – on June 1, 2014 the hourly rate changed from \$10.25 to \$11.00 an hour. However, this change is not enough! A \$0.75 per hour increase still leaves full-time workers earning 16% below the poverty line. The *Campaign* also successfully pushed to change the law so that the value of the minimum wage will rise each year to keep up with higher prices. Ontario's minimum wage has been frozen for 12 out of the past 20 years, so indexation of the minimum

wage was a key demand of the *Campaign*. Winning this represents an historic achievement.

In 2014-15, WAC continued to take the lead role on behalf of the *Campaign* to review past successes, and reinvigorate our demands to continue and expand the fight for decent work for Ontario workers. Working closely with our membership and provincial allies from the *Campaign to Raise the Minimum Wage*, a broader message was developed and the **Fight for \$15 & Fairness** officially launched in April 2015.



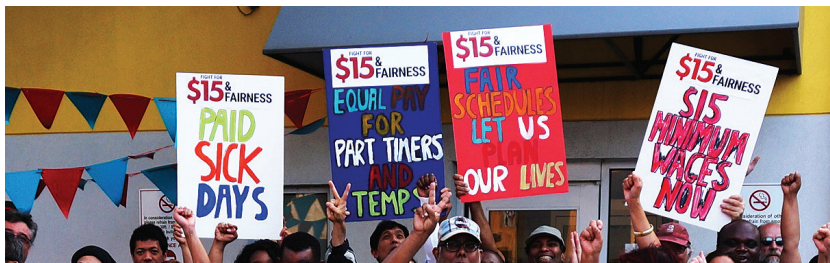
LEFT: WAC and allies present a 40 foot petition to the Ministry of Labour, with hundreds of signators from across Ontario demanding a fair minimum wage, June 2014

The Movement is Growing!

The **Fight for \$15 & Fairness**, through its Provincial Mobilizing Network, connects with activists in over 45 cities across Ontario. As coordinator of the network, WAC organizes provincial conference calls, facilitates the sharing of resources and strategies, and connects individuals interested in supporting the Campaign with active groups in their local community. Along with our union allies, we are also pleased to welcome the health care community as an active supporter in the fight for fairness.

The **Fight for \$15 & Fairness** has also been inspired by our allies and movements in the United States, across Canada, and around the world. In the U.S., workers in several cities have been successful in creating laws that implement a \$15 minimum wage, along with measures like paid sick days and fair scheduling that compel management to post schedules in advance and to offer additional work hours to existing employees before hiring new workers. Fight for \$15 campaigns have emerged in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, and the Federal and Alberta New Democratic Parties have both pledged to support a \$15 minimum wage.

Organizing together, change is possible.



THE CAMPAIGN PRINCIPLES

- ✓ **\$15 minimum wage for ALL workers**
- ✓ **Decent hours**
- ✓ **Paid sick days**
- ✓ **Respect at work**
- ✓ **Rules that protect everyone**

THE CAMPAIGN IN ACTION

678

Twitter followers re-tweeting our message to 29,200

2,545

Campaign Alert e-mail subscribers in communities across Ontario

3,675

union brothers & sisters inspired by a campaign presentation

4,156

Facebook "likes"

12,200

Web visitors



Bill 18: WAC and Allies Win Historic Improvements in Employment Standards

After years of organizing, we all breathed a sigh of relief on November 6, 2014 as Members of Provincial Parliament gave final approval to Bill 18. **The Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act** makes several important changes for people in Ontario, including better provisions to stop wage theft, increased protections for temp agency workers, and pegging the minimum wage to annual increases in the cost of living. Bill 18 is an important step forward in our fight for better working conditions in Ontario.

Some important wins in *The Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act*

Temp Workers Win Joint & Several Liability Protection

Nowhere else in Canada has legislation been adopted that makes temp agencies and their client companies jointly and severally liable for unpaid wages, overtime and public holiday pay. These changes will make it easier for temp agency workers to seek redress when they are short-changed on their wages under the law.

Removal of the \$10,000 Limit

As of February 20, 2015, there is no longer a limit on the amount of unpaid wages that the Ministry of Labour can order an employer to pay a worker. The period of time that a worker can claim wages will also increase starting February 20, 2015. This increase will be phased in until February 20, 2017 when workers will have a full two years to file a claim.

Longer Time Limit for Filing a Claim

Under the new rules, workers will now have up to two years to file a claim from the date that the wages become due. This increase will come into effect on February 20,

2015 and will be phased in until February 20, 2017 when workers will have a full two years to file a claim to recover their wages.

Longer Time Limits on Wage Recovery Period

Workers dealing with wage theft will be able to claim wages in the two years prior to the date that the claim was filed. This is a big increase from the previous six month limit that was under the old rules! There will be a transition period as the new rules are phased in until February 20, 2017.

Indexation of the Minimum Wage

Starting in 2015, the minimum wage will be increased by the rate of inflation each year. This is being done to ensure that the minimum wage will not be eroded as the cost of living goes up. Almost one in ten workers earns minimum wage. No later than April 1st of each year, the Minister of Labour will announce the new rate which will start October 1st of that year. The minimum wage in Ontario is set to go up to \$11.25 on October 1, 2015.

Ontario government to review labour laws

In February, 2015, the Ontario Ministry of Labour announced an 18 month-long review of the Employment Standards Act and the Labour Relations Act. We believe this review is a result of WAC and our increasing number of allies who have been pushing and demanding change for better protections and coverage in our labour standards. We know our members have been courageous in speaking out about the precarious realities at work, unfair conditions and the impact of violations such as wage theft on not only themselves but also families. As this review gets underway, WAC and its allies will ensure that the voices of workers trapped in low wage and precarious work are heard – and that we can indeed bring fairness back to our workplaces.

WAC members celebrate the passing of Bill 18 by the Ontario Legislature, November 6, 2014





ON THE POLICY FRONT

Still Working on the Edge: Building Decent Jobs from the Ground Up

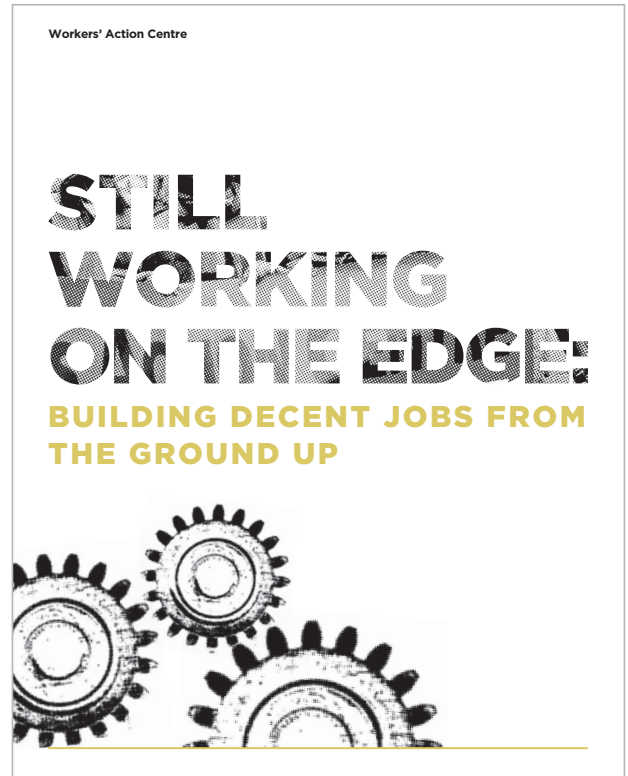
In anticipation of the government review of Ontario labour laws, WAC, in partnership with Parkdale Community Legal Services, released its latest policy report on March 31, 2015 in front of a packed auditorium at the Central YMCA. The report received front-page newspaper coverage in the Toronto Star!

The report was well received by a wide range of media, policy, community, union and government representatives who were very interested in the detailed recommendations addressing precarious employment. The new report builds on our previous research and is a follow-up to our 2007 “Working on the Edge” report. Workers’ Action Centre members and staff spent the past year identifying key problems workers were still facing in the labour market and developing priorities for change.

Some of the major areas of concern addressed include:

- Improved protections for workers in temp, contract and part-time employment
- Decent hours, decent work
- Closing exemptions and special rules which exclude some categories of workers
- Ensuring strong enforcement of the law
- Fairness for the migrant worker community
- Fair wages and protections, including sick leave and vacation provisions, for all workers.

It is our hope that this report will bring workers’ voices, experiences and recommendations for change to the labour law review, contributing knowledge that will be essential to updating Ontario’s labour legislation from the ground up. WAC and its members will be working closely with our union and community allies to bring these issues to policy makers and push to win much needed improvements to employment legislation in Ontario.



ON THE RESEARCH FRONT

WAC continues to be involved in two important research initiatives. First, WAC is participating in the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) project examining the impact of precarious work on workers and their families. Secondly, we continue to play a leadership role in the Closing the Employment Standards Enforcement Gap project, a multi-year project involving 7 Ontario universities and 16 partner organizations researching enforcement of our basic labour laws.

Acknowledgements

A Big Thank You to our 2014-15 Project Funders

City of Toronto
The Law Foundation of Ontario
UNIFOR Social Justice Fund

We would like to especially acknowledge the following organizations for their support, guidance and commitment to social justice:

The Atkinson Charitable Foundation
The George Cedric Metcalf Charitable Foundation
The Maytree Foundation
Ontario Employment Education and Research Centre
Parkdale Community Legal Services

A Special Thanks to:

Our Members, who make all our work possible

Our allies - union brothers & sisters, social justice activists, and community partners - for your commitment and spirit to improving the lives of all workers

Our legal volunteers who give their time, energy and support

Our Solidarity Program financial supporters (you know who you are!)

2014-15 Board of Directors

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Amelia White
Gary Thompson
Helena Rubiano de Ruiz
Lorraine Ferns
Weiguang Wu

TESS Member Internships

Beulah Paul
Gary Thompson
Itasha Lynch
Rajarubeni Ahilan

Student Placement

Ayesha Jabbar (York University)

Financials

	March 31, 2015	March 31, 2014
Revenue:		
Professional services	\$410,066	\$412,680
Project funding	\$256,117	\$252,672
Supporter contributions	\$21,949	\$47,620
Honorariums and misc	\$14,548	\$25,311
TOTAL REVENUE	\$702,680	\$738,283
Expense:		
Salaries and benefits	\$531,510	\$516,330
Facilities and office	\$91,611	\$91,328
Publications and resources	\$43,224	\$38,330
Meetings, workshops and events	\$22,777	\$17,456
Volunteers and participants	\$14,241	\$24,411
Office renovations	\$13,735	—
Communications and outreach	\$10,668	\$10,650
Staff travel	\$7,841	\$6,902
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$31,998	\$705,407
Surplus for the year	(\$31,998)	\$32,876

Excerpt from audited statements prepared by Cowperthwaite, Mehta Chartered Accountants. Full statements available upon request.

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FIGHT FOR
\$15 & FAIRNESS

JOIN US!

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