

Building a Movement for Decent Work



\$15 & Fairness rally at the Ministry of Labour, April 2016 (photo courtesy of Ontario Federation of Labour)

WORKERS' ACTION CENTRE
Annual Report 2016-17

WAC Members Lead The Fight For Decent Work



Our Scarborough outreach team at Finch & McCowan, August 2016

EDUCATING POLITICIANS on decent work, **SPEAKING OUT** to ensure legislative changes for workers struggling in low wage and precarious jobs; **RAISING AWARENESS** at community events, in neighbourhoods and on the streets; **MARCHING** in support of workers' rights and with our union and community allies – WAC members continued to be a vocal force in the fight for decent work.

Over the past year, within the context of the Ontario Government's review of our labour laws, we have continued to support our members to develop their skills as organizers through our leadership programs, one-on-one mentoring, special events and monthly organizing meetings. Building on the success of our 2015 Senior Leader internship program, eight more of our

members (5 who completed their training December 2016, and 3 new members starting in February 2017) were able to take advantage of this 10 month program. To support our growing Latinex membership, for the first time this year our 5-part Labour Education Series was facilitated in Spanish.

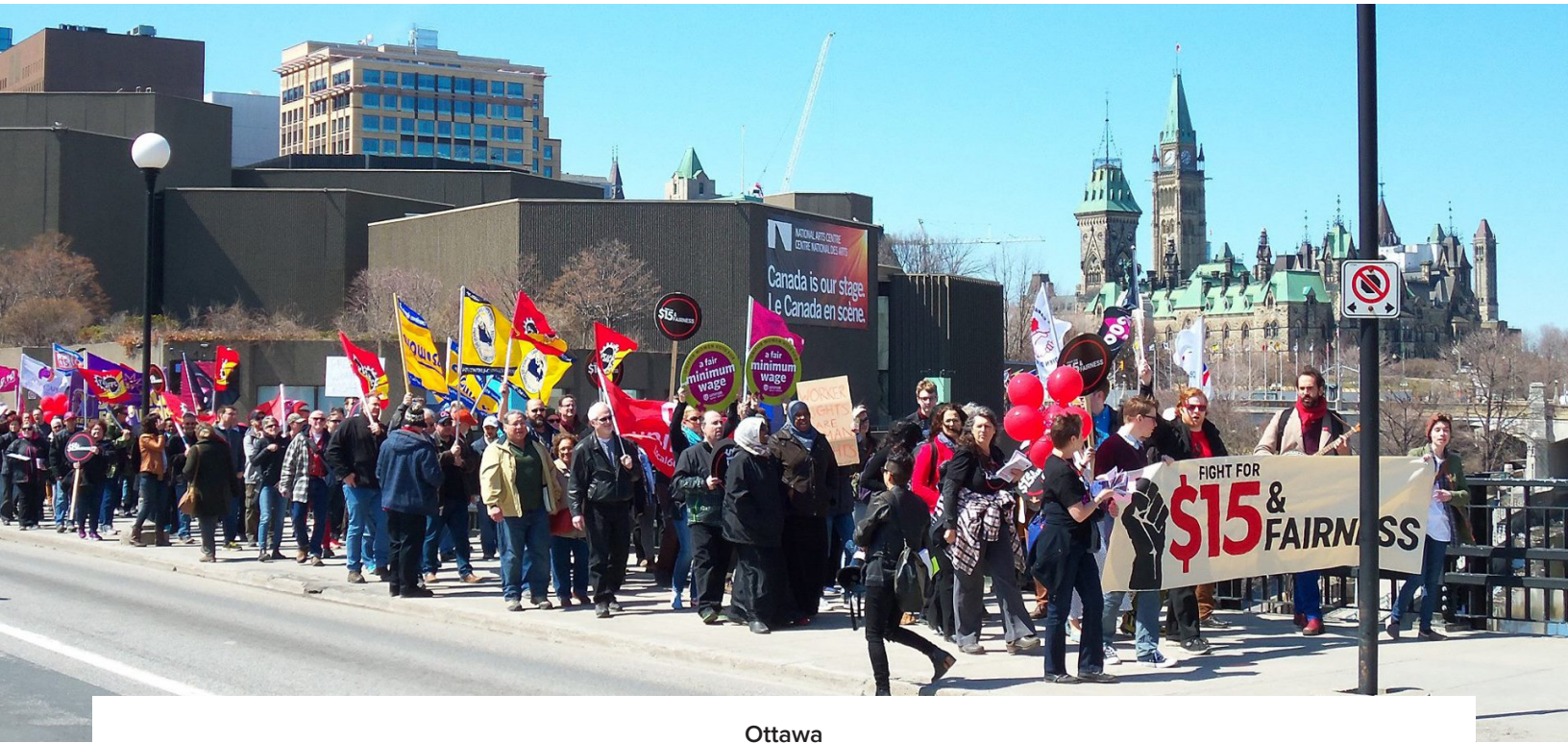
And our members' strength is showing! Senior Leaders took the lead in facilitating our monthly organizing meetings; members planned their own outreach activities; and the member newsletter committee created all the content for our monthly member newsletter, with articles in 4 languages.

WAC members will not give up the fight until they see real change, fair wages and decent jobs for Ontario workers!

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.

WAC is proud to be an advocate for change, and thus is not a registered charity. A contribution to WAC will support our fight for fair wages and decent jobs for all workers in Ontario. Contact us to see how you can help. Join us in our fight for decent work.

Feet on the Ground



Ottawa

Training Community Leaders Across Ontario

From February through October 2016, WAC facilitated a training program for local community leaders to build connections between workers and to nurture local groups that could respond to the needs of workers in low wage and precarious work. The 31 participants represented a wide range of communities - seven cities (Toronto, Ottawa, Sudbury, Cambridge, Kitchener-Waterloo, Peterborough, Brampton), three Toronto neighbourhoods (Scarborough, Rexdale, Regent Park), five sectors (airport, grocery, health, post-secondary students, faith) and six languages/communities (Latino, Bengali, Somali, Punjabi, Chinese, Tamil).

The program included two training sessions in the basic foundations, practical tools and skills needed for community organizing. Participants were mentored by a staff member

as they developed their local base, and organized public meetings and outreach events. Significant emphasis was put on alliance and movement building strategies to build capacity and create lasting alliances beyond the life of the project.

With the backdrop of Ontario's Changing Workplaces Review, these local organizers worked hard to get the word out about the potential impact for workers. Leaders organized over 120 local presentations & events, spoke in local media and distributed thousands of outreach materials.

In February, we were pleased to continue with Feet on the Ground "Phase 2". Phase 2 will bring forward a handful of graduates from Phase 1 who will work alongside and assist to mentor a new cohort of local community organizers.



Regent Park neighbourhood, Toronto

Fight for \$15 and Fairness



\$15 & Fairness leads the march for International Decent Work Day, October 2016

OUR BASIC DEMANDS

\$15 minimum wage

Decent Hours

Paid Sick Days

Right to Organize

Respect at Work

Rules that Protect Everyone

A Movement for Decent Work

Since its launch in April 2015, the Fight for \$15 & Fairness has grown to become a significant voice fighting for decent work across Ontario.

WAC continues to play a central role on behalf of all the campaign partners and members by managing the network infrastructure, communications and social media; producing shareable background flyers and educational materials; mentoring partners on organizing strategies; and facilitating trainings. WAC hosts bi-weekly meetings of Toronto-area activists, as well as facilitates a monthly Provincial call with workers and leaders from across Ontario.

This year the campaign reached out to Faith Leaders to add their voice to the call for \$15 & Fairness. The Faith Leaders were asked to support the ideals of the campaign - decent work and fairness for all members of their communities. A Faith Leader statement supporting the aims of the campaign was created, and our campaign partners reached out to Faith Leaders in communities across Ontario to sign on to the statement. We will be pleased to have the Faith community as part of our movement for decent work.



The campaign's Toronto City-Wide Organizing Team

Provincial Strategy Meeting

In March 2017 WAC organized its annual 2-day Provincial Strategy Meeting to coordinate provincial efforts to ensure that workers' concerns and issues were heard by the Changing Workplaces Review. We were joined by over 150 participants from a wide range of communities – trade unions, anti-poverty and community organizations, legal clinics, faculty associations, airport workers, student unions, health providers, faith communities and more. We were thrilled to be joined by Kendall Fells and Betty Ann Douglas - key organizers in the Fight for \$15 in the United States who shared with us lessons and strategies from their national campaign.

On the Friday evening there was a public forum and panel discussion with our U.S. allies hosted by journalist Desmond Cole. The forum was live-streamed, with the video receiving over 9,000 views, thus reaching a wide provincial audience who were able to hear directly from the leaders of the U.S. "Fight for \$15" movement about their challenges, strategies and successes.

Food Service Workers win \$15!

WAC members and our campaign partners supported UNITE HERE Local 75 Food Service Workers at York University and at the University of Toronto who, despite being contracted out, fought for and won huge improvements in their collective agreements. A \$15 minimum wage for all workers and equal benefits for part-time and full time workers were just some of the successes won. WAC was proud to be part of the alliance that came together to support the inspiring leadership of the food service workers.

In Solidarity

We would like to thank all of our union sisters and brothers for their generous financial support of the Fight for \$15 & Fairness campaign.

Special thanks to:

Canadian Association of
Labour Lawyers

OPSEU

Society of Energy
Professionals

USW Revolving Fund

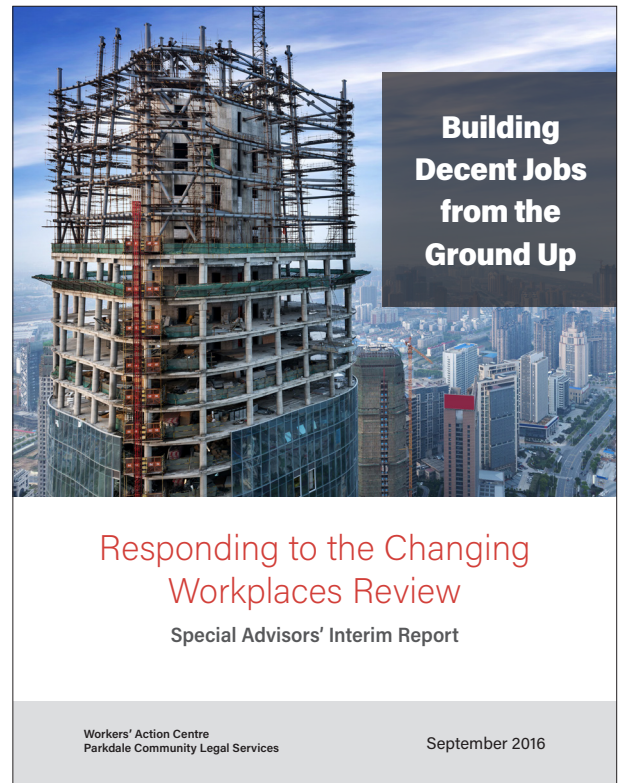
The Changing Workplaces Review

An opportunity to make significant legislative change for Ontario workers

In 2015, the Ontario government embarked on a much needed review of the legislation governing workplaces in Ontario – the Changing Workplaces Review of the Employment Standards Act (ESA) and the Labour Relations Act. Current ESA legislation is sorely out of date, and offers little protection for workers in precarious work, such as temp, part-time and contract. WAC, our members and allies were actively involved in hearings which took place over the summer of 2015; WAC also presented our detailed recommendations for change in our report “Still Working on the Edge”. We all eagerly awaited the recommendations of the Special Advisors charged with the task.

Finally, in August 2016 the Advisors released an Interim Report to the Ontario government. WAC, in close association with our ally Parkdale Community Legal Services (PCLS), reviewed the Report and prepared a 100 page detailed response with our comments and recommendations: “Building Decent Jobs from the Ground Up”. Additionally we provided a specific submission on Personal Emergency Leave, again with PCLS and the “Decent Work and Health Network”, as the labour review was scheduled to hear final submissions on that issue first. We also encouraged and supported many organizations to provide submissions and ensure that workers’ voices were heard on this important issue which could provide access to 10 unpaid personal emergency days for all workers.

Throughout 2016-17, WAC continued to raise awareness through media, public presentations, meetings with government officials and community organizing about the Review and the changes need to protect workers in low wage and precarious work. We anticipate the Final Recommendations of the Special Advisors on changes to legislation to be released in the Spring of 2017.



Research

WAC continued to act as a resource to organizations producing reports on workplace issues, precarious work, discrimination and poverty. Through providing feedback, participating in consultations or attending strategy meetings, WAC supported a number of policy groups, networks and advocacy coalitions in their strategic directions. In addition, WAC continued to be an active partner in the “Closing the Employment Standards Enforcement Gap” multi-year research project. “Closing the Gap” is investigating the gap between legislated standards and their enforcement, in order to develop strategies and best practices that will strengthen protections for workers. Visit closeesgap.ca for more information.

Protecting Workers' Rights

29 community workshops on employment rights at locations across the GTA

48 support clinics and info sessions on workplace rights

694 workers attended an employment standards workshop or support clinic

823 workers received support through our Workers' Rights Information Phoneline

8,000 factsheets & booklets distributed on rights at work

Organizing for Fair Employment

20 meetings with MPP's & government representatives

24 members' events and organizing meetings

44 frontline staff of community organizations mentored on community organizing

51 community events, rallies & neighbourhood outreach opportunities

87 members took advantage of a WAC leadership training opportunity

102 media moments - print, tv and radio – with staff and members speaking out

6,247 allies & community members get involved in the Fight for \$15 & Fairness

+30,000 flyers and backgrounders on decent work

Financials

Expenses - \$773,683



Community & Leadership Development **40%** | Policy, Research & Campaigns **28%** | Education & Support **25%** | Administration **7%**

Revenues - \$832,858



Professional Services **62%** | Union allies **16%** | Government **11%** | Foundations **6%** | Other **5%**



WAC members at Pride 2016 in Toronto

A Big Thank You to our 2016-17 Project Funders

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

A Special Thanks to:

Our Members, who make all our work possible

- » Our allies - union brothers & sisters, social justice and student activists, faith leaders, healthcare providers, 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 Monthly Solidarity Program Financial Supporters (you know who you are!).

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
- » Unifor Social Justice Fund

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2016

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Julie Wang
Linda Bernard
Shawna Dixon
Yahui Wang

2017

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Winnie Ma

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Student Placement: Chrissy Lynn Trudel

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