

**Outdated labour laws** have not kept up with the **reality of work** for many of us today – one of three jobs in Ontario is **temporary, contract, part-time or forced self-employment**. This **excludes** us from **basic protections** such as employment standards, health benefits, sick days, human rights, adequate health & safety protection, and Employment Insurance. Ontario's **minimum wage** is still below the **poverty** line, forcing many of us to work two and three jobs to try and pay the bills. Workers entering Canada through various **temporary migrant programs** are left vulnerable to abuse, appalling working conditions and the threat of deportation if they **dare to speak out**.

**Change is needed!**

**Join our movement of working people to improve wages and working conditions.**



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#### **A Big Thank You to our 2010-11 Project Funders**

CAW Social Justice Fund, Citizenship & Immigration Canada, City of Toronto (Community Service Partnership), City of Toronto (Access & Equity), The Law Foundation of Ontario

#### **Special Thanks**

...to our Members, community partners, union allies, volunteers and students who gave their time, energy, and spirit to improving the lives of all workers.  
...and to our individual supporters and union brothers and sisters who made a financial contribution to our Solidarity Program to help make our work possible.

*We would like to especially acknowledge and thank 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.

## **Together we are strong!**



# **WORKERS' ACTION CENTRE**

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[www.WorkersActionCentre.org](http://www.WorkersActionCentre.org)

## LAUNCH OF STOP WAGE THEFT CAMPAIGN!

Throughout 2010, the WAC Organizing Committees met to plan and develop a new campaign to raise awareness and fight for changes to improve workers' lives. Members chose the slogan STOP WAGE THEFT. When workers are not paid for the hours they work, or are paid less than minimum wage, or are wrongly treated as an independent contractor – their rights are violated and their wages are stolen. This is WAGE THEFT.

The Stop Wage Theft campaign is fighting for:

- Stronger enforcement to make all employers follow the law in all workplaces
- Updated labour laws to protect all workers
- Increased minimum wage to bring workers out of poverty
- Equal status and protection for all workers regardless of immigration status

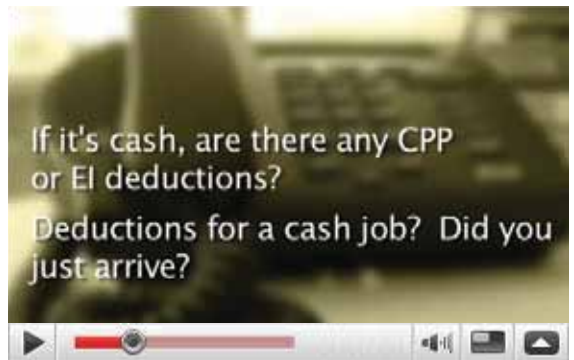
WAC members began reaching out to their communities to talk about Wage Theft and the need for action. Supporters and allies have been asked to join our email and postcard petitions urging the Ontario Government to take action against Wage Theft.

A video series was launched on YouTube and through our website to let workers tell their own stories of Wage Theft...

Video 1 - Our members expose bad bosses.

Video 2 - Mohammed and Lillia speak out against bounced cheques, unpaid wages, and working for less than minimum wage.

Watch for more actions, videos, alerts as our Stop Wage Theft campaign continues.... And join us to STOP WAGE THEFT!



## EXPOSING THE REALITIES FACING UNPROTECTED WORKERS

Throughout last winter, WAC Members, our union allies, and frontline staff at community agencies across the city and in the Windsor area reached out to workers to hear about their everyday experience with low-waged and precarious work. Over 500 workers participated in the survey. The results document the extent of employment standards' violations that people face and the resulting economic hardship that follows. WAC, in association with Parkdale Community Legal Services, will release a research report later in 2011 to summarize the findings of the survey and present detailed recommendations for change to policy makers to improve enforcement and the protection of workers' rights.

### ***"They went undercover for workers' rights"***

Toronto Star – March 31, 2011

As part of a public education campaign on workers' rights, new Canadians Kash Tahkur and Beixi Liu went undercover to expose wage theft. Their voices are featured in a YouTube video....

*Quotes throughout this report*

*are from the workers who shared their experience as part of our 2011 survey on workers' rights.*

*"We need permanent jobs, good job; get the employers to hire full-time instead of temps and contract workers."*

## WAC MEMBERS – LEADERS ON THE FRONTLINES

Our members struggle every day to make a living. With the recent recession and the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs in Ontario, many have been forced onto social assistance or into re-training, others are underemployed and many more are juggling two or three jobs. Jobs that are found are often precarious, with little protection from basic violations. In the midst of dealing with unpaid wages or unfairness, workers get involved in WAC. Many have become strong leaders in our organization, working hard to find solutions to the difficulties that working people are facing. Working together through our Organizing Committees, WAC members are speaking out publicly and in their communities about the issues facing many workers in Ontario and the need for change.



*“Eat less; don’t go to the doctor even if sick because there is no money to buy medicine”*

## WAC MEMBERS FIGHT BACK AGAINST BILL 68

The involvement of our members in all aspects of our work is key to our fight for change. This became very clear in our vocal opposition to Bill 68. In 2010 the Ontario Ministry of Labour began moving very quickly with a new Employment Standards Modernization Strategy. WAC members and front-line community workers participated in focus group meetings to review the proposed changes and provide advice on the difficulties people faced when filing a claim. The government proceeded with “Schedule 9, Bill 68: An Act to promote Ontario as open for business by amending or repealing certain Acts”.



- Bill 68 requires workers to approach their boss to enforce their ESA rights before filing a claim... *through our active opposition, Bill 68 allows for some workers to be exempted from this requirement.*
- Bill 68 requires workers to provide certain information about their employer, violations and state their case before the claim will be accepted... *we believe that the information requirement will create barriers to workers, particularly those with language and literacy barriers.*
- Bill 68 provides new powers to enable ESOs to facilitate workers and employers to enter into a settlement (this would usually be at amounts less than the worker has claimed)... *WAC believes this is unfair to workers who face unpaid wages.*

On the first day of committee hearings in August 2010 we organized a press conference at Queens Park where we released a short 3 minute video with WAC members talking about the need to ensure workers are supported to make a complaint. We also deputed that day as well. The high number of racialized and immigrant workers who would face barriers with the new process received a great deal of media attention. In a short period of time, our Bill 68 video received over 1500 hits on the web. The video can be seen on our website [www.workersactioncentre.org](http://www.workersactioncentre.org).

4元一個鐘 華人做苦工 對勞工法 認識淺 對被剝削 忍忍忍

**“\$4/hour for a female worker, lack of knowledge of labour laws, suffering from exploitation”**

Sing Tao Daily - July 23, 2010

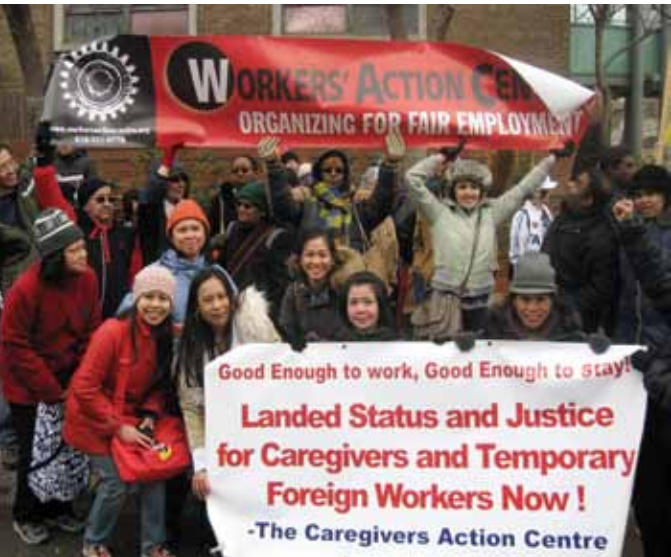
A survey, carried out by the Chinese Interagency Network (WAC is a member of CIN and participated in conducting the survey), reveals the exploitation of workers, particularly new immigrants. Lack of protection for workers is a serious issue in the Chinese community.

*"I always have to live in fear of getting fired if I complain or don't do what the employers tell me to do."*

## ON THE POLICY & RESEARCH FRONTLINE

We have been busy connecting our frontline organizing to research and policy projects that address precarious work and enforcement.

- Advisory Committee: "Understanding the Management of Prevention and Return to Work in Temporary Work Agencies" ~ Institute for Work and Health
- Advisory Group: "Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work" project ~ The Law Commission of Ontario
- Community Advisory Group: "Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario" ~ Community University Research Alliance, McMaster University
- Employment Standards Enforcement Research and Policy Group ~ York University, Ryerson University and OISE
- Roundtable on Labour Market Regulation ~ The Wellesley Institute
- Income Security Working Group ~ Greater Toronto Civic Action Alliance



### ***"Ontario bill hampers worker complaints: critics"***

CBC News – August 3, 2010

The province of Ontario's push to streamline the labour complaints process is being criticized as a move that will punish some workers who feel they have been wronged....

## OUR ALLIES

WAC works with many community allies, networks and coalitions in the fight for social justice. Here is a highlight on one of our newest allies...

The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change (formerly the Coalition for Change) is comprised of various advocacy and community groups, unions, workers and community members, aimed at improving working conditions and fighting for better protections for live-in caregivers, seasonal agricultural workers and other temporary migrant workers. The Alliance is bringing workers and organizations together to develop an action plan to tackle labour and immigration policy provincially and federally in Canada. The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change has recently released a set of three plain language factsheets to help temporary migrant workers know about their rights. Each factsheet covers sector specific issues on basic rights at work, facts about work permits, Employment Insurance and how to protect oneself at work. The Alliance recently completed a 10 minute documentary on the recruitment fees and conditions facing foreign workers. *WAC is proud to be a member of the Migrant Workers Alliance for Change!*

## **MIGRANT WORKERS** **Alliance for Change**



## FIGHTING TO ENFORCE WORKERS' RIGHTS

Alex (a pseudonym) dropped in at our centre one day and was owed over \$2,000 dollars in wages. He attended an information session and then a support clinic where he learned what he was owed and how to fight for it. Alex and two staff went to call at the site where he had worked as a construction worker. After going from one job site to another, Alex and our staff tracked his employer down and got a cheque that day – one that did NOT end up bouncing. Over the next couple of weeks, with persistent phone calls and visits, \$1980 was finally paid by the employer. Alex is now a member of WAC.

This is a typical situation at WAC. We go with workers to visit restaurants, construction sites, offices and sites where we can hold the employer responsible for the money they owe workers. A worker will have already spent weeks phoning and visiting their employer to ask for their wages only to be ignored and disrespected. It takes a lot of courage to go on a visit to a boss when you don't have a union to support you. WAC Organizers and members support workers to directly challenge their bad boss and get their wages!



### **“Disillusioned chef leaving Canada”**

Toronto Star – October 16, 2010

Mahavir Dhirwan tells how he was cheated out of wages after working 12-hour days, six days a week. He recounts how employers paid him cash to save money on payroll taxes and how this denied him the opportunity to build a Canadian work record. And he lays the blame on a federal program that lets employers bring foreign workers here on a temporary basis....

வேலை செய்யும் இடங்களில்  
வன்முறைகள் ∴  
துன்புறுத்தல்களை  
எதிர்நோக்குகின்றீர்களா?

Veednu – June 2010

“Set up your own business! Earn \$\$\$1000's from home!” “We will find you a high paying job! It's worth the fee!” “Act now! Hiring 30 security guards immediately, \$30 an hour!”  
Protect yourself against Job Scams...

## WORKERS SPEAK OUT!

What are workers calling us about on our Workers' Rights Information Phonenumber?

- 50% of the workers who called experienced violations of their rights under the Employment Standards Act (wages, vacation pay, overtime, termination)
- Almost 20% of workers needed support with Employment Insurance
- Access to EI continued to be a major issue, especially with workers who have been wrongly treated by their employers as independent contractors or self-employed
- Working with our ally, the Caregivers Action Centre, we have strengthened our connections with the live-in caregiver community and been able to offer critical support
- 8% of workers have experienced a violation of their human rights

## MULTILINGUAL WEB & RESOURCES

Our website was improved in 2010 by the addition of language specific web pages, where workers from 12 language communities can now easily access educational resources and information on our services.



“Increase the minimum wage.  
I cannot survive with only  
one job.”

## WAC INTERNS IN THE COMMUNITY!

An exciting development in 2010-11 was the hiring of two WAC members as Organizing Interns, Beixi Liu and Mumbi Musilla, for a project called “Workers in Precarious Employment: Improving Awareness, Access and Support for Human Rights”. Beixi and Mumbi worked closely with WAC staff to learn community organizing and adult education skills – and then went out into a diverse array of communities in the city delivering workshops, handing out materials and talking with workers about human rights. Mumbi and Beixi were committed, hardworking and passionate interns. We were lucky to have them! We hope to be able to offer more internship opportunities to our members in future years.



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Year ended March 31, 2011

	<b>2011</b>	<b>2010</b>
<i>Revenue:</i>		
Project funding	322,164	256,415
Professional services	213,908	210,656
Honorariums and other	17,890	11,644
Supporter contributions	8,439	9,971
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>562,401</b>	<b>488,686</b>
<i>Expense:</i>		
Salaries and benefits	399,807	325,647
Office and administration	69,420	71,028
Publications and resources	33,642	54,391
Meetings, workshops and events	13,742	11,726
Communications and outreach	8,840	11,254
Volunteers and participants	4,712	4,728
Staff travel	4,497	2,087
<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>534,660</b>	<b>480,861</b>
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<b>27,741</b>	<b>7,825</b>

*“He (employer) told me I don’t have rights since I am illegal and he can call the police.”*

## **SUPPORT OUR FIGHT FOR CHANGE**

A donation to WAC will provide much needed resources to support our advocacy and political work to fight for better wages and working conditions. Please consider making a one-time gift or become a monthly supporter by joining our Monthly Solidarity Program. Together we can make a change!

Special Note: WAC is proud to be an advocate for change and thus, under current legislation, cannot be a registered charity or issue tax receipts.

### **“Education and Leadership Fund for Workers in Precarious Employment”**

This special fund, set up by the Ontario Employment Education and Research Centre (OEERC), will support collaborative projects with the Workers’ Action Centre to educate workers in precarious employment on their rights under employment legislation, and to support their development as leaders in their communities. For more information and to contribute, visit [www.oeecr.org](http://www.oeecr.org). The OEERC is a registered charitable organization.

# WAC BY THE NUMBERS 2010-2011

## 35000

copies of our “Know Your Rights” **Factsheets** - on 5 topics and available in 12 languages - were distributed to workers and community groups across Ontario

## 2272

workers attended an employment standards educational **workshop**

## 1000

**postcards** signed saying “Stop Wage Theft” from communities across Ontario

## 576

**referral cards** - “Work Problems? Important numbers to know” - were distributed to community agencies across the province

## 410

subscribers to WAC **E-Alerts**

## 77

front-line staff from community agencies were **trained** on how to lead an educational workshop on basic Employment Standards for members of their community

## 57

**community agencies** from across the GTA hosted a WAC employment standards workshop for members of their community

## 17

number of **community events** and rallies attended by WAC members and staff

## 18201

visitors to the WAC website over the course of the year

## 2147

**union members** from across Ontario attended a presentation about WAC and our work

## 917

workers called our Workers’ Rights Information **Phoneline** and received support with their problem at work

## 524

**surveys** on employment were completed by workers in the GTA and Windsor area

## 303

**front-line** staff from community agencies attended a presentation on basic Employment Standards and the issues facing workers in low wage and precarious employment

## 71

“Know Your Rights” CD’s, with pdf’s of all our **educational resources**, were distributed to community groups across Ontario

## 51

community agencies sent frontline staff to one of our **Train-the-Trainer workshops** where staff received materials and training on how to deliver Employment Standards workshops to their community members

## 14

**unions and locals** from across the province financially supported the work of WAC

## 5500

copies of “Your Rights at Work: Action Guide for Fair Employment”, our 24 page **booklet** on employment standards, were distributed across Ontario

## 1900

**posters** promoting WAC Web Resources and the Minimum Wage Law were distributed to community groups across Ontario

## 720

responded to our Stop Wage Theft campaign urging Ontario Premier McGuinty to **take action**

## 446

workers attended one of our **human rights** educational workshops facilitate by WAC interns

## 169

educational **workshops** on rights in the workplace facilitated across the GTA

## 61

**MPP’s and government** officials were made more aware of the issues facing workers in low wage and precarious employment by meeting with WAC staff and members

## 24

newspaper **articles** and radio **interviews** featured WAC members and staff speaking out on workers’ rights issues

## 12

number of **languages** that WAC educational materials are available in

