

Activism as Work: An Institutional Ethnography *for* (not *of*) Ethical Trade Movements

by

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B.A. with Honours in Sociology, Acadia University, 2003

B.A. with Honours in English, Acadia University, 2005

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ABSTRACT

This project aims to identify and “map” the stages of municipal decision making including the development of an Ethical Purchasing Policy by a coalition of community organizations, the approval by the municipal Council, and the implementation of the policy through the municipal departments. The focus is the standardized processes that comprise public participation, public decision making, and public administration. By using institutional ethnography in an innovative manner, this project develops a new way of studying social movements in general, and the social organization of activism in particular that demonstrates that activism is work which is coordinated translocally by text-mediated ruling relations. The results of this project will further the understanding of community members, and municipal Councillors and staff of the social implications of their work and the Ethical Purchasing Policy they helped develop and implement. This research could be used by community organizations and other municipalities considering developing similar policies.

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For Joe

Chapter 1: A Sociology *for* (not *of*) Activists

We produce knowledge as we change the world. ~ Gary Kinsman

1. Statement of Objectives

Various forms of ethical trade have been researched in recent years. By searching for related material in library catalogues and on the internet, one can acquire hundreds of sources. At the same time, the movements related to these issues have grown and become more organized. The collaborative work done by members of the movements around the world has had a tangible impact on everyday/everynight consciousness and on the working and living conditions of labourers (Barratt Brown, 1993; Waridel, 2002). Despite this and the scholarly interest, there is a paucity of research that explores the social organization of the work done by the activists of these movements. I address that absence in this thesis.

The problematic of my institutional ethnography takes its standpoint in the experience of Fair Trade activists such as myself and Jack¹, a Fair Trade activist whose advocacy work with members of other organizations concerned in various ways with issues of ethical trade was successful in encouraging the City of Vancouver to adopt, on February 17, 2005, an Ethical Purchasing Policy (EPP) and Supplier Code of Conduct (SCC). It was the first Canadian municipality to do so. The EPP and SCC are innately linked. The EPP is the document in which Council instructs staff what principles to apply to their purchasing decisions for products within the scope of the EPP. The EPP currently applies to approximately \$1.4 million in apparel and approximately \$3.7 million in agricultural products. The SCC is the text that staff uses to tell potential suppliers what type of business conduct

¹ As per the regulations of the human ethics board, the names of this study's participants have been changed in an effort to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Jack and I share a standpoint as Fair Trade activists. Jack's experience in the Vancouver Ethical Purchasing Policy campaign extends and specifies our standpoint as a research direction, but the problematic of my research is not reducible to his experience alone, as I make evident at a number of points.

Vancouver will support in procuring these products. The development and implementation of the EPP and SCC is Phase I of a two phase Vancouver initiative which is to ultimately draft and adopt a comprehensive Sustainable and Ethical Purchasing Policy (SEPP).

I am specifically interested in exploring from a Fair Trade activist standpoint how the advocacy work relating to the policy development was done, in the process itself, and particularly in what was involved in the negotiations between the City and activists in devising the wording of the draft policy texts eventually passed by Council. The work of participating activists engaged and continues to involve them in interplay among various community and “non-governmental” organizations² (NGOs) at different stages of establishing the policy documents and their implementation. The British Columbia Ethical Purchasing Group (BCEPG) which worked on the project is a coalition representing labour, national and international “non-governmental” organizations, and local community organizations. The local activist work was and continues to be supported by non-local organizations active in the Fair Trade, No Sweat, and trade union movements. This led me to recognize how local struggles may be connected to and supported by a wider complex of non-profit organizations that is sometimes known as global civil society.

From the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist, I explore the institutional dimensions to which activists’ work orients – for example, the media, and governmental institutions such as those of the City of Vancouver, like the electoral processes, the processes of drafting, adopting and implementing policy, amongst others. I explicate how the social organization of the activists’ work adapted to the institutions as activists learned more about them as they were continually coming into being by the co-ordered and co-ordinated actions of people,

² Louise Amoore and Paul Langley (2004) point out that organizations commonly referred to as “non-governmental” are actually involved in governance on multiple levels, as they were and continue to be in Vancouver regarding the City’s Ethical Purchasing Policy.

including themselves. I also investigate the institutional dimensions of ethical trade itself that relate to Vancouver's EPP and SCC – the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its Conventions, particularly its “core” Conventions, and the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations (FLO) International and TransFair Canada and their Fair Trade certification standards. The ILO's Conventions and FLO International's and TransFair Canada's Fair Trade certification standards are analyzed as being part of the ruling relations of ethical trade. They are governing texts with the power to regulate other texts such as Vancouver's EPP and SCC, the local doings of ethical trade activists, others involved in ethical trade elsewhere, and Vancouver's Council, bureaucrats, and potential suppliers. These texts are in turn regulated by other texts – the United Nations' (UN's) *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, for instance. The UN is a key politico-administrative régime for translocal relations of ruling.

This is a new approach to studying activism in general, and the social organization of advocacy in particular. Conventional studies *of* social movements do not talk about activists as doing work. They instead abstract activists' actualities into social movement literature and subjugate them to theoretical meat grinders situated in ruling relations; any study *of* social movements – that is, one that begins with theoretical prescriptions and is not designed to explicate activists' actualities – could be named as an example.³ In *Sociology for Changing the World* (Frampton et al, 2006), some researchers try to break with this tradition. While this book outlines some valuable activist and research lessons, and a much needed critique of studies *of* social movements, it does not do enough by way of telling us *how* to actually conduct research *for* activists. I develop such a method in my thesis by using institutional ethnography in an innovative manner. Such an enterprise necessarily must begin with the

³ I further discuss this topic in Section 2.2: Review of the Literature and Section 2.2.1: The Study *of* Social Movements. See Nick Crossley's (2002) *Making Sense of Social Movements* as an example of how to use Bourdieuan theory to objectify activists' actualities.

acknowledgement that activism is work, and that activists' work is ruled like any other work.⁴

It is done locally, text-mediated, and translocally organized as I discuss in Chapter 3:

Activism as Work and Chapter 4: Hooking Local Doings into Translocal Relations of Ruling.

In exploring this element of the social organization of ethical trade advocacy I open doors to the translocal ruling relations of that activism, and locate it in those generalized and generalizing relations. Recognizing activism as work enables one to explicate the actualities of that work and how it is socially organized, both locally and extralocally. Such an analysis can expand the knowledge of activists and inform future strategies for action.

2. Background Information

2.1. Establishing the Problematic

It's not a question so much of being on track...it's really just more a matter of my ignorance, and my ignorance will be thoroughly demonstrated. ~ Dorothy Smith

My thesis project hooks into a larger study Dorothy Smith and I are conducting for Rural Women Making Change, a community-university research alliance based at the University of Guelph. As Dorothy so aptly put it to one of this study's participants, ethnographers start from ignorance. The best tool an ethnographer has to work with when beginning a new project is her/his ignorance. Ethnographies are fuelled by the researcher's desire to know more. Being ignorant and wanting to know more, ethnographers often ask questions about things that people may take for granted and would not think of mentioning.

I came to this study more ignorant than I realized. The longer the research has gone on and the more I discovered, the more I came to know how little I used to know and how much I still do not know. I did not come to this project knowing nothing about ethical trade

⁴ George W. Smith's (2006: 44-70) landmark essay "Political Activist as Ethnographer" implicitly speaks of activism as work. I seek to explicitly make that point in my thesis and explicate how activist work done locally hooks into translocal ruling relations.

activism though. I am a Fair Trade activist. I have been involved in Fair Trade since I was a teenager. In the beginning I was involved as a consumer. I love coffee. My introduction to Fair Trade and the politics of international trade occurred when my passion for coffee began. I was fifteen. I grew up in Nova Scotia's beautiful Annapolis Valley, and in 1995, when I was fifteen, *Just Us!* Coffee Roasters Co-operative began operating in New Minas, a small village close to Hantsport, the even smaller village where I grew up. In 1995, *Just Us!* became the first coffee roastery in Canada to begin roasting and selling Fair Trade Certified (FTC) coffee. At the time, products were certified as being Fair Trade in Canada by a third party, non-profit organization called Fair TradeMark Canada which was founded not long before *Just Us!* became the organization's first licensee. Fair TradeMark Canada's successor is TransFair Canada. TransFair Canada began operating in 1997 and currently has about two hundred licensees who sell various products, including coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, sugar, fresh-cut flowers, wine, quinoa, rice, spices, cotton garments, and sports balls. The Fair Trade movement, in Canada and elsewhere, has grown exponentially since 1995.

I remained involved in Fair Trade strictly as a consumer until the fall of 2002. During the 2002-2003 academic year, I conducted a case study of *Just Us!* as part of the thesis I wrote for my first degree, a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Sociology from nearby Acadia University. One day, Jeff Moore, the co-founder of the co-operative, was showing me how to cup coffee. "Cupping" basically means a coffee taste test. It is a similar idea to wine tasting but involves a vastly different process and has its own language. I am far from an expert of either. There was a computer with internet access in the room, and between slurps Jeff showed me the website of a student-led Fair Trade education and advocacy organization in the United States called United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). USFT had been founded not too long before that. I emailed them and started volunteering for them shortly thereafter.

The organization was still finding its identity. Through no fault of USFT, I became frustrated before too long. They were trying to grow and unite the student Fair Trade movement in the US, and I was in Canada.

From 1995 through 2002, I researched the Fair Trade movement in Canada and other places mostly by using the internet. It seemed to me that many organizations and businesses working in the movement in Canada and elsewhere were trying to achieve the same goals, more or less, but they did not collaborate very often – not nearly as often as they should. This is still a problem although not as much as it was a few years ago. At that time there was no national, umbrella organization in Canada whose goals included facilitating collaboration. Having such an organization seemed to me to be a simple, practical idea that might benefit the movement substantially. Young, naïve, and full of energy, Jodie Creaser and I co-founded an organization now called the Canadian Student Fair Trade Network (CSFTN) in August, 2004. The CSFTN's mission is to facilitate the growth of local, regional, national and international Fair Trade education and advocacy initiatives through supporting collective communication and resource sharing. We work to shift the purchasing-decisions of individuals, organizations, businesses, and governments across Canada to choices that encompass a respect for human rights and dignity, and environmental sustainability as understood over decades by the Fair Trade movement. I joined USFT's Advisory Board in the spring of 2006.

During the spring of 2006 in a class about the social organization of knowledge facilitated by Dorothy E. Smith, I began researching the social organization of the activist work relating to Vancouver's EPP and SCC. In that class, I was introduced to institutional ethnography (IE) as a research approach. Institutional ethnographers explore questions about how everyday/everynight life is socially organized, and how people experience and

help produce that organization. Starting from the investigator's ignorance, an institutional ethnography "grows from what a researcher makes problematic and the topic of further exploration" (Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 7). The institutional ethnographer adopts a standpoint that identifies people's knowledge and modes of knowing as essential elements of the social and therefore of social research.

My continued commitment to and work for the Fair Trade movement led me to launch this study. While I am a Fair Trade activist, I was not involved in the advocacy work done in Vancouver relating to the EPP and SCC. I had not been involved in activism directed toward a municipal government when this research project started. I wanted to know more about it – how the activists' work is socially organized and ongoing, the material conditions of that work, and how the activists achieved their goal of encouraging the City to draft, adopt and implement an EPP and SCC. I have taken the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist. The experience of Jack – a fellow Fair Trade activist, an advisor to the CSFTN since shortly after its inception, and now a good friend of mine, who was and still is involved in the Vancouver process – extends and specifies our standpoint as a research direction. From this standpoint I first explore how the activist coalition's – the BCEPG – work is socially organized and institutionally accountable with the explicit intent of producing knowledge for ethical trade activists, including myself and Jack, to use in our ongoing work. This part of the investigation involves explicating the time, effort, expertise, and material conditions in which the activists worked and continue to participate. Secondly, I locate that experience in the ruling relations by explicating how activists' local actualities hook into and are coordinated by text-mediated, translocal relations of ruling, including those of ethical trade. I explore how activists act as agents of the ruling relations of ethical trade, how the discourses and ideologies of those generalized and generalizing relations coordinate activists' doings,

externalize their experiences, and connect them to others similarly objectified by ruling relations, including those of ethical trade, who are involved in ethical trade locally and around the world.

2.2. Review of the Literature

IE is a method of inquiry that converts Dorothy E. Smith's (2005) theory of the social organization of knowledge into a research practice. Institutional ethnographers practice and learn to hone a technique of observing and analyzing which recognizes the intrinsic relation between us as researchers, our research participants/partners, the social and knowledge, and acknowledges that we cannot leave our bodies and histories to know "in general" (Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 7). IE's theoretical grounding complicates its relation with other forms of scholarship. Institutional ethnographers do not review literature as it is traditionally done by researchers. We read it "not necessarily for information, but to analyze how the work of intellectuals has helped to give shape to the topic of interest" (ibid). We "do not cede authority to the literature, as scholars conventionally do" (ibid: 8). Institutional ethnographers recognize that texts, including those that comprise "the literature", are socially organized and have the power to co-order and co-ordinate people's doings locally and connect them to translocal ruling relations.

Institutional ethnographers use the notion of "ruling relations" to refer to and analyze "an order of social relations that enter into and may be observed in the everyday world of our experience but cannot be fully explored there" (Smith, 2005: 13). The ruling relations are "objectified relations of ruling [that] coordinate multiple local everyday worlds trans- or extralocally" (ibid). They are "forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places"

(ibid). It is important to emphasize that ruling relations coordinate. They are not “modes of domination but...a new and distinctive mode of organizing society that comes into prominence during the latter part of the nineteenth century in Europe and North America” (ibid). They are social organizations and social relations mediated by texts of all forms – print, images, photographs, television, film, computer, and music, for example. Increasingly in contemporary societies, power generates, is generated by, and depends on textually-based “realities” (ibid: 13-20; D.E. Smith, 1999: 79). People who are in institutional positions with the power to create governing texts have the power to use those texts to coordinate the activities of people who are objectified by or accountable to those texts, which may include themselves. Conventional methods of conducting social research that begin with a theoretical framework objectify actualities, filtering them through the conceptual lens into textual “realities”. Such research adds to “the normal flow of information and inquiry that transfers knowledge about people to the institutions which produce knowledge for the ruling of society, namely, to universities and academic discourses” (D.E. Smith, 1999: 29). Social movement theory is no exception. Conceptions of social movements are part of their social organization. I aim to study the social organization of ethical trade advocacy, to do so I need to engage various bodies of literature, such as that of social movements, with a critical eye for its social organization and political commitments. By “political commitments” I do not mean what politics the researchers favour. I mean whether these studies are written *for or of* people, in this case members of social movements.

2.2.1. *The Study of Social Movements*

Conventional studies *of* social movements treat activists and their actualities as objects of analysis or theory. Such studies add to and reproduce academic conceptual paradigms *of*

social movements but do little or nothing to expand the knowledge of people working in movements or those interested in learning about activists' actual doings and how they are socially organized. Social movement theories, regardless of their differences, do not elucidate the social relations and social organization of struggle in which movements are engaged (Frampton et al, 2006: 11). These theories "often [reify] activists and movements and [establish] regulatory practices within academia by classifying activists and their work...rather than explicating the importance of what a movement produces in the social world and what its confrontations with ruling relations bring into view" (ibid)⁵. As I explain below, researchers can produce knowledge *for* activists to use in their efforts to change the world.

2.2.2. *The Study of the Social Organization of Activism: Doing Research for the Struggle*

My thesis explores the idea of activism as work. Dorothy Smith's (2005) generous concept of work defines work as anything that takes time and effort.⁶ "Work" is a concept known by institutional ethnographers but not to the majority who write about social movements. Advocacy work, just like all forms of work and human activity, is socially organized. The social organization of activist work for ethical trade cannot be assumed to be the same as the social organization of the gun lobby, for instance. The actualities of particular advocacy work are learned by doing. The social organization of these actualities cannot be explicated from an objective, outsider standpoint. They cannot be known in general. I aim to study the social organization of ethical trade advocacy done relating to Vancouver's EPP and SCC. From the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist, I map the work processes of the coalition of activists, the

⁵ For a more detailed history of social movement theory critiqued along these lines, see Frampton et al, 2006: 11-15.

⁶ I discuss the generous concept of work in more detail in Chapter 3: Activism as Work.

BCEPG. I draw attention to the effort, time, organization, and other resources involved in mobilizing, learning, educating, and building relationships with people not just a contact database. This kind of work involves coordinating and participating in campaigns, coordinating volunteers, hosting press conferences and teleconferences, moderating and participating in listservs, reading and writing emails, working through differences in terms, principles and practices, organizing and attending meetings, conferences and trade shows, sharing experiences, gathering information, lobbying governments and other institutions, and so on. My research is designed, as I outline below in Section 3: Research Design, to study the social organization of activist work relating to Vancouver's EPP and SCC. My goals in doing this project are to expand the knowledge of people doing this type of work, and to explore how this work can be done more efficiently, effectively, and collectively.

Marie Campbell (2006) and Gary Kinsman (2006) provide some useful advice for using institutional ethnography to study the social organization of activism and for doing research for activists. Campbell (2006: 87) notes that institutional ethnographers' social ontology and commitment to explicating the actualities of people's everyday/night lives lessens "the problems of power-sharing between academics and activists." Such commitments do not, however, necessarily eliminate the "longstanding problem [of using] scholarly language in research for activism" (ibid). I have made a conscious effort in writing up this thesis to write in a manner that I think is reasonably accessible to activists and academics alike. My goals of providing an analysis that works for activists and contributing to methods of doing research for activists could not be achieved otherwise. Campbell (ibid: 88, original emphasis) explains the importance of such an analysis.

We all know what happens when activists find themselves arrayed on the opposite side of issues from those with the power to take needed action. Official agents of the powerful seem to be acting from a different set of understandings, priorities and positions, which while

they may not be spoken, or if spoken be necessarily rational, will nevertheless supersede the activists' views. Activists faced with the task of communicating a controversial view must find ways of impressing on the opposition the importance of this view and the different course of action it requires. In a leadership position, the activist's task is to consider how to approach a problem, what pieces of the problem to concentrate on and what course of action will have maximum impact. *This is where a good analysis is needed.*

I want to emphasize Campbell's final point that doing research for activists necessarily entails making recommendations for taking specific courses of action to create social change. Analysis of a problem is of little use to activists, or anyone for that matter, if a course of action for creating the desired social change is not suggested. Whether the suggested course of action is taken up is another matter, of course. My thesis contains recommendations for how activists can more efficiently and effectively encourage municipal governments to draft, adopt, and implement ethical purchasing policies. In the interviews, the study's participants recommended some of these action plans. Given my access to all of the collected data and my experience as an activist, I formed other strategies for action myself. More importantly than giving credit where credit is due is the potential social changes that might arise from this knowledge.

One strategy that institutional ethnography recommends is getting beyond thinking of right and wrong to look at how the problem you wish to remedy is socially organized. Activists, not unlike other people, "might have the urge to classify different perspectives as simply right or wrong" (Campbell, 2006: 90). Doing so is not often effective in trying to create institutional change. As Campbell (*ibid*: 91) explains

It may not be so easy to identify interests within officialdom. Official views are usually presented as being neutral and official actions as being in the public interest, or for the common good. It may therefore be ineffective to challenge them on the level of claims about which view is 'right.' For activist researchers, that means learning a set of research strategies beyond critiquing differing perspectives and their appearance in public policies. Activists must also learn how to understand and

engage with the actions of public administration whereby policies are planned, implemented and evaluated. Ruling interests are enacted routinely through specific administrative practices. When attempting to intercede on behalf of marginalized people, activists must discover how their constituency's interests are being marginalized in routine organizational action.

Institutional ethnographers “suggest that we expect to learn something from seeing how [different perspectives] are embedded within and arise from particular social locations” (ibid: 90). Campbell (ibid), in exploring how government decision-makers hold ruling perspectives which are embedded in officialdom, argues that “[t]he activist ethnographer, using the methods of institutional ethnography... can discover how certain perspectives are embedded in officialdom and how they buttress official actions and discount other knowledge and other actions.” While I agree with her, I would add that activists' perspectives are embedded in the officialdom of their social movements. Ethical trade activists' perspectives are embedded in the officialdom of ethical trade standards, for example.

Campbell (ibid: 89) says that as an institutional ethnographer she “treat[s] those on the power-holding side of a contested position as holding a ruling perspective, which the other side challenges. ...If successful, activism disrupts the ruling perspective.” While activists may challenge one or more ruling perspectives as Campbell says, activists' work is organized by and accountable to other ruling perspectives. Studying the social organization of ethical trade activism exemplifies this point. A person's, including an activist's, ethics or morals do not just come from anywhere. We can learn something from how these value judgements are socially organized. They are coordinated by ruling relations. In most, if not all, contemporary societies, what it is to be ethical, lawful, sane, privileged, educated, or even officially alive or dead is text-mediated and institutionally accountable. Religious people are coordinated by and accountable to the text-mediated, ruling relations of their faith. Human rights are defined and standardized by the UN's *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Ethical

trade activists are organized by and accountable to the various standards of ethical trade – union rules, the ILO's Conventions and Recommendations, the FLO International's and its Labelling Initiatives' Fair Trade standards, and so on.

The ruling relations are inescapable in a text-based social organization. We were born by actions coordinated by them, our lives are organized by them, we will die under their watchful eyes, be objectified as a statistic by bureaucrats whose work is accountable to them. They will go on. Some of those who write about ruling relations (Kinsman, 2006, for example – although others make this same mistake), write as if ruling relations are bad or evil. I am suggesting that ruling relations are neither good nor evil, rather they are socially organized and they organize text-mediated social relations. Labelling something as good or evil depends on the standpoint from which you speak, and the ruling practices to which your standpoint is accountable. Judgement is not neutral. It is socially organized and can be explored as such using institutional ethnography. Institutional ethnographers, however, need to get beyond good and evil if they wish to conduct research that truly explores people's doings, differences in standpoints, and their social organization. Conducting this type of research for activists involves mapping the social relations of struggle.

Gary Kinsman (2006: 135, emphasis added) argues that “we need to challenge approaches that lead us away from addressing the forms of ruling social organization we are struggling *against*.” He attempts to “outline what mapping the social relations of struggle entails” because, as he says, “[m]apping out the social relations of struggle in which a movement situates itself is crucial to developing knowledge *for* social movements” (ibid: 135; 136, original emphasis). He explains that mapping “the institutional relations and obstacles that movements are facing identifies the contradictions that exist in ruling relations and illustrates the weak points that can be actively challenged” (ibid: 139). It involves figuring out

potential allies and alliances to further and expand the struggle (ibid). It “builds on and extends the research capacities of movement activists” (ibid: 155). It begins from a standpoint, “from where movement activists are with their practices, insights and questions, with what they are confronting, with what they are learning and with what their knowledge is” (ibid: 139-140). In the context of my thesis, this means beginning from the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist. I am doing this research with the explicit intent of furthering the ethical trade movement and expanding the knowledge of activists working within it.

Kinsman (ibid: 136) notes that “[i]t is a mistake...to see this mapping out of social relations as simply a technical matter, since it is also very much a political and social undertaking.” He explains that the mapping he is

arguing for is not a ‘neutral’ or disinterested mapping. It is instead an engaged and reflexive (mutually determined) mapping from the standpoints of the oppressed and social movements. This mapping out maintains an indexical (context-dependent) and reflexive relation to social movement organizing and *confrontations with ruling regimes*. Activists must be able to locate themselves within these mappings of social relations of struggle; these maps are used to further their analysis of the situations they face as they chart paths and move forward in their/our struggles (ibid, emphasis added).

Hence, for Kinsman (ibid, emphasis added), “mapping out the relations of struggle is crucially about mapping out the ruling relations that oppressed people and movements *confront*.” He explains that mapping the social relations of struggle differs from “critically investigating the set of ruling relationships that oppressed people *confront*, which institutional ethnography more typically focuses on (ibid: 139, emphasis added). Political activist mappings, for Kinsman (ibid, emphasis added), are “instead a mapping of the social struggles themselves, a relational sketch of the *conflicts between ruling relations and social movements*.” It “is not only an analysis of ruling relations.... Central to the mapping out of the relations of struggle there also needs to be an analysis of the social organization of

opposition, resistance and transformation – of the sources of agency that can bring about social transformation” (ibid: 136). He says “[w]e need to move beyond the inside/outside dichotomy, beyond arguing for either absolute ‘externality,’ outside ruling relations, or absolute ‘internality,’ inside ruling relations” (ibid: 155). He argues that “[b]y starting instead inside social relations and social organization we begin with our double and simultaneous engagement with social relations of ruling and resistance to them” (ibid). Kinsman (ibid: 139) recognizes that “[s]ocial movements and class and social struggles are not simply outside of capital or ruling relations, but are also internal to reshaping the ground upon which ruling strategies are deployed.” He continues: “activism...can shape the options of governance for ruling agencies, forcing the adoption of different strategies” and “creat[ing] new terrains of social struggle” (ibid). But all the while struggle occurs on the terrain of the ruling relations. Kinsman writes as if opposition, resistance and transformation are not themselves socially organized by ruling relations, but are always struggling against or in confrontation with ruling relations. While his research offers useful insights, he does not recognize that the struggle itself has ruling relations, so while activists confront certain ruling relations, their/our work complies to, is coordinated by, and is accountable to others. Mapping the social relations of struggle thus must also entail mapping the ruling relations of the struggle itself.

3. Research Design

My thesis is an institutional ethnography (D.E. Smith, 1987; 2005; 2006). IE is a method of inquiry that ethnographically explores “a ‘section’ of the social world from the standpoint of the organization of the work of those who in various ways are involved in its production” (G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 172). An IE takes as its problematic the constellation of relations in which the local social world is entrenched. The researcher is not limited to what can be

directly seen, or to what research participants have observed. She or he aims to expose and analyze “the extended bureaucratic, professional, legislative, and economic, as well as other social relations involved in the production of local events and activities” (ibid).

Researchers employ various methods of inquiry in IE, such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and textual analysis. The properties of social organization of the phenomena under study determine the choice of method(s). In my thesis research I conducted in-depth interviews, participant observation, both in “real-time” and reflexively from my experience, and textual analysis. My project’s focus is the social organization of advocacy work relating to Vancouver’s EPP and SCC. Three main field sites were identified and explored: the location of the advocates, Vancouver’s City Hall, and the offices of the City’s management and staff whose work it is to implement the EPP and SCC.

My thesis has three main chapters. The first provides historical background by telling the story of the Ethical Purchasing Policy campaign. In exploring the institutional relations to which the activists’ work is oriented, I further develop my problematic. This enables me to expand my interest in activism as work in the next chapter. In that chapter, I show the time, effort, and expertise required of activists to participate in and have influence on the writing process undertaken by the task force struck by the City of Vancouver to draft the EPP and SCC. The third chapter in the body of my thesis locates the work of the activists in the ruling relations of ethical trade. Staying firmly planted in the actualities of the Vancouver ethical purchasing initiative, I explore how the local doings hook into the translocal. I seek to direct attention to the more general significance of my local investigation. I open doors to the ruling relations of ethical trade activism via an analysis of how texts such as the ILO’s core Conventions and FLO International’s Fair Trade certification standards organize ethical trade activists’ work. In my concluding chapter I draw on lessons from the women’s

movement and from institutional ethnography, particularly Dorothy Smith's landmark book *The Everyday World as Problematic*, in developing a generous concept of politics, a new institutional ethnographic tool for explicating the extended political relations that hook into and coordinate local actualities. I close my thesis by reflecting on the contributions I have made to sociology *for* activism.

3.1. Starting from the Standpoint of a Fair Trade Activist

As I have already stated, the design of my thesis starts from the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist. The standpoint of a Fair Trade activist is different from those of No Sweat and of trade union activists. Fair Trade activists' work is coordinated by and accountable to the FLO International's Fair Trade certification standards. Similarly, No Sweat and trade union activists' work is coordinated by the ILO's Recommendations and Conventions, particularly its "core" Conventions. No Sweat activists are predominantly, but not exclusively, concerned with sweatshop conditions in manufacturing facilities in the global South. Trade union activists do work relating to labour rights as do No Sweat and Fair Trade activists. Union activists' primary focus, however, is the rights of their members. This is not to say they are not concerned with labour rights in general or non-unionized workers' rights. They have priorities though, as do Fair Trade and No Sweat activists.

Conceptually, my thesis is designed to explicate the issues that activists face in working collectively to have Vancouver draft, adopt and implement an EPP and SCC. In particular, it is the experience of the Fair Trade activist involved in this work that defines my starting point, not the trade union or No Sweat activists' experience, the policy documents, the international standards cited in these texts, the City Council or bureaucracy, or professional prerequisites or obligations governing the workings of the City's Council,

management, or staff. I will, of course, analyze the experiences of trade union and No Sweat activists, but my standpoint and starting point for this project is that of the Fair Trade activist. My conceptualization of the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist was informed by my experience as a Fair Trade activist and by the specific experience Jack had in Vancouver's EPP initiative. My thesis is not a study of the attitudes of City Councillors or employees, but a study of social organization – first, in terms of the work of activists, and second, in terms of the institutional dimensions to which activist work is oriented.

Jack is a Fair Trade activist who specializes in coffee. He works with an informal group of citizens mostly located in the lower mainland area of Vancouver who are predominantly concerned with issues of Fair Trade as they relate to coffee. The network comprises activists, businesspeople, students, academics, trade unions, “non-governmental” organizations, and community members. Using a listserv, members of the group discuss Fair Trade issues, and share information relating to Fair Trade, including news articles, event listings, and so on.

Jack is also a member of the BCEPG, the coalition that successfully encouraged Vancouver to draft, adopt, and implement an EPP and SCC. Jack was not involved in forming the BCEPG, but he has participated in the group since shortly after its inception. The BCEPG comprises activists and businesspeople from various ethical trade movements, including the trade union, No Sweat, Fair Trade, and, to a lesser extent, environmental movements. Many of the activists in the group are movement intelligentsia, people who have been involved in political organizing for years.

Jack also participated on the task force that was struck by Vancouver to draft the policy documents. The clauses in the EPP and SCC that relate to Fair Trade agricultural products were put in place near the end of the task force writing process. Jack was the only

member of the task force with substantial knowledge of Fair Trade. He had a large part in shaping the clauses and definitions in the policy texts that relate to Fair Trade. He was interviewed for this research project in April, 2006. The EPP and SCC were officially passed by Vancouver on February 17, 2005. The first annual review of the policy was made public when the review was submitted to City Council by the City's Corporate Management Team (CMT) shortly before this interview occurred.

Ethical trade movements have been building momentum in Canada in general, and in Vancouver in particular, over the past several years. Ethical purchasing was occurring in large Vancouver-based institutions such as universities, and large institutions elsewhere, before the BCEPG was established.⁷ As a result of activists, including Jack, Fair Trade coffee was being sold at the University of British Columbia (UBC), for instance. Shortly before the BCEPG was formed, a large project was started at Simon Fraser University (SFU) called No Sweat SFU. No Sweat SFU's mandate is to lobby the university's administration to encourage it to begin purchasing ethically produced apparel. No Sweat SFU was already working with activists from several "non-governmental" organizations and trade unions that, through no coincidence, ended up also participating in the BCEPG. These activists have been involved in ethical trade for years. They are experienced, have connections, reputations, access to resources, and influence within activist communities and society at large.

⁷ In the context of my thesis, I am using the concept of "ethical purchasing" to refer to the procurement of products that are FTC or No Sweat. "Ethical purchasing" and "ethical trade" are used in my thesis as umbrella terms that pull more specific terms like "Fair Trade" and "No Sweat" into one rubric. As I said at the beginning of this section, the work of Fair Trade activists and No Sweat activists is oriented to different trade standards – that is, different ruling relations. In other contexts, the term "ethical purchasing" could also be applied to the procurement of environmentally sustainable products. This was not the focus of Vancouver's EPP initiative, however, and so I am not using the term for that purpose. I do not mean to imply that institutional purchasers are being unethical in the sense of being unlawful in their everyday work of purchasing. I am talking about how products are produced and traded and whether these work processes are "ethical," not whether purchasing officials are conforming to laws relating to doing the work of procurement.

Members of the BCEPG recognized that large institutions' ethical purchasing policies expand the region's markets for ethically traded products. Institutions like the UBC, SFU, and the City of Vancouver buy considerable volumes of commodities such as coffee and apparel. Having such institutions procure ethically traded goods makes these items more available to citizens and smaller businesses in the region. It brings debates about the exploitative nature of capitalism to public forums. It also sends a message to citizens that business ethics are important and should be given due consideration. This manner of expanding markets for and awareness of ethical trade is what I call the domino effect. Activists often subscribe to the rationale that movement momentum and successes in lobbying efforts to have institutions adopt policies will have an effect of more institutions, businesses, and individuals adopting ethical purchasing policies. The rationale of the domino effect is that the more the products are available and visible, and the more the political issues relating to the goods' production and exchange are known by people and decision-makers, the greater the demand for them.

No Sweat apparel and Fair Trade coffee were the primary foci of the BCEPG, and Vancouver's task force charged with drafting the EPP and SCC. Jack is involved in the BCEPG and he participated in the task force because of his expertise and experience with Fair Trade, particularly Fair Trade coffee. Other people involved in the BCEPG and the task force had a general awareness of Fair Trade and the coffee industry, but Jack was considered the authority on Fair Trade in both of these groups. Most of the other BCEPG members, many of whom also participated on the task force, were focused on No Sweat apparel. The Oxfam Canada representative, for example, has done political organizing around Fair Trade and No Sweat issues for years. She has a thorough understanding of the political issues of the international coffee trade, but her knowledge of No Sweat issues is more substantial. In

recent years in Vancouver, Jack has been more involved in the Fair Trade movement than other members of the BCEPG, such as Oxfam Canada's representative. He provided knowledge of the current status of the Fair Trade movement to the group. The Oxfam Canada and other representatives from the No Sweat and trade union movements, such as the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), an executive from the Vancouver and District Labour Council (VDLC) who I have given the pseudonym Simon, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and UNITE HERE⁸, provided knowledge about sweatshops, the No Sweat movement, trade unions, and the ILO. Jack, as a Fair Trade activist, was in the minority of the BCEPG and the task force.

3.2. The Reflexive Basis of My Understanding of Ethical Trade Activism

My investigation was conducted reflexively from inside the social organization of my own world as a researcher and, by extension, the social worlds I researched. Doing interviews, participant observation, and explicating the relevant texts extended my everyday/everynight knowledge of my own world to understanding other people's lives, in this case to the work processes and organization of activists involved in Vancouver's EPP and SCC. George W. Smith and his research associates (2006: 173-174) point out three additional tactics pertinent to this reflexive orientation:

1. Informants are to be treated as knowledgeable about the social organization of the local settings in which they conduct their affairs. Informants are taken to be competent practitioners within the context of their everyday world. The point of interviews is to have them share these competencies, thereby extending them to the interviewer.
2. The social world under investigation is not taken to be truncated at the boundary of local settings but to be treated as extending in a contiguous fashion beyond the purview of the everyday. These extended courses of action are taken up as social relations as a series of

⁸ On July 8, 2004, UNITE (formerly the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees) and HERE (Hotels Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union) merged to form UNITE HERE.

moments that are dependent upon one another and articulated to one another not functionally, but reflexively, as temporal sequences in which the foregoing intends the subsequent and in which the subsequent 'realizes' or accomplishes the social character of the preceding.

3. Texts and documents are investigated as active constituents of social relations. We want, in this respect, to see how they operate as extra-local determinants coordinating and concerting the organization of local settings.

3.2.1. *Interviews*

The interview process was open-ended. Seven in-depth interviews were conducted. The first one was with Jack. Simon (an executive from the VDLC who was also on the Coalition of Progressive Electors' (COPE) executive, the leftwing political party in power at the time the EPP and SCC were drafted and adopted) and two COPE Councillors also participated in the study. In addition, two City staff members were interviewed; first separately, and then a follow-up interview was conducted in which the two of them participated together. I also had informal discussions with activists via email and phone, and at three meetings, two of which I discuss later – a meeting of the BCEPG in March, 2006, and a meeting of the Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Environment in October, 2006. The other meeting was an ethical purchasing forum I helped organize at the University of Victoria in February, 2007. A workshop about the Vancouver EPP initiative was given at this forum. I took extensive field notes as a participant observer in this session.

Digital recordings of the seven formal interviews were produced for transcription. Recording and transcribing the interviews enabled a thorough and systematic analysis of the data. The interviews attended to the organizational knowledge of active participants in applicable settings. Participants were recruited through a purposive sampling technique on this basis. Interviewing and recruitment included two central strategies. The first strategy involved exploring with research participants their working knowledge of the organizational

procedures that they are a part of and partake in. Interviewing participants positioned differently in the policy drafting, adopting and implementing processes enabled me to map the germane organizational sequences as courses of action involving people and textually mediated relations. The second strategy was informed by previous research (D.E. Smith, 1990a and 2005; Turner, 2002 and 2006; Eastwood, 2005) in the area of textually mediated social organization, which has guided me to view organizational texts as constituents of organizational procedures. Interviews also attempted to uncover what research participants know about how texts practically play a part in the routine co-ordering and co-ordinating of their work.

Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy (2006) recently wrote about the use of interviews in IE by talking to various practitioners instead of ceding authority to the literature. They explain that as opposed to conventional social researchers who use interviews to collect data on individual experience, institutional ethnographers use “interviewing as part of an approach designed for the investigation of organizational and institutional processes” (ibid: 15). In IE talking with people opens doors into the ruling relations and how the local hooks into translocal governing and bureaucratic processes, rather than windows into participants’ inner experience (ibid). Despite the difference in approach, many procedures of conducting “institutional ethnographic interviews are the same as the ‘good practices’ used by researchers conducting other kinds of interviews (methods of gaining access, building rapport, probing for specific accounts, listening carefully, and so on)” (ibid: 16). DeVault and McCoy (ibid: 15-44) spell out research conduct of interviewing, analyzing, and writing distinctive to IE. Their essay includes several institutional ethnographers’ experiences of using interviews in their research, and provided a guide for me in doing, analyzing, and

writing up interview data. As I outline below, my research design also includes participant observation and textual analysis as understood by institutional ethnographers.

3.2.2. *Participant Observation*

Timothy Diamond's (1992) *Making Grey Gold: Narratives of Nursing Home Care* is arguable the most significant IE which uses participant observation as its primary method. He recently explained how he conducted and wrote up his study (2006). Participant observation, as he puts it, "can help refine skills pertaining to telling stories, the presence of the author, and the author's embodiment. [It] can also enhance institutional ethnography's goals of incorporating place, time, motion, and the presence of larger social organization within local situations" (ibid: 45). Diamond's explanation of how to use participant observation in an IE helped me critically reflect on my experience as a Fair Trade activist and observe some of the work, relations, and texts involved in Vancouver's EPP initiative.

The beginning of Diamond's (ibid: 46-47) article is part of a transcribed conversation he had with Dorothy E. Smith. In the conversation, Smith says that in doing an ethnography, "[y]ou aren't able to previsualize (sic) what it is you are going to do, or what you are going to discover." She continues: "with institutional ethnography...you actually don't even know what questions you're going to ask" (ibid: 47). Diamond (ibid) confirmed her assertions by explaining that "sometimes [he] would notice some material object and wonder how to incorporate it into analysis, how it might contain the social relations [he] was trying to uncover." The participant observer in IE does not know what to do or look for next, what she or he will discover next, or even what questions to ask. She or he does know that they are looking for social relations of a particular "section" of social organization. The participant observer in IE cannot leave her or his body to observe objectively. Their

epistemology of the everyday world as problematic recognizes that they remain grounded in their bodies in “real-time” at a particular place where they are making observations subjectively (ibid; D.E. Smith, 1987; G.W. Smith, 2006: 50-51).

An IE develops “a step at a time” (Diamond, 1992: 48). The research is about observing, doing, explicating, and writing about the work of people actively constructing their own lives and the daily routine of it, if only in obedience of, or resistance to, the rules (ibid: 50). In the context of my study this involves the social organization of the advocacy work of challenging Vancouver’s business ethics in relation to their procurement of apparel and certain agricultural products. In my research I discovered contrasting standpoints. I observed how people’s experiences are textually mediated by focusing on the sequencing and activating of texts. But all the while, since IE “is a materialist method; [the researcher] searches out the social relations contained within materials and studies the relations as themselves material” (ibid: 52). Observation is thus “a sensual activity, of setting and people’s bodies” (ibid). In writing up observations, the institutional ethnographer preserves the presence of the subject by, for example, “quot[ing] people in their talk and build[ing] around their speech” (ibid: 53).

IE in general and participant observation in particular encourage and insist on a depiction of action (ibid: 62). The investigation takes place in and researches the social organization of particular settings. It also is conducted in a specific time and over time. Research explores the social as it happens, in action, as a continual concerting of activities. Participant observation provides the institutional ethnographer with opportunities to explore ruling relations from the “‘outside’ in the sense of ‘under’ ruling relations, from a particular subordinate position in an organization”, such as that of an activist (ibid: 60). Participant observation can enable the researcher “to locate the institutional *in* the local, at the point of

contact with the actual” (ibid: 61). The institutional ethnographer looks for ways “to collapse the dichotomy of micro and macro, to find the latter in the former, in people’s doings”.

To accomplish this feat “it can help to be anchored in specific doings” (ibid). The investigator can proceed from there to spot texts that hook people’s activities into the institutional, and to explicate how institutional procedures are co-ordered and co-ordinated textually mediated social relations. From there one can observe texts being read, activated, and put into play in a sequential and dogmatic hierarchy (ibid). In IE “[p]articipant observation can open up the analytic aperture away from individuals and toward the *coordination* of their doings observed while doing them. One can observe (some of) the texts as they occur in the course of a work sequence in which the researcher is involved” (ibid). Drawing texts into analysis is vital for looking up into ruling relations from one’s standpoint in the everyday/everynight material world. Texts have a seemingly magical power of allowing one to journey beyond the experiential foundation, but at the same time the institutional ethnographer needs to hold onto and be able to return to that material basis (ibid: 62). In IE “[p]articipant observation is grounded in actual events from which descriptions and stories are derived” (ibid: 58). The researcher “enter[s] into local settings to see beyond them, or rather to see the beyond within them” (ibid).

In doing research for my thesis, this entailed first critically reflecting on my own experiences as a Fair Trade activist and Jack’s experience in Vancouver’s EPP initiative as those were the bases for my problematic. Second, in entering the local setting of, for example, a meeting of the BCEPG, I looked for ways that their advocacy work is socially organized, how it orients to the relevant institutional relations of the City of Vancouver and ethical trade, and how it hooks into translocal relations of ruling. This involved explicating ethical trade as a complex of global industries. It also entailed paying attention to the

sequencing and activating of texts. In all of this investigatory work I have tried to preserve the presence of the activists by quoting them, describing the settings of their work, and talking about their actions and social relations.

3.3. The Study of Activism as Textually Mediated Social Organization

A distinctive characteristic of contemporary society is the capability of textual forms of organization to mediate and rule multiple local settings (D.E. Smith, 1990a, 1999, and 2005). A good example is the way that governmental policy, such as Vancouver's EPP and SCC, officially adopted in one site (i.e. City Hall), impacts people's lives and work in several other places across time. This reproducing, repeating power lies in its textually mediated character. This is why, along with interviews and participation observation, textual analysis is a key part of IE (G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 175).

A routine quality of textually mediated social organization is the exercise of the text's power to concretize and maintain definite language, images, or documentary forms of communication that are detached from the particularities of local sites and contexts (D.E. Smith, 2005: 165-182). Texts can "speak" without the aid of a speaker. Their meaning is disconnected from local interpretative situations. They can be concurrently activated and occur with the "identical" meaning in an assortment of socially and temporally separate locations (D.E. Smith, 1990b: 61-80). The routine, "social character of texts is essential to their uses in organizing administrative, managerial, and professional forms of organization" (G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 175).

The social and temporal organization of community organizations, "non-governmental" organizations, businesses, institutions, and agencies, amongst others involved in ethical trade movements is heavily reliant on different uses of texts to co-order, co-

ordinate, supply continuity, monitor, regulate, and otherwise organize social relations across and between various divisions, stages, and levels of organizational sequences of action. Texts mediate these relations across time and space. They are activated by readers and occur in an array of locales. In the context of my thesis this conceptual lens directs attention to textually mediated work processes, relations, and social organization of ethical trade advocates relating to Vancouver's EPP and SCC, and the institutions activists oriented to and continue to orient actions toward in performing this form of advocacy work. I aim to make visible the work of activists and its social organization. My objective is to produce an account and a guide of the textually mediated social organization of ethical trade advocacy in the municipal milieu, not a critique as this is generally viewed.

The IE approach which my investigation employs, thus, is one that stresses the importance of texts in social organization and social relations. The significance of texts in advocacy work is not recognized by most studies *of* social movements. Techniques for conducting this method of inquiry, however, have been developed by institutional ethnographers, such as Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990a and b, 1999, 2005, and 2006), Marie Campbell and Frances Gregor (2002), Janet Rankin and Marie Campbell (2006), Susan Turner (2002 and 2006), and Lauren Eastwood (2005), amongst others over the last three decades. I consider the textually mediated nature of the social organization of activists' work which I aim to explore as having significant relevance to the investigation of how relations between institutions – such as the City of Vancouver, its various relevant departments and processes, and the media, for example – and activists' everyday/everynight lives and work are shaped. A vital aspect of my thesis is an exploration of how an array of texts, from policies to organizational mandates, is active in co-ordinating and concerting advocacy work.

From interviews and participant observation, texts were identified, collected, and analyzed in relation to the work of activists.

4. Analysis

The concepts of “social relations” and “social organization,” as understood by institutional ethnographers over the last three decades and outlined below are the main analytics for this project. In IE, the term “social relations” functions as a research apparatus for situating and explicating the social nature of people’s doings in and across time and space. It is a means of analyzing how individuals and individual actions are co-ordered and co-ordinated vis-à-vis one another. Therefore, “social relations” is an analytic lens, not something to be looked for in conducting an investigation. It directs the researcher in an empirical exploration of how people and their actions are reflexively and reproducibly intertwined into specific modes of social organization (D.E. Smith, 2005: 27-45; G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 177-179).

“Social organization” is a notion that institutional ethnographers use to direct attention to replicable and repetitious methods of co-ordering and co-ordinating social relations. As delineated earlier, textually mediated social organization can simultaneously govern people and their actions in multiple local settings. In explicating such translocal social organization, institutional ethnographers analyze how texts are social organized, and how they are active co-ordinators and organizers of people’s lives and work. We study how “[t]he recursivity of a generalized course of action... makes it possible to go from particular events in local settings to a set of general, textually mediated social relations because they have the same social form” (G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 179). This method of textual analysis enables the researcher to explore and illustrate complexes of regimented social relations and social

organization continuously coming into fruition in and across numerous distinct locales (D.E. Smith, 2005: 27-45; G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 177-179).

“Social relations” and “social organization” are thus practically employed analytics of IE for describing and exploring people’s actualities, co-ordered and co-ordinated to each other, comprising life and work courses of action where stages in sequences of action are dependent on each other, and oriented reflexively, not functionally, to each other (D.E. Smith, 2005: 27-45; G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 177-179). While these strings of action are synchronized and determined in and across time and space, they are neither begun nor ended by one person (G.W. Smith et al., 2006: 178).

5. Results

The results of my research come in two forms. The first is a detailed depiction of the social organization of the advocacy work done in relation to Vancouver’s EPP and SCC. Secondly, this description provides the foundation for recommendations for future ethical trade advocacy work oriented to a municipal government. It also offers activists, and City Councillors and managers an occasion to make recommendations for change. In other words, they are not, of course, limited to the recommendations of my thesis if they can think of better ways to improve the ethics of municipal government purchasing.

Chapter 2: The Campaign

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it. ~ Karl Marx

1. Introduction

This chapter offers an account of the successful campaign to convince Vancouver to draft and adopt an EPP and SCC from a Fair Trade activist's standpoint – a standpoint Jack and I share.⁹ I illustrate how activists are continually involved in the policy process, even after policy is formally approved. I emphasize the social organization of activists' work, and explicate the different roles members of the advocacy coalition (the BCEPG) carried out and continue to perform in the process. The group drew on pre-existing resources, knowledge of City politics, sweatshops, the International Labour Organization (ILO), Fair Trade, particular industries and so on, the local and international momentum of relevant social movements, and connections based on previous working relationships, including with City Councillors and the Mayor, amongst other things. There were trade union resources available to the BCEPG (e.g. use of the Canadian Labour Congress' (CLC) office for meetings). The labour groups had worked with many City Councillors and the Mayor prior to and during their process of being elected. The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN) had connections elsewhere. VanCity Credit Union and Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC) employees wrote about child labour and other relevant issues in response to a *Vancouver Sun* article decrying Fair Trade. Those involved were all concerned with social relations elsewhere – with standing and resources, for instance.

⁹ The notion of standpoint that I am using here “cannot be equated with perspective or worldview. It does not universalize a particular experience. It is rather a method that, at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual [people] speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds” (D.E. Smith, 1987: 107). Writing the story of the campaign from a standpoint Jack and I share, that of a Fair Trade activist, gives us presence in its telling – Jack as active participant and me as narrator who has more information on the overall campaign than any of the participants and who interjects pieces of said information from time-to-time.

The activists knew one another previously; some had worked together for years. They were all experienced. Activists' previous experiences and their accumulated knowledge, including their relationships with various people inside and outside of the movement within which they work, all informs their current strategies and is part of the social organization of their work. Their previous work also earns them a reputation as being knowledgeable or easy to work with or hard-headed or whatever. No Canadian municipality had adopted an EPP before; none of the activists had experience with that specifically¹⁰. Their work with the City of Vancouver was successful though, and paved the way for others to achieve similar success in their municipalities. Vancouver's EPP and SCC are looked upon favourably across Canada and beyond. The initiative boosts the reputation of Vancouver, its Council and management, the unions, organizations, businesses, and everyone else involved in the process.

2. Council Composition and Connections

During the time that the BCEPG was working with Vancouver to draft an EPP and SCC there was significant momentum for left-leaning politics across British Columbia (BC). In the municipal elections of 2003, majority governments were won by left-leaning slates across most of BC's municipalities. Some think that the election results were a reaction to unpopular policies of the BC Liberal government. Vancouver's Council comprises the

¹⁰ The municipalities of Nanaimo and North Cowichan, British Columbia had passed No Sweat resolutions previous to the City of Vancouver adopting its Ethical Purchasing Policy. The eight point resolutions are value statements, essentially, with no implementation or enforcement aspects to them. Most of the No Sweat resolutions and policies in Canadian public institutions are a result of the Ethical Trading Action Group's (ETAG) work. "In 2000, the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG) launched the No Sweat campaign to promote the adoption of ethical purchasing policies by Canadian public institutions such as high schools, universities, and municipal governments, and mobilize public support for changes in federal textile labeling regulations to require apparel companies to publicly disclose the name and addresses of factory locations. The campaign tried to open the door for industry-wide changes in how our clothes are made – from abusive working conditions hidden behind closed doors to humane conditions open to public scrutiny. At least 13 universities, 11 school boards, three major municipalities and one province adopted 'No Sweat' policies by the time ETAG ended the campaign in 2006" (MSN, 2007).

Mayor and ten Councillors. In 2004 and 2005 when the EPP and SCC were drafted and adopted by the City, the Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) held eight Council seats and the Mayor position. The Non-Partisan Alliance (NPA), the rightwing opposition party, only held two seats. The political climate in Vancouver was agreeable to the objectives of activists like the BCEPG. Adding to the amicable political scene, several members of the BCEPG had previous work relationships with a number of Vancouver's Councillors, including Mayor Larry Campbell.

Having previous connections with Councillors and the Mayor was instrumental in the BCEPG's success. An effective way to lobby politicians is to know them and their politics, and to lobby them appropriately with the appropriate members of your group. Those connections provide easier access to decision-makers, and potentially decrease the time period needed to woo politicians into favour of the issue at hand. Trade union activists predominantly did this work for the BCEPG, and were central to the group's success. They had worked with many Councillors and the Mayor prior to and during their process of being elected.

3. The BCEPG's Social Organization and First Meeting with City Managers

Throughout 2003, BCEPG members spoke to Councillors and the Mayor about the City drafting and adopting an EPP. The first attempt at lobbying Council served the purpose of communicating to the City that a coalition had been formed to work on ethical trade and the group wished to work with the City to develop a municipal purchasing policy. Most of the Council seemed to like the idea. They directed some of the City managers to meet with representatives from the BCEPG.

Jack was the sole Fair Trade activist in attendance at this meeting. He did not do any of the talking. Activists play different roles in coalitions. Often times a hierarchy develops. The hierarchy may be based on expertise, experience, resources individuals have available to them, including the membership size and budget of the organization or union that the activist is representing. Sometimes the coalition will decide that specific activists will play lead roles at different stages of the campaign.

Jack was not one of the key players in the task force or the BCEPG. He was peripherally involved at some points in the process. His job was to know about Fair Trade and have connections throughout the movement, a role he performed and continues to play well. He is still not entirely aware of all the work that was done by other BCEPG members who have more influence on City politics and who have closer relationships with City Council and bureaucrats. He also still has a limited knowledge of how the City operates. When we spoke he did not know that the City has Standing Committees of Council comprising Council members that hear and make decisions on specific issues, such as the Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Environment which deals with urban planning and environmental issues, amongst other things. Standing Committees of Council make important decisions, including policy revisions and budget allocations. Activism is more efficient and effective if activists know the social organization of the institution they are trying to change. Mapping the institution can inform strategies for changing it.

Other members of the BCEPG had more history with and knowledge of the City. In the initial meeting set up by Council between some of the activists and some of the City managers, the representatives from the Vancouver and District Labour Council (VDLC), Oxfam Canada, the MSN, and the CLC led the way for the group. This made sense to the coalition because those activists had extensive knowledge of most of the matters at hand,

had resources available to them, had links to other experts elsewhere, and had previous relationships with Councillors, the Mayor, and the managers. Despite all that though, the activists did not feel that they were taken seriously by the managers. According to Jack, the managers paid more attention when Simon, an executive from the VDLC who was on the COPE executive, made a soft threat to the City that this was a very important issue for the VDLC's members and they were due to begin contract negotiations before too long.

Unionized workers are a large part of the workforce in Vancouver and in BC. They are also a significant voting constituency in the City. They can have considerable sway because of their voter power and because their daily work contributes to the ongoing operations of the City.

Jack said that nothing concrete was achieved in this meeting. Conversely, Simon contend that the coalition learned about some of the hurdles and reservations the City staff would pose to the Ethical Purchasing Policy initiative and that this information was useful for future organizing. This newly acquired knowledge was indeed an achievement in itself, one which led to future material effects. The managers presented a number of arguments to the activists in the meeting about why they thought having an EPP and SCC was impossible or at least difficult to do because of various laws and regulations relating to procurement and trade in general. The activists learned from this experience, and in their future interactions with staff they first asked staff to tell them what obstacles they perceived there to be. According to Simon, members of City staff were then boxed into that argument, and less able to propose numerous roadblocks along the way. Activists felt that this strategy helped move the EPP initiative along quicker.

Building relationships with staff and learning about their concerns regarding developing a new policy takes time and effort. Working with staff is critical to drafting and implementing a policy though. While activists do not want to create antagonistic

relationships with staff because ultimately they have to implement policy, or with Council since they have to approve of policy and direct staff to implement it, sometimes staff and Council need a little “encouragement” to start the work processes of drafting a policy.

4. Using the Media to Expand the Struggle

Making change is a process with stages. Changing corporate and governmental policies and rationale is not easy. Jack thinks that developing an EPP was a backburner priority for the City at that time. Making an issue like ethical trade a priority for individual consumers, corporations, or governments takes time, work, and resources. Part of the work of activists is the work of being patient. Activists want to achieve certain objectives, but they do not expect to be immediately successful, especially in the area of policy. This is not to say that activists do not become frustrated when things take longer than they would like.

Almost a year passed after the activists’ initial meeting with staff, and there was little movement by the City toward drafting a policy. Individual members of the BCEPG were still speaking with COPE during this time, especially Simon who was on their executive and was in charge of their relations with trade unions. No collective advocacy occurred during this time period though. Jack was not privy to these conversations; most of the BCEPG were not. According to Simon, COPE was concerned an EPP would be perceived by the public as a gift to the unions. The EPP does not benefit the local unions much, however. It is more significant to workers elsewhere. Council is an elected body though, and their main motivating factor is often public perception, not actuality. Council needed more “encouragement” to move on the issue. In the spring of 2004, an opportunity arose and the BCEPG decided to embarrass the City.

The City had purchased winter coats for the police department from Myanmar, formerly called Burma. Myanmar is notorious for human rights abuses. Some countries will not even trade with them. Campaigns and research relating to the situation were already happening and are still. MSN discovered that Evin Industries, a Montreal-based business, had factories in Myanmar, and was selling winter coats to municipalities across Canada for use by their firefighters and police officers. MSN informed Simon of the VDLC that Vancouver may have procured some of these coats.

A phone conversation later, Simon had confirmation from the police department that their winter coats were in fact made in Myanmar. The police officers were infuriated. Some of them refused to wear the coats. Simon acquired a tag reading "Made in Myanmar" from one of the coats. He scanned the tag and expanded the image to poster size. The VDLC, CLC, Oxfam Canada, and MSN then organized a press conference to highlight this particular City purchase in the Vancouver media. The latter three organizations are part of a national coalition called the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG). ETAG does advocacy, education, and research work on No Sweat issues. They lobby governments and businesses about these issues, specifically those that relate to the trade of apparel.

During the press conference, the enlarged image was displayed. The media smelled a scandal and ate it up. They grilled the City government and managers. The City was embarrassed. Wanting to avoid similar incidents and eager for better press, they stopped posturing and started moving on the issue of an EPP. It is hard to say whether they would have without this scandal. Most of Council was already in favour of such an initiative. The scandal made ethical purchasing a more immediate issue though.

Council directed some members of the City's Corporate Management Team (CMT), including the Manager of Materials Management, to coordinate a one day meeting with

various “stakeholders” about ethical purchasing. According to one of the City managers, he did not know where the ethical purchasing initiative was headed, but he knew since Council had made it a priority that it was not going away.

The stakeholders brought together for this meeting included some current suppliers of the City, and representatives from various “non-governmental” organizations and unions who were members of the BCEPG. In the meeting, the group did not speak specifically about writing the policy documents. They discussed potential implications for and reactions from businesses to an EPP and SCC, and what issues of ethical trade the City should be concerned with and know more about before beginning an EPP initiative. Jack said that during this meeting the managers were concerned with learning more about ethical trade issues and who could help the City draft a policy. The CMT reported back to Council after the meeting.

5. A Resolution Is Only the Beginning

It is important for advocacy groups to have a champion on Council who will speak in favour of the activists’ position during Council meetings and meetings of relevant Standing Committees of Council. COPE Councillors Tim Louis and Raymond Louie emerged as the BCEPG’s champions for the EPP. On June 22, 2004, Councillor Louis moved a resolution in a regular Council meeting entitled “Implementation of a Sustainable/Ethical Procurement Policy” that read as follows.

A. THAT Council, as Phase I of the development of a Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Policy, create a task force to prepare and present a draft policy to Council on the purchase of apparel and fair trade agricultural products. The task force shall be co-chaired by Councillors Louie and Louis and be composed of City staff, members of the following business, labour and NGO’s: LogoTex, MEC, Maquila Solidarity Network, No Sweat SFU and UBC, Oxfam Canada, Vancouver and District Labour Council, VanCity, Vancouver Fair

Trade Coffee Network; and any additional organizations that are deemed necessary. The policy is to be based on best practices of similar organizations and to be implemented by December, 2004. Staff will also report on resources required to implement the policy.

B. THAT Council direct staff, on a Phase II work plan to report back by December, 2004 including resource requirements for developing and implementing a comprehensive Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Policy that incorporates environmental and social objectives.

C. THAT Council direct staff in the interim to purchase fair trade certified coffee, at the expiration of current contracts, and where there are no contracts, as soon as is practicable (City of Vancouver, 2004).

The resolution carried easily. Councillors Peter Ladner and Sam Sullivan, the two NPA members on Council at the time, were the only Councillors to vote against the resolution.

From an activist's perspective, the resolution was pure genius. It set a reasonable but tight timeline for when a draft policy would be delivered to Council for consideration. It ensured the policy's scope would include the commodities that the BCEPG's campaign was focused around – ethically produced and traded apparel and Fair Trade Certified (FTC) agricultural products. It ensured the BCEPG's two champions on Council, Councillors Louis and Louie, would be the co-chairs of the task force charged with drafting the policy. It ensured City staff would be involved in the task force's writing process, which was important because staff would have to implement the policy if it was eventually approved by Council. It ensured numerous BCEPG members would participate on the task force as representatives of their respective organizations, unions or businesses. It ensured the policy would be based on international standards – “benchmarks” or “best practices” in business speak – and would not be written as a “made in Vancouver” policy. It ensured staff would prepare a report on the resources required to implement the policy, a practical and essential point. It also directed staff to compose a work plan for how the City would develop and implement a Sustainable and Ethical Purchasing Policy. As an initial token effort, the

resolution required the City to begin its commitment to Fair Trade as soon as possible. Because of this last point, even before the City officially adopted the EPP and SCC they were obligated to purchase FTC coffee. The BCEPG could not have asked for more from Council. This was a huge step in the campaign. It took more than a year of work to get to this point.

There was groundwork done prior to this year of work on the EPP campaign, of course. City officials were aware of Fair Trade issues and activists' work in Vancouver, for instance. Fair Trade activists successfully advocated for the Mayor to announce proclamations of World Fair Trade Day and National Fair Trade Weeks on a few separate occasions. One of these occasions was reported on by local television stations. Student Fair Trade and No Sweat activists had also been organizing at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Simon Fraser University (SFU), and Capilano College. Also, Vancouver is one of Canada's largest markets for socially and environmentally responsible products – Fair Trade, No Sweat, organic, recycled, “green,” and so on. It has one of Canada's most vibrant Fair Trade coffee markets, and was the City where Fair Trade bananas, mangos, and fresh cut flowers were first introduced in Canada.

The June 22, 2004 resolution directed staff to start purchasing FTC coffee as current contracts expired. The City was in need of a more positive public relations report after the Myanmar scandal. Starting to purchase FTC coffee fit the bill. It showed they were taking the EPP initiative seriously. Activists' viewed this as a good first step in an incremental process of the City drafting and adopting an EPP, moving toward purchasing more ethically produced and traded products, and incorporating a concern for the social relations of production into their purchasing decisions and ideology.

It is significantly more difficult to write clauses and definitions in an EPP for ethically traded apparel than it is for FTC agricultural products. This is largely because unlike Fair Trade, there is no internationally recognized certifying system for No Sweat goods. The City staff knew this, so did the BCEPG. The City could not immediately start purchasing No Sweat apparel like they did with FTC coffee. Apparel has a much more complicated supply chain behind it than a homogenous commodity like coffee does. It is more difficult to make the supply chain of apparel transparent.

“Transparency” is one of the chief concepts of ethical trade movements. It signifies a process by which the social relations of production and trade are made visible. The process is text-mediated and institutionally accountable. Since apparel is not a homogenous product like agricultural goods, it is more difficult to make the supply chain for apparel transparent. In other words, certifying and standardizing the ethics of production and trade of apparel is a more complicated process than it is for agricultural products.

The Fair Trade and No Sweat movements are based on similar principles of human rights.¹¹ The movements have developed historically in different ways, however, and have historically been concerned with different goods. No Sweat has been and continues to be concerned with products manufactured in factories – garments, footwear, cola, for example. Historically, Fair Trade has been concerned with agricultural products and handicrafts.

When the Fair Trade movement began in 1946 it was concerned with handicrafts.¹² The term

¹¹ I am including labour rights and women’s rights under the rubric of human rights here. This conceptualization glosses these complex issues, however. For instance, members of the Fair Trade movement have criticized the movement for not being entirely equal for women and men. The Fair Trade system can be said to be fairer for women workers than the conventional systems of production and trade. Women are still not equal participants with men in the Fair Trade system, however. This is not acceptable, of course. It is an important issue the movement needs to address, I would say more critically and proactively than it has to date.

¹² An organization called the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) accredits Fair Trade Organizations (FTOs), including those that produce and trade handicrafts. IFAT accreditation of FTOs is not the same as the certification of goods through the FLO International’s system. The difference between the two requires much

“alternative trade”, instead of Fair Trade, was more commonly used back then. The first commodity to be certified as Fair Trade was coffee. Fair Trade Certification began in 1988 in Holland. As time has passed and work of building the Fair Trade movement has happened, the certification system has grown and so has the variety of commodities certified through the system. For instance, some clothing, predominantly t-shirts, is now being sold as FTC. Some small Canadian businesses began importing FTC t-shirts into Canada from Britain in 2006. These businesses are still not large enough to supply an institution the size of the City of Vancouver. The market for FTC garments is still quite small. It is larger in Europe than it is in Canada. FTC shirts are not yet available in the US.

When the FLO International started certifying garments, some members of the No Sweat movement, such as the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN, 2006a), criticized the initiative. Members of the Fair Trade movement echo this concern and criticism of the FLO International. The FLO International started certifying clothing before it had a comprehensive system in place to audit the entire supply chain. It still does not have an ample system in place. It audits the production of the raw cotton, but does not inspect the entire journey of the raw cotton through its phases of development which lead to its arrival in factories, nor when it is in the factories where the garments are being made. Most of the supply chain is not being inspected; most of it is not transparent. No Sweat and Fair Trade activists share a concern that the shirts being sold as FTC are misleading consumers into thinking that the shirts are guaranteed to have been made and traded according to FTC standards. The FLO International cannot make such a guarantee at this time. Having the Fair Trade label on garments suggests otherwise to consumers, however. The label is authoritative. It is presented as a guarantee and may discourage consumers from asking

explication work, and is not immediately pertinent to my purposes here. More information on IFAT can be found on their website at www.ifat.org.

questions. Many consumers are told by activists and businesspeople to look for the label as your guarantee that a product is Fair Trade (Certified). Such a slogan is helpful when trying to convince people to buy Fair Trade and point them in the direction of Fair Trade goods. Uncritical and uninformed blanket use of that slogan is problematic, particularly in the case of “Fair Trade Certified” garments.

FTC garments were not available in Canada when Vancouver was drafting its EPP and SCC. “Ethical” apparel, for the City of Vancouver, was and still is “spoken” of as No Sweat apparel. There currently still is no internationally recognized certification system for No Sweat apparel. The FLO International’s certification system, however, is internationally recognized. Consequently, the decision to start procuring FTC goods, such as coffee which Vancouver committed to in the initial resolution passed by Council, seems less onerous (not that it is onerous to begin with) when Fair Trade is coupled with No Sweat.

Writing Fair Trade clauses in an EPP is also less onerous than writing No Sweat clauses because the FLO system is internationally recognized and does the work of certifying. The ILO is internationally recognized for setting labour standards, but it does not certify products. The City Council and staff did not have the expertise to work through all of the issues and write the EPP on their own. The task force was struck to help them, and comprised experts who acted as their consultants. I explore the writing process of the task force in detail in Chapter 3: Activism as Work.

6. Implementation and Activists’ Work of Following-up (or not)

Implementation of the policy texts is a practical matter addressed in and across time by particular employees of the City under particular material conditions, including budgetary constraints, other related policies, the number of staff members directed to oversee

implementation, and the amount of time they have to educate and work with City buyers situated in various departments in the City bureaucracy to implement the policy. Council makes decisions about allocating resources to City managers, and the managers organize City departments. Resource allocation coordinates the products of the bureaucracy. The production process in terms of levels of documented performance of City suppliers in relation to the policy texts ties the City to its suppliers, the workers throughout the supply chain, standard-setting and certifying agencies, activists and others working in ethical trade movements, the standards, regulations, and laws that coordinate their work, and so on. All of these work processes, these sequences of action, are within the ruling relations (discussed further in Chapter 4).

During the writing process, the task force did discuss how the policy would be implemented and what resources were required for implementation. They decided that the City would not be obligated to visit and inspect factories around the world. This would not be the most efficient use of City resources, and the City could not afford to do it, of course. The task force concluded that it was best if the City require its potential suppliers for products within the EPP's scope to prove that they met or exceeded the criteria laid out in the SCC. The task force, thus, elected for a complaint driven compliance process with some disclosure of factory locations. The factory locations of the City's suppliers and their sub-contractors for commodities within the scope of the EPP are posted on the City's website.

While the task force discussed implementation, they did not define exact procedures in the policy because that is not usually done. Jack "didn't know that ahead of time." I did not either. I do not know if any of the activists did. The activists accepted this stipulation when the City managers explained, as Jack put it, that "[i]t makes sense for you not to put implementation in policy because then your implementation isn't fluid anymore because it

becomes hammered in policy. You are bound by policy if it goes through.” Jack felt this situation “was weird because we [the activists] had to have a lot of trust when it came into the implementation-side because it’s not something that we could force them to do. They could decide how to do it in any way they wanted.” His last claim is not entirely true. All four sections of the EPP provide guidelines for the City managers and buyers to activate when considering their next procurement decision. The guidelines provide boundaries but also flexibility for City managers and buyers to do the work of purchasing. Also, the CMT report submitted to Council on February 7, 2005 and approved on February 17 has a fairly concrete work plan for implementing the policy.

The work of purchasing is done by various and numerous City staff members. The City managers said an additional staff person is required if the City is to actually implement the EPP and SCC into relevant purchasing decisions. In his report to Council on February 17, 2005, the City’s Director of Financial Services recommended

THAT Council approve the creation of one full time permanent position in corporate purchasing department to provide support to all City departments and boards to implement and for ongoing administrative support of the Ethical Purchasing Policy related to the purchase of apparel and fair trade certified agricultural products and to develop and implement a comprehensive Sustainable and Ethical Purchasing Policy that incorporates broader environmental and social objectives as Phase II (City of Vancouver, 2005a).

The managers’ rationale, as Jack put it, is that the policy is “an extra thing that would apply to...a lot of the purchases that the City would make, and so [the City] needed somebody to be kept informed about these issues.” This point highlights a problem of many policies.

Policies are passed by Council, but then staff is supposed to implement them while still juggling and trying to conform to other policies. Policies can contradict one another, and thus implementation of all the policies may be impossible. Also, someone needed to educate City buyers in multiple departments on the EPP and SCC. Who was going to find time in

their already busy schedule to do that? An additional staff member had to be hired or implementation would not be nearly as efficient and widespread as it should be. When Council officially approved the EPP and SCC, they also approved the recommendation to create a new staff position to oversee implementation.

Implementation is not something Council or activists can do. It is not either of their roles or within either of their skill sets to do it. As Jack noted, “at the end of the day, you’ve got to have a certain amount of faith in the people who are going to do it. ... You have to develop that faith.” The work of implementation is monitored by Council and activists alike, however – having faith is nice and all, but having proof the job is done is better. Managers evaluate and review the work of the staff members they are responsible for coordinating. The Manager of Materials Management annually submits to Council a review of the implementation work relating to the EPP and SCC.

Jack thinks the implementation process “wasn’t very transparent” to the activists. The BCEPG had hoped to receive more information about how implementation was going. Given the amount of time and effort the activists put into encouraging and working with the City to get this policy drafted, it only makes sense that they would like to know how the implementation process is coming along. It is moreover understandable that they did not directly receive such information from the managers and staff who were doing the work of implementation. The managers and staff are not accountable to the activists who initiated the policy change; they are responsible to Council. And they already have much to do in the run of a day, having to juggle an additional policy in deciding how to go about their job takes time and energy even if they view it as worthwhile. Finding time to inform a group of activists about how their job is going is probably the last thing on their minds. Also, it could be considered a breach of trust to inform outsiders about an aspect of City operations. Thus,

activists need to do the work of keeping in touch with managers, staff, and Council. Activists should try to make their communications as small a burden or annoyance as possible for Council, managers, and staff. Showing a little consideration for the efforts of others, when the effort is being made, will likely yield more positive results, and create better working relationships with the City government and bureaucracy.

Follow-up work is largely text-mediated work (websites, meeting agendas and minutes, film, and so on). By activating the government's texts, activists can learn about its social organization, about how implementation is going, and if potential changes to the policy are being considered. Activists might monitor the City's website, for instance. The agendas of upcoming meetings of Council and of Standing Committees of Council are posted online. The proceedings of these meetings is filmed and posted online afterward. The minutes of meetings are also posted online. These meetings are open to the public. If an issue pertaining to the EPP and SCC is going to be officially discussed by Council, these online resources will indicate that. It is unlikely anyone from the City is going to email activists to let them know these discussions will occur. Activists need to keep on top of that.

Jack does not know much about the specifics of how the EPP and SCC are being implemented, whose job it is to implement the texts into the City's purchasing decisions, or how City managers and buyers make purchasing decisions. Through his participation in the task force, he knows the City hired someone to help oversee the implementation of the policy documents. He does not know who the City hired though. He does not even know the person's gender, or that she is a procurement specialist. It was an internal hire. The information is publicly available on the City's website. Vicki Wakefield was awarded the position. She has almost twenty years of experience in "the field", and had already worked for the City for five years before being hired for the newly created position. Jack knows the

hired person answers to the Manager of Materials Management, and part of the procurement specialist's job is to coordinate City managers and buyers incorporation of the EPP and SCC into their purchasing decisions and the City's Request for Proposals (RFPs). He knows the RFPs for products within the scope of the EPP "have to somehow be consistent with the EPP" and the SCC, I might add. He has never seen a RFP for a City contract though, not even for a coffee contract. He said he could probably get one since he knows numerous coffee companies. He did not do any follow-up work in this regard. RFPs are posted online and available to anyone with internet access. Jack is unaware of that, obviously.

Jack persists that once the EPP and SCC were written, adopted, and implementation was occurring, the task force was supposed to remain intact and available to meet, consult, review, and talk about the policy as it was implemented. There is no language in the June 22, 2004 resolution that created the task force that obligated the City to maintain the task force beyond December, 2004 when the task force was supposed to – and did – deliver drafts of the policy texts to Council for consideration. This means that there was no official basis for funding the task force or allocating staff time to it beyond December, 2004. In its official communication, the City clearly indicated that the plan was to have the task force draft the EPP and SCC. After those draft documents were presented to Council, the task force's job and its tenure were complete.

The "Review" section of the EPP says that

[t]he Manager of Materials Management will be responsible for reviewing the EPP and SCC annually and reporting findings to Council annually. Through consultations with key stakeholders (suppliers, subject experts, city staff, etc.) the Manager of Materials Management will identify and recommend revisions to the EPP and SCC. Such review will include a review of new items for potential inclusion within the scope of the EPP (e.g. new fair trade certified agricultural products) (City of Vancouver, 2005b).

Jack thinks that “it was obvious that we [the task force] were the key stakeholders for this.”

He explained that the task force were the key stakeholders to be consulted

because we were the people who were consulted with when it came to drafting the policy. We were the ones with the background that was necessary to inform staff what these things mean and what the current issues are. . . . We were in the best position to be able to tell them whether they had a problem potentially coming down the road, or what are ways that they could improve their policy because once they decided to go with the policy, then it’s really in their interests to have a really great one – one that stands up and gives them a lot of credit. So, that was kind of the function that we would serve there.

In reading the “Review” section it is not obvious at all that the task force members are the key stakeholders to be consulted during the review process. This section of the EPP obligates the City’s Manager of Materials Management to consult with “key stakeholders” including, but not limited to, City suppliers, subject experts, and City staff in identifying and recommending revisions to the EPP and SCC. “Subject experts” could mean various members of the task force, such as the BCEPG members. The term could point to a slew of other people, however. It is open to the interpretation of the reader.

Also, it is the job of the contract specialist hired and paid by the City, not the task force, to oversee the implementation of the policy, and to educate staff about what the policy texts mean, and how to incorporate them into their purchasing decisions. Most members of the task force and most activists in general do not have any background in doing the work of institutional purchasing. They are not in a position to tell City managers and buyers – people whose job it is to purchase the materials needed to keep the City operations going – how to do their job. Doing the work of purchasing requires expertise. Procurement specialists are formally educated with the skills needed to do institutional purchasing. They have degrees, diplomas, and certificates to prove it. They also obtain on the job training, attend conferences, and have professional networks and societies. They are

experts. They are in the know. Most activists do not know what the work of institutional purchasing involves. The role of the activist is to convince Council to adopt a policy and to monitor how implementation is going – that is, to make sure the policy is actually being implemented, and how comprehensively implementation is occurring.

Activists monitor the implementation of the policy in various ways. Section 4 of the EPP, “Review”, states that the City’s “Manager of Materials Management will be responsible for reviewing the EPP and SCC annually and reporting findings to Council annually” (City of Vancouver, 2005b). This manager, Larry Berglund, was on the task force, and continues to be the main contact for BCEPG members when they want updates relating to the policy texts and their implementation. Jack is not directly involved in these ongoing conversations, however. He did note that the City is implementing the policy. In the end, that is what matters. Jack knows surprising little about how the City government is structured, how it operates, and how the EPP and SCC are being implemented. I was quite ignorant of these matters at the outset of this research project. Jack’s knowledge defined the starting point of this project, but activists’ knowledge is not equal to that that the institutional ethnographer can produce in a systematic inquiry. Lack of concrete knowledge of the institutions we engage as activists – how these institutions operate, make decisions, and implement policies – is a problem institutional ethnography can be effective in addressing. This knowledge can extend that of activists and inform further work to create political change.

7. Money, Money, Money: The Financial Cost of Year One of Implementation

Council approved the EPP and SCC in principle on December 16, 2004. At the same meeting, upon the recommendation of Terry Corrigan, the City’s General Manager of Corporate Services,

Council direct[ed] staff to report back early in 2005 on the impact on the City's operations including potential costs and resource requirements for implementing the Ethical Purchasing Policy and Supplier Code of Conduct as recommended by the Task Force and the development of a comprehensive Sustainable and Ethical Procurement Policy that incorporates broader environmental and social objectives (City of Vancouver, 2004).

The CMT submitted their report to Council on February 7, 2005. A few days earlier, on February 4, it was presented to the task force who did not approve of it. Despite their objections, the report was submitted to Council as it was, and presented to them on February 17.

In the report, the CMT estimated implementing the policy would cost the City \$570,000 in its first year of operation. The yearly salary for the new staff position was set at \$68,000, and a \$20,000 budget for consultation was approved. The BCEPG was confused about the \$570,000 estimate. Jack said "[t]he figures didn't make any sense" and seemed to be "pulled...out of the air."

He has reason to be frustrated. He knows how the CMT calculated the estimates of the Fair Trade agricultural products because they emailed TransFair Canada about it and the email was forwarded to him. The email did not provide any information about how much the City was currently paying for specific goods such as coffee. It also did not mention that the City buys different quality coffees for various purposes and locations. It simply said the City was considering adopting an EPP that would require them to purchase FTC products, and they wanted to know how much more that was going to cost.

Whether it is conventional or FTC, coffees of varying quality cost varying prices. Also, there is no regulation on retail or wholesale prices of coffee, whether it is conventional or FTC. The lack of information in the CMT's email made it impossible for TransFair to give them an estimated price comparison. TransFair suggested the CMT contact Jack to help

them estimate a cost comparison between their current coffee expenses and their projected FTC coffee expenses. The CMT never contacted him. Despite TransFair's suggestion, and the fact Jack was on the now dissolved task force and had worked as a consultant to the City in that capacity. The CMT instead arbitrarily estimated that the shift to FTC agricultural products would increase their costs by 15% across the board.

As Jack put it, the CMT's estimate is "absurd." The City was already buying "gourmet", branded coffee from Starbucks and Seattle's Best. Across Canada, FTC coffees of comparable quality cost the same or less than these branded coffees. Jack added that if the City did end up paying \$1 more per pound for FTC coffee compared to their previous coffee, then that equates to about two cents more per cup. He explained that such an increase "can be easily built into [their] pricing, and so [they] can recoup those costs if [they] need to." They could recoup the additional expense, if there was any, and then some by charging five or ten cents more for coffee sold at concession stands.

Jack thinks that "to say that Fair Trade chocolate is also 15% more expensive is also absurd...because it is probably much more expensive." There are some nuances worth noting here. Jack explained that the quality of conventional candy bars and FTC bars is not comparable. Conventional bars have very little chocolate in them. Some of the cacao for these bars is harvested by children, some of whom are slaves. The conventional bars contain a lot of sugars and artificial flavours. The ingredients are of poor quality. Fair Trade bars are considered gourmet, and they contain mostly Certified Organic ingredients. Unlike conventional bars, they contain a high percentage of cocoa, none of which is harvested by children, slaves, or otherwise under inhumane conditions.

The vast difference in quality and the work conditions of the farmers is part of the reason why Fair Trade bars cost more than conventional bars in Canada in 2005. The other

reason is that at this point in 2005 only 100 gram Fair Trade bars were available in Canada. Those bars retailed and continue to retail at \$3.50 or \$4. They cost a similar amount to equivalent sized, gourmet, conventional bars. They cost a lot more than a regular candy bar though.

The Canadian market for Fair Trade chocolate and the businesses in the market have developed substantially since 2005. Fair Trade chocolate is now more widely available at lower prices. Some companies are now selling 40 and 50 gram bars in a variety of flavours. Those bars are better able to compete with conventional bars on store and concession stand shelves. Activists, like Jack, are currently working with the Vancouver Park Board to encourage them to continue to offer Fair Trade bars on their concession stands. The Park Board offered 45 gram bars from Equita, a Québec-based Fair Trade company, at their concession stands in 2007.

MSN echoed Jack's sentiment. They suggest the estimates "not be used as a guide for other municipalities" (MSN, 2006b). They explain that

Approximately \$146,000 of the \$570,000 total would be for anticipated increases in the cost of apparel – set arbitrarily at 10% across the board. The staff report admitted however that 'it is difficult to assess the cost implications' for apparel and 'assumed' a 10% increase without any rationale. Other public institutions that have instituted No Sweat standards have not encountered cost increases for apparel because manufacturers will not admit that they aren't already meeting the basic standards.

The bulk of the additional anticipated costs are for agricultural products – food and coffee. City staff estimated that fair trade coffee and other products will cost a minimum of 15% more, reasoning that 'most fair trade agricultural products are also organic' and that 'organic agricultural products are consistently 10-30% higher than regular products.' These anticipated costs should be compared to actual costs at institutions that have previously adopted fair trade policies for verification.

The City requires staff to carry out annual reviews on the policy's implementation, which will ultimately provide the public with valuable

information on the process and the real costs of compliance (MSN, 2006b).

The first annual review confirmed the activists' claims. The policy did not cost the City hundreds of thousands of dollars. The financial cost was negligible to shift from conventional products to No Sweat and FTC products. The first year of implementation essentially did not cost the City anything, apart from the expense of the salary of the contract specialist hired to oversee implementation. For some contracts the City actually saved money. The City has been re-structuring its purchasing to a centralized system. The centralized system enabled it to consolidate its suppliers, buying larger quantities of product, and distributing the appropriate volumes to different departments.

The No Sweat and FTC products being comparable in price to conventional products resulted in the negligible expenses. The City saved \$14,000 on uniforms. The Park Board did not lose money on its sales by switching to Fair Trade. The Carnegie Centre and the Gathering Place, two locations of social programs in the City's downtown eastside, saw an increase of \$11,000 in their coffee expenses. The two community centres already had coffee contracts, which, of course, the City could not break. The coffee purchased for the community centres had been particularly cheap and of poor quality because it was served at a subsidized rate by the centres. The City managers were directed by Council in the EPP to switch to FTC coffee. The managers were obligated by contract to work with the community centres' current suppliers. The suppliers knew the managers were bound by the contract and by the City's new policy. The suppliers charged the City \$14 per pound for FTC coffee. You can get a better price for a single pound at your local store, let alone for bulk contracts such as these. The City managers were caught in the contradiction, however, between requirements of the new policy and existing commitments, in this case a contract. The result was the \$11,000 increase. Overall though, the cost to shift to No Sweat and FTC products

was negligible. The debate in City Council and management then became about what to spend the over \$500,000 surplus on.

8. The Continuous Struggle

Vancouver's Council comprises ten Councillors and the Mayor, as I said earlier. The Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE), a leftwing party, had control of Council when the policy was proposed, drafted, and adopted. COPE, however, only has one representative, David Cadman, on the current Council which was elected in November 19, 2005. The Non-Partisan Alliance (NPA), a rightwing party, a minority on the previous Council, has a slim majority on the current Council. Councillors Peter Ladner and Sam Sullivan of the NPA were the only two non-COPE Councillors on the previous Council. Ladner and Sullivan were also the only two Councillors to vote against the adoption of the EPP and SCC. Sullivan is now the Mayor and Ladner was re-elected as a Councillor. The NPA currently holds half of the Councillor seats and the Mayor position, so they control the Council.

COPE split in half before the 2005 election. Some members stayed with COPE, and the others formed a new party called "Vision Vancouver". The COPE members who are more centre-left joined Vision, including Raymond Louie who was co-chair of the EPP task force. Vision holds four seats on the current Council; however, Vision's Jim Green lost the job of Mayor to Sullivan. Green used to be a COPE Councillor, and he voted in favour of the EPP and SCC. Vision still supports the EPP and SCC. The NPA's position on the matter is less clear.

The spring of 2006 featured the first budget of the NPA's term as a slim majority. Governments often spend big at the end of their term in their bid to get re-elected, and make cuts at the beginning of their term in the name of catchphrases for media consumption

like “fiscal responsibility,” “balancing the books,” or “reducing the deficit.” “Fiscal responsibility” is presented as being apolitical, as necessary, as good for the citizens. The traditional conception of fiscal responsibility does not include considerations for social and environmental criteria. The NPA, claiming the COPE government had not kept balanced books, voted to discontinue the funding for the salary and benefits of the contract specialist position charged with implementing the EPP and SCC, in the name of fiscal responsibility. The policy itself was not touched.

Back on February 17, 2005, at a meeting of the Standing Committee of Council on City Services and Budgets when the Committee was discussing under what conditions the City would officially adopt the EPP and SCC, the then Councillor Sam Sullivan, who is now the City’s Mayor, put forward a motion that “the City support the principles for ethical purchasing and direct staff to incorporate them into the City’s purchasing policies and implement them to the extent possible without direct impact on staffing requirements and limited increased costs to the City” (City of Vancouver, 2005c). Sullivan did not want the City to create a contract specialist position to oversee the implementation of the EPP and SCC, nor did he want the EPP and SCC to cost the City anything financially. The Chair of the meeting ruled that Sullivan “was out of order.” Sullivan challenged the Chair’s decision, and Council then voted on the legitimacy of the decision. A two-thirds majority of Councillors present at a meeting is needed to overrule the ruling of the Chair. Only Councillors Ladner and Sullivan, the two NPA Councillors, opposed the Chair’s decision, so the ruling was sustained. Council created the staff position which had its funding cut by the current Council who has Sullivan as its Mayor.

The later decision to cut the funding for the contract specialist position was reversible if the political will of the Council could be shifted. The City management and

activists both worked toward that goal but not collaboratively. The managers wanted the funding reinstated so they could better do their job as a team of implementing the policy that Council had passed and that they were legally obligated to follow. The policy texts are one set of documents that coordinates their work of purchasing certain apparel and agricultural products. As professionals, City managers' and purchasing staff members' actions are socially organized by the City's purchasing policies, various contracts, laws relating to procurement, and so on. They cannot do their job properly without adequate resources, of course. Certain texts like the EPP and SCC which are supposed to coordinate the work sequences of doing purchasing do not necessarily get activated because management have not had time to review all of the City's current contracts and see how the policy texts can be applied to them. Also, part of the contract specialist's job was to educate purchasers in different City departments on what the EPP and SCC are and how to apply them to their purchases.

Most activists are not all that concerned about the everyday actualities of City bureaucrats. Bureaucrats are often criticized but the work they do is seldom understood. The BCEPG was concerned with the implementation of the EPP though. If the CMT say they need a contract specialist to oversee the implementation of the EPP, then activists will not and did not hesitate to support that claim. The CMT recommended the reinstatement of the funding in a report presented during the October 5, 2006 meeting of the Standing Committee of Council on Planning and Environment.

The CMT made a second recommendation in the report that the activists could not accept. The other recommendation was "that Council amend the Ethical Purchasing Policy as outlined in Appendix A to allow departments to differentiate application of the policy for products for resale" (City of Vancouver, 2006). This amendment, if approved, would allow departments to procure conventional goods instead of or along with No Sweat and FTC

commodities for instances where the department intended to resell the products at, for example, concession stands in City parks, community centres, and so on. In other words, the CMT was trying to make the procurement of No Sweat and FTC goods an option, not an obligation, for these situations. During the discussion of this proposed amendment in the October 5 meeting it became known that the City managers did not want to be obligated to buy FTC coffee for the Carnegie Centre and the Gathering Place. I explained earlier that since the managers were caught between having to honour current contracts and apply the new purchasing policy, switching these community centres to FTC coffee cost the City \$11,000. Councillor Raymond Louie, who had co-chaired the EPP task force, pointed out this contradiction in the October 5 meeting. He asked Larry Berglund, the Manager of Materials Management, who was presenting the proposed amendment and who had served on the EPP task force, if supplying the community centres with FTC coffee would continue to be as costly once the current coffee contracts for those centres expired. Berglund answered that it would not.

An almost final draft of the CMT report that included this proposed amendment was received by some BCEPG members – apparently leaked strategically by a City bureaucrat – two days prior to the Standing Committee meeting during which the discussion of the report was to take place. The activists worked quickly. They were able to mobilize enough different constituencies in the City to encourage the Standing Committee to delay their official discussions of the CMT's report until their next scheduled meeting (which took place on October 5). This allowed time for the community members' – that is, the voters' – concerns to be discussed with the Standing Committee members, including concerns about the proposed amendment. It also bought the activists some time to mobilize further support.

The CMT's report was the last issue on the agenda for the October 5 meeting. The five issues before the EPP discussion took almost three hours to work through. Sitting through the meeting was hard work in itself. Dorothy and I watched and listened to the proceedings. The people waiting for the EPP agenda item, besides Dorothy and me, all waited in the hallway outside of Council's bear pit. While they waited they caught up with each other, strategized, and talked about what they were planning to say to Council and their concerns about the NPA.

The Standing Committee members needed a break before moving into the EPP issue, which had a speakers list of sixteen people. The next largest list for an agenda item was four speakers. The list for the EPP issue was impressive in size and in diversity. It included Fair Trade, No Sweat, and trade union activists, members of the business community including Ethical Bean and Ten Thousand Villages, a representative from Phontong Handicrafts (a producer group in Northern Lao that Ten Thousand Villages works with who happened to be in town), a nun, a representative from a local synagogue, students, former Councillor Tim Louis who co-chaired the EPP task force, and other community members, including a teacher who had taught some of the Standing Committee members' children and is also a global justice activist.

None of the speakers expected what happened after the meeting reconvened. The members of Vision Vancouver and COPE who are on the Standing Committee were also surprised. Dorothy and I were sitting in the front row. I turned around to see Jack's reaction. He just shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

The NPA tipped their hand. They indicated after a short opening discussion of the Standing Committee that if a vote was called that they would vote to not only reinstate the funding for the contract specialist position that they had cut in the spring, but they would

also vote against making the procurement of No Sweat and FTC goods an option for products for resale. Councillor Peter Ladner, who voted against the EPP in every instance it has been before Council, actually wanted to move the motion. Councillor Raymond Louie was next in the queue though. He not only moved the motion that subsequently passed unanimously, he had it noted in the meeting minutes that the NPA had cut the funding that the Standing Committee was now reinstating, and that Councillor Ladner had voted against the EPP initiative in every instance. After the vote, the Chair of the Standing Committee opened the floor to the speakers list.

When the floor was opened up, Jack was first on the speakers list. He and the subsequent speakers changed their tune from the critical tone they had had in the hallway during the first three hours of the meeting. The speakers congratulated the Standing Committee on their decision, re-emphasized why it was the correct choice in their minds and the worldwide impact it would have, and indicated they were looking forward to the Council strengthening the policy and expanding the scope of it through the annual review process. Activists are never satisfied. Our job is to create social change. Creating change is more than making a critique. As Dorothy Smith (1987: 78) points out, “[a] critique is more than a negative statement. It is an attempt to define an alternative.” Critique may define an alternative, but it does not necessarily bring it about. Critique alone is not enough to make change. Change occurs through work that is guided by critique. Various forms of ethical trade are attempts to define alternatives to corporate capitalism, and are part of a broader global justice movement aimed at changing the neoliberal agenda.

During the discussion that followed the Standing Committee’s vote, Councillor David Cadman remarked that the Standing Committee received more phone calls and emails from concerned citizens – that is, voters – about the EPP issue than they had received for

any other issue that term. Since the activists had received the CMT's report in advance, they were able to mobilize support through union membership lists, "non-governmental" organizations' email lists, and various listservs. Jack sent a message through the Canadian Student Fair Trade Network's listserv requesting that members of the Fair Trade movement send emails to Standing Committee members. He included a sample email message. Movement members from across the country emailed the Standing Committee letting them know the importance of the issues at hand and that we were watching. The activists won, for now. The BCEPG continues to monitor.

Activists should do follow-up work, even though they do not have much control over the implementation process, because how a policy is implemented is critical. In my experience, after a coalition achieves its goal, as the BCEPG did, members frequently go on to do other work. If they are doing activist work on a voluntary basis, like Jack was, then sometimes they take some time away from their activist work because they are burnt out or other things in their life were put on hold because the campaign took up a lot of their time and energy. For instance, the time and effort Jack put into his activist work took away from his studies. It took him an additional year to complete his degree as a result.

Follow-up remains crucial, however. After a campaign has been successful, the group should assign some members the task of doing follow-up and reporting back to the coalition. Activists need to keep in touch with one another, and with the corporation or government that they are lobbying. Things change, often quickly. If activists are not on the ball, then the ball may be dropped. In other words, campaigns do not end when a victory is perceived to be achieved. Policies can be changed or scrapped just as quickly or even quicker than they were created.

As a result of years of activist work, including groundwork done prior to this specific campaign, Vancouver has an EPP and SCC. Furthermore, the City's managers now post on Vancouver's website the names of their suppliers for products within the scope of the EPP and the locations of the factories in which the goods are manufactured – emergent practices that in themselves are major accomplishments. If implementation is happening, as it indeed is in Vancouver, then it should be less of a concern to activists how “transparent” the everyday work of managers and other staff members is to them. Activists can complain all they like, Council does not even receive such details, it is unlikely activists ever will, their energy would be better spent elsewhere. This does not mean that activists should not continue to monitor implementation, as the BCEPG is well aware. It is not in the character of activists to be satisfied, but being too nit picky with City managers is likely to create unnecessary antagonism in a fairly agreeable situation, one that provides an excellent model for activists, Councillors, and managers in other municipalities.

In exploring the story of the EPP campaign, a problematic for further inquiry – activism as work oriented to text-mediated institutions located locally and elsewhere that hooks into and is coordinated by ruling relations – has developed. In explicating the local actualities of the EPP initiative using institutional ethnography, we can discover how they are socially accomplished and connect to the extralocal, and what role texts play in these extended social relations. In the next chapter I systematically analyze activism as text-based and -mediated work by explicating one part of the campaign, the task force's writing process. In the following chapter I investigate how that work connects to and is organized by translocal ruling relations, including those of ethical trade.

Chapter 3: Activism as Work

I think of investigating a politico-administrative régime as an ordinary part of the day-to-day work of challenging and transforming a ruling apparatus. ~ George Smith

1. Introduction

Activism is work. Activists work to create social change. In trying to create social change, activists do different tasks and play different roles. Activists do not and cannot act individually, however. Activists' work and social change are socially organized. Social change is a social act like all human actions. Individuals are part of the social, and thus are socially organized. This does not eliminate the possibility for individuality; we are all uniquely socially organized. We act in relation to others; our actions are co-ordered and co-ordinated. Since individuals are socially organized, individual change, even personal change, like social change, is socially organized. Individuals acting to create social change do not and cannot do so individually since individual action is a social act. Mapping social action can help us better understand it. The better we understand the social, the better equipped we are to change it.

In this chapter, I first outline Dorothy Smith's generous concept of work, and then explore the work activists did while participating on Vancouver's EPP task force. My intent is to further understanding of this particular work organization in hopes that this knowledge will be of use to others when they engage in similar efforts. In conceptualizing and explicating activism as work I draw out what otherwise is often taken for granted by studies of social movements, the actualities of activists and what activists actually do in their efforts to create change. In this analysis, readers will find some ideas about the significance of inquiry into activism as work. In Chapter 4, I delineate the more general significance of my analysis by illustrating how activist work done locally hooks into and is coordinated by translocal ruling relations, including, in this case, those of ethical trade.

2. The Generous Concept of Work

As I explained in Chapter 1, beginning in discourse – ideological speculation – objectifies people's actualities. This is common practice in studies *of* social movements, and most sociology for that matter. In this research approach, people's "thinking, the effort and time they have put in, and the varying material conditions under which their work is done do not appear" (D.E. Smith, 1987: 164). Their active presence as subjects is subsumed by the researcher's ideological apparatus. The local context of their doings, the realities therein, the complex of "social relations in which it is embedded and through which it forms part of a division of labor, are emptied out" (ibid). Institutional ethnography breaks with this suppressive approach to knowledge creation.

Institutional ethnographers do not begin inquiry in discourse and speculation. Rather, we "begin in the work and practical reasoning of actual individuals as the matrix of experience in the everyday world" (ibid: 165). Work is done "in determinate material contexts and therefore in an economy of conditions, effort, and time" (ibid). Thus, investigation must begin there. As I explore further in Chapter 5, "categories and concepts of institutional ideology" make some aspects of the social visible, while concealing others (ibid). This is why, following Dorothy Smith (1987), institutional ethnographers deploy a generous concept of work.

Narrow conceptualizations of "work" do not include women's work in the home (it was and predominantly still is women who do this work). Their work is not made observable-reportable in the economic sense of the term. The women's movement fought and continues to organize to expand the category "work." An expanded notion of work makes visible work that is done but not observable-reportable in institutional accounting

practices (ibid: 165). Thus, drawing on her involvement in the women's movement, Dorothy Smith (1987) created the generous concept of work.

Campbell and Gregor (2002: 72) explain that “[b]y the generous concept of work Smith means that everything that people know how to do and that their daily lives require them to do.” Smith (1987: 165) herself defines the generous concept of work as “what people do that requires some effort, that they mean to do, and that involves some acquired competence.” This idea of work “directs us to its anchorage in material conditions and means and that it is done in ‘real time’ – all of which are consequential for how the individual can proceed” (ibid). Approaching institutional procedures as courses of actions, as work organization, means the field of inquiry is the complex of work processes that accomplish the institutional, whether all of this work is made visible in accounting practices or not. This means that investigation “go[es] beyond the functional boundaries [defined by the institution] as these are defined by its ideological practices” – its concepts and categories – “to explore these aspects of the work organization that are essential to its operation” (ibid: 166). The entirety of this work organization is the institutional ethnographer's field of investigation.

Smith (ibid) notes that “[b]y locating institutional ethnography in the work people do we are not concerned so much to mark a distinction between what is work and what is not work, but rather to deploy a concept that will return us to the actualities of what people do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations.” By explicating those actualities, people's everyday/everynight activities, “[w]e return thus to those processes that both produce and are ordered by the social relations of the institutional process, and to actualities that are observable, that people can describe, and that in their concerting accomplish its orderly processes as ordered” (1987: 166). In the context of my thesis, this

means explicating the work activists did and continue to do in encouraging and supporting the City of Vancouver to draft, adopt, and implement an EPP and SCC. In Chapter 2, I did this in a somewhat general way by telling the story of the campaign from a Fair Trade activist's standpoint. In what follows, I explicitly explicate the time, effort, and material conditions of one section of the campaign – the work process of writing the EPP and SCC undertaken by a task force which included Jack and several other activists who are also BCEPG members. I seek to show that activism is work and can be investigated as such.

3. Activists at Work in the Task Force's Writing Process

The social relations of production are not made visible in conventional systems of exchange. Ethical trade movements work to make these relations and the supply chains through which commodities travel more observable, more “transparent” as activists put it. The work done locally by ethical trade activists is coordinated by the translocal, ruling relations of ethical trade (further explored in Chapter 4). The work of City managers and staff is governed by professional and bureaucratic organization informed by ideology which regulates and gives coherence to practices of purchasing. Ideologies that coordinate and determine the shape of the work of procurement can be changed. This involves working with texts embedded in local and translocal political processes. The work of writing Vancouver's draft EPP and SCC done by the task force was of this character. Viewing ethical trade activism as a work process articulated, in this instance, to the work process of institutional purchasing by Vancouver managers and staff enables us to locate the relations to be investigated in exploring the local work of trying to change the ideology which coordinates the work of procurement in and across time and space in the City of Vancouver. My field of inquiry is the entirety of this work organization. The task force was a local node of this transnational production.

The fact that the task force was an official body of the City government was what made it so effective. The City funded the task force by allocating it a budget, by providing space for the group to meet, by employing a facilitator on a contract basis, and by paying the salaries of the Councillors and managers who participated in the group. The allocation of staff time to the task force was particularly important since members of staff ultimately do the work of implementing policies that Council passes. A number of task force members were not Councillors or staff though, many of them were also members of the BCEPG. It is not unusual for lobby groups to influence government policy on any level. Having members of lobby groups sit on an official task force to write policy on the government's bill is less common. The task force was created and funded to do just that. The group worked through the issues, the terms, and the definitions. It took time and effort. It required a trust and respect of each other's background, professional opinion and knowledge which was work in itself. It also required the City to hire a facilitator with experience in negotiating.

The importance of having a great facilitator for the task force cannot be emphasized enough. It is a critical position in the social organization of the task force and the writing process. Tim Reeve was employed on a contract basis by the City to perform the role. Reeve is the former Sustainability Coordinator of VanCity Credit Union. He developed their ethical purchasing program. He is also a former President of the British Columbia Recycling Council. The facilitator's job is to ensure the process goes as smoothly as possible. This meant Reeve had to work closely with the City managers participating in the process to do a lot of research on the subject matter and incorporate it into drafts of the policy texts while working under tight deadlines. By all accounts, Reeve and the managers did a great job. Having comprehensive drafts to discuss sped up the task force's writing process. The group could concentrate on the larger issues and not waste time on less significant details. Jack is

under the impression Reeve also acted as an advocate at times, greasing some wheels when the City managers had reservations. This is not unusual in processes like the one Vancouver undertook. Facilitators have professional opinions, and are active participants in the work process just like everyone else involved.

Jack described the task force as a “stacked deck” in the BCEPG’s favour because of the significant contingent of the coalition’s members involved. Many of the other organizations and businesses that were represented on the task force were also politically progressive – VanCity Credit Union and Mountain Equipment Co-op, for example. If disagreements arose, a discussion on the matter ensued, and it was resolved through discussion. The group moved together through the work of writing the policy texts. Before the task force met for the first time, Jack “anticipated a bit of an adversarial relationship” between the BCEPG members and the City staff on the task force where the activists would want a comprehensive policy and staff would “try to whittle it down.” By in large, he discovered the opposite. After participating in the task force writing process, he observed that the participating staff members “wanted to create a meaningful policy.... They wanted to make sure that it would be something that would function. They didn’t try to sabotage it by creating something that would be meaningless. They didn’t try to make it...so unworkable that it would have to be abandoned. They really tried to make a good policy.” He added that the City staff’s knowledge of how institutional purchasing is done “improved [the policy] in a lot of cases.” Denise Taschereau, the Social and Environmental Responsibility Manager of Mountain Equipment Co-op, contributed her substantial knowledge of ethical purchasing and supply chains as well. Her expertise complemented and added to that of the City staff.

The membership of the task force also included representatives from the Vancouver Park Board and the Vancouver Public Library. I spoke with Jack in April, 2006, shortly after the first annual review of the EPP and SCC was made public. At that time, he still thought that the Park Board and Public Library were involved in the task force because the policy might affect their purchasing decisions. The social organization of any municipal government and bureaucracy is complex. The complexity increases with the size of the municipality. Leading up to the policy being adopted, Jack and most of the BCEPG simply thought that "City Council decides what's going to happen" in the City. They were largely ignorant to how Council interacts with the CMT and the directors of various City departments. Council does not make decisions in a bubble. When the CMT makes a report to Council, the beginning of the report always includes recommendations. Also, Council does not reside over all municipal departments, some are semi-autonomous. The Park Board and Public Library were under no obligation to adopt and implement the EPP and SCC should the City decide to do so. The Park Board did implement the policy though.

Dorothy and I attended a BCEPG meeting in March, 2006, shortly before I spoke with Jack. This meeting was the first time Jack and I ever met face-to-face. We had worked together the three years prior all by phone and email as activists on the national level of the Fair Trade movement as it manifests itself in Canada. This meeting was the first time the BCEPG discussed a new discovery brought forth by a UNITE manager. Some City departments, such as Fire, Police, and the Park Board, amongst others, have their own budgets allocated by the City. These departments have authority over their budgets. The EPP and SCC do not coordinate the purchasing decisions for the products within the policy's scope for the departments that operate in quasi-independence from City Council. While Council is a governing body that passes policies, those policies do not necessarily

apply to all the departments that operate in the auspices of the City of Vancouver. No one from the BCEPG was aware of that until the spring of 2006, more than a year after the EPP and SCC had been officially approved by Council, and long after the task force completed its work.

The task force drafted the EPP and SCC over a period of roughly three months throughout the fall of 2004. They had three meetings during that period. They had their first meeting September 8 and Council adopted the texts in principle on December 16. The task force also met on October 6 and November 3. Coordinating schedules for everyone involved in the task force, and staying on target to meet the December deadline for delivering draft texts to Council, was a lot of work in itself. Finding a day and time for everyone to meet in processes like this one can be frustrating. Preparing for, doing related work in between, and participating in the three meetings meant taking time and energy away from something else – other work, loved ones, leisure time, and so on. This meant further scheduling work had to be done to make up for what was missed, and sacrificing what could not be made up. Jack was the only member of the task force who was not working for the City, a business, the union movement, or a “non-governmental” organization. He was a student at the time and was not paid for his activist work, at least not in money.

The agenda for each meeting was set ahead of time by Reeve. During and between the meetings, the task force talked about what issues the City needed to address in the EPP and SCC, what provisions should be included in the texts to ensure the City had a comprehensive policy, and what specific wording of the clauses was most meaningful. Minutes of each meeting were produced and circulated to the group. Between the meetings, Reeve and the two City managers on the task force, Larry Berglund, Manager of Materials Management, and Terry Corrigan, Director of Financial Services, researched the topics

discussed during the meetings and wrote drafts of the EPP and SCC. Drafts were sent to the rest of the task force for further discussion before and during the subsequent meeting.

Between meetings, the next meeting's agenda, minutes from the previous meeting, policy drafts, relevant background information, and other communication that occurred within the group as a whole happened through a listserv the City set up for the task force. The minutes and draft policy texts batted back and forth through the listserv contain evidence of previous conversations, accumulated knowledge of task force members, and the results of research undertaken by Reeve, Berglund, and Corrigan. The task force would discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each draft text. Task force members would point out specific language within the draft documents that they thought left the policy open to potential abuses of the ethics the policy texts were being written to uphold. Reeve, Berglund, and Corrigan incorporated the group's thoughts into the next revision of the texts.

The work done in the task force meetings and the remedial work transferred to members' offices and homes between meetings was communicative work mediated by texts – language, images, hardcopies of policy drafts, meeting agendas and minutes, electronic versions of these texts shared, read, and worked on between meetings, emails, websites of standard-setting and certifying agencies, and so on. All of the work could not be done in the time the group had in the three meetings. The task force had a deadline though, and scheduling meetings for this size of group comprising very busy people was not easy. The pace of the group's progress in the writing process was coordinated by their December deadline for delivering their product, the draft policy documents. All of this work was done in and across time and space in material conditions and means. For instance, the way the task force proceeded presupposed that each member had access to a computer with internet access, that people had time to meet and time to work on task force related matters between

meetings, that members had ways of getting to the meetings, that collectively they had the knowledge needed, or it was available somewhere, to draft comprehensive policy texts that others could understand and take up in the course of their work, that work continued to be done daily both locally and elsewhere to accomplish the No Sweat and Fair Trade movements and systems of exchange as it had been leading up to and participating in the creation of the task force, and so on.

As I explained previously, it is more difficult to write clauses for ethically produced and traded apparel than for FTC agricultural products. A lot of the task force's time was spent discussing the production and trade of apparel, how clauses relating to these issues might be worded and what information needed to be included in them. The task force spent less time talking about Fair Trade agricultural products. The discussion of Fair Trade occurred near the end of the task force's writing process. More members of the task force, particularly those who were also members of the BCEPG besides Jack, were primarily interested in the issues of ethically produced and traded apparel. This is not to say that the other BCEPG and task force members were not in favour of Fair Trade for agricultural products. It just was not their main concern or motivating factor.

The task force members representing the City did not want to tie the policy texts to any particular third party auditing agency of ethically traded apparel because there is no internationally recognized one established yet. The Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) do this kind of work; neither has been able to establish an internationally recognized system to date though. The WRC has a better reputation amongst activists than the FLA which is favoured and supported by industry (major corporations such as Nike, PUMA, Adidas, Liz Claiborne, and Philips-Van Heusen are represented on its board of directors (FLA, 2007)). Both organizations are US-based. Some No Sweat and trade

union activists had concerns about basing the labour standards in the policy relating to ethically traded apparel on the work of US organizations since Canadian labour standards are higher than US ones. The activists prefer to look to the European Union or to an international agency like the ILO for guidance and leadership. The City was concerned with the ramifications if they tied themselves to the WRC or the FLA and then the organization's reputation became tarnished. Also, if a better auditing system or organization were developed, the City wanted the flexibility to use it if they saw fit.

Except for Jack, the BCEPG members who participated on the task force were more focussed on No Sweat. The No Sweat and trade union movements define "ethical" in relation to the ILO and its Recommendations and Conventions, particularly its core Conventions. The clauses in the EPP and SCC that relate to apparel are written in relation to the ILO's core Conventions, with one notable exception which I will return to later. In the EPP, "ILO Core Labour Conventions" is defined as "the minimum labour standards set out in the Supplier Code of Conduct" (City of Vancouver, 2005b). The SCC includes ten core standards: legal and ethical requirements, child labour, forced labour, disciplinary practices, freedom of association, wages and benefits, working hours, discrimination, health and safety, and environmental commitment (City of Vancouver, 2005d). Other than Jack, the BCEPG members on the task force were experts of the No Sweat and trade union movements. They were the activists pushing for the ILO's core Conventions to be included in the policy documents, and were involved in wordsmithing those clauses with Reeve, Berglund, and Corrigan.

Jack, like many Fair Trade activists, supports the ILO's Recommendations and Conventions but does not know much about them. Similarly, many No Sweat and trade union activists do not know much about the specifics of Fair Trade. In other words, Jack

does not know how to speak the social organization of the No Sweat movement – its particular way of using and putting concepts into language in the way that movement members do. Likewise, many No Sweat and trade union activists could not have a conversation with a Fair Trade activist about Fair Trade in the same way two Fair Trade activists could and do. Movements are organized in and coordinated by language. Language itself is social organization. Activist work is largely accomplished in language; often ordinary words used in particular ways. This is one reason coalitions across movements, such as the BCEPG, are created. What emerges as effect of these coalitions is a larger ethical trade movement – a movement of movements, if you will, which are intersected with anti-oppression movements in various ways.

Coalitions across movements are meant to create strength in numbers, resources, and level of expertise, and bridge the gaps between movement boundaries defined by the institutions and ruling relations of specific movements. Defining and institutionalizing movements in specific ways using ideological practices like creating categories and concepts produces particular boundaries for which practices fit in the movement and which do not, for what is observable by the movement and what is not, and who fits in the movement and who does not. Institutionalization affects what movements make actionable. With institutionalization, experience becomes externalized; actualities objectified; categorized; spoken of, recognized, given agency by the ruling relations that coordinate the movement. People's actualities are subsumed by the ideological practices – the categories and concepts – of the movement's institutions, and the ruling relations, including ideologies and discourses, that coordinate them translocally in and across time. The specific way movement members use language is one example of how the discourse of the movement's ruling relations gives

determinate shape to the experiences of movement members, including what and how they see, speak, and otherwise act out.

Jack said that other BCEPG and task force members “kept referring to ILO core Conventions, but when I looked around the ILO website I couldn’t find any document that said ‘core Conventions.’” The ILO has almost two hundred Conventions, information on the eight core ones is available on the organization’s website but it is not immediately obvious where to find it. An internet search for “ILO core Conventions” will yield the information. Jack was not able to find it so he did not know the specific standards to which the other task force members were referring. He knew the issues well enough to follow the conversation when the standards were being discussed in No Sweat speak. It was not his responsibility to be an expert in the subject though. The BCEPG and the task force comprised people with varying yet complementary experience and expertise.

Movement members are trained to reproduce the social organization of the movement. In this instance, No Sweat and trade union activists can confidently name, refer to, and reproduce the standards that for them signify “ethics” in trade and production. They activate and use in specific ways concepts like “legal and ethical requirements,” “child labour,” “forced labour,” “disciplinary practices,” “freedom of association,” “wages and benefits,” “working hours,” “discrimination,” “health and safety,” and “environmental commitment.” Some of which Jack knows as some are used by the members of the Fair Trade movement too. But are they used in the same way by both movements? Jack cannot entirely tell. Some of the other concepts he does not know specifically what they mean and how to use them properly in the context of ethical trade of apparel defined in relation to the ILO. He has not been trained to reproduce the No Sweat movement’s ideological discourse.

The task force did not have a big debate as to which ILO Conventions they would incorporate into the EPP and SCC. Jack was a partly conscious observer of these discussions. The City, as represented on the task force by two Councillors and two managers, agreed with most of the other task force members' requests for including provisions in the policy texts regarding the ILO's core Conventions. The task force did, however, have significant debates over the details and wording of two of the ten clauses they included in the SCC: wages and benefits, and working hours.

A number of task force members wanted to include a living wage clause in the policy. There was a general recognition amongst the task force that some countries do not have a minimum wage law or the legal minimum wage is well below anything that could reasonably be considered a living wage in that nation-state, Canada is no exception. Part of the point of having an EPP is to ensure that your institution is not contributing to the creation of "working poor" as Jack described people in such situations. The City, as represented by two managers and two Councillors, did not want to include a living wage clause because the definition of a "living wage" was too open for interpretation in their view. Jack described the debate as a "cumbersome process." The result of the debate is Clause 7 of the SCC, "Wages and Benefits" (City of Vancouver, 2005d). It reads as follows.

City suppliers and their sub-contractors:

- will meet national and legal requirements, whichever is higher for wages and benefits within the country of manufacture, irrespective of special status granted to a company, worksite, or geographic area that permits the organization to compromise applicable standards.
- meet industry standard benchmarks for prevailing wages and benefits where such benchmarks are readily available.
- recognize that wages are essential to meeting employees' basic needs and will make every effort to ensure that workers receive wages that meet basic needs by local standards.
- will pay workers directly and provide workers with clear, written accounting of hours worked, deductions, and regular and overtime wages in a language they can understand.

- will not make direct wage deductions from employee pay as a disciplinary measure. Where an employee is temporarily suspended without pay, infractions must be proven openly and promptly (City of Vancouver, 2005d).

This clause does cover significant workers' rights issues relating to wages and benefits. But, anyone making minimum wage in any country is a member of the working poor. Minimum wage is not a living wage. Some ideals are difficult to define in policy. The task force was not able to textualize the concept of a "living wage" so they did not include it in the policy. The everyday actualities of government or any bureaucracy are brought about by the text-mediated coordinated doings of people. If it cannot be textualize, then it does not get put into policy and subsequently into action, and it cannot be institutionally accountable.

I stated above that in the EPP, "ILO Core Labour Conventions" is defined as "the minimum labour standards set out in the Supplier Code of Conduct" (City of Vancouver, 2005b). This definition is inaccurate. Clause 8 of the SCC, "Working Hours" (City of Vancouver, 2005d), does not conform to the ILO's standards. MSN explains the divergence from the ILO Convention in their critique copied below. This deviation was not the doing of the task force, however. Council approved the EPP and SCC in principle on December 16, 2004, but official adoption of the policy awaited a report from the CMT on the financial costs of implementing the policy. The task force was not involved in drafting the CMT's report. The report recommended changes to the policy documents prepared by the task force and adopted in principle by Council on December 16, 2004. The CMT's report was presented to the task force on February 4, 2005, submitted to Council without alteration on February 7, and approved by Council on February 17 when the policy was officially adopted. The CMT report states that the changes were reviewed with and agreed to by the task force in the February 4 meeting. Jack said they did not approve of the report. In Chapter 2, I

outlined the activists' concerns about how the CMT estimated the cost of implementing the policy. MSN's critique below delineates the other concern activists had with the CMT's report. Council approved all of the CMT's recommended changes to the policy texts. One of these changes was to the "Working Hours" clause. Objection to this particular change by the MSN member on the task force was not noted in the CMT's report, nor was the activists' disapproval of the estimated budget for implementation. On February 22, MSN (2006b) posted on their website the following critique of the changes to the "Working Hours" clause.

The City of Vancouver adopted norms in line with international labour standards, including strong provisions on child labour and freedom of association. Unfortunately, it has weakened its hours of work provisions so that 12 hours overtime per week can be compulsory and regularly required – rather than voluntary and exceptional as found in most international codes and standards. If other jurisdictions are to adopt the Vancouver policy as a model, they should adopt a provision consistent with international labour standards (MSN, 2006b).

MSN's evaluation of the policy shows how activists' work is coordinated by text-mediated relations, and how a critique such as the above could be legitimated with reference to governing texts like the ILO's Conventions. The "Working Hours" clause is considered sub-par because it does not meet the standard of the governing text. The SCC is the subordinate text in this textual hierarchy. The MSN's critique adopts the position of the ILO Conventions. The subordinate text is supposed to conform to the governing text. MSN holds the City accountable for not meeting the standard since the EPP and SCC passed by Council claim to conform to the "ILO Core Labour Conventions" (the ILO's Conventions are considered as part of the ruling relations of ethical trade in Chapter 4).

As I said earlier, there was not much disagreement in the task force during the writing process. The representative of LogoTex, a current supplier of apparel to the City, was the lone voice on the task force that spoke out against the policy. LogoTex is based in Vancouver and sells apparel branded to the specifications of the companies and institutions

with which it does business. The corporation's representative had limited power in the task force. As Jack put it, the "deck was stacked against her." Her comments garnered little attention. Jack "had a lot of sympathy for her." She said it is impossible for her to know all the links in the supply chain of her products. LogoTex sources from an importer, the importer sources from an exporter in another country. There may be other links in the supply chain of which she is not even aware. The chain is not transparent. The importer that LogoTex buys from will never freely publicize names and addresses of their suppliers on the grounds that it is proprietary information. The importer makes money from companies like LogoTex by having that information and keeping it close to them. Otherwise, LogoTex and others could simply bypass their importer and do business with the next link in the supply chain, increasing their profit margin in the process. Jack explained: the more links in the supply chain before you means more people got to the pie before you, and you get a smaller slice. Each link in the chain reduces the potential profit margins of the subsequent links. This situation points to another aspect of Fair Trade; it is a more direct form of international trade. Besides greater transparency and a "fairer" price paid to producers, the Fair Trade system of exchange reduces the number of links in commodity supply chains.

The "Compliance and Implementation" section of the Supplier Code of Conduct states that "[t]he City will require that suppliers provide details on factory and production facility locations of suppliers and subcontractors and will make this information publicly available (i.e. annual reports, web site postings, etc)" (City of Vancouver, 2005d). City managers are accountable to this standard, and have done well to follow it. Businesses like LogoTex who cannot provide such information cannot bid on City contracts. This standard ensures transparent supply chains. It benefits corporations and trade unions that produce and sell apparel that have more control and knowledge of their supply chains, and that can

supply the textual information of factory locations which will be subsequently activated in the SCC governed competitive bidding process by the City manager who receives and evaluates the bids.

When the LogoTex representative said that she could never provide the information about her supply chain that the task force wanted, one of the City managers on the task force replied that he had already spoken to Nike and they said they were willing to disclose the information. Shortly after the policy texts were adopted, Nike announced that they were making their supply chains for all their products transparent. The events are no more than tangentially related. Nike was already working to orchestrate such a public relations stunt. Nike's move defies what businesses have been saying was impossible for decades. This announcement came after decades of mobilizing against them and other similarly scrutinized corporations. I suspect Nike is represented on the FLA's board for similar reasons.

The risk of potentially linking the City to a certifying agency that might develop a bad reputation in the future led the task force not to write the WRC or FLA into the policy. They did tie the policy to the FLO International, TransFair Canada, and Fair Trade standards, however. They defined "Fair Trade Agricultural Products" as "products that are agricultural in origin that can be Fair Trade Certified by Transfair Canada, or if unavailable, another National Initiative (NI) of the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) International. Examples of commodities currently include, coffee, green and black tea, cocoa products, sugar, and bananas and other tropical fruit" (City of Vancouver, 2005b).¹³

Once the task force's conversation turned to Fair Trade, Jack said "people would mention Fair Trade but they didn't really know what it was, so I was kind of free to say what

¹³ The names of TransFair Canada and the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International are both misspelled in the policy texts. Since the EPP and SCC were approved, the descriptor of National Initiative has been changed to Labelling Initiative.

I wanted.” He knows how to speak the ideological discourse of Fair Trade. He knows the social organization of the movement and the system of exchange connected to it. For these reasons he was considered the Fair Trade expert amongst the group. This gave him authority to speak and be listened to. He insisted that the task force define Fair Trade in relation to the FLO International and TransFair Canada and their Fair Trade certification standards.

These actions and experiences cannot be understood as if they are autonomous from external social and political forces. We are situated in an active organization of politics. We often act as agents of external authorities (D.E. Smith, 1987: 139). “Agency”, as Smith (1987: 130) notes, “can be transferred from people to a discursive object originating in and reflecting the social relations of their actual lives and work.” We formulate courses of action as attributes of categories of discourse. For instance, quality of performance in a workplace is evaluated in relation to a norm established externally to the local, historical everyday world of practitioners. Evaluation done in this way is impersonal. A documentation of value is worked up relative to the norm. A manager filling in an evaluation form of an employee is acting as an agent of the text and the ruling relations it espouses. Similarly, when Jack defines Fair Trade in relation to the FLO International and TransFair Canada he is acting as an agent of these organizations and their Fair Trade certification standards. He is acting as an agent of the ruling relations of the Fair Trade certification system. The ideology organizing those relations coordinated his doings. The ruling relations of ethical trade are an alienated mode of knowing movements to alter capitalism. They are “universalized modes of an objectified representation fitted precisely to the objectified and objectifying forms of ruling” (D.E. Smith, 1987: 224). They subordinate activists to their “relevances and themes and methods of knowing” (ibid; discussed further in Chapter 4).

Upon Jack's suggestion, the task force insisted that the agricultural products within the scope of the EPP be FTC by TransFair Canada. TransFair Canada is the only independent, third-party certification organization for FTC products in Canada. It is a national non-profit certification and public education organization promoting Fair Trade to improve the livelihood of "developing world" farmers and workers. It is the Canadian Labelling Initiative of the FLO International, the international umbrella organization that sets and monitors international Fair Trade standards (a more nuanced explication of the international level of the Fair Trade certification system is presented in Chapter 4). Given his extensive knowledge and networking with businesses and activists in Vancouver and beyond, Jack knows that there are companies operating in the City and elsewhere claiming to sell Fair Trade products despite their goods not being certified. These corporations may not have clear standards or any standards at all that explain what they mean by "Fair Trade" and how they incorporate such principles into their operations.

The FLO International and its Labelling Initiatives not only set standards, they also perform audits to ensure standards are being followed. Some businesses that sell non-certified products think that paying a certain price for a commodity and giving some money to a charity is Fair Trade. Others just claim to be selling Fair Trade as a marketing ploy and have nothing to back up the claim. Some businesses that claim to be doing Fair Trade but do not sell FTC products actually go above and beyond what certification requires. Many consumers, despite their good intentions to support Fair Trade, still do not know enough to ask the proper questions of companies. Based on his experiences, Jack anticipated that City purchasers might not be able to differentiate between the various claims corporations make, and be able to ultimately pick a company that is actually doing business in accordance with Fair Trade principles. Writing TransFair Canada and the FLO International into the policy

eliminated that concern. It also eliminated companies who are not licensees of TransFair Canada or another Labelling Initiative from bidding on relevant contracts, whether these businesses are admirable and simply operating outside the FTC system or not.

When I asked Jack where the language about Fair Trade in the policy documents came from he responded: “made it up.” Yet, the clauses are written in relation to the FLO International’s and TransFair Canada’s Fair Trade standards and hence, in a sense, in collaboration with many other movement members. Without the work of many people around the world who coordinate the Fair Trade certification system and the movement, the Fair Trade clauses in Vancouver’s policy documents would be meaningless. The movement created the meaning of the term “Fair Trade” as it is conceptualized in Vancouver’s policy. Jack did not just make it up. His work of wording the Fair Trade clauses was coordinated with the FLO International’s and TransFair Canada’s standards. The standards of the FLO International and its Labelling Initiatives coordinate translocally. They socially organize in and across time and space the doings of millions of Fair Trade activists, producers, businesspeople, staff at certifying agencies, and consumers in numerous local settings around the world. The standards connect this social organization with Vancouver’s EPP and SCC, and the City’s Council and bureaucrats. All of these people’s work in regard to Fair Trade is done locally, but it is coordinated with the translocal text-mediated ruling relations of Fair Trade (further analyzed in Chapter 4).

Jack’s other concern with tying the policy texts to TransFair Canada and the FLO International was the competing auditing and trading systems to Fair Trade coordinated by organizations such as Utz Kapeh and Rainforest Alliance. Utz Kapeh mostly operates in Europe. As a certifying agency, it is solely concerned with coffee, no other commodities. It is called “Fair Trade Lite” by many in the Fair Trade movement because it does not set a floor

price for the raw coffee traded through its system. It maintains a low public profile and takes the stance that talking about the political economy of the coffee industry will scare off more mainstream consumers. Many in the Fair Trade movement do not even consider Utz Kapeh to be a competing system. Based in the US, Rainforest Alliance is primarily concerned with coffee that is produced in a manner which sustains the environment, and pays less attention to the social relations of production. The system coordinated by the FLO International and its Labelling Initiatives does both, in particular, institutionally defined ways.

At the time the task force was writing the policy texts, the Utz Kapeh and Rainforest Alliance systems were being spoken of by people and in the media as being Fair Trade despite the significant differences in these three systems of exchange and the social movements linked with them. Jack did not mention Utz Kapeh or Rainforest Alliance to the rest of the task force. He simply noted that when it comes to Fair Trade, the FLO International's system is the only certification system, and TransFair Canada is its only member in Canada.

The first draft definition of "Fair Trade certification" did not explicitly mention the FLO International's system or TransFair Canada. Jack made the case for it, and the adopted versions of the policy documents reflect that. As the only Fair Trade expert on the task force, Jack's opinion carried the most weight on such issues. His suggestion of the wording of the clauses and definitions in the policy texts relating to Fair Trade were, he reported, accepted wholly – without question, without discussion. The task force spent most of its time on apparel and most of the task force members were knowledgeable about various issues relating to the production and trade of apparel. The two City managers on the task force and the group's facilitator did research and verified what Jack had said. TransFair Canada is the only independent, third-party certification organization of FTC products in Canada. There

are other certification systems for agricultural products besides that of the FLO International and its Labelling Initiatives, but they do not certify commodities as being Fair Trade.

In defining “Fair Trade Agricultural Products” the task force was also concerned with limiting the policy to a realistic scope given the current size of Canadian markets for FTC commodities. Jack anticipated the City having problems with implementing the policy if the initial scope was too broad. He said that he “didn’t want a policy where the City from go would have to buy Fair Trade Certified cotton, so that all the clothing would have Fair Trade Certified cotton in it, have to buy all Fair Trade Certified chocolate, all Fair Trade Certified sugar, this kind of thing.” Cotton is an agricultural product, of course, but FTC cotton garments were not available in Canada when the task force was writing the policy. The Canadian market for these garments is still quite small as I mentioned in the previous chapter. The policy texts “speak” of ethically traded apparel and Fair Trade agricultural products yet the connection between the raw agricultural product, cotton, and the finished product, apparel, is not made. In a practical sense, it was not possible to make these connections in Canada in 2005 when the policy was being written. Furthermore, as I explained in Chapter 2, the FLO International does not monitor the raw cotton through its development into garments. Despite the FTC label appearing on garments made with FTC cotton, only the raw cotton, not the garment as a finished product, is guaranteed to have been produced and traded in accordance with FTC standards. It is not possible to know for certain at this time if all the work that goes into producing and trading garments labelled FTC has been done in agreement with FTC principles.

The size of Canadian markets for FTC commodities and the number of businesses operating in those markets are part of the social organization of the Fair Trade movement as it manifests itself in Canada, and of the policy texts. These actualities affect activists’ work.

Jack is well aware of the market maturity for different FTC products in Canada. He was afraid a broader scope might “bankrupt” the policy, and the City would be more likely to abandon the initiative after the first annual review. For this reason, he advocated for the policy to begin with the scope it did because some Canadian markets for FTC products are not mature enough to provide a sustained supply of goods for large institutions like the City of Vancouver. There are other concerns for an institution besides sustained supply.

Institutions need to coordinate a competitive bidding process when vetting responses to their Request for Proposals (RFP) for purchasing contracts. In Canada, they are more reluctant to publicize a RFP for FTC chocolate than they are for FTC coffee, for instance, because the pool of potential suppliers for chocolate is much smaller than that of coffee. Only a select few businesses in Canada who currently sell FTC chocolate are large enough to supply an institution the size of the City of Vancouver with the volume it requires. The bidding process for a RFP for FTC chocolate may only include two or three companies.

There is also the challenge of substitution of a FTC product for a conventional good. This challenge is twofold. First, the FTC product needs to be available at a competitive price to the conventional product. Second, and this issue is particular to chocolate bars, FTC chocolate needs to be available in a variety of different bars as conventional bars are, that is, ones with flavours, nuts, dried fruits, spices, amongst other things. The task force had to consider all of these factors in drafting the policy texts and defining their scope.

When Vancouver adopted the EPP and SCC, the Park Board also elected to implement the policy. They bought some FTC bars. They tried to sell the bars at their concession stands in the City’s parks during the first year the policy was in place. At the time only a select variety of 100 gram FTC bars were available in Canada. The bars retailed at \$3.50 or \$4 depending on the location. The problem of substitution smacked every potential

customer in the wallet. Most consumers are not willing to buy a FTC bar for \$4 when a \$1 conventional bar is available on the shelf beside it, no matter the ethics behind the bars and the huge difference in quality. Smaller FTC bars have since been developed and are offered in a larger variety of flavours. The Park Board had a reduction in revenue during the first year of the policy. Jack said some Vancouver staff members and Park Board representatives speculated this was because of the FTC bars. He said others noted the 2005 summer season was not good for business in Vancouver overall. Either way, the Park Board was reluctant to source FTC bars again in 2006, despite developments in the market. They returned to offering FTC bars in 2007, ones from Equita, the trading arm of Oxfam Québec.

The task force had solid drafts of the EPP and SCC completed after their second meeting. They had been allocated a small budget from the City to draft the documents. Tim Reeve, the facilitator of the task force, suggested between the group's second and third meetings that they have Verité review the draft policy texts. The suggestion made a lot of sense. Verité reviews ethical purchasing, corporate social responsibility, and similar kinds of policies. They also offer monitoring services on related matters. Jack said this was a valuable step in the drafting process because Verité's staff members "are experts in the field of policy...where a lot of us knew different things about the issues and things that we wanted to get forward...[but] we were all new to this policy arena."

Verité commented on the strengths and weaknesses of the policy texts. The task force then met one last time before the EPP and SCC were submitted to Council on December 6, 2004 for consideration at their next meeting. In their final meeting, the task force discussed Verité's comments and recommendations, and what, if any, they would incorporate into the draft policy documents. The main advice the task force took from Verité's report, which according to Jack they were already keenly aware of, "was that the

strength of that policy really came down to the manner in which it was implemented. ...If adequate resources were put to implementation, and if it was implemented faithfully and along with the spirit of that policy, then it was a fine policy.” As I discussed in Chapter 2, the struggle to have Council allocate adequate resources for implementation is an ongoing affair in which activists are at work.

In this chapter I have explicated activism as what it is: work. This orientation enabled an exploration of activists’ actualities and what activists actually do in their day-to-day practices of trying to make change. Activist work, such as that undertaken in Vancouver’s EPP initiative, is oriented to and coordinated by text-mediated institutions. It occurs on the terrain of the ruling relations. Building on Chapter 2 and this one, in the next chapter I explicate how activist work done locally hooks into and is coordinated by translocal ruling relations, including those of ethical trade. Working as an activist coordinated by ruling relations, toward influencing a text-mediated institution also organized by ruling relations will always have unique features. Yet, the elements of “activism as work” described here – putting a policy together for presentation, debate and eventual approval by the City of Vancouver’s Council – can be read for insight into what made this project successful. Not a “model”, nor a theory, nor even a list of recommendations, yet my pulling apart of this project to show who did what, when and how, may help other activists answer important questions for preparing to participate in developing a new policy, or constructing a plan for an organization-based strategy. I have reviewed and explored further, where necessary, and reflected on one such process. I recommend this focus on activism as work for seeing what is actually going on, that often stays below the radar of reports and formal paper trails of activity. I suspect that my analysis can work the other way round, too – for people beginning a project. Considering, as I have done in retrospect here, all the mundane pieces of work that

go into making one project successful may illuminate at the beginning or during the course of a similar project some of the elusive elements that make a difference to getting an activist project put together effectively.

Chapter 4: Hooking Local Doings into Translocal Relations of Ruling

The revolution will not be televised or funded, but it will be text-mediated, institutionally accountable, and translocally organized. It will objectify local actualities.

1. Introduction

Work happens locally. Local doings, including activist work, are coordinated by, hooked into, and accountable to translocal ruling relations. Work done locally can create local and translocal social change as was and continues to be the case for Vancouver's EPP and SCC. Organizing to establish an EPP is local; it involves locally organized or local representation of national and international organization. What this study shows is how the work of organizing locally for an EPP connects with, relies on, and is accountable to national and international levels of organization that form part of the translocal ruling relations of ethical trade, and how local organization contributes to the anchoring of translocal ruling relations in particular local settings *with particular effects*. This study also illustrates a division of labour in the work and function of non-profit groups in the area of progressive organization. The work of organizations involved in the BCEPG – the VDLC, CLC, MSN, Oxfam Canada, Vancouver Fair Trade Coffee Network, No Sweat SFU, and so on – do different work and perform different functions than the ILO, FLO International, TransFair Canada, Verité, and other standard setting and certifying or auditing agencies. The standards and certifications are ruling relations of ethical trade. They coordinate and give legitimacy to activists, like the BCEPG, and policy documents like the EPP and SCC adopted by Vancouver.

The ethical trade movement is a movement of movements. It is a multifaceted project; one of many that have created and continue to develop modifications to capitalism that incorporate a respect for human rights, dignity, and environmental sustainability as conceptualized and practiced in various, sometimes conflicting ways. Ethical trade movements aim to show, not simply hypothesize, that alternative models of trade are

possible if consumers and political will support them. These movements are confronted by the corporate elite's strong pressure on people, businesses, and all levels of government to support their neoliberal agenda. A fundamental property of the social – the world we live in – is that it is contested textually mediated “ground” constantly coming into being by people's co-ordinated and co-ordered actions. Governments are no exception, neither are corporations. Governments influence business. Business influences government, but does not own it. All levels of government have the potential to act in the interest of a broad spectrum of social groups.

Such struggles for democracy and social rights are activities of what Greg Buckman (2004), Joel Bakan (2004), Alex Callinicos (2006), and many others call the “anti-globalization movement.” Naomi Klein (2000), Jamie Brownlee (2005), and others label these struggles the “anti-corporate movement.” In what follows I scrutinize these conceptualizations. I then criticize abstract, liberal notions of “civil society” and “global civil society” – two manifestations of the same idea, which is neither useful for advancing research *for* the struggle, nor explicating the politics of the social in general. I chose to preemptively criticize these four concepts because they are used by some activists, scholars, and members of the general public in relation to ethical trade, which, as I explain, is inappropriate. These conceptualizations do not capture or enable an explication of the actualities of ethical trade, and thus lead us away from discussing the material realities of these movements. I then illustrate a novel way of analyzing these activities using institutional ethnography in an innovative manner. This new analytic approach involves recognizing activism as work and, like all forms of work, that activist work is done locally but hooks into translocal relations of ruling to which it is institutionally accountable and by which it is coordinated in and across time and space.

2. Ethical Trade: Neither the “Anti-Globalization Movement” nor the “Anti-Corporate Movement”

Buckman (2004) analyzes a broad complex of interrelated movements which he refers to as the “anti-globalization” movement by dividing it into two schools: the Fair Trade/Back to Bretton Woods School and the Localization School. While dividing the multifaceted ethical trade movement into two schools might facilitate analysis, it is highly reductionist and does not capture the size and diversity of this family of movements.

Klein (2000) and Brownlee (2005: 143) prefer the term “anti-corporate movement” to “anti-globalization movement”. I agree that use of the latter should be scrutinized. The issues and problems addressed by movements working for ethical trade in general and Fair Trade in particular arise largely in the context of and are driven by globalizing economies. Only localization, one of the two “schools” Buckman (2004) tries to analyze using the concept “anti-globalization movement”, is anti-globalization. But, “anti-corporate movement”, Klein’s (2000) and Brownlee’s (2005) preferred term, is also inaccurate.

Ethical trade movements are not anti-corporate. They are, however, consistently opposed to corporations whose practices and policies are exploitative. Other types of corporations exist – non-profit corporations, for instance. The term “anti-corporate” is too simplistic. It is an ontological blob. It does not capture the actualities of ethical trade.

One of the objectives of my thesis is to map the actualities and social relations of advocacy work done relating to Vancouver’s EPP and SCC. This social cartography involves locating activist work within translocal social organization. The ethical trade movement is a complex of interconnected movements. It is intersected by other global justice movements pertaining to issues of gender, race, and class. Most movements for ethical trade are not anti-globalization. They would be better described as advocating for an alternative globalization or a globalization from below.

Some ethical trade advocates call for “trade not aid.” They endeavour to level the international “playing field” by participating in the empowerment of the disenfranchised. Foreign aid, however administered, goes to governments or specific agencies. Ethical trade movements, on the other hand, aim directly at changing the situations of workers by participating in the development of different ways of organizing production and trade. This is not to say that ethical trade is the solution to all of the world’s problems, far from it. But various forms of ethical trade do improve the immediate dire circumstances of millions of lives (FLO, 2007). These movements also raise awareness of the exploitative nature of capitalism in particular ways.

Ethical trade movements are not anti-corporate, however. Several ethical trade movements – Fair Trade, No Sweat, organics, “green,” for instance – have multinational corporations who participate in them to varying degrees. Movements engage other multinationals, scrutinizing them for not doing business ethically; and pressure them to adopt ethical purchasing policies and procedures. Multinationals’ participation in ethical trade is a highly controversial topic amongst members of these movements. Some maintain that multinationals’ participation will increase the material effect and visibility of the movements. Others argue that multinationals should not be allowed to participate in ethical trade, that they are tainting the image of ethical trade, and are attempting to co-opt the movements and use them for positive public relations reports. And yet others declare that ethical trade should not and cannot be exclusionary in its “membership”, and that having multinationals participating in ethical trade shows the success of the movements. People have nuanced opinions on such a complex matter, of course, which would include a melange of these reasons and perhaps others.

3. Criticism of “Civil Society” and “Global Civil Society”

The term “global civil society” (GCS) is problematic. It has roots in the idea of “civil society.” While the concept of GCS has been discussed by intellectuals for the past three decades, and has since become a popular catchphrase in international development and aid communities, the term civil society is much older. It dates back to “the works of Cicero and other Romans [and] to the ancient Greek philosophers, although in classical usage civil society was equated with the state” (Carothers, 1999: 18; see also Kumar, 1993: 376). The idea was reborn in the eighteenth century. Its evolution as a concept can be traced through the writings of the Scottish and Continental Enlightenment and one of America’s Founding Fathers – John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Paine, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx (Carothers, 1999: 18; Kumar, 1993: 376-380). Claude Henri de Rouvroy, or Comte de Saint-Simon as he is generally known, Auguste Comte, Count (Charles) Alexis (Henri Maurice Clérel) de Tocqueville, Émile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies, Talcott Parsons, and others have also grappled with the idea of a “third way” between the market and the state (Kumar, 1993: 380). Alexis de Tocqueville (2000) made an incisive contribution.

“What de Tocqueville did”, as Krishan Kumar (1993: 381) notes, “was to refine the state-society dichotomy, common not just in Marxism but in much other discussion of the time, and introduce a third region, a third term, that kept alive the idea of a political culture below, or perhaps better around, the state.” For de Tocqueville (2000), there are three spheres of society: the state (the system of formal political affairs, that is, government, the courts, civil service, police, and military), civil society (“private” interest and economic activity), and political society (associations – this is what is commonly conceptualized by

liberal – as in, not radical – thinkers as civil society or global civil society nowadays as I outline below). Kumar (ibid) notes that

In civilized societies there are political associations, such as local self-government, juries, parties and public opinion; and there are civil associations, such as churches, moral crusades, schools, literary and scientific societies, newspapers and publishers, professional and commercial organizations, organizations for leisure and recreation. The life of all these associations, the ‘super-abundant force and energy’ that they contribute to the body politic, constitutes political society.

I do not know exactly what Kumar means by “civilized” societies, the descriptor sounds Eurocentric. By describing societies with the listed features as “civilized”, Kumar suggests that societies without these features are uncivilized. Such a mindset resembles the imperialist thinking of European colonialists, missionaries, early anthropologists, and the like that circled the globe in their efforts to “civilize” indigenous peoples – “noble savages,” the other. Democratic is a more accurate descriptor for societies with the elements Kumar lists. Indeed, de Tocqueville’s (2000) formulation of a tripartite society was what he saw coming into being as he studied democracy in the US in the nineteenth century. His research shows, according to Kumar (ibid), that it is “through political society that the potential excesses of the centralized state, especially in democratic societies, are controlled.” Whether such an assertion can be made now with the contemporary development of capitalism and the ruling relations is not as clear-cut. I will return to the discussion of the concept of political society later. A brief look at how Antonio Gramsci (1971) took up the work of de Tocqueville and others is first in order.

Gramsci reinvigorated something of de Tocqueville’s idea of “political society” (Kumar, 1993: 381). Gramsci drew on Hegel, not de Tocqueville, for his formulation of the notion of civil society which, of course, influenced how he took up de Tocqueville and the concept of political society. In the *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci (1971: 208) talks about “civil

society as understood by Hegel, and as often used in these notes (i.e. in the sense of political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the entire society, as ethical content of the State).” He sees civil society as standing “[b]etween the economic structure and the State with its legislation and its coercion” (ibid). His use of the concept and the meaning assigned to it waivers throughout his theorizing. Gramsci, like intellectuals nowadays, uses the concept in various ways, adding to its ambiguity. Kumar (1993: 382) argues that “[t]he formula most commonly found in Gramsci is: the State = political society plus civil society. Political society is the arena of coercion and domination; civil society that of consent and direction (or ‘leadership’). The hegemony of a ruling class is expressed through the ‘organic relations’ between the two realms.” Gramsci frequently “emphasize[s] the central role of civil society in the manufacture and maintenance of hegemony. He thus sometimes narrowly equates the state with political society, the system of direct coercive rule, leaving civil society the main work of organising hegemony” (ibid). Kumar (ibid) notes that “[a] section of the *Prison Notebooks* is headed ‘Hegemony (Civil Society...’” and “[e]ven where [Gramsci] warns against the identification of the State with political society, as merely ‘dictatorship or coercive apparatus’, he still singles out civil society as the area where hegemony is exercised.” While Gramsci’s thought does have its ambiguities as Kumar notes, his formulation of the idea of hegemony is a major contribution to political theory. It should not be used unreflectively as an ontological blob, however.

Dorothy Smith (1999: 84) points out, in the making of contemporary capitalism “the bases of civil society, at least as Gramsci (1971) conceived it, in individuals, particularly in an intelligentsia, were transformed to the objectified social relations of discourse and large-scale

organization.”¹⁴ How hegemony might come about in society today, thus, changed with the development of the ruling relations in the making of contemporary capitalism. Applying an ontological blob of Gramsci’s original idea of hegemony formulated in the early twentieth century to an analysis of contemporary social activity would be problematic.

From Dorothy Smith’s observation, we see that we cannot just take up concepts like civil society, GCS, political society, hegemony, ruling relations, or any other ideological apparatus without reflecting on its pertinence to the everyday, material, temporal circumstances of the social. Institutional ethnographers, following Dorothy Smith (1987), maintain that the ruling relations came about with the making of contemporary capitalism as social relations mediated by texts that coordinate multiple local sites of social activity in and across time. The concept of the ruling relations is pertinent to analysis of text-mediated social organization. Throughout my thesis thus far, I have used the idea to explicate the social organization of ethical trade. I do so in a more rigorous fashion later in this chapter. I purposely did not use the notions of civil society or GCS in my analysis.

As people’s doings and the ruling relations that coordinate them have become increasingly globalized, the discourse of globalization has emerged and has become more commonplace. The idea of civil society had the descriptor “global” tacked on to it in the 1980s when discussions of globalization became all the rage. Interest in “globalization” and “civil society” emerged as people became aware of and looked for ways of thinking about major changes taking place in capitalism. An authoritative definition of the notion of GCS does not yet exist and likely never will. It is often said to be a political arena comprising associations or groups “outside” or “between” the market and the state (Amoore and

¹⁴ How the concepts of hegemony and ruling relations might be used together in a social analysis is worth investigating further but such an exploration would significantly increase this already lengthy thesis, and take away from the contributions of the sociology *for* activism which I am attempting to formulate herein.

Langley, 2004; Bartelson, 2006; Swift, 1999; amongst others). This is more or less Gramsci's idea of civil society, or what de Tocqueville called political society, plopped inappropriately into attempted analyses of politics as they play out on the global stage.

GCS is thus said to comprise “non-governmental” organizations, the mafia, religious and sporting associations, the Ku Klux Klan, Al Qaeda, and so on (Carothers, 1999; Amooore and Langley, 2004). It is a broad tent. Institutional ethnographers reject sweeping generalizations, and instead seek to study the specifics of social organization. At an early stage of this study – when I was initially developing my skills as an institutional ethnographer – I came across the concept of GCS and thought it might be useful to my analysis because it is broad enough to capture the diversity of movements discussed explicitly and implicitly in my research. The problem is that it is too broad. My decision to abandon the term as an analytic tool was largely based on its generality and ambiguity. I have come to learn that the concept is problematic for other reasons as well.

Ronaldo Munck (2006: 325) asserts that the notion of GCS is “irredeemably Eurocentric in its assumptions and orientation.” He argues that it “is based on universal moral norms and values” conceived in the West (ibid: 327). Craig Calhoun (2003: 92 qtd. in Munck, 2006: 328) adds that “the cosmopolitan ideas of global civil society can sound uncomfortably like those of the civilizing mission behind colonialism.” Kenneth Anderson and David Rieff (2005: 32) have drawn an analogy between contemporary international “non-governmental” organizations and religious missionaries. They describe the international NGO movement as

a movement with transcendental goals and beliefs. It is self-sacrificing and altruistic. It asserts a form of universalism that builds into its transcendentalism and legitimises it. It appeals to universal, transcendental but ultimately mystical values – the values of the human rights movement and the ‘innate’ dignity of the person – rather than to

the values of democracy and the multiple conceptions of the good that, as a value, it spawns (ibid qtd. in Munck, 2006: 329).

Munck (2006: 329) notes that this analogy “might not apply directly and certainly not across the board”, but it does point out some striking parallels. He recognizes “even that most ostensibly universal of concepts that of ‘universal human rights’ is cut across by the history of colonialism, imperialism, and cultural dominance” (ibid). He thus has threads of anti-oppression thinking in his consideration of the concept of GCS. He has not rejected the idea as I have though. But instead, he asserts that “[w]e certainly need to make ‘global civil society’ more global, place it firmly within the context of imperialism, and consider it from various perspectives that do not see the world in the same way as predominantly western liberal advocates of GCS do” (ibid). I do not think such a re-conceptualization is possible.

Anderson and Rieff (2005), whom Munck (2006) himself cites, point out that “non-governmental” organizations can act as extensions of a capitalist imperialism. Moreover, even if we were to bracket the problematic addition of “global” to the notion of civil society, and consider civil society in the neo-Gramscian sense, as a field within which hegemony is exercised – typically through text-mediated practices, then GCS would still be conceptualized as imperialist. The idea of democracy is of more use than that of GCS when we talk about political groups trying to participate in global governance by organizing around imperial practices of nation-states, corporate capitalism, international policy planning groups, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and so on. Democracy can be a radical idea, one worth fighting for. The notion of GCS does not even make clear which political groups are working for democracy and which are not. I see no use for it. It adds no value to research *for* the struggle. It only serves to abstract actualities.

The ideas of civil society and of GCS are profoundly inadequate to make explicit the organization of local actions taken by activists to make social change as they are embedded

in interrelations among and intersections of translocal movements operating in multiple local sites around the world. How changes in a local setting reach, through these forms of organization, into changes at a distance in the organization of production, work conditions on farms or in manufacturing facilities, and the working of supply chains can also not be explicated using the concepts of civil society and of GCS. An institutional ethnographic approach, by making use of analytic tools such as the notions of social relations, social organization, the generous concept of work, ruling relations, and so on, can be employed to concretely perform such an explication, as I am trying to do in this thesis.¹⁵

4. The Concept of the Ruling Relations¹⁶

Institutional ethnographers, following Dorothy Smith (1999: 77), define the “ruling relations” as “text-mediated and text-based systems of ‘communication,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘information,’ ‘regulation,’ ‘control,’ and the like.” In a society governed by ruling relations, such as ours, power occurs and is reinforced by text-mediated modes (ibid: 79). To investigate them is to explicate “forms of power that are diffused through complexes of text-mediated social relations constituting subjectivity and agency” (ibid: 82). The ruling relations are text-mediated and -based social relations through which people govern and are governed (ibid). Smith (ibid: 87) explains that “[t]he technologies, regulations, and arts of creating a standardized ‘environment’ of events are fundamental to the organization of societies governable within the ruling relations.” Our society is of this kind, it is an ongoing construction of human activity coordinated by text-mediated relations of ruling – laws,

¹⁵ In Chapter 5 I formulate the generous concept of politics which might also be useful for this type of research in the future.

¹⁶ For a more detailed and better articulated conceptualization of the idea of the ruling relations, see the chapter titled “The Ruling Relations” in Dorothy Smith’s (1999: 73-95) *Writing the Social*. Indeed, it is this conceptualization that I have made groan here.

treaties, policies, certifications, signs, labels, logos, concepts, knowledge, instructions, money, the stock market, and so on. Through these objectified and objectifying relations, human activities are standardized; reproducible in and across time and space. This allows for the “same” social act to occur simultaneously in multiple local sites. These local sites of action are constructed by people’s coordinated activity. Local activity hooks into the translocal via text-mediated ruling relations and connects to other local sites.

The ruling relations and the coordinated sequences of action that they organize “are not neutral systems of representation” (ibid: 85-86). They coordinate in specific ways and have particular effects. Human activities coordinated by ruling relations are performed in such a manner as to produce the “forms to correspond to and realize locally the forms and norms borne by text-mediated discourse” (ibid: 86). The text-based nature of the ruling relations facilitates “[t]he replication of local ‘events’ as identical (though identity is always more or less a fiction) [which] makes possible, for example, systems of measurement, the accumulation of statistical data, the formulation of rules and instructions applicable from one setting and time to others, and other textual practices of science, management, and the market” (ibid: 87). Ruling relations are not objective, but their text-based nature enables them to objectify and coordinate people’s actualities.

The ruling relations do not dominate; they *coordinate*. Smith (ibid: 79) stresses that “[w]hile the ruling relations are an organization of power, it is misleading to reduce them to relations of domination or hegemony, or to view them as monolithic or manipulated.” The ruling relations even coordinate “the relations of knowing” as “[k]nowledge is socially organized; its characteristic textual forms bear and replicate social relations” (94). For Smith, “knowledge is [not] necessarily a relation of power” as the popularization of Foucault’s work would have us believe (ibid). She argues instead that “[t]he intersection of knowledge and

power is an effect of the integration of the ruling relations, establishing subject positions within discourse from which experience can be known only externally” (ibid). This involves a shift in social consciousness.

Beliefs, concepts, and understanding (what Marxists consider consciousness) are essential to science, economics, and any other human activity (ibid: 75). Marx attributed consciousness to individuals (ibid: 78). The emergence of the ruling relations “mark[s] a transition from the social conditions of Marx’s theorizing of consciousness as an attribute of individuals to ‘consciousness’ as the workings of objectifying organization and relations mediated by texts and computer technologies” (ibid: 78-79). With the development of text-based and -mediated relations of ruling, “[s]ocial consciousness exists now as a complex of externalized or objectified social relations through which people’s everyday/everynight activities organize and coordinate contemporary society” (ibid: 78). The ruling relations bifurcate consciousness into, on the one hand, the sensual, particular, local, material, temporal world that we know in our bodies “and, on the other, the abstracted discourses and forms of organization creating the matrix of a consciousness outside the local and particular” (ibid). We experience this dual consciousness in and across time and space.

This means that the social is alive, ongoing. It comes about through the co-ordered and co-ordinated doings of people in and through time, “that is, active, thinking, intending, feeling, in the actual local settings of their living and in relationships that are fundamentally among particular others – even though the categories of ruling produce particular others as expressions of its order” (ibid: 75). “Order” itself is a concept signifying a complex of discourses and ruling relations, fields of coordinated social doings. People enter and participate in order, discourse, ruling relations, and so on by “reading/watching/operating/writing/drawing texts; they are at work, and their work is

regulated textually; whatever form of agency is accessible to them is accessible textually as courses of action in a text-mediated mode” (ibid). From this standpoint, the “[s]ocial is emphatically... *not* an ensemble of meaning” (ibid). It “*happens*; included in the happening/activities are concepts, ideologies, theories, ideas, and so forth” (ibid). Texts also happen. Thus, “[t]exts and text-mediated organization and relations must be explored as they are ‘in action’ and constitute media of action. Their conceptual dimensions must be held, not as meaning, but as ‘organizers’ packaged in texts that transmit ‘organization’ invented in one site of ruling to multiple sites, regulating the local activities of particular people” (ibid: 93). The deceitful stasis of the social as coordinated activity of ruling relations “is an effect of how the printed text enables us to return to them again, find them again, as if nothing had changed” (ibid: 75). Yet the social is ongoing, continually coming into being by people’s co-ordered and co-ordinated doings. The invention of text-based ruling relations is the biggest trick we have ever played on ourselves. In these relations actuality disappears (ibid: 76).

The institutional ethnographer, beginning in local lived experiences, as I did in this study by starting in the actualities of Jack and myself as Fair Trade activists, aims to explicate how those actualities are socially organized, and how they hook into and are coordinated by ruling relations. Institutional ethnography “extends and expands what we can discover from the local settings of our everyday/everynight living” (ibid: 74). Institutional ethnographers problematize ruling relations, however, in doing so we do “not proclaim them invalid, but rather [recognize] the extra-locality of relations as itself a social organization of actual people’s practices” (ibid: 76). Institutional ethnography, as a “method of inquiry into the social extend[s] people’s own good knowledge of the local practices and terrains of their everyday/everynight living, enlarging the scope of what becomes visible from that site, mapping the relations that connect one local site to others” (ibid: 94-95). Institutional

ethnographers are social cartographers. The maps of social organization that we aim to produce are “through and through indexical to the local sites of people’s experience, making visible how we are connected into the extended social ruling relations and the economy” (ibid: 95). In what follows I map some (indeed, it would be impossible to map them all!) of the ruling relations that coordinate people’s activities that result in ethical trade as conceptualized in relation to and organized by the ILO’s Conventions, and the FLO International, TransFair Canada, and FTC standards.

5. Exploring (Some of) the Ruling Relations of Ethical Trade

The debates delineated in Section 2, Ethical Trade: Neither the “Anti-Globalization Movement” nor the “Anti-Corporate Movement”, point to the fact that “ethical trade” and “ethical purchasing” are not easy to define as terms or practices because “ethical” can be subjective, both for businesses and consumers. In general, these terms refer to a range of interconnected systems of economic exchange through which people produce, sell, and consume products that have been made and traded in a manner that respects humans, animals, and/or the environment in one way or another. If we consider ethical trade in a general sense, then it could be said that these are not new forms of trade. For instance, think of how long people around the world have been exchanging seeds with their community members, or participating in local marketplaces. In recent years, numerous third-party certification systems – such as Fair Trade, organics, and Green Seal, for example – have been created in an attempt to define, standardize, monitor, and inevitably objectify these trading systems and the work of the people participating in them. Including the work of purchasing the product, this might be done for an individual, a corporation, or a government. Certification is presented as and generally considered to be a guarantee that labelled products

have been monitored during their production, journey through the supply chain, and sale, and that those processes conform to the standards defined and transparently presented by the certification body (as I said previously, the monitoring of the production and trade of FTC garments is far from comprehensive).

The FLO International formulates FTC standards.¹⁷ Standards are written in consultation with Southern producers and Northern alternative capitalists, who are sometimes referred to as social entrepreneurs. The FLO International was established in 1997 as an international umbrella organization when seventeen national certifying agencies, or National Initiatives as they have been referred to until recently by movement insiders, coalesced. National certifying agencies are now officially called Labelling Initiatives. The FLO International presently connects twenty-one Labelling Initiatives, and is considering adding many more.

Fair Trade is both a movement and a system of exchange that began shortly after the end of World War II. It is an international initiative comprising a network of actors, including: “non-governmental” organizations and their members, businesses, community groups, faith groups, unions, students, organic intellectuals (school teachers, academics, lawyers, and politicians), producers, certifiers, and consumers. The Fair Trade system of exchange aims to circumvent the systemic inequities of conventional international trade between the “global North” and “global South” via more direct procurement of commodities from producer organizations, payment of a “fair” price, and governance of certain, commodity-particular conditions of production (Barratt Brown, 1993).

¹⁷ There is an independent organization called FLO-CERT GMBH that inspects and certifies producer groups and traders according to Fair Trade standards. FLO-CERT GMBH stemmed from FLO International. While these two organizations are independent, for the purposes of this preliminary sketch of the social organization of ethical trade, I simply refer to the international level of the Fair Trade certification system as FLO International.

TransFair Canada is Canada's Labelling Initiative. It is responsible for monitoring commodities sold through the FTC system of exchange in Canada to ensure that that trade meets the aforementioned commodity-specific FTC criteria. TransFair Canada does occasional site visits to the business headquarters of their licensees. Licensees are also required to submit reports to TransFair Canada, so they can be audited to ensure, amongst other things, that the volume of FTC goods imported into Canada matches the volume sold. This is meant to help ensure that goods that are not FTC are not being sold as such. If discovered and publicly known, deceit of this kind would bring the legitimacy and integrity of the FTC system of exchange into question. Using similar methods of site visits and text-mediated reporting, the FLO International ensures that the relations of production meet FTC standards. FTC products are labelled with the Fair Trade mark, an image – a text, if you will – that acts as a guarantee to consumers that labelled goods were made and traded in accordance with FTC standards (again, the label makes this claim for FTC garments but the claim cannot be substantiated by current certification practices). A common slogan that consumers are told by educators is to “look for the label” to ensure that the product is Fair Trade (Certified).

“Ethical trade” or “ethical purchasing” are often also used to refer to No Sweat or union-made apparel. There are currently several consulting groups, monitoring agencies, watchdog, advocacy and education organizations that work on such issues around the world. There is, however, no globally recognized certification for “ethical” apparel. Generally, the movement and the businesses within it define “ethical” in relation to the ILO's Conventions, particularly its “core” Conventions.

The ILO is a UN specialized agency structured as a tripartite association where labourers and employers participate as equal partners with governments. It was created in

1919, became the first UN specialized agency in 1946, and is the only remaining major creation of the Treaty of Versailles which established the League of Nations. It promotes social justice and globally recognized (but sadly not always practiced) human and labour rights by setting international labour standards through its Conventions and Recommendations about “freedom of association, the right to organize, collective bargaining, abolition of forced labour, equality of opportunity and treatment, and other standards regulating conditions across the entire spectrum of work related issues” (ILO, 2006). The ILO and its Conventions and Recommendations are legitimated by the agency’s international constitution, relationship with the UN, tripartite structure, and signatories who include most of the world’s countries, including Canada.

When an EPP is adopted by a corporation or government, like the City of Vancouver, it is an authorized governing text focused on the trade of specific goods in particular ways. In other words, “ethical” is defined and standardized. Vancouver’s policy uses international standards of excellence, or “benchmarks.” It is not a “made in Vancouver” policy. The clauses in the policy documents that relate to the procurement of Fair Trade agricultural products are written in relation to the FLO International, TransFair Canada, and FTC standards. The articles of the policy texts that apply to apparel are written in relation to the ILO’s core Conventions (more or less).

As I explained in Chapter 3, Clause 8 of the SCC, “Working Hours”, does not conform fully to the norms governed by and accountable to the ILO and its relevant Conventions. The City of Vancouver was critiqued by MSN because of this discrepancy. The ILO’s headquarters are located in Genève, Switzerland. The ILO’s Conventions, as text-based and -mediated ruling relations of ethical trade, connect MSN activists in their office in Toronto to their representative who participated on the EPP task force, and Vancouver

Councillors and bureaucrats. Suppliers interested in applying for a City of Vancouver contract for products within the scope of the EPP now need to prove to the City that they are compliant with the SCC before the financial part of their bid is considered. The SCC is one criterion by which the City evaluates bids.¹⁸ The suppliers' work, like the work of activists and Vancouver Councillors and bureaucrats, is oriented to the relevant ethical trade standards. These people in multiple local sites are connected and coordinated by ruling relations in and across time and space. Their work is text-mediated and accountable; regulated; reproducible. Their actualities are objectified; their consciousness is formed and coordinated externally to their bodies. A similar analysis could be done relating to the FLO International located in Bonn, Germany, TransFair Canada located in Ottawa, the FTC standards that connect and coordinate people working in these institutions of ethical trade to producers, consumers, procurement specialists, and the like around the world.

The certification systems and standards that have been set up over the past couple decades to govern and monitor these types of trade actually act like management systems. Like any bureaucracy, people's actualities governed by certification systems and standards-setting organizations are made to fit into institutional categories. Categories and concepts enable us to see certain things in specific ways, while other things are veiled (as previously discussed in Chapter 3. I explicate this further in Chapter 5).

¹⁸ The CMT report submitted to Council in February, 2007 that I discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 inserted the following sentence into the SCC: "The SCC will be one of the criteria in the overall evaluation process" (City of Vancouver, 2005a). In the report, the CMT explained the reason for this request: "Evaluation criteria built around the EPP and SCC will be one of the criteria used in the decision to award a contract along with other criteria such as price, quality, value added services, fit for purpose, etc" (City of Vancouver, 2005a). It is a mistake to make a blanket argument that this allows the City to do an end-run around the EPP and SCC. It does allow the City some wiggle room though. If products that meet the standards set in the EPP and SCC are available, *and* satisfy the other criteria listed here then the City will buy and has bought those. The company that submits the lowest bid and meets all the bid criteria (one of them being accordance to the policy texts) has to be awarded the contract by law. Since Fair Trade and No Sweat commodities are of high quality and available at competitive prices to conventional goods, the City has to date only awarded contracts to suppliers compliant with the SCC for goods within the scope of the EPP.

For example, perhaps the most well-known Fair Trade standard to the general public is that producers are paid a “fair” price for their goods. In actuality, this means that producers are paid a fairer price than usual for their goods. The price for a commodity such as coffee is conventionally set in the market, a text-based and -mediated matrix of social relations that determines abstract value and connects and coordinates people at work around the world. The “fair” price is referred to as the “floor price.” It is the minimum price a Northern importer is allowed to pay for products that are traded through the FLO International’s system. Each commodity has its own floor price. The floor price is determined by the FLO International in negotiation with Northern businesses and Southern producers. Both of these constituencies, however, have complained that the FLO International does not facilitate a high enough level of participation from either group. The FLO International’s Board of Directors was reconfigured on May 25, 2007 in an attempt to remedy this issue. The Board now includes representation from Northern traders and Southern producers. It had not previously, amazingly enough.

While the FLO system is internationally recognized and the people working within it are doing commendable work, setting one floor price for a commodity is problematic. The social conditions are not the same in the Mexican and Guatemalan states that border one another, let alone Mexico and Ethiopia, for example. The institutional category of “floor price” does not make visible these realities. It does make observable what producers are paid at a minimum. Many, but not all, Northern businesses actually pay more than the floor price.

The concepts of “floor price,” “Fair Trade,” and “ethical trade” amongst other ideological apparatuses of these social movements also imply that the conventional capitalist system formulates the category “price” differently (via the market), that capitalism is not fair, unethical, and so on. Despite the differences in material conditions in local places of

production (Peru and Kenya, for example), the same Fair Trade standards, including the same floor price, are applied in every case for goods produced and traded through the FLO International system. Ethical trade systems and standards, including the FLO International system and FTC standards, essentialize people's actualities and externalize their experiences.¹⁹ They are needed, however, to make ethical trade standards transparent and to guarantee that at least these minimum standards are practiced (text-mediated work processes involving monitoring producers and traders and checking operations against standards).

The reason the FLO International does not set different standards for say Ghana, the Dominican Republic, and Côte d'Ivoire to better fit the actualities of these local places relates to the material conditions and means of the certifying agency.²⁰ The more local standards are intended to be, the more people and resources are needed to govern the international system. Ideally the system would be fit to local realities. Practically this is impossible. For the same reason, nation-states have laws that govern translocally, and international organizations like the UN set standards such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* which abstract experience. These abstractions are taken up in various ways in numerous local worksites with particular material conditions and means. Traces of UN declarations can be found in ethical trade standards, for instance.

The information provided above outlines a historic trajectory of ethical trade. How ethical trade and ethical purchasing are conceptualized to this point in time is part of the

¹⁹ The issue of standards essentializing actualities is why the "Working Hours" clause in the SCC diverges from the ILO Conventions. Jack said some task force members argued that in some industries at certain stages in the production process or in order to meet a contract deadline, workers are required to work more than usual if the manufacturing facility is to fulfill the contract on time. The argument, according to Jack, was that such circumstances do not happen all the time or in every industry, but these situations do arise, and after the busy period is over workers can go back to working their regular number of hours per week. The task force members making this argument, Jack reported, asserted that setting a standard, inflexible work week would not allow the City to procure goods produced under such terms. The City, thus, elected to depart from the ILO Conventions for the "Working Hour" clause. Jack was not entirely satisfied with this provision.

²⁰ Indeed, we can be more precise here in recognizing that actualities are not the same from town to town, let alone state to state, or country to country.

social organization of activists' work on these issues. The BCEPG was the coalition within which these activists worked. They attempted to, and successfully did, influence a course of action undertaken within a public institution to draft, adopt and implement a public policy using public funds. The coalition was built with people who played and continue to play different roles in this social organization given their expertise and location in various ethical trade movements and society. By engaging the City of Vancouver, participating in the writing of the EPP and SCC, and continuing to monitor the implementation of these texts, ethical trade advocates are working to change Vancouver's purchasing ideology and procedures from being strictly accountable to the bottom line to considering particular, text-mediated ethical standards but still being accountable to a bottom line.²¹ My thesis has explored the social organization of ethical trade advocacy work in hopes of expanding the knowledge of people doing it, including myself. This work is ongoing, in action.

²¹ The bottom line itself is a text-mediated social organization. It involves money (a text given abstract value), budgets (the City of Vancouver's and their suppliers', for instance), trading relations (mediated by contracts (texts), money (a text), labour and environmental laws (texts), and so on), accounting (a complex of text-mediated work processes), amongst other text-mediated relations.

Chapter 5: Rethinking “Politics” and Sociology *for* Activists

There are human activities, intentions, and relations that are not apparent as such in the actual material conditions of our work. The social organization of the setting is not wholly available to us in its appearance. What is here for us is the product of a social division of labor. If we heard in the things that we make use of – typewriter, paper, chair, table, walls – the voices of those who made them, we would hear the multitudinous voices of a whole society and beyond. Were it not for the time lapse involved, our own voices would be part of them. ~ Dorothy Smith

1. Introduction

Using institutional ethnography, from the standpoint of a Fair Trade activist I have explored activism as text-mediated work that is coordinated translocally by ruling relations. This is a new way of doing research *for* activists which needs to be developed further than I have done here. Inquiries into emotions and into how agency is allocated by ruling relations are worth looking into more, for instance.²² In this chapter I develop the generous concept of politics, an analytic tool that could be used in future sociology *for* activists – investigations aimed at making knowledge that will work for people trying to create change from below. I conclude with reflections on this emerging research approach.

2. Preliminary Thoughts on the Generous Concept of Politics

The personal is the political. ~ The women’s movement

We may not realize it or know much about it, but our routine activities are embedded in and coordinated by local and translocal political processes, complexes of social relations given determinant form by ideological apparatuses. Dorothy Smith (1987: 17) argues that “the ways in which we think about ourselves and one another and about our society – our images of how we should look, our homes, our lives, even our inner worlds – are given shape and distributed by the specialized work of people in universities, schools, in television, radio and

²² I have done the latter in a preliminary way in Chapter 3. For a succinct article on how agency is allocated and operates in the institutional mode, see “Schooling for Inequality” (D.E. Smith, 2000: 1147-1151).

newspapers, in advertising agencies, in book publishing and other organizations forming the 'ideological apparatuses' of our society." Ideological apparatuses mediate the ruling relations that coordinate people's actions and experiences in institutional contexts (ibid: 161). The ruling relations "are mediated by texts, by words, numbers, and images on paper, in computers, or on TV and movie screens" (ibid: 17). Administration, management, and governing are text-mediated communicative work. Thus, "[t]exts are the primary medium (though not the substance) of power" (ibid). Practices of power are ideologically determined forms of action – "images, vocabularies, concepts, abstract terms" (ibid). Political and organizational processes are accomplished by text-coordinated courses of action that get done in words, in language.

A narrowly defined concept of politics conceals many practices of power from view. Beginning in or around the 1960s the women's movement fought to expand the notions of work and of politics. From her experience in these struggles Dorothy Smith developed the generous concept of work (see Chapter 3 for further detail). Expanding the category "work" enables activities that take time, effort, and some competence, that are not conventionally considered work in accounting practices, to be named as work and explored as such, as I have done with activism. Prior to being named as work, the activities women (it was and still is predominantly women) did in the home, what we now might call housework or domestic labour, were not considered or ascribed value as work. These activities were seen, thought of, and spoken of differently. The women's movement fought to change the way these activities are conceptualized. When we change the way we conceptualize, we change the way we act – see, think, speak, and so on.

During the same time period, a popular slogan of the women's movement was "the personal *is* the political." In order to begin to see, think about, and speak about the

oppressions they were experiencing in their daily lives, women needed to name those experiences as political. The women's movement fought to change the common conceptualization of the time that their routine experiences of being excluded, abused, and so on, were personal problems, not political issues. They fought to expand the concept of "the political." They began in their experience. Dorothy Smith (1987: 59) explains, "[t]he resort to beginning from our experience and from our own subjectivities has been a fundamental and essential resource in the work of radicalizing (remaking from the root) the various ideological structures" of women's oppression.

Working for political change involves personal change of yourself as activist as well as change in the practices of the people which your activism engages. Personal change itself is social as people are part of the social. But, personal change is also political. The women's movement contended and still maintains that experience is political, that the personal *is* the political. This major political discovery led Dorothy Smith to develop a sociology *for* women (what is now conceptualized as a sociology *for* people). She called this method of inquiry institutional ethnography. She explains,

[t]his equation [the personal *is* the political] locates an oppression invading our [women's] most intimate relationships, the immediate particularities of our lives, the *power relations* between persons. We have seen that intimate and personal experiences of oppression are anchored in and sustained by a patriarchal organization of ruling. Our political vision has denied, for the first time, the distinction between the powers of the public and the private domains. The method of thinking and writing sociology that I have put forward here has intended the *systematic* development of a consciousness that traces these relations from this standpoint, the standpoint of she who stands at the beginning of her acts of consciousness (D.E. Smith 1987: 211-212, my emphasis of "power relations").

Drawing on the work of the women's movement, Dorothy Smith's (1987) generous concept of work, and institutional ethnography as a research approach, in this section of my thesis I

develop the generous concept of politics, a tool for explicating the politics in which people's everyday/everynight actualities – their sensually, locally experienced world – are embedded.

Following Dorothy Smith (1987), institutional ethnographers employ Marx's ontology of the social. We see the social world as it is, continually coming about by the coordinating and concerting activities of people – that is, the social happens, it is not an ensemble of meaning. We begin research in the actualities of everyday/everynight reality, not in speculation using a prescriptive theoretical framework, and seek to explicate rather than explain how those actualities are organized by and hook into extralocal, text-mediated ruling relations. Such an understanding can raise consciousness of the relations that shape our locally lived actualities.

Social relations “arise in the articulation of work processes and work organization in one setting to those of others” (1987: 175). Institutional ethnographers explore and explicate “work processes and other practical activities as these are rendered accountable within the ideological schemata of the institution. The latter are not merely in thought but are also practical activities and in some contexts work processes, organized in relations of textual communication” (1987: 176). Ideological schemata do not themselves comprise institutional forms. Relations between ideology and actual happenings do (*ibid*).

In institutional contexts, matrixes of generalizable social relations are manufactured by people's actual doings, and generate the bases of experience in characteristic ways (1987: 175-176). “Order”, in the institutional mode, “arises in and is accomplished by the actual practices of actual individuals, including their practices of reasoning, interpreting, rendering what has happened accountable” (*ibid*: 175). The institutional ethnographer seeks to explicate how experience is coordinated by and given determinate shape by institutional relations. Smith (*ibid*) contends that “[a] grasp of a set of interlinked institutional relations

will explicate the generalizing relations determining its characteristic and diverse bases of experience.” These relations are ordinarily invisible (ibid: 160). Understanding the determinants of experience has empirical force for consciousness-raising efforts to reveal the common foundations of oppression (ibid: 176). Once revealed, these foundations can be struggled against. Institutional ethnography can be used to make such revelations.

In her groundbreaking book *The Everyday World as Problematic*, Smith (1987) discusses the complexity of creating a concept that can be used to further social analysis but not objectify people at the same time. Institutional ethnography is a political undertaking that “is constrained by the project of creating a way of seeing, from where we actually live, into the powers, processes, and relations that organize and determine the everyday context of that seeing” (1987: 9). An important question to ask when creating an analytic concept for use in institutional ethnographic research is what does the concept tell us about the characteristics of the social relations we seek to explicate?

The generous concept of politics is meant to aid us in explicating the political *in* the social. “The political” pertains to systems of ruling, not just formal governmental institutions like the courts, police, parliament, and so on. The term refers to aspects of the social that are shaped by partisan interests, interests that serve to benefit an individual or social group over another or others, that is, to privilege some while oppressing others. Political relations are of power and of authority. Power and authority are socially organized, and they give determinate shape to social relations. Thus, the political does not arise spontaneously. It is manufactured socially by courses of action coordinated ongoingly by relations of ruling. In however seemingly small or large a way, we all participate in its production. We are political beings. Our everyday/everynight actions are part of “relations of ruling the society, the relations that put it together, coordinate its work, manage its economic processes, generally

keep it running, and regulate and control it” (1987: 19). It is important to recognize that everyone participates in the political. Such an orientation means that we can and do affect local and extended political processes in our actions. We are also affected by these processes, including in what and how we see, think about, and talk about politics.

To begin to see, think about, and talk about how politics play out in the social, in our lives – our actions and experiences, we first need to be able to name experiences and actions as political. We talk social organization, often unconsciously (D.E. Smith, 1987: 189). “The language of the setting”, Dorothy Smith (*ibid*) notes, “observes the relations of its social organization” (1987: 189). Consciousness-raising involves language. The way we speak of the social makes some of its properties visible and others invisible. Consciousness-raising thus involves changing the ways in which we and others speak of the material realities of our daily lives.

Concepts like “politics” and “political” can be and are used to organize and interpret sequences of action. They provide a method of analyzing, assembling, categorically identifying, and describing how a course of action ties into local and translocal relations of power. Provided subjects are competent in its conceptual methods, the category “political” gives them a procedure for analyzing their own work practices in terms of how their doings participate in producing relations of power. Hence, the generous concept of politics is about conceptualization. Conceptualization itself is political (Walker, 1990). *How* we conceptualize is also political, as institutional ethnographers are already well aware given our break with conventional methods of knowledge production that objectify actualities.

Conceptualization is an act done in language. It is social, like all human action. Language, like actions and experiences, is socially organized. When language is used in the description of the everyday/everynight world, as it routinely is, the world we describe and

the language we use to describe it are embedded in and shaped by social relations beyond the local. Language, however, “expresses relations not peculiar to the particular setting it describes” (D.E. Smith, 1987: 156). Concepts, categories, ideologies, and discourses are “anchored in and depending for their meaning on a larger complex of social relations” (ibid). Thus, an object like coffee or apparel is “not reducible to the object that we can in imagination bring before us when we name it. The terms tie the material entity into social relations that constitute it as what it is in terms of uses, functions, entitlements, ownership” (ibid). Description of the particular “gives access to that which is not particular since it is embedded in categories whose meaning reaches into the complex of social relations our inquiry would explicate” (ibid: 157). Therefore, institutional ethnographers are not confined “to particular descriptions of local settings without possibility of generalization” (ibid).

To conceptualize is to put something into words, to name it, to make it social (give it social existence), intelligible, and actionable – that is, it becomes observable-reportable in the way, the shape, the form that it has been conceptualized; it can then be taken up, spoken of, thought of, seen, experienced in the specific ways that its conceptualization enables. Conceptualization thus affects what is made visible and what is concealed. It affects treatment of the subject matter. Restricted notions of politics confine political consciousness: what we can know of politically and how we can think of, speak of, and analyze it as such. Consciousness is formed and coordinated by ruling relations, external to our bodies. A generous concept of politics can be used to raise consciousness, to explicate the complex of power relations that give shape to our ideologies which organize our doings.

In being more generous in our conceptualization of the political as a complex of power relations we are enabled to name acts and experiences as political. Naming an act or an experience (which itself occurs in action) as political provides a point of entry into the

complex of power relations that that action or experience is embedded. The political aspects of our lives are already there to be discovered, named, explicated, complied to or revolted against. As Dorothy Smith (1987: 18) puts it, “we have assented to...authority and can withdraw our assent.” Withdraw of assent presupposes that we recognize that we are assenting, that we have named it as such, that we want to withdraw our assent. Discovery happens in action and may incite further action. Naming enables inquiry, inquiry can raise consciousness, consciousness informs and shapes action, change happens through action. Action is a reaction to what is perceived.

Actions, including political action, occur in determinate material contexts – conditions, time, and effort, all of which are consequential for how individuals and groups proceed. Politics are thus not to be seen in isolation from their history or history itself and the social relations of its making. Politics occur in and across time. They are neither eternal nor inevitable. They are not necessarily rational either, although they may be spoken of as such. Rationality itself is political, and is socially organized. What is considered rational in any given time and place is an effect of power. Rationality is socially constructed, as is politics by the co-ordered and co-ordinated activities of people, including ourselves. Rationality and politics are effects of relations of power. Thus, politics happen. They can happen differently; they can be changed. Political change is a power struggle.

Activists working for political change, like people going about their day-to-day work, do so in particular, material conditions and means. The point of the generous concept of work is not, as Dorothy Smith (1987: 166) says, “to mark a distinction between what is work and what is not work, but rather to deploy a concept that will return us to the actualities of what people do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations.” Similarly, distinguishing what is political and what is not political is not really the point of

having a generous concept of politics. It is a notion we can deploy in explicating how what people do on a day-to-day basis under definite conditions and in definite situations is an effect of politics, of power relations, including the way ruling relations give definite shape to our work and our experiences. The material conditions and means that the generous concept of work anchors us in are themselves effects of politics, of power relations. They can be named as such and explicated as such when the point of entry to such an analysis is enabled by the conceptual lens of a generous concept of politics.

The social, including institutional procedures, are accomplished through courses of action – that is, work. *How* that work is done, by whom, under what conditions, through what means, and that it is even conceptualized as work are effects of politics, of relations of power. The institutional ethnographer's field of inquiry is the matrix of work processes that accomplish the institutional. The institutional is a political complex comprising relations of power. Relations in institutional settings are mediated by texts. Texts are the medium, although not the substance, of power in a social organization coordinated by ruling relations. Ruling relations give rise to particular material effects. These effects are the result of relations of power, political relations that coordinate people's doings and can be struggled against. As I illustrated earlier, the struggle itself is organized by ruling relations. Courses of political action can problematize and disrupt ruling, but at the same time these courses of actions may be coordinated by other ruling relations. Courses of action that prevent or marginalize disruption are also political and organized by ruling relations. Actions aimed at disruption, and actions aimed at preventing or marginalizing disruption may be coordinated by some of the same ruling relations. For instance, political movements need to be financed, so these courses of action are coordinated by texts ascribed monetary value. Similarly, riot squads, police battalions, militaries, the legal system, and so on all involve financing.

Dorothy Smith (1987: 127) explains that “the social itself...creates the conditions of its own observability.” The political is present in the everyday/everynight social world, but not always immediately evident. As Smith (1987: 91) points out, “the everyday world is neither transparent nor obvious...its inner determinations are not discoverable within it.” The material conditions and means “of our action and experience are organized by relations and processes outside them and beyond our power of control” (ibid: 92). The local is thus “not fully understandable within its own scope” (ibid: 92). While transformation happens locally as an effect of people’s co-ordered and coordinated doings, “[t]he logic of transformation is elsewhere” (ibid: 94). These extralocal logics are ruling relations. In addressing the ruling relations “[w]e are addressing a more general property of the social relations of capitalism and, specifically, of corporate or monopoly capitalism, for it is in capitalism that the socially organized forms, in and through which individuals depend upon one another, become externalized as a differentiated system of relations” (1987: 95). Individuals are necessarily present and active in the political – in relations of power, but they do not appear as such in all the ways that they are. The invisibility of subjects in the political as a complex of social relations is a conceptual effect, a feature of the particular way in which politics and trade are organized in a capitalist mode of production.

The ideological practices of capitalist society coordinate people to set aside as irrelevant, to deny, to not even really know about, and to obliterate thought and questioning of where commodities come from and how they are made and traded. Capitalist organized economics enforces an exclusion of certain concerns and interests. Ethical trade activists work politically in particular ways coordinated by ruling relations to make visible aspects of, but not all of, what the rulers, those in positions of power, have made invisible by the way the workings of the world are conceptualized by ideologies of the ruling class, ideologies of

neoliberalism. The proliferation of the neoliberal agenda depends on the silence and compliance of everyday people in their daily lives.

Members of ethical trade movements are doing political work in trying to make visible the exploitative aspects of commodity production and trade that are not immediately evident. This is political because it problematizes the inequities involved in the manufacturing and exchange of goods. It questions how products got to our local store shelves, to warehouses for e-businesses, into our kitchen cupboards, our closets, our homes, and our lives. It questions the bottom line, to re-conceptualize it. It aims to make the lives of the workers producing these items more visible to consumers. Everyone is a consumer. Consumption is a fundamental part of life and of the social. What, how, when, why, where, and how much people consume is political. What activists make visible and how they do it is coordinated by ruling relations mediated by ideological discourses.

A generous concept of politics can aid the researcher in analyzing the politics of the everyday/everynight, such as the politics of consumption and the politics of conceptualization. The characteristics of relations – such as relations of production and consumption, or experiences of exclusion, abuse, and so on in routine activities – that relate to, are an effect of, or otherwise involve relations of power can be named as political by deploying a generous concept of politics. Once named as such, given social existence as such, they can be explicated as such. Explication can elucidate the root of the issue, and can inform actions to radicalize (remake from the root) it.

3. Sociology *for* Activists at Work

In *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, Dorothy Smith (1987) gives practical substance to a feminist sociology that begins from the standpoint of people (which, at this

point in her career, she referred to as the standpoint of women). This groundbreaking book outlines an initial sketch of the institutional ethnographic research practices that I have applied to the study of the social organization of activist work. In “Political Activist as Ethnographer”, George Smith (originally published in 1990, reprinted as 2006: 44-70) drafted a preliminary sketch of how one might apply institutional ethnography (IE) to an inquiry aimed at doing research *for* activists. George Smith called this research approach “political activist ethnography” (PAE).

PAE is a specialized form of IE. Not enough work has been done using this specialized approach since its initial entry into the ruling relations of scholarly literature. In PAE, the ethnographer does research as she or he works as a political activist. Thus, activism is conceptualized and used as a research practice. In his pioneering essay, George Smith implicitly writes about activism as work. His focus is more on what can be found out from activists’ confrontation with institutions, what he called politico-administrative régimes. He does not explicate the social organization of activism, as I have done here.

As Dorothy Smith (1987: 166-167) outlined, IE is a research approach with three main procedures. The first involves explicating the everyday/everynight work of the subjects of inquiry, activists in the context of my thesis and George Smith’s essay (though he does not explicitly explore the work of activists). The second involves locating that work in the local and translocal social relations in which it is embedded. George Smith explicated the local and translocal relations of politico-administrative régimes that were pertinent to his research *for* AIDS and gay liberation activists. He did not explore the local and translocal relations of the struggle itself. The third procedure of IE involves explicating how ideologies and discourses are determinants of those local and translocal relations. In this thesis, I have sought to anchor the study of the social organization of activist work – what might be called

political activist ethnography or the sociology *for* activists – in these foundational principles and practices of IE.

While George Smith (2006: 44-70) offers us an initial sketch of one way to do such research, he does not explicitly explicate activism as work, as I have said. *Sociology for Changing the World: Social Movements/Social Research*, in which George Smith's landmark essay is reprinted, offers us a useful explication of how conventional studies *of* social movements objectify the actualities of activists (Frampton et al., 2006: 11-15). This book points to the need to develop sociology *for* activists. The book overall, however, does not remain very faithful to IE and leaves me wanting more practical substance for *how* we might do sociology *for* activists.

Marie Campbell's (2006) and Gary Kinsman's (2006) chapters of the book offer us some useful insights for doing sociology *for* activists. Campbell's chapter is faithful to the reflexive-materialism of IE, but she does not recognize that activists' perspectives are embedded in the officialdom of their social movements. Kinsman offers an initial sketch of how to map the social relations of struggle, but he does not recognize that while activists oppose, resist, and transform *some* ruling relations, the struggle *itself* is socially organized and coordinated by ruling relations and participates in them. His initial sketch of how to map the social relations of struggle, thus, maps the ruling relations activists confront, but does not map the ruling relations of the struggle itself. Neither Campbell nor Kinsman, like George Smith, explicitly analyzes activism as work. It is not my intent to slight the contributions of any of these researchers. Rather, I wish to reflect on what my thesis has contributed to the young tradition their research also contributes to, the sociology *for* activists.

We have only begun to know how to begin from our experience as activists and make ourselves as activists the subjects of the socially organized act of inquiry. In doing

research in this way, my main discoveries are that activism is work, and that work, while being done locally, is coordinated translocally by ruling relations, and can be investigated as such using IE. This research approach is a social and political consciousness-raising tool.

Activists' agendas are shaped by what they make problematic. This is organized and given determinate form in relation to a matrix of text-mediated power relations which the activist aims to change in one way or another, and in relation to the intermingling complex of the ruling relations of the struggle itself. What and how activists are able to see, speak, and act is organized by the ideological practices of the ruling relations that coordinate their work translocally in and across time. Ideology conceals actualities, as the women's movement found out when they began to recognize that the personal is the political in the mid-twentieth century. Using IE to do research *for* activists can shed light on how things come about in the specific ways that they do, how we might work to change them, and how that work in itself comes about in the particular way that it does because of the ideological apparatuses that organize it.

Sociology *for* activists thus aims to make knowledge and skills available to activists. The researcher who deploys this method of inquiry, who might her/himself be an activist, does so because she or he wants to contribute to the struggle, not objectify the actualities of those who work to create political change as conventional studies *of* social movements do. Sociology *for* activists begins from activists' experience, and draws on it as its primary source. This research approach thus re-centers inquiry into social movements. Investigation starts from an activist standpoint, and their everyday work. Beginning with what activists do – their work – enables an exploration of how activism is socially organized, and how activism might be done more efficiently and effectively.

The struggle occurs on the terrain of the ruling relations, on ideological ground (D.E. Smith, 1987). This is not to suggest that activist work is not material or practical, but that those material doings, those practices, are organized by language, discourses, ideologies, concepts, categories that coordinate ruling relations – translocal, text-mediated, objectified and objectifying social relations. Activists' experiences and concerns are not independent of or separate from determinations in relations beyond them. Explicating activism as work entails a systematic analysis of what activists actually do and how those doings hook into and are coordinated by ruling relations, including those of the struggle itself.

Developing this new way of doing research *for* activists using institutional ethnography, and drawing on Dorothy Smith's (1987) generous concept of work and the work of the women's movement led me to the discovery of the generous concept of politics, an analytic tool that can be used in institutional ethnographic social and political consciousness-raising. Writing up the analysis in my thesis has also enabled and forced me to critically self-reflect on ethical trade movements and the systems of exchange connected to them, particularly the Fair Trade movement and system of exchange. I believe in the power of Fair Trade, I have seen it. But that does not mean that I do not recognize that Fair Trade has its limitations and can be improved. In conceptualizing activism as work, I have explicated the social organization of ethical trade itself. This piece of social cartography has pointed to areas in which movements for ethical trade can be improved, and the work of activists in these movements can be done more efficiently and effectively.

Activist ethnographers can work with activists to develop handles on extralocal social and political forces, to explicate from activists' experiences the discourses, ideologies, and ruling relations that shape those experiences. This specialized research complements the research, knowledge, and reflection activists' already do in their local work settings.

Sociology *for* activists can in this way expand the understanding activists' have of the struggle, the external complex of social relations in which activists' work is embedded, the power of their actions, and how their work might be done more effectively and efficiently by pointing out areas and strategies for future action.

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