THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF
THE ONTARIO MINIMUM WAGE CAMPAIGN

by

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Abstract

My dissertation research is interdisciplinary in nature, at the nexus of three areas of scholarly work and actual practices: union renewal and non-unionized workers-rights organizing in Canada and the US; feminist, anti-racist Marxian approaches to class relations as being racialized, gendered and bureaucratic; and, the institutional ethnographic method of inquiry into social reality. My empirical focus is on the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign (OMWC).

The OMWC was a Toronto-based labour-community project to raise the minimum wage to $10 per hour. It was started in 2001 by Justice for Workers (J4W), was carried on by the Ontario Needs a Raise coalition (ONR) from 2003 to 2006, and was re-launched in 2007 by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) in association with some community groups. The OMWC brought together across time and space activist groups, community agencies and labour organizations, all of whose volunteers, members, clients, educators, officials and staff were the agents and/or targets of the campaign.

The apparent victory of the OMWC is quite contested. Local campaign realities were compartmentalized in numerous ways and OMWC involvement met different institutionally specific and coordinated needs. And while coalitions generally arise as vehicles to transcend such institutional separation, the campaign was challenged to materially bridge such
compartmentalization. The fragmentation of reality amongst institutions and how it was managed in practice affected how collaboration, participation, and decision-making happened and appeared to have happened in organizing and educational activities. While there were at times transformative intentions, there was generally a pragmatic anti-racist organizing practice and effect.

I contend that the complexity of contemporary society poses great challenges for the possibilities for human-agency based labour-community workers-rights organizing with a broad-based, political capacity for movement building orientation. I suggest that this is largely so because the social coordination of what we do and what we understand about what we do turns on at least three components of social reality: an institution-based organization of multi-layered social relations that is generally locally circumscribed but extralocally driven; a conditioned individually-driven orientation to meeting human needs; and an ideological orientation to both the content of ideas and thought, and the process of that reasoning.
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Chapter One:
Researching and Organizing the OMWC

The Researcher, the Activist and this Inquiry

The Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign (OMWC) was a Toronto-based labour-community project to raise the minimum wage to $10 per hour that started in 2001, was revived briefly in 2007, and ebbed and flowed in the years between. The OMWC brought together across time and space activist groups, community agencies and labour organizations, all of whose volunteers, members, clients, educators, officials and staff were the agents and/or targets of the campaign. There were three phases of the campaign:

1. 2001-2003, led by Justice for Workers (J4W);
2. 2003-2006, carried on by the Ontario Needs a Raise coalition (ONR), and
3. 2007, re-launched by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) in association with some community groups.

My interest in investigating the social organization of this labour-community workers-rights campaign was developed through a number of years of community and union organizing activity and reflection. I was a member of Justice for Workers, actively participating in the research, political discussions, outreach and organizing of both J4W and of the earlier challenge led by the Employment Standards Working Group (ESWG) against the regressive reforms leveled at employment standards by the Harris Provincial Conservative government initiated in 1999 (Thomas, 2009). I also wrote Taking Responsibility, Taking Direction: White Anti-Racism In Canada (2005), which explored what I saw as a fundamental aspect of contemporary movement-building difficulties. Increasing levels of poverty, precariousness of work, and
erosion of migrant and workers rights, even as a fragmented left has continued with various kinds of activity, led me to an increased questioning of collective contemporary organizing praxis.

In that particular period of re-regulatory attacks on workers, I had a part-time job in a workplace unionized by the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) union. I belonged to a composite local, made up of a range of workers (couriers, engineers, factory workers, and co-op housing staff). I worked, and was relatively well paid, 3 1/2 days per week. As a feminist anti-racist unionist, while I was a shop steward in the CEP I found not only my employer to be overtly displeased with my militancy, I also found the union to be more covertly hostile to my minor attempts at encouraging rank-and-file democracy. I was frequently told that things were just not done in the ways I proposed and my small efforts to discuss issues with a larger group of local members (such as bringing together women members across the local) were quietly sidelined or made ineffective. My local executive was silent on the J4W proposal made to them to endorse and fund the $10 an hour demand and campaign. This hourly rate was higher than the collectively bargained wages of a number of our local’s members at the time. Research participants in this study share similar experiences with their unions and both they and I analyze how the historically evolved legal-political arrangements of the union as an institution condition this reality to be so. I will discuss in Chapter Two what these arrangements are and how they have come to be.

Through such union activity and community organizing (for example, against war, in various international solidarity efforts and on workers rights projects) I have come to the view that socially progressive people in our time and place that support some kind of positive, social-change oriented movement building are loathe to undertake an ongoing critical political analysis
of our ideas and activities. Unionists and community organizers generally avoid the kind of
difficult, critical discussions that would locate us individually and collectively within socially
organized relations, as unavoidably active participants in challenging and reproducing this
organization. It is true that people’s differential degrees of well-being and freedom are
profoundly conditioned by capitalist social relations that are, amongst other forms of power,
racialized and gendered. And social life is increasingly privatized and communities of work and
home continue to be reorganized (Frege, Heery, & Turner, 2004). And in the time and place in
which I have done this research, there is little to show for “infrastructures of dissent” (Sears,
2009), forums and forms of interaction that historically have led to/developed from informal and
formal political discussions and socially supportive practices becoming commonplace. The
increasingly economistic, skills-based process of working people’s formal education has also
“undercut the tradition of the worker-intellectual, who often had very limited formal education
but a rich cultural formation” (p. 21). I have observed and participated in the reproduction of the
lack of space for dissent: organizers do not seem to be able to really dialogue in an open,
questioning, non-sectarian political and social way. There may well be discussions of strategies
and tactics, yet people are quick to level blame at capitalist social relations as determining all of
the negative conditions of struggle and life. However, when activists and organizers generally try
to look collectively at the complexity of what we are doing, attempts to do so often have a
combined moral and ideological drive: “good” ideas (beliefs and tactics) are implicitly or
explicitly the “right” ones and the degree of reality organizers and activists share is organized on
that basis. Interventions that would suggest another way of seeing or doing things become thus
“bad” and “wrong”, outside of a simultaneously layered and fragmented shared reality.
By the time the 2007 OMWC phase started I had another higher-waged, part-time unionized job. The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local I am in is also a local made up of small scattered sub-locals of campus-based activist groups, graduate student association and union staff, whose delegates meet at annual conventions. While this CUPE local is widely known as a very progressive one within a relatively more progressive union, it is still structured by the same legal-political restrictions of unions in general. Meetings, elections and officials’ duties are generally carried out as in most other locals. One difference in this local is that community/union activists and labour officials are often embodied in the same people, and frequently in a determinedly uncritical way. Given the tendency I see of activists to see themselves outside of social relations, there is an overshadowing, unexplicated dynamic in that kind of environment that I find makes it difficult to discuss political issues in a complex manner. I will explain this further as I discuss in detail my social relations conceptual orientation in Chapter Three. I will also build on that framework in Chapter Four as I explore D. Smith’s (1987, 1990, 2005) institutional ethnography, a method of inquiry she developed that uncovers the varying locality and translocality of extralocal origin social relations.

At the July 2007 convention of my union local, a request by the TYRLC for a $150 donation was on the meeting agenda. In that meeting, I found that my attempts at discussion of the campaign trajectory, the TYRLC’s goals and interests, and questions on the actual nature of rank-and-file mobilization were treated as challenges to solidarity within the labour movement. As I will explore in Chapter Four, what Berger and Luckmann (1966) name as a “tension in consciousness” was apparent on the faces of a number of silent members. I found it frustrating and actually surreal that a room made up of various kinds of “radical activists” did not want to have a discussion on what donating money to officialdom meant politically to our local and
people’s sense of movement. I think now that people did not know how or what it meant to have such a discussion. The topic of raising the minimum wage was treated as an object outside of that local setting, an object located in (but not of) social relations that were elsewhere initiated, and the TYRLC officialdom’s campaign was a translocal coordinating vehicle to makes changes in that “thing” the minimum wage was. It was thus a fact that it was “good” to fund the campaign. The union local officials actively reacted to my attempts to discuss why this was “good” and how it would lead to more member involvement, as an undermining of the shared reality, the belief in the “rightness” of union-based activities. As union members saw those officials more as activists than officials, they had a double, masked moral and institutional authority for what amounts to local social control, using language that re-affirms the notion of union solidarity to prevent debate. Two longer time officials eloquently and forcefully made vague promises of future mobilization of our membership, along with re-affirmations of the “goodness” of the campaign. The motion to approve the donation heartily and quickly passed. As I explore further in Chapter Four, a local dialectical cycle of internalization of an already externalized then objectified reality was again completed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). As I will continue to explore in Chapter Five, the reality maintenance that goes on in union settings like this inherently requires contradictory activity and messaging because of the way unions have come to be structured and so the people in them function.

I see the OMWC as an example of labour-community workers-rights campaigns that continue to generate and reproduce mobilization moments that bring “community” and “union” together without engaging in activity that truly builds workers’ collectivity, consciousness and ongoing unity. The result is a lack of sustained momentum needed to build broad-based transformative workers’ movements “in the struggle against global capitalism” (TYRLC, 2005).
Investigating the social organization of the OMWC across time and space has led me to having a deeper understanding of the nature of the moment/movement separation in this politically significant campaign that involved many people, in various social locations, and a number of organizations. My dissertation is therefore a contribution to developing a better collective appreciation of the political and intellectual challenges of labour-community workers-rights organizing in our conjuncture.

Many committed and dedicated organizers and educators share at least some of the concerns and questions I have raised, in different ways. I thus see myself as having been a kind of intellectual liaison in my dissertation research, uncovering and exploring the content of both shared and disparate realities, the links, fragmentations and the meanings made in active social process. At the same time, I am not a neutral party and so cannot pretend to stand outside either the OMWC or my research on it. And, my past activism and ongoing social change beliefs mean that I have a particular political location in my research. There was thus an unavoidable tension in the analysis and writing process that arose from these combined insider and liaison realities. My standpoint is simultaneously and inescapably that of an organizer and a scholar. What I know about organizing and the political perspective I have on movement building come from having been an organizer in a range of projects with diverse groups of people over a number of years. This knowledge naturally drives and influences me as a scholar. Yet it does not determine my scholarship. In fact, being able to access the time, space and financial resources for academically organized reflection has allowed me a distance from the activity of organizing that has aided in critical analysis of the OMWC work.
Thesis Overview

As I have noted, I contend that there is lack of movement-building momentum arising from numerous and often-isolated mobilization moments in labour-community workers-rights efforts. To contribute to an understanding of why this is so, I have combined areas of three types of scholarly work that together create my orientation towards workers rights research as that of investigating the social relations of class struggle. These are: union renewal and non-unionized workers-rights organizing; feminist, anti-racist Marxian approaches to class relations; and the institutional ethnographic method of inquiry into social reality.

The time and place of the OMWC gives what occurred, who was involved and people’s understanding of it specificity. However, consciousness and social activity are not isolated in particular moments or places even if they might appear to be. Social relations are historically developed and dynamic patterned human activity. They are in motion both by us and to us, where we are and in places extralocal to us. The relations are many and intertwined and include those of the state and labour market, of class, race, gender and bureaucracy. In contemporary society, with the division of labour having evolved to being organized on a deeply institutional basis, the content of relations are codified and power is imbued in different ways in the informal and formal practices, policies, laws, regulations and norms that make up these social relations. Much of how this happens is hidden from people’s view. And what happens extralocally is strongly conditioning and translocally coordinating of local activity. Yet it is not completely determining.

How the legal-political arrangements of unions were laid down some 70 years ago thus has much to do with how and why unions and other workers rights groups today approach and act in coalition in the ongoing era of political economic conflict and crisis. Thus, in Chapter
Two, I will situate the OMWC in contemporary union renewal efforts and the historical development of unions in Canada. I will also introduce the various coalitions of the OMWC. Chapter Two thus provides an historical and concrete context for this research. The list of abbreviations in Appendix A and the OMWC chronology in Appendix B are presented for greater clarification. In Chapter Three I present my conceptual orientation, demonstrating how class relations are racialized, gendered as well as bureaucratically organized in this research context. In addition, they are inherently conflictual relations made by actual people that are also organizationally inscribed. In Chapter Four, I will continue to develop this conceptualization as I explore and build on the institutional ethnographic (IE) method of inquiry for its application in the labour-community setting. I also present how I collected and analyzed the data in my research. IE provides a way to concretely inter-connect activity and consciousness in research and do so in a way that dialectically engages the local, extralocal and translocal. I suggest that IE as I apply it also allows for an expanded understanding of reality creation and apprehension, including the contemporary role of ideology, in terms of what people and groups are doing, how it is happening and why. That is, how are such patterns set, changed and/or disrupted? The work in Chapters Three and Four produce four analytical concepts that I apply to the data presented in Chapters Five through Eight. These concepts are: social relations, ideology, ideological practice and transformative/pragmatic anti-racism.

Once these three frames are explored and connected, Chapter Five lays the foundation for the data analysis through an uncovering of the complexity of the multiple layers of reality and appearance of reality in the OMWC, as well of the translocal links and disjunctures that conditioned the campaign’s social organization across time and space. In Chapter Six I compare and contrast two predominating methods of organizing praxis that occurred in the OMWC and in
labour-community coalitions more generally. The relationship between the campaign and union renewal and revitalization in the US and Canada is explored in Chapter Seven. Chapter Eight is a discussion of workers’ education and learning throughout the OMWC and how they were related to relation to the organizing activities and approaches of the campaign. In the concluding Chapter Nine I summarize my findings and present my analysis of a complex relationship that is difficult to grapple with in contemporary workers-rights organizing, given the equally complex contemporary social relations we live and that condition class struggle. This is the relationship between human-agency based social change activity, ideology/ideological practice, and the profoundly institutionalized organization of everyday life.
Chapter Two:
Unions, Renewal and the Contemporary Context for an OMWC

Introduction

Neoliberal changes to the global economy in the 1970s led to declining unionization levels and so union dues, sparking the engagement of the organizations of unionized workers in the US and Canada in various forms of union renewal for their basic survival. Yet, Forrest (2009) points out that renewal and labour-community organizing is not wholly new. She observes that the unionized labour movement’s self-conscious orientation to organizing for broader economic equality is historically recurring. Frege et al. (2004) also note that, “coalition-building is not a recent innovation, devised by new social movement unions, but has long formed part of labour’s repertoire” (p. 137). Similar to Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) President John Cartwright’s notion of “political bargaining” (TYRLC, 2008a) discussed in upcoming chapters, Forrest (2009) calls these efforts that focus not only on unionized workplace concerns but also on larger social issues as “bargaining for equality” (p. 98). She suggests that prior to the period of union renewal in 1990s, there were two other recent historical times – from “the mid-1930s to mid-1950s and the 1970s to 1980s” (p. 97) – during which Canadian unions sought to build labour-community coalitions with specific equality goals.

Although the crisis in US bureaucratic trade unionism that started in the 1990s (Moody, 2007) and the associated decline in union density has been later and less severe in Canada, there are more similarities than differences between Canadian and US renewal approaches. This is at least in part due to the fact that, “28 per cent of Canadian union members belong to American-based international unions” (Yates, 2007, p. 59), and so are deeply influenced by what goes on in the US. The labour legislation governing unions in Canada is also a borrowed version of the US
Wagner Act of 1935 (Wells, 1995; Yates, 2007). As discussed in detail in chapters to come, in both countries unions are engaged in various types of union renewal strategies with union size, labour-market sector focus and the influence of community-based organizations on workers or potential future membership conditioning their practice. Since the late 1980s in the US and somewhat later in Canada, labour-community relationships have been rediscovered as key campaign vehicles (Frege et al., 2004; Kainer, 2009; Kumar & Schenk, 2006; Reynolds, 2004; Tattersall, 2005, 2009, 2010), with a range of organizations participating. Labour councils (Gapasin, 2001; Gapasin & Wiel, 1998; Ness, 2001; Nissen 2004; Yates, 2008) and workers centres (Fine, 2006; Jayaraman & Ness, 2005) have become important institutional focal points for organizing activity. While they may share some visible tactics, place value on workers’ education, have some focus on racialized worker representation and anti-racist change, and both groups are oriented towards organizing workers, they generally have different political goals as well as strategic orientations. Such differences inform the effectiveness of joint campaigns. Significantly, in unions and their coordinating bodies, “unionizing” is often implicitly synonymous with “organizing”. The historical trajectory of the development of union institutions informs these politically and strategically different orientations to engagement in class struggle as does the ongoing dynamic social conditions under which people’s coordinated activity is carried out. While the activity of workers centres will be discussed further in upcoming chapters, I will now review the historical development of union legal-political arrangements as these social relations have a significant conditioning effect on most workers rights organizing activity today.

**The Evolution of Unionized Labour Organizations**

As much as was gained by the arrival of industrial legality, then, so too was something lost. A part of that loss was the restructuring of industrial unionism
away from its mobilizing movement-oriented character of the early 1940s and into the legalistic, business form of the post-war period. (Palmer, 1992, p. 284)

Today, “union interests” are by no means synonymous with “working class interests.” In exploring the complexity of how this is so, my work departs from much of the labour-community coalition scholarship. Rather than prioritizing in investigation and analysis roles, interests and/or scales of activity (Frege et al., 2004; Tatersall, 2010) my focus is on the social processes of creating, reproducing and challenging relations of people that are state and labour-market conditioned as well as constitutive of how labour and community take place. Having an historical orientation to contemporary unions as institutions is important for grounding this inquiry into workers-rights organizing in such a class relations and struggle perspective.

Unions vary greatly in terms of internal democracy and broader social orientation yet they all arise from the same fight for “human dignity.” As Jackson (2005) notes, “Unions emerge from and are a product of the fundamental difference of interests between workers and employers” and “the fundamental recognition that there is strength in numbers” (p. 144). They have a “truly mass membership, much larger than that of any other movement”, members who are structurally related in a way that other consumer- or other volunteer-based organizations are not (Camfield, 2008, pp. 71-72). In Canada, the relative labour-law and so union stability “has meant that unions continue to control considerable resources, especially in comparison to social justice and informal workplace rights groups” (Yates, 2007, p. 62). Taking a broad interpretation of the understanding that the union “goal is to improve the working conditions of all workers rather than to raise the wages of a small union elite” (Jackson, 2005, p. 153) provides material ground for the expectation that unions make serious commitments to labour-community campaigns.
Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) note that, “Today's U.S. union movement is the product of relentless struggle between workers and employers” (p. 9). This is equally true in Canada. Unions arose historically to fight employer and state power and control; in short, to take on the ruling class in defense of working people. And the historical trajectory of labour relations in Canada has much to do with the contemporary forms of institutionalized separation of unionized and non-unionized workers, and the often-masked and -contradictory social relations among labour and community organizations, officials, staff and workers. While often softened into different forms of social unionism today (Ross, 2007), the bureaucratic economistic model commonly known as business unionism has required and ensured that, while members became nominally involved in contract negotiations and processing of grievances, the top-down approach to running the union and the cooperative approach with employers (Camfield, 2008) together manage members' hopes and expectations for any radical social change. Fundamentally, such hopes have been institutionally curtailed by their organizations’ officials, as the model formally “precludes a politics of class mobilization, particularly in the workplace” (Wells, 1995, p. 194). Workers’ consciousness of this hegemony continues to ebb and flow in various conditions, as does their informal and formal activity in support of and against this institutional structure and functioning, in the workplace and in the union. Given the “necessarily conflictual” (Hyman, 1975, p. 27) relationship between employers and employees, this process is always in motion and contested, with workers ideas about their rights in society as a whole and in the workplace shifting in different conditions.

Key developments in Canadian industrial relations in and around the World War II have shaped union, community and worker praxis as it continues to evolve today. During World War II, the combination of the “state’s direction of the wartime economy” (Heron, 1996, p. 70),
workers’ determination not to relive the deprivations of the 1920s, the resulting massive and ongoing strikes, women and more people of colour entering (better) paid industrial work, and national labour leaders’ alternating militancy and capitulation, as well as the fight on the left between communists (such as the Canadian Communist Party) and social democrats (the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, CCF), all came together to form a vibrant moment of class struggle with mixed and contradictory results (Heron, 1996; Panitch & Swartz, 2003). It was a turning point period in the union movement that brought working class victories in the form of wage increases and other benefits for “the significant minority of workers (mostly men) who were now their members” (Camfield, 2008, p. 66). It was also a time of growing alignment of labour officials with the state and capital, with the UAW (United Auto Workers) playing a central institutionalizing role in this “complicated historical and sociopolitical process” that has conditioned contemporary Canadian industrial relations (Wells, 1995, pp. 195-196).

With labour scarce in an active war-time economy, workers were so emboldened that, “By 1943 union membership in Canada soared, and one out of every three unionists was on strike…many women were active in these campaigns as shop stewards and local union executive members, though seldom rising to higher positions in union officialdom” (Heron, 1996, p. 70). In the midst of this worker organizing and the CCF’s growing strength, it was in 1944 that the federal Conservative government announced not only the initiation of social security programs but also, through Privy Council (P.C.) Order 1003, the set up of labour boards, certification requirements, and the compelling of employers to recognize and bargain with duly certified unions. Significantly, the new labour law prohibited workers from walking off the job to protest contract violations or workplace problems (“wildcat strikes”). It also disallowed walk-offs in support of striking workers at other workplaces (“sympathy strikes”). Grievance and arbitration
procedures in collective agreements to solve disputes became required (Heron, 1996, p. 72), and bargaining was to be done workplace by workplace. Palmer (1992) notes that the piecemeal nature of the wartime P.C. Orders point to the lack of unity within the state about how to deal with the industrial relations crisis (p. 279). The result however was a stabilization of class relations (p. 268) that dealt a huge blow to “collective union power” (Wells, 1995, p. 199) and so to the development of working class consciousness thereafter. It has assisted in the increasingly privatized and individualized era of neoliberal global capital in workers identification of their own interests with that of the fate of their employer (Moody, 2007). Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) suggest that this is not a phenomenon specific to this era, as the AFL (American Federation of Labor) leadership of the early 1900s strongly, “repudiated the notion of class struggle...[and instead promoted]... that labor and capital have a unity of interest in improving the economic climate that justifies their cooperation” (p. 16).

P.C. 1003 effectively laid down a legal framework that was later enshrined in provincial post-war labour law (Taylor, 2001, p. 61). The model implemented that was to bring stability and industrial peace was based on the 1935 US Wagner Act, arising as a response to militant US worker organizing of the 1930s (Wells, 1995). Combined with the impact of the Rand Formula, these developments are the foundational legal-political underpinning of the contradictory mix of union solidarity, support, bureaucratic and anti-democratic functioning that endures today. The Rand Formula was a result of what was to become a pivotal, historical strike of UAW workers at Ford in Windsor, Ontario, when Justice Ivan Rand’s decision allowed for automatic dues deduction from pay-cheques by employers. It also gave preferential treatment to union officials for return to work during layoffs and for overtime work. Rand was the final piece in that period in a complex mix of benefits and detriments for workers, as power within labour shifted more
and more to the hands of officials, and between labour and capital, to the ruling class (Wells, 1995). Contradictory class struggles to enshrine these compromises into provincial labour law have been ongoing since the first *Ontario Labour Relations Act* first became law in 1950 (Smith, C. W., 2008). As such, significant changes occurred in the very meaning of unionism (Wells, 1995) as class harmony has come to be the systemically organized shared goal of the state, employers and labour officialdom (Palmer, 1992).

Another result of this institutionalization of industrial relations was the effective sub-contracting out to labour officials of the state’s policing of workers’ ongoing acceptance of this massive legal-political shift. Officialdom continued to extract the price of organizational security by suppressing “workers’ direct action” (Wells, 1995, p. 194). As Camfield (2008) summarizes, “Unions became more stable but less democratic institutions, run by full-time officials and staff with a 'leave it to us' attitude” (p. 66). Palmer (1992) notes that virtually all contemporary trade union leaders take seriously their role of “keeping a lid on class struggle and maintaining unionism within the boundaries of respectable organization” (p. 371). As this functioning has evolved so too has the sub-contracting out of the production and reproduction of hegemonic ideological practices within the “house of labour”, for capital’s and labour officialdom’s contradictory yet mutual benefit. This also contributes to what Yates (2007) calls an “organizational sclerosis,” effectively undermining union renewal (p. 65).

The post-war boom period came to a halt with a recession from 1973-1975 (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000, p. 10). Martin (1995) refers to the subsequent period of 1975-1989 as a “counter-attack” era, of employers against unions (p. 6). It was during this time that capital began to unveil its neoliberal responses to the crises started in the early 1970s to, as Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) note,
break the hold of stagnation and inflation and restore corporate power and profits. Central to these strategies was the imposition of discipline on the working class, which meant – from the standpoint of the working class – wrecking their organizations and diminishing their hopes and expectations. (pp. 42-43)

These authors note five main strategies of this period as, “privatization, deregulation, casualization of the workforce...deunionization, and free trade” (p. 45). Deregulation can also characterized as re-regulation given the state maintains its function in class relations even as it changes the rules within those relations. To this list can be added the escalation of the global travels of investment capital, and the associated speculation, which has led to recurring financial crises. The devastation to workers lives and the impact on their organizations is ongoing. When a workers' struggle leads to a plant occupation and a “victory” is defined as achieving 2-months severance, health benefits and access to employment insurance (Mead-Lucero, 2008), this is a potentially significant moment in a further shift in the balance of power within class relations and of consciousness in relation to this.

To date, the impact of this multi-layered private and public sector restructuring has been disproportionately on young workers, women and racialized and Aboriginal workers, as well as on persons with disabilities (Jackson, 2005, p. 21). As a result of a combination of discrimination, occupational segregation and undervaluing of the kinds of jobs to which women have greater access, women are more likely to hold (often involuntarily) part-time and lower paid jobs than men (pp. 79-80, 83). In Canada, the Federal government's infamous “wage and price controls” implemented in 1975 were a joint political and economic challenge to workers, “blaming rising wages for the upward spiral in inflation” (Yates, 2008, p. 92). The 1980s were even worse for workers as Brian Mulroney launched Canada's version of Reganomics and Thatcherism – started in 1980 and 1979 respectively – after his election in 1984 (Yates, 2008, p. 101). The Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, the re-organization of work, outsourcing, and the
overall advent of lean production (Moody, 1997) have been about increasing ruling-class profit accumulation, requiring a shift in “the balance of power in the workplace further in their favour” (Camfield, 2008, p. 75). Even with an unemployment rate as high as 12% (Jackson, 2005, p. 18), falling real wages, increasing child poverty, and “record lineups at food banks” (Martin, 1995, p. 96) the Canadian economy in the 1990s experienced “unprecedented levels of growth” (Yates, 2008, p. 97). As Jackson (2005) reports, in the period between 1993 and 2002, the Gross Domestic Product grew by more than 25% cumulatively while real income for people increased by half of that. As corporate profits have grown significantly, the loss has been to workers in wages and benefits (p. 19). As a result of the onslaught and the job losses in workplaces with high unionization levels (Yates, 2008), union density started to decline, to a greater degree in the US than in Canada. Moody (2007) notes that between 1970 and 2005, in the US nine million private sector unionized jobs were lost (p. 98), with overall density dropping from 15.3% to 12% between 1995 and 2005 alone (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 82). In Canada, the private-sector decline was from 25.9% to 17.5% between 1984 and 2005 (Camfield, 2005, p. 289). In the public sector, the decline reached a 71.3% unionization level. Overall density in Canada was 37% two decades ago, down to 30.7% today (Camfield, 2008, p. 68). This is partly due to the fact that “employment expanded more rapidly than did union membership” (Yates, 2007, p. 58).

The union movement was generally “ill-prepared to challenge the restructuring of workplaces, state and society by corporations and governments that over time has led to neoliberalism” (Camfield, 2008, p. 67). Many unions did fight back in the 1970s, with women workers' militancy and willingness to strike standing out (Yates, 2008, p. 93). While US unions were on the defensive, in the early 1980s Canadian public sector strikes took militancy far enough to see “heavy fines and in some cases union leader imprisonment” (p. 94). Part of the
militancy saw splits from US-controlled international unions as made-in-Canada solutions to the growing global crisis were sought. As Yates (2008) comments, “The CAW quickly became the darling of the media, a potent symbol of worker militancy and national determination, and a magnet for disgruntled workers throughout the Canadian labour movement” (p. 96).

As such, some unions have resisted employers' concessionary demands (Camfield, 2008) and, to this end, “by the early 1980s the labour movement began to have an increased understanding of the potential value of coalitions” (Martin, 1995, p. 6). Yet, given the historically organized interests of labour officialdom, it is small wonder that the dominant labour response has been largely defensive. Entering the period of recession from 1990 to 1993, Canadian unions were divided over the militant vs. cooperative orientation to employers, and between public sector and private sector as well as on national/international lines (Yates, 2008, p. 97). The main focus has been to “preserve the union as an institution and the leadership’s position within it” through three main strategies: “concessions, labour-management cooperation then partnership, and mergers as a substitute for new organizing” (Moody, 2007, p. 108). Two-tier collective agreements, creating wage, benefit and so a social divide between existing and newly hired workers, have become increasingly common (Yates, 2008, p. 98).

Yates (2007) also notes that the contemporary union context is one of an “abundance of opportunities for renewal but a dearth of capacity in revitalising their influence over the Canadian political economy” (p. 57). She also discusses how the political struggles within labour officialdom, despite the protests and fightbacks of the late 1990s in Ontario, led to the estrangement of union and social activists from unions and often to a union-by-union “politics of pragmatism” without a strategic vision or practice to respond to the ongoing crisis (Yates, 2008, p. 103). In my experience as a union and community activist, the reality of union pragmatism is
inconsistent with the rank-and-file oriented concerns and goals promoted in many union educational and organizing activities. As well, even as women have come to outnumber men in Canadian (public sector) unions and there is an increasingly racialized membership (Yates, 2007), there are nonetheless also deeply contradictory and under-contested race, gender and class relations among these union events and the day-to-day activity of workers and labour officials. I will explicate how contemporary class relations happen this way in Chapter Three. As I particularly discuss in Chapters Six and Eight, in such settings, skilled labour organizers and educators effectively employ popular adult education techniques to generate participation, raising diverse members’ voices and perspectives. Such moments have helped galvanize hard-fought struggles for an important yet relatively minimal level of organizational representation, “within unions of feminists, anti-racists, and supporters of the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered people (LGBT) [which has also] broadened the political consciousness of some unionized workers” (Camfield, 2008, p. 67). Nonetheless, since these educational and organizing forums are not generally within or directly feeding back to the decision-making structures of the unions and community groups involved, foundational decisions that labour officials and community agencies would be bound to are not made in these settings. Diverse participation and representation are not the same as full democratic involvement. In Chapter Eight I will analyze the relationship between such workers’ education and organizing in the OMWC, given this reality of contemporary class relations and struggle.

Frege et al. (2004) suggest that, “Union coalitions…[involve] discrete, intermittent, or continuous joint activity” (p. 138). However, given this context Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) contend that labour-community workers-rights activities usually take the form of alliances that “generally do not go beyond conducting outreach and perhaps creating a community advisory
committee with lists of endorsers of a union effort” (p. 170). Once a campaign is done, while a relationship may nominally endure, the moment of organizing activity is often over until a new campaign is launched and a new set of mobilizing moments can be activated. The Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign that ran over an extended period from 2001 to 2007 offered an opportunity to investigate the multitude of relations and issues in the contemporary and specifically Canadian context.

**The OMWC in the Contemporary Context**

Canada has a growing number of working-poor families (Jackson, 2005, p. 36). The combination of massive government cutbacks, employer lay-offs and increasing precarious work that escalated throughout the latter decades of the 20th century, has continued to intensify with the serious and ongoing economic crisis that occurred in late 2008 a year after the OMWC ended. As the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) (2009) notes “an utter catastrophe” has continued to unfold in Canada since then. While coordinated efforts of government and business have led to a recovery for banks, corporations and wealthy individuals, “There are still more than 250,000 fewer full-time jobs today than at the beginning of this ‘Great Recession’” (CLC, 2010). In the month of July 2010 alone, 139,000 full-time jobs were lost while 130,000 part-time ones were added (Statistics Canada, 2010). It is precarious temporary and contract work that has been growing most quickly (Yalnizyan, 2010). Yet, recent Federal and Provincial government responses have a narrow focus on economy, with increasing cuts to corporate taxes, public services and public sector employment deepening austerity for workers (PSAC, 2010). Canadian communities are thus “in crisis” (CLC, 2009) even as the minimum wage in Ontario now sits at $10.25 with no government plans for either an increase or indexation to the inflation rate. And no organizing activity is in sight.
Well before what workers are living through at the time of writing the “dramatic cutbacks to the welfare state, deregulation of the labour market, and active government support for private enterprise” (Yates, 2008, p. 102) deepened poverty (Jackson, 2005). Often ruthlessly carried out by the Ontario Progressive Conservatives from 1995 to 2003, all these actions generated the need for stepped up, province-wide workers rights organizing. In 2003, the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) for a family of four in a big city was $31,000. This means that a “two-adult family with children has to put in about 75 weeks of work a year at $10 per hour to get above the poverty line” (Jackson, 2005, p. 35).

It was this reality that, generated as it is by historically evolved state and labour market social relations, led to the OMWC. Minimum wages have not been meant to eliminate poverty but “to try to mitigate the worst of the market’s inequities” (CSJ, 2001, p. 1), to manage poverty in relation to prevailing ideologies, social assistance rates, union wage rates and capital’s need for flexibility (Thomas, 2009). In terms of how this balance is managed, Dickson and Myatt (2002) suggest “politicians adjust the minimum wage to maximize their political support for re-election chances” (p. 58). The Ontario McGuinty Liberal government’s two phased-in increases in the minimum wage (each announced in election years 2003 and 2007) could attest to that. Pressure from workers and their organizations has also historically influenced the social relations of employment standards changes and management. Thomas (2009) points out how both “union pressure for a general minimum wage” and government worries over excessive worker impoverishment led to “a new approach to the regulation of minimum wages” in the mid-1960s that was consistent with the postwar pattern of setting minimum standards at the same time as ensuring business concerns were accommodated (p. 61). A participant in this research also notes about the OMWC:
traditionally, it was the government saying, “We need to raise the minimum wage.” And it was a goodwill gesture to the people [to get their vote]….But this [campaign], [people] actually asked for it, saying, “No, we need more.” So I think that attitude was something that [changed]. Prior to that unions did that behind closed doors. (CG4, Aug.19, 2009)

As I will explain further in Chapter Three, the minimum wage as an employment standard is thus a class relation, both in terms of the ongoing social process through which it is struggled over and in relation to the content (both what and how much it is). Before that next chapter’s discussion, I will first introduce the three labour-community coalitions of the OMWC.

**The Labour-Community Coalitions of the OMWC**

Even if the forming of such relationships are not entirely new, the term labour-community coalition has arisen in practice and scholarship in this renewed era of union revitalization (Tattersall, 2010). “Labour” is understood to be synonymous with union and “community” is thus any person or group that is not union in a particular moment time or place. Materially dividing people’s reality based on real or perceived institutional affiliation affects organizing, as I will discuss throughout my dissertation. Community in this framing thus includes various kinds of organizations working with people and on issues related to social marginalization, justice and the environment. In relation to workers-rights organizing in particular, in my research I categorize the range of community groups and organizations involved as either “non-union workers rights groups” (such as legal clinics and workers centres) or “community groups” (any group supportive of, but without a specific focus on, workers rights). I discuss the research participants from these groups in Chapter Four.
The chronology of the campaign is detailed in Appendix B. Toronto was the launch point and continued to be the geographical fulcrum of the OMWC from 2001 to 2007. As noted in Chapter One, I was one of the initial organizers as part of the group Justice for Workers (J4W), linked to Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment (TOFFE – now the Workers Action Centre). We were determined to focus on grassroots, neighbourhood-based, campaign-building before broadening efforts out through lobbying and organizing to obtain substantive political commitment from both unionized labour organizations and community agencies. We would have then taken the campaign city and province-wide. The campaign arose from the fightback against the Harris government's deeply regressive amendments to the *Employment Standards Act* in 2000, an organizing project with the Employment Standards Working Group in which I was also involved. In talking with low-waged workers through a range of outreach and organizing efforts, we – the workers-rights activists that were to come to form J4W – heard time and again that, while workers were certainly against the Harris government's imposition of a 60-hour workweek, their biggest material problem was the abysmal wages they were earning, and so the deepening poverty they and their families lived in, that forced them into multiple jobs and such long hours of work (Gellatly, as cited in TYRLC, 2008a, p. 6). Through research and much discussion J4W decided to launch the OMWC based on LICO figures (for example, CSJ, 2001, p. 12), the broad social impact winning such an increase would have and the clear focus of the provincial government as a political target.

Within 2 years, the labour-community coalition “Ontario Needs a Raise” (ONR) (ISAC, 2008) evolved, with varying degrees of community agency and union involvement. Overlapping with J4W initially before it folded late in 2003, the ONR carried out the campaign from 2003 to 2006. It was made up of community activist groups and coalitions and had some union
representation (NUG5, July 16, 2009; U1, Oct. 1, 2009). The period of the OMWC that went from January 2007 to the October 10, 2007 provincial election was coordinated by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) in conjunction with New Democratic Party MPP Cheri DiNovo. She had tabled her private member’s Bill 150 to raise the minimum wage in Ontario to $10 (DiNovo, 2007). As I learned in an interview, groups like the Canadian Federation of Students and ACORN were also part of that organizing (Cartwright, July 10, 2009). Along with print and electronic petitions, the main tactic in the 2007 phase of the campaign was the holding of community-based meetings in various racially-diverse, lower-income neighbourhoods around Toronto (TYRLC, 2008a), organized by both TYRLC staff and officials, and labour educators through the TYRLC’s Labour Education Centre. The campaign was deemed a success (TYRLC, 2007) when the Ontario provincial government agreed to a phased-in increase to $10.25 an hour by March 31, 2010.

I will now move in Chapter Three to the conceptual orientation for my research, demonstrating how class relations are inherently conflictual and racialized, gendered as well as bureaucratically organized. The historical development of the legally and politically formally circumscribed union structures and functions discussed above are foundational to contemporary bureaucratic social relations, and conditioning of the race, gender and class relations of work and workers in union and community.
Chapter Three:
Conceptualizing Class Relations as Racialized and Gendered

Introduction

Class is not something that only happens at the point of production, even if it is ultimately anchored and sustained there. People do not stop belonging to classes when they leave their workplaces. Class pervades all aspects of social life. (Camfield, 2004, p. 424)

Many theorists have contributed anti-racist feminist and Marxian analyses to develop an understanding of how class, race and gender have evolved historically and dynamically as social relations (Bannerji, 1987, 1995, 2000; Brand, 1999; Das Gupta, 1996, 2009; Ng, 1993a, 1993b, 1998). While there are various ways to approach this integration, I find it particularly useful in this research context to conceptualize these lived social experiences and relationships as class relations that have become thoroughly racialized and gendered. From the most fundamental human starting point, and a materialist perspective, neither a living person’s body nor her social experience can be parceled out into separate moments and relations, as if they existed alongside of each other. What we do and what is done to us, and how we understand and think about this, is about the entirety of who we are in the time and place we are actually in, and the history of where we have come from. And at the level of society within contemporary capitalist organization, historically developed social processes that produce, condition, reproduce or resist how one relation is organized or happening to people, will necessarily be related to and have an affect on others. As Bannerji (2005) notes, lived experience of “the usual racialized environment is not divisible separately and serially.” All aspects of our personhood “blend into something of an identity simultaneously and instantaneously.” What is thus needed is “a social ontology” that “captures such formative experientiality” (p. 145) and so understands that there is no generic
worker or working-class consciousness. Such an ontology also includes racism and sexism as historically evolving social relations, not as subsumed under class but as fundamentally defining of human experience and organizing of class relations.

Thus, while class is rooted in the workplace it is simultaneously a living, ongoing process in communities and households as well. And the degree of integration of workplace, household and community as actual physical places has historically involved fundamentally gendered and racialized processes. This orientation to class is inclusive and opens up a broad social-relations mediation orientation, one in which complex everyday individual experiences and social structures are the dialectically relational subjective and objective. As Wood (1995) notes, “It is necessary somehow to incorporate in social analysis the role of conscious and active historical beings, who are 'subject' and 'object' at once, both agents and material forces in objective processes” (p. 92). With that orientation we can see the numerous kinds of unpaid and underpaid reproductive work of working class, disproportionately racialized women as foundational to class struggle and capitalist social organization. That is, unlike the term “people of colour”, “racialization” carries a meaning that denotes being/becoming raced as part of an active historic social process. I follow Miles (1989), who uses “the concept of racialization to refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities” and it is “a process of categorization, a presentation defining an Other (usually, but not exclusively, somatically)” (p. 75). Indeed, in contemporary Canadian society real or manufactured cultural attributes can contribute as much to racialization as scientific approaches historically have (Wilmot, 2005). Mills and Clarke (2009) discuss the cultural racism experienced by Aboriginal workers in the workplace and union.
This chapter now proceeds in four sections. First is a defining discussion on *Social Relations* and *Bureaucratic Social Relations*, the former being a general conceptual orientation to social functioning and the latter arising out of union organization analysis. Following that is a presentation of my orientation to class, in the section *Class Relations: Dynamic Formations vs. Static Locations*. Section three, *Race and Gender as Individual, Institutional and Class Organizing Relations* is divided into two parts: *Race, Gender and Work* explores what happens in the capitalist organization of work; *Race, Gender and Class Relations of Workers in the Union and Community* explores how this organization conditions what happens in unions and communities. The first part of the section will thus give a conceptual orientation to the more empirical presentation in the second part. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion on concepts I have developed, *Pragmatic and Transformative Anti-Racist Practices*.

In addition, Chapter Four, in which I explain and explore Institutional Ethnography theory and practice as applied to this research, is a continuation of the development of the analytical grounding of this dissertation.

*Social Relations and Bureaucratic Social Relations*

This concept of *social relations* offers a way to understand complex historically conditioned and always evolving social dynamics. Social relations are the myriad of patterned complex, coordinated, power-infused, inter-subjective happenings (and our consciousness of them), carried out and lived by individuals in actual places and across real time, producing, reproducing and challenging the social structures created by this human activity. There is both content and process to these relations. Two such relations are racism and sexism. I use these terms following Ng (1993b) as socially constructed “systems of domination and subordination that have developed over time as taken for-granted societal features” (p. 51) and systems “of
oppression and inequality based on the ideology of the superiority of one gender and/or race over the other gender and races” (Ng, 1993a, p. 280).

As such, an integrated class, race and gender relations orientation understands racism, sexism and other forms of oppression as power relations with particular historical origins yet ones that have evolved in complex and contradictory ways and are mediated by and are foundational to contemporary lived experience as inseparable parts of class relations (Acker, 2000; Bannerji, 2005; Camfield, 2004; Ng, 1993a, 1993b). Such an orientation is the antithesis of treating class as acting “alone in an abstract economic relationship” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 167). On the contrary: experience within a social relations orientation is understood as “the medium in which social being determines consciousness” (Wood, 1995, p. 97). Even as they are profoundly institutionally mediated in contemporary society social relations are always relations amongst people.

For workers-rights oriented research, incorporating the notion of bureaucratic social relations is useful. Camfield (2010) proposes this way of conceptualizing union bureaucracy as something much more than particular groups of elected officials and staff, or a defined set of roles. Rather, his theory conceptualizes bureaucracy as a particular mode of existence of social relations. It identifies the sources of union bureaucracy as wage-labour contracts, the separation of conception from execution in human practical activity, [and] the political administration of unions by state power and union officialdom. (p. 1)

The historical evolution of Canadian unions discussed in the Chapter Two is an explanation of what bureaucratic social relations look like today and how they have come to be. The legal authority and preference granted officials, P.C. Order 1003, the prohibition on wildcat strikes, and the narrowly formal and legally coded collective bargaining and grievance/arbitration processes are all content and process examples of such relations. Seeing
union bureaucracy as simultaneously relational in these ways puts the multiple relationship moments among workers, employers and labour officials in view at once, and keeps them grounded in the reality of the alienation of labour. That is, how workers become objects in the process of capitalist social production, not self-determining subjects. This is not an isolated objective structural concern; rather, it profoundly conditions people’s individual and collective consciousness and being. The concept of bureaucratic social relations also assists in distinguishing “between working-class movement and working class” as a social formation (Camfield, 2004, p. 424), which is critical to the present inquiry. While working-class movements are collectively and both informally and formally organized, all working-class people do not participate in the array of unions, parties, labour councils, workers centres, coalitions and networks that range from deeply bureaucratic institutions to formally or informally organized activist groups. The distinction between the groups of people in a historical collectivity and the organizations that some of them have created allows for greater analytical clarity of what is going on in class struggle, including the relations among workers in formation and struggle (p. 425). It also prevents us from equating “struggle” with the activities of working-class institutions, and “union” with “labour” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008). This is important given that so much “labour movement” activity is now so deeply institutionalized within bureaucratic social relations that the mere structured activity of coming together is generally presented as a dynamic movement by officials, staff and many workers alike.

Application of this orientation to bureaucracy helps to uncover how the activity of (working) people is conditioned and constrained by the deeply relational and difficult-to-change formal rules and laws of state, employer and unions. When combined with an integrated class relations perspective as a whole, this concept thus becomes an additional tool in assisting in
developing an understanding of the combination of struggle and complacency of workers in the workplaces, unions, communities and in labour-community campaigns.

**Class Relations: Dynamic Formations vs. Static Locations**

Class struggle has a distinctive potential as a transformative force because, whatever the immediate motivations of any particular class conflict, the terrain of struggle is strategically situated at the heart of social existence. (Wood, 1995, p. 110)

If we understand classes as “multidimensional formations constituted by social relations in time, at a level of analysis higher than particular groups of workers,” then class formation is the “broader field” within which workers in a “concrete society” are located based on relations amongst themselves and the social context (Camfield, 2004, pp. 421-422). Class formation arises out of *class struggle*, a phrase that now brings with it the specter of antiquated, now-failed attempt at “socialism.” This demise was apparently secured with the end of the Soviet Union, according to one of the architects of neoliberalism Margaret Thatcher, who thus ushered in the era of capitalism as democracy (Singer, 1999). The dominant contemporary ideology tells us that class struggle and socialism are dead and gone, an unsuccessful praxis. Yet as long as exploitative class relations go on so too does class struggle because of the inherent “antagonism of interest” (Wood, 1995, p. 95) in these unequal active relations that have developed over time between a now complexly stratified Canadian working-class and the real and increasingly powerful dominant class. This conflict has a conditioning effect on workers’ consciousness and activity (Camfield, 2004, p. 431). Class and class consciousness are dynamic, “active creations of social individuals” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 147). And, as the balance of power ebbs and flows in place and over time, class struggle is an open-ended relational process (Camfield, 2004, p. 436).
As such, class, its ongoing formation, and class struggle need to be understood through people’s relationships to the complex socio-historical process of both social production and reproduction, our degree of control over all of our activity within this and of the meeting of our basic and larger human needs, and if/how profit is being extracted from the activities we are engaged in to meet these needs. In this light, Camfield (2008) defines working-class people as:

all people who sell their ability to work to employers in exchange for a wage (whether paid by the hour or as a salary) and who do not exercise significant managerial authority plus unemployed waged-workers and unwaged people (for example, people working full-time as unpaid caregivers) who live in the households of wage-earners. (p. 61)

How class struggle plays out locally is deeply conditioned by the way bureaucratic social relations evolve, such as those discussed in Chapter Two. In the context of union-community workers-rights organizing it can be said that, “Trade union struggle is a subset of class struggle” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 166). Yet, even within that, most union members today are not active and generally only become more so during collective bargaining when they come out to ratify an agreement that, most often, officials have negotiated for them (Camfield, 2008).

But class and class struggle are generally not understood in this way in the Canadian context today. The legacy of the post-war compromise has indeed involved a negative impact on class consciousness. Day-to-day workplace and union functioning is profoundly conditioned by the ideological presentation and uptake of class as inert strata, as a “thing”, rather than as dynamically produced relations in process (Cockburn, 1991; Ng, 1993b). Even as there are pockets of active resistance, working people today have little ground on which to build any sense that their own activity means or might mean something, in term of either reproducing or challenging power arrangements. Class as a relation, one of the “deep and long-standing conflicts of material interests” between groups of people (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000, p. 18),
is masked in our society on many levels. It is seen as more as a location rather than as a relation that is both between classes and among people of the same class (Wood, 1995). And without a relational orientation, an understanding of inherent and potential struggle is missing.

In the contemporary Canadian context, this class-as-location “tripartite” orientation predominates in ideology and consciousness. This view holds that there are three distinct classes: upper, middle and lower (Luxton & Corman, 2001, p. 257). As Rikowski (2006) suggests, this is reproduced by “mainstream sociologists and education theorists and researchers [who] become ‘box people’: that is, they attempt to force groups of people into pre-ordained categories” (p. 1). This has an effect of naturalizing inequality and domination, segmenting people into one of three semi-permanent socioeconomic groups that they can only shift from individually (and perhaps bring a family with them) with a change in income. Rarely do we hear the phrase “ruling class” in public discourse to describe those deploying social, political and economic power. While words like “elites” are used to refer to the domination of the ruling class and condemn their runaway profits, such characterizations do not account for how that domination is manifested through the class-relational activity of exploitation (Luxton & Corman, 2001). The “two moments of capitalist exploitation – appropriation and coercion” (Wood, 1995, p. 30) – and the implications for how we live and understand our lives, are thus removed from immediate view.

When class is discussed, it is often used either to refer to people who are poor, or to refer vaguely to those who may have some level of a living wage, a home and may or may not be struggling to maintain these – the designated “middle class.” Such class positions have come to appear as arising from the three pre-assigned locations, often mediated by a consumerist or morally-based engagement in locating self and other. Along with this, there is often “fear and resentment of the poor” (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000, p. 16) that arises from insecurity, as
well as a socialization into a narrow view of what being socially respectable means. Part of the origins of this is in the post-war boom, when many white working-class men in better-paid industrial jobs eventually came to think of themselves as middle-class, an identity formed through a combination of having secure well-paid work and a masculinist orientation to being the family breadwinners (Acker, 2000; Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000). Running through this new rights and respectability orientation was a working-class shift from a producerist to a consumerist orientation and racialized notions of who deserved a “living wage” standard of living (Glickman, 1997).

The inability to see class relations as arising out of (yet not reducible to) production relations is not some political aberration, but instead happens through social processes that have the effect of masking such social relations. Relations of production are not localized in one factory, office, call centre or neighbourhood where sections of the working class are “directly assembled” (Wood, 1995, p. 95). As part of the alienating experience of living in and through capitalist social relations, most people are continually socialized into apprehending social organization in just such a compartmentalized way. When classes are seen as empty places structurally existing as separate from the people apparently objectively located in them, this hinders working people seeing themselves as part of the larger, complex profit-based social production process in which the exploitation of wage labour by one appropriator group is carried out to extract surplus value from the producer group. In this process the relational and “antagonistic nexus between those who produce and those who appropriate their surplus labour” (p. 95) is also masked.

The combined ideological and material onslaught known as neoliberalism that descended on workers in Canada, starting in the early 1970s but particularly since the 1990s, has invaded
human consciousness, deadening alternative visions, strengthening the relative power of capitalists (Luxton & Corman, 2001, p. 250). Already organized by differential capitalist management strategies (Das Gupta, 1996, p. 8), neoliberalism has deepened working-class divisions, as white workers reproduce racism and men replicate sexism (Luxton & Corman, 2001; Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000), as attitudes, actions and organized social practices. It has also lead to more precarious, contingent or fundamentally insecure work. Fudge and Vosko (2003) include in contingent work “those forms of employment involving atypical employment contracts, limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low paid tenure, low wages, and high risks of ill health” (p. 183). Ng (1993a) notes these jobs are often short-term and temporary, with irregular work hours and little employment standards protection (p. 289).

The threats to an increasingly precarious higher-waged, disproportionately white working class are often seen to be from increasingly racialized lower-waged workers below (Luxton & Corman, 2001, p. 257), not from where production relations are actually extralocally organized. The fear of the poor, of immigrants often turns into blame and resentment, as for example when higher-waged working class people see themselves as the tax-paying middle class, footing the bill for everyone else (p. 256). With these tensions and the tripartite type of class orientation prevailing, little room is left for poor, working-poor and higher waged workers to see themselves as sharing something potential powerful as working-class people. Even when fear or resentment are not predominating, the sense of middle-classness may come from a consciousness of many working people's real, day-to-day harsh conditions of life. For example, the incredible differential between living standards in the political North and South and the less sharp but still stark stratification within Canada, contribute to making the understanding of class relations complex. Higher-waged workers relative comfort – even if less and less guaranteed – may lead
them to see themselves as socially closer to their managers than the person who sells them coffee every morning on the way to work. And those who make something approaching a living wage may look below them, see the yawning gap between their relative comfort and the struggles many people, especially in the South, have just to survive making it difficult to understand themselves as working class too (Wilmot, 2005).

The wide range of evolving ideologies, everyday normalized practices and systemic organization of racism and sexism are now deeply entwined as integral parts of class relations. The following section is thus a discussion on how racialized, gendered class relations organize the labour market, workers rights activities and people’s daily lives at home, community, workplace and union.

**Race and Gender as Individual, Institutional and Class Organizing Relations**

**Race, Gender and Work**

Immigrant women in American society bear the triple burden of poverty, ethnicity, and gender, and they bear these burdens as workers as well, often working in low-wage industries that are segregated by gender as well as ethnicity. (Fine, 2006, p. 69)

The historic joint nation-building and capitalist-expansion projects in Canada and the US had white supremacy as a well-documented firm foundation (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Wilmot, 2005). And in contemporary Canada, the racialized and gendered class relations of workers lives continue, with experiences in union and community being fundamentally conditioned by labour market structuring and its relationship with immigration policy and programs on the basis of these social relations (Ng, 1993a, 1993b). This is profoundly material, in everyday life for an increasing percentage of the population. In her research on employment and wage gaps, Block (2010) notes, “Sexism and racial discrimination pack a double wallop for racialized women in
Ontario, seriously hampering their earnings. They made 53.4 cents for every dollar non-racialized men made in 2005” (p. 3). In addition, “While 6 per cent of non-racialized families lived in poverty in 2005, more than three times the share of racialized families, 18.7 per cent, lived in poverty” (p. 4). Adequacy of wages is directly related to the quality of work people have access to. Das Gupta (1996) found “working class immigrant women and women are colour” to be over-represented in processing and light manufacturing; the service sector; domestic work; and; low-level administrative work (pp. 7-8).

And the labour market structure that conditions this harsh reality is also relational with how immigration is organized. Racism has always organized nation-building and so immigration policy in Canada (Ng, 1993a); the nature of policies and programs, of who “gets in” evolves as conditioned by changes in how capitalism is organized. In the decade leading up to their study, Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005) note that 75% of new immigrants were racialized people, making that period the one with “the fastest growth in the size of the racialized group in Canada’s history” (p. 2). By 2011 it is projected that 100% of the net labour force growth will depend on immigration (Dugale, 2006, p. 24).

It is important not to conflate the multiple processes, experiences and effects on people of being racialized with those of being categorized as an immigrant (Das Gupta, 1996, 2009). A case in point of this is the ongoing particular colonial-origin racism experienced by Aboriginal peoples that organizes the social relations of their lives (Mills & Clarke, 2009). Brand’s (1999) in-depth analysis of the racialized, gendered and classed legacy of slavery for Canadian Black women is another example. At the same time, there is a clear relationship between how immigration policies and practices are evolving today, the increasing precarity of work, and socially organized racism.
The standard employment relationship (SER) created by the labour-capital post-war compromise has always been available on a racialized and gendered basis (Fudge & Vosko, 2003; Fuller & Vosko, 2008). The white male breadwinner model and SER became synonymous, what Fudge and Vosko (2003) define as “full-time, full-year employment relationship where the worker has one employer, works on the employer’s premises, and has access to social benefits and entitlements to complete the social wage” (p. 186). Materially this meant for women an entrenchment in responsibility for domestic labour, unpaid in their homes, which generally continues today whether they have paid work outside the homes or not. In relation to this, Luxton and Corman (2001) note how increases in anti-sexist solidarity in the public space of the union have not flowed into the private space of the home (p. 254). Not readily visible using the tripartite analysis of class discussed above is how “private life becomes enmeshed in the processes of constructing the gender and race contours of class” (Acker, 2000, p. 203). Included in this is the fact that the alleviation of the burden of “unpaid caring labor” (p. 194) is not generally available to lower-waged working class women, whether white or racialized, as it usually requires paying some other women to do this privatized work. It is higher-waged working, middle and upper class women – disproportionately white – who have access to the lifting of this burden, not generally through male partners, but through the hiring of also disproportionately racialized women to take on this low-paid socially reproductive domestic work (Brand, 1999; Wilmot, 2005).

Armstrong (1991) has noted an ongoing high concentration of women in part-time food and general retail employment. Years later, Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich (2003) note that gender inequalities endure and Fuller and Vosko (2008) report 60% of casual work is done by women. And while the SER or “good job” (p. 52) has become more elusive for all workers over
the past three decades, an increasing body of research on precarious work is documenting what Fudge and Vosko (2003) note are “growing racialized gendered hierarchies by occupation and sector” (p. 204). And it is racialized women “who are recent immigrants who are most likely to be employed in a casual job as their main job (Fuller & Vosko, 2008, p. 43).

Scarcity, precarity and low-wages of work, as organized by well-documented systemic racism are on the rise (Jackson, 2005, p. 113). In Canada, the relationship between the increased migration of racialized workers, who comprise three quarters of new immigrants since the 1980s (p. 103) and their disproportionate poverty demonstrates these integrated social relations. That is, at a time when economic migrants were more white and European, these workers actually earned more than the Canadian average (p. 109).

The Workers Action Centre in Toronto notes in a handout that 40% of workers are now in non-permanent “core” jobs (WAC, personal communication, October 3, 2008). An increasing number of workers in Canada are regularly employed in a series of precarious jobs and survive on low annual earnings, with limited or no health and pension benefits (Jackson, 2005, p. 21), and are often part-time or live with the threat of lay-off at any moment (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000). What is often dubbed “flexibility for workers” is in reality an “obligatory flexibility of workers, bending to employers demands to keep their jobs” (p. 10). Large inequalities in the job market continue to exist between women and men, and have grown sharply between recent immigrants and other Canadians (p. 18). Jackson (2005) reports Citizenship and Immigration Canada figures show that “70% of the net growth in the Canadian labour force in the first half of the 1990s was the result of immigration, and all of the net growth of the labour force is expected to come from immigration by 2011” (p. 103). There is a concomitant deepening of racialized and gendered access to the work available. Despite being
“more highly educated than all other Canadian workers” (p. 107), as documented by the Colour of Poverty campaign (2007):

Racialized workers are most likely to be in low-status jobs. They make up over 40% of workers in the sewing, textile and fabric industries, over 36% of taxi and limo drivers, and 42% of electronics assemblers...One in four workers in Ontario earns below the poverty line. This number is higher for women overall (31%) and women of colour especially (38%). (p. 1)

Racialized workers have higher unemployment rates, lower wages and are less likely to have jobs with health and pension benefits. In 2000, Aboriginal workers earned 64% of the national average wages of non-Aboriginal people in Canada and one in three people live below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) (Jackson, 2005, p. 117). As well, “many women of colour are employed in underground jobs, such as nannies, cleaners, and home-based sewing” (p. 106) where wages, benefits and conditions of work are even worse.

In the 1980s, “flexibility and deregulation became the defining themes of labour market policy” (Jackson, 2005, p. 195). University educated racialized migrants routinely experience “the process of devaluation of their skills and education as well as employer racism at the point of hiring” (Das Gupta, 2009, p. 27). Das Gupta’s in-depth study of the nexus between neoliberal restructuring of nursing and severe workplace racism lived by nurses of colour is a graphic case in point. And Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005) discuss how “aggressive immigration policy” draws immigrants with post-secondary education, professions and particular well-developed skill sets, many of whom then “find themselves relegated to precarious employment in low wage sectors and low end occupations” and their over-representation in a range of occupations such as light manufacturing, textiles, assembling and less-skilled labouring, while being under-represented in professional occupations or managerial positions. (pp. 3-4). Ng (1993a) similarly describes the three kinds of services and industries that racialized, non-English speaking
immigrant women have access to as, household based domestic work, low-paid work in “restaurants, janitorial and cleaning services, and the food industry” and in also low-waged light manufacturing (p. 289). And as the textile industry in particular was restructured, the homework of garment sewing became a super low-waged sector for women racialized in a particular way (Ng, 1998). Aboriginal people are under-presented in paid work in general and are also similarly segregated as other racialized people into “types of work that tend to be lower paid and less stable” (Mills & Clarke, 2009, p. 994).

In addition, many people come to Canada under programs such as the decades-old Seasonal Agriculture Workers and Live-in Caregivers Programs. Over a 10-year period, there was a 122% increase in temporary workers in Canada, reaching 171,844 in 2006 (Choudry, Hanley, Jordan, Shragge, & Stiegman, 2009, p. 31). While I would disagree with these authors’ suggestion that a process of “commodification of immigrants” is unique to contemporary immigration practices – since it is a systemic part of the labour process under capitalism – I would agree that there is another level of commodified inhumanity integral to the social relations of being a migrant in the neoliberal era with the state’s focus on global competitiveness. New immigrants in this context “are expected to be self-sufficient agents who must shoulder increased responsibilities for adaptation and integration” (pp. 18-19) and accept their re-classification from human beings to participants in the state- and capital-organized category of immigrant in a “racialized labour underclass” (p. 60). As will be explored starting in Chapter Five, this social reality directly informs the kinds of organizations that are developed by and for non-unionized workers and conditions how unionized institutions approach labour-community projects like the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign, and how low-waged or precarious workers such relate to or are involved in such campaigns.
Race, Gender and Class Relations of Workers in the Union and Community

The legacy of official and active white supremacy lives on in different forms even as race, gender and class now feature prominently as defining relations of the organization of society in union renewal practice and analysis. There are various reasons for and orientations to this concern. As discussed above, these social relations continue to be lived in real everyday ways for racialized workers, whose historical and ongoing self-organizing both outside of and before and after unionization, continues to challenge social exclusion by capital, labour officialdom and white workers alike. Lukas and Vashti Persad (2004) document the anti-racist labour-community struggles forged by workers of colour in which a combined local and internationalist, anti-racist and anti-colonialist perspective brought a “significant shift in the political consciousness” to anti-racist workers-rights organizing (p. 11). And both Das Gupta (2007) and Walker (2009) document and analyze the historical importance of the “tireless efforts” (Walker, 2009, p. 86) of the Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionist, as well as the Asian Canadian Labour Alliance, in accessing racialized community solidarity for and anti-racist organizing in unions, achieving representation and education oriented institutional reforms.

The demonization, social exclusion and differential subjugation of racialized workers has often been a cross-class project through the mobilization of, “the notion that all ‘white people' shared certain things in contrast with the Other [who was] thus identified...as a threat to all those eventually classified as white” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 10). As a result, these authors go on to suggest that the US “has never had a true labor movement, only a segmented struggle of workers” (pp. 10-11). Much has changed since the first half of the 20th century, yet much has stayed the same. Yates (2008) notes a 2006 strike in Alberta involving a union whose members were 60% recent immigrants, most from Sudan:
While immigrants walked the picket line to demand basic human rights, the provincial government refused to uphold basic labour standards and some in the community disparaged striking immigrants, half hoping the plant would close and that immigrants would be forced to move out of this largely white, rural Alberta community. (p. 86)

The most progressive strand of union renewal activity led by labour officials has also taken on an anti-racist working class orientation due to pressure from the organizing of workers of colour but also for strategic reasons. In a time of union crisis, labour officialdoms have discovered the importance of women and workers of colour and so, with varying degrees of reluctance, some unions in the last few decades have started “to address issues raised by the feminist and civil rights movements” (Clawson, D., & Clawson, M. A., 1999, p. 99). Kainer (2009) also notes that internal union democracy improvements have resulted from “equity-organizing strategies” (p. 16). And Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) discuss how the AFL-CIO's 1999 decision to admit nonstatus workers was a result of pressure from anti-racist immigrant organizing and,

mostly because of the increasing number of immigrant workers in sectors of the economy that the union movement want[ed] to organize. Thus, pragmatic concerns drove some trade union leaders to change their stance on organizing immigrant, especially undocumented, workers. (p. 37)

During the 1990s, Canadian unions unionized new workers in “home care, auxiliary hospital services, university support staff, security guards, and casinos” (Yates, 2008, p. 99). In fact, 2006 saw for the second year in a row unionization rates of women higher than men (Yates, 2007, p. 58). As diversity has grown, so too has conflict within unions as “aging men who have done well through their unions want to protect their privileged position” (Yates, 2008, p. 99). Even so, women and racialized workers are active in their unions, influencing policy and practice that focuses on social issues (p. 100), putting themselves at “the forefront of demands for greater
internal union democracy” (Yates, 2007, p. 63) and influencing the building of the very real workplace/community connection in workers' lives. As Lukas and Vashti Persad (2004) note

Workers of Colour contributed enormously to the development of the politics and culture of the labour movement. They insisted that organized labour be more representative. They challenged organized labour to incorporate anti-racism into the movement's political analysis and the issues affecting workers into its agenda. The adoption of a politics of inclusion made it possible for links to be developed between different communities and struggles, diversifying the agenda, political culture, and perspective of labour and social justice movements. (p. 5)

The history of struggle for unionized workers of colour against racism in their workplaces and unions is one that is often determined and militant. Lukas and Vashti Persad (2004) document a number of the often-overlapping historical struggles of workplace, union and community racism in the Toronto area. In one instance, Black carpenters, unsupported by their union, took their protest about contractors' racist hiring practices public. After marching the end of the Labour Day parade, in 1984 the union started to take their complaints seriously and facilitated Ucal Powell's filing of a labour board complaint. After Powell won the case, he got elected as the business representative of the union and later became secretary-treasurer of the Carpenters Regional Council (p. 26). And while Wells (1995) credits the UAW for its pivotal role in institutionalizing “labour peace,” UAW-organized plants and the union itself were also sites of anti-racist struggle in 1960s and 1970s. In the plants and in the streets, these struggles were at times deadly, particularly for people of colour (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 43). From 1964 to 1979 a labour upsurge took place involving “all kinds of workers” from Latino farm workers to young whites, and particular Black workers (Moody, 2007, p. 157). The success of the UFW struggle, led by the Chicano/Mexicano movement and including Filipino union leaders stands out (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 32). Moody (2007) also notes it was a time of white backlash. Georgakas and Surkin (1998) detail the relationship between the profoundly systemic
racism in US society, the historical conjuncture of the state-labour cooperation in the bureaucratization of labour-capital relations, and the labour-shortage based increase of African-American auto workers, both during the war and later due to auto industry expansion, as well as lean production strategies in the 1960s and 1970s. While there were a quarter million African-American workers in industries in the late 1960s, the “institutional racism which pervaded every aspect of factory life” was in sharp evidence at the Dodge Main auto plant, shaping life on the shop floor and racism-based working conditions, “90 percent of all skilled tradesman were white, and 90 percent of all skilled apprentices were white” (p. 28).

In contrast to the current language of union reform, and buttressed by vibrant civil rights and other social movements of the time, the militant anti-racist working class orientation of radical caucuses and organizations like DRUM (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement) brought a revolutionary orientation to challenges to capital and how “the company deliberately cultivated and institutionalized racism in order that white workers and black workers would face their workaday lives in racial conflict with one another rather than in class solidarity” (Georgakas & Surkin, pp. 28-29). Many such “RUMs” were to spring up in factories around the US in this period as “the black revolution of the 1960s had finally arrived at one of the most vulnerable links of the American economic system – the point of mass production, the assembly line” (Georgakas & Surkin, 1998, p. 20). Of note, Edna Ewell Watson is clear that anti-sexism was not integrated in the race/class analysis of the RUMs. While a committed militant in her own right, she reports, “Women were positioned and constricted to be supportive of the male leadership” (p. 224).

The union officialdom response to this reality, case after case, clearly showed that, “Organized labor, as a whole, had failed to grasp the strategic significance of the growing civil
rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 35). By the early 1970s there were two dominant union critiques generally brought forward by left and progressive social movements. One perspective sought replacement of unions by new forms of organization – such as DRUM and the United Community Construction Workers in Boston (p. 50) – that could build for “fundamental social change.” The other point of view held that new leadership was needed (p. 34).

In contrast to this vibrant activity at the beginning of the neoliberal era and the ongoing resistance and demands of racialized workers, contemporary race, gender, class relations are now often dominantly viewed from the “organizing the unorganized” union renewal perspective, driven by the need to expand unionization in the predominantly low-waged service-sector as this is where jobs are on the rise; it is also where the majority of workers is often women and men of colour (Bronfenbrenner & Warren, 2007, p. 144). In Canada, women were 12% of overall union membership in 1970s but are now almost half, because of the type of administrative work that dominates the public sector (Camfield, 2008, p. 68). D. Clawson and M. A. Clawson (1999) point out how occupational groups that were occupied by large numbers of women have been targeted for organizing, without attention to the significance of sexism in the union, so women often have become unionized but have never had real democratic access in and to the their unions. And Yates (2006) reviews four gender biases common to unionizing practices that limit unionization opportunities in private service sector areas such as “retail, accommodation and food and finance, insurance and real estate” where union density is lowest (p. 572). Such research indicates how ideologies – in this case, of sexism – condition social activity even when the material reality (here, of women workers) is lived in a way contradictory to those ideas.
Related to this, Mills (2007) reviews a case of the profound effect this social marginalization has on developing different forms of working class and union consciousness. She looks at how anti-union statements by Aboriginal women in the northern prairie forest industry can actually be read as statements of solidarity with non-unionized workers who are outside of the unionized workplace in which the women are a struggling minority, but who are inside the women’s day-to-day community and family life. Aggarwal (as cited in Lukas & Vashti Persad, 2004) attests to this dynamic as well:

We did not feel a part of our unions. We were not heard or seen. Even those in leadership positions felt that their leadership was not supported by the membership or the union leadership. (p. 30)

Additionally, organized labour’s inattention to bargaining culturally-related provisions and labour officials’ and scholars’ watering down of power relations as issues of “identity” or “individuality” deepens the social exclusion of non-white union women. Parker and Gruelle (1999) suggest that the expansion of “diversity programs” in the workplace actually represents a failure of unions to do serious anti-racist organizing in the workplace and union (p. 69). In a similar vein, Bronfenbrenner and Warren (2007) look at how in the US “women, especially women of colour, have the highest [union certification] election win rates among all demographic groups” (p. 144) yet unions do not commit enough resources to organizing in a community-oriented way nor are they making the “extensive changes in organizational structures and practices” (p. 145) that would connect community and union in a way that reflects racialized, gendered and classed lived experiences of injustice.

In the context of the organizing of racialized and gendered workers that make up a “substantial proportion of the expanding contingent workforce” (Needleman, 1998, p. 71), Cranford and Ladd (2003) note that seeing “unionism as a broader community affair” is not a
new project but is about creating contemporary forms of historically successful practice that existed before the industrial relations model. This model has evolved relationally with ongoing capitalist expansion, falsely separating social production and reproduction, and creating apparent separations among work, home, community and people. To materially challenge this separation, the community development organizing approach is a process in which workers who have been deeply individualized can link their “personal problems to broader political issues and begin to think about how to address those problems collectively” (p. 51). This is critical given, as Needleman (1998) points out, “there is no way to remedy the needs of low-wage women as workers without also addressing their needs as mothers, heads of households, wives, or children. Their needs are inextricably bound up, and they are overwhelming” (p. 72). And, as Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) note, with about 50% of Black men unemployed in New York City in 2004 (p. 89), unions would do well to focus beyond unionizing and seriously support and engage in joint strategizing with workers-rights organizations as a whole, if they wish to have a full anti-racist orientation. The AFL-CIO’s approach to this has been limited to giving some funding to groups working to organize unemployed and poor people, such as ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). ACORN has a chapter in Toronto that was involved in the 2007 phase of the OMWC.

Having reviewed conceptually and concretely the dynamic, historically conditioned and multi-layered relationality of human activity, I now propose a pair of new concepts for analyzing in organizing practice how these relations are challenged, disrupted or reproduced: pragmatic and transformative anti-racism.
Pragmatic and Transformative Anti-Racist Practices

It seems appropriate that those who are directly affected by poor working conditions should be the ones to lead the struggle for change. (Wall, 2009, p. 80)

Given the neoliberal assault on workers and trade unions, and the rapidly increasing racialized population in Canada, it is not surprising that unions have built anti-racist education, training and leadership initiatives into their union renewal strategies (Dugale, 2006). Labour leaders often reference this equity orientation as a being about survival and building power, with “community-building” as being “high on the priority list” (p. 27). As discussed above, racialized workers’ activism has played no small part in this shift.

In her studies of coalition work in Canada, the US and Australia, Tattersall (2009) has found that leadership is necessary but “not sufficient to create deep union engagement” (p. 501). And, despite intentions, efforts and commitments by individual unionists and officials, the union renewal consolidation orientation of unions as institutions often actually buttresses existing social relations, placing more “power in the hands of whites generally and white males in particular” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 159). And even when racialized women and men achieve leadership positions, their place in officialdom often does not come with real power, the power to close the deal rather than go to someone else. Without this power, they will generally be incapable of becoming community leaders. Further, without this power, they will be incapable of creating community coalitions or blocs necessary to build power for working-class people at the community level. (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 160)

Grounded in the above discussions of class relations as racialized and gendered in work, home, union and community, I introduce here two analytical concepts I have developed for understanding the OMWC as a case of contemporary labour-community workers-rights organizing: pragmatic anti-racism and transformative anti-racism. Fletcher and Gapasin (2008)
discuss how both traditional and pragmatic unionism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were inherently racist and sexist due to the “narrowly defined self-interest” held by most unions (p. 15). They see three historical trends in the union movement as being traditional, pragmatist and leftist ideological orientations, with the former two approaches remaining predominant. These authors ultimately seem to be suggesting that anti-racist practices inherently go hand in hand with democratic ones, through racialized workers rising to the leadership of unions and making a broad range of social issues integral to union work in the community and the workplace (p. 182). I would argue, however, that while such anti-racist social movement activity is key to democratizing organizing practices, deep union and workplace social relations changes – including racism – do not automatically come along with them.

As such, I build on yet depart from these authors through my analysis of contemporary worker-organizing practices as having pragmatic anti-racist and transformative anti-racist orientations in union as well as community settings. Pragmatic anti-racism has a very specific job to do. Anti-racism is simply good sense in unions today and so the whiteness/institutional power nexus can welcome some racialized people in official or staff roles as a means to an end. That is, it is good sense because of the increasing number of racialized workers in urban areas and because of racialized unionists’ ongoing demands for real access to their unions. Pragmatic anti-racism is not, however, a thorough re-subjectifying approach to anti-racism. It can actually lead to further objectification. Having some racialized people in public leadership roles is meaningful for them as individuals and certainly has varying degrees of material importance beyond those specific people. However, given how racism endures within bureaucratic social relations such limited inclusion makes racialized people only “appear to have power” (Johnson, as cited in Edelson, 2009, p. 66). The ongoing multiple social relations of power limit the full
expression and so material presence of people’s humanity and potential. While “the antiracism struggle that workers of colour led in the last 30 years produced results” including more staff hirings and worker of colour elections to “decision-making bodies” (Lukas & Vashti Persad, 2004, p. 12), what those positions mean for those workers and officials, and for the rank and file workers of colour is often contradictory. Bureaucratic social relations condition a degree of necessary co-optation of racialized unionists who achieve leadership positions at the same time such leaders face “isolation, exclusion, and alienation from white members” (Das Gupta, 2007, p. 202). Walker (2009) echoes this, “White members and leaders chose to justify the existing systemic barriers facing racialized workers” rather than challenge them (p. 87). Along with this, “open debate and constructive criticism,” (Wall, 2009, p. 80) continues to be prevented by unionists with a combination of race, gender and institutional power. The research of Mills and Clarke (2009) on Aboriginal workers’ unionizing makes this query: with CUPE and PSAC having created Aboriginal specific committees and executive seats, Aboriginal unionists question “whether these newly formed committees will serve as ghettos for Aboriginal peoples or whether they will foster a transfer of power to Aboriginal members” (p. 100). Hard-won but now “virtually ineffective” and “token” (Wall, 2009, p. 81) equity seats in unions and their federations seem to have become a pragmatic norm, along with a lack of employment equity in unions and harassment of women of colour (Das Gupta, 2007, p. 203). Pragmatic anti-racist practices can thus actually buttress systemic racism.

Pragmatic anti-racism can also be seen in activities that are multiple moments of working-class based collectivity without a transformative orientation. Demonstrations, marches and public meetings are often “one-time-only affairs rather than part of escalating campaigns of action,” and often symbolic ones at that (Camfield, 2008, p. 77). Within such pragmatic practice,
there is no thorough examination required to ensure actual workers are involved in making decisions about the events and what happens before and after such activities. Such leadership-driven, event-based movement activity is often “a set of complex, contradictory, and inclusive phenomena of social interactions,” a narrow representational and tactically-oriented union-community “coalitionist activism...that reflects [a non-relational] pluralist aggregative logic of social understanding.” In these environments each identity-basis of oppression is “primarily formulated in cultural terms, outside of class and capital” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 145). The important social fact of participation is thus often separated off from the social relations that condition how isolated and short-term, or how broad, deep and ongoingly meaningful this involvement is, conditioning a pragmatic anti-racist orientation rather than creating space for a transformative one, as the momentary presence and voice of workers of colour may generate an appearance of democratic movement making.

Everyday living in a highly individualistic society supports the pragmatic approach, bringing with it as it does the notion of individual agency and determination trumping all. While a collection of individuals in a campaign is not a collectivity, many people who spend any time in Canadian society are nonetheless deeply institutionally organized and socialized to orient ourselves as first and ultimately individuals to a collectivity. Our union institutions in particular reproduce this as union renewal-type activity often focuses, as Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) note, “simply on replacing the leadership and [doesn't] look to the overall culture” (pp. 53-54) of the union. This potentially results in some numbers of leaders of colour but without the structural change to make their leadership positions successful for them or materially meaningful to rank-and-file workers of colour in particular and the working class as a whole. And shop floor racism,
from white managers and co-workers alike, can and does continue in unionized workplaces (Das Gupta, 2009).

On the other hand, transformative anti-racist practice is process oriented. Its achievement requires a different, anti-ideological way of being in order to have a different way of doing things, one that is fully inclusive, at all levels of activity, of thinking, planning and doing. This requires fundamental changes in bureaucratic social relations, which are very difficult to accomplish given the general knowledge that “Anyone who threatens the power or institutional leadership of pragmatist union leaders is an enemy” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 38). A transformative orientation brings together from-below rank-and-file and community-based debate and decision-making for militant organizing with real integrated multiracial and anti-sexist leadership development that supports class struggle-oriented transformative movement-building initiatives and attempts to be meaningfully inclusive of all working people. It is not possible to transform our organizations on the basis of race and gender relations alone without disturbing class and bureaucratic relations as these inequality regimes are profoundly intertwined in historical and ongoing institutional processes (Acker, 2000).

These concepts are not presented as two organizing formulas from which organizers ought to select the “correct” one. In orienting themselves to transformative anti-racism, sufficiently dedicated collectivities of people cannot just, with good hard work and the right ideas and activities, go forth and transform the existing relations. Quite on the contrary: there is nothing pre-determined or inevitable about the end of profit-based social production nor is finding the roads that might lead there getting any easier. Taking on a racialized and gendered class relations orientation to class struggle for research and organizing requires bringing praxis fully to life, grounding the work in the concrete realities of actual people, whose individual and
social experience is dialectically related to the dynamic conditions within which they live and struggle. I would suggest that while we do see attempts at such organizing, there are no examples of effective transformative practice in the contemporary Canadian context as it requires a collective change in being as well as doing, a change that seems quite difficult to achieve within the dominating social relations. It is not just an approach a group can will itself to take on; what we do, think and are able to collectively accomplish is deeply conditioned by translocally organized social relations.

And with the use of that phrase, “translocally organized”, I now turn to Chapter Four and an explication and exploration of Dorothy Smith’s theory and practice of Institutional Ethnography (IE) as applied to the labour-community workers-rights organizing context. The theoretical underpinnings of IE are continuous with the racialized, gendered, and bureaucratic class relations conceptual orientation discussed in this chapter. IE as a research approach is oriented to uncovering social relations in particular situations that may not be apparent to people due in large part to the relations’ extralocal organization. Life in a highly fragmented society, managed on a compartmentalized institutional basis allows locally- and individually-based activities and consciousness processes to be coordinated by various institutional processes and texts, as if people were absent from such social process. This masks the complexity of social relations and obscures to people a fuller sense of reality. The concepts of ideology, ideological practice and reality/reality maintenance discussed in the following chapter are illuminating for my social relations based research process and integral to my orientation to this institutional ethnographic inquiry.
Chapter Four:  
Institutional Ethnography as a Social Relations-Based Research Approach

Introduction

The time and place of the OMWC gives what occurred, who was involved and people’s understanding of it specificity within labour-community workers-rights organizing. However, consciousness and social activity are not isolated in particular moments or places even if they might appear to be. As I have been contending, social relations are historically developed and dynamic patterned human activity, occurring in everyday life where we are and in places extralocal to us. The relations are organized by power, are many and are intertwined, and including those of the state and labour market, class, race, gender and bureaucracy. The minimum wage itself is such a social relation. In contemporary society, with the division of labour having evolved to being organized on a deeply institutional basis, power is codified and imbued in different ways in the informal and formal practices, policies, laws, regulations and norms that make up these social relations. Much of how this happens is hidden from people’s view. And what takes place extralocally is strongly conditioning and translocally coordinating of local activity.

Given this reality, the institutional ethnographic (IE) method of inquiry provides a way to concretely inter-connect activity and consciousness in research and do so in a manner that uncovers the dialectical engagement of the local, extralocal and translocal. In the section Institutional Ethnography, I will present IE and its key concepts. In the two sections that follow – Institutional Ethnography for Inquiry Into Union-Related Settings and Building on Institutional Ethnography for Labour-Community Inquiries – I will explicate how I have adapted IE to my labour-community inquiry. I argue that my application has allowed for an expanded
understanding of reality creation and apprehension, including the contemporary role of ideology, in terms of what people and groups are doing, how it is happening and why. I have found this approach important in uncovering a range of issues and complexities in the kind of class struggle activity that the OMWC was. Finally, in the section Method, I will explain the specific method I used in my research.

**Institutional Ethnography**

Dorothy Smith’s ontological orientation foundational to her Institutional Ethnography (IE) research approach and method of inquiry arises from both Marxist praxis and various feminist sociologies (Carpenter & Mojab, 2008). She critiques on the one hand feminist research that is positivist in practice and, on the other, over-subjective approaches to inquiry grounded in an essentialist orientation to women’s social location and experience (Smith, D., 1987, 1990, 2005). Instead, Smith has evolved an approach that embeds the concept of “women’s standpoint” as an entry point into understanding the dynamic social relations of a given local setting, to uncover fetishized organizational activity and practices that are translocally relational.

Within IE, people are always located in a real everyday local world, carrying out our lives in a materially grounded way. While the conditions in which most people live their lives are not of their choosing, IE nonetheless requires that we approach people as experts about our own daily lives actively involved in their creation. This knowledge is grounded in the social conditions that people historically and collectively create. As such, the understanding of the social organization of a given local setting is not to be found by researchers setting up an Archimedean point from which to look in on objects of inquiry and “create” knowledge from such observations (Smith, D., 1987). Instead, the researcher is always within and the research subjects always central in a process of developing knowledge and understanding, “The knower
cannot be collapsed into the known, cannot be eliminated; the knower’s presence is always presupposed. There is no other way to know than humanly, from our historical and cultural situation” (Smith, D., 1990, p. 33). As such, getting at how people understand their lives, how they talk about them and how they carry out their coordinated activity is key to uncovering social relations and so to understanding how social cooperation actually works in a given place and time.

The intensification of the social division of labour as capitalist social formation expanded and the associated differentiation of legal, administrative and other forms of institutions that escalated in the late 19th century are foundational to the contemporary obscuring of social organization and functioning. Given this context, a key underpinning of this research approach follows Marx’s critique of ideology and his related proposal of a “new materialism” (Marx, 1978a, 1978b; Smith, D., 1990). That is, the concept of ideological practice. D. Smith (1990) says that ideology for Marx is not a set of beliefs or ideas but rather of procedures that mask and suppress the grounding of a social science: ideological procedures fix time in an abstract conceptual order. They derive social relations and order from concepts...They substitute concepts for the concerting of the activities of people as agents and forces in history. (p. 34)

D. Smith thus contends that, “Ideas and concepts as such are not ideological. They are ideological by virtue of being distinctive methods of reasoning and interpreting society” (1990, p. 36). One result of such procedures is a dialectical relationship between both the appearance of this conceptual priority and the lived reality of this appearance. This is because, from a materialist perspective, these concepts cannot actually fully substitute for human activity, and also since ruling ideas themselves do indeed have a key place in ruling. As such, appearance of reality is appearance insofar as it is abstracted from its material ground (Marx, 1978b).
While Marx saw ideology as both a body of ideas and a practice of deploying those ideas (Marx, 1978b, pp. 172-173), few scholars have given the method of reasoning component attention (Bannerji, 2009). He saw what D. Smith has named ideological practice as happening in a recurring set of three steps or tricks. First, the ruling ideas are separated from the material reasons for them, the social conditions, and the actual people thinking them. It thus comes to appear as if the ideas exist on their own. Next, he saw that ruling ideas that develop over time get linked together by the making of “mystical connections” among them, giving the concept(s) a self-determining appearance. The final trick is then for such self-determining concepts “to appear thoroughly materialistic [becoming] a series of persons, who represent the ‘concept’ in history….Thus the whole body of materialistic elements has been removed from history and now full rein can be given to the speculative steed” (Marx, 1978b, p. 175).

This process helps explain, for example, the predominance of the tripartite, class-as-boxes orientation to understanding class relations discussed in the previous chapter. That is, ideology in this two-part form in contemporary society assists in masking the complexity of our social organization, and our complex and contradictory participation in the production and reproduction of the social relations that make up this order. Although our activity and consciousness are grounded in actual material conditions of our day-to-day lives, “The break between an experienced world and its social determinations beyond experience is a distinctive property of our kind of society” (Smith, D., 1990, p. 54). This substitution of a range of “categories and concepts of ideologies” for the actual relations among people has an important mediation function in these disjunctures of activity and consciousness (Smith, D., 1986, p. 8).

The rise of neoliberal policy, activity and discourse in Canada in the 1990s exemplifies ideological practice. While standards of living plummeted, unemployment grew, and welfare and
social programs were slashed, corporate and ruling class personal tax breaks increased. Yet this
very material onslaught was blamed on immigrant's taking advantage (Wilmot, 2005), individual
failures of working class people and “a decaying moral fibre” (Yates, 2008, p. 97). In Ontario in
1995 this active and vicious separation of ideas from material reality by a section of the ruling
class saw autoworkers and welfare recipients alike among those who voted for and elected the
right-wing Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris. Ideological practice thus
served well in the material re-regulation of state and labour market origin social relations of that
period.

While the ideas generation and social control process is largely dominated by the ruling
class, I argue that ideological practice is a fundamental activity running through all contemporary
class relations and thus the people involved in them. It is not just done to us but also by us as we
are all in and of racialized and gendered class relations in some way or other. There is no place
of innocence when it comes to such thought process and product tendencies. This deployment of
an objectified version of the way the world works, detached from everyday social processes, and
grounded in concepts implicitly abstracted from social life can be seen in workers rights
organizing today. What we do in the union, workplace and community becomes masked, as these
become separate spheres, isolated conceptual places, naturalizing social functioning, denying
historical, relational roots and fetishizing overlapping and coordinated human activity. “Union”,
“community” and “workplace” have become “things”, substitute expressions for actual relations
arising from the activity of actual people, most of who are carrying out this activity in conditions
not of their choosing. People then take up these ideological procedures as a form of social
consciousness. As Hyman (1975) points out:

Trade unionism provides a good example of the way in which a purely
institutional perspective can be dangerous and misleading... what does it mean to
say that 'the union' adopts a particular policy or carries a certain action? This is a clear instance of...reification: treating an impersonal abstraction as a social agent, when it is really people who act. (p. 16)

Again, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five, capitalist social relations condition ideological practice but that does not mean it is a way of thinking and doing limited to the ruling class. In workers rights activity organizers can continue to use formulaic organizing tactics in attempts to “pull people out” from the reified labour and community spaces, in which contradictory ideas and material reality exist. It is quite common for there to be no low-waged workers involved in the campaign strategizing and decision-making process, even as organizers say – and many people in general seem to believe – that it is the “base” or “community” of low-waged workers that is directing the apparent movement building.

And another workers rights example can be found in an analogy to feminist Marxist sociologist Himani Bannerji’s (2005) explication of how the Canadian “national imaginary” produces and reproduces racialized, gendered and class-organized ideas and experiences of who is “inside” the nation and who is “outside.” This historically specific evolution of ideological practice in union organizations sees unionists creating and re-creating a “union imaginary”, in which we are all “brothers and sisters in the struggle” against the employer, corporate globalization, et cetera and “an injury to one is an injury to all.” From my experience, I would argue the ideology at work assists in masking this distinction, generally allowing slogans and limited pragmatic practice, and occasional activation and participation of members to stand-in for fully representative, community-based and rank-and-file planned and directed organizing.
The analysis of such ideological procedures is carried out through three principal IE processes:

1. the employing of a generous description of “work” as people’s actual coordinated activity in the production of their everyday world, a world which is both organized by and sustains institutional processes (Smith, D., 2007);

2. applying the concept of social relations to analyze the (often unconscious) coordination of these work processes (Smith, D., 1987, pp. 166-167); and,

3. the associated discovering of which texts are key mediators, producers and reproducers of our local social organization, of our “objectified-world-in-common” (Smith, D., 1990, p. 61). They coordinate and often regulate translocally occurring activities.

Institutional ethnographers’ key task is thus the finding of “the generalizing and standardizing processes in the ethnographic data, in people’s local practices, including language” (Smith, D., 2005, p. 135). As I will discuss below, I suggest a conceptual and methodological addition to IE to assist in uncovering and understanding the particular dynamic form of labour-community coalitions.

**Institutional Ethnography for Inquiry Into Union-Related Settings**

The feminist Marxist ontology underpinning IE as both research approach and method provides us with a praxis-based orientation to carrying out research, one that inter-relates the activity of research subjects as people, researchers as subjects and the dynamic social organization of the setting being researched. Such reflexive and dialectical social analysis allows researchers to both make connections in the complex “many-sided character of a social/natural
world that is fundamentally relational, practical and emergent” and to unmask these relations and the ideologies that assist in legitimizing the power relations themselves (Carroll, 2006, p. 236). It is thus an approach well suited to bring together “scholarly research and political engagement” (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 14).

In this inquiry I sought to uncover the coordinated activity over the 7 years of the campaign, among community people, workers, agency staff and labour officials and educators, within and among their organizations. I explored the linkages between planning meetings, events and other mobilizing activities. A detailed look at the organization of this activity shed light on what kinds of conditions are both needed and created to generate movement-building activity out of moments such as events and meetings. I wanted to discover who was involved, what they understand about the way they were involved, what decisions got made, by whom and when, including how far-reaching these decisions were. An integral part of this was to look at the conditions that both generated people’s ongoing involvement and hindered it.

Yet, when looking to taking up IE for this inquiry into the social organization of labour-community worker-rights organizing, I found that the ontology underpinning the approach made it difficult to take up in its original theoretical and methodological form. The objectified functioning of bureaucratically deployed power varies in degree, intensity and inflexibility with the social importance of the institution in the maintenance of social order. For example, while the method has had various other applications (Carpenter, forthcoming; Sharma, 2000; Slade, 2008), IE has frequently been applied in settings that involve the police and health care systems. Given the key role texts have in coordinating social organization, as an institution so critical to the maintenance of ruling class power, the police force has an undeniably high degree of text-based regularization (Smith, D., 2007). It also has an equally high degree of inflexibility in treating as
fully (or even partially) human anyone relating to it. It is clear in this environment how complex activity that appears as separate “incidents” involves relations among people that are bureaucratically (and often violently) reduced by police and other police-organization functionaries to criminalizing behaviour or characteristics of individuals. The mainstream medical system similarly has an individualized pathologizing orientation that turns people into “cases” (Smith, D., 1990).

Unions are also key institutions in the ongoing reproduction of contemporary capitalist society. And, as reviewed in Chapter Two, the grievance-arbitration procedure laid down as part of the legal-political institutionalization of labour in the 1940s has given unions their own forms of “incidents” and “cases”. Nonetheless, union organizations and the activity of unionists have a very different location on the social landscape, although ultimately linked to other institutions through coordinated human activity in various ways with varying degrees of distance and closeness. As also discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the contemporary institutionalization of unionized labour is fraught with historical and dynamic contradictions and conflict in its social purpose that play out in complex everyday ways in the activity carried out by and amongst rank-and-file workers, elected officials and staff, in relation to the employers.

Given such a contradictory context of both sub-contracted ruling and policing, and mobilizing members to fight employers and change employment law, I question some of Dorothy Smith’s formulations that frame how we employ IE to uncover and understand the ideological practices and “unaccounted for work processes” (1987, p. 177) that are key to articulating the social relations of the labour-community organizing process. In light of this and to build on the social relations conceptual orientation presented in Chapter Three, I attempt in the
Building on Institutional Ethnography for Labour-Community Inquiries

The Objectification of Consciousness and Social Relations in IE

For D. Smith (2005), ruling relations arise specifically from capitalist social organization and the associated “major transformation in the organization of society in which ‘consciousness’, ‘mind’, ‘rationality’, ‘organization’, and so on become reconstructed in objectified forms external to particular individuals” as “an objectification of consciousness and agency” (pp. 69, 184). D. Smith (1990) discusses at length the consciousness of people, our feelings and thoughts, as inter-woven with material, everyday social-relations based processes. To this end she notes, that people’s “activities and how they are organized are their lives, their existence” (p. 36). On taking up this view of consciousness as inseparable from actual individuals, she also says - as she builds on what she notes as a shortcoming of Marx’s formulation - that he stopped short of proposing a method for the “the investigation of the social relations and organization of consciousness” (p. 51). Smith’s reason for this is that,

If consciousness appears as distinct from and determining social action and relations, that appearance is a product of the activity of real individuals and their material conditions. [Further]…the objectified and organizational forms that externalize consciousness create possibilities for inquiry that did not exist for Marx. (1990, p. 52)

We see here perhaps D. Smith’s dialectical orientation, as appearance of reality and reality itself contradictorily co-exist. Perhaps we also see a contradiction in Smith's theory: that is, that consciousness can both be inseparable from individuals and objectified outside of people in organizational forms. As I will continue to elaborate below, I think this contradiction is
resolved by understanding that it is reality that is socially objectified, and not consciousness per se.

In her later work, Dorothy Smith (2005) goes on to say that the new forms of social (or ruling) relations [that objectify consciousness] had not developed in Marx’s time; hence, he did not incorporate into his thinking forms of social consciousness that were (a) differentiated and specialized as specific social relations and (b) objectified in the sense of being produced as independent of particular individuals and particularized relations. (p. 14)

Similarly, she also notes that Marx did not understand gender oppression as he was conditioned by the social relations of the period in which he lived and so it is absent from his work (Smith, 1990, p. 39). Yet, after a century of first, second and third wave feminism, this reasoning fails to explain why many contemporary Marxist scholars, unionists and organizers have been equally unsuccessful at integrating sexism and other forms of oppression as social relations into their Marxism. I will discuss different orders and kinds of “choice” later but this is a good example of the complexity of how that which is objectified human activity as a condition “outside” of us is also a relation within us and our daily lives that we can choose to challenge or reproduce. It is thus an example of the necessity to keep the subjective/objective dialectic alive in theory and method, which is what D. Smith argues overall. This is unless of course there is real social benefit to be maintained from keeping thinking and “real” life separate (as, for example, with men’s generally ongoing social control of women in what are considered private-sphere relationships) and so less incentive to do so.

Building on these observations of D. Smith’s treatment of consciousness, I suggest that there are a number of inter-connected issues within IE that create difficulties in studying social reality given my research setting. Much of Smith’s theoretical orientation refers to the process of conceptual thinking that arises from concrete and coordinated human activity. She discusses,
referring to Marx, how the concrete does not come into being by thinking it; rather, our meaning-making processes are rooted in our activity. She notes that in the realm of philosophical consciousness, “conceptual thinking is the real human being and for which the conceptual world as such is thus the only reality, the movement of categories appears as the real act of production” (Marx, as cited in Smith, D., 1990, p. 209). From a Marxist perspective however, the process of consciousness is “the working-up of observation and conception into concepts” rather than the concept being generated outside of this process, through “thinking and generating itself” (Marx, as cited in Smith, D., 1990, p. 209). Yet when we look at three issues explicitly or implicitly found in explanations of the IE approach and its implication for the method of inquiry based on this (Smith, D., 1986, 1990, 2005), I see a tendency for D. Smith (2005) to arrive at a treatment of consciousness as more about content or product rather than seeing consciousness as a dynamic process, the activity of which is a social product. I would suggest that this results in a potential for the detachment of the subject from social processes that objectify, and, as a result, the drift from the grounding of individual consciousness and activity in reflexive and dialectical relation to the social organization of people in a given setting. I suggest that the three underlying issues related to this tendency are:

1. As discussed above, contemporary capitalist ruling relations have resulted in what Smith calls an objectification of consciousness itself;
2. These ruling relations are outside of women (and so of other socially marginalized individuals and groups);
3. Text is the primary coordinator of activity and so of social cooperation that swallows up individual consciousness. (Smith, D., 2005, p. 21)

With respect to the second point, D. Smith (2005) says, “The ruling relations are forms of consciousness and organization that are objectified in the sense that they are constituted externally to particular people and places” (p. 13). She also notes, “A sociology beginning from
the standpoint of women must...begin where women have been and still generally located, outside the ruling apparatus” (Smith, D., 1986, p. 6). What D. Smith (2005) seems to mean at times by “external to” is “subordinated within”, as when she says, “women were excluded from appearing as agents or subjects within the ruling relations. However we might have been at work in them we were subordinates” (p. 9). When taken up by Campbell and Gregor (2002) this becomes, “peoples’ lives come to be dominated and shaped by forces located outside of them” (p. 12). When taken up as political activist ethnography, this “external to” formulation can have the effect of seeing the ruling class as the keeper and reproducer of ideological practice while the activists need to uncover their internalization of this in order to make the most of what they are keepers of: agency (Kinsmen, 2006; Smith, G. W., 2006b). That is, this external to/subordinated within conflation leads to potential non-dialectical analyses of these settings and the activity within them.

D. Smith also seems to see ruling relations as essentially political relations, separate from the economy (1990, p. 31), an apparently traditional Marxist base/superstructure interpretation. While more dynamic, reflexive social relations orientations to base/superstructure have been offered (Sayer, 1987; Wood, 1995), I would suggest what appears to be a more conventional yet unexplicated understanding could be significant in creating a relational break between subjective experience and objective conditions that I am noting. It might also obscure the complexity of how the multiply entwined social relations I discussed in Chapter Three organize the “two moments of capitalist exploitation – appropriation and coercion” (Wood, 1995, p. 30). Further, ruling relations seem somewhat different for her than social relations, the latter being more of a conceptual technique to guide researchers “to look for the sequences of action in which [work knowledge] is embedded and which implicate other people, other experience, and other work in
the institutional process” (Smith, D., 2005, p. 158). The conceptual orientation that I present integrates actual, material social relations with relations of class and class struggle. In this approach I do not understand ruling and social relations as separate, nor externalize any social subject from social processes. An example of the critical difference in these two conceptualizations is when considering bureaucratic and related social relations of unions. As discussed previously, state and labour-market (ruling) relations are dynamic and have a tremendous effect on unions as organizations made up of and for working class people. But the general legal-political form of unions in Canada has led to decision-making being taken out of workers’ hands as their organizations are led by an officialdom constantly driven to compromise within such ruling relations. Add to this the experience of many dues-paying, racialized unionists who are in but not included in the union, and the complexity of it all deepens. This shows why a social relations of class struggle approach to IE in my research is useful for uncovering contradictory co-existing practices and realities.

In IE, texts are key to the “double coordination” of institutional work processes of the ruling relations: one coordinates a sequence of activity among people and another occurs through the people in charge making sure what is going on “meets regulatory requirements” (p. 170). If the former were to cause an inconsistency with the latter, people’s work is transposed to conform. Key in this is the text-reader conversation, “a process that translates the actual into the institutional” and in which “institutional discourse subsumes and renders ‘institutional’ the particularities of everyday experience” (p. 105). Through the process of coordination of hierarchies of textual and conceptual relations, while people activate texts at “processing interchange[s]” (p. 171), agency is transferred from individual to institution as, “The necessary disjunctures at the point of transition from actual to institutional reality dump or distort the
experience of those who are caught up in and subject to institutional forms of action” (p. 187) and “resistance, repudiation, disagreement, and rejection work with and from the text’s agenda” (p. 111).

As a result of these issues, I suggest that it might be difficult to uncover the very real conflict and contradiction in human activity and the meaning we make of it in ongoing social organization maintenance and change. All D. Smith’s explications of the IE research process make it clear how complex it is for a researcher to carry out an inquiry, and she has a determined grounding of what goes on in the mind as happening in the body of real people in real places (2005, p. 25). Yet, as seen in the description above, there is often a kind of analytical smoothness once the work-text-work method is introduced. Once the unmasking of the coordination occurs, there is a potential then for an almost mechanical and linear mapping of local relations (Smith, D., 2005, 2007; Kinsmen, 2006), losing a fully reflexive orientation, that may well reproduce institutional practices of treating people and their work as a resource but not seeing them as agents “in the making of accounts of [their] behavior” (Smith, D., 1990, p. 91).

By bringing in the integrated and reflexive social relations orientation of Bannerji (2005) along with Berger’s and Luckmann’s (1966) dialectical analysis of individual consciousness and inter-subjective reality construction and maintenance, I now explore how these authors’ contributions might assist in addressing these conceptual concerns.

**The Reflexive Process of Social Reality Objectification**

Given the deep implication of our bodies and selves in contemporary property relations, capital accumulation cannot occur outside of social and cultural relations. Forms of oppression such as racism and sexism, while not reducible to class are materially inseparable from class relations, “as any social organization rests in inter-subjective relations of bodies and minds
marked with socially constructed difference on the terrain of private property and capital” (Bannerji, 2005, p. 149). We are in and of the social relations because we are all in and of society, even as various social relations are organized on the basis of greater and lesser imbalances of power that prevent people from access to everything from meeting basic needs to meaningful involvement in social decision-making. Building in such an orientation to the IE theory and method can replace the separation of ruling relations as external to and over, and social relations as “research technique” (Smith, G. W., 2006b, p. 54) with a more inner-related social relations orientation (Allman, 2001) that might assist in uncovering social dynamics, moments in a labour-community setting in which the same people may be reproducing some power relations as they are challenging others.

Drawing on Marx’s original works, Bannerji (2005) also discusses “the concrete” as she argues for a “reflexive theorization of the social.” From this exploration she posits:

The “concrete” as the social…has a dual character for Marx. It is a mental or conceptual category, and an existing specific social formation….Something that is “concrete”… is concretized by specific social relations, with mediating and expressive as well as reproductive forms of consciousness and practices. In fact, this “concrete” social form is to be seen in contrast to a fact or an “object,” because it is not reified/fixed or hypostatized. It is a fluid, dynamic, meaningful formation created by living subjects in actual lived time and space, yet with particular discernible features that implicate it in other social formations and render it specific. (p. 150)

This manner of understanding and engaging with the “concrete” is one that undermines the contemporary social tendency for practices and beliefs to become detached from material reality and thus ideological. As well, within Bannerji’s reflexive formulation, consciousness itself does not arrive at objectification; instead we see a dynamic “constitutive complexity” of inter-subjective activity (p. 151). While social activity in a local setting can be deeply bureaucratized and so appear fixed and outside of us, this formulation allows us to keep our analysis in motion,
to see that it is people – many of whom are doing so in unfree conditions – that ongoingly produce and reproduce such institutions through our activity, the products of our activity and the meaning we give it. Such agency is often understood as an ability for individual or collective action independent of or despite constraints imposed by predominating social relations (Bergene, Endresen, & Knutsen, 2010, p. 6). In relation to this, the complex dialectical link between thought and action is taken up by Bannerji (as cited in Gorman & Mojab, 2008, p. 139) as a “relational/reflexive method” in which agency is understood as a combination of experience and politicization from experience. Such politicization can mean having an ability to analyze social relations as they concretely are, as people are actually in and of them. Experience can also mean to people having a set of organizing skills. Or it might mean be both. Much of Bannerji’s (for example 1995, 2000) body of work explores the profound difficulties for most people to actualize such agency in a meaningful way within predominating racialized and gendered capitalist class relations. Thus, by maintaining such an approach to both agency and standpoint throughout a process of inquiry, we can reveal social activity, even of the intended emancipatory sort as in the OMWC, to be infused with tensions and contradictions (for a thoughtful exploration of the complexity of standpoint in IE, see Carpenter, forthcoming).

To explicate further the social process of objectification, I now draw on Berger and Luckmann (1966). They discuss how “everyday life” is an ordered world originating in our actions and thoughts, organized on the basis of apparently pre-arranged patterns that are nonetheless evolving historical products of a shared history (p. 54). Everyday life always appears objectified to us and we take it for granted as reality (p. 23). Consciousness, the subject-based process through which we apprehend everyday life – as conditioned by the physical organization of our lives (Marx, 1978b, p. 158) – is always intentionally directed towards objects, be it an
actual object (looking at a sunset) or a consciousness of feeling anxious about what kind of sun
damage the ozone layer destruction will cause. Consciousness is also always organized
temporally, even as it occurs intra-subjectively at different levels, and varies in inter-subjective
availability. And while we try to engage in this complex process, there can never be full
harmonization between the temporal forms in the inter-subjective world, and those internally for
each individual. Consciousness is not a fully socialized process; it cannot be fully collective.

This inter-subjective world that we share with others, the “paramount reality” that
surrounds all other “finite” realities of everyday life (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 25), is
experienced with a closeness and remoteness that varies, temporally and spatially, with what we
control through our bodily activity being the closest (p. 22). Shifting to one of these finite
realities causes at least a transition, at most a radical change in the tension of consciousness, as
each person is “capable of moving through different spheres of reality” (p. 21).

As inter-subjective patterns – supported by secondary systems of social control (such as
texts in IE) – become integrated as institutions, they are experienced by people as having a pre-
existing, historic life of their own, beyond the individuals, and so they become objectified as an
“external and coercive fact” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 58) as choices are narrowed and
predictability is created. For example, the “choice” to have a higher wage, which the state and
capital have shared interests in keeping as low as socially possible. Yet, no matter how
determining the objectivity of the institutional world may seem to people, it is still a construction
and product of human activity. Of course this alienation is material and not simply perception
because, while under human control such institutions are not under popular control. The
alienation though is part of what prevents us from grasping the ongoing interactive relationship
between humans (the producers) and the social world (the product) as a dialectical one.
“Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. The third moment is internalization” of the objectified social world into our consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 61). These moments do not happen in a linear way; within each part of society, and society as a whole, people are living these moments historically. From this perspective, it is not consciousness itself that is objectified but the products and content of our own subjective processes, as they are informed by how we are located and actively being and carrying out our coordinated lives in the social world. The objectified forms of reality carried in IE’s text become instruments then for maintenance of the social order.

The more institutionalized a conduct is, the more predictable and controlled it becomes, with sanctions ensuring compliance (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 62). The sub-contracted policing role of unionists by labour officials is an example of this. Language is the key vehicle by which sanctions are transmitted within the social world. Similarly for D. Smith (1990), “The realities to which action and decision are oriented are virtual realities vested in texts and accomplished in distinctive practices of reading and writing. We create these virtual realities through objectifying discourse; they are our own doing” (p. 62). Actual people create facts, but we as people then disappear as the facts become external to us through the relational production (legitimation, reinterpretation, editing out, editing in) of their facticity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 68). For example, as I will discuss further in Chapter Five, the textual pronouncements by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC, 2008a) on the success of the OMWC tend to make this success appear as an indisputable fact, separate from workers' reality. Still, with language as the main vehicle, the objective and subjective experience of reality are incompletely symmetrical. What is real within, is real without but, while there is always a "for without" to be had that can be internalized into consciousness, all that is within does not come
from outside. “Subjective biography is not fully social” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 134). This perspective can be contrasted with D. Smith’s (1990) apparent unidirectional view that, in contemporary society, “subjective experience is opposed to the objectively known. The two are separated from each other by the social act that creates an externalized object of knowledge - the fact” (p. 69).

Through these processes institutions are inter-connected translocally. For Berger and Luckmann (1966), when institutional knowledge is socially objectified so as to appear as all knowledge itself, this becomes reality for people, so any shift from institutional order looks to people like a departure from reality. Their concept of “reality maintenance” helps to explain this complex coordinated social functioning a little more. “Procedures of reality-maintenance” are necessary to maintain a degree of objective/subjective reality symmetry, as, for example, the competing definitions of reality within individual consciousness, can threaten this balance, especially if externalized as shared finite realities that people then take collective action on (p. 147). So, even as I can reconcile the theorization of ideological practice and reality maintenance in one ontology, the process Berger and Luckmann describe is quite different from objectification of consciousness because it is conceptually clear and materially observable in day-to-day life that individually-based consciousness processes continue dialectically as and with the existence and reproduction of socially objectified reality.

For Berger and Luckmann (1966), conversation is the most important vehicle for maintaining, modifying, contouring and reconstructing (often at the same time) a person’s subjective reality. Much of this is happening implicitly rather than explicitly, going on against a taken-for-granted background world, and is often shown in the casualness of conversation. Ridicule (of self, internally, as well as of other) is an example of a social sanction against
reality-disintegrating doubts” (p. 155) that can be a threat. Since IE texts do not seem to exist in “the same temporal and local world” that we do (Smith, D., 2005, p. 102) because they are both in the here and now, yet endure over time, they are vehicles for objective reality maintenance. And while they are not wholly inconsistent we can make a useful distinction now between “text” as the written word and Berger and Luckmann’s “conversation”, similar to D. Smith’s text in the form of speech. Seeing how talking often actually is activity is important to understanding what is actually going on in union-related social organization. It is important to understanding that texts do not have agency in reproducing or challenging the social relations that are in and of us. Notwithstanding D. Smith’s (2005) own view on the connection of activity and talk (p. 25), the more predominantly operationalized IE concept of people activating texts only goes so far. And looking for texts to explain activity coordination may distract us from questions of individual and collective agency. The text standing in for activity may cause the researcher to inadvertently lose the subject’s presence. A related language/consciousness/activity connection was noted by Marx (1978b) as, “Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other [people] and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other [people]” (p. 158).

As D. Smith (1990) notes, “Issues of wages and working conditions are incorporated into elaborated structures in which class struggle is displaced onto struggles within legal and bureaucratic processes” (p. 65). With that in mind, I now work through an example to explore some of these ideas (Personal journal, August 12, 2007).

Much of the day-to-day work of most union staff involves the double coordination described above. In unions, it is not uncommon for labour officials and staff to refuse to activate
collective agreements (key texts in that setting) even when workers go to them with requests to do just that. Rank-and-file workers often do not have copies of their contracts and so approach or call staff when their employers are doing something they find unjust. Not infrequently in many unions, staff simply say (without ever producing a document for the worker to refer to) something along the lines of the following: the worker’s complaint is not a contract violation so they cannot grieve it, the employer is a jerk, but what can you do. If an institutional ethnographer were talking with the worker who has had such a conversation with the official, that researcher will have just uncovered a potential guiding problematic, especially if she sees that the staff person in this situation is not “talking text”. I suggest that what is going on here is the activity of one powerful official in his body to a less powerful worker in theirs. It is a moment of top-down reality- and social order- maintenance given that “Labour leaders don't so much live by labour's legalistic, state-imposed codes as they are an integral part of that coding” (Palmer, 1992, p. 377). Notwithstanding the historically incarcerating effect of collective agreements on workers ideas of what is possible on the shop floor (p. 284), it is not inevitable that the social organization of the institution be uni-directionally maintained in such a way. There can be a range of reactions by different workers to this activity, and a range of meanings they give to it. If it happens to different people, perhaps they talk to each other after, externalizing previous subjective realities that they were the only ones that were being moved by the staff from a personal finite reality back to the generally suffocating, over-arching objective reality of harmonious, peaceful union-employer labour relations in a current local and global context of massive ruling class domination, involving recurring periods of staggering job loss, increasingly precarious work, and under-employment. If they talk to enough other workers, objectifying and so collectivizing this experience more, might they have different degrees of tension in consciousness as they share this
finite objective reality that is so dwarfed by the paramount one? And how is this tension in consciousness and experience of subjective reality localized to individuals or groups because of experiences of both workplace- and union-based oppression, which organizes their exploitation and so the workplace and the union? Are the paramount reality-maintenance activities so successfully sub-contracted out to the labour officialdom that the workers get privately angry but believe they can do nothing? And, importantly for a social-change oriented researcher in this context and as discussed in Chapter Four, what are the complexity of conditions and oppressive social relations for the workers in their everyday lives of workplace, home and community that support or mitigate risking some kind of change-directed activity? What is the relationship with the tension of their consciousness and with whom and how it is collectively shared as reality? What are the forms of coercion and complicity that hinder doing what we at least partially want, on the basis of our subjective reality or narrowly shared objective ones? As D. Smith (1990) points out,

> the relationship of social forms of consciousness to the social relations they reflect changes. The possibility of the separation of the concept from its ground in the actual co-ordering of people’s activities depends on the forms of social organization in which a concept and the practices it regularizes and reflects can be taken apart. (p. 42)

These questions were important ones to orient me in sifting through the activity and meaning making I sought to uncover in my interviews with the OMWC-involved workers, staff and officials. Getting too concerned about looking for a text to hook up the activities of the people in this union example, given the problematic generated, might have led to me as a researcher missing an opportunity to uncover and understand an important social reproduction moment. It may also have distracted me from the issue of agency that people of all social locations have in our everyday lives. If we are distracted from the subject we lose the reflexive
and often contradictory relational quality of people’s consciousness and activity with the social. We are not simply wandering robotically in a “dream-like state” overwhelmed by the fetishizing effects of consumerism (Kuhling & Levant, 2006, p. 213). Unless in captivity (and even then to a degree in many circumstances), we are always making choices, in worse or better, more or less constricting conditions not of our choosing. The degree to which people can bear to make such choices of resistance varies with the degree to which conditions are restricted but is not wholly determined by it. These good, bad or indifferent choices that are expressions of our agency lead to some form of activity that will challenge and/or reproduce existing social relations and order. There are of course very different orders of choices so this is not to say we are able to effectively make choices about all areas of our lives. In the neoliberal individualistic ethos that is the suffocating air we are forced to breathe, “choice” has become a concept detached from material reality. Nonetheless, choices still exist. The worker in the scenario I present might choose to tell the official that she would like a copy of the collective agreement. However, they and other working-class people are not able to simply make a choice not to sell their labour power for a wage and climb into some other ideal mode of production and so of cooperation. To “choose” to not sell our labour power would require a level of collective support and so social organization to create the conditions for all those people to collectively make that choice. I would suggest that it is quite possible that the inability to make that ultimate choice has become unconsciously conflated by people as an inability to go against the grain at all, so captured is people’s consciousness by the combined material and ideological onslaught we live and labour under. As D. Smith (2005) has noted, “The relations and organizations in which (individuals who rule) are active are also those that organize our lives and in which we in various ways participate” (p. 18). And the more power those ruling individuals have themselves as a social class, the more each of
their “doings”, their “work”, becomes about what they tell people to do, what they say to us, buttressed as it is by translocally controlled objectified reality in the forms of laws, contracts and regulations, but also fundamentally by how, “The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker” (Marx, 1977, p. 899). The power in such moments like the example above is thus not in a text; it is in a person, the labour official as granted by the bureaucratically organized relations of officialdom as a whole. As our being and doing determine our consciousness, such officials “context-specific views” about their doings do “converge over time” (Seccombe & Livingstone, 2000, p. 23) within, and as a conditioning feature of, the social organization of power. Such power is conferred and reproduced systematically by that person and other people like him, people with shared material and class interests, interests that have historical evolved to be deeply relational with those of employers.

I will now explain my method of implementing IE in my research on the OMWC.

**Method**

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guided my data collection and design were:

1. What are the racialized, gendered and classed relations of the social organization of the OMWC?

2. Within that social organization, what has been the relationship between both labour- and community-driven educational events and organizing activity in different phases of the OMWC?

3. How has the OMWC’s social organization across time and space informed its limited outcome?
Data Collection

To develop an understanding of the OMWC’s social organization, I combined my own reflections, participant-observation, in-depth interviews of community people, workers, staff and labour officials and educators, and document analysis. Once the ethics approval process was completed in June 2009, my interviews took place between July and December 2009. I interviewed 21 people, and reviewed various documents, many from my own and from one participant’s archives.

Participant-Observation.

My participant-observations included specific group, union and coalition meetings, and community and union events. These included TYRLC-organized events: a town hall on March 23, 2009 “Workers Rights in Troubled Times” and a May 7, 2009 Stewards Assembly.

Interviews.

Interviews were open-ended, digitally recorded and later transcribed. I spoke with a range of OMWC participants to access a range of experiences with and so knowledge about the campaign. Using the interview guide in Appendix C, the focus of the interviews was on the person's experience of and thoughts about an event or a set of events related to the OMWC. We met in offices, parks, and coffee shops. No personal information was asked for. I wanted to uncover what people were doing, what they understood about their involvement as located in the OMWC as a whole and how they related their activity and understanding of it to their social change goals as a whole. I actively sought to interview OMWC participants with varying degrees of social and institutional power, in general and specifically related to the campaign. For example, the President of the TYRLC arguably has the greatest degree of institutional power while a low-waged worker in a racially diverse low-income Toronto community has the least.
Such varied standpoints, social locations and so campaign organizational knowledge were important for developing the campaign's complex social organization across time and space.

In terms of confidentiality and ethics, I gave participants the choice of anonymity or to identify themselves. Seventeen chose the former and four the latter. These are John Cartwright, President of the TYRLC, John Clarke, staff organizer with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, Nicole Wall, a labour educator with the TYRLC’s Labour Education Centre, and Steve Watson, a national staff representative with the CAW. Most of the participants were people I contacted because I had worked with them or was acquainted with them. Four participants (CG1, CG2, CG7 and John Clarke) were suggested to me by other research participants as important people to speak with.

Table 1 presents some demographic information on the participants. The 21 people are almost evenly spread out amongst the three types of organizations that participated in the campaign between 2001 and 2007: unions, community groups and non-union workers rights groups. I have denoted these as “U”, “C”, and “NUG”, respectively, and then numbered each anonymous participant accordingly. People also come from a range of social locations and experiences. Nine participants were racialized people, seven of whom were women. However, participants were not selected on the basis of their race and gender; rather, the diverse involvement reflects both my pre-existing relationships, the range of people doing this organizing work, and (to some degree) who chose to agree to an interview.

Interviewees are not individually noted in this research by their specific racialized and gendered identify. Not only were participants not chosen on an identity basis, objectification and tokenizing due to racialized identity for many people in the labour-community setting is already an ongoing problem for them. This was reported to me by a number of participants and will be
discussed in Chapters Five to Eight. In addition, given both the organizational and individual demographic distribution, participants’ expertise and insights are wide-ranging. The candor they all show in discussing the OMWC allows the complexity of racialized, gendered class relations and thus the campaign’s organization to be revealed. Their openness demonstrates not only people’s political commitment and desire to make a contribution to this intellectual project; it also displays a high degree of trust in me, the researcher, to protect their anonymity to the best of my ability. As such, while the use of pseudonyms would avoid the potentially mechanical feel of the number/letter designation, it might also identify people’s ethnoracial location.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Groups (CG) Non-Union Workers Rights Groups (NUG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers/Activists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (white)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (white)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Document review and analysis.**

There were a number of documents that were instrumental for understanding the campaign's social organization. These included reports, personal archives of organizers, meeting minutes (e.g., of J4W and TYRLC), websites, newsletters, flyers and e-notices. Much of this material I reviewed for the content. I also reviewed the textual material to see how the very
existence of it may have activated people in making connections or in creating disjunctures, and also how texts may have spoken in the absence of speakers (Smith, G. W., 2006a). That is, how press releases, buttons and petitions as concrete things to connect people and processes became translocal coordinators. They might have been simply announcing or standing in for, reproducing or creating the appearance of mobilizing activity. Some participants also indicated textual material that functioned to make such connections or disjunctures.

**Data Analysis**

After interview transcription, I imported the documents into a qualitative data analysis application, MAXQDA. I read and re-read the transcripts, keeping four analytical concepts working as I organized the data into four thematic areas: the concepts social relations, ideology, ideological practice and pragmatic/transformative anti-racism, as found in the themes reality/reality maintenance, mobilizing and capacity-building organizing, union renewal, and education. The re-reading was necessary to continue to make sense of participants’ contributions in relation to each other, not as standing side-by-side. I used the data analysis program to mark sections of interviews in terms of both the concepts and themes. After I had made what relevant selections from all interviews, I then prepared a Word document, divided into the four themes, and copied in all relevant interview sections. I then continued the analysis through the writing process, as I explained the ways in which my and the 21 participants’ contributions uncovered the OMWC’s social organization. As I wrote I referred to and incorporated contributions from the various areas of scholarly literature in which my research is situated.

Thus, the following four chapters of data analysis are titled by the analytical themes:

*Reality and Reality Maintenance in the OMWC, Capacity-Building and Mobilization Organizing*
in the OMWC, and The OMWC as a Union Renewal Opportunity?, and Workers’ education and Learning in OMWC Organizing.
Chapter Five: 
Reality and Reality Maintenance in the OMWC

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, I find the dynamic relationship between human subjective experiences and consciousness, and actively objectified social reality to be an important focus for this research on the moments, momentum and movement building in labour-community workers-rights organizing. In this chapter I thus seek to uncover the complex material processes and content of the creation, apprehension, and internalization of the multi-layered and institutionalized social reality in the OMWC.

In the context of workers-rights organizing, one way in which different reality perspectives are observed in practice and in the literature is in the use of overlapping multiple terms, including community, social, and social movement unionism. This complicates our understanding of the specificity of each practice (Ross, 2007). There is also variation in the literature in the focus on actual subjects, the workers, officials, staff, educators and others that are socially producing and reproducing the union and community organizations that are often discussed as if they were the subjects. All forms have some critique of the current organization of society, seeing workers as located not just in their jobs but also people with rights and interests in society as a whole. Yet, there are a range of viewpoints in this literature and among community organizers, labour officials and activists, on “in what ways unions should change and what the strategic objectives of unions should be” which “implicitly assume or explicitly advocate particular forms of unionism and the thinking that informs them” (Camfield, 2007, pp. 283, 284). Labour and community groups participating in the OMWC clearly had different realities in this regard.
Underpinning my analysis in this chapter is a critique I have made of a fundamental piece of IE. That is, what D. Smith conceptualized as an objectification of consciousness I contend is actually a social process of objectification of reality. It is a complex, ongoing multi-layered process, always happening across time and space. To explore this in the case of my research thus involves much detail, both in order to adequately demonstrate what I uncovered and to lay a foundation of the campaign reality upon which the subsequent three thematic chapters are built.

There are two main sections. The first, *Layers of Reality and Appearance*, is divided into five sub-topics: *Local Reality and Campaign Demands; The OMWC Outcome as a “Victory;” Institutional Categorization and Fragmentation; Individual/Institutional Reality Relationships, and; Bridging Reality Gaps*. The layers are temporal, spatial, institutional and individual. Each section revolves around an analysis of participants’ reality descriptions: the way things are, what people do or have done. They also revolve around people’s reflections about why things are the way they are, and what that means to them. Building on the local, individual and institutional reality layers explored in section one, in section two, *Translocally Organized Links and Disjunctures*, I take this analysis to the extra- and translocal levels, uncovering some of how and why many people’s activity and perspectives were related to social relations originating externally to but an integral part of their local realities. This part also has five sub-sections: *Changes in Extralocal Origin Social Relations During the OMWC; Minimum Wage vs. Living Wage Campaigns; The 60-hour Workweek; Endorsements, and; Petitions, Stickers, Buttons and Print Materials*.

I focus in this chapter on understanding the combined individual/social processes of externalization/ objectification/ internalization that both involve and lead to varying degrees of shared consciousness, and reality harmonization or disjuncture. Analytical concepts developed in
Chapters Three and Four will be used to understand these reality layers: social relations, ideology, ideological practice and pragmatic and transformative anti-racism.

**Layers of Reality and Appearance**

In this first section I attempt to demonstrate how local, individual lives conditioned people’s campaign experiences, even as institutional realities conditioned individual involvement and how the campaign is understood by people and their groups. In particular I will explore at some length the perspectives on the outcome of the OMWC. I first look at people’s local reality in general but also in relation to the campaign demands.

**Local Reality and Campaign Demands**

Many research participants graphically expressed the everyday life conditions of themselves or low-waged workers that drove the need for the campaign and the demands. One of the relations that was frequently discussed was class, and how extralocally caused economic crises affect people’s daily lives, conditioning working-class stratification.

One participant spoke to me entirely about the psychological and economic violence she lives with in the less than $10-an-hour job she had been working at, describing in detail the racist and sexist conditions of many low-wage retail workers. CG5’s (June 24, 2009) sense of herself as involved in the OMWC comes from having signed a petition and from being in material need of its success. At the time of the interview she was making only $9.54 per hour and was being forced into increasingly part-time hours. The topic of the campaign was an entry point for her to speak with me about the range of workplace challenges she has faced for some time, to both include that as relevant data for my research, and to see if I might facilitate her getting some support in improving her work conditions.
Her very real situation of racialized and gendered precarity is multi-layered. In a large retail chain in which she has worked for a number of years, she describes racism in access to hours and permanent work as having increased since a US-based corporation took over the previously Canadian retail giant.

The coloured staff [are getting bumped down to part-time work]. Even when you just come on [and have no seniority] – Italian, Spanish or white – you can get your hours…. And there’s one girl – she’s Muslim – and she applied for a permanent position in the electronics department, and the manager told her that she can’t give her the position because the other girl has seniority rights with the other position and he’s gonna give it to her. And that girl had a permanent position already, full time. He moved her from that department just…because she’s Muslim [and wears hijab]…and it’s not fair.

Further she says, “I begged my manager even yesterday for more hours because I have more seniority than the others. And I’m trained, and I got 13 company courses through the Internet, and still they wasn’t givin’ me no hours, but they’re givin’ the other staff.” If such a manager were asked they might somehow blame the recent economic crisis on creating such a trend. But as Armstrong (1991) notes, “In 1990, 71 per cent of part-time workers were women. While there were 125,000 fewer full-time jobs for women in 1992 than was the case in 1990, there were 69,000 more part-time ones” (p. 32). And Das Gupta’s study (1996) has documented how the racialized allocation of such gendered and precarious work is not particular to CG5 or her workplace.

The economic effect on CG5 (June 24, 2009) is significant; “I have a mortgage and two kids in school too. My daughter’s in York University studying to be a teacher. And the fees is not cheap.” She also talked about her own collective and individual efforts to deal with this injustice. When a union expressed interest in unionizing the workers, she was eager to sign a card even
when others feared to do so. As can happen with unions in relation to women-dominated, low-
paid workplaces (Yates, 2006), that drive died before it was even started when the union saw that
too few workers would readily commit interest. Since then, as conditions have worsened, her
activity has sometimes been silence to protect herself – “I keep quiet because I don’t want to get
involved in nothin’ no more” – at other times vocally demanding respect: “And I look at [the
manager] and I say, ‘Well, you know, I’m a human being. I can only do so much. If you shout at
staff and you don’t want to pay people to work the hours, then I can only do so much’.”

CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) illustrates another way in which class relations occur within a
racialized local reality. Her organization’s work of difficult respectful debate was fruitful in
grappling with the local racialized class situation

We all know or have heard stories of people in [this ethno-racial] community who
work under the table for less than minimum wage and we also know that small
business owners, many of whom have their own, independent businesses and they
may or may not be paying minimum wage; they may or may not be hiring family
members or using family members as labour, paid or unpaid. And so there were
some questions as to what would this $10 minimum wage mean to people in those
circumstances. In the end we decided that because of the things that we stand for
in social justice and human rights and workers rights, we felt that we should
support this campaign.

Their local discussion process was not taken up translocally in the 2007 coalition. On the
contrary, CG7 experienced herself and the ethnoracial community she works with and is a part of
as being objectified by the campaign organizing. With about a month left to an already planned
town hall event, TYRLC organizers met with CG7’s group

They had their ideas of how the town hall should look and they wanted petitions
to be signed and they wanted all kinds of stuff to happen without ever really
having a discussion about why the $10 minimum wage was important; without really developing that kind of relationship or getting people on board.

U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) also makes it clear how everyday local reality is organized by gender. And, in understanding the unpaid, socially unrecognized and unaccounted for work of most women, the $10 on its own is not for her a reform that addresses actual, complex, lived conditions. Extending her union social-wage consciousness to all workers, she says

I think it's our social safety net that we need to deal with… You know, can you [even make it to poverty level] if you have a sick child, if you have a sick day, your car breaks down… there's a power outage and you get sent home from work for a day or two. All those things that mean you're really not making the 400 bucks a week right, the 40 hours. I really think that we need to have something else in place that gets people there….I don't know, there's got to be a better way to keep people at a level that's not poverty. I think it's social programs. Harper stomped all over our goal for universal childcare and that was I think one of the most important things that could have happened for people, anybody, but for people making lower wages [in particular].

CG1 (July 2, 2009) was involved in the 2007 phase of the campaign because of her, her family’s and her community’s lived experience of marginalization: “I have children myself, and I want to see a workforce that they can participate in and be paid fairly for the job that they do so that they can be contributing members of society. And also to support my neighbours who are struggling in minimum-wage jobs [and] not being able to put the food on the table and pay the rent.” Continuing, she gives an example of state-based ideological practice in its child-focused anti-poverty programs and messaging: “Considering the government commitments at all levels [on addressing child poverty] it’s like they’ve forgotten that children need parents who can feed
them properly to take care of them.” She also gives some local history to translocally-organized relations that appear to some as new

Where we hear of recession today; this particular neighbourhood has been under a recession for more than 20 years. It used to be the hub of employment activity in Toronto, and all those jobs have gone; factories have closed and we see a lot of people who are struggling, despite the fact that under StatsCan we’re not considered to be a low-income neighbourhood. But we see the evidence every day through the [local community group]. There are many people struggling in this area.

CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) echoes this, noting the day-to-day time consuming activity of being poor

Food banks had like 300, 400% growth in terms of usage by [the time of the start of the campaign], so it was really clear that lower-income people needed help. Not only were we seeing people on social assistance and the homeless, but working poor [who need to] take an afternoon off to come to the food bank to register. [Then] they have to arrange with somebody, a neighbour or whoever who is not working, [and] give them a letter on the day that they need to go, so this person can go pick up food for them. So I mean, just that alone, is so much organizing.

U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) got involved in the OMWC in a different locally compartmentalized way from other participants. She and two other women in her union local chose to do a campaign as an organizing project that was part of a 4-week union education program she attended. As the $10 campaign was being launched in Toronto, her project focused on an $8 demand. She said they came up with the number the same way Justice for Workers (J4W) did: by figuring out what the low-income cut-off was (LICO). If the LICO for her region were lower than for cities of more than 500,000 population this would explain the different numbers. Both campaign moments had a necessarily extralocal provincial target, but the thinking was very localized in
this case. When asked about the Toronto-based campaign and the New Democratic Party (NDP) $8 demands she told me she’d heard about the campaign but “didn't know very much about it, it was just sort of coming together” and that it was coincidental that the NDP demand was the same. It was after her project was completed in 2002 that the national office of her union agreed in early 2003 to match the J4W $10 demand instead of the $8 NDP position they had supported (Justice for Workers, personal communication, January 28, 2003).

As a higher-waged worker, U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) experienced a limited social distance between herself and lower-waged workers given her small city. Her noticing of class stratification was quite personal in that, “I'm walking around in a grocery store in my [factory] uniform and everybody knows how much money I make and that my day is 8 hours or 10 hours….” For her, there is an injustice that she brushes up against daily as she meets people. The minimum wage demand was not a “thing” for her; it was about real people in her community. It was a class relation. She also talks about the changing nature of the lived experience of class for more and more people in reference to the resonance the 2007 campaign had with people at election time:

I think there's a shift because more people are subject to making low wages [when] it used to be whole families had factory jobs or they had white-collar jobs but either way they're making enough money. But now you have whole families making minimum wage or one partner's in part-time contingent kind of work…I really think it's coming from the parents and grandparents who are saying, "My kids aren't leaving, they can't afford university, they've got $60,000 in debt now because they did want to get a degree." So I think that there's more dialogue and the media picked it up this time too.
Speaking from a different geographic and social location, CG1 (July 2, 2009) also notes the economically based compressing of class stratification through increasingly difficult conditions.

In this day and age when we have lots of people in the auto industry losing their jobs, there seems to be more opportunity for collaboration between even more groups right now because lots of CAW members are finding that they either fall between the cracks to get on E.I. [Employment Insurance], or they cannot get onto social assistance unless they liquidate most of their assets which puts them in abject poverty. And then it’s hard to break that cycle of poverty under the current rules of social assistance. So, there definitely is a connection going on between all of these issues.

And with this changing material reality for once higher-waged workers, Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) (a CAW national staff representative) sees that it leads to an increased understanding of what social assistance (named Ontario Works, or OW, and the Ontario Disability Support Program - ODSP) is for. A consciousness change comes with a change in awareness of translocal social relations and how they become personal.

The reason why they wanted to know more about OW is that there is a huge number of our members who have exhausted their severance, they’ve exhausted their E.I. benefits, they haven’t found another job and now they are confronting the reality of disposing of assets … and when our members confront that reality they say whoa, we never realized what this was all about until now we’re confronted with it.

But consciousness changes in difficult times are not inevitable as U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) learned. She was shocked at people’s reality maintenance efforts, even in the face of new information she gave them which would ultimately be to their material advantage to integrate into their consciousness, shifting then their reality perspective,
We spent part of a day talking to high school students about why we thought they should make more money, and it was amazing the resistance that we got from those students; it was amazing the resistance we got from lots of people, but I didn't expect it from students [for whom] that is going to be their entry level wage… their arguments were very much like the adults, it was “Well, if people make more money then everything I pay for will cost more money,” and that was a very strong thing… I really struggled with the resistance that came from workers, with our arguments… [that], if you're making more money at your minimum wage job then chances are those folks are going to spend most of their money in the community, they're not jetting off to places so, overall it stimulates the local economy and potentially creates more jobs.

Ideological practice and alienation go hand-in-hand for the students and workers U3 speaks of. My experience talking with workers when J4W leafleted subway stops and malls, from 2001 to 2003, was quite different. Members of our group spoke with many racialized workers who would immediately say that $10 an hour would be great and we need to make the government raise the minimum wage. Their everyday lived reality made this obvious to them. CG1’s, Watson’s, U3’s and my experience show how both individual life experiences and the extralocally controlled dominant reality shape our consciousness, but there are many layers of reality between that are not easily – if at all – in our view.

NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) says, “[We had] people coming to us who are working two or three jobs... people identifying low wages as a… critical issue in their lives.” NUG4 (July 19, 2009) also works with people living through this kind of class relations shift. So a phased-in increase in the minimum wage was not a great outcome but the context in which it has happened makes it materially meaningful:

this is also in the context of the social welfare rates and social assistance being still 500 bucks for a single person. Which is fucking awful. And having a 2%
increase every year, like what the hell is that shit? So we have members now who used to have a full-time job, gone off E.I., are relying on social assistance now, are single, trying to look for a room in the city for $300, living in some shithole rooming house because then they got $200 that they survive on for the whole month.

The Ontario Needs a Raise (ONR) campaign was initiated before the 2003 provincial election because, “We need[ed] large numbers and strong voices to organize…rather than being divided among smaller groups” (Justice for Workers, personal communication, January 28, 2003). In echoing NUG4’s remarks, CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) also points out how “the base”, the people who workers rights campaign demands of a $10 minimum wage and social assistance rates increases would benefit, are not the ones balking on more multiple-demand organizing.

People who came to town halls in [2007] …were often one and the same …people who were cycling on and off bad-paying jobs and on social assistance and, you know, would have been fine and happy to see those things linked more closely…the minimum wage is one piece of the puzzle but there’s a lot more to it if we’re really going to bring a lot of people out of poverty.

Which is why he also notes, “part of the [ONR] project plan was to involve community members in addressing some of the reasons that people are food insecure, and so two of those main pieces were insufficient minimum wage and insufficient social assistance.” But institutionally driven needs and more powerful bodies managing them did not support the ONR project prior to the 2007 election. Instead, NDP MPP Cheri DiNovo put forward the $10 private member’s Bill 150 and the TYRLC actively supported that. Because of the class-bias within people and institutions associated with improving workers rights, social assistance campaigns for labour and the NDP are “untouchable, no-win propositions” (CG6, Aug. 27, 2009). NUG5 (July 16, 2009) explains that the NDP will say, “Of course we support increases in social assistance...
rates, we would increase in social assistance rates [if we were in power], but we’re certainly not going to talk about it as a major part of our platform leading up to the election.” Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) organizer John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) notes, “It was actually Cheri DiNovo that… used the term, ‘political suicide,’ to be pushing the question of welfare rates.” Such political pragmatism is generally accepted even as Clarke also asserts, “The minimum wage and welfare rates are, in terms of government policy, all connected issues. And you can’t really address one without addressing the other in a meaningful way.” While I recall OCAP supporting the $10 demand in the early phases of the OMWC, Clarke says that his group was not formally involved in the OMWC at all because of the lack of material connections made between the minimum wage and social assistance rates.

In the coming sections and chapters, the significance in the OMWC organizing of these local material realities will be discussed. If extralocal-origin economic attacks and crises give rise to a compressing of class stratification and present “opportunities for collaboration” (CG1, July 2, 2009) how were labour-community OMWC relationships relating to that reality in their organizing? And how were racialized and gendered realities of class relations part of that? Exploring the consistent public presentation of the OMWC as a “success” starts to address those questions.

**The OMWC Outcome as a “Victory”**

Reification and fetishization are major problems [that can] limit and contain the theory and practice of social movements. (Kinsman, 2006, p. 139)

Tattersall (2010) identifies “four measures of success” in labour-community practice: winning a specific reform; shaping of the overall political climate; creating sustainable relationships; and, increasing organizational capacity, in terms of skills, vision and leadership
development (pp. 22-23). While Chapter Six will address people’s understanding of the last measure in relation to the campaign, research participants have various perspectives on how much and what kind of a success the OMWC was, exploring all of these measures in the interviews. While a specific reform was realized in 2007, many people saw the achievement of the phased-in increase in quite a mixed way. As U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) notes, “It's disappointing but exciting at the same time; you know it's always partial victories that we get.” Or, more bluntly put, “The Liberals half-ass met the demands” (NUG5, July 16, 2009). John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) also states, “The victories that we win are occasionally making sure that they didn’t go quite as far as they were planning to go or winning some small reverse or tiny gain. But overall, massively, we’ve been driven back.” The ways in which and how far translocally organized forces drive workers’ organizing back has an impact on what people deem as a victory. Perhaps in that vein, CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) thinks that because the campaign result did not “actually remove anybody from living in poverty…it was [more] symbolic than it was actually concrete.”

All individual perspectives and labour and community institutional orientations are not socially organized equally; they do not have the same amount of social space in which to be expressed and so are objectified translocally to greater or lesser degrees. I found that the orientation to how and if the campaign outcome was a win varied with the types and closeness of relationships participants have with working people directly affected and with what people and their organizations hoped to achieve with the campaign. These types and closeness of connections are both organized by and conditioned by the nature of their organizations and the translocal coordination of these. As explored below, I suggest that frequent public assertions of victory on the part of labour officialdom also have a conditioning effect on how other campaign participants viewed or came to view the outcome.
The equity agenda and the win.

In late 2002, the TYRLC announced it was “committing itself to an equity agenda” that was to involve a focus on leadership development and presentation, organizing unrepresented workers and forming “solid links with diverse communities across Toronto” (TYRLC, 2002a). Since then there have been significant changes in terms of hiring experienced organizers of colour and also electing more racialized officials (TYRLC, 2009b). This is not only symbolic because these are real people, doing real work, and their access to these seats of power is important. Yet, the meaning and possibility of their access is bound to be limited by bureaucratic and other social relations. Pragmatic anti-racist practice allows people to champion demographic change even as such informal systemic exclusion continues and multi-layered material changes do not happen. But, as I will continue to explore, a multiracial officialdom combined with generally poor anti-racist and democratic practice allows pragmatic practices to have an appearance of being more than they are. While the labour council’s post-OMWC booklet, “A Million Reasons Why”, presents the campaign as a complete victory (TYRLC, 2008a), there are other views. Both a union and a community organizer reported their deep frustration with being objectified by staff and officials as translators, present only to give access to some homogeneous notion of “their” communities throughout the 2007 part of the campaign (U2, Dec. 12, 2009; CG7, Aug. 13, 2009).

In relation to informal implementation of the equity plan, Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009), staff at the TYRLC Labour Education Centre, says of the TYRLC President

John’s a smart guy, he’s very strategic and positions himself well, and so I think he said, ‘You’re right. So, as a president, let me do this... this Million Reasons campaign’, and the $10 minimum wage fit in just wonderfully...I think that that shift was a shift that was gently pushed by strategic people.
U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) also notes “They [understand that they] better get behind some of these issues that affect non-unionized workers…so that they can appear to be a place” that fights for all workers rights and so increase interest in unionization. She also notes, “I think definitely a phenomenon would be that the union at least had to look more reflective of its membership to continue to grow, to continue to keep its members happy.” Along with the acknowledgment of the president’s power, both participants suggest multiple pragmatic anti-racist actions and effects. The strategic people Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) refers to in our interview are staff and officials of colour, people who are in their positions because of “several decades” of anti-racist organizing and the equity agenda (Kelley, 1999, p. 52). The pushing must be gentle because of the reality that racialized officials and staff are in hard-won but generally precarious positions (Das Gupta, 2007; Walker, 2009; Wall, 2009). They promote an anti-racist orientation, which bureaucratic social relations will only reproduce in a pragmatic way.

In terms of campaign content, CG1 (July 2, 2009) would have liked to have seen “more focus on the fact that race plays a major part in people’s ability to obtain employment, and particularly in a market like we have right now where people are looking for Canadian experience or experience in general.” U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) had quite a mixed experience in and around the 2007 phase of the campaign, dealing with racism with her employer, sharp moments of whiteness and racialized incomprehension on the executive board she served on, dealing with resistant union officials and staff, and being frequently tokenized as a translator. As in her life in general, racism is a key organizing relation in all her union activity. Pragmatic anti-racism has allowed her brief access to some work and an official position at least temporarily, but does not address the ongoing overall racist conditions. But she also wants to see the good in the campaign because she has been so isolated and angry in the past.
We just have to take that energy and build it, because a lot of us have the capacity to turn something bad into good, but where’s the roadmap? So for me, that’s what I learned [to ask], “Is there some sort of road map out there?” Building coalitions is one of the tools to get you there… because it’s not just a final result of whether it [was] raised to the point that we want, but it’s the coalition building too.

Similarly, CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) talked about his struggles over the years in the labour movement as unions have failed to see on-the-job racism as a workers rights and union issue. He also values the humanity he found in his involvement in the initial phase of the campaign. People he worked with thought it unlikely that they would win the $10 demand but they felt it needed to happen, “I met a lot of really interesting people in that campaign, people from diverse sources…people put their heart into it. And they worked really hard with no expectation of compensation…And I think I really value that experience.”

The ideology of agency and social change.

NUG4’s (July 19, 2009) perspective shows the complexity of how organizations grounded in their local reality grapple with relating to real social relations not of their choosing, ones they are challenging, while still foregrounding workers’ agency.

I know for us, it was very important to claim it as a victory because people have been shit on for so long… I would say that we don’t call it a victory, we definitely talk about it to our membership as it’s not enough… what we do say is that workers showed that the government had to deal with this, they couldn’t ignore it any longer…And you know, we’ve been very critical, and every time there’s a minimum wage that goes up we do an action … But I think that you can’t discount it, you have to take those moments.
NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also believes “those moments are important” because people living in poverty just aren’t involved in [campaigns] in a sustained kind of a way because it’s just frustrating [and] discouraging [when] you put all that time into everything and you get nothing or very little. So to be able to point to some wins, even if they’re limited and say “you helped make that happen” is important.

Such victory moments are thus important to develop a sense that coordinated agency-based social change activity is worth doing. Organizers like these need wins not just for material reasons, given the real human relationships they have with low-income people they have been working with. They also need them to keep reality disintegrating doubts at bay, so they maintain the belief in organizing for change, a belief which is reality defining for them.

This belief in workers’ coordinated activity against the dominating social relations as having been the source of this win is an ideology that comes through in a number of interviews. While she says that the Liberal’s few bi-election losses in 2006 and early 2007 were also making them “really strategic around winning the elections and realizing that this was an issue that they actually had to pay attention on,” NUG4 (July 19, 2009) also makes passionate comments on workers ability to make change, as she links pronouncements of the Minister of Finance - a translocally acting, powerful individual who assists in the state’s control of social relations - to workers’ conditions and agency.

Sorbara was saying, “There’s no way, there’s no way, there’s no way,” and in fact we proved him otherwise, right? And they felt the pressure enough [that we said], “Actually, not only do you have to raise it to $10, you have to raise it to ten twenty-five.” Which I must say, at this particular moment now, to be dealing with workers who just got the nine fifty, it’s fucking amazing to be able to say [that] it’s going up to ten twenty-five next year. Because people are struggling, and now
with the economic crisis, you could see how things would have just deteriorated substantially…one of our members, he’s managing to survive on maybe 2 days a week of temp agency work in a bakery, and on little bits of E.I. that he’s getting, and his credit card.

The materiality of class relations in people’s lives comes through concretely in these ideas about how successful social change happens. And organizers’ respect for the workers they work with buttresses the local production of this ideology. For example, while NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) notes, “I think people feel very discouraged if we’re just looking at the fact that we didn’t get enough every time,” she also says, “I know the members of the [non-union group where I work] feel that that’s something that they participated in and that was a victory that we moved the government on something as important as wages.” NUG4 (July 19, 2009) also states

It feels like at least we can be saying, “We pushed for this increase,” and every year we can say, “You guys pushed for this. So this is part of your work, that it’s going up to ten twenty-five, because you guys are the ones that spoke up about it.” It’s kind of a constant reminder to people and…this is the silver lining, right? Trying to look at the positive side of the fact that we didn’t get it right up to $10, but I think it’s a way of then being able to organize every year to say, “Okay, it’s going up, what’s happening with our poverty levels?”

NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) seems to say that because there was a minimum wage increase it becomes important to say that the organizing orientation she and her group engaged in worked. Thus, there is vindication element (King, 2009) associated with the ideology of agency-based social change. That is, I would suggest these participants are engaged in ideological practice because their retrospective look at the $10.25 achievement seems to give importance to the $10 demand as a concept, detached from a myriad of material realities (such as movement building) previously considered as at least as important. Then, with a linear reading back in time,
speculative connections are made between the demand’s achievement and the activity of demanding on the part of members of their groups. That is, since a change happened that is related to a demand we have made and fought for, we are shown to be doing the right thing.

I think we downplayed our role in [the 2007 phase]. And I think that it’s really important... to see it as a victory. Nothing would have moved… if there wasn’t action on the ground... when we talk about our victories, we always talk about the minimum wage. And that it’s not enough, and it’s not nearly where we would have wanted things to go. But I think the fact that there was movement on it - not the kind of movement that was our goal, but you know… I think it shows that that kind of on-the-ground organizing and mobilizing did have [an effect]. And using the media and people telling their stories and exposing just how grave the situation was [important] for people who might not understand what it’s like to live and work on minimum wage. (NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009)

Similarly, CAW staff representative Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) finds it was a “brilliant campaign” in retrospect not only because the TYRLC “took ownership of that issue and campaigned on it” but because the $10 demand was achieved. Although he remains critical of the lack of indexation of the minimum wage to inflation, and the fact that the town halls did not lead to work on other issues, the win for him sweeps away a critique he had held that the minimum wage campaign should not have been done as a single issue. On this kind of thinking John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) notes,

The great failing has always been that we just agitate for any kind of forward movement or appearance of forward movement on the part of the [labour] bureaucracy. And once that happens, we’re so grateful that we just get people on the buses and I think that’s been the problem.

Another layer of reality in the campaign is seen in one participant’s expression of the ideology of social change by reform and an implicit acceptance of the state’s translocal
organization of how social change is to happen. That is, the organization both of employment standards and the elections cycle means organizers are supposed to plan fights for reforms every four years. About the increase CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) tells me that

> It's still too low but… it’s a step in the right direction, and we'll take that as a victory…it's not a good opportunity to try to force the government to move, take another step when they just took a step, because they'll just come back and say, “We just did this, so, you know, you're wasting your breath.”

For this participant, “change happens slowly” by working on small, winnable projects, and “connecting the dots… to the big picture”. Social change is thus inherently a process of accumulating reforms. I would suggest though that such an ideology does not help explain how, for example, “bad” changes can actually happen quite fast. U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) discusses a more urgent need for change but in a similar way, “[Together] is the only way we can fight against this giant. We’ve got to link all the dots, we’ve got to link as fast as we can, and to not be afraid to actually do something that you want to do.” It is paramount reality not only that the system works in a certain way but also that organizers must work with it as it is. While at times this may arise from a pragmatic acceptance of an unfavourable balance of forces, I would suggest more generally that to see reality in a different way requires seeing both ourselves and institutions as contradictorily inside of the social relations and so fundamental changes are needed within our organizations and selves.

In relation to this reform ideology, NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) uncovers how local workers' rights organizing is often coordinated by extralocally generated relations that determine how politics happens in relation to the state. Even if it is not the goal of everyone involved, social change projects become coordinated by elections, which in turn conditions people’s and institutions’ ideologies about the work we do. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) says for her neither the
2003 nor the 2007 McGuinty government phased-in minimum wage increases were victories. They were “not sufficient” but a

little bit of a result that we could then go back to those communities [with] and talk about how we had come this far, and it was probably unlikely for us to get any further until the next election….So then I think it did make sense to ramp up again before the next election 4 years later…we thought that it was a testament that we’d been able to get this demand out there and into policy and…that [it] had become one of the key election issues, was a victory…but it was very mixed, because it obviously was a lot later [than we had worked for it to be].

Again, organizers need these victories for themselves too, not just the people they work with. As NUG5 (July 16, 2009) explains, thinking about both the OMWC and other campaigns.

The high point was seeing so much momentum around the $10 minimum wage…when all those people were coming out to those town halls and there was all this media coverage of it and the NDP won the bi-election around it, there was hope that we might win….I so rarely think that I’ll actually win around the demands that we’re organizing around.

Other participants see the phased-in increase as too little, too late, benefiting bureaucratic social relations more than actual people. As CG2 (July 17, 2009) notes,

I’m thinking maybe it was relatively speaking a success for them especially [since the] Labour Council didn’t really get involved in any successful campaign for awhile… but we also need to put it into context of the time…meaning $10 an hour in 2002, 3, 4 would have been a great victory and right now we are only slowly heading towards [$10].

And CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) is able to live with her discontent with how bureaucratic social relations spill into labour-community relationships because of the material result
I think it was a great result; I think…[the Labour Council] pissed people off along the way but…I'm glad they got the result that they did with their like big flashy media $10 minimum wage campaign, [because without it] we probably wouldn’t have gotten the results that we did.

**Generating an appearance of winning.**

Sisters and brothers, we can win when we do strong things and we do good things. Two years ago, we elected a fabulous New Democrat member of provincial Parliament called Cheri DiNovo and she went to the Legislature and said I'm not going to stand here and be a good girl and wait to know the ropes. I'm going to bring forward a member's bill that says that no job should be paid less than $10 an hour in this province. We took that bill and built a campaign of $10 minimum wage. You know that we succeeded in doing, sisters and brothers, when we built a campaign with our movement and our allies? We gained, through political bargaining, a wage increase of 28 per cent over three years for hundreds of thousands of Ontario workers. The labour movement did that in this city and in this province with our allies. It shows what you can do when you pull together political bargaining, formal and mass movement politics (J. Cartwright, as cited in CLC, 2008, p. 7)

As discussed in Chapter Four, my approach to how reality appears to us is not in binary relationship to some objectively existing paramount reality that is the “real” reality. The concepts and experiences of how things are and how things appear are in dialectical relationship to each other. Appearance is reality too, although it is only one layer of it and is often generated by the two ways in which ideology operates – as sets of ideas and ways of thinking – to detach the complexity of material social being from the meaning and sense we make of what is going on in our individual and collective being and doing.

I observed in my research that the farther away social change organizers and activists full lived reality is from that of people who are the would-be beneficiaries of the campaign’s demands, the easier it seemed for them to accept the appearance of meaningful activity and reform as actually meaningful. That is, the combination of enjoying generally met needs and
overall well-being, and not having day-to-day contact with those who do not seems to make reform appearances easier to accept. TYRLC President John Cartwright’s above statement made at a Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) convention represents one end of the spectrum. At the other, in reference to people on social assistance she works with, NUG5 (July 16, 2009) says,

Because when you talk to people living on low incomes, you can tell really quickly whether it’s a win or not...they’ll say “it’s made no difference for me, it’s going to mean $10 extra a month, I can’t even get diapers with that [and] well it’s not happening until 3 years from now and why then?” And that’s why the debate around the demand in itself was always a debate [about] the whole issue around what’s winnable and realistic and...what would resonate with government and what in reality people need. There’s often that debate [when] working with...government or working with policy people who always want to frame things around...how to make something happen within the parameters of government, but you know you can’t, as an organizer, organize around...a 2% increase to social assistance rates because it’s bullshit.

As I will continue to argue, an institutionally compartmentalized society allows the co-existence of such stark layers of humanity and reification across the realities NUG5 relates. And U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) reveals further some workings of class relations as social assistance campaigns are

Seen as a no-winner... people on social assistance are [seen as] hard to organize, sometimes difficult to work with [when actually it’s] the heads of some of the big labour movements [that] are very hard to work with [because they have] very paternalistic approach to dealing with social assistance issues.

As the minimum wage reached $10.25 on March 31, 2010, social assistance rates were increased by a paltry 1%. John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) explains one facet of how such reality
layers co-exist, as he discussed the lack of working class understanding about social relations of poverty,

One of the major divisions that exists within the working class is certainly between employed workers, and certainly somewhat better paid workers, and the poorest people who live on social assistance...there’s no understanding of why people are on welfare. There’s no understanding of the functions of welfare in society. The link between wages and income support is not understood...the simple truth is that you can’t seriously address the question of the minimum wage without raising the question of social assistance rates. Not for some reason of justice and fairness...but because the two things are completely linked...Minimum wages [and]... welfare rates are there as a begrudged concession to the poorest people to prevent complete destitution and social dislocation. But they are deliberately designed to be as low as possible to ensure that the lowest paying jobs on offer are as attractive as possible. So, they’re not going to see the minimum wage go up very far if welfare rates are left down very low and vice versa. You can only effectively struggle for major gains on either front by linking the two issues together in a united working class campaign. And to fail to do that, you win crumbs, things that are going to be eroded over time.

This reality perspective was reflected in the ONR campaign, in which NUG5 (July 16, 2009) was an organizer:

I think the strength of the campaign’s approach was that, we were trying to build the links between social assistance and the minimum wage because... you can’t have increases to one without the other, and it’s more reflective of the reality of people’s lives, whether they’re cycling on and off between social assistance and low-wage work... and [given the] precarious nature of work and the labour market... in order for changes to have an impact [in] people’s day to day lives... you have to have a number of changes.
John Cartwright’s (July 10, 2009) relationship reference point is with the officials of the union affiliates his institution brings together, as he tells me,

And we were hearing, through all of our affiliates, a real sense of disquiet from people... even if they weren’t poor at all, just this notion that the global economic system was restructuring people out of jobs, was making more and more jobs insecure and precarious. And people just had a sense that something was going wrong in global capitalism. They weren’t using the c-word at that time. And, you know, something should be done about it. The fact that McGuinty chose to give themselves, the Members of Parliament, and himself as Premier and his Cabinet, a significant raise, somehow that stark relief just really came out and got up people’s notice.

Perhaps the affiliate officials did become aware of the economic pressures on their members in late 2006. And maybe the union affiliates that make up the TYRLC as a body then started talking and so something needed to be done, something big and public. However, as I will show from the contributions of a number of participants, and as will be seen in Chapter Eight from the TYRLC’s own education activities since 2003, it would seem that officials would have known something was not right for workers for at least a few years before the campaign re-launch by the TYRLC. I thus suggest that both the CLC convention remark and this above statement are eloquent representations that have the effect of generating a public appearance of labour officialdom’s reality perspective as the reality. That is, he suggests that suddenly an apparently new paramount reality of capitalist social relations came into view for people. Basic class-struggle language buttresses the appearance, showing a simple reality picture of labour officialdom being with workers, with community, while it is capital that is the enemy.
For this participant, the campaign was also about improving the labour-community relationship, which he sees being realized “around the campaign on temp agency workers [and] the fight to fix E.I.” In relation to this Cartwright says,

The second important thing was that community allies who have been very distrustful of the labour movement for a number of years came out of this thing saying, “Jesus, there wasn’t a lot of union members earning minimum wage. You guys really did this for us, and for members of our community. That’s who’s going to benefit. And it was you [that] put a ton of money, a ton of resources, a ton of leadership time into this thing, to help people in our community? You know, if that’s what solidarity looks like, maybe we can work together in the future.” So those relationships that were built out of that, you know, were then deepened in the Good Jobs For All Summit.

Labour “doing something for” community has more of a charity than solidarity ring to it (Nissen, 2004). And, more than one participant has a diametrically opposed perspective on the relationship-building component of the last campaign phase. A number of participants also source Cheri DiNovo’s electoral interest as the reason for her minimum wage Bill, and TYRLC’s appearance interests as well. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) states that DiNovo sees the work of small groups as “something [she] can tail”. She goes on to say that because there was “a partial victory in that campaign, Cartwright and the crew saw that this was a way to tail and try to control and use this to build the profile of the labour movement.” Similar to Nissen’s (2004) comments on how coalitions can be “a tactical device for immediate gain” (p. 55), NUG3 finds their interest to be “sheer opportunism…a way that Labour Council ... could begin to build its profile as a fighter for workers. So in using that, they’re trying to…use a similar model in the Good Jobs Coalition.” U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) also challenges the TYRLC presentation of labour-community relationship building
I think they’re trying to erase all the work that enabled them to have a [successful] town hall… this is the labour sort of M.O.: they get a bee in their bonnet, and usually it’s sparked by the work that someone else is doing. They decide that they have to move on it now, or there’s enough grumbling in their membership that they should be moving on an issue, that they decide they have to do it.

Similarly, John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) states, “The problem, I think, in terms of union activists and union leaders, is that their starting point is they approach their political campaigns as a kind of a Decima Research kind of a project. You know, where do things stand now, what are people saying, what are our members saying?” He also notes of labour-based organizing, “its also very much controlled, very top down.” U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) also remarks

If [labour] can’t control the agenda they get really threatened by it. So they want to engage community and coalition work in a way that they get to determine what the demands are and what the outcomes will be that are appropriate victories, and in this case that was just enough of a victory to be able to say this is good and so then they pull back on their resources and time spent on it. So they can say, “Yeah, we did our piece, and then we’ll move on to our next thing which will keep our profile up.”

*Appearance and consciousness coordination.*

In continuing this victory discussion, it becomes apparent that the consciousness of OMWC organizers is not as coordinated as it might as first appear. CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) comments on one of the forums she assisted in doing some ethnoracially specific mobilizing for. She notes how, of the attendees she knew, “people worried that if they ask for too much then they would lose their jobs entirely,” and also

Even though there were those small groups after the panel to have some discussion, I think there needs to be more discussion. People who were there did sign the petition but I think the Labour Council was hoping they’d be more
enthusiastic and …more raring to go and willing to take those petitions to their communities and get them signed by other people and I think that was less of a case in this meeting. I mean there may have been a couple of individuals but I think as a group that was not the energy of the room.

Even after he says that when people “fight together for something, then you build a sense of common purpose and trust,” Cartwright (July 10, 2009) notes himself that the appearance of labour taking low-waged workers was quite important for improving labour’s image, “It was a hugely important thing, *that labour was seen as* not just looking after itself, but actually being out there, fighting for people who didn’t have unions or didn’t have a union voice” [emphasis added]. In relation to such appearances U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) remarked, “There was some momentum around the minimum wage that [a non-union group] had been doing, and that can look like a partnership.” Looking at the various participants’ perspectives, the control of the social relations of workers rights organizing can be seen as being across time and space. As I will continue to explore, I suggest that this is seen in the relationship between the failure to acknowledge work that has gone on in the past and a desire to control that which might be done in the future.

A look back to the start of the OMWC sheds more light on the layers of reality and appearance of a labour-community victory. As a J4W organizer very involved in the 2001 to 2003 phase, one of the shared activities I took on was giving talks on the campaign in various community-group and union meetings. J4W was concerned about both having too little labour involvement (in terms of not getting broad-based rank-and-file involvement) and too much (being taken over by officialdom). One moment of balancing this concern was the making of a presentation at a TYRLC affiliates’ meeting in early 2002. U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) comments on the work done to make space for the 5-minute presentation that evening,
I remember that it was very difficult to get members of the executive board … who had an analysis that it was important to… fight on this issue [to support J4W speaking]… I felt there was resistance definitely from some key people on the executive that got to determine what was on the agenda at the Labour Council meeting.

This person’s experience as an executive member demonstrates how such boards and the institutions they represent are not human monoliths of objectified consciousness even if bureaucratic social relations ensure that a predominant reality continues to be objectified. Some level of individual difference is tolerated and an appearance of campaign support was generated by ultimately allowing me to speak on J4W’s behalf to the large meeting. Perhaps this was because the reality that would have been disclosed by not allowing J4W to have the floor briefly would have been worse. U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) refers to this reality as the union movement’s “embarrassing” weakness, while U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) comments —had they not allowed the talk— “they’d look stupid or unsupportive, and [like] there was no solidarity.” Labour’s appearance of fighting for all workers rights would have been stripped away by not giving some voice to a campaign that had non-union workers rights group leadership and some level of community group endorsement, however minimal. And, I would suggest that giving that voice also potentially generated an appearance of Labour Council involvement in the campaign should officialdom decide on activating that. This can stand because the predominating ideological method of reasoning allows people’s consciousness to interpret such moments as general involvement in ongoing activities and, in some way, supportive of movements. The appearance meaning thus generated also eases the tension in consciousness caused for some who note the silence and lack of enthusiasm of lead officials like TYRLC president (already John Cartwright at the time) and the 5- or 10-minute token speak not as part of labour-community relationship
building of activity, but rather as an appearance of building. One appearance predominates over another, as a familiar reality is reinforced. And the doing/being-seen-to-be-doing reality combination has a pragmatic anti-racism purpose as well. As U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) explains,

[The TYRLC] know[s] that they did not have legitimacy in so many communities—communities of colour, communities of low income… So I think on a very practical level, to try and to attract membership, they decided that the best way to present themselves was to be behind these issues and to hopefully attract people to unionization…I think that they started to want to build links in particular communities and so they could show that the labour movement’s out and front and centre on fighting racism and dealing with inequality, and whether it’s economic inequality and injustice or social inequality and injustice and discrimination and all those issues, that they had to meet people where they’re at.

While Chapter Six is dedicated to an analysis of the OMWC in relation to labour-community organizing practices, it is timely to discuss at this point how such labour-community reality disjunctures are not something peculiar to the OMWC. In the following section I will explore various unionism practices and scholarly perspectives on them in relation to the OMWC.

**Reality disjunctures and labour-community organizing practices.**

There is a range of practices of unionism that lead to or arise from union and community workers rights organizations coming together. Under the banner of “social unionism”, Ross (2007) has conceptualized three kinds of practices: leadership-focus, membership-focused mobilization and membership-focused democratization (p. 28). In the first, union officials choose important issues, how they get framed, the strategies and tactics, and how they will be deployed. The member-focused orientation is essentially the “organizing model” plus union official control, a contrast to the business unionism “service model”. An example of the difference between them is in how grievances might be handled not individually but by building group
grievances and so solidarity campaigns around the issues. Tactics like wearing buttons in the workplace or showing up unannounced in the manager’s office are characteristic of this approach. It can be very effective; however, it is generally applied as issue-by-issue member involvement without broader democratic or ongoing action (Parker & Gruelle, 1999, pp. 25-27). Officials and organizers who take this kind of approach recognize the tactical value for the union in getting the membership “activated” yet, in practice have tended to become formulaic. As will be discussed in the next chapter in detail, it is meaningful, decision-making based participation that membership-focused democratization seeks to bring to “all aspects of the process of defining union goals, strategies and tactics” (Ross, 2007, p. 152). In Canada, various versions of the first two practices are currently the most common form of unionism (Camfield, 2008).

Exemplifying the contrast between the activation and democratization approaches was the appearance generated by “the 14 community meetings across Toronto”, the town halls that some 870 people attended (TYRLC, 2008a, p. 10). The organization of the meetings, and the attendance and the participation of low-waged workers are presented together as evidence of relationship building. But NUG4 (July 19, 2009) comments that with one or two neighbourhood exceptions,

I’m starting to realize that those town halls, were very surface, because…there was a particular moment where people were talking about the minimum wage, and there was that debate that was raging about it. And then they did a call-out [for example] in south Etobicoke, I think that they brought together some English classes in some areas, because when we did [more organizing in those areas later], we were expecting that there would be this huge infrastructure out there [and there wasn’t].

NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) concretely explores the reality of participation as relationship building in relation to a campaign she was involved in at the time of the interview,
[The TYRLC President] will say, “We’ve been fighting this for 20 years,” and you think, well yeah, but there’s no base of people. And people [are] asking the question, “Well, how do we get people in their communities to be out there talking about E.I.?” We have no relationships with those people, so how can we even be exclaiming our disappointment in the fact that people out there aren’t doing what in their neighbourhoods? Like, what would you just do? I mean, no one is going to walk out their front door and knock on their neighbours door, saying “Have you heard of...?” if there’s nothing you’re connected to, or there’s no substance to what you’re doing. So you can talk about it, but if you’re not connected…and I don’t think there’s a way for people to really be connected.

Again, one of the things at work in this kind of reality disjuncture is a difference in unionism practice that well predates the OMWC. When many interview participants discuss “building the base” or having a “worker-centred approach” to organizing they are engaging in what many describe as a form of community unionism (CU). Fine (2006) sees CU as low-waged worker support activity that focuses on “issues of work and wages” (p. 283). It is also seen as “occupying the centre range along a continuum of community organizing and union organizing,” employing a community development approach to organizing contingent workers (Cranford & Ladd, 2003, p. 49). Part of the conceptual contrast of this version of CU with other forms of unionism is generated by the legal-political arrangements organized by the state – yet buttressed and reproduced by labour organizations – that structurally locate many contingent workers outside of union organizing. For example, in Ontario within the framework of the Ontario Labour Relations Act, unionized workers’ membership is generally individual workplace-based, in a job in which they have ongoing employment. The increasing form of precarious work organized through temporary agencies precludes unionization under these terms.
The grassroots social justice orientation of this form of CU sees the worker as more fully social, as living in real, always overlapping social locations. The community-development organizing approach that takes up long-term and flexible strategies (Fine, 2006; Jayaraman & Ness, 2005) reflects this perspective in practice. Sawchuk (2007) describes CU from a social economy perspective, as a “deep integration of labour unions and community combining traditional work-based issues with issues of community sustainability” (p. 1). CUPE Ontario’s self-description as “Canada’s community union” (CUPE, as cited in Ross, 2007, p. 22) reflects this conceptual orientation as public workers are also “neighbours and friends.” While this vision may result in project funding (e.g., CUPW’s financial support of the Winnipeg Workers’ Organizing and Resource Centre) it is less clear what this means for day-to-day inter-subjective activity of people in community and at work.

Tufts (1998) describes CU as “the formation of coalitions between unions and non-labor groups in order to achieve common goals” (p. 228). This orientation has two main pillars: the focus is on the unionization of non-unionized workers, with that latter being subsumed under “non-labor” organizations, in a coalition which must allow community groups “significant power” (p. 232) if they are true to the CU approach. Akin to the non-unionized worker as non-labour orientation, Fantasia (1988) notes how Teamsters have mobilized unemployed workers to support strikes “to minimize the availability of strikebreakers” (p. 21). He suggests this as a moment of solidarity although it is unclear how much of a long-term, two-way street this might be. NUG3’s (July 31, 2009) perspective is that officialdom has no interest in working on building such democratic labour-community relations.

Communities in a whole variety of thought-out and maybe so well thought-out ways were really trying to challenge unions around basic principles of democracy and how decisions get made and who participates in those decisions. And, there’s
probably a lot of confused politics, and maybe some bad politics, but nonetheless, I think the response to that [by the TYRLC] was like, “Forget the community and the alliances, let’s go and construct our controllable connection to community.”

Continuing to look through the layers of campaign practice uncovers more reality disjunctures among campaign participants on the victory question, reflecting the multiple layers of reality views on the TYRLC’s work in labour-community relationships in general. The relationship between taking credit and claiming the OMWC as a success was raised by a number of participants, which I will now explore.

**History, success and who gets credit.**

Participants’ local institutional locations condition how they construct meaning to maintain their local world, and to challenge and communicate with others. But the social relations of labour-market and union organization continue to place labour officialdom in the more powerful position to publicly present their version of reality as the reality. Even as union representation declines, unions continue to have financial resources to be speaking (or at least, appear to be speaking) on behalf of all working people.

Bringing a bit of recent history into the picture also sheds more light on how ideological practice is happening in the presentation of the OMWC as a victory. As NUG4 (July 19, 2009) and NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) indicate in their interviews, 2007 was not the first time the Ontario Liberals structured a phased-in minimum wage increase this decade. This first happened after the 2003 election of Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government, during the J4W and ONR campaign phases. There was no NDP Bill or TYRLC-backing behind this 17% increase that saw the $6.85 per hour amount go up to $7.15 Feb. 1, 2004 and reach $8.00 by Feb. 1, 2007 (Ministry of Labour, 2003). One of those participants involved since the initial campaign characterized this
first phased-in increase as “a little bit of a result” (NUG6). There were no promotions of a working-class win back then by any group. NUG6 further notes that “We won that small increase, and groups were then trying to follow the Liberals [with] how it was totally inadequate and insulting.”

But in 2007 and after, I suggest that the public presentation of the resounding success of the campaign by the TYRLC put organizations with an ongoing relationship with labour in the need of a position on this question of the victory. The Council has presented in multiple forums and forms the 2007 phased-in increase as a unique moment in contemporary workers rights organizing and employment standards changes by linking together specific ideas and moments of activity detached from a fuller accounting of the various kinds of organizing and state/labour-market activity happening over time. The mystical connections thus made by the powerful close space for and distract attention from the raising of more complex political questions. For example, questions that might explore the relationship between elections cycles, labour-market conditions, workers’ reform demands, and unions’ strategic goals that would at least help people understand why a 28% increase became a resounding victory while a 17% raise of just a few years earlier is all but forgotten. Ideological practice on the part of those holding most of the power in the labour-community relationships can thus condition community and non-union workers rights groups to reproduce the victory claim, making use of it for their own purposes. Interestingly, many of the people who are relating to the victory in some way have not read the “A Million Reasons Why!” booklet referred to above (TYRLC, 2008a). Given that their reality is so different, it seems uncomfortable and annoying for them to even contemplate reading it (NUG2, NUG3, NUG4). One of them even gave me the only copy she had. As discussed earlier, their perspectives on the “win” are conflicted.
A kind of socially uprooted appearance generation occurs as John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) explains the origins of the victory and how Bill 150, introduced on November 5, 2006, got past second reading,

And when DiNovo’s Bill got a second reading, I’d say there’s a number of miracles... because she’s a United Church minister. Former street kid and bad girl, and then she became a minister. That, first, was a miracle, her taking Gerard Kennedy’s seat away from the Liberals. And the second miracle was that her Bill got a second reading. The Liberals were basically asleep in the Leg that day, and when it came to a vote, the only people voting on it were the NDP voting yes, and nobody voting against it, and suddenly it had a second reading, and it became much more public property.

He presents these events as unorchestrated, spontaneous outcomes. While I would agree that we cannot foresee the future and equally true that the Bill might not have got through the first stages, I would also suggest that this reminiscence can be seen as ideological because it is a statement out of the local and translocal historical context, and the events and activities that are quite possibly associated with the Bill’s passing in the way and at the time it did are erased. Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) echoes this perspective, “When the Labour Council in Toronto adopted and took the initiative, after…Cheri DiNovo put in the [minimum wage] Bill, John Cartwright recognized the potential for that issue for a whole number of reasons, it just seemed that the stars or planets or whatever were in the right alignment.” But, having been involved in the campaign in its early stages, CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) reflects differently on some of the translocally driven social relations in terms of the victory question:

There was a big push [in 2002] to get the NDP onside, but [they were talking] of $8 an hour. You know, that was their vision. [When we] we started discussing, back in 2002, 2003…most of the people who came out were saying, “Look, we’re talking about $10 an hour. But the reality is it should be $15.” And that was the
rallying cry of the time. But [the NDP was] saying, “Look, we can barely get $8. So it wouldn’t make sense to ask for $15.” So even in terms of the discussion, the group was holding itself back in terms of the what the reality was; you know, you’re just going for what you think you can get, which didn’t come until a lot later.

Different layers of reality and appearance are also reflected in another issue raised by participants: who gets credit for the campaign outcome. The raising of this issue by a number of research participants again shows that, even though the TYRLC has much greater relative power in the social relations of workers rights organizing, this does not translate to officialdom’s ideological practice as having a uniform objective effect on people’s consciousness. But the same social relations coerce people into not revealing their different perspectives publicly.

Looking into the TRYLC president’s views on what he calls “political bargaining” continues to uncover this. That is, his idea that this is a combined “formal and mass movement politics” in action (CLC, 2008, p. 7). He suggests that following on the DiNovo Bill, his close relationship with Minister of Finance Greg Sorbara (who had let him know at least a small increase was in the offing) along with the Toronto Star’s sudden “reading” of “people’s [economic] pain”, and combined with a successful labour-community mobilization of an NDP bi-election win in the York-South Weston riding, were key moments around which the town halls and petition-signing could have an impact on the state. The suggestion is that a combination of officialdom power, the benevolence of the appropriate branch of big media, and activation of communities are key factors for achieving victories. He noted in the interview that the OMWC “was a clear example of a real need to have both... a formal political strategy and a movement-building strategy, at the same time.”
We can look at this perspective in relation to the quoted 6-year window on the OMWC, which starts to explicate the cyclical social relations of elections. Looking at these two things together disrupts appearance creation by the TYRLC president, who seems to suggest that his campaign achieved something wholly new in our time and place. Thomas (2009) provides an historical overview of employment standards development in Ontario from 1884 to 2004 that included the significance of the post-war settlement on employment standards, the nature and course of minimum wage changes of the 1960s and the Harris era “flexibilization.” Through this, he notes how standards like the minimum wage have and continue to exist “in a complex relationship with the labour market” as well as the state, whose “interrelationship creates a dynamic of both reproduction and social change” (p. 7). As such, I would say that the 2007 OMWC outcome cannot literally be traced back solely to NDP, labour and media activity of late 2006. Nonetheless, given how capitalist social relations tend to appear quite ahistorical, such rhetorical tracings can be believable to many. In addition, U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) sees that it was the ONR that got the Toronto Star interested:

It was right after the Toronto Star Editorial that we had worked really hard to get play… there’s no acknowledgement there [from labour]. And that’s frustrating because activists bust their ass, and I think in particular for low-income people and activists who really made significant personal sacrifice, like you know, who are juggling ‘x’ number of jobs and still going to lobby their MPP.

Cartwright’s (July 10, 2009) suggestion that the Toronto Star out of the blue decided to activate its self-assigned role as the “conscience of the Liberal party” masks another group’s hard work. U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) also states, “There was no acknowledgement of the work that had gone on before, who was working on that… [There was just a] hijacking [of] the agenda and saying ‘it’s our victory’.” It is noticeable when, even as NUG5 (July 16, 2009) is talking about a
campaign high point brought about by years of organizing activity, she has criticism for labour embedded:

It was somewhat encouraging and I really felt that it was because of all the work that we put into that demand, that created the base for the NDP and the Labour Council to walk in with their resources and take it away. I really think if we hadn’t done all the groundwork that they wouldn’t have had those networks to build from and wouldn’t have been able to find people in marginalized communities to speak to the media; they totally relied on us for that.

CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) also notes:

I think they need to be a little more inclusive in who they thank for getting there because I think people came before them. I mean how long has [a local non-union workers rights group] been working on that campaign to lay that foundation? I think the Labour Council also has this tendency to bulldoze people and I think the Good Jobs Coalition is trying to mend some fences.

CG4 (Aug 19, 2009) expresses something similar, noting the failure to acknowledge the collaboration with a non-union organization “doing really good work” does not fit with most people’s reality.

Amongst the research participants, Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) has a unique location and so perspective. She comes from a family and community history of involvement in anti-racist struggles. Her mother has been a well-known and -respected anti-racist, feminist union organizer, and her grandfather was in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union in the 1940s. She is very oriented to “community” and “labour” as overlapping lived realities. Wall sees the phased-in increase as “such a huge victory,” at the same time she also challenges officialdom:
Who gets or takes most of the credit? It’s not equally distributed for the work that was done. Which is really unfortunate, because if you think about the principles of the labour movement and why we even have unions - to fight for fair wages for labour - you would think that that would play out when the labour movement is working with community groups... And it is really unfortunate, because I do think that there has been some steps made towards... labour working with community more equally, but they’re not big enough steps. And then, when these kinds of things happen...then people aren’t given equal credit, those steps seem even smaller than they actually are... I think the power structure of the labour movement is very hierarchical and not collective, and it’s hard to give credit and have equal relationships when people are given titles and positions and are credited just because there’s a “President” behind their name.

I would suggest that her orientation to the TYRLC role is an adaptation to the social relations that organize her work life. She is both inside the institutions of organized labour and inside the social reality of racialized, gendered working class life. She takes her valuing of community and translates that into an idea of equality of participation between labour and community in the organizing, denying labour’s determining effect on the 2007 campaign. A contradiction exposed by other research participants is thus dealt with by setting it aside,

It was a grass-roots struggle that started, and because of labour’s resources and connections, sometimes they take more credit for the Bill going through than I think they should. Or at least acknowledging the hard work that was started by, and all the way up until the Bill was passed, done by community. But I believe, from what I know, it was a series of conversations... and again, the Labour Council was just the most central body to go to draw in the members of the affiliates and work with the various communities.

Another reality disjuncture is uncovered in U1’s (Oct. 1, 2009) anger on the credit issue. As NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also commented in her interview, U1 sees the TYRLC–NDP
relationship as undesirable “partisanship.” These two organizers have become focused in extracting reforms from whatever party will support them, from whichever government is in power. At the same time, bureaucratic social relations of unions in combination with the NDP’s drift from being a party that really represents the working class, makes labour’s prioritizing of the labour-NDP relationship a problem for locally grounded groups that have not only some different tactics but different goals too. U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) believes that DiNovo “crashed press conferences” and the like because “she wanted us all to sort of give her all the credit and just get behind her campaign.” She also remarks,

I think the Labour Council has really failed - and often [has] failed - to recognize all the work that happens in a lead-up that enabled them to do a campaign. I’m glad that we had Cheri DiNovo at Queen’s Park. I’m glad the Labour Council supports her. But I think it’s disingenuous and at best wilfully ignorant to make those claims [of victory].

There are also different reality views on how the campaign ended. Cartwright (July 10, 2009) describes “a debrief with all the partners, shortly after” the announcement of the phased-in increase in which it was generally agreed that they were “pissed off, but let’s just also realize what we’ve won.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also suggests

The campaign was limited. After the election was over, and the by-elections and after the announcement was made about [the phased-in increase], the campaign just ended…that was the decision that the Labour Council and the NDP made. So then in terms of … who’s left with grappling with how you organize around low wage work, that just went back to who the usual suspects… like the Workers Action Centre and the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign and those groups with no resources.
Given this range of perspectives among union, non-union and community group participants involved over the life of the campaign, presenting the phased-in increase to $10.25 and so the campaign as nothing less than a victory is a clear example of ideological practice in labour-community organizing. The next section will explain and explore this further.

*Reality maintenance, ideological practice and the “victory”.*

“Victory” claims are made in multiple forums by the TYRLC. In their earlier-noted booklet, whose subtitle is “The Victory of the $10 Minimum Wage Campaign,” the 2007 phase of the OMWC is presented as “extraordinary” and “probably the most successful bargaining effort that’s been undertaken in decades” (TYRLC, 2008a, pp. 1, 18). As quoted earlier in this chapter, TYRLC President John Cartwright also presents this reality perspective when speaking in public (CLC, 2008). Two more examples of his ongoing public promotion of the minimum wage campaign as largely a TYRLC victory are at events I attended, one on March 23, 2009 billed as “Workers Rights in Troubled Times” and the May 7, 2009 Stewards Assembly (TYRLC, 2009a). On both occasions he called the phased-in increase a victory, making it clear that TYRLC-led 2007 campaign was largely responsible for it happening. In both moments, he also located the source of the win as “political bargaining”. As a research participant in this inquiry Cartwright remarks:

For low-wage workers, the end of the common sense revolution meant the end of the constant attacks, but it didn’t translate into people having their standards raised. They were still stuck in a treadmill, and in fact a treadmill going down, in a slow downward spiral, as a result of the changes in global capitalism… More and more people [saw] only temp agency jobs on offer. And so this was an actual first time that they’d been able to see a victory, a true victory for low-wage workers. And that’s always important, in any historical perspective of the working class and what it’s going on within society.
The remark on the local/extralocal conditions relationship accurately speaks to many workers’ reality. However, when he links that reality to the minimum wage increase and suggests a categorical victory, that configuration reflects ideological reasoning. When we look at other participants’ perspectives and how they differ, we see how this powerful official can expose translocal capitalist social relations as he speaks without affecting his or his institution’s reified practice. Global capitalism and working-class history become ideas invoked in a detached way from historical and contemporary conditions. As if they were facts, speculative connections get made between workers past and present, contemporary activity, and “the win”. Capitalism and “the victory” thus appear as the conscious agents in this story. A multi-layered reality is thus dematerialized. In relation to this, when asked about how decision-making was actually done in the campaign, the TYRLC president paused and then said,

I can’t remember. I’d actually have to go back and look at my notes to see what were the various forms of process that we undertook. I mean, a lot of it was checking in with our Labour Council executive board. A lot of it was just, bang, it’s happening, it’s moving on. But there were other processes where we were working closely with a number of allies on this. But I’d have to go and check my notes before we finish this thing and see.

An apparent, implicit connection often made between the mobilizing of people and those same individuals ability to participate democratically in activities is unveiled here. No clarifying information was available upon request. A similar reality threatening moment led to the end of the interview, as it was starting to wind down,

We actually risk letting people down, and demoralizing them, and that is the really tough thing. I’ve had many debates with activists who want us to do 50 things, because there are 50 things that need doing. The difficult piece is to be able to say no, we can only do three at any given time. And those three, we’ll do
in a way that also transforms. So we’re always seeking to win and build. It’s never just to win. We’re always seeking to win and build, and that’s the frame in which we think through how we design our campaigns, that we carry out our campaigns, that people are constantly learning new skills, they’re learning a sense of confidence. And not just confidence in tactics, but also the confidence to challenge the logic of the system. And that’s a really crucial piece…Being able to translate a fight that comes right to the very kind of fulcrum of class struggle, essentially, in this century now, is really important for working people.

I contend that this is an example of how conversation – controlled by powerful people with leadership roles in organizations with greater relative power – is a key reality maintenance vehicle. This official makes explicit all the taken-for-granted, anti-capitalist views he and I would likely share. Use of words like “transform”, “build” and “fulcrum of class struggle” are reality-contouring efforts. This is to bring us together – him and me, “the movement’ –, and dismiss questions that would keep us apart. Questions such as, who decides which campaigns will be fought, who decides how not to “let people down” and what the priorities are for building collective capacity and confidence to challenge the predominating social relations? The TYRLC President had said in a meeting at the start of the campaign that they would not be engaging in “drive-by organizing” (Socialist Project, personal communication, February 9, 2007). So, given that and in response to these remarks, I raised the issue with him in our interview of rank-and-file and community-based debate and decision-making. I asked if the campaign efforts had translated into building some of that collective power in practice. He said, “Yes. Yeah. Okay,” then got up, bringing the interview to a close. I would say that I had led our conversation into a layer of reality under his ideologically reasoned speech. This created too much of a reality disjuncture between us, too much of a departure from the paramount reality; the shared reality appearance had eroded to the degree that our conversation had to end.
Having explored at length the various reality perspectives on the campaign outcome as a victory, in the next sub-section I will analyze how such compartmentalization necessarily happened within and among different institutions involved in the OMWC. I will explore how organizations by their sub-categorization come to create specific reality perspectives of their own. I will also look at the relationship between how individuals acted and understood their activity in the OMWC and their institutional connections.

**Institutional Categorization and Fragmentation**

From a materialist perspective, the exploration and understanding of layers of reality is not simply an exercise of unmasking individual perceptions and consciousness in isolation from how these are socially objectified and (re)internalized over time in the course of day-to-day being and activity. In our highly compartmentalized contemporary lives, activity and consciousness are also part of and very quickly absorbed into or creative of some sort of institutional environment. In terms of the OMWC, both labour and community are made up of multiple sub-institutions, with different and overlapping realities, coordinated as they are by social relations happening translocally. In this section I thus explore how people and their different sub-institutions understand what they and each other are doing.

A complexly categorized and fragmented society conditions the sub-institutional development that is part of how labour and community are organized in workers-rights campaigns. Each group has its own particular realm, crossing out of which can cause difficulties. NUG4’s (July 19, 2009) organization is neither union nor community group but very active in workers-rights organizing. She sees the group’s degree of success in the media and with government as causing a good deal of “tension” with sections of labour officialdom important for ongoing relationships, a tension that is challenging to manage. There are moments of tensions in
consciousness and public reality maintenance through silence within this experience. At the start of the 2007 campaign phase NUG4 (July 19, 2009) relates, “Things were really tense between the Labour Council and [our NUG]. I think [staff] were feeling an incredible pressure to just start doing all this stuff on the campaign, which was being directed by the Labour Council.”

The relative power labour has in relation to community in combination with the imperatives of bureaucratic social relations create such situations in which non-union and community groups must be silent about their different perspectives or risk a rift in their connection with labour. Officialdom does not tolerate well threats to its reality perspective. Amongst themselves in their groups or one-on-one in an anonymous investigation, shared finite realities allow the silence to be broken. As Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) notes on the anonymity issue,

People are fearful [that], if they tell the truth, or if they say what a lot of people are thinking, that they’re going to get slapped on the wrist, and it’s not worth what’s down the road for them. Which is really unfortunate, because the labour movement is supposed to be about people coming together to protect each other, and to fight for each other’s rights. And if we can’t name these things without being shut down, there’s something wrong with the system, there’s something wrong with the structure that we’re working in to fight for rights, our rights.

Networks and coalitions arise as means to transcending the institutional separation. Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) sees the TYRLC-initiated Good Jobs For All Coalition (that to some degree arose from the last phase of the OMWC) as welcoming to everyone and so an equalizing forum for community groups that are “not getting along.” She may be allowing the quantitative equality of labour and community representation on the coalition to stand in for the material way social relations play out in labour-community relationships so that the coalition being “open to anyone to come” and it being “made up very equally of labour and community” creates an appearance
that does not bear out in practice. On this same coalition CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) says, “I think the Labour Council is kind of in charge of that.” At the same time Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) notes how each group’s need to reproduce its own institutional reality means that it “gets really challenging when you’re working with a range of community and labour groups, and everybody comes with their own agenda.” One way such power-imbued relations play out is in terms of financing and autonomy from bureaucratic social relations is related by NUG4 (July 19, 2009):

We’re an independent organization, and we don’t need money from the Labour Council. We’re able to find our own money, and so therefore, we may not have the same agenda as them. And we have our own agenda, because we have our own membership.

And they are able to have their own agenda because of success at the increasingly hard work of finding funding.

Two participants identify this reality playing out in the OMWC to such a degree that they see it not as one campaign. Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) states, “Well there wasn't a campaign called Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign per se, it was a number of different initiatives started by different groups.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) discusses an ebb and flow of the overlap and involvement of J4W organizers in the ONR campaign and vice versa. Individuals going to each other’s groups’ events thus linked the campaigns and institutions in time and space:

But [a key non-union workers rights group] wasn’t participating in the planning and the strategizing around the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign. They were organizing around the $10 minimum wage campaign, temporary work, E.I. and so we kind of organized in parallel, supporting each other as we could.

This reality of the separateness of the campaigns plays out in various ways, including amongst sub-institutions at the local level. CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009), an organizer active in the 2007 phase of
the campaign is completely unaware of the work of CG2’s group since 2001, in the same overall campaign, in the same neighbourhood, and working with the same general group of community people. While CG3 is aware that “there's lots of organizations” she cannot identify specific active staff organizers like CG2 nor particular community people. Similarly, CG2 (July 17, 2009) sees the 2007 phase as a campaign that the TYRLC rolled out, and never references CG3 or her organization, an apparently key community group in that phase. This is an on-the-ground moment of the fragmentation of labour-community campaigning in time and space. There are likely a number of reasons for the “not seeing” of each other here. CG2 is an organizer grounded in the neighbourhood, and in a community organization that prioritizes having board members and staff that are reflective of the largely racialized and impoverished people’s experience of living there. CG3 and her group, extralocally rooted in the US and a few major Canadian cities, are from outside that neighbourhood. And CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) tells me a number of times that as paid staff she does not “need empowerment”. These racialized and gendered class relations are a fundamental part of how social fragmentation and categorization takes place.

The workers-rights campaign is thus a time/space moment in which groups can all be together and “the demands” the method by which it is made somewhat possible. The creation of the demand text and the acting on it requires putting aside the complexity of local sub-realities while in the coalition space. Simple, clear demands then become often-reproduced textual glue for the campaign and coalition existence. As CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) says,

Having an issue that is easy to understand I think that’s part of what made it successful. People could understand that a hard day’s work should be a good day’s pay; that is an easy message to connect with. Cheri DiNovo’s private member’s Bill was about that issue; it wasn’t about a greater income security program.
But gluing together temporarily is not the same as uniting the groups, not the same as actively creating some lasting praxis-based shared reality. A number of participants illustrate how this played out in the OMWC, with reference to the demise of the ONR part of the campaign. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) speaks to the initial development of text that reflects the social justice ideology of rights and needs, and how the process of text development was important to relationship building

So that [it] would reflect both social assistance and minimum wage, and that language around rights and need. And we knew that adequacy was a huge issue… [the] minimum wage was inadequate, social assistance was inadequate… And we [worked] really closely with the labour representatives to come up with the pamphlets and the joint events.

She refers to the campaign as “dribbling out” and “falling apart” after the 2007 election for a multiplicity of reasons. CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) refers to it as having “petered out” after “losing steam for some time.” U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) suggests the campaign “fizzled” partly because the text got too complicated

There were five or six demands that got piled on. And I think the extent of the campaign originally was there were two demands around the minimum wage and social assistance. So there was a clear focus, and it just became sort of everything to everyone, and a less potent campaign [becoming]… more of a broad-based loosey-goosey coalition.

Ideology needs to be simple because shared reality is limited. Ideas about institutional ownership of campaigns can become more important in practice than the human beings that would benefit from social changes brought about by organizing. As U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) relates, “We lost the place to house the campaign, and so there really was even greater fuzziness about structure and processes and decision-making, and who owned what.” She explains that “The
Ontario Coalition for Social Justice [OCSJ] is a provincial network of labour organizations [with] the big unions involved as the primary funders… I think maybe it was a third union, a third community groups, and a third social justice coalitions.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) explicates how ideology, the challenges of textual coordination, institutional power dynamics and different institutions’ realities combined in this case:

One of the problems that emerged later in the campaign was that the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign was a campaign for the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, but the organizing around the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign was somewhat independent of the OCSJ. So those of us involved in the campaign weren’t necessarily all members of the OCSJ and that was all fine when the demands of the campaign were clear … but after the election and the budget we had to reassess what the direction of the campaign [was]. Then it became an issue, that you know, whose campaign is this? Who makes the decisions? Is it this group of people who have been actively involved in the campaign for the last how many years? Or is the OCSJ steering committee?

In this explanation, demands are the ideological glue. Uncertainty, disinterest in continuing the campaign or relationship, and/or the threat of reality-disintegrating political discussion lead to the invoking of institutional ownership and rights, and an open disjuncture. How decision-making works is thus exposed: participation in this sort of coalition is at the whim of the most powerful, in this case those they see themselves as “owning” the ONR. Translocally organized changes that come as a result of elections and relatively minor reforms create crisis, dissolve the glue and reveal disunity. And, as no one else was actively doing work on it for some time, it was the substitutionist work of one person that kept it going for awhile (U1, Oct. 1, 2009). Substitutionism – local activity of isolated individuals standing in for more extensive
involvement of people, which may or may not be bureaucratically organized (Camfield, 2010) – functions as a translocal coordinating dynamic in NUG5’s (July 16, 2009) view:

I think it was very difficult to involve people and, and I think that often as activists or workers and organizations it’s why we kind of substitute ourselves for people…just don’t put the amount of effort into actually really reaching people because it’s so difficult.

This institutionally based partial view of translocally-organized reality is also reflected in remarks by U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) and NUG4 (July 19, 2009). Thinking about the recent history to the re-development of labour-community coalitions to overcome fragmentation, U4 says,

Way back in the Days of Action [in 1995], we had all those all struggles around working with community and labour and building coalition and fighting Harris … And [labour officials] always say, “We’re going to get better and we’re going to do this differently”, and that’s when all the coalitions started to exist, like MNSJ [Metro Network for Social Justice] and OCSJ… the labour movement knew they had to do it differently, but they don’t seem to learn.

Similarly NUG4 (July 19, 2009) finds the inability to develop a larger, ongoing shared reality, to be “building upon each leg of the work” incomprehensible given that individual union and people in key community agencies have recognized “that their approach was not the way to go.” What is not immediately apparent to her is why they would not “move that [support] to the next level”. I would suggest that she is not considering the possibility that the whole labour-community organizing institution cannot be different just through the will of a couple of people with more consciousness than power. Nonetheless, she does later say that “they know they can’t do it, because they’re not built up that way.” That is, their institutions are not organized to support such changes. She often feels like she is “just beating a dead horse.” I would suggest that her non-union group and labour are two quite different animals. Each leg of the work cannot be
built upon without a fundamental challenge to bureaucratic social relations. The union as an institution must necessarily change to work in a meaningfully collaborative and democratic way with community. As Tattersall (2005) notes, “Before unions are able to engage in deep coalitions and truly harness the capacity of union-community coalitions they must engage in a process of internal change” (p. 109). And I would argue that the community reality would have to internalize more of a newly formed coalition reality, and so partially dissolve its reality into that of labour.

While it is part of it, this ongoing process does not happen by people and their sub-institutions merely choosing to both maintain their own unique reality and to seek to generalize it as the dominant one. This social organization of labour-community functioning is profoundly extralocally conditioned by state and foundation-based funding, the state-organized cycle of elections (and groups’ attachment to these as social change moments), and historically driven legal arrangements and (labour) market (re)-structuring. As noted above, substitutionism can appear to solve the problem for a time. It is this very translocal organization that NUG3 (July 31, 2009) identifies as the need for coalition, “To win the more substantive changes around, and to confront labour market deregulation, we need a broader movement, we need union support. We need to do it from a stronger base of workers.” And Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) notes the historical roots that conditioned the challenges in this movement building,

It’s been a long time since labour and community worked together equally… it’s been a long time since the labour movement started to really gain momentum and build itself up, and form a hierarchy and the various structures of this top-down approach…it’s been a long time since then that you’ve seen labour really working with community.
This fragmentation of reality amongst institutions and how it is managed in practice affects how collaboration, participation, involvement and decision-making happen and appear. The mere existence of a piece of text – made powerful by who is involved in creating it - and the involvement in the creation of the text can have a reality coordinating effect. The Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults report (MISWAA, 2006) is an example of this. This rather large Toronto-based but translocally focused labour/community/business/government task force came together in 2004 to develop proposals for all levels of government on reforms needed for “a robust social safety net” (p. 12). The minimum wage is listed as one of these. Three research participants referenced MISWAA as either demonstrating their organizations’ involvement with the minimum wage increase initiatives (Cartwright, July 10, 2009), as having drawn attention away from downtown, community-agency support for the OMWC (NUG1, July 24, 2009) or as having been an exhausting experience to fight clashing social relations amongst all those parties, with no support from the TYRLC (NUG4, July 19, 2009). Two years after its inception, the task force generated three recommendations directed at the federal government and 11 for the Ontario government. The one for the minimum wage simply states that

The provincial government should establish an independent body, with representation from labour and employers, to recommend periodic increases to the minimum wage and monitor the employment and economic effects. It should be in place before February 2007 when the currently planned minimum wage increases will have been completed. (MISWAA, 2006, p. 14)

There are five dissenting opinions in the document, from groups or individuals who “fought hard” to have them there because they could not support the recommendations in some way (NUG4, July 19, 2009). Two organizations – the Income Security and Advocacy Clinic and the Workers Action Centre – found the minimum wage recommendation quite inadequate to the
task. Even though NUG4 feels like, “We were scrapping it out on the minimum wage and it wasn’t going anywhere,” she also thinks it ultimately had, “A big impact on the Liberal government.” And while Cartwright (July 10, 2009) tells me labour has been, “Arguing in print and in policy papers and so on, with the government, with the business lobbyists and the right wing politicians, and saying, “No, you need to have a $10 minimum wage,’” it is noteworthy that the TYRLC did not dissent.

Another example of how reality fragmentation has been managed in OMWC practice is in relation to the 2007 campaign. On one hand, John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) relates the 2007 OMWC (re)start as resulting from “special executive board discussion” within TYRLC, following which they “immediately called together a number of allies that we’d worked with in a whole series of previous campaigns, community groups, unions who organize low-wage workers” who then decided to “launch something.” On the other hand, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) reports her group’s involvement in that campaign phase as “not in the campaign at all, but it was just trying to deal with the impact of the Labour Council really just taking our stuff and just ignoring us.”

Textually linked coalition moments can also mask the lack of meaningful engagement of community people and rank-and-file workers actively marginalized by racialized and gendered class relations. Talking not just about the OMWC but also on events arising from that activity in 2007, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) comments of the TYRLC strategy of

Going from thing to thing to thing to thing, and if you take that approach, you’re not going to build in the ability to work with your affiliates in a real way. I think there’s a lot of forums, and conversations, and discussions; I think there’s been a lot more in the last couple of years than I ever have seen. Like the Steward’s Assembly, the Good Jobs Summit. But again, how do people really engage?
Similarly, NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) reveals how the members and organizers of her group are caught in local institutional reality, with no way to bridge out because of disjunctures among different Good Jobs For All institutions. Because of their determined member-driven orientation, they are repeatedly sent back to a local organizing focus on extralocal issues with extralocally oriented tactics. And it is material for her because she has relationships with actual people affected by the E.I. (Employment Insurance) campaign. They are not reified mobilizing targets:

We thought, this is great, people are really interested in Employment Insurance… a lot of people who’ve run out of E.I. or weren’t eligible for E.I., or were making like $127 a week on E.I., who were using their Visa to pay their rent came out…but, how do we keep that going? Because it’s almost like we will then have to create [or] just do our own thing.

And she suggests that this was because the rest of the coalition was not actively mobilizing. In addition, in the context of this worker-centred or community unionism approach, for engagement to be meaningful, for social relations to be materially challenged, many community unionism-type organizers believe that socially marginalized people need to be actively involved in the decision-making. CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) suggests that the appearance of participation as democratic involvement is partially about the lack of the kinds of institutions that would generate and support that

The idea of town hall meetings and including people outside labour did feel democratic…but I think like in terms of decision-making…we’re not at the point where we actually have community councils that are able to make decisions, so I don’t know…what that would have looked like then.

For a degree of real unity, fundamental local institutional reality changes must happen as a result of internalizing coalition reality moments, a process which in turn would make a
coalition that is something different than a varying degrees of limited moments of institutional overlap, one that would do more than “enhance a union’s ability… to advocate for legislation and social policy” (Tattersall, 2005, p. 98). It would require both being and doing differently, and establishing true “reciprocal interdependent interconnections” (p. 99) among union and community organizations. People and their groups would have to seek and accept the disruption of the locally reproduced and institutionally objectified reality as the reality.

**Individual/Institutional Reality Relationships**

In the previous section I discussed how the OMWC work of various groups at the same time or over a few years was seen by some to have a cumulative effect and by others to have no relationship at all. Similarly, such disjunctures are found among individuals and sub-institutions perspectives. As a J4W organizer otherwise unconnected to another union, workers rights or community group, Justice for Workers for me was the group that we were collectively developing for the joint goals and vision we shared. Through the interview process, I learned that I had this view because I needed to both belong to an institutional place and believe people were there with me who valued what we were doing, as part of that group’s development, just as I did. CG2 (July 17, 2009) saw it as a coalition of groups coming together across the city. I made sense of this because his geographical and sub-institutional location was in a neighbourhood other than downtown Toronto, in which the core J4W formed and from which organizing started. I was surprised though to hear NUG4 (July 19, 2009) say, “Because, of course, we had reps for our organization going to the meetings of J4W and then they would come back and we would debate stuff in our staff meetings.” This simple piece of information shared by someone with whom I had started J4W caused quite a tension for me. It raised questions about how we collectively had understood what our joint project was and where people’s priorities were focused when
strategizing and making decisions. My activity and my meaning-making process in relation to J4W’s development as a pivotal OMWC sub-institution had been very important to me as an individual. I was not paid staff, did not volunteer with any group and I was not representing a union. I needed some other form of institutional belonging.

Being employed by an organization that allows or requires an organizing orientation to the work creates a particular kind of individual/institutional relationship and so reality perspective. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) talked about how working in an organization with a specific social-justice need focus, but not a workers rights one per se, limited her involvement in the OMWC. It was when she moved into a position in an agency with an organizational mandate that saw low-wages as part of the problem of poverty that she could play a key part in the ONR and develop demands, strategy and lead activities. I suggest that this exemplifies how institutional compartmentalization of social struggles against injustice organizes individual workers’ activity and meaning making. The contradiction of the value placed on having paid staff to coordinate time-consuming organizing work and the institutionally required prioritization of the reproduction of local social relations by those same paid individuals is an often-unexplicated tension. As NUG5 (July 16, 2009) draws out, “Most of those people [were] coming [to the ONR meetings] as agency workers and organizations and so [the work needed] to be directly relevant in their view to whatever their focus [was] organizationally, and they [were] busy.”

And it is not only the organizationally mandated topics that create this reality tension; it is the method of addressing those that further conditions in what way and where they feed into extralocal coordination. And vice versa. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) says,

I don’t do casework and I am not seeing people who are in crisis all the time and so I am able to do [organizing] work and my experience is that others who are able to do that work are often in similar kinds of broad-based organizations and
that people who are connected more to local organizations will take your materials, those demands are created [and]…organize around them if they think it relevant…but they don't stay involved in the strategizing.

On such extralocally coordinated materials development and dissemination, U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) also notes that local organizations would take materials, “And then people kind of did with them what they wanted.” This is a staff attempt to be a translocal activity coordinator. Staff like NUG5 (July 16, 2009) and U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) generated text through their work, disseminated it, and attempted to stimulate more activity, coordinated by the text. But there is no local requirement of using that text in any particular way or at all.

And getting connected, having access to networks, can identify individuals as politically successful and important, allowing them to create new sub-institutional relationships for their organizationally driven but individually sought out purpose. Reality is (re)externalized by NUG5’s (July 16, 2009) activity and consciousness process because she has the sub-institutional power and a translocally situated job that make her and her organization’s subjective realities into objectified ones. In this case an individual/campaign disjuncture occurred. Substitutionist activity that had kept the ONR going is also thus exposed:

I had [developed] extensive networks across the province and so essentially didn’t need the OCSJ and so that’s when I stopped being involved. And when I stopped being involved, the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign stopped meeting because I was playing a major role in coordinating those meetings, and then we were not moving forward [anymore].

As such, various groups and coalitions in the different periods of the OMWC had their own perspectives about and were doing their own “base-building” in their specific institution and so sphere of reality. CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) exposes this, and I suggest she does so in a manner
quite consistent with the dominant individualistic orientation to daily navigation of social relations. As a solution to her frustration with institutional compartmentalization, disjunctures amongst them, and being locally trapped, she would seem to want to circumvent any sort of movement and instead have a direct local institutional link to extralocally located social relations organizers. She is “building a base” for the purpose of lobbying:

This is a challenge we have organizationally. We're really good on the ground. But… at some point, the government was making decisions about what to do, and I bet they were consulting not-for-profits and they were working with people. It wasn't us. If we could actually figure out a way to have our membership work more directly with the powers-that-be on that, I think that would've been more effective. Because then maybe we could've pushed a little harder. But we were kind of just doing all the groundwork.

Another way this kind of individualism plays out is in how one person’s ongoing involvement can stand-in for and so appear as significant involvement of their organization. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) notes who was involved on the ONR coalition, “Everyone from local community activists to labour, which was primarily the CAW.” While an individual’s work and commitment can make them effective as “bridge builders” between labour and community (Nissen, 2004, p. 55; Tattersall, 2010, p. 27), as Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) himself notes, “It wasn’t really well resourced to be honest. It was really a shoestring campaign [because] it didn’t have a lot of labour support. I was the guy from the CAW who was arguing for this, who argued for this on the OCSJ.”

And the desire to expose this implicit understanding of how individualism and substitutionism generate the appearance of an institution as involved and important is uncovered by NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009), when she poses rhetorical questions that she would like to ask but believes she cannot in ongoing labour-community settings, “What are the politics driving this?
What are the institutional demands behind the people who are coming to the meetings that are driving our inability to be really explicit about why we can’t do this differently?” Similarly CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) relates his desire to speak about the 2001 to 2006 campaign period in a meeting to which a Labour Council speaker came to discuss the 2007 launch, “[I thought to myself], ‘Well, do I say something and create a bad atmosphere?’”

Such reality appearances can generate the impression that individuals with more power can make major institutional changes if they just had some correct understanding of reality. And, in a highly categorized and fragmented society, people’s consciousness processes can and do adapt to many conflicting realities. Even in the powerful, agency is very much institutionally conditioned and managed. As John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) notes on this,

I don’t think somebody like John Cartwright would be inherently opposed to a substantial increase in social assistance rates – probably the opposite – but he wouldn’t be prepared to fight for it because he would see it as not a winning proposition and something that he would have difficulty dealing with in terms of the union structures he operates within.

And this helps explain why the material reality of people who came to town halls “who are bouncing between the work world and social assistance because they cannot afford to live on one or the other,” (CG1, July 2, 2009) can co-exist with the lack of strategy to address this by those organizing the 2007 meetings. It assists in explaining why real people’s lived experience of this marginalization was very far away from informing the activity within the campaign beyond event or media-based moments. Ideological practice both conditions this activity/consciousness separation and gives a general appearance that they are not separate. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) uncovers this further as she remarks
There isn’t this rigid separation between people who are on social assistance and people who are working. Often people who are on social assistance are working and often it’s for low wages. And often people who are working for low wages, get laid off and end up on social assistance and so there isn’t that separation in a way that the NDP was wanting to talk about it or, or the Labour Council.

There is not a seamless connection between the individual and the institution they represent. Human consciousness and activity is more complicated than that, and is not organized or driven in a full way by the objectified reality of the institution. An example of this is U4’s (Sept. 24, 2009) various organizational locations and activity. Working part-time in various union and community locations, and being on an executive board allowed her to migrate demand texts from one place to the next, which the decision-makers in each locale could choose to hear and support or not. Her multiple activity locations made it necessary for officialdom to hear her at times; her and community’s relative lack of power in labour-community social relations made it quite easy for them to ignore her at others. Similarly, CG1’s (July 2, 2009) individual involvement in various anti-poverty projects is coordinated by overlapping demand texts. I suggest that this creates an appearance of her activity as being part of a more coordinated, ongoing movement than actually exists:

I’m involved in 25-in-5 Campaign on poverty reduction, and increasing the minimum wage is part of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy…I’ve also been a spokesperson for Campaign 2000 on child poverty. So again, we have the overlap of the demand that people need sufficient income in order to be able to support their children, to take their children out of poverty.

Competing realities and appearances of reality create consciousness and social tension for people. Such “reality gaps” occur due a lack of knowledge (on the past, present and future),
understanding or shared reality amongst people and their groups. I found some participants in similar ways bridged such reality gaps.

**Bridging Reality Gaps**

Living in a society that has come to be based on institutionally organized division of labour leads us to having a necessarily partial view of reality. We cannot see or fully know other institutional realities. This includes people with an analysis and practice of challenging capitalist social relations. That commitment to creating a more humane society does not materially place people outside of the social relations even if we drift there ideologically. At the same time, having such a partial view of reality does not by definition necessarily lead to having an equally partial analysis. But the same social relations that organizers seek to undermine condition partial views and consciousness of social organization. I suggest that, when the gaps in reality are exposed, we seek something to fill them in order to maintain the sense of partial reality as the reality.

In light of people’s varying critiques of and concerns about the OMWC organizing and outcome, and of workers rights campaigns in general, how do people reconcile the gaps in reality in order to continue to organize? I saw one common piece of ideology amongst some participants coming from different social and organizational locations that seems to serve that purpose: a combination of belief and hope. I suggest this is an ideology given that the hope/belief bridge is made with little to no material grounding or reason to support the connections they make through the hope/belief combination. It is human to be hopeful and have ideals. It is not naturally human though to be idealist. I suggest that the hope/belief combination I heard in my interviews is a form of ideological glue, creating a bridge across realities in the present, but also giving continuity between now and what is actually unforeseeable, in the future.
CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) acknowledges a reality gap between where the campaign went and what he would like movement-building to do. He fills the gap existing now with belief and hope, thereby linking present and future. Without relating to any history of workers-rights organizing before the campaign, he generalizes the novelty of his experience and reality perspective to hope for social change as a whole:

I think that this stuff does not...end with a campaign. I think it’s around building democratic structures and a democratic culture. And so it does an important part of starting to develop that but...we need councils in every neighbourhood, we need ways that workers can organize... I think that it didn’t go far enough and that we shouldn’t have stopped there. And ... I think we need more ways to bring people together on the left, so that it’s not labour versus other stakeholders. I think there’s enough people who are economically insecure in this city that [we] could have a really viable, powerful, civil society, [people who] wouldn’t be happy with a $9.50 minimum wage...I think that... the minimum wage campaign helped us as anti-poverty folks feel like we could push the government on this issue. I think it threw a bit of a scare into the Liberal government, so it was one of the first times when we had any kind of momentum on these issues and that all felt, you know, hopeful.

In town hall participants’ anger and frustration, Nicole Wall (Oct.1, 2009) finds hope for bridging organizing into the future:

And so, in some of the conversations, there was anger. Because people were saying, “Why are we fighting for $10? Let’s do more.” And so that frustration was good, because it gave you hope that, even when this Bill is passed, that this fight will still continue, because people were fired up, and people wanted to do more than fight for $10. And they gave good feedback, and people seemed energized, and willing to work.
Shortly after she reflects a bit more, saying “So, the [minimum wage was increased], and seasons came around and people got busy, but I think that there will be more done around increasing the wage...” She acknowledges that the anger and frustration has not immediately led to anything else but she seems to suggest it is natural that it will. Conflict defines capitalist social relations so she can be sure there will be some collective class struggle moment in the future. The belief in our humanity also creates some reality continuity among past, present and future. But there is nothing inevitable about such organized moments of struggle bringing the kind social change organizers seek.

John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) does something similar, as he sees a broad-based movement as latent, and he hopes that more dire need of more people will bring it to the fore:

It’s latent in the sense that very little has emerged in an organized, clear-cut way. But the level of indignation is massive. At a certain moment that can really come together… [Because] it seems to me that what we’ve faced up until now is nothing compared to what’s going to be happening. Once they achieve a level of stability within their system, they’re going to be facing a deficit and a debt that’s going to be enormous. They’re going look to use it as an opportunity to impose austerity, union busting and attacks on communities… There’s going to emerge such a need for organization. So, that’s, I think, the biggest hopeful note in terms of what could come out of this.

For U2 (Dec. 12, 2009), her hope/belief in the future is based on positive changes of the past, “I always have faith that, imagine, 100 years ago, we couldn’t even work as women, so 100 years later we’re now owning property, we’re driving around…there’s better days ahead.”

This first section has been an analysis of the multiple layers of people’s consciousness and their and their institutions activity during the campaign. Building on this, I now turn to a
focused exploration of the relations and mechanisms that arose from or conditioned coordination among and across labour and community, people and organizations involved in the OMWC.

**Translocally Organized Links and Disjunctures**

In this section I continue to explore the social process of reality objectification in the campaign. Having presented and analyzed various layers of local temporal, spatial, institutional and individual reality in the OMWC, I will now take this analysis to the extra- and translocal levels, uncovering some of how and why many people’s activity and perspectives were related to social relations that both originated externally to and were also an integral part of their local realities. The coordination of this activity, consciousness and reality happens at the level of society as a whole through state and labour-market driven relations, at the labour-community coalition level in relation to all the groups and organizations within them, and at the sub-institutional level within those groups as they carry out their work and make sense of it across geographical space and time.

To start, in the section called *Changes in Extralocal Origin Social Relations During the OMWC*, I frame the overall discussion with an analysis of the changes in provincial state and labour-market driven relations that had a critical translocal linking or disjuncture effect. Coordinating texts are key to creating and reproducing translocal realities. The content of the text may be important for its function, but certain kinds of text coordinate given the form in which they exist. Throughout the 7 years of the campaign there are different kinds of texts which came to function in this way. In the section called the *Minimum Wage vs. Living Wage Campaigns*, I thus move into a historically informed discussion of how the minimum wage increase as both material demand and text evolved in the campaign as it did. The final three sections look at specific campaign text-based coordinators. *The 60-hour Workweek* and *Endorsements* are more
content-based coordinating texts, while *Petitions, Stickers, Buttons and Print Materials* often functioned more as text in their form. That is, their function was often more important than what they said, as they became textual things to create, link up or appear to link moments and people’s activity.

**Changes in Extralocal Origin Social Relations During the OMWC**

As I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, state and labour-market (ruling) relations are dynamic and have a tremendous conditioning effect on all aspects of everyday life, including the content and kinds of collective class struggle happening in community and union organizing. Many participants spoke of significant changes in extralocal origin social relations from the start of the OMWC in 2001 to the time of the 2007 phased-in increase. That is, how the state and labour-market policies and practices have been re-regulated and the impact on organizing. Participants related this to how their own work was controlled, limited or curtailed. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) encapsulates the translocal effect of those years:

> In the Canadian jurisdiction, year after year, all over you were seeing governments realize that they had to increase the minimum wages, that the worst effects of...the restructuring that had taken place were leaving people in such poverty that...liberal states felt that they had to bring it up to a degree to avoid the massive impoverishment of their working population. And so...I think, certainly we had governments that were primed to make a move. What moves happened, I think, in terms of the kinds of increases, were shaped by, or influenced, by the organizing.

The restructuring she refers to is the project of “flexibilization” and “modernization” that the Progressive Conservative government’s Common Sense Revolution under first Mike Harris and then Ernie Eves subjected Ontarians to, focusing on employment standards starting in 1999.
Part of this was the freezing of the minimum wage at $6.85 per hour, “a significant change in policy direction, as historically, minimum wage increases had been implemented regularly since the enactment” of the Employment Standards Act (p. 115). When the Conservatives ran the Ontario state, they wielded power in an often-simple way that NUG4 (July 19, 2009) relates:

Now in 2009 [with the Liberal government] there is such an openness to having conversations around social justice issues and community organizing which was so different back then. Pretty much anyone wanting a meeting with the government, they would just say ‘No.’ [laughs].

Along with the “no” came pressure on most community organizations, “Many organizations [had] either their funding or their community organizing program [cut], so most workers started to do services as opposed to working with grassroots initiatives,” says CG2 (July 17, 2009). Das Gupta (2007) reports that a United Way study in Toronto “found that in 1996 alone, 146 of its member agencies lost $14 million in government funding” (p. 110), compromising the “counter-hegemonic role” played by racialized women’s organizations since the early 70s, in terms of the challenging state and labour-market conditioned social relations but also “in broader mainstream movements, such as the labour movement and the women’s movement” (p. 109).

When the Liberal government came into power in 2003, “People were pushing so there could be more advocacy… [During the government of] Mike Harris, our organization was under pressure not to do advocacy” (CG2, July 17, 2009). It was after 2003 that the United Way designated thirteen neighbourhoods as high priority and foundations funding (NUG4, NUG6) led to “shitloads of money [being] pumped into neighbourhoods and community organizing” (NUG4, July 19, 2009). It was because of “the devastation that had happened under the Tories, that the foundations realized that to fund services was not the way to go, because things had
gotten so bad” (NUG4). Similarly CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) notes, “I think the political moment [and] the kind of desperation that ensued after the big Harris cuts…made people that understood what was going on know that…a charitable solution was no solution at all.”

Since 2003, capacity building and community engagement have become part of the advocacy/organizing lexicon as a result of or conditioned by available funding (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009). There is a range of meaning given to these terms and project approaches, from an individually oriented citizenship focus (Andrews et al., 2008), to developing partnerships between community people and agencies (O’Meara, Chesters, & Han, 2004), and to a focus on some sort of organizing for community control (Mason, Carr Hill, Myers, & Street, 2008). As NUG4 (July 19, 2009) notes, “[The funders] would frame it as ‘capacity building’ but I think that the focus is really about…trying to find ways to challenge poverty rather than service a program to deal with the effects of that. So that’s also been kind of happening parallel.” CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) sees significant changes in this regard

Through the work that [our organization] did, we were able to apply for funding for a second similar kind of position here so now we really have two people who are doing full-time community development stuff and that program’s been outstanding and has actually been able to hire people from the community to do both individual advocacy for people in need as support but also linking that to the campaign and more systemic [work].

Participants do not see the conditions changes they identify in the Liberal from the Tory era as benevolent. On the contrary, a number spoke about what NUG4 (July 19, 2009) calls a “crafty” strategy:

[They are] crafty, because they do things so that you can’t exactly rail at them, and it kind of undermines a big show of strength… if you really want to take them
on. And I think we’ve seen that in all the sort of work they’ve been doing. [They are] very, very strategic in terms of how they play things.

NUG5 (July 16, 2009) talks about this in relation to the demise of the minimum wage organizing:

There was some uncertainty after [the phased-in increase] about whether the $10 minimum wage demand was relevant anymore because Dalton McGuinty was saying it’s going to increase to $10.25… And so if you’re calling for ten-dollar minimum wage and everyone’s [saying] “They promised to raise it to $10.25 in a year”, it’s kind of irrelevant…. [Bringing it in] over three years was brilliant politically for them…. It was like [they were saying], “Let’s just crush this and stuff it to the bottom; they’re calling for $10, let’s give them ten twenty five in 3 years.” I think [they] greatly destroyed the campaign.

CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) also sees the Liberal government as a “big player” in the campaign’s demise after 2007. He says,

I would assume that they calculated…and they were able to cut it off by promising incremental increases…. Instead of $10, now it became $10.25 [over 3 years] and we didn’t really have a plan around that… it took some of the wind out of the sails of the campaign, and I think that’s…the kind of culture of Liberal Party politics in the country, is to…appropriate from all sides.

And as NUG1 (July 24, 2009) notes, the insufficient minimum wage raise:

Took a little bit of urgency out of [the organizing], in the way that really inadequate reforms can do… How can we continue to talk about raising the minimum wage when it’s been raised, and it hasn’t been raised enough but it’s really different from having a really clear and concrete, “It’s been frozen.” But it’s very different kind of resonance to say, “It’s raised but it’s not raised enough.”
These participants’ perspectives lead to me questioning what it is that organizers understand about our process of demanding and demanding over a few years until a reform happens and we're "supposed" to finish with the demanding. Have we internalized the extralocally organized limits to our activity? Do we accept this as reality and re-group to create another set of demand texts to be ready to “ramp it up” for the next election? (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009). What does seem to be the case is that since the translocal coordinating effect of the elections cycle is such a powerful orienting force that organizers work with that reality as a given. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) notes a satisfaction with a response to all of their demands even as she was critical for the way they are met in a “half assed way”:

[After] the election what follows from that is then, of course, the focus shifts to the budget…But it was significant because they responded in some way to all of our demands right and shifted the ground… We could no longer call for an end to the clawback to the National Child Benefit Supplement because it wasn't an obvious clawback anymore it was just a clawback that was happening because when before you were allowed to keep the National Child Supplement they were just clawing back money through by reducing social assistance rates.

She is pragmatic, “You have to adapt to the political context that you’re in” (NUG5, July 16, 2009). Organizers will take what they can get and go back to a focus in their local-level functioning, until the next extralocally generated trigger happens. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) explains the impact of these extralocally generated conditions on the current capacity of community workers and activists to have leadership in organizing. The de-skilling issue she raises will be discussed further in Chapter Six. Even as foundation funding has flowed, organizing has not significantly improved because,

I think people have been [politically] deskilled, and certainly way more so now [than even in the Tory years]. I think it’s the legacy of the Harris era where it used
to be organizations couldn’t apply for funding and use the words “advocacy” so if you’re spending all your time trying to figure out how you can talk about advocacy, how you can think about advocacy without using the word - it’s not that the words drive the actions - but it had a huge impact. The depoliticization of organizations, what they believed was possible, what they believed their role in community was, and maybe the kind of people they hired [is significant].

Das Gupta’s (2007) study of immigrant women’s activism echoes this fear of funding loss with advocacy work, “Some activists reported that many of their younger counterparts turned to ‘quiet diplomacy,’ and were avoiding direct confrontation” and instead “embraced a style of working with the state that was polite and consensual rather than a challenge to the status quo.” Another dimension to the translocal effect of the state’s “dismantling of the counter-hegemonic potential” (pp. 111-112) of such organizations and their networks is added by NUG1 (July 24, 2009),

And then you’re not just born knowing how you can do social service kind of work but from an organizing approach, that’s something that we learn together, and if you’re isolated and not supported in the organization it’s really, really hard to do. So, I think, for some organizations there was no will at all, [and] for some there was will but just not the experience, the confidence, and the skills to do it.

Similarly, CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) notes how organizations’ sources of funding still drive organizing limitations:

A lot of social service agencies don't do advocacy work and wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole because of the way our charitable laws are written. They're only supposed to spend 10% of their resources doing advocacy work and they don't understand what that means and so they just completely steer clear of…anything remotely appearing like…organizing, mobilizing, anything like that. Some agencies understand that that's important and will make a big difference in the
lives of their clients, but a lot of them are very quiet in their support or just you know will not [endorse]… I also think is the lack of resources; I mean if it's not in your work plan, if your funder is not paying you to do this, then you're not going to do it. And I think a lot of people who go into the social service sector, especially as frontline workers are not activists. They're counsellors, program coordinators…but they're not necessarily politicized the same way as union organizers are.

In the same period, there was a shift in the TYRLC practice through the drawing up and implementation of equity and strategic plans that would address in practice racialized and gendered worker exclusion (TYRLC, 2002a, 2002b, 2005). While this will be pursued further in Chapter Seven, Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) notes,

About 4 years ago, you started to hear conversations and talk from Labour Council about globalization, and how we really start pushing back on capital in a way that’s building solidarity across borders, across communities. And not just locally here in Toronto, but nationally and internationally. And that’s not the kind of conversations that you would have heard from Labour Council 6, 7, 8 years ago. So I think that that shift has been some really key [staff and officials saying] from their personal experiences, and from their perspective....“There’s really good work that we could do to draw in members, and members that traditionally we haven’t been getting involved, and who... the economic crisis [is] affecting.”

And so if we want to start reaching out to workers who aren’t organized in the traditional way of organizing with a union, and building a movement, then we need to start speaking to issues that affect them. And issues like globalization, issues like a minimum wage, issues like health care and so on, and so on are the kind of issues that people can relate to, want to hear about, want to talk about, and that will draw them into the labour movement, the formalized labour movement.

These are some of the key changes in state- and labour-driven social relations during the 7 years of the campaign. Without determining it, such changes conditioned campaign activity, in
terms of strategic possibility and tactical choices. This will be explored further in Chapter Six in the discussion of capacity-building and mobilization types of organizing. I now turn to an analysis of text-based coordination in the OMWC.

**Minimum Wage vs. Living Wage Campaigns**

The activity on and meanings given to minimum and living wage campaigns can be understood when seeing how both of these kinds of demands have evolved as significant textual coordinators. The phrasing of, framing of, and acting on demands related to attempts at achieving minimum wages, living wages or both have brought with them ongoing disjunctures in both the early OMWC phases and, for some, in workers-rights organizing that continues. While the combined ideas and practices are not entirely historically distinct, in contemporary local workers-rights campaigns there are both ideological and organizing differences between the two types of projects and the people and institutions that engage in them.

Glickman (1997) traces the historical origins of the terminology and the fight for a living wage back to the gradual ideological shift of workers and their organizations to a re-definition of freedom and thus of waged labour itself. In the late 19th century as the notion of “wage slavery” morphed into “living wages”, a relationship also developed between the concepts of “wages” and “natural rights”, with many advocates “merging wage labor with citizenship” (pp. 11, 62, 65). Some actively took on the ideology implied in the reformulation of wage labour while others made “a pragmatic acknowledgment of its omnipresence.” Among such supporters were women and freed African-Americans who “tended to treat wage labor, when it amounted to just recompense, as evidence of their liberation” (p. 64). Regardless of political perspective on this question, the “acknowledgement of permanence [of waged labour] did not make the meaning of
wages self-evident nor did it say anything about what level of wages might be legitimate” (p. 63).

With capitalist social relations so normalized more than 100 years later, the contemporary context provides little ideological space for people to challenge neither a key pillar of class relations – the need for workers to spend “a lifetime of working for wages” – nor assert that a “fair and honest remuneration for labor” is truly being about having “the ownership of the means of production” (Glickman, 1997, pp. 11, 61). Today, in the most basic terms, a living wage is “envisioned” as a wage that allows for a decent quality of life, including giving access to what is needed to be healthy, pursue leisure and recreation activities, and “to participate fully in social life” (Mackenzie & Stanford, 2008, p. 7). As when the term was first coined in the 1870s, the puzzle of “how to determine just rewards” continues today (Glickman, 1997, p. 62). The minimum wage differs not only in that it is supposed to allow someone working full-time to do so at the poverty level (as measured in Canada by LICO). This concept is also different because it is a broadly existing legal relation, mandated at both federal and provincial levels as part of employment standards. As NUG4 (July 19, 2009) relates about the OMWC, “People were throwing out ‘living wage’ but they didn’t really understand what that was, and I think that’s why we did that research and why we really thought about it. Because, [we were thinking] ‘What does [a living wage] mean, how does that connect?’” CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009), whose organization pursues living wage campaigns in the US and Canada says of the living wage that it is, “A concept of saying that everyone deserves it.”

There are recent, extralocally-driven social relations that shed more light on this perspective. Living wage campaigns (LWC) are numerous in the US (Reynolds & Kern, 2004), occur very occasionally with success in Canada (Living Wage for Families Campaign, 2010). I
argue that both have links to officialdom’s pragmatic anti-racist mobilization for union renewal strategy. A significant case of US labour council-based labour-community campaigning is that of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor (LACFL). It has had a major role in two social movements, building a labour-community relationships around immigrant rights and a local LWC. With the development of Union Cities, the LACFL was at the helm of the most “dramatic change... in a local union movement” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 101). Gapasin (2001) reports that under the leadership of the LACFL, more than anywhere else in the US “unions here have embraced the more aggressive, more sophisticated approach to organizing promoted by the leadership of the AFL-CIO” (p. 79). They have understood the “dynamic reciprocal relationship among political power, union density, and organizing; thus, organizing increases political power and political power can facilitate organizing, for example, resulting in improved labor-law legislation and enforcement” (p. 80). In this context political power development is explicitly primarily electoral and organizing means unionizing. For Gapasin (2001), to become this type of organizing force labour councils need to take seriously “the creation and affiliation of community-based labor-community organizations” (p. 82). To this end, the LACFL created an organizing department and hired an SEIU 1877 Justice for Janitors (J4J) former staff director, the late Miguel Contreras, who later became head of the LACFL. As well, “Immigrants from Mexico and throughout Latin America with years of organizing and campaigning experience in the Latino communities have been appointed to key positions in the council.” (p. 94). SEIU, HERE and UFW lead “get-out-the-vote” campaigns in Latino communities to build ties with them (p. 95).

Among a number of campaign initiatives that seek to increase unionization through mobilizing non-unionized workers around a labour law or regulation change to address urgent
material needs of low-waged workers, the LWC strategy was taken up by the LAFCL. LWCs are based on winning local-level ordinances such that if a firm gets public money either by subsidy or service contracts they must pay their workers a higher hourly wage. Across the US, about 40 such ordinances were reported by Luce (2001, p. 141). In 17 of 40, LCs played a leading campaign role through funding staff, outreach and funds for mailouts (p. 142). Supported by the LACFL and created and funded by HERE Local 11 (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008) the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) led the formation of a coalition between ACORN, a tenants' group (AGENDA), environmental and religious and other community and labor groups, and “coordinated a multilevel campaign for two years” (p. 104). They prepared the ordinance and

Carefully organized workers who would be affected by the ordinance, incorporating them into the campaign in mobilizations and as spokespersons in city-council-meeting testimonies. This was not just a campaign tactic, but rather an integral element of their central objective of building support for union organizing. (Gapasin, 2001, p. 90)

The LWC win was such that,

any new city contract or concession agreement with a subsidy over $100,000 has to provide employees with $7.25 per hour with family benefits or $8.50 without, twelve paid days off per year, and ten unpaid days of her year, with wages indexed for inflation. (Gapasin, 2001, p. 91)

The process of getting the ordinance also raised broader wages and working condition issues, and lead to unionizing successes in the hotel industry.

While the LA-based LWC “provided impetus for less formal labor-community groupings and networks to develop and play a direct role in influencing the direction of the Los Angeles union movement” (Gapasin, 2001, p. 94) both Gapasin and Luce (2001) note the effects of the short-termness of the LWC strategy. While diverse coalitions work hard on these campaigns,
implementation of ordinances is a major problem, as labour councils are not generally paying attention to this phase (p. 145). As well, LWC ordinance wins have been used to benefit unionization but not in ways that ultimately support broader movement building. Luce (2001) reports that the Hartford, CT ordinance has a “labor peace clause” which allows workers unionization “in exchange for a no-strike agreement” (p. 151). The SEIU representative Luce interviewed supported this as a win. This seems to be reflective of the workers-as-property, market-share ideology discussed in Chapter Two that removes the unique (and only) legal collective power workers have, the ability to withdraw their labour. “Without that the inherently unequal power relationship between capital and labor [can] not be redressed” (Moody, 2007, p. 111).

“Fairness” is another piece of ideology contributing to the minimum/living wage disjuncture. It is one that has various historical underpinnings. The ideological practice of the Ontario Tories in the 1995 to 2003 period saw the fairness concept used in a quite opposite way to how it has been used historically in relation to workers rights. While early 2000 attacks on provincial employment standards were presented as promoting “both ‘fairness and flexibility’” (Thomas, 2009, p. 109), Glickman (1997) reviews how, in the late 19th century, fair wages were about a fair price for a person’s work:

Fair wages discourse defined economic justice as a productive equivalence, a direct correspondence between the value of work performed and wages paid… that is, the full productive value of one’s labor. That one could live on such wages was an expected by-product but not the essence of fair wages… the concept of fair wages shared the prevailing producerist assumptions about receiving the value of the product. By contrast, the living wage was defined in consumerist terms. (p. 67)

Further, a fair standard of living was often seen as derived from “the collective claim of all those who find themselves in a common class situation” and of common “social status” (Weber, as
cited in Glickman, 1997, p. 69). The stratified racialized and gendered class relations of that period have only deepened all these years later, as has the notion of a common, customary standard of living. What was referred to as “American standards” were actually meant for “white, male, trade unionists” (p. 85). While social relations changes aided by feminist and anti-racist struggles have dulled the overt quality of this, today as the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) discussed in Chapter Three has become “an elusive norm for a growing number of Canadians, creating a climate that was conducive to backlash against employment and pay equity” (Fudge & Vosko, 2003, p. 199), the invisibility of the complexity of racialized and gendered class relations to many organizers and social change advocates persists. One research participant remark shows just how lost to view and naturalized the historical evolution of ideas with material practices can be:

If I were to give my opinion as to what the minimum wage should actually be, I would say it should be something to connect with the average wage, like fifty or 60% of the average wage in Ontario. [And] it should be indexed. It turns out that if you actually look at the average wage in Ontario and divide it in half, it would be about what the minimum wage should be, either 10.50 or 11 bucks an hour. The idea [here is] that nobody should be working for less than half of what their neighbour makes. It’s okay to be making half of what your neighbour makes but you shouldn’t be making less than half of what your neighbour makes. That’s just unfair. And I like that concept but we still haven’t won indexation. (Watson, Aug. 11, 2009 – my emphasis)

Inequality thus becomes not inherently unfair; just too much of it is. This participant’s perspective has an historical echo to the post-war compromise. Thomas (2009) points out how, in that period, “the normalization of the standard employment relationship” for unionized workers “entrenched a distinct pattern of segmentation between primary and secondary labour markets”
And Fudge and Vosko (2003) discuss the paradoxical process of the 1960s and 1970s expansion of and improvements to collective bargaining and employment standards such that, while “equality became an official theme of labour law and policy, an increasing proportion of employment deviated from the norm” (p. 192). As precarity for some and security for others became normalized, “fairness” has become conditioned by those labour-market and state-regulated relations, as well as by individual experience of them. This can lead to a lack of integration of the everyday material reality of how labour markets and so waged work are organized, thus preventing a full analysis of who particular campaigns might involve and who they might affect.

On this point, the MISWAA report (2006) notes, “There was considerable debate over what constitutes adequacy. Some Task Force members saw $15,000 as adequate for a single person in today’s dollars” (p. 17). Given that even with the increase to $10.25 on March 31, 2010 “minimum wage workers will continue to earn sub-poverty wages, as the increase will be outpaced by inflation” (Thomas, 2009, p. 208), one wonders about the precise nature of this debate. As discussed above, there were very few dissenting opinions in the report. I suspect, given CG5’s (June 24, 2009) grim description of everyday workplace racist sexism discussed at the start of this chapter, she would have dissented. When I asked what made her readily accept an interview for this project she simply said, “We need to get fairness in the workplace.”

U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) provides a thoughtful suggestion on how to reconcile fairness with pragmatic observation of how class relations work:

I have this idea that employers should only be paying [minimum wage] if they can show that that's really all they can afford. Because there are more and more of those jobs, and if you're a small business and that's really and truly all you can afford for the people you're employing then that might be legitimate, and [they]
should be raised by an indexed amount every year because all your other costs go up and that's just the cost of doing business. But as far as other businesses, I almost think there should be a two-tiered minimum wage based on your profit margin, or the size of your business. If you have a hundred or 200 or 500 people like some businesses do and you're paying that amount of money and yet you're posting record profits, I don't think you should be allowed to pay minimum wage, I think there should be another element to it where it's, you know, if your profit margin is this much, then you must, this is your minimum wage, and if it's this much, this is your minimum wage.

Related to the issue of fairness, the distinction between concept and practice was one source of disjuncture in the early part of the OMWC as “minimum wage” and “living wage” became competing texts that causing inter-institutional organizing disjunctures. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) relates how “a number of the union types who look for those kinds of template campaigns that you can just come and plop down” were pushing for some sort of living wage campaign. Further she notes, “I think that, in part, [J4W] were seen in a negative light by labour folks because of that position we were taking. And word gets around, so I think Cartwright knew about [our] effort to try and put a stop to living wage organizing” (NUG3, July 31, 2009). And J4W was trying to do this because it seemed that the living wage advocates wanted to do a nebulous, combined campaign that would not assist in achieving our movement-building goals and one we also thought was un-winnable.

As a member of the ONR to come later, Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) notes, “The average working class family in Toronto would actually need to be making about 18 bucks an hour but obviously that can’t be a legislated minimum wage.” This demonstrates why minimum and living wage language has become used interchangeably by some organizers (CG3, Sept. 4, 2009). As Thomas (2009) notes, the enduring below-poverty line reality of minimum wages has
led to “redefining the minimum wage as a living wage [as] also key to employment standards reform” (p. 159). But practical need does not easily translate into organizing that concretely connects with people. In this regard, NUG3 (July 31, 2009) uncovers a moment of ideological practice embedded in this disjuncture:

All the groovy little fun campaigns that activists can do [are] frustrating, because it’s so out of touch with the incredible need. Like, people are working two frigging 40 hour...they’re working 80-hour jobs cleaning, because wages are crap, and [activists are] going to do a nice little living wage campaign that’s not going to connect.

A campaign can be “groovy and fun” when it is based on a somewhat ethereal ideology of fairness. Translating such disembodied fairness concerns into organizing practice is a challenge that NUG3 (July 31, 2009) also notes, “In the absence of movements, those people that are coming together trying to do political activity…tend not to have an appreciation of the history and various forces that were involved in [similar] campaigns” in the past. So the living wage for her becomes a thing detached from the people it would benefit. CG3’s internationally, translocally connected group was working on a living wage campaign in another Ontario city at the time of interview. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six, her mobilization orientation is clear as she tells me about doing

A lot of work with our membership base, getting them to plan events and try to raise the profile publicly, and lobbying their local councillors, and the mayor in [that city]…so we fought really hard to get the living wage on the agenda of that poverty reduction committee at the local level. And so we've done a lot of work just mobilizing local residents to lobby the people on that group to make sure that living wage is a priority on that.
Even with the critiques of such campaigns, CG1 (July 2, 2009) points out a contradiction that arises from pursuing a project that may materially affect more people but less well, which she hopes the state might resolve: “[Governments] also need to realize what a livable wage is for people. And even at $10.00 an hour, it’s not really livable when you consider the high rents in a city like Toronto.”

Leading up to the J4W campaign in the spring of 2001, we did research on minimum, living and fair wage policies in Canada and the US. We met with Stephanie Luce, who had been involved with US living wage campaigns, and NAFFE, the US-based National Alliance for Fair Employment. The J4W precursor, the Employment Standards Working Group (ESWG), found that, as discussed above, living wage campaigns targeted specific municipal labour market sectors and was advantageous in terms of garnering more union coalition involvement. However, only a small group of workers would be affected, such campaigns need to be organized by finding some kind of legal hook in a specific geographic area (such as subsidies to business or local government for tourism), and compliance had been a very significant historical problem (Employment Standards Working Group, personal communication, May 23, 2001). “Our instincts were turning towards going for the provincial minimum wage” (NUG4, July 19, 2009), since organizing around the minimum wage both provided the provincial state as a clear political target and would affect a much larger group of workers. The group that became J4W thought that the pros and cons combination would make a minimum wage campaign a better vehicle for building broad involvement of lower-waged workers. While NUG4 believes that initial group’s thoughtfulness about the project made us “very accountable on our $10,” NUG3 (July 31, 2009) also openly points to the importance of developing a simple coordinating text, “Focusing on the
10 bucks became the big kind of gimmick in driving the campaign forward.” I will now review another piece of text that came to play a similar role in the J4W campaign phase.

**The 60-Hour Workweek**

Among the many regressive actions taken by the Ontario government under the Progressive Conservatives from 1995 to 2003, Bill 147 and all the accompanying employment standards act changes were a major attack on workers in the drive towards “neoliberal labour flexibility” (Thomas, 2009, p. 7). That government’s platform, the “Common Sense Revolution,” stated that in order for Ontario to be “open for business” and promote “fairness and flexibility”, “A comprehensive reform of employment standards” was necessary (p. 109). Among the many that the Bill included, one of the major outrages was the return to the 60-hour workweek, from a 48-hour maximum.

As discussed in Chapter One and displayed in the timeline in Appendix B, I was part of the J4W-precursor attempting to lobby and organize against Bill 147, the ESWG. As Thomas (2009) notes, this group

Organized a campaign to oppose the Bill 147 amendments, focusing particularly on the sixty-hour workweek. The campaign included the distribution of leaflets, outreach and education, and several large demonstrations in downtown Toronto between December 2000 and July 2001. In April 2001, the campaign was connected to a global-justice demonstration, in order to highlight the connections between globalization, the restructuring of workplaces and labour laws, and the rise of precarious work. (p. 121)

The translocal material and textual connection between the ESWG and J4W organizing in relation to the April 2001 anti-Free Trade Area of the Americas demonstration is related by NUG4 (July 19, 2009) who says there were, “Armed soldiers on the street, ready to take you down, all for the 60-hour workweek” and
The [activist-organized] Globalization Summit…was all very focused on the international level, [not] really on the local stuff, which is the kind of element that we were trying to bring in, to say, “What does this globalization mean to us at the local level?” Well, it means a fucking 60-hour workweek and it means a fucking minimum wage that’s like six eighty-five.

What I uncovered in this investigation was that this 60-hour workweek issue became a profound piece of coordinating text, one that had an extralocal origin and an important local function for Justice for Workers. In a 2001 interview, one of Thomas’ (2009) research participants calls the ESWG’s ability to get the media and public talking about the 60-hour issue a “big victory” in the face of the Tories’ attempts to minimize it (p. 121). This remark helps situate the history of this piece of text for J4W and it’s origins as a legitimizing text for the group’s 2001 to 2003 OMWC activity.

All interview participants directly involved in the J4W organizing phase of the OMWC referenced the 60-hour workweek in relation to low wages as the reason for the group’s minimum wage campaign initiative (CG2, CG4, NUG1, NUG2, NUG3, NUG4, NUG6, U1, U4). Some of these people never worked directly together or carried out their activity in different neighbourhoods. One of them I had never met before our interview. But a September 30, 2002 J4W document “What We’ve Done So Far” that I jointly prepared with another group member (Justice for Workers, personal communication, September 30, 2002) reports this text as each of these participants explained it:

What we heard consistently from workers [during the ESWG activities] was that it wasn’t just that they worked to [sic] many hours that was the problem: it was that their wages were too low. In fact at $6.85 an hour, the frozen minimum wage is now $3.15 below the poverty line. So, we decided to plan a campaign to raise workers’ wages.
As NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) also notes, when we leafleted people would say, “Where can I get a job for 60 hours, because I can’t survive on my full-time job or my part-time job making minimum wage.” Although not involved in J4W, Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) also references in our interview this reality as the 2001 OMWC starting point. Even the TYRLC (2008a) booklet on the campaign notes these same kinds of conversations (p. 2).

As explored in the local reality discussion above and in earlier chapters, this text reflects a grave material reality of an increasing percentage of the population. It is very real in everyday life for actual people. However, the application of the text as the campaign unfolded detached the ideas within it from the materiality, becoming thus a piece of ideological practice, as the 60-hour workweek became a group coordinator for its activities across time and space, enabling a temporary appearance of reality. It was difficult for individual’s within the group to keep this appearance going. NUG4 (July 19, 2009) talks about how activity buttressed by determined ideological practice can be exhausting and unsustainable:

I think that the group was incredibly coming from a very progressive place in terms of how they envisioned stuff, and that’s why they remained small because they were really integral to that vision. But I think though there needed to be a bit of a three or 2-month evaluation plan, now when I look back at, going, “Okay, are we reaching those, reaching that sort of vision?” Instead of waiting a year, and then feeling kind of like that your energy was being sucked out of you.

Our reporting of workers having said to us “where is that 60-hour job?” became a mantra for us in J4W that validated our activity and coordinated our consciousness when, in reality, there was no developing base of low-waged workers to speak of. I think that it gave us legitimacy within and among ourselves to be able to say, “The campaign comes from low-wage workers.” Not only did this moment of ideological practice stand in for actual people, it also
assisted in reifying some of our relationships with people living in communities in which I was working on the J4W campaign, along with other people. This became clear to me during my interview with NUG4 (July 19, 2009) when she says of women in that low-income, “I don’t even know if they were working or what jobs they were doing, or what kind of conversations were happening in that community about jobs.” At that moment I realized that I had sat across from those very women a couple times a month for at least a year and I could not answer that question either. I developed a connection with two women in particular because they were coming to meetings most often. My recollection is that they were doing very part-time retail work. I remember speaking with one of them about problems with her landlord. And while we did not treat these real life concerns as peripheral to the immediate purpose of the regular group meetings, we were not able to integrate this reality into our work, in that neighborhood-based small group of four or five community women, local community group staff and one or two downtown-based J4W organizers. And when tactical suggestions did not “organically” arise from the group (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009) and we got stuck trying to figure out what “to do” to move the campaign forward, my commitment to fighting racialized, gender and class relations became a detached set of ideas, as I sat there a few feet away from women living, embodying those very relations. I do not recall us talking very much about concretely how our everyday lives, how different our own individual conditions were, how small a group we were for the task at hand, or how suffocating the extralocally organized social context was for our project. When silence or uncertainty happened, I as an organizer would promote pursuing a tactic or two to keep us going. After all, we had started the project; it felt like the organizers’ responsibility to keep it going. Then on the long bus ride home I could comfort myself with the mantra, reminding myself that J4W was on the right track because “workers had told us” this was the
way to go. The by-then mythologized masses came to stand in for the very real human beings I was sitting with. I could use this text for my reality maintenance, but at the cost of some humanity.

I see as a researcher years later how I as an organizer was a committed producer of ideological practice and reality maintaining text. As a result, while I maintained the idea that I was committed to what I now describe as transformative anti-racist practice, the material effect of the ideological practice was a limited pragmatic anti-racism. I was indeed working with low-income, community-based women of colour, as such people like them are identified by people like me at such times. As I will explore more in Chapter Six, we did do a number of events together in a very egalitarian way. But it was a very superficial “working with”, a minimal relationship-building that occurred. Building the relationship was focused on “doing stuff” in relation to the demand. Come the time to do interviews 7 years later, no one who had been in the J4W campaign had an in-service phone number for the two key women we had worked with. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) reflects on this issue, pointing to an additional effect:

I think we tended to talk about minimum wage and poverty...we were still continuing to insert our notion of what kind of wages and poverty and how to frame the issue. And I think that that alienated people. I think people don’t identify as poor people, and people don’t identify as minimum wage workers and I think that we weren’t able to really kind of tap into the way [these are issues] for people, in a way that could open up a space for people to be involved.

While the 60-hour workweek text coordinated J4W internally in relation to its activity externally, there were other textual coordination mechanisms amongst various OMWC participants. I will now turn to endorsements as a more general form of coordinating text, which some campaign participants challenged as such.
Endorsements

As noted briefly above with the example of the CAW and staff activist Steve Watson (Aug 11, 2009), the act of endorsing can appear as more involvement that it is, both for endorser and sometimes for campaign organizers. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) does not “put a lot of time into them” because “for endorsements to be effective at all you have to follow up with them… to see if people are actually organizing around the campaign.” Rather than generate such support appearances with little material ground, in her work she “would rather support people who I know are organizing in their communities around it and to see what they need to do that.”

When an organization has its name attached to a campaign – on posters for events, on a website, in outreach materials – such a textual pronouncement of support may be little or nothing more than that. As NUG1 (July 24, 2009) relates J4W organizers had experience with this, noting that the group did not want “paper endorsements only” from organizations. Rather, when community organizations in particular were approached, the endorsement request was that:

organizations would take this on as something that workers would integrate into their work and to their conversations in the work that they were doing with people in the community; that they would use our outreach materials, that they would encourage and support people to become involved in the campaign, both the workers as well as community members.

A range of groups was approached, from those who provided housing or housing services, to ESL classes and settlement services, to community health centres. Union locals and federations were also contacted. Funding was also the goal with “some of the bigger organizations, or the Labour Council.” Nonetheless, the group sought “that it would be an endorsement that lent some active connection to the campaign” (NUG1, July 24, 2009).
NUG1 also notes an expectation that, if an organization stood in principle for social justice, it needed to make that a material practice with its own workers. Endorsing such a campaign demanded a change in local social relations in community and union groups that many were not prepared to make:

We would have expected it also meant the organizations would at least pay people $10 an hour in their own organizations, but that wasn’t necessarily the case. In fact, some organizations didn’t sign on because they knew they couldn’t do that, so at least they recognized the contradictions, which is better than not recognizing them at all.

Reality maintenance took place in these situations as supporting that kind of worker reform would have been a threat to the institutional order. In that sense, such organizations really “couldn’t do that” as NUG1 suggests. And in most community organizations that provide housing for the lowest income people, community health care, and legal rights advocacy, the human relationship is commodified and reified as “workers give clients service.” Ideological practice occurs as a normalized part of everyday functions and is part and parcel of the reproduction of class relations.

As NUG1 (July 24, 2009) alludes, there are different kinds of endorsements. Throughout the life of the OMWC support was sought from city councils as well as from unions and community groups. The goals of endorsement included access to funds, broadening involvement in campaign planning and carrying out activities, and also targeting supportive state bodies that would officially promote the campaign demands at higher state levels. U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) talks about how the tactic of seeking city council endorsements was related to other extralocally organized social relations moments. Learning in their union course that workers rights groups often go to city councils for local minimum wage increases endorsement, and that environmental
and social justice groups lobby municipal governments to stop the OECD-origin Multilateral Agreement of Investments in the mid-1990s, she and her project group used this as their main campaign tactic. They sent a letter to one of their local city councils asking that they pass a resolution supporting the minimum wage demand, request that of other city councils and that they, “Write their own letter to the provincial government and lobby for a provincial raise of the wage.” She reports how once her small group at a local level set this in motion, councils had different approaches. The common effect of this tactic for this group is that it left their control once the letters went out. She relates how strange it was to see, months later, on television a report of a city council debate on the issue. The strangeness seems to have been about this project being finished for her but the translocal effect continuing as the text moved on from council to council. This was regrettable for her when she found out a resolution was voted down in an Ontario municipality quite far from hers. This regret was about having unleashed a text that she could not be active in supporting, representing and explaining.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009) also notes how it is possible to have too many allies of an undesirable kind, triggering institutions to “do” endorsements, creating text that initiates a coordination of the usual kinds of organizing processes. The result is a drift, an often-unseen coordination away from a worker-centred or capacity-building approach:

I remember there was also a conscious decision not to go after possible allies, to leave some space for building the base and recognizing that if you start loading in your allies, that could really impact on our capacity to spend some time trying to build a base of low-wage workers to try and make sure that leadership was there before we brought in other people, particularly labour… so [we asked ourselves] what does it mean when you have endorsements or when you start to outreach to labour or other groups?
On the other hand, union organizations often support a campaign looking for other political effects that will have, as seen from the living wage campaign discussion above. U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes how the union she was part of did not see any such value in the early OMWC phase,

That was really hard. I mean, the union wouldn’t spend any resources on it: there was no donations made, there was no support formally to endorse the coalition or to endorse that work… I think because they could get away with the excuse of saying it wasn’t their members’ issue.

Individual-as-institution appearances discussed earlier can generate an appearance of “movement”, especially when aided by the translocally active labour-community endorsement link. This can be particularly so if the union endorsement is made at a national level. As Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) says, “The CAW supported the work I was doing in the OCSJ but we were largely carrying it on through a community-based movement rather than through the union itself.” This well-placed unionist had the institutional freedom to do labour-community work but it was largely through the activity and consciousness of him, as one staff person. The union received some benefit through the appearance of the institution’s involvement yet did not have to make any significant resource or political commitment, least of all one that would involve rank-and-file mobilization. Substitutionism, individualism and reproduction of institutions can be mutually reinforcing.

Another general form of coordinating text brings this chapter to a close: objects that can be passed from group to group, and hand to hand, to demonstrate that a campaign is real, is happening and continues to once the objects pass out of the immediate local time and space.
**Petitions, Stickers, Buttons and Print Materials**

Throughout the life of the campaign petitions, stickers, buttons and/or print materials were key activity and consciousness coordinators, within local groups and with different degrees of translocality across groups and in relation to the state. They were important either in their content or form, in terms of the actual text they carried or their ability to be passed from place to place, as textual things to build (apparent) connections between events and people.

J4W first produced various background documents, often disseminated in the form of a campaign kit, with the titles, “It’s time for low wage workers to get a raise” (Justice for Workers, personal communication, 2001) and “Increase the Minimum Wage” (Justice for Workers, personal communication, 2002). The former documents gave the campaign background, who J4W was and what its organizing approach was, the goals of the project, timelines and the rationale for a minimum wage campaign. We also created an “arguments and facts” document as a resource for press conferences and workshops (Justice for Workers, personal communication, 2003). The campaign kit states that there are more than one million people in Ontario living in poverty and raises concretely how this lived reality is racialized and gendered. On this NUG1 (July 24, 2009) says that J4W had:

> Absolute commitment to showing how the racialization of poverty [had a] very specific impact for workers of colour, and not actually letting that be diluted in some of the messaging or the demand. So it was really front and centre in even the kind of the briefest of pamphlets or releases around what the issue was, that that was actually part of the reason why the minimum wage campaign was so important, because you see increasing poverty in our communities of colour, and this [low minimum wage] is one of the reasons.

The kit offered leaflets in eight languages, provided an endorsement form, a petition directed at the Ontario government, a sample newspaper article and a fact sheet that addressed some
minimum wage myths. The fact sheet explained racism, sexism and the big business “race to the bottom” strategy as social relations conditioning of poverty, ones that individually oriented education or skills-improvement training will not be able to address.

J4W was trying to organize a long-term campaign to both raise the minimum wage and build a movement, using an anti-racist and feminist “worker-centred approach.” On this NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) states, “I think the vision was to be a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-community kind of campaign.” While we were mostly women and the group was multiracial, we were also mainly higher-waged workers or what NUG1 (July 24, 2009) calls “paid activists.”

Our text thus stated more who we wanted to be than who we were at the time:

We are a coalition of low wage immigrant, and young workers, women, community groups and union members. This is a campaign for fair wages. We aim to raise the floor so that the minimum wage is at least poverty level. It is a campaign about dignity and respect – we need to get paid enough to survive on, (Justice for Workers, personal communication, 2001).

We would take our plain-language flyers and pamphlets to community agencies, they were handed out as part of talks at union locals and non-union workers rights educational events, and we leafleted at shopping malls, subway stations, and press conferences. The geographic focus was Toronto in the J4W phase. Busy shopping areas and TTC stops frequented by high numbers of racialized workers were generally targeted. The leaflet text coordinated the campaign across the city as act of handing out leaflets and having conversations with workers who by-and-large agreed wholeheartedly with the campaign goal made them as momentary part of the project. As outreach continued however, J4W grew little. The ongoing disjuncture between the realities of the hundreds of workers we spoke to and the involvement of so few in the actual organizing was a contradiction the group would not ultimately support.
With respect the ONR campaign that was initiated in 2003, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discusses different translocal layers of coordination in the relationships among provincial elections, the developing of demand texts and bringing various institutions together:

It was the OCSJ and Justice for Workers that jointly initiated the call...members of the Employment Standards Working Group were also part of Justice for Workers, but just because that was the case didn’t mean that the person didn’t bring it to the ESWG and say “Do we agree and can we send [someone]...” In preparation for that meeting we did ask people to let us know what their key demands around the election were going to be, and what strategies they were planning.... So in that first meeting we really tried to [find] the common themes in all the demands [and] come up with common demands that people felt were reflective of what their organization or their network or their coalition would be demanding on its own. And miraculously we seemed to come up with something that people were happy with... it was an attempt to push back on that real growing hatred of poor people.

NUG5 (July 16, 2009) gives a detailed explanation of how the ONR campaign texts functioned to coordinate people’s local consciousness and activity translocally across the province. Materials were given to community groups and unions, who were then to disseminate them to their memberships:

The materials that we developed were organized in a way that people could fill out what they thought was their monthly budget, and then [they] would realize [on flipping the sheet over] what someone on minimum wage makes and someone on social assistance makes. And we also have some fact sheets that made the links between social assistance rates and minimum wage, arguing that it is very difficult to win increases to social assistance rates if you’re not winning increases to minimum wage.
On filling out the budget sheets, “at a local level [they would get] involved in lobbying their MPP and talking about the issues in their community and then when there were events, mobilizing people to come out.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also discussed how some of this did happen with some people coming out event by event without getting involved in planning and strategizing. About this she says, “You can strategize all you want and develop all these amazing materials but if no one uses them and no one gives a shit about your campaign, it is not going anywhere.” For her then text is useless as a coordinator if more activity is not generated. In relation to this rallies and events function to, “[Contain] the demands of the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign” and so as both activity and text moments, using the text to connect with other campaign moments, extralocal in time and space.

U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) also made links between the ONR campaign kit fact sheets and the demand texts, and is quite explicit about the translocal coordinating function of the materials in content and form:

[I] traveled around the province talking with different groups [who] were lobbying their MPPs, doing local action. In some small communities people were meeting with Business Improvement Associations. It really varied across the province as to what was happening on a local level, but there was sort of a framework, fact sheets, demands, there was a language and a discourse that was shared across the province… [In some communities] people were really interested in direct action and other communities there were really good relationships with the [local] labour council. So it really varied. In some communities they liked their MPP or wanted to target their MPP, and in others they didn’t. So people really liked doing petitions so they did that. So it really varied according to what the interests, skills of the group and what they deemed to be the opportunities locally.
From what she relates it can also be seen how a lot of textually coordinated organizing may also in reality be disparate, isolated activity were it not for the text and a staff person embodying a link between the translocal discourse and the local tactics.

In contrast to NUG1’s (July 24, 2009) aforementioned perspective on the anti-racist practice in the J4W campaign, U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) says the ONR was putting out text as a stand-in for actual anti-racist activity:

I think that early on in the campaign we took a pretty simplistic approach to the issues. We did a little bit on the racialization and gendered nature of poverty, but not much more than sort of like throwing out some stats about who’s more likely to experience low-wage work or poverty. [Our anti-racist practice was] more academic I guess than anything… I think we had some materials translated, but [laughs] but it didn’t ever affect how we organized in a really profound way, or how we grappled with issues. It was really… sort of an academic exercise, there was a very superficial understanding of the racialized and gendered aspects of poverty that sort of informed our rhetoric and our analysis at a sort of representation level, but not the structure of the campaign or the organizing tactics.

Petitions featured prominently in the TYRLC 2007 campaign phase, as they worked “with community allies to develop a strategy of gathering thousands of signatures” province-wide (TYRLC, 2008a, p. 6). This was done both electronically and through petition cards. John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) discusses the effectiveness of these tools:

Depending on the union, some embraced this and really ran with it. The two big retail unions, the UFCW and CAW retail-wholesale, they both took them into stores and came back with thousands and thousands of petition cards, because [last hired] retail workers were at minimum wage… And us winning the way that we ultimately did was a huge victory for their new employees. So they really took it and ran with it.
At the same time U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) and U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) both spoke about challenges of getting union staff and officials to actively support the OMWC. They were in/worked for unions of predominantly racialized low-wage workers, affiliates of the TYRLC, and they did not find the petition process as smooth and energetic as Cartwright. U2 reported staff resistance in the form of telling her the campaign would make them look bad and would also cause member unhappiness if a new minimum wage was higher than the one they were making currently, one which had been bargained collectively. U4 commented that the officialdom was so lacking in class analysis, was so detached from the reality of the rank-and-file workers that they did not even register how such a campaign is relevant to the membership. As such, what the TYRLC President presents as successful piece of translocally coordinating text, U2 and U4 experienced as creating a disjuncture for them in their unions, as it was seen to interfere with bureaucratic social relations. Cards still got signed, but since everyone was not as on board as it can be made to appear a lot of organizing work is made invisible.

The “A Million Reasons!” booklet (TYRLC, 2008a) discussed earlier, their monthly newsletter (TYRLC, 2008b) and various public statements and press releases (TYRLC, 2007, 2010) have served as translocal coordinators of key campaign messages. While the booklet is the most complete, all these materials make the campaign victory appear as an indisputable fact, along with the TYRLC as the source of this. And “political bargaining” is repeated time and again as the strategy that brings with it a win (CLC, 2008, p. 7; TYRLC, 2008a, p.18; TYRLC, 2008b, p. 1). The simple, accessible and linear way in which mobilization tactics are retrospectively mapped out in the booklet, combined with its distribution in labour-community circles engenders a textual coordinating effect in content and form. Contrary to this apparently consistent and linear narrative, one press release shows a difference in messaging before and
after the 2007 elections. For example, a TYRLC press release that went out late March/early April 2007 (TYRLC, 2007) about the phased-in increase announced by Finance Minister Sorbara calls the 28% increase a great victory but is most focused on what “nagging questions” about the “Walmartization” of our society” and why “politicians think it is alright that wealthy companies pay poverty wages to a million Ontarians.” The Labour Council also asks “everyone to keep signing petition cards and turning them back in. In the next phase of this effort we won’t just be talking about a minimum.” The phrase “political bargaining” appears nowhere. I would suggest this is about the TYRLC needing to continue the appearance of activity until the elections took place. Because, in contrast, documents produced in 2008, 2009 and 2010 all focus on the two key textual legacies of the campaign, often united together: the OMWC as one of the labour movement’s “tremendous victories [won] through political bargaining” (TYRLC, 2008b, p. 1). And in contrast to the spring 2007 press release, the booklet (TYRLC, 2008a) relates that same Sorbara announcement as a moment of great excitement, in which their initial reaction to being “pissed off” at the government’s budget announcement “was soon transformed” as:

“We realized what we had achieved,” says Cartwright. “That we had bargained a 28% wage increase over three years. And not just for a few hundred workers, but for hundreds of thousands of workers. That’s probably the most successful political bargaining project that’s been undertaken in this province in decades.” (p. 18)

He says something almost identical in our interview, “After they announced that they were doing $10.25 over 3 years, and people were all angry and all pissed off, somebody did the calculation and said, “Hold on a second. Do you know what we’ve just achieved? This is a 28% wage increase over three years! When was the last time...anybody in this room has bargained a 28% wage increase in 3 years? And it’s not just for a few hundred workers. We’ve done this for hundreds of thousands of Ontario workers. That’s stunning. That’s political bargaining at its
finest.” I would suggest that for such an analogy to collective bargaining to be more meaningful, then it might be expected that the TYRLC would have taken the Liberal government's proposed 3-year phase-in deal back out to the 14 communities for a ratification vote.

This demonstrates both how these TYRLC texts can also be employed as retrospective translocal coordinators and how powerful officials are able in text and activity to produce versions of reality then maintain them, as they move from the local (such as TYRLC meetings) to the extralocal (such as the Canadian Labour Congress convention), creating not only text but embodying translocal reality coordination. “Political bargaining” is a foundational piece of ideological practice in the OMWC retrospective and a top labour official has continued to bring that home.

In this chapter I have applied my understanding of social relations, ideology and pragmatic and transformative anti-racism to uncovering in the OMWC the combined individual and social processes of externalization/ objectification/ internalization in activity and text. The diversity of participants’ perspectives demonstrated both layers of shared reality and sharp reality disjunctures. And I have shown that ideological practice is not limited to powerful people; indeed, it occurred in all phases of the campaign, and was institutionally conditioned in various ways. At the same time, the social relations of the OMWC explicated in this chapter do demonstrate that the relative power of unions and thus of their officials in the labour-community configuration conditions a harmonization of reality, at least in appearance. This is both in relation to the questions surrounding the victory of the campaign and the building of a/the workers movement through the course of it.
I will now explore in detail in Chapter Six the organizing practices I uncovered in the 7-year campaign, going on within, challenging and/or reproducing the multi-layered reality I have described above: *mobilization organizing* and a limited *political capacity building*. 
Chapter Six: Capacity-Building and Mobilization Organizing in the OMWC

Introduction

Two types of organizing practices were revealed in this research through the 7 years and three phases of the campaign: mobilization organizing and a limited political capacity building. These practices overlapped at times. This was possible due to a limited degree of shared reality among the various groups involved and the generally compartmentalized way of acting socially. The layers of subjective and objectified reality and translocal coordination of the latter discussed in the previous chapter form the social foundation on which this organizing occurred. I argue here that the J4W campaign organizers had an explicit capacity-building orientation – what the group called “worker-centred organizing” –, the ONR phase organizers had an implicit mix of approaches but tended towards mobilizing, and the TYRLC campaign entirely followed mobilization unionism practice.

This chapter starts with an explanation of these two organizing practices in the context of union- and community-based activities, to clarify the ideas about these practices and what actually happens when they are taken on. After those two sections, Mobilization Unionism and Community Organizing and Capacity Building as Political Organizing, I then take up how Participation as Activity and Ideology happened in all campaign phases. The word “ally” is used by organizers frequently (in general and in my research), to locate themselves and their groups within class relations and to explain their organizing approaches and coalition relationships. Thus, in the final section will explore what Being an Ally meant in the OMWC, in relation to individual organizers and their organizations.
Mobilization Unionism and Community Organizing

As discussed in Chapter Five, community and social unionism are two of the many approaches taken by workers, unions and community groups to workers-rights organizing. In that chapter Ross’s (2007) understanding of leadership-focused and membership-focused mobilization was discussed. She also conceptualizes membership-focused democratic practice as a third type of social unionism. Also called social movement unionism (SMU), this practice is understood by many as:

A highly inclusive and class-consciousness definition of workers’ identity, a broader agenda at the bargaining table and in the wider political economy, a more radical critique of capitalism and the limits of liberal democracy, a social movement repertoire, and an explicit concern with the democratic transformation of workers’ organizations. (Ross, 2008, p. 25)

Seen by some as a path to union renewal (Nissen, 2004), SMU as an ideal type fundamentally integrates a transformative orientation to social change with the development of strategies and deployment of tactics, as well as with meaningful and broad member involvement in decision-making on these orientations, strategies and tactics. It also requires actively working with the broader working class, not just unionized workers, and not just in order to unionize workers. As Tattersall (2010) notes, such community-oriented organizing has as a “core principle…developing leadership and relationships between individuals and organizations as a strategy to enhance a group’s ability to take public action” (p. 23). Moody (2007) notes the origins of SMU in the practices of the CUT in Brazil and COSATU in South Africa, whose power was rooted first in workplaces yet expanded, by working with the communities to “address the full range of issues that working-class life calls for” and “draw together a broader range of groups to forward a class agenda” (p. 237). Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) discuss a meaningful difference in the legal-political union context of COSATU, potentially enabling
SMU to a greater degree than in the US and Canada. Like the CLC, wile the AFL-CIO “cannot make unions do anything”, as affiliation is voluntary and affiliates make their own organizing as well as structure and function decisions, COSATU does have the institutional ability to bring about “far-reaching changes” (p. 82).

Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) also offer what can be characterized as another version of SMU, what they call “social justice unionism.” Similar to the class-struggle SMU version, they build in an explicit social justice orientation in relationship to the contemporary reality of the integration of racialized and gendered relations with those of class, and make the case for the need for active, from-below inclusion of poor and unemployed workers in transformation-oriented class struggle (pp. 168-169).

Camfield (2005) sees mobilization unionism as a distinct type of praxis that is generally subsumed under the more transformative orientation of SMU (p. 285). Militant tactics (almost always only legal ones) are used to “defend and build the union movement” without challenging top-down officialdom's movement control (Camfield, 2008, p. 70). Unlike the SMU practice of the CUT and COSATU, the mobilization practice does not adequately attempt to address the question of what all the organizing is for, whether of organized or unrepresented workers, except to generally “save” labour. The historical and conjunctural purpose of the labour movement thus remains largely unexamined (Ross, 2008, p. 129) even as reformers worship “member mobilization and activism” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 61). These authors also note the inadequacy of this kind of organizing model in which union or community members are “activated” campaign by campaign. Officials and staff “encourage member involvement without member control” expecting to turn such involvement “off and on like a faucet” (Parker & Gruelle, 1999, p. 26). This model and practice arises from an intentionally partial or a superficial
tactical assessment of the union movement’s problems. As Wall (2009) discusses, Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) also note,

The lack of a truly open forum for debate, and the toxic culture within the overall union movement that denies the importance of debate,” a culture that lends itself to “the ‘ideologizing of organizing’ which holds that organizing workers into unions is, in and of itself, a progressive, if not revolutionary, action. (pp. 124, 128)

As a result, the limited mobilization orientation does not simply arise from a conceptual gap; the practice and the associated failure to examine the complex and contradictory relationships between unionized workers and officials, and their coordinated activity in making and re-making unions, is more a problem endemic to the perpetuation of the union as a bureaucratic institution.

**Capacity Building as Political Organizing**

The “worker-centred approach” raised by a number of research participants (NUG1, July 24, 2009; NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009 and NUG4, July 19, 2009) is a practice that has similar features to both community and social movement unionism. In my analysis of the specific activities and understandings of people and their groups involved in the OMWC, I conceptualize the worker-centred organizing in the OMWC as attempts at *capacity-building organizing* (CBO).

Unionization is not the determining ground of such an organizing practice. Rather, political capacity building can be described as “the development of dissent capacities within the working class” (Sears, 2009, p. 5). The application of such an approach is not an institutionally circumscribed orientation that focuses on the “discrete priorities of organizations” (Tattersall, 2010, p. 25). And, while it necessarily involves political vision, skills and leadership building (p. 23), it is much more than that. Such a movement-building practice successfully applied in labour-community workers-rights campaigns would also necessarily partially dissolve the
institutional boundaries between union and community, between unionized and non-unionized worker, and would prioritize the creating of shared reality for movement building; that is, it would not implicitly prioritize union renewal nor materially relegate all workers concerns – such as employment standards regulations and enforcement – to “the community.”

Organizing-based capacity building recognizes that movement building cannot focus on skills and abilities development abstracted from relational individual and collective consciousness processes. And consciousness is not a finite set of knowledge to achieve, that organizers have and must download to a mass of workers so they have “it” too. Rather, workers and organizers, paid and unpaid, living in a range of conditions, are always in process of understanding their reality as they act in and on it.

As discussed in Chapter Five, the terms community engagement and capacity building are often used interchangeably in community organizations and the literature. And there is a range of practices associated with the terms. In CG6’s (Aug. 27, 2009)’s organization, it is “a strategic priority to have a full-time position here…that’s not direct service based, that’s around building people’s leadership skills and engaging people” with collective social change activities.” While funding staff and having a different organizational vision for the work being done in the community is part of a capacity-building organizing, the CBO attempts in the early part of the OMWC went beyond that. What J4W was trying to do was build political relationships with people, ones based on solidarity within and across shared humanity and conditions, and also without people necessarily being part of the same social, family, cultural or religious networks. The CBO efforts by that group sought to form a “political community” of people grounded in a focus for developing a capacity for a “political imaginary… a vision beyond the bounds of what is possible within the constraints of the current system” (Sears, 2009,
Creating and institutionalizing new social processes that would develop such meanings and relations takes time and needs local and translocal support. A number of research participants discussed the inter-related issues of building relationships and resources for CBO. NUG4 (July 19, 2009) poses key capacity-building oriented questions, as she explains that J4W’s OMWC was never just about the $10 an hour target. The group focused more on:

Issues, like, how do people get involved in your organization? How do people [apply] their experience of poor working conditions, and what becomes that moment that allows them to get involved in that deeper way and not just come out to a forum and then never maybe come and see them again… I think one-off moments and one-off meetings, I mean, who has the time to do that? I don’t want to do that; it’s about continuously building.

Developing relationships with people takes time and in that process an infrastructure is needed within which not only food, public transit and photocopying costs, and childcare support are provided (CG2, July17, 2009), but one in which an organizational culture relevant to workers evolves. CG2 discusses some of the changes his organization made and why:

The staff here [come] from the cultural communities, they've been in the community and been community activists for many years and many of them have been dealing with the issue[s] of poverty and … racism. And… the board [changed] our policy [such that] board members are supposed to be…community residents… not all …doctors and lawyers and all that. Most of them were community residents that understand these issues and community activists. Recommending them made such a huge difference.
And changing the meaning in practice of developing trusting relationships requires seeing workers not as bodies to activate for some fully pre-defined project:

People being involved in that planning and being part of that long-term vision, and having a relationship with each other, and [our organization], I think that that’s a critical piece. So there is a base of people coming together, and it’s... You know, I can say it a million times, but not just being pulled out for different things. (NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009)

It also means actively challenging extralocally organized social relations of the one-to-one worker/client relationship. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) talks about the perspective/activity combination for this, saying that a relationship needs to begin by trying to “break the isolation” of workers - that the labour-market geographically scatters due to the nature of precarious work - and “build relationships with other folks” through collective activities such as workers rights workshops or “coffee-style discussions in marginalized communities” (NUG5, July 16, 2009).

The practice is to intertwine an individual worker’s issue with the collective extralocally organized problem

With folks to connect [their] individual experience with an understanding of and wanting to get involved in the changing of the system. And then, looking at that process of... people taking on their individual problem and working to support [other] workers to do that, rather than traditional models of representation or advocacy. Then, building people’s confidence and desire to participate in those broader struggles for change. (NUG3, July 31, 2009)

Engaging with workers in this way does not mean it will be successful:

You do a meeting, sometimes it doesn’t work out, and you fuck up, right? And you have these plans of trying to do something different and it doesn’t work out, but I think as long as you’re really being true to having all of these things be
building blocks... unfortunately there’s no easy formula for these kinds of things, and that infrastructural hard slogging work where you build people’s relationships with a campaign, it takes a lot of time. (NUG4, July 19, 2009)

Changing the social relations of organizing also means that the focus of workers-rights campaigns needs to be grounded in workers’ reality not in the organizers’ idea of it. In talking about her group’s current activity, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) reveals that CBO tends to be grounded in the understanding that extralocally organized employment standards and labour-market access create multiple issues for low-waged workers. This means that

To divide people up and say, “Okay, we’re going to just do a minimum wage campaign,” doesn’t reflect the fact that even though the minimum wage goes up to $10, they only have a part-time job. Or that they’re not even getting paid those $10 an hour job, because of the lack of enforcement. So in some ways, we wanted to have a campaign that was inclusive, that was comprehensive, that could change and be flexible as to those moments that arose in terms of either an employer campaign, to deal with lack of enforcement, or movement on the legislative front around temporary contract jobs.

U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) acknowledges a key part of living precarious lives and so a challenge to relationship building, “I’ve seen people…they don’t even have time to sit down with me for half an hour and talk. It’s constantly running, running and rushing.” For CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009), part of the respect that grounds this type of relationship building is acknowledging the materiality of living such marginalization and so avoiding being ideological about CBO. Low-waged workers are human beings not objects for organizers to act on as soon as they come around: “People’s lives are so stressed, you know, when they come to a place like [ours] [they need] to sort of relax, eat some food, take a breather.”
In noting how it’s even difficult to make first contact with low-waged precarious workers who are “working multiple jobs that tend to be very stressful kinds of jobs,” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) continues to uncover the effect of the “silent compulsion” (Marx, 1977, p. 899), the economic coercion that drives workers everyday lives in our broadly divided, highly fragmented society:

But they’re…not going to community agencies and organizations a lot…they may not even know they exist and they just don’t have time to go and… [If they do know about them] then there’s also the whole feeling [of] … “can it really make a difference?” when you’ve got so much going on in your life and you’re so stressed and organizing around increasing the minimum wage, you don’t have time to do it and you may think that it doesn’t matter.

The project of making change feels monumental because it is. If CBO is to be effective this needs to be part of the organizing reality. Similarly, CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) adds that:

I think a lot of people also just accept it as a fact of life, that they're going to have a shitty job and they're going to have a shitty boss and to change the dialogue to say, “We don't need to live in a society where this is the norm, you know? We should be thinking about how we change our society so that people can live and work with dignity. So that you can feed your family and you don't have to work three jobs.

Yet, workers are not a passive homogenous group with a mass consciousness. Even with all the running around and the stress, participating in organizing can alleviate that for people:

For me personally it is an empowering tool… Because in all these [hard] years… I mean, I came here as a refugee, and then went through high school in [a small southern Ontario city] and then went to university, and then all those times there was all kinds of family crises. (U2, Dec. 12, 2009)
Hiring staff that have such lived experiences and come from “strong social justice backgrounds” is part of an organization doing more than “provid[ing] programs and services, but also [being] committed to being socially and politically active in the community” (CG2, July 17, 2009). People may bring with them years of organizing experience in other countries; they may also bring with them years of experience with racism in this one. U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) also tells me how angry she was all the time before she got involved in “unionization and mobilization”:

It’s been an interesting journey…I end up working for employers who just…I mean, you have a document saying you’re a university graduate but you’re being treated like you’re the bottom of the shoe, scum…So for me [organizing] is more of a vision, “Ah, so this is how you do it, and this is how you form a group and then move together.”

What such participants discuss then is, to greater or lesser degrees, some kind of CBO orientation. What NUG3 (July 31, 2009) calls an “intensive model of organizing” is a political CBO approach based on a combined individual/collective orientation to people, relationships and transformative change. Developing a shared political imaginary and capacity for challenging the dominant social relations requires not only a physical infrastructure with social supports. It also requires at the same time (re)building such organizations as “infrastructure[s] of dissent through which oppressed and exploited groups [develop] their capacities to act on the world” (Sears, 2009, p. 14). As NUG3 (July 31, 2009) explains one piece of this, she demonstrates the kind of individual reflexivity that is a key part of ongoing consciousness development:

Institutional support is incredibly critical for people who are probably working two or three jobs and all the rest…It has to be a constant struggle in terms of looking at what is reasonable for staff to do in terms of logistical grunt work, background research, providing tools, supporting political and leadership
development. What is reasonable, and what is important to leave the space for organizers... members of the group to do.

NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) addresses this too, seeing the “building [of] people’s leadership skills that are directly affected” as a fundamental “principle” in worker-centred organizing, that seeks to build from collectively winning workers rights cases to building a “bigger movement...of people.” And if CBO seeks to build representative leadership, but it is mainly paid staff leading initially, then “accountability back” becomes critical. As NUG3 (July 31, 2009) discusses, how this is done is an ongoing process that:

Needs to be constantly reflected upon...and questioned. Because it’s so easy just to go off and, be blathering on [to allies and the media] about [what is needed] and be totally disconnected. [The staff must] bring it back, so that people know what’s being said, how it’s being said, who’s saying it...we need people that will be able to take those leadership positions.

NUG3 (July 31, 2009) also spells out a key understanding of political capacity building: that struggles that may to appear spontaneous usually arise within an infrastructure:

We don’t have control; we can’t choose when forces are going to come together in particular ways. And so [it is important that] as you’re trying to help move stuff forward, that the politics and the perspective be as comprehensive as possible, so that, people involved think, “You know, this is covering my shit, right? I’m not sort of glomming on to this one campaign [for no concrete reason]. But that we’re trying to push forward something here.” We’re not necessarily going to be able to choose when something breaks, so we [have to].... work to support members...so that we in the organization can seize the moment to try and push stuff forward.

The infrastructure building is as much about being differently as it is about doing so.

Along these lines, a number of participants who support CBO practice speak of “opening up the
space” (NUG1, July 24, 2009; NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009; U4, Sept. 24, 2009). This aspect of CBO is key to the “collective undertaking to develop independent thinking” as “self-activity is necessarily linked to independence of thought” (Sears, 2009, p. 20). Space and time must thus be opened so a range of voices and opinions are not only heard, but silences and absences are explored, as decision-making about and carrying out of activities is shared, not happening “behind closed doors, with just bureaucrats” (CG2, July17, 2009). It’s about having a vision that goes well beyond a single project, to building a movement, so that leadership can develop as people “participate and learn and share” developing both individual and collective confidence (NUG1, July 24, 2009). NUG3 (July 31, 2009) explains this in relation to making translocal social relations connections, saying it is important to be

Looking at how we, in those meetings, open up that space to have that kind of cross-fertilization [of workers sharing their experiences with each other]…and then connect that to... how I’m standing in the system and how it works, and what are the changes that we need to make. And providing the support for resources so people have the tools to have those conversations.

And the doing needs to involve workers as full subjects in CBO. As CG2 (July 17, 2009) explains:

We've been getting from the community that people are sick and tired of just talking, people are sick and tired of just being studied by different [groups]. Just being studied by nothing that is linked to action and nothing that is really linked to positive real social change. So they've always been [experiencing] this and then many [are] disappointed in the community agencies that they don't do enough action for social change.

This phenomenon of “over-studying” racialized people in low-income neighbourhoods sheds additional light on the need for anti-racism to be fundamental part of CBO, especially in large
urban centres. As CG2 (July 17, 2009) also notes, “More and more you can see that…anti-racism is becoming very essential. Most of the campaigns are officially happening in Toronto that it is so important because of the whole racialization of poverty.” CBO in practice is thus about trying to disrupt and fundamentally reconfigure social relations. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) discusses this as a staff organizer:

The people that are really the ones whose experiences are front and centre, there’s [often] a language or way of talking about their experiences as victims, as people who don’t have any agency, and in a way, [once you start working together] it’s just that the power starts to shift…the power and leadership was coming from people who were being directly affected by the issue. That you’re there in more of a support role.

Worker centres are contemporary organizations today that often take up such a political CBO approach. As Fine (2006) notes, “Most workers centers have a long-term transformational social justice agenda, including intermediate goals related to ongoing policy or organizing campaigns” (p. 72). Such organizing is not a recent invention; rather it has deep historical roots:

Many of the strategies and tactics workers centers use today are the same as those first developed by organized labor in it efforts to improve wages and work conditions for low-wage workers. Then, as now, organizations engage in advocacy, compiling statistics and documentation on the problem of low-wage labor, struggle to create lasting organization, and turn to the state to agitate and organize for the enactment of policy solutions. (p. 39)

Turning now to an exploration of OMWC participation will shed more light on this organizing style and purpose in relation to both building local capacity and working with mobilization-oriented unions in coalition.
Participation as Activity and Ideology

Participation was an organizing ideology embedded in a range of both CBO and MO activities and was uncovered through a combination of my own reflections as a J4W activist, document review, and interviews with people in which we discussed the combination of their beliefs and practices, themselves and within their groups. I will review this praxis chronology, in terms of its character, purpose and execution in the various phases of the campaign. After that I will explore another related idea/practice: storytelling.

Justice for Workers

Previous to J4W, I had participated in or worked on organizing projects with a number of the people involved in that group. Many of us had just worked closely together in the ESWG, fighting Bill 147. The late 1990s and 2000 was a discouraging time to be a workers rights activist in the Tories’ Ontario and we had just come off that disheartening fight to prevent regressive reforms to the Employment Standards Act (ESA). There was a hopeful sign at time, the start up of Toronto Organizing for Fair Employment (TOFFE), which is today the Workers Action Centre (WAC), an organization central to J4W.

Evolving out of a participatory research project, WAC was first constituted in 1999 as TOFFE (Lukas & Vashti Persad, 2004; Wilmot, 2005), based on the model of US-based CAFÉ (Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment) (as discussed in Fine, 2006). WAC is today a “worker-based organization committed to improving the lives and working conditions of people in low-wage and unstable employment. We want to make sure that workers have a voice at work and are treated with dignity and fairness.” The Centre “provides a new way for people to join together to fight for fair employment. People who are directly affected by poor working conditions should
be the ones providing leadership in our struggle for fairness and dignity at work” (WAC, 2008).

This orientation mirrors the US experience documented by Fine (2006), where “centers evince
great skill at creative means of recruitment, leadership development, and democratic
participation” (p. 5).

Fine (2006) describes workers centres as “community-based mediating institutions that
provide support to low-wage workers” giving them “a range of opportunities for expressing their
“collective voice” as well as for taking collective action” (pp. 2, 11). The centres generally
combined approaches are service delivery (legal, ESL, workers rights education), advocacy
(government and employer lobbying and legal challenges, research for law changes), and
organizing (building organizations and leadership development). While there is a lot of variation
amongst centre approaches, the organizing piece is what makes them different from other non-
profit agencies (p. 2) and arose out of need as the “service approach was simply not enough” (p.
15). The need also arises from racism in the labour movement. As Walker (2009) and Das Gupta
their own organizations, coalitions and support groups to strategize, raise their visibility, and
promote their demands within organized labour” (p. 28).

As well as WAC in Toronto, in Canada other such centres include the Immigrant
Workers Centre in Montreal, and the Workers Organizing and Resource Centre (WORC) in
Winnipeg. Much more common in the US, there were 137 centres in May 2005, the majority of
which identify as immigrant worker centres who fight to claim unpaid wages and challenge
unjust labour and immigration laws. Immigration policies have become “de facto labour market”
one (Fine, 2006, p. 27) as living without status or on a temporary work visa deepens work-
related precarity. They also do leadership development and popular education (p. 12). Gapasin
(2001) notes that worker centres are “specifically dedicated to the organization and empowerment of immigrant workers in some of the most exploited occupations in the United States, like garment, restaurant, day labor, and high-tech-manufacturing workers” who experience social marginalization as well due to “language, race, citizenship status, and immigration status, not just as workers” (p. 96). Workers centres understand this integrated lived experience and see “community, workplace, and political organizing as inextricably tied together” unlike a lot of unions (p. 97).

Although I was involved briefly in WAC when I was a contract worker in 1999, once I got a permanent part-time unionized job, it was not clear to me how to actively continue building the centre. J4W became a way for me to be involved in workers-centre style organizing, as a higher-waged worker who did not share the specific conditions and injustices faced by workers who were becoming members of WAC. Like others in J4W, I needed to be involved in organizing that had a longer-term, less-reactive approach to building something concrete and positive. I had also been continuing to develop a perspective and need to do activism from a conscious anti-racist feminist worker-centred standpoint. I described this as a lot of research participants did: opening up the space and giving voice to workers of colour, particularly women, as the most and increasingly socially excluded people in our society, could lead to collectively-driven positive social change for everyone, and challenging my own whiteness. I wanted to participate in activities that undermined the dominating social relations by making such human connections and “doing” those relationships differently than they are generally done. And I wanted to work with a group of people who shared this perspective, who I could learn from and who I trusted. U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) comments on this as well:

I came to getting involved in [J4W people] or getting [my organization involved] because we have close personal relationships [and] share a similar workers rights
analysis and anti-racist analysis [and] had had collective discussions about class. So I trusted them, [and through them I met] you, then [if] they trust you, they know you, I feel comfortable with that, [us all] organizing together.

Similarly, as a long-time activist on many projects, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discussed why she got involved in J4W,

It’s difficult to select out one issue that’s more important than the other, since they’re so connected anyway. I would say [my interest came from] both configurations around the issue and also the people who were around the table. There were a lot of really strong women activists, who I would be really happy to work with and learn from and be [with] in that kind of collaborative process. I didn’t know them very well [but] I think partly because it was really a woman-dominated space for a lot of the organizing…[and] I think I have a particular interest in workers rights issues coming from my socialist orientation. And this particular issue of the minimum wage really allowed us to be doing anti-racist and feminist work because of the people who are affected by low wage. The people who are working in low wage and are affected by poor working conditions and being ghettoized in that kind of work, it’s women of colour and immigrants and so it … allowed me to feel like I was really trying to tackle those in a connected way. And also, because of whom you’re trying to be connecting with, your practice has to be integrated as well.

The participation point of departure for J4W was, after a number of years of disappointing efforts of trying to work with unions (NUG1, July 24, 2009; NUG3, July 31, 2009; U4, Sept. 24, 2009), to start from a base of CBO-oriented people we knew and trusted, a base in which there were some “deep interpersonal ties” common to the kind of political community that develops as part of an infrastructure of dissent (Sears, 2009, p. 21). We also, “Were [all] coming to the table with an analysis that, for the most part, people who are earning poverty wages are
people of colour, new immigrants, are women. And that was pretty central” (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009).

As U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes, “We had to do some things in parallel,” which meant “build[ing] relationships…with community organizations, then have those relationships on the ground already, and so that we don’t just become ‘J4W, the downtown activist group’.” So, as well as the research and document preparation described in Chapter Five, our initial activities focused on developing and broadening existing connections between J4W organizers and staff and community activists working and living in racialized, low-income neighbourhoods across Toronto. While the goal was ultimately to take the campaign province wide, with an initial consistently active core group of 7 – 10 people we decided to focus initially on Toronto.

J4W quickly came to include like-minded organizers who worked as paid staff in community organizations socially reflective of and located in such neighbourhoods (CG2, July 17, 2009; CG4, Aug. 19, 2009). To continue to broaden the group, we took multi-lingual plain-language leaflets to subway stops and working class malls, as well as meeting with people at local neighbourhood events or holding movie nights (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009). CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) says it was “fun” leafleting communities and “talking with people because you felt like you were doing something… as a political person [not just working on] band-aid solutions” like he somewhat had to do in his community agency job. He goes on to add, “Being involved in that campaign, you felt like you were actually trying to address what was going on.”

The initial group was thus, “Fairly conscious that we weren’t involving unions writ large, but maybe key activists who supported the notion of the need to look at issues facing non-unionized people and the wage and crappy work” (NUG3, July 31, 2009). J4W was, “Trying to build the allies’ support and to see if the campaign could connect with people in the community
through [various] organizations” using different outreach activities. This was done by “the core folks who came out of the ESA organizing, none of who were low-wage workers” (NUG1, July 24, 2009). Nonetheless, great value was placed on “grassroots” (CG2, July 17, 2009) campaign involvement of “community members” or organization “members” (CG1, July 2, 2009; NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009; NUG3, July 31, 2009; NUG4, July 19, 2009; NUG5, July 16, 2009; U1, Oct. 1, 2009), of locally grounded people and their everyday reality being at the centre of defining and making decisions on campaign activities and direction. Such an orientation is conscious and not reactive (CG2, July 17, 2009). And NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) underscores that, “From our own politics, it’s very problematic to be speaking on behalf of other people.” NUG1 (July 24, 2009) describes one of J4W’s approaches to trying to make this happen:

I remember there was also a conscious decision not to go after possible allies, to leave some space for building the base and recognizing that if you start loading in your allies, that could really impact on our capacity [so] we [were] going to spend some time trying to build a base of low-wage workers to try and make sure that leadership was there before we brought in other people, particularly labour.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discusses how both the $10 demand text and the process the group went through in testing the text in our materials was grounded in material reality, a key feature of a capacity-building orientation. The social relations of control are thus challenged at every stage:

The materials were usually drafted by paid activists, [but] they were vetted in different workshops to make sure that they were useful and resonated and used language that made sense for people. And certainly the demand itself [arose from] both a research base and kind of an organic process…it was a long process deciding what the demand was for the campaign, looking to what made sense both at a practical level for people and at a demand that would be feasible when you think about doing the lobbying... It was enough to make a concrete difference for people, and that’s what we heard, we tested that out.
CG2 (July 17, 2009) confirms this:

I think that the minimum wage campaign of 2000 gathered lots of support in the community and as far as I remember we even had signatures and lots of people signing petitions and because people and everyone felt that was fair to ask $10, especially the living situations and low income.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discusses what kind of commitment it takes in our kind of society for a group to take on the social relations of exploitation right at the base of organizing:

So many low-wage workers are newcomers who are immediately vulnerable to exploitive employers who’ve got the systems all set up almost from the airport. So knowing that our work was going to be with workers of colour, that would mean, if I’m not a person of colour, I don’t know what that experience is, so making sure that, there’s space for the specificities of that to come out. That also means really practical things like having interpretation and translation. When I’ve been working in big organizations I’m constantly told we can’t do it, we have no funds for translation or interpretation. And I see the materials that were translated within the Justice for Workers organizing, maybe five different languages, I think that actually took a hell of a commitment to get that done. And so that was a real commitment to connecting with those communities, and making sure that the media that we were approaching was communicating and connecting with communities of colour.

Throughout our phase of the campaign, it was important to the group to keep focused on the “core goals/values” expressed in a meeting as (Justice for Workers, personal communication, June 26, 2002),

To build the capacity of low-wage communities/workers to fight back and to improve wages and working conditions
To open the space for workers to organizing
Campaign should be led by low-wage workers
Campaign/organizing to be based in communities – communities of colour/low-wage
To raise awareness about the issue workers are raising – through education and outreach
Specific goal to raise minimum wage to $10 an hour. (p. 1)

The document is entitled “Evaluation Meeting” but the minutes reflect more of a workplan implementation discussion. Remarks that acknowledge the “need to expand the planning group. Be more public about our meetings, Have a process for involving workers and agencies” (p. 2) are featured. What this demonstrates is also what I recall in the process. That is, a very limited collective reflexivity (given it was an evaluation meeting) as the group focused on tactics but not on how we understood social conditions to be happening and evolving. As discussed in Chapter Four, to be “concrete” in a relational manner means looking at the specificity of consciousness and practices as happening within given social relations. I suggest that the group’s participation commitments became ideologies when such reflexivity was absent. This was deepened in our practice due to the coordinating effect of the 60-Hour Workweek text discussed in the previous chapter. Such commitments are reflected in a group ideology in conversation with U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) and NUG4 (July 19, 2009),

It’s not going to be staff-driven, it’s going to be membership-driven, it’s going to be from the workers themselves and they’re going to identify the issues and they’re going to lead the campaigns and then… and they’re going to determine the priorities and what kind of actions [we do]. (U4, Sept. 24, 2009)

We didn’t want to carry out a campaign for the increase in minimum wage around that table [of the core group]. That was not the goal. So it was a group that was coming together to come up with ideas, to come up with strategies, but that our goal… our ideal was that those decisions and strategies would be carried out in conjunction with local groups on the ground. (NUG4, July 19, 2009)
The early OMWC phase was thus about building capacity for a movement, not just for a campaign. And she raises the issue of how she now sees the goal as an “ideal,” given the project did not evolve as planned.

A key participation moment discussed by many J4W participants was the launch of the OMWC on May 1, 2002 in a Toronto community in which poverty is graphically racialized, and would later be designated one of the United Way’s high priority neighbourhoods. J4W members believed it was important to launch our campaign from such a location, both for symbolic and relationship-building reasons. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) emphasizes, “It wasn’t a one-off event; it was a launch, it wasn’t an event. A launch meaning that it’s supposed to be going forward, or going somewhere. As an outreach strategy, a profiling of, ‘Here’s the work that we’re doing.’” And there was a lot of outreach done prior to that event to arrive at an attendance of some 300 people, “Tons of planning, meeting, lots of peer pressure to bring [different] community groups” (CG2, July 17, 2009).

My research participants speak differently about the launch, some still putting most emphasis on the value of the day as a powerful and hopeful organizing moment, while others reflect on the lack of ability to see its promise through. CG2 (July 17, 2009), a paid organizer in that community for many years, sees it as so important because there were some “main shifts” and taking of “some essential steps” in how community-based organizing was done, including having downtown-based activists take working with community seriously. “Having the event in numerous languages really helped because that made it accessible to 2 to 300 people,” who read posters and flyers ahead of time and could speak their language at the event. The fact that some event organizers were also “from the same kind of background so people could also identify themselves with” them, not just the language but the people, was also important. “People stayed
throughout the whole event, for all these workshops and small group discussions” (CG2, July 17, 2009). The discussions were held in “Tamil, there was Somali, there was Spanish, there may have been one or two other languages as well” (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009).

Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009), who attended and participated in that event as a facilitator ties a number of participation pieces together in this CBO-attempt moment:

It was amazing to go to that community, because - I’m not from [that neighbourhood] - but to go there and see the range of people from the community come out and participate and really get involved and take a leadership role in helping facilitate, organize the space so people could sit, there was food. It was... it felt like a real community function, and it was very political, and people were really engaged in the conversation. It was amazing…. And, you’re talking about the $10 minimum wage campaign, and at the time the political climate and what was going on in the community... There was a lot of shootings that had been happening, and people were talking about it, and they were excited for change, and they were excited to be doing political work, and to push for something that would affect their everyday life, their community as a whole, and at the same time, there’s kids running all over the place, laughing and playing. And, I mean, ultimately their older brothers and sisters and their parents are talking about issues that will impact and affect them in their adult lives.

The launch was “was a really pivotal moment” for NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009), who became a key organizer with CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) in the neighbourhood of his organization following the same local J4W model. She describes a moment of working hard to do social relations differently:

I remember coming to the end of that event and feeling that we had just really met our goal of having a very inclusive event, where we certainly were bringing a campaign to a community, but trying to have people be really active participants
in thinking of how that campaign could play out, and contributing their knowledge of their community and what they thought would work.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009), is more measured, taking into account the purpose of that event:

We seemed to have all our pieces in place in that we did have interpreters [and] the space, the food, the entertainment, the discussion; it was a very live event. I think at that moment we were very, very hopeful that we were going to be building on that, on the numbers of people who came out. And we were animated and creative and responsive, and the diversity in the room, it was a kind of a hopeful thing. And you know, while we did make connections with folks, we know the follow-up meetings demonstrated how difficult it is to do follow-up from an event like that.

More bluntly, NUG3 (July 31, 2009) reflects how what was intended as a CBO-style launch can turn into another mobilization-style moment:

On May 1st, when we had that meeting with... different languages and you had people coming together and kind of that excitement about the issue. But because then our organizing model wasn’t able to carry that through, there wasn’t really any way to support ongoing participation of the workers.

Few people reflected on that event in a way that took the campaign activities that came after into account. Even 7 years later the moment burns brighter than the ultimate lack of campaign success. I suggest that what was revealed here in this discussion was that the ideology of grassroots, build-the-base style CBO participation goal kept J4W going even as few low-wage workers were participating in an ongoing and ultimately meaningful way. When looking at the notes that documented the small group discussions at the launch, there were few breakout groups that generated concrete activity ideas. J4W had suggested a timeline of internal education, outreach and event-based activities but wanted to leave the space open for people to contribute
(Justice for Workers, personal communication, May 2, 2002). After the May Day 2002 event, 17 people attended a meeting on May 14 in that neighbourhood and the local J4W group started. Meeting discussion centred on leafleting and petition signing, and doing some “train-the-trainer” style events with the group (Justice for Workers, personal communication, May 29, 2002). Thereafter, each meeting saw two to four community people come out, to join two local staff and one or two J4W organizers, like myself, from the original core group. The local group were almost all people of colour, both community and staff people; the downtown organizers participating most consistently in that local J4W were white. As one individual, I am not sure how much my white higher-waged worker lived experience individually contributed to the limited pragmatic anti-racism of the campaign, given the ambitiousness of the project in a context of suffocating social conditions. As I will discuss below, I do know I failed to discuss my concerns and doubts about this with anyone. From an organized social relations perspective, one participant explains how gaps in social experience were quite significant, and deepened with the geographic divide as well,

I definitely would say that there was a lot of thought about reaching out to workers of colour, racialized communities. I think the fact that we went to [that neighbourhood] and saw that as a natural place to launch the campaign was a recognition of who was being affected by low wages. I think unfortunately though, that there became this separation from the J4W people who were meeting [in the downtown group] who were predominantly white, and the workers that we were trying to bring in, who were mainly workers of colour. (NUG4, July 19, 2009)

This remark reflects an understanding of the complexity of doing multiracial organizing. The issue is not simply one of living as white or racialized. Communities of colour are not homogeneous. There are historical cultural and political differences among them as well as class-
based divisions. The specific forms vary community by community but class is still operating within and among communities as part of how society is organized as a whole. And racialization of work continues to be often ethnically segmented. Fine (2006) notes that, “The ethnic makeup of worker centers varies not only from region to region but also from industry to industry” (p. 19). For example, in the US there are South Asian taxi drivers and grocery stores with more Latino men and Korean women workers. As such, organizing involves the often-difficult work of developing interracial working-class alliances and challenging intracultural class exploitation. There are also racialized class differences between communities of colour in access to work opportunities. Lee (as cited in Fine, 2006) notes that Latino workers are more “trapped from above” in low-waged work while Korean workers also trapped “from the sides by the bounds of their own communities” (p. 63). With the Spanish-speaking population being so large, Latinos may get out of local restaurant work, move to bigger ones or into construction. Korean workers however are not so inter-culturally/class mobile.

That local J4W group leafleted a number of times, carried out our own educational work and had an unsatisfying visit with the local MPP who was very disrespectful to the women from the group. As CG2 (July 17, 2009) describes it, “He was very argumentative and non-sympathetic.” It left one of the local women organizers in particular very angry with him and the experience. I felt awful about that visit because I had pushed to do it. It was one of the things in our tactical tool kit (NUG1, July 24, 2009) and I pulled it out at a meeting when our next steps were very unclear. I reflect on this as NUG1 comments on capacity-building oriented organizing,

You can’t be working with people as allies if they’re not involved in trying to figure out what makes sense. What are they comfortable with, what are they willing to be uncomfortable with and still do, because I’m sure for some folks, to go visit their MPP…is a scary thing to do. But if we can do it together then we
feel more powerful. So you can’t have a campaign that’s to contribute to low-wage workers’ self-organizing if they’re not involved in the planning and figuring out what next. And people know, what the local newspapers are and they know what the agencies are and they talk to their neighbours, so if we’re going to grow at all and make really community-centred organizing spaces, then you have to be collective, because we don’t know it.

I contend that this was a key piece of ideology central to that group. And it also became ideological practice because of the frequent detachment from material reality. As discussed in the previous chapter, this ideology worked with the 60-hour workweek text as an ideological practice tool that assisted in giving some degree of appearance that multiple activities carried out over time were meaningfully coordinated. That is, multiple moments appeared to be joined by momentum. It kept me believing in the project for a time, even when the organizing was not evolving in a way that shifted power. In that moment, after the MPP visit, I felt that using that tactic had reinforced existing relations and I had facilitated it. Of course the women wanted to go on that MPP visit; we made the decision in our group meeting. But I had actively facilitated, had encouraged that wanting. CG2 (July 17, 2009) comments demonstrate the vagueness of decision-making process of those meetings, “I think they were more consensus…It was more of discussing things and then deciding, agreeing or arguing or something and then you know, come up with the decision.” Such nebulous consensus also took place at the downtown meetings. And silence was implicitly taken for agreement. As NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) also notes:

I remember hearing at the meetings just about the challenges that that committee was facing, and trying to have, 1) that involvement continue, and 2) also not being the ones that would [say], “So what about if we did this, but having those ideas organically come from those participants.”
But for the first year and a quarter of that campaign our commitment to our ideas was so strong that we did not become reflexive enough, we did not say “And what if there are no ideas coming from people that we can figure out how to carry out?”

A second May Day event in May 2003 saw two of the women from the local group and myself carrying out the main presentation. We worked together to prepare it. A year later, the group remained “tenuous”, as did the other local J4W (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009). I reflect on this positive experience the three of us had together in relation to a NUG4 (July 19, 2009) remark,

I’m always looking at, what is the capacity left over after you do that stuff? How do you try to, even if stuff doesn’t work out, how do you make sure it’s a good experience for people, that they’re getting something out of it that they could take away.

This is some distance from building an infrastructure of dissent but given the labour-market and state-driven social and geographic fragmentation of contemporary life, probably a very anti-ideological and realistic approach. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) notes too something similar as organizers lose touch with community people after jointly learning, “We [did] open up the space for people to participate and learn and share and get confidence [that we can make collective change]… I think that kind of learning happened; I can’t say what people did with that.”

Yet, very difficult social relations that are increasingly powerfully extralocally controlled can condition us to conflate those important and valuable human moments with the development of collective political capacity. Or to blame it on a “wrong” idea as NUG4 (July 19, 2009) does:

I think in the absence of really grounded organizing, we ended up falling into a discourse or a way of communicating that still constructed the worker as the poor, vulnerable worker, which is alienating and exclusionary. And, we got the result of bad organizing by not being able to really draw people into the organizing…[in our organization after that] we began to push forward more about fairness. You
know, we were trying to struggle for dignity for workers, as opposed to that poor thing.

She goes on to discuss how the failure to involve people affected by campaigns as you develop them leads to a “crude substitutionism”. I would say that is an accurate two-word summary of the pragmatic effect of J4W’s CBO attempts. Yet, I would also suggest that there is a kind of reflexive ideological practice here, as this organizer sees things differently in the present, after having had some success – with a different project, in different conditions and after building it from the time of the OMWC start – yet attributes that to having discovered the “right” kind of messaging. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes that the more successful organizing to which NUG4 (July 19, 2009) refers uses the same neighbourhood-based committee model attempted by J4W and some of the same tactics, saying, “It’s the same formula.”

And the most obvious way that CBO became ideological in the J4W phase is in what is absent in this narrative: there are just two contributions from low-waged workers to this particular research project because the OMWC-based connections that were made did not endure past the end of their involvement. NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) echoes this:

That’s always been an issue, is when we’re just pulling people out to meetings, or pulling people out to talk, or to be quoted. I can think of one particular person … who, when I just looked through our media file he’s quoted, there’s a story about his life, the impact on his life. He’s in …our campaign materials around the minimum wage, and so he became someone who always talked about his experience and his life, and we always referred to him in … our speeches and…at conferences…And was he ever at any of the planning meetings? He was probably at membership meetings, or probably came out to meetings, but I don’t know how he was really involved in the long term planning, or the long-term vision of where this campaign was going.
NUG2 makes clear that “pulling people out” is akin to the activation orientation of mobilization organizing, the antithesis of the J4W core group approach. NUG6’s (Sept. 24, 2009) self-correction makes this clear in a conversation on CBO challenges, “Being able to pull people...well, not pull people, but invite people who have experienced a workplace issue.”

Realizing that the group’s ideals and efforts were not being realized, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discusses how the J4W phase formally ended in late 2003 with mutual appreciation and thoughtful reflection. An (albeit unintentional) ideological practice to the work was thus interrupted:

We did actually a reflection and evaluation and decided to wrap it up. But we did that with all the people who had been involved - the workers or community members [to not just disappear]. We did that in [the key non-union group’s] space and really integrated the celebration of the work that had been done, the connections that had been made, and I suppose the movement within government [on the minimum wage]. But that was part of this overall organizing and that people were very welcome, supported, encouraged to put their energy there. So, I remember we had the cake. [laughs] And then that team members from [the first local J4W] came, which was massive [because], we’ve been up there, it’s a long bus ride… So I think it was kind of hard, because we were all very invested in it, but I think we did it as well as it could have been done to wrap that up.

Participants’ contributions in the section so far have pointed to some of the reasons why, despite a “hell of a commitment” (NUG1, July 24, 2009), a thoughtful transformative anti-racist, capacity-building orientation to the OMWC by J4W ended up in a limited pragmatic anti-racist mobilization outcome. I think that there are a number of factors that worked together through our activity and our consciousness that collectively conditioned such an outcome.

As discussed in this and the previous chapter, the J4W campaign demand of $10 an hour came from an ongoing process over a number of months involving research, collective
discussion, worker outreach and intuition. It was a materially grounded process that the group engaged in. The group arrived at a simple, clear demand whose win would have an effect on a large number of people. There was an equally clear political target to organize around. As also reviewed in Chapter Five, the extralocally state-controlled social relations of cuts and re-regulation that started in Ontario in earnest just before the OMWC started, were suffocating to the everyday reality of workers lives and to organizing as well. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) notes that we

Were putting time and energy into [community organization outreach] and I think we were all shocked at how difficult it was downtown, because we were doing our outreach through agencies. I think that really kind of threw us a little bit, [that] it just wasn’t bringing people around.

One important agency that had been previously counted on for such grassroots advocacy seemed to become focused later on projects like MISWAA (2006) instead. The degree of the advocacy chilling effect of the Harris and Eves governments' cuts and policies was only fully understood by J4W members after going through the process of trying to do organizing.

NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) notes how momentum in the campaign “dissipated” very soon after the May 2002 launch and that there was such a “struggle” to keep a “sustained campaign, and [keep] connections with [people]... it’s the basis of...all our issues around organizing, is keeping people connected over the long term.” NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) comments, “That joining a group isn’t the natural next thing....I think often we assume that we can build [like that], in a kind of a linear way.”

The creation of new institutions and new infrastructures that can be sites where people can be understood and supported (NUG4, July 19, 2009) with everyday multiply lived relations needs to be understood as happening at the same time as those relationships are being built.
Members of J4W had an understanding that while building a broad-based workers movement was the ultimate goal for starting the OMWC and a particular political vision was needed for that, short-term needs are very sharp and material for racialized workers. The challenge then of the meeting of immediate needs while having emancipatory goals is a common tension for non-union workers right groups such as workers centres. Most generally “engage in service provision as a central function” (Fine, 2006, p. 72). This creates an ongoing need for centres to ensure service provision does not become only individualized casework, compromising “collective and systemic approaches to change” (p. 73). The casework also builds the base of workers for collective organizing (p. 82). In this vein, NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) talks about how J4W organizers were thinking and working:

It was really a priority to engage people in the process and the planning. But we didn’t have the relationships with people [and] I know now it takes a long time [to develop]. If I work with someone on their case, I’m developing a relationship of trust and [then] people tend to come out to events … because we’ve had maybe weeks or months of communication back and forth, [And now we have a] drop in office, where people could feel a connection.

NUG4 (July 19, 2009) adds that her organizing experience has taught her that, “You build relationships with people around workers rights issues through their own workplace experience or lack of it, dealing, grappling with it. And I think that provides a point of connection.” But even as such organizations are finding some success, extralocally controlled social relations cannot be transformed by isolated local level initiatives. The combination of developing infrastructure, changes in social conditions, collective anti-ideological functioning, and transformative practices of trusted organizers in community did not happen in the J4W campaign phase. Of the last piece NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes,
If you’re not there yourself, on a regular basis [it is difficult]… you can just see the difference of someone who is working or living in the community, that those relationships are easier. A lot of times they’re building them informally first... people kind of coming out, to… a movie night, and then joining the group is not necessarily a natural progression. So that there’s some way to be having that base built, and it’s hard work to do that.

J4W logically and methodically crafted a demand and the majority of workers we discussed it with immediately found it valid. But a combination of good text and multiple individual consciousness cannot transcend such extralocally and institutionally managed social relations as we live today. Translocal coordination of class struggle is what has been historically required to transcend this suffocating reality. However unions, the organizations that have been historically most appropriate for that task, are conditioned to maintain a compartmentalization in their own sphere (as I will explore further in Chapter Seven).

I will now turn to an analysis of the second and third phases of the OMWC.

*The Ontario Needs a Raise and the TYRLC Phases*

Moody (2007) notes how social movement unionism, “has lost much of its unique meaning. Often it seems to mean union + community + issue campaigns. There is sometimes the implication that the union increases its power from leaning on or allying with various community and issue groups” (pp. 236-237). Both the (ONR) (2003 to 2006) and the TYRLC (2007) phases are examples of such labour-community mobilization organizing. Unlike the conscious, multi-layered orientation that was part of the political capacity-building efforts of J4W, the ideology of mobilization organizing is more implicit as union and community organizers pay less collective attention to the in-process undermining of social relations that active involvement of a range of (employed and unemployed) workers at every stage would bring. To greater and lesser degrees,
and with a different methods and individual perspectives within the campaign work, the ONR and TYRLC organizers sought – after first pulling labour and community groups together out of their “silos” (Nicole Wall, Oct. 1, 2009; U4, Sept. 24, 2009) – to “activate” people to carry out a specific set of pre-determined tactics.

Given both how the increased voice and presence of racialized workers and officials was ideologically mobilized and managed in the TYRLC phase and due to the phased-in increase outcome, it seems that pragmatic anti-racist mobilization organizing practices appeared to some degree more like transformative capacity building ones. U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) notes that the town hall meetings were a chance for “dialogue among ourselves, to see other people standing up” and a show of “unity,” all of which would “generate a buzz” in the media.” CG1 (July 2, 2009) seems to accept the mobilization method as well, “I think that more people in the community have spoken out; we’ve had postcards filled out; we’ve signed petitions; having meetings with the MPP [All] that has increased.” This was perhaps added by not only the apparent success of the campaign but also by the use of capacity building type language – “building the base”, “members identify campaigns”, “members run the meeting”, “doing leadership development” (CG3, Sept. 4, 2009), even when an examination of the activities do not bear such practices out in reality. Of the 2007 phase, CG2 (July 17, 2009) says it was a “cunning” kind of campaign that involved few working people, and both he and CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) found it very “top-down”, failing to take time to develop relationships even with community organizers they targeted for involvement.

As discussed in Chapter Five, a “crafty” state (NUG4, July 19, 2009) that “half-assed” (NUG5, July 16, 2009) met a demand contributed to the ONR demise. And CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) says the mobilization method contributed to this as well:
It was just that issue and it didn’t mobilize other people who were economically vulnerable. So after they were able to cough up on that one issue, which really didn’t cost the government anything – it was one of the least expensive campaign promises you can make in some ways – there was nothing left.

*The ONR coalition.*

The ONR coalition started in 2003 as an attempt to consolidate various anti-poverty and workers rights organizing initiatives in the lead up to the Ontario elections of that year. J4W members actively sought this out (NUG1, July 24, 2009), building on existing community and non-union group relationships, and trying to develop others with labour through the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice (OCSJ) that came to sponsor the ONR. It was hoped that the elections could be harnessed to bring attention to the devastation caused by 8 years of Harris and Eves Tories, and so drive forward some much needed reforms. So, while, “There was always a priority to have people living on low incomes…speaking and being interviewed by the media” (NUG5, July 16, 2009) it was not a foundational goal of the ONR coalition to build a broad-based movement on this basis. It was a tactic to try to achieve the three demands of increasing the minimum wage, raising social assistance and ending the clawback on the child tax benefit. And the group’s provincial mandate and outreach orientation meant a mobilization approach was just easier. CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) also notes that an ongoing labour-community “competition around who’s running campaigns” as a chilling effect on making the OMWC “fully open” and did not “[push it] to bring more people…I don’t know that we continued to build…a real culture of resistance into communities, I think it was more campaign based and trying to win a victory.”

NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also suggests that the provincial level, translocal coordination of the ONR structurally made low-income people already distracted from organizing as their poverty is locally compartmentalized within the coalition’s structure and functioning:
Generally their involvement in terms of strategizing in the committee wasn’t for the most part sustained….Because there were things going on in their lives, you know [they] can’t make all these meetings….And their involvement was more locally and through some of these agencies and groups around the table.

In terms of the anti-racist orientation of the ONR, U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) called it “academic” and CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) said even with “people of colour that were affected [participated] and Latinos in this neighbourhood are working minimum-wage jobs,” he is not sure “what we did specifically on that issue.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) says she thinks anti-racism in the ONR work “was relatively non existent.” Again she points to the extralocal ideas and materials preparation and coordination method as being partially at fault, as those organizers who created “materials and spaces, and events to raise those issues with MPPs and with the media” handed these ideas and activities off to local groups around the province, relying on them to take up the ideas and information as active anti-racist practice with no indication of or consultation on how that might happen. She adds that, “There was really no way of knowing [if it did] unless you had conversations with people or people called you and then you might get a sense of it.”

Along with creating and distributing materials and trying to stimulate and support local activity across Ontario, the ONR organized periodic province-wide events. Acknowledging the ebb of the ONR, NUG5 (July 16, 2009) discusses the Walk Wheel and Ride she tells me was a cross-province event held Sept. 29, 2005 as an attempt to “re-energize” the campaign. It was an event that she says, “Fell into my lap…[because a] guy who’s on social assistance from Sarnia had approached [a non-union group there] saying he wanted to walk from Sarnia to Queen’s Park to protest how low the social assistance rates were.” People in the OCSJ and ONR based in Toronto made event coordination decisions, and together created postcards and informational materials for translocal outreach, to groups they had connections with in particular. Many people
from across the province participated and it got a lot of media attention. As Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) notes

I think there were somewhere around 6 or 700 people around there. It was a pretty large demonstration for an anti-poverty demonstration and it was on the united themes of the minimum wage and ODSP and OW, and actually because most of the activists from Peterborough were more ODSP activists, for them the challenging issue wasn’t raising the minimum wage…they were quite content just to raise the issue of ODSP.

He also underscores the participation of CAW rank-and-file members who “just booked off and took a day’s lost wages to be at that rally.” NUG5 (July 16, 2009) also says, “It was a very focused event; it really got people involved.” Nonetheless, after the event,

A core group of people continued to meet around the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign and…develop materials and do more of the traditional way of organizing…where you have your demands, so then you can organize some, create some backgrounder and create some materials around them, periodically organize some events, you try to get media attention.

Mobilization organizing has thus become traditional, with small groups of mainly staff continuing to meet as the coalition ebbs and flows. This can continue as it does through the use of textual materials to translocally link periods of relative inactivity together, as a look now at the TYRLC efforts will also demonstrate.

**The TYRLC and the OMWC.**

The 2007 phase of the campaign led by the TYRLC saw a combination of apparent capacity-building activities and pronouncements embedded in a fundamentally traditional campaign of mobilization unionism organizing. President Cartwright’s (July 10, 2009) view that it was both, “Political bargaining [and] it was formal and informal political movement building.
People who just think we can build a political movement, and not engage in a form of politics, are not using every tool at hand” is not shared by research participants with different standpoints. For many participants, effective political capacity building does not take place with short-term deployment of a certain set of participation tactics; it requires fundamental social relations shifts in the institutions that lead the way.

A number of participants speak about the start of the 2007 phase, MPP Cheri DiNovo’s private members Bill 150, introduced on November 5, 2006. They spoke of her “all of a sudden” (NUG4, July 19, 2009; NUG5, July 16, 2009) attaching herself to a community-organized press conference to announce her Bill, which came out of nowhere (NUG1, July 24, 2009; Watson, Aug. 11, 2009; U1, Oct. 1, 2009; U4, Sept. 24, 2009). NUG5 (July 16, 2009) spoke of being “So pissed off. So that was my first experience with Cheri DiNovo.” For them it was very negative moment in which extralocal-origin social relations landed materially in their midst, embodied by an MPP. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) goes on to say,

I don’t know how the NDP decided that they were going to mobilize around the $10 minimum wage…all I know was that one day the NDP are coming out strong around the $10 minimum wage and there was absolutely no attempt to talk to us at all, ever.

Even after some non-union organizers made an attempt at “sitting down with Cheri” to try to get a more collaborative approach, NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) notes that she still came to press conferences interacting like “she was the expert, and she was the saviour of the poor.”

Mobilization-style, “The Labour Council worked with community allies to develop a strategy of gathering thousands of signatures on a province-wide petition” (TYRLC, 2008a, p. 6). Of the paper, postcard and online petition, the TYRLC President tells me,
There was the whole petition and outreach campaign that went through unions and organizations, workplaces, schools, subway stops, all that kind of stuff. There was a Chinese language campaign that was specific, and...then there was the actual lobbying of MPPs and Cabinet Ministers. (Cartwright, July 10, 2009)

People also gave suggestions on getting “petitions in, different [rental housing] buildings [as well as] going into mosques, churches, people going into their ethnic social groups and getting petitions done there.” Union officials and staff mobilized shop floor officials:

The hotel workers are amazing. They would take out 1000 petition cards, and they come back and be wrapped up in little bundles organized by work department… they actually had a conversation with almost every single member, and that was incredibly powerful. (Cartwright, July 10, 2009)

While such conversations and petitions “going through” all these places might have gathered numerous people’s signatures, there was no indication of how these same people might actually have become involved to shape the campaign. This is especially important given that rank-and-file unionists need encouragement and to have space created for their coalition involvement because of the deep socialization of unions being about bargaining and service provision (Nissen, 2004, p. 54).

As I have discussed, mobilizing for one reform win was not all the TYRLC said it was doing. As state re-regulation continues to support increasing labour market precarity, in a disproportionately racialized and gendered way, it has become important for unions to make themselves relevant to community. A key part of the TYRLC method involves hiring staff and electing officials of colour with community and union organizing experience. The multiracial and de-centralized appearance of the town halls were aided by both the limited connections to specific community groups and the application of popular education techniques, particularly by
racialized people. Cartwright (July 10, 2009) summarizes the TYRLC strategy that started in early 2007 as involving the following:

We got some money together [and] we hired folks to do some of the actual organizing work. There were different elements to the campaign. There was a media strategy, there was an on-the-ground organizing strategy which involved 10 town hall meetings in different low wage communities across Toronto, and each of them was co-sponsored with the Labour Council and two, three, [or] four community groups in the different areas.

The groups previously central to the OMWC organizing were not involved in this active co-sponsorship (NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009; NUG5, July 16, 2009; U1, Oct. 1, 2009). This Toronto-based Council coordinated cross-province activity, through

getting the petition cards [out], getting people on the website, volunteering to go out to public meetings. We ran out of people to go to public meetings. We were getting calls from all around the GTA and across the province. You know, “We’ve seen what you guys do. We want to have a town hall meeting. Can somebody come and speak [in] Peterborough, Barrie, Sudbury, London?” It’s just crazy… we were being bombarded with requests. (Cartwright, July 10, 2009)

Not only were community and rank-and-file workers targeted; organizers report they too were being mobilized by an extralocally planned project. NUG4 (July 19, 2009) says, “They basically wanted our contacts.” Similarly, NUG5 (July 16, 2009) says she was approached, “To talk about the campaign but what they wanted was access to our networks…I do feel like the NDP and the Labour Council swooped in and swooped out again and [had] taken their resources with them.”
Participants also discussed their perspectives on those town hall meetings. While the vibrancy and attendance of some of them was important in the moment, a number of people queried how meaningful they ultimately were. NUG3 (July 31, 2009) thinks that

A lot of the town halls were [attended by] NDP staffers and riding association folks, union folks in the communities. I think there were a number of rare exceptions where I saw partnerships with community agencies, where they actually got some [community] folks out.

She also referred to event attendees as “pretty much Rent-a-Crowds that were brought out for media ops.” NUG1 (July 24, 2009) sees these as “one-off events” for which there was “no follow-up.” As NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) finds TYRLC focusing too much “on numbers”, similarly CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) says, “I find that the way labour organizes events, it’s as much if not more about putting bums in seats, then it is about really about having people understand what the issues are in a real kind of way.” NUG4 (July 19, 2009) adds,

The lack of infrastructure built in those communities [from that organizing] makes you feel that then the tactic of kind of swooping into a community, having a Town Hall, riling everyone up, getting petitions, and then just disappearing, it’s not a way to go.

These participants’ remarks reveal the different meanings they have associated with the use of such tactics: they are meant to build people’s organizing capacity, not just temporarily activate people. Given the discussion in previous chapters of how the history of the way certain types of union labour activities influence state policy in particular contexts, the mobilization strategy quite likely played an important role in the McGuinty government’s phased-in increased. At the same time, it seems from many participants’ comments that the method not only did not assist in building relationships, it also harmed some.
This kind of organizing disjuncture raises the question of the nature of anti-racist practice with the 2007 TYRLC-led organizing. On this, John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) explains that I don’t want to use the term “anti-racist” practice, as much as an equity practice, pretty well integrated throughout the entire campaign. All of the facilitation was organized and done by… Jojo [Geronimo, Executive Director of the Labour Education Centre (LEC)] and many of the facilitators were workers of colour. Judy Persad from the Labour Council was the main person leading it on the ground and doing that kind of work. Faduma Mohammed, from Labour Community Services was doing a lot of that relationship [building] with social service agencies and community groups….And we had Minerva Hoy [LEC Operations Manager] leading the Chinese language work. So it was the way that we have come to do all of our work, is reflective in that way….I was at a thing with the Toronto Region Immigration Employment council, and they were celebrating five years of existence and pointed to all these companies that have hired immigrants. And I said…we don’t do it the same way you do…in the last 5 years, we’ve had eleven full time people in the Labour Council and its projects, and… 10 of them have been folks who were born outside of Canada, and 11 were workers of colour, or leaders of colour, in different forms….we see the need to transform our movement, to reflect the working class.

For racialized people, getting access to union officialdom – as staff and member leaders – has and continues to be a very difficult struggle, people whose “tireless efforts” have had some success (Das Gupta, 2007; Walker, 2009, p. 86). The TYRLC’s (2002a) equity plan’s “top priority” of “participation and leadership” of workers of colour is an achievement that has a degree of material significance for such leaders and for other workers of colour. Yet, I would argue that it has arrived in a pragmatic form, given that the people just mentioned are apparently to substitute for all the rank-and-file affiliate members. U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) notes that she finds Cartwright had “good leadership” in the campaign and she valued the multiracial presence in
events and other organizing moments. Yet racialized staff presence and efforts are not enough in a more comprehensive anti-racist organizing strategy. The existence of such leadership does not in and of itself tap into, “The strength of thousands of working people” (TYRLC, 2002b), as a number of participants bear out. About a 2007 town hall, CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) notes that it was set in a particular geographic location yet she was pressed to mobilize a specific ethnoracial community with no presence in that neighbourhood:

I think we managed to get about 30 or 40 people to it. I think they were hoping for more…like a hundred on short timelines….If you’re trying to get people from downtown to come up to a rally or a town hall in [another part of the city]…it’s not really going to happen.

CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) also reflected on the campaign involvement of people she mobilized for one town hall event:

I think their involvement was really just at that one meeting. I don’t think they were involved after that. There was a town hall discussion where [two ethnoracial community leaders connected to the campaign] and Cheri DiNovo spoke. Then we had small group discussions [in] different language groups and talked about “what does the $10 minimum wage mean to you and why is this important and how are you going to support it.” And people signed petitions and they had a little photo op. But I remember transportation was an issue because not everyone was from that neighbourhood and when you’re [in that area of the city], even when you’re in the neighbourhood, you’re not necessarily within walking distance.

As she called the mobilization method, this seems a racialized “bums in seats” moment, the kind of situation that is often experienced as tokenism by people of colour (Wall, 2009). CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) was tokenized herself, as the community organizer assigned the mobilization of “her” racialized community, as she was objectified as having knowledge, connections and
responsibilities. She also commented on a racialized staff member of labour officialdom as having been “given her marching orders and [doing] the best she could.” CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) believes she did not get the support from TYRLC she requested because

I don’t think it was a priority for them. I think they really wanted to get some good message out in the [specific language] media but I don’t think they really took the time to understand what the concerns of the [ethnoracial] community really were.

Pragmatic anti-racist mobilization efforts can thus lead to tokenizing racialized people in multiple institutional and community locations. As Johnson (as cited in Edelson, 2009) summarizes, “There have been advances; there has not been progress” (p. 75). About a different town hall, Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) also notes the space created for people of colour to take on particular campaign roles was important but limited:

The anti-racist practice that I witnessed was the diversity in the [town hall] facilitators, and the diversity in the community members….Those things were really important, and it was really good to see and you don’t always see that, but I do think that it was somewhat at a superficial level, because in the end, when you heard from people at the front of the room after community folks had had a conversation about the $10 minimum wage campaign and how they wanted to be involved and what they wanted to do and what they see next, the speakers at the front of the room still were not reflective of the communities….I would say, unfortunately, the role of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council was more doing the talking at the front of the room, getting the politicians to come and make presentations, and trying to draw in a couple of facilitators here and there.

Another way pragmatic anti-racism happened throughout various phases of the campaign is highlighted by CG2 (July 17, 2009) who says that,
The campaign highlighted many of the people who were actually working with minimum wage...[from] racialized communities in very large numbers like cities like Toronto. I am not sure if it was very explicitly an anti-racist campaign but it was a campaign that people from racialized communities could have identified [with].

This identification would have been because of their material circumstances, their location in racialized social relations that make them over-represented in low-waged work. One limitation of relying on the people who would benefit from the campaign to “be” the anti-racism is seen on CG3’s (Sept. 4, 2009)’s approach to anti-racist practice, “We have policies that people have to not say crazy racist things at meetings or the staff will intervene.” Low-waged, presumably white community people here become the problem, but only those with tendencies towards random moments of hate speech. And it seems that the organizer will solve that problem should it arise. Such mobilization style anti-racism as a tactical response can thus be turned on and off.

Instead, CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) discusses that anti-racist organizing efforts understand that relationships need to be built on multiple levels. And, at the very least, a start is to not treat community groups and people in such an instrumental way, “And I understand that resources are limited all around, but I just think there needs to be more thought put into equity...when you're working with these kinds of power dynamics and these kinds of financial differences or constraints.” And she emphasizes that, “You just can't call us up and use us as a translation service because we're not a translation service.” U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) speaks on this particular problem, “Because I have the capacity to reach communities or different language groups, please don’t see me as a translator because translators don’t do what I do….It’s been one of my struggles….It’s been quite a long struggle.” She also explains,
There are mobilizing powers within communities; just because when you speak to someone in English and they don’t respond in full grammatical sentence structures…doesn’t imply that they are another dot for you to tap into in terms of fighting for fairness, fighting for justice.

Both CG1 and CG7 identify the Colour of Poverty network and campaign as key to integrating racialization and poverty in various campaigns on income security (CG1). CG7 notes, I don't think there really was much of an anti-racist campaign [in 2007]. I don't think that was really part of the analysis and I think that's something that the Colour of Poverty Campaign has been trying to push for like changes in language and changes in how we talk about some of these issues…from a policy perspective we felt that it was important to recognize that people from racialized communities experience poverty at higher rates and experience poverty differently and if policy makers look at this and all they see are newcomers and immigrants, then they're going to tinker with settlement policies, immigration policies and things like that. But they're not going to look at systemic barriers and they're not going to look at, what happens to second, third and fourth generation immigrants because really they're still being treated as immigrants even though they're Canadian born or they have their citizenship. So, I think the Colour of Poverty was successful in changing that language and changing that dialogue and getting people to understand like it's not just about being new to the country.

I attended a town hall put on by the OMWC successor coalition, Good Jobs For All, on March 19, 2009. Arising from the OMWC, this labour-community coalition “was formed in 2008 to start a focused dialogue on how to improve living and working conditions in Canada’s largest urban centre” (Good Jobs For All, 2010). During a breakout group discussion someone commented that this event was exactly like the OMWC town halls of 2007. There was a multiracial panel and attendees. There were a lot of community people present, as well as food and refreshments served. The NDP was well represented on the panel (Cheri DiNovo and Peggy
Nash). And John Cartwright reminded the group that we could take on the federal government on Employment Insurance (E.I.) if we remembered the “victory” of the “28% wage increase,” a campaign that TYRLC had “kicked off” at that same location 2 years earlier.

I found that town hall quite literally surreal. The reality disjuncture that made me feel like I was in a dream not a vibrant labour-community event was created by a combination of the way in which popular education/participation tactics were used, my knowledge of the bureaucratic institutional reality of the lead organization involved, the passionate references to challenging racialized poverty and the previous campaign’s $10.25 outcome, as well as my understanding of the multiply layered extralocal-origin social relations of economic crisis making such an E.I. fightback so necessary. I would suggest that without such a layered translocal perspective such a moment of partial reality can appear in that moment as the reality of workers struggle. In the moment, public appearances of reality trump surreality. Perhaps when people leave and do not get a follow-up phone call, or see no changes material to them in access to E.I., they might also find it surreal in reflection. Or at least feel like the event was not all it promised to be. But, by then they are on their own, and we are all back in our silos until the next mobilization moment.

The activities and tactics of capacity building may look like or actually be the same as mobilizing organizing but it is how they are carried out, who is involved, who carries out which kinds of activities, who makes decisions on strategies, and what is built from them that I argue distinguishes the two practices. Petitions and public events were features in all phases of the campaign but they often seemed to have had fundamentally different purposes: for political capacity building they were meant to be tools, not as end in themselves. Cartwright (July 10, 2009) explains the petition/town hall links for the TYRLC phase:

Every time there was a town hall, we were asking people, how do you… get people to sign it, how do you bring it back? How do you get people directed to the
website? So that was one of the features, one of the asks at the town hall, how do we [do] this? And the petitions were then broken down by riding, and they generated e-mails to the MPPs. So the MPPs were being bombarded by e-mails from their own constituents, which is all the politicians care about, [emails that said] “This is my address [in your riding]. I want you to support $10 minimum wage.”

U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) saw this petition-signing process as “more than a signature, it is a seed of mobilization” because of the conversations that people having in the process of getting a signature on that sheet.

In comparing the J4W events discussed above and these 2007 town halls, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) reflects on capacity building and mobilizing differences:

I would say it was different in terms of the intent; I’d say sometimes the effect was maybe the same. I think the intent behind the way we were doing the forums was really trying to get people to think about how they wanted to be involved in the campaign, and on a longer-term basis how they wanted to… do politicization about the issues, have people from those communities speak, to be involved in the planning of those forums, to be thinking through educational information, getting it translated, working with community front-line workers from those neighbourhoods, trying to get them to think about how they might want to work with those residents afterwards. Which again, looking back, was probably a really difficult thing for them to do, given the conservatism that they were all facing in their agencies.

Such relationship and organizing consciousness building for people like this research participant is about developing trust over a period of time. And I suggest that to do so means sharing power, and so undermining dominant social relations to the degree possible in everything undertaken. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) also discusses this:
[In J4W], we were in the first instance, building or sharing experiences about the impact of living on a low wage and what that meant for people. I say sharing rather than kind of giving that information to the organizers, and then building on that passion that comes from voicing that experience to [get to], “So what can we do about it?” And so when I think of the [launch and similar] events a lot of the organizing was, “So what would make sense? What would you be willing to do? What would work in your community to do something about this?” Looking at the different kinds of tactics was also a brainstorming thing, where people could choose to actually then go ahead and do it or not. So as an outreach strategy…those kinds of tactics would be generated by the groups and always the invitation was, “Okay, so, let’s do this together.” And I think that…it was transparent, it wasn’t “We’re taking this away and we’re going to come back with a plan.” Or “We’re going to write up a report from your experiences and do something with it.” It was always meant to be owned by the people who were there, and hopefully be a launching pad for their ongoing participation, and in that participation, hopefully leadership.

She brings out something that I argue is a key difference between the capacity building and the mobilizing orientations that other participants raised: with the latter, organizing often just goes event to event. I contend that there is an institutional drive to do it this way because the kind of relationship building NUG1 (July 24, 2009) and NUG4 (July 19, 2009) discuss would disrupt top-down controlled social relations. I have observed and heard from many participants that there is little orientation to figuring out how to integrate event participants and people who share their stories into the strategizing, planning and decision-making work of the project. Yet, the institutional coordination, the institutional formulas (regardless of beliefs and text on the purpose) create a great appearance similarity between capacity building and mobilizing. NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009), active in ongoing labour-community projects says that after each event she and others ask, “Where are all of those people, and how are we contacting those folks who came out,
who spent a day giving their ideas and input, and then never [are] able to access that.” NUG4 (July 19, 2009) says on this,

You have a thousand people that come out to the Good Jobs Summit, and we have contact information for those thousand people. What I would like to do is… map out where did those people come from, and create, riding or community specific [maps], a hundred people from Etobicoke, 200 people from North York. And, have we contacted those people again? [No]. And we keep raising it at every meeting, and [TYRLC staff and officials] just say, “Oh, it can’t be done, it can’t be done, we don’t have the capacity.”

Such “pushing to connect” (NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009) with participants beyond the event moment reflects a capacity-building commitment in an officialdom-driven mobilization reality. There is a material disjuncture in such labour-community coalitions as there are two different concrete practices with very different ideologies underpinning them, competing at each meeting. In the next sub-section I will expand on this further as I analyze a case of ideology in participation.

A participation practice and ideology nexus case.

An interesting individual case study of the nexus of participation practice and ideology is that of CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009). She reports 12,000 members across Toronto in her community-focused organization but when this is discussed further that number does not necessarily have anything to do with active engagement. Those 12,000 were signed up through a process of going door to door, [to] talk to people. We ask them what their biggest issues are, and then we talk about how individually it's really difficult to make changes, but collectively we have a voice and power, so let's get together and work on these things. Come out to our community meetings and be a part of the planning team, and a part of the actively engaged members that are actually driving the direction of the organization… We pick where we do our organizing drive where we think it's going to be politically useful for other campaigns that are going to affect low
and moderate-income people…. [We try to] get people to join the organization right there on the spot.

When asked about active membership in a particular part of Toronto she says,

It's a really tough question to answer, because we're as active as we're able to staff out an organizer into that neighbourhood. Because we have a huge list of people who want to be active there, but if we're not planning a meeting and telling people there's a meeting [then they are] not coming to the meeting. If we were able to afford to have two organizers up there, we could have meetings with probably like a hundred people.

She also notes that, “Thirty people [may] come out to the chapter meeting. But it might be a different 30 people [who come] the next month.” She also spoke about community people organizing to be “in hot pursuit of [a local MPP].” But when this is explored, it was not necessarily the same 10 women each time and she was unable to follow through with anyone to interview even though she suggested it. She has the perspective that people are mobilized or “pulled out” for campaigns or events then may fade away and organizers can never really sure what happens with the “capacity built” but she believes they’ve walked away with new learning and skills. Later she qualifies that what she described as members “actually driving” the organization is not really about making decisions. On the contrary, she reveals that local groups are instrumentally activated to follow an extralocal origin, citywide board that will decide [something] is a priority of the campaign, then they'll go back to their local chapters and deliver it to the membership, [telling them] "The board has decided that we're going to….” But that decision is informed from discussions that have happened at the chapter meetings. And, one of the very key components [of] how to run an effective campaign is [to do] something you can win, and raising the minimum wage was something we could win. Something that affects a lot of people, because people is what you need for your base. Running campaigns that
affect a small amount of people are harder to mobilize people around. And you need people to actually win a campaign. You can go through the press, but sometimes it's more effective just to actually get people to contact the politicians. The board has been trained on how to evaluate what a good campaign is, and what not a good campaign is.

In describing how this mobilizing translated into OMWC activity, CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) explains with common member-activation type of language:

We partnered with the Labour Council and John Cartwright came [and some other people/officials]...They kind of managed the agenda so it was like a partnership between the Labour Council and [us]. And so, we turned out all our members from [a specific neighbourhood]. Those are the people that were fighting for it.

Throughout the interview she emphasized a theme repeatedly in remarks such as “[Staff] just do all the busy hard [background] work, and just try to get members... at the decision-making table,” and “We're just training people how to run meetings. [We tell them] ‘You need to run this, I don't live here, you have to run this meeting’, ” and that it is the membership base that lobbied on the OMWC and got the by-election win in York South-Weston, “I want to be clear about that. I don't lobby.” She says often that she is not being “empowered”, community people are. Yet, at the same time she explains that staff, “Talk to people and find out what they want to work on, and we kind of manage what people choose” to make sure it is “winnable.” They also ensure members are not unruly, “[We] just don't pile a group of people who are angry about everything into a room with an MPP, because then it's just disorganized, and they'll just be yelling at the MPP, and it won't do anything.”

I argue that this organizer quite unconsciously exposes many of the social relations of mobilization organizing and the contradictions embedded in them in such an unusually obvious
way. I find her at once deferential and paternalistic. She values people’s agency but in an ideological, reified way: people are things needed to make up the idea of a “base.” An organizer needs to amass those people objects together, make them collectively fight for yet other things that have are good for them to “win.” And, she can say in one sentence that a partnership existed but it was a labour-managed meeting agenda. Her organization is a national one, organized in city-managed chapters but has origins in the US. In both countries they receive funding from and work very closely with unions, labour councils and federations (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008). So, while she is partially consciousness of and values to a degree what she understands as empowerment and capacity building, her institutional location is driven by extralocal bureaucratic social relations and so her consciousness seems thus largely coordinated as well. Ideological reasoning manages these competing realities well, separating the ideas (“empowerment”) from the material reality (“we turn out our members”).

This discussion on participation and ideology, particularly in the more mobilization-oriented phases of the campaign, leads to the next section of this chapter. I will now explore the relationship between workers participating in movement moments to “share their stories” and how this was part of pragmatic or transformative anti-racist practices in labour-community OMWC organizing.

**Storytelling as Participation**

Workers sharing of their experiences of everyday injustice, in public events, press conferences and publications (for an example, see TYRLC, 2008a, p. 7) is seen as key to making their agency central to workers rights campaigns. This is particularly the case for increasingly and disproportionately racialized and gendered precarious workers. Such counter-narrative practice is by now a well acknowledged and established part of feminist, anti-racist and other
social movement activity. Giving voice to the realities of socially marginalized people is a basic starting point for inclusion in events, meetings and other activities, and is a fundamental part of worker-oriented popular education practice (Burke, Geronimo, Martin, Thomas, & Wall, 2002). The sharing of different perspectives also challenges dominant ideologies and social relations they are part of, and makes visible and heard those who are silenced and dehumanized.

In the workers rights context, storytelling happens in different ways with various effects for the individual worker and organizing as a whole. In the mobilization organizing approach used within the OMWC, one research participant notes that such personal disclosures are often encouraged by staff and officials as fundamentally empowering acts, without contemplation that, “Most people are not comfortable talking to the media about their troubles” (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009). John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) also explained how the 13 priority neighbourhoods in which the 2007 phase mobilized were ones in which there was:

A combination of …low wage incomes, and community groups in those areas who could mobilize and bring people together. Because there’s no point in us saying, “Let’s have a meeting,” if there weren’t people on the ground bringing people there to tell their stories, or to reflect on what was said.

He goes on to talk about how the strategy exposed to him multiple local realities of difficult lives:

[The] reality that we kept hearing [was] of folks that were actually working two to three jobs. I come out of the construction industry, so we went through tough times in the 90s – people lost their houses, and there were suicides and all kinds of terrible things. But I had never really sat down time after time after time with folks who actually juggled two to three jobs in order to put food on the table for their kids. It was quite a powerful sense of a new reality... Including [for] the government…when we were lobbying MPPs and Cabinet Ministers, we were able to say, “This isn’t just made up shit, right? There are silos in this city [and] you
have no idea of how people are living, because ... you’re not exposed to that reality, this campaign is bringing that reality out.”

In the campaign, people’s first hand knowledge of racialized poverty was disseminated further through the media:

The Toronto Star was doing a whole series of stories. We’d met with the editorial board and suggested that when we did these town hall meetings...[there] would be crucial stories for them to reflect. And they did a lot of that. So actually bringing to the fore the voices of these people who are living in these poverty wage situations, was a really important element of winning the moral argument, and, in fact, an economic argument. (Cartwright, July 10, 2009).

Looking at these remarks along with the TYRLC Executive Board Statement (TYRLC, 2002b) this storytelling tactic seems to be related to the goals set out by the Council 5 years before the 2007 campaign. The policy statement points to “weaving together two threads - labour and community organizing” for getting “workers from diverse communities” involved. But there has been an annual Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers Conferences since 2002 at which “building power” and “linking struggles” are always discussed where the majority of attendees is racialized and come from labour and community locations (TYRLC, 2010). Also, given the TYRLC involvement in projects like the MISWAA Task Force discussed in Chapter Five, I am not sure why this reality would be so new.

I submit that to bring a person’s voice forward while leaving them and their bodies behind is a strong moment of ideological practice. NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) notes that this has been the effect for people when such disemboding in the media happens:

Then people who came out to talk about how this [economic crisis] had impacted on their lives, and also...how they were involved in the fight back. And that just got diminished, and people were just portrayed as “someone living in poverty.”
Counter-narrative in organizing practice is not fully achieved if the teller does not have some control in the situation. Holding a microphone for 3 minutes or catching the camera’s gaze may suffice for a pragmatic moment. But going beyond that means the stories make material changes in how organizing happens and evolves.

In thinking on the town hall that his community organization was involved with CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) says, “There ended up being, very brave and very powerful stories that came out of that night” from some people who were sharing their stories for the first time, but it was difficult to really incorporate working people on an ongoing basis after that “partly just because of how stressed out [and busy] workers are.” But NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) reports that in the environment of the meetings where labour and community, staff and officials, meet there is little to no questioning of who is at the table, let alone how the environment might need to change for a range of workers to be there. She says that, “Three very active members [of our non-union group] come out to one of the meetings, and it was just [not a good experience].” Fundamentally, during the OMWC as after she reports that, “Really, the role that people are being asked to play is to speak about their experience.” And, it seems from this research that often the role of political capacity-building organizations is seen by the predominant mobilization-oriented ones to be to provide such “poor workers for a quote” (NUG3, July 31, 2009).

NUG1 (July 24, 2009)’s own experience in going from moments of participation to organizing leadership shows how mobilization storytelling is on a very different path from a process of capacity building. Stories in this approach are the ground of lived experience on which political analysis and decision-making can be built:

I think a lot of it was around confidence and just feeling like I had some experience and that I could sit in a meeting and actually weigh what was being said, and have an opinion. I sat in lots of meetings and had nothing to say,
because I’m not going to just say something, just talk for [the sake of] talking. I actually had to be able to feel like I had enough going on in my head to be able to be weighing the different options, to be able to make a decision about them, or also to offer something else. So that’s why I think both the confidence, kind of having some framework for making decisions [was what took time to develop].

What these participant remarks make apparent is that low–waged workers’ busyness with running from job to job are not the only organizing barriers. Rather, it is also that union and community, officials and staff located within bureaucratically organized social relations are not individually and/or institutionally inclined to share that power and control; little is happening to change their practice and create more of a shared reality. Pragmatic anti-racist mobilizing can incorporate this limited storytelling without making reality-threatening institutional change. Such dominant labour-community social relations collapse the act of telling stories and the stories themselves into coordinating texts, for campaign materials or the media, which can make pragmatic anti-racism look transformative. It can make people in a room for an evening appear like part of a movement, as if they were actually connected to other people in another room on another night, in other neighbourhoods later, on the same or different topics. It can make an idea out of the “low-waged worker,” out of a growing population of real people living real lives. And the idea is reproduced time and again as each new racialized person is invited to speak in an elsewhere-orchestrated setting, to talk about their very real “personal struggles” (CG1, July 2, 2009), which can then get relayed by an official or a media report for their own purposes.

This can happen too with projects that have a capacity-building intent as NUG3 (July 31, 2009) notes of J4W, “I think, the minimum wage thing was really tough, and we weren’t successful in that. I think we had more victimizing kinds of stories that had come forward despite our efforts not to.” It was partly a growing recognition of the drift in the pragmatic mobilizing
direction that led to the group wrapping up. CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) also reviews how workers stories were heard and ultimately the J4W organizers’ response:

One of the things that we started doing was holding these community meetings, where people could come out and just speak about their experience as a worker. [There were] some really horrifying stories, because so much legislation had been done away with in terms of protecting the worker, that people were just being abused left and right. Then it was like, “Okay, which activity now is more valuable? Going to continue in this $10 minimum wage campaign, which we can’t get any politician to take on, which is [what we need] to get some type of political recognition for the demand. Or to form some type of body that will protect these workers that we’re seeing on our way while we’re advocating for this….We opted to end the campaign so that [core organizers] could focus on developing [the non-union workers rights group].

In the preceding section I presented participants’ perspectives on and my analysis of both the activity and ideological dimensions of OMWC involvement of people of various social and organizational locations. I looked at how this varied or not with capacity-building and mobilization approaches, and pointed to more of the pragmatic or transformative anti-racist intentions and effects during the campaign. The next section explores participants’ understanding of what it is to be an ally, as an individual and an institution, and just who is seen to be on either side of that relationship.

**Being an Ally**

**What is an Ally?**

An exploration of what being an ally means to organizers in relation to both individuals and institutions is important to uncovering what organizers’ activity meant to them and how their ideas about being an ally may have affected their activity. This is especially so given the minimal
involvement of people most affected by a minimum wage increase in both the OMWC and this investigation of it.

In the TYRLC phase the strict mobilization unionism approach applied to the labour-community campaign seemed to support an objectifying orientation to understanding what an ally is and does. That is, “community” is seen as an ally to “labour”, in more of an organizational than an individual sense (TYRLC, 2008a). Forrest’s (2009) look at union renewal activity suggests there was continuity in the OMWC with a general instrumental ally orientation. She reports that revitalization and building of community solidarity has historically happened when unions as institutions have a need for such activity. At these times, labour “self-consciously acts as an equality-seeking movement.” As such, engaging with community in specific periods of “bargaining for equality” (Forrest, 2009, p. 98) can have an objectifying effect, with the subject always being labour.

As revealed already, throughout the OMWC there were tenuous connections made with low-wage workers that were not developed or maintained. As I argued in Chapter Five in the 60-hour workweek section, such connections may have seemed more like relationships due to ideological practice of the initial organizers. They thus largely existed at the level of appearance, of pragmatic need or real good-hearted intention but appearance nonetheless. Although J4W organizers were not simply trying to put “bums in seats” (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009) we failed to see this appearance/reality difference. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) says of her intentions in the J4W phase,

At the time, I was thinking about what it means to be an ally, how do you work as an ally, and that this was part of my learning experience... I don’t think we did it perfectly...[For example], the decision making powers, really, we were trying to use that at a local community level, but I think that overall campaign planning
was still being done in our [core] grouping. I think it might have been different if we had been able to get to another level of the organizing.

NUG3 (July 31, 2009) describes how even with capacity-building ally intentions an organizing practice in a particular set of social conditions can lead a group to an unintentionally pragmatic place:

I think that...there needed to be more of a critical conversation early on around the fact that we just didn’t have the resources and the capacity to really follow through. I think it just painfully dragged out some stuff, where I think in some ways, when you did have a couple of people who were women of colour from that community, the kind of expectations that were put on them in terms of carrying out this campaign in a community that’s struggling with so many fucking issues, I think was really unrealistic.

Much-referenced by a range of organizers aspiring to improved white anti-racism, Bishop (2002) defines an ally as, “A member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression which gives her or him privilege” (p. 152). NUG1 (July 24, 2009) defines being an ally as

a term that suggests that I am deliberately conscious about where I fit into...the material reality of the issue that we’re working on, [and] that I’m not pretending that I know the experience except from what I learned from other people... And then what can flow from that also is if I’m trying to contribute to people’s self-organizing around that issue...being conscious of...my access to resources, my access to the places where I have power, and how that can impact in...all the kinds of spaces where we come together.

A key piece in her definition is the issue of consciousness about one’s own social location, which – within the transformative capacity-building approach – requires an active, ongoing self-reflexivity within which racialized and gendered class relations are understood not as fixed
locations to assign self and other to but as dynamically made and re-formed by ongoing human, collective activity. Allies in this way then are consciously involved in struggle in a fundamentally self-interested way. People’s self-interest in this sense is not a self-focused one; it is inseparable from that of other people, even as social relations organize us such that we often do not share the same conditions of everyday life, we still share our humanity.

Yet, higher-waged organizers and staff implicitly were seen to have come to the campaign with their consciousness and capacity built. Unchecked exclusionary in-group “repartee” about labour officialdom, the state or even non-capacity building organizing (NUG1, July 24, 2009) were reality contouring moments that reinforced this. Thus capacity appears a thing to acquire through a finite process, in content and time. People can be “filled up” with skills and know the “right things” which we then set out to share with others in our organizing efforts. Kuhling and Levant’s (2006) discussion of political de-skilling and re-skilling and working class consciousness re-development has this non-dialectical flavour to it, in terms of the relationship between the analysts, organizers and workers. They discuss in detail how the consciousness of the politically de-skilled has blocked out reality under capitalism, which has also caused this de-skilling. They review how certain kinds of organizing activities can be re-skilling and so transformative. It is unclear if learning specific tactics and skills building also includes how to actively dissent within an organization or group, and not just as a unified group in relation to a powerful force external to it. They thus also pay little attention to the human collective process, including to the relationship between those who apparently “see”, who “know”, and those who apparently do not. Unconsciously putting the knowers outside of social relations because of their knowing is ideological practice that was often foundational to OMWC organizing.
This is most dramatic in the case of CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) who knows other people have important things to learn—such as how various levels of the state institutional functioning are organized—but seems unaware of her own consciousness and skills development as a process, not as an implicitly already-finished knowledge acquisition exercise, “People that don't understand jurisdiction, you know, who understands jurisdiction? I certainly didn't know anything about housing until I started.” As discussed above, CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) repeatedly tells me “I'm not trying to empower myself.” Ideological practice in relation to being an ally and an organizer leads to what I have suggested is a contradictory deferential/paternalistic expert view of herself, an appearance which she energetically wishes to be the opposite of. In contrast NUG1 (July 24, 2009) discusses how she sees herself has built capacity:

> It can be a long process to go from participating to taking on leadership. And in that long process, if there’s not [constant] momentum or things for people to engage in, then you can lose people. Or [if] there’s not the moments for people to be working towards taking leadership, and quite frankly not everybody’s going do it anyway. But if I think of my own politicization: I was involved, I’d go to meetings, I’d go to demos, I’d go to talks....It was years before...I said, “Oh, okay, I’m going to actually start organizing....Instead of just being the participant, which is absolutely essential that we have participants, but I’m going to actually get involved in organizing that.” That was a huge long process.

That long process is not solely an individual, agency-based one. In the capacity-building frame, being able to lead means being able to be materially part of decision-making processes. But in many organizations throughout the life of the campaign how this happened was vague. A review of ONR minutes from 2004 and 2005 reveals no clear decision-making method. As NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes on J4W, “I don’t remember [how we made decisions], but it was by consensus, I think. I think definitely people who had more experience would be playing the bigger role in
making those decisions. I know for myself I was really just learning as I went.” I would say something quite similar about my experience in that group.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009) also notes the J4W capacity-building start and what reflexivity and mutual consciousness building looked like in practice as the group believed that, in order to do such a campaign, there was a need to undermine

The ideological stuff out there, floating around that we knew would come at us when we raised the demand….So [we built] some strong arguments around $10. So, if people say, “$10, we feel really confident about, but why is it $10?” [We needed to be able to say] why it’s not…necessarily going to mean that jobs flee, why it’s not going to be bad for the economy and lead to inflation, so that everybody who is involved in the campaign could feel confident making those arguments to whomever, to their neighbours if need be. So that education, sometimes we went away and we did our research and we shared that. So sometimes it was more one-directional, but I think the framework was the mutual kind of work, we’re in this together, I recognize I am an ally in this struggle and…so it’s not me giving you skills and information. It’s us building them together in practice for a purpose…not disconnected from the organizing.

In a similar vein, NUG3 (July 31, 2009) goes on from what she says above, to note that transformative practice intentions became pragmatic effects not as a result of multiple individual ally failings but through social interaction of organizers and workers in a specific time and place-based reality that is difficult to fully understand while right in it:

I don’t think it was coming from the traditional, “Oh, well let’s get these two black women to do all our work for us.” I don’t think it was coming from that at all. But I think the sort of analysis of how things were moving... again, hindsight is 20/20. There were a lot of issues that we were struggling with…a lot of stuff I don’t necessarily think that we were really understanding at that moment, in terms
of the kind of environment that we were organizing in, and the capacity of those organizations to support things.

To explore this complicated issue of ally-oriented relationship building, I now turn to a discussion of how allies themselves build their own capacity in relation to organizing efforts.

Capacity Building of Allies and “Others”

I contend that people do not on their own invent “self” and “other” designations. Dominant social relations profoundly categorize and institutionalize people into different locations. And I think that ideological practice is nothing short of an unconscious social problem reproduced by organizers who believe they can step outside and transcend social relations, by determinedly building subject-to-subject relationships, across different conditions.

When a group of organizers gets together on a project and they seek to incorporate a group of people that is not there at the start, there is an unavoidable “othering” that occurs. That is, “we” are here and “they” are not yet. In the political capacity-building oriented campaign that J4W started our sense of the distance between who we were and who we wished to be varied because individuals and specific groups did have some kind of relationship with low-waged workers and there were a number of racialized organizers in and connected to the J4W work. Given that social distance and the group’s commitment to a worker-centred capacity building project, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) describes an embodied social relations orientation of an organizer doing that work:

Even more so than winning a $10 an hour minimum wage…it was how we were trying to contribute to building a low-wage workers’ movement or confidence in communities to be taking on whatever issue it was. Because low-wage workers…are also women and they’re also people of colour, new immigrants, newcomers, people who are facing bad landlords. So this campaign was in part to build that
consciousness and solidarity and the capacity to be taking on issues through self-organizing. And so, because I’m not a low-wage worker and I’m not a newcomer and I’m not a woman of colour, I really had to think about my impact on that space and also what it means to be an ally, which is part of my impact on that space.

Echoing NUG1 (July 24, 2009) and NUG3 (July 31, 2009) on the group intention towards self-awareness and ongoing reflexivity on our individual social locations in relation to the campaign, U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) also talks about how the group “struggled” to

Figure out how to build a base, because I think many people recognized that we were in these positions of relative privilege that we could do this [work] and others, the fear of arrest or the risk of dealing with the cops or also the ability just to have the time to organize….I think we were really self-aware…But in terms of actually translating into practice….I don’t recall us figuring that all through [in] the pieces that I was involved in, I recall that they weren’t really very reflective of people that were involved in those struggles on the ground or having that lived experience.

Building on my own reflections discussed in Chapter Five, I recall that we did not have explicit discussions about the challenges in our local J4W groups. I think we had assumptions about shared politics and perspectives because of past, shared organizing experiences. Through this research I learned that I conflated what I saw as my social location of relative privilege with “I ought to know”, I ought to be able to figure out how to transcend that in any organizing moment. It was a conflation of self with conditions, of the individual with the social. I thus suggest that our ideological orientation told us our organizing was not, as U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) says, “About tokenizing people who earning a minimum wage…you do need to have people with lived experience setting the agenda and…saying what actions should [happen]…because
otherwise you take over the agenda from a place a privilege.” For me, when actual real life situations did not lead to the women I worked with “organically” coming up with campaign-related ideas or them “setting the agenda,” I did not explore the possibility that the social conditions were so against us as to make the transcending of these relations very unlikely. It also did not occur to me that I could continue my/our own capacity building by speaking with others in the core J4W group about uncertainties and doubts. It certainly did not occur to me to say anything to the local J4W group. On the contrary, while I remained in the group, it seemed my personal political task was to figure out how to transcend privilege. Implicitly it seemed to me that the institution building of J4W could not be threatened by voicing reality-disintegrating doubts about my ability to do so. It seems that, as part of the ideology of building the base, the organizers’ main job is to be positive and keep coming up with events. Part of building capacity for us was about finding things to do, hoping that each event will solidify a local group and spark more organizing translocally:

I think we were trying to give people something to do [when leafleting]...you can call the Premier’s office, you can call your local MPP, and this is something you can do…doing that kind of outreach, we don’t suddenly get a surge of people calling our [organization]....But you know people have something in their hand, and…I think it’s also part of people participating and having those discussions, and on the street and signing petitions. And I mean its part of just being active. (NUG2, Oct. 15, 2009)

I agreed with this at the time. As we did this work together, we had different ways of talking about people. We referred to the J4W group that started the project as the “downtown activists”. I thought of staff in organizations that were organizing in local neighbourhood groups with us as “community organizers.” Interestingly, while I called the women coming to the neighbourhood J4W I worked with “community people” the local staff organizer there called them “activists.”
He had an actual relationship with those local activists, rather than my implicit ideological orientation to them as the low-waged workers who we set out to give voice to and to make leaders out of. This objectification also happened across space – from the “downtown activist” environment to the “racialized low-income community” – but it was also happening through a tool of ideological practice: the “ally rules”. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) reveals this:

I’m going to try to put into place from the get-go, where I’m trying to take direction and be a support and a resource, and not occupy leadership spaces always. And how frigging complicated that is. [laughs] I mean it’s hard enough to talk about but it’s even harder to do, trying to be really authentic, [considering] how can you share experience, how can you share information, how can you share resources in a way that doesn’t automatically thrust you into powerful, leadership positions. I think that’s the constant challenge. But it’s at least a statement of being conscious that that’s the dynamic that happens and that you’re working with that dynamic….I suppose [there are] some practical rules. Rules on being an ally, which you - situation by situation - would apply.

Even as she raises the issue of the rules, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) cautions against ideological practice, noting that how to be an ally has to be figured situation to situation. That is, she describes her process for assessing the complexity of what is concretely going on in a given setting and how she is part of that. In discussing the negotiation of sharing of knowledge in social process she works to avoid creating a detached, template-version of what allyship is and who she is as “it”. I would suggest that her remark reveals nonetheless a rather moral orientation that activists often have to a complex political undertaking that does not ultimately assist in undermining ideological practices. In relation to this, Bishop (2002) presents a list of characteristics that allies have, and she also lays out several points on how to both be and work with allies. The bar is quite high and largely an individual challenge, as she notes of the ally
characteristics, “they are also characteristics that mark people who are well advanced in their own liberation” (p. 111).

There is a contemporary social tendency for people to be reduced to individuals, not to value our individuality but for us to have a privatized responsibility for ourselves. This happens even as a multitude of texts coordinate our activities and consciousness daily, within and across multiple institutionalized environments, such a set of reflections can be easily lifted off the page and applied in a codified way. And given what I have already discussed about the multiple reality perspectives and happenings in the OMWC, it seems quite improbable for a collection of individuals to become individually self-aware, then follow a set of “ally rules” and thus hope to be able to counteract multiple and coordinated institutional logics.

While we as organizers would have agreed with NUG3 (July 31, 2009) that “there has to be constant, critical question[ing]” it was rare for critical individual reflexivity to translate into collective discussion. This participant’s many years as a white activist doing anti-racist work would have been important experience for many of us to draw on:

I don’t want to be involved in organizing [that is just] purposeful for white folks coming together….I need to consciously be looking around, [asking] “who am I sitting around the kitchen table talking about organizing with?”....I guess it’s kind of the layers of evolving an integrated political [perspective]…around workers organizing. So, you know, when meeting after meeting after meeting of Justice for Workers, it was still a bunch of very wonderful, well-meaning activists sitting around that table, that was a problem for me. And, with such limited resources, it’s so constantly coming back to…at its most basic level it’s kind of critical questions I always ask, like who am I standing shoulder to shoulder with in these activities? And if it’s not... integrated or kind of connecting with people, in that struggle to address those problems, I don’t want to do it.
It seems to me now that the ally rules were not working in practice. As I did not raise my own concerns, I do not recall her discussing this with the group at the time. I suggest that, on reflection, she ideologically separates herself from the group. I saw no way to deal with this than to physically separate myself from the group as I separated myself from activism as a whole. In the J4W project, I see through this research that I felt stuck in the ideology and practice of myself as a “privileged white woman”, an ally, who should be able to figure out any challenges. I also did not want to poke a hole in the J4W balloon by sharing potentially reality-disintegrating doubts. I was afraid to do that both for how people might react to me and for how that might affect the project, assuming that that could only be in a negative way. At times I remember feeling absolutely overwhelmed, continuing to meet with another J4W organizer plus two or three women of colour and local organization staff in the neighbourhood-based, local J4W. These were the (“kind of”) women that we said we wanted to build the relationships with, but the geographic and social distance between us, driven by extralocally generated deepening social crisis, made these human connections difficult to develop. I kept my commitment to that model of having things organically come from people, even when that was not happening. How all that materially played out in those relationships was difficult yet I never went to the core J4W group and shared that.

In relation to this, J4W did have a fundamental commitment to the marginalized workers we hoped to start to build a movement with. This is reflected in how our anti-racist practice was part of that foundation. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) finds J4W had a combined anti-racist practice and analysis in terms of the groups understanding of racialized poverty and how that drove how organizers spoke about the campaign, who we were determined to work with (“the kinds of allies that we needed on the ground”), the materials that were prepared and our attempts to consult
with workers living this reality as we developed the campaign. She also notes, “I don’t really remember how much we did that sort of self-analysis [asking ourselves]...‘how much are we reflective of the communities that we’re working with’ or ‘what’s missing?’ But I feel like...our analysis of the way we were trying to work was pretty conscious.” Since many of us came to the project having worked together before, there was a confidence in a shared worker-centred, anti-racist feminist perspective. In addition though, the combined effect of capacity-building operating as a finite process and the ideological practice inherent in the existence of implicit “ally rules” both conditioned this group silence. Our accountability practices were energetically directed outwards to the low-waged worker but it is quite unclear how accountable we as organizers felt to each other collectively.

And I think that we were accountable to workers in a very “we can do it” sort of way. We had to be positive, show we are hopeful, and demonstrate our belief in the campaign. And the coalition relationships are ultimately functional to this end. It seems to me now that since we were implicitly allies inwards, our process of ally formation with each other was finished; now our job was to become allies outwards. Some of us were farther down the road on this than others. As NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes,

I think I saw that the most strongly, the sense of accountability to people that you were trying to kind of say, “Come on, this is really possible... if we come together, we can make these changes,” and feeling that sense of accountability to them. And when you see that... you’re not increasing your momentum in a neighbourhood… that translates back to the bigger group, too.... I think we did try to have discussions about why isn’t it working, but then I think at a certain point, we just kind of kept going with it.... I don’t think we ever had the discussion [that] it’s just not working.
This is reality maintenance conditioned by a deep need for shared reality in a particular period and in a project quite isolated by and from extralocal state and labour-market controlled social relations. I think that pulling at such a thread in conversation would have been a threat to the project. While I had by that time left the project, it was not until about 2 years in that an evaluation could be had. I suggest that this might be because an organization within the coalition had developed enough for the people group to have a place to transfer their commitment, belief and hope to.

What I wonder is what kind of relationships we thought we would continue to build with each other as we grew J4W? As the outwardly focused allies were we just the tools? When I look at my own penned meeting notes, meeting after meeting in 2001 and 2002, I see and remember many tasks being assigned and coming back and it being apparent that people had not done what they were to do or they simply did not come to the meeting. But while there was a quietness sometimes about that there was no discussion. No one was ever asked, “How come you didn’t do that? Do you need help with that? Would you rather not do that?” Or any question at all. I have seen this before in other activist projects. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) has too and is very delicate about discussing this:

I think probably there was some element of …people taking on a task and not necessarily having time to completely do the task before the next meeting... my experience has been that in coalitions where most people are there out of their voluntary time, that’s pretty much...how things go. And I think that for the most part people there [were] not paid staff people.

NUG1 (July 24, 2009) also speaks to this, uncovering further a kind of hierarchy of responsibility in the organizing. She talks about higher-waged organizers as “paid activists” because they are not low-waged workers, even if they are volunteers in the J4W project,
You get this with paid activists; they don’t start thinking about the questions before they get to the meeting. That’s not a criticism … well, for the paid activists it’s a criticism, but for other people it’s one of the barriers for people being able to participate in the same way. And if I’ve thought about something a lot, and I come with all sorts of ideas, I can say, “Well, there’s all the ideas and we’ll work with that.” If I haven’t had the same opportunity to think it through [I cannot do that].

There seems to have been a similar issue in the ONR coalition. NUG5 (July 16, 2009) discussed how she would prepare for meetings, thinking, gathering information in advance, but few people would. This affected who actually made decisions and the quality of discussion on them as well.

For all this lack of preparation and follow through, “the base” is off the hook. It is generally understood that material reality of many workers lives created by the need to piece together multiple jobs leaves less time and mental space available for organizing. Beyond that it would seem that the only people we might actively collectively hold accountable is someone who is in a paid staff position. I would suggest that along with the above-discussed reality maintenance and ideological practice reasons for this there is also the fact that we have no institutional mechanism to hold the unpaid organizer to account. We are socialized into using formalized regulatory texts and processes for this purpose. In their absence we do not collectively know what to do. As individuals we know we can come and go as we please if such processes are absent. Which for me begs a question never asked in J4W and generally inconsistently of individuals and each other in different projects, “If you have joined this group, why do you not follow through on what you say you will do?” As I have suggested, the practice of halting organizers own consciousness and collective political capacity building does not lead us to figuring out new voluntary ways to be responsible to our own selves and each other.
There is great complexity of and contradictory social relations within movement building on the basis of shared humanity among people living and struggling with incredibly different conditions. I contend that the appreciation of this complexity was absent or got lost at times in the OMWC through ideological practices that created an ally kind of othering in which the privileged organizer/paid activist does not get empowered, does not seek their own liberation as necessarily materially linked to the low-waged worker “other”. Instead I find that the activist gives of self, their time, their skills to the other and the movement the organizer would build for workers, the organizer who is then humbly at their side. That lead activist’s job is to open the space for workers to learn and be active too. Being an ally thus becomes part of an organizing formula.

CG3’s (Sept. 4, 2009)’s reality maintenance efforts exemplify this, “Our members…run the meetings, they do all the press events because we're building their capacity, I'm not building my capacity or our staff’s capacity. Our staff is building the capacity of low and moderate income people.” I would suggest that perhaps her whiteness and higher-waged working class location ideologically co-mingle, creating the appearance of a greater social distance between herself and community people than actually may exist. But I wonder what her understanding is of how extralocally organized capitalist social relations actually happen for working class people, albeit in a highly racialized and gendered differential way. That is, I wonder why she does not seem to see that she has more in common with the community than she appears to believe. What she does seem to have though is a moral commitment to self-reification, reminiscent of activist approaches to being a white ally at the service of the community (Wilmot 2005).

Our meetings and our leadership and our board all are reflective of the membership in low and moderate-income neighbourhoods. So, our board is
extremely diverse. The chapter chairs are extremely diverse because they are elected out of the local chapters. That's where business happens, that's where their activity is, they're driving the show. The board that I work for is extremely diverse…Our whole organization is structured so that I'm not the activist, I'm not doing the work, I don't talk... I'm not trying to empower myself, I'm not trying to be a politician. (CG3, Sept. 4, 2009)

Ally-based mobilization can be encouraging and may generate a push for translocal change. But I am arguing that it has little more than a pragmatic, short-term effect. As NUG5 (July 16, 2009) notes, “[The NDP] won a by-election… around the minimum wage and that was exciting and the fact that there was all of a sudden a lot of media coverage around it and a lot people were coming out to the town halls, more than the usual suspects.” Event attendance and the “base” championed by some has no endurance even though there is denial of this and the capacity built is short-term and individual at best. Or so it is hoped because organizers do not create very close connections with people and often do not event see people again. New campaigns are often planned and decision-making continues on nonetheless, extralocally and functionally top-down, as CG3’s (Sept. 4, 2009) details above on how board make decisions and deliver them to the local community and NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes on J4W, “I think [decisions were] definitely… made in the coalition; they were not made at a local level.”

Often those charged with capacity building in the OMWC seemed to be without it themselves because of a lack of organizational resources as a whole or because their organizational role is to be the capacity-builders, to go out and “build the base”. This is either internally organized or can arise external to the group, as in the 2007 TYRLC campaign phase and CG7’s (Aug. 13, 2009)’s experience of repeatedly asking for support and not getting it. Her
community role for labour was to pull her ethnoracially-specific people out not build her own capacity. She relates a conversation with TYRLC staff:

“I need some support from you, can we talk it through? And, can you help me come up with some arguments or some ideas, because I know they’re going to ask me, what about small businesses? What about people who aren’t getting minimum wage? And, I’ve got a lot of other things I’m working on, I’m kind of new to this so if you could give me some support that would be really helpful.” And they said they would, and they didn’t. And I asked again and they didn’t.

CG7’s (Aug. 13, 2009)’s remarks on this translocal lack of accountability to her and her organization are an example of how labour often materially makes its relationship to community in the “vanguard coalition” that often develops as “coalition partners simply support labor-defined and –led activities (Nissen, 2004, p. 50).

**Capacity Building of Institutions**

How organizations are built, developed and run, including if there are staff, unpaid activists/volunteers, staff and/or officials, what their organizing freedoms and constraints are, and how space is made for people to be involved, conditions and is conditioned by capacity-building or mobilizing orientations to getting union or members involvement in social change activities. Community agencies may see community people as targets of some sort of capacity-building activity but often do not look at their organizational relations as integral in that work. Capacity building for dissent requires that institutional development and change is central to the organizing work. In referencing how the J4W failed to ground itself in more than two neighbourhoods, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) says that having an, “agency in the area...is a critical component… you have to have that kind of infrastructure support, where people can get involved and be connected somehow.”
In one neighbourhood-based group the key organization is “a bit of an anomaly”, having had a capacity building orientation for “10 or 11 years”, and had developed “a culture of meeting” in the community (CG6, Aug. 27, 2009). Nonetheless, the three research participants involved there each seem to have their own self-contained historical orientation. CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) was a staff person very active in the J4W phase, a key organizing liaison between the local community and the core J4W. He notes that, “A lot of my own interest went into it, because once you get involved in a campaign you feel committed to it. It goes beyond your job.” CG1 (July 2, 2009), a key, non-paid community leader supported by her organization and involved in various anti-poverty initiatives including OMWC, had never heard of the campaign before 2007. To her it was launched the first time by the TYRLC that year. This is even though she had a close working relationship with current staff (CG6). CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009), who had knowledge of past efforts that staff and community were involved in, had himself been involved in the ONR phase, and had a critique of the TYRLC-led efforts. It seems like CG1 and CG6 never actually talked about the campaign, in a historical, analytical way. CG1 (July 2, 2009) also had an interesting response to my question on who decided how the campaign as a whole would be carried out and how those decisions were made. She looked surprised, paused and said “I don’t know.”

As community- or capacity oriented as this organization is and has been, there is an intra-institutional disjuncture here. While CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009) explains that, “The executive director has taken a lot of leadership in the organization and in the community to change the kind of culture here and has been able to bring resources around that kind of vision,” there seems to be little work done amongst individuals on this topic. The time- and space-localized activities and the text of “community engagement” that coordinate them might well stand in for a dynamic collectivity of individuals. I suggest that this is consistent with everyday life in our highly
fragmented society in which moments and individuals’ activities and ideas within them are parceled in time within space and social relations obscured.

Organizations cannot build political capacity with individuals if they do not have that orientation and ability themselves. It is inherently a social and so collective project. Without this, doing advocacy or sitting on a coalition can have the appearance of organizing and can be represented by those in power as such. NUG4 (July 19, 2009) discusses this:

You find a lot of community organizations that don’t really know how to do advocacy work will tend towards seeing their advocacy work being part of [coalition work]. So you see that in 25 in 5 [anti-poverty campaign], you see that in the Good Jobs For All Coalition, where then advocacy work gets shaped by their involvement in those coalitions, because they really don’t have any capacity on the ground, and they’re not really sure how to do that organizing themselves.

Both NUG1 (July 24, 2009) and NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) discuss how time was a limiting factor in J4W campaign capacity-building efforts. NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) notes that tactics used to building low-waged workers collectivity (such as bringing neighbourhood leaders from across the city) have had some success in her group since but the J4W OMWC was so “fledgling” we did not get there. In terms of leadership, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) thinks that, “why people maybe wouldn’t have stepped up to be making decisions in their own…could have been [because] the process just wasn’t long enough for that to happen.” At the same time she notes that time is not separate from other social relations:

It could also be…the way people have been socialized to relate to agency workers in a certain way. Even if [the agency workers] are the most progressive and politicized, it’s really hard, and I imagine that’s even worse now....So, where agencies have so much decision-making [power] over your life, even if you know that you’re in a collective space, it’s really hard to break that relationship down, [for low-waged workers to think] “I’m going to be making decisions, and you’re
not.” That kind of socialized relations. And then the nature of, for some of the people who we were working with, [having] a lot on their plate. And coming from really different places in terms of their confidence, and the resources that they have, like time and otherwise.

I think that groups and organizations that take on capacity building as political are few in number. One result for one organization in the OMWC was a high degree of local organizational responsibility for building capacities for dissent, which was difficult to sustain. Maternity leave of key organizers and the hiring of new staff with less organizing experience led to a decreased ability to push the capacity-building approach translocally (NUG3, July 31, 2009). The would-be capacity building facilitators were thus without capacity themselves.

Capacity building is very difficult when efforts are so localized and there is little to no translocal support. The practice seems to end up being an individual, worker-by-worker, campaign specific orientation or, at best, the efforts get institutionally localized. The degree of collective extralocally coordinated movement-oriented capacity building is questionable in the labour-community coalition work ongoing after the OMWC:

There’s different [activity focuses] of that coalition... but it doesn’t go anywhere. So that’s what we are talking about today [in our group]…when do we try to push [a currently key employment standards issue] because what does that mean for the amount of work that we then end up doing when we [already] have a campaign that’s running? So it’s also about the capacity of us, here [in our organization]. We’re very...small, and we… have a membership to sustain and to keep active, and do leadership building [with]. And we have to really focus on membership development, I think. And that sounds like such a catch phrase... but just having people be part of the planning… takes a lot of time. It’s a lot of meetings.
What she uncovers is that organizational capacity cannot be built in isolation from that of translocally coordinated movement capacity. One organization cannot on its own be responsible for or effective at it. And, perhaps moreover, no one group’s efforts can be effective without labour-community coalitions building their capacity to take direction from below.

In this chapter I have explained the practices of pragmatic anti-racist mobilization and transformative anti-racist capacity-building organizing and analyzed how they occurred in the OMWC. I have argued that during the ONR and TYRLC phases the former practice predominated. I also argued that J4W had a CBO intent with a mobilization effect due to the both the predominating social relations and the ideological practices of the group within these. Disembodied storytelling, tokenizing and substitutionism were three tactics or effects of the pragmatic anti-racist practices that predominated. I contend that such practices are inconsistent with the transformative movement building goals many participants would aspire to. At the least, the tensions between doing [for], participating in, and being a leader is a key issue in CBO that requires an ongoing and open collective reflexivity to be able to address.

In Chapter Seven, I will focus on the labour side of the labour-community coalition equation, exploring the relationship between the activities of the OMWC and the translocally material issue of union renewal and revitalization.
Chapter Seven:
The OMWC as a Union Renewal Opportunity

Introduction

[The labour movement is engaged in]…a form of class struggle… which… is sanitized and takes place… under terms of engagement that are agreed upon between the parties and that are respectable and safe and don’t challenge too much. Class struggle – particularly in today’s context, when we’re talking about a profound crisis of the whole system – involves actually going up against employers, going up against the state, going up against governments. And it certainly doesn’t involve cozy relations and worked out deals and all the sort of assumptions that go into that kind of methodology that [the TYRLC has] personified. (Clarke, Sept. 25, 2009)

While what John Clarke says would not likely be debated by many research participants, the complex layers of social reality and individual and institutional organizing practices revealed and analyzed in the previous chapters are fundamental and profound barriers to generalizing such a perspective and to collective action. In addition, contemporary union renewal is not generally approached or understood as class struggle. While they are some exceptions (Camfield, 2005, 2008, 2010, in press), the closest the literature generally comes is with Moody’s (2007) orientation to discussing transformation-oriented organizing. Authors often talk of transformation without an analysis of class relations (Gapasin & Wial, 1998; Tattersall, 2010).

Tattersall (2010) and Nissen (2004) note how the academic and union literature point to various social movement unionism practices as a way for unions to revitalize and survive. Both Forrest (2009) and Kainer (2009) discuss how the focus is usually on finding the best strategy for resolving an apparently agreed-to problem. Forrest (2009) notes that union interest in social
equality in and out of the workplace has gone through had multiple phases in Canada. Frege, et al. (2004) similarly discuss that, in the West:

From anti-fascism in the 1930s to the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s…unions have participated in coalitions of protest. Thus, coalition building is not a recent innovation, devised by new 'social movement unions', but has long formed part of labour's repertoire. (p. 137)

In the latest revitalization period started in the 1990s, predominant themes are how union density is declining and so the need for labour movement rebuilding. Nissen (2004) reviews the range of areas of recent union renewal writing. Organizing non-unionized workers and unions getting involved with social issue organizing are key topics. There is also extensive writing on living wage campaigns, seen as key contemporary labour-community coalition success stories. Immigrant and racialized worker organizing is another focus, as is the role of labour councils as axes for coalition development. Kainer (2009) also notes that “inclusive representation” of “women and other equity-seeking groups” is seen as important for both “promoting internal solidarity (enlarging membership participation); and promoting external solidarity through labour and community alliances or coalitions” to encourage more interest in and support for unionizing (p. 17).

In Chapters Five and Six, I discussed the complex layers of individual and institutional reality in the labour and community OMWC, the ideologies (both ideas and practices) that shaped consciousness and activity, and the extralocally originating and translocally organized social relations of pragmatic anti-racist mobilization and (attempts at) transformative anti-racist capacity building organizing. In this chapter I will build into this an exploration of the activities and ideas of the OMWC in relation to contemporary union renewal practices, particularly those involving or promoting local labour councils or federations as vehicles to that end. The first
section will look at the role of Labour Councils and Union Renewal in Canada and the US, and in the OMWC, followed by an analysis of the OMWC in terms of Union Renewal and Class Relations. A discussion on Union Leadership and Pragmatic Anti-Racism will be the third section after which Labour-Community Tensions in OMWC organizing will be explored.

**Labour Councils and Union Renewal**

The longstanding failure of the labor movement to unify around a common program of building local and regional power by increasing member participation and energizing central labor councils has allowed employers to dominate the economic and political agenda with little resistance from organized labor...If labour councils are doing little to mobilize from among their own ranks, how can they build political and economic power for the majority of workers not organized into unions? (Ness, 2001, p. 13)

Neither anti-racist organizing that spans community and union nor labour seeking coalition with community for increasing their memberships, are new phenomena (Kelley, 1999). Nonetheless, the contemporary practice of local labour councils and regional federations engaging in union renewal to act as bridge builders (LCS, 2008; Kelley, 1999; Nissen, 2004; Tattersall, 2010) between the unionized labour movement and community groups and people is less wide-spread in Canada than in US. The TYRLC stands out in this country as one Council that has had an equity-based union renewal program since their equity plan was announced in 2002 (TYRLC, 2002a, 2002b).

Known as central labour councils (LCs) in the US, they were established by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the 1890s to address broad working class interests that individual unions could not effectively take on separately (Eimer, 2001, p. 57). In Canada, self-described as the “largest democratic and popular organization in Canada with over three million members” (CLC, 2005), the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), was formed from a merger of the
Canadian Congress of Labour and the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada in 1956. In 2005, 72% of union members were affiliated through their unions to the CLC (Camfield, 2008, p. 69). Under the CLC umbrella, there are today 136 district labour councils that are regional and local level bodies of the CLC, whose broad mission is to get “the working families' point of view across to business, governments and the general public on issues affecting workers across many unions, sectors and regions” (CLC, 2005). Nonetheless, the legal-political relations discussed in Chapters Two and Three have put power is in the hands of individual unions which makes it a challenge to develop powerful coalitions that can democratically make major political decisions and carry them out (Tattersall, 2009).

As “destructive competition” (Yates, 2007, p. 68) among unions for new workers intensified in the union renewal era, the “weakness of the CLC has exacerbated ... internal fragmentary tendencies” (Yates, 2008, p. 100), rather than developing it as a force to foment political unity and coordinated campaign activity. Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) remarks on one way this can be seen in the OMWC, “The Labour Council came in behind the minimum wage campaign not the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign. They created their own campaign [because] they didn’t want to have anything to do with this Ontario Needs a Raise campaign, and the way it was originally conceived by the OCSJ [a coalition of the Ontario Federation of Labour].”

Particularly since the early 1990s' phase of the neoliberal era, the increasing mobility of capital and a prevalence of corporate subcontracting out to smaller, non-unionized firms has lead to plummeting wages, increased precarity of work and a “spatial dispersion of work and concomitant declining capability of industrial unions to organize workers in these new workplaces” (Ness, 2001, p. 14). Even as the economy becomes more global in the forms it takes, organizing has needed to become more local. Labour councils are thus seen as key as “the
only existing body capable of organizing the common interests of workers – whether they belong to unions or not – reach beyond the individual difference if unions and form the basis for a more unified labor movement” (p.13).

Even though most labour councils in the US had little to no direct contact with the AFL-CIO until 1995 (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008), at the regional and local levels they have come to be viewed as a linchpin for union-renewal organizing. While there is little in the literature on this topic in the Canadian context, as discussed in Chapter Five it is clear from the TYRLC's 2004-2010 strategic plan and their practice that the Council has more recently taken a page from the AFL-CIO strategy (TYRLC, 2005). The TYRLC goal of building labour power is broken down into three tasks: “Building Leadership; Building Power for our Communities; and Organizing Unrepresented Workers” (p. 2). A key element of this is building the leadership of workers of colour, as their equity action plan “ask[s] our unions to make the goals of workers of colour participation and leadership a top priority” (TYRLC, 2002a). At the May 2008 25th Canadian Labour Congress Convention, the eleven resolutions of the “Action Agenda” put together by the TYRLC were taken up by the convention (Labour Action, 2008a). The union renewal tactics embodied in the resolutions include restoring card-check certification, organizing (unionizing) one million workers in the next decade, building a strong practice of equity and inclusion through the labour movement, and supporting ongoing minimum wage campaigns in every province (Labour Action, 2008b).

John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) discusses the recent history to the development of translocal coordination of mobilization unionism between the Toronto Council and the Los Angeles Country Federation of Labor (LACFL), to both build power locally and among US and Canadian unions:
We’ve had a close working relationship with the LA County Fed… Our first Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers conference that we held, the keynote speakers were [top LACFL officials] Maria Elena Durazo and Miguel Contreras. Miguel was actually here in Toronto with the farm workers in the 70s, and that’s how I got involved in trade unionism, [through] the farm worker boycott committee. And so he was pleased to come back up here, with his partner and his son, and she at that point was the national co-chair of the Immigrant Workers’ Freedom Ride, that was organized for this mass descent on Washington about immigrant workers rights. So they both spoke at our first Workers of Colour conference, and we spent a fair bit of time talking about what they had done and what the Hotel Worker Rising campaign was [doing]... then Miguel invited me down to their first ever fully delegated convention. They…have monthly meetings, and they brought 1000 people in to lay out a very specific program of building power. So we stole a bit of that idea when we pulled our [May 2009] stewards assembly together. And then Julius Deutsch [late TYRLC Executive Assistant] went down to work with them for 4 weeks when they were running the last presidential campaigns…to see how they did that work. And we brought Maria Elena up to be a keynote speaker at the Good Jobs summit [in November 2008]. So we’ve had ongoing relations with them.

Thus, the TYRLC’s pragmatic mobilization unionism practice had its contemporary start in the US in the 1990s. In the context of the rise of John Sweeney to the leadership of the AFL-CIO in 1995, in 1994 labour council leaders organized a strategizing meeting, which led to a July 1996 national conference called “Organizing for Justice in Our Community.” Of 600 LCs, some 160 committed to the AFL-CIO’s “Union Cities program” that had “the goals of reestablishing the councils as support centers for local organizing and focal points for expanding labor’s economic and political power” (Ness & Eimer, 2001, p. 4). The program also promoted labour councils to “develop union leadership that reflected the diversity of the working community” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 101). The type and nature of initiatives have varied widely. As Fletcher and
Gapasin (2008) point out, “The best labor councils created local labor movements by developing strategic political community alliances, which in turn created more favorable conditions for organizing.” There were some LCs with an organizing orientation prior to the AFL-CIO re-orientation that “created alliances between organized labor and communities (particularly communities of color) [and so] facilitated union growth and organization” (p. 72). These, “organizing [LCs] usually have eight behaviors…[including] organizing new members, mobilizing against employer opposition, building political power, promoting economic growth, providing economic education, supporting the right to organize, and fostering diversity” (Gapasin, 2001, p. 81). For example, after the New Voice slate was elected at the AFL-CIO in 1995, they rolled out a “member-focused economics education program” called Common Sense Economics, although they seemed not to promote it sufficiently with affiliates. Even as some labour councils carried out train-the-trainer programs to disseminate it, it was not made enough of a priority to ensure local union trainers had time and resources to carry it out (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, pp. 71, 257).

The 1999 New Alliance launched by the AFL-CIO saw a major institutional re-orientation that aimed “to transform the institutional basis of labor councils by encouraging international affiliates and local unions to participate more fully in the revitalization of councils and state federations” (Ness & Eimer, 2001, p. 5). Nonetheless, a number of AFL-CIO national affiliates “were particularly resistant to [LC's] role in organizing” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 86) because of struggles over national vs. local power and control. While the national and international unions want to set the unionizing agenda, the local councils “by definition attempt to build local political and economic power of working people” (p. 86). LCs see local power as important as sectoral power; national and international unions do not (p. 87). Cartwright (July
10, 2009) discusses the inherent challenge of labour council based organizing in relation to the OMWC, and how the institutional form of unions and their networks mean that LCs must develop local and translocal interests and relationships in the same moments:

We’re constantly just glorified beggars, as a central labour body. And it doesn’t matter if you’re a national body or a local body, you are constantly going to affiliates and saying, “Do you want to sign on to a campaign?” And you never get 100%. I mean, what we’re able to do is get clusters of key affiliates… the national unions [say], “Well, we’ve got a CUPE campaign on x.” So that’s coming down this way. And we’re saying, “Well, we’ve got a local campaign on y.” There’s only so much money and people to deal with all the good ideas that are around.

So, while the TYRLC, similar to the Union Cities program, may be seen as, present[ing] the possibility of a comprehensive articulation of the relationship between unionized and non-union workers, between the labor movement and other social forces (e.g. movements of minorities, immigrants, and women) and between issues of shop floor democracy and internationalism. (Gapasin, 2001, p. 86)

the complexity of bureaucratic social relations is a material barrier to achieving this. As TYRLC Labour Educator Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) puts it simply, “The structure we have for the labour movement is not the most conducive structure to practice what you preach.” Also conditioned by this bureaucratic reality, the LACFL succeeded in persuading “only a handful of 325 local unions” affiliated with it to adopt an “organizing agenda” (Gapasin, 2001, p. 95) as part of its efforts to develop improved union-community relationships, to have more diverse executive board representation and “build bridges to multiple communities” (p. 82). As well, the LACFL still functions bureaucratically as:

The real decisions remain with key committees... [and]... delegate meetings are usually seen as opportunities to rubber-stamp previously made decisions. CLC agendas move very rapidly without providing much opportunity to intervene. The
decision-making processes of the LACFL are not readily accessible to most rank-and-file delegates, let alone rank-and-file union members. (p. 99)

A past executive committee member, U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) sees the TYRLC functioning similarly:

John Cartwright…runs that Labour Council…even though it looks better now, outwardly, I don’t think it’s changed…he decided what were the issues that were the priority issues and what he believed the boys thought the issues were, and that was what Labour Council was going to deal with.

For NUG3 (July 31, 2009) this is related to why there was no Council involvement in the J4W campaign phase. Referring to the TYRLC President, NUG3 says:

He was trying to portray a more progressive and more active Labour Council [but] I think that, it was still within a fairly narrow framework that “The best way to protect workers’ interests… and the best way to protect wages is through unionization.” And while we would agree that collective representation is a very critical and essential point to protecting wages and working conditions, it kind of belies the reality of what’s happening … through labour-market restructuring and the response of unions to neoliberal restructuring, which unions were forced to, in some cases, participate in: Protecting the core at the expense of the periphery of workers. And so I think anything related to improving conditions for workers that did not involve unionization as a key strategy was seen with a little bit of disdain by folks like John Cartwright, at that point.

With such a union institutional reality driving coalition building, a political capacity-building orientation to community and rank-and-file workers seems far off. With competing campaigns jockeying for position, the dominant worker-activation, mobilization orientation to organizing is not surprising. And with that being the deeply rooted mode of internal union organizing, it is difficult to see how unions might proceed differently in external relationships
with community. U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) reveals one way in which ideological practice operates within unions to condition the reproduction of pragmatic anti-racist mobilization unionism:

When I worked in [that union]…it wasn’t ever saying to the members, “What are your demands?” …We were told… “These are the demands we want you to go out and mobilize and pull your committee people out on and so that we can have 20 people in front of the [corporation, making these demands]. [We never said] “Is this the most important thing to you?” No, I was instructed and … I thought that was the right thing, I thought… “This is the program and I’m going to pull them out and help them understand why this is their issue,” and then it looks like this is their voice [but]…it’s using them, tokenizing them, all this shit. But that was how you delivered. And then the big freaking [corporation] sees that these women of colour, these Black women, Filipino women, Chinese women are out there fighting for lower workloads. And did we ever ask them if that was the key issue?

Determined by the union as an institution, agency and decision-making become “things” in relation to rank-and-file workers, even as they are active in trying to achieve campaign demands. Such pragmatic anti-racist mobilization unionism can co-exist with business-oriented practice quite well. And the extralocally dominant approach to revitalization conditions what happens locally. A significant and defining example of this is the “Change to Win” (CTW) coalition in the US. Led by the SEIU, and including the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, UNITE HERE!, UFCW, LIUNA, UFW and the Carpenters Union, the coalition came together in 2005 through a split from the AFL-CIO that “seemed to defy explanation.” The high-level power struggle inside that national federation lacked “substantive debate” and seemed to have “been about personalities, egos, turf, and money” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 4). SEIU is one union that has become well known for organizing low-waged workers of colour using militant tactics in a from-below form of mobilization. After the international office officially decided to make
external organizing a priority, SEIU had a major success in working with non-unionized workers in Justice for Janitors campaign, in which the militancy and tenacity of mainly Latino cleaners led to their successful unionization in 1990 (Moody, 2007, p. 124). From 1987 to 1995 the percentage change from non-unionized to unionized janitors was from 10 to 90 percent of the workforce (Kelley, 1999, p. 53). This kind of organizing is being done in Canada on a much smaller scale. CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) reports that, “We're working with SEIU in Ottawa on a living wage campaign that we launched 2 months ago, and they're very happy to work with us, because they're trying to organize janitors that are contracted out from the city of Ottawa.”

Yet, even when workers are successfully unionized as a result of such union-community mobilizing, most unions do not take in large numbers of members at once in a welcoming and democratic way: “incumbent union leaders are unwilling to provide full access, let alone real political power, to newcomers” (Gapasin, 2001, p. 96). There are often major power struggles within large unions when “newcomers” demand democratic practice, leading to heavy-handed, top-down control responses by the national unions. SEIU has put locals in trusteeship over this (Gapasin, 2001; Moody, 2007) and continues to do so (Brenner, 2008).

As it grows, SEIU is becoming increasingly top heavy, with more and more mainly white labour officials cooperating with management, and pulling in enormous salaries. Gus Bevona, president of New York City SEIU local 32B-32J, “makes multiple salaries totaling about half a million dollars” (Parker & Gruelle, 1999, p. 22). A challenge to these salaries by a reform rank-and-file movement, representing janitors, doormen and elevator operators, failed after two rounds of member voting, in the face of intense organizing from above, a reflection also of a fragmented consciousness (and the process by which it develops) in the rank and file. There was also “the highly controversial trusteeship of SEIU Local 399 in Los Angeles in September 1995”
Such heavy-handed power and control is more reminiscent of “bread-and-butter” or “pure-and-simple” unionism (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 141) than a forward-thinking practice of union social change.

The change-from-above orientation of CTW has a corporate orientation to it, with their vision of unionism being to “grow labour” through the capture of “market-share” (Moody, 2007, p. 172). One way to do this is through merging into mega-unions, such as UNITE HERE. Such an orientation to renewal treats the working class effectively as property to be owned by one union and or another (Palmer, 1992, p. 371). This is evidenced in the four solutions to the crisis in the labour movement advanced by CTW: consolidation of unions to make them more efficient; a reduction of the number of unions depending on their core jurisdiction; develop links with unions outside the US in similar sectors, known as pragmatic international solidarity; and to have a policy of domestic political flexibility, which meant strategic support or voting would be possible as no interests and political party relationships were permanent (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 130). In light of this, it is not surprising that Moody (2007) argues that the orientation of SEIU is actually taking unionism away from progressive renewal.

While today's focus on organizing may at times unionize more workers, when carried out in a competitive way (see for example, Kutalik & Gaus, 2008), the reality of the challenge of unionizing in an era of increasing precarious work is not addressed. As noted in the MISWAA (2006) report, only 11% of low-waged workers were in unions versus 38% in higher-waged jobs (p. 20). In relation to this, U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) notes of her involvement in the OMWC that another piece of why I got involved was [because] not everybody [is] able to organize a union in their workplace. It’s either because the workplace is too small or just when you do organize, they shut it down – that’s the reality. I’ve had
campaigns like that during my time – [the businesses] just shut down… it’s just horrible.

Yates (2007) decries active inter-union competition through “retaliatory poaching of other union memberships” (p. 69). Such struggles over control of union bureaucratic social relations has led to divisive mergers and splits, such as the UNITE HERE/SEIU-Workers United debacle (Labor Notes, 2009). All of these are unions that represent lower-waged workers in overlapping labour-market sectors in Canada and the US. This is happening as part of the clear trend towards consolidation through mergers: before the CTW split from the AFL-CIO, there were sixty-three unions in the federation. Nonetheless “the majority of union members are [now] represented by only ten to fifteen unions” (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008, p. 132). Among TYRLC affiliates, two large SEIU locals, eight Workers United locals and the one large UNITE HERE local are all represented (TYRLC, 2009b). As Tattersall (2010) notes such consolidation also, “reduces opportunities for local worker participation in union strategic decision-making” (p. 179). With rank-and-file members becoming structurally more distant from discussion, debating and making decisions on organizing, bridge building amongst unionized and non-unionized workers becomes more institutionally difficult.

Such a focus on consolidation politics and the lack of LC power in the face of this perhaps sheds some light on the absence of unions in workers rights struggles on a range of employment standards. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) remarks on this in relation to late 1990s early 2000 organizing in Ontario, as “draconian legislation was going through with almost no fight back from organized labour.” And NUG4 (July 19, 2009) exclaims, remembering the large and over-policed community and non-workers rights group organized demonstration in April 2001 in
Toronto against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, “Oh my God, where were the trade unions?!"

How the consolidation union renewal focus can influence labour-community campaign activity is also exemplified by U4 (Sept. 24, 2009). Officials and staff of her union would not even debate supporting the J4W phase of the campaign. The ideological practice of separating unionized workers out from community was one reason for this:

They didn’t see non-unionized workers as part of them. And they didn’t even see their current members who…may be unionized in one context and non-unionized in another, as [having the minimum wage] as one of their key issues and how as a union we can help to leverage [that]…[And] if the minimum wage has been increased, then fighting for increases for [union members]…would have been easier because then we’d even have not as far to go [in bargaining]…. [But] those …that are making the decisions at the top levels of the union were not seeing the links between why we needed to make that fight…our own.

There was subjective ground on which to build this understanding as many executive board members had lived experience of racialized low-waged work. But, while they appear as leaders on the executive board there are longer-serving others and/or paid staff that drive the decision-making, coordinating translocal bureaucratic social relations’ reproduction. This compromises some service-based achievements but the institution will accept that to ensure the integrity of bureaucratic social relations:

If they would have…allowed those leaders [on] the executive board to develop, to discuss their analysis of why there was such a disparity in terms of wages and then why this fight is their fight…they would have been able to help support them making those links and that would have been a priority for [the] workers to fight on. (U4, Sept. 24, 2009)
Interestingly, both she and U2 note that when minimum wages go up officialdom has “to deliver.” For the institution to continue to “justify its existence” (U4, Sept. 24, 2009) and to not “look bad” to the membership (U2, Dec. 12, 2009), there must be a decent gap between the union and non-union low-waged worker rate. “The union’s going to have to be more organized and be more sophisticated in how it achieves its bargaining demands” with a minimum wage increase (U4, Sept. 24, 2009). This is even though it is also materially the case that “lowering standards for non-unionized workers is something that …puts pressure on bargaining collective agreements” (NUG6, Sept. 24, 2009). But a lack of rank-and-file confidence around officials’ negotiating successes is potentially worse for the institution if it results in workers having reality-disintegrating doubts about the organization of the union. So it seems that it was initially perceived as better for U4’s union not to organize for the provincial minimum increase.

Nonetheless, with the backdrop of the TYRLC equity and strategic plan texts that got approved by the TYRLC early on in the OMWC, NUG3 (July 31, 2009) believes that over time, “[Officials] were pushed…by the weight of racialized communities in the membership” in affiliate unions to take on that labour-community campaign. In the next section, I will explore further the changes in class relations in terms of the OMWC and the effect this had had on unions and renewal efforts.

**Union Renewal and Working-Class Relations**

Interviews with OMWC organizers revealed changes in multi-layered working-class relations within their unions and disjunctures between unionized and non-unionized workers. U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) discusses how merger-based renewal efforts have led to a push for consciousness changes within her private-sector union:
Our demographic has changed. I wouldn't say they're all minimum wage earners, but lower wage earners. At the time [of my minimum wage project] we didn't have a lot of health care workers [or] retail workers. I think retail workers were just coming into the union, there was some mergers happening around then. But in our minds, union meant $20, $25, $30 an hour, so people would say, "Why is [the minimum wage] a union issue when this issue isn't in our union, it's not us?"

And I've heard people being reminded of that in education [programs] when they do say things like that, “Well actually, today, our union does have a wide range of wage earners, everything from minimum wage to $40 an hour…we started to see you know, unionization of Starbucks and grocery stores, especially some of the lower wage ones were being unionized.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the state and labour-market generated processes of work restructuring have caused both increased insecurity and decreased quality of work as well as a decline in the numbers of unionized workers. For the few postwar decades in which work seemed steady and stable to those with access to such jobs (generally on a racialized and gendered basis), such higher-waged unionized workers were institutionally separated from the working class as a whole, both in the workforce and, by association, in their union. The members of U3’s union thus became ideologically separated from the community, with the union as institution, their union wages and their workplaces marking the material boundaries. More recently though, private sector unions like U3’s that formerly had a strong manufacturing industry base have had to shift the focus of new worker representation to various kinds of often lower-waged service sectors. Even as community continues as a “buzzword” for “social movement’ union organizers” (Kelley, 1999, p. 43), this inward-looking focus of higher-waged unionized workers, as conditioned by racialized, gendered and bureaucratic class relations, has negatively affected labour-community solidarity efforts, and class consciousness as part of this.

While U3’s comments suggest an incremental consciousness change towards a little more unity,
CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) reveals this, referencing the CUPE 79/416 Toronto municipal workers strike underway at the time of our interview:

If you're not able to support those workers and support people in the community that… don't have the same kind of benefits that you do, when you start arguing for those benefits, particularly as a public sector union, [non-unionized workers’] taxes are paying your salary. If [non-unionized workers] are doing the same job as you and you're getting a hefty percentage more in pay, I just feel that the gap creates more tension and [impetus] for [city] councillors to contract out those jobs….as this gap between unionized workers and non-unionized workers grows, the pressure for the city to hire non-unionized workers increases…if there was less of a gap, then contracting out [would be] less attractive as an option …a lot of people in the community don't understand what the unions are doing. A lot of people feel that a lot of unions are out of touch. And I would say some of them are and some of them aren't.

Related to this, U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) notes a key effect of being paid union staff, “Some of us get very comfortable with the lifestyle we sought from being a worker for the union movement.” She also speaks to the racialized and gendered working class relations gap, what Kelley (1999) sees as part of the “dialectic of work and community” (p. 48),

You know the concept [“an injury to one is an injury to all”]? It applies only within the [union] membership… it seems to be there’s a limitation. It doesn’t seem to apply to society as a whole, because I have struggled with certain communities that I was a part of about addressing racism, about addressing [difficult] neighbourhood problems… because we have members who live there. So it seems to be very limited [to] collective agreement bargaining… and that’s why the minimum wage campaign to me was to expand the scope.

I will now further discuss the practice of pragmatic anti-racism in the OMWC and how this is related to the goals and activities of union revitalization in general.
Union Leadership and Pragmatic Anti-Racism

Simply inserting women and equity-seeking groups into the existing union structures without understanding that the equity project is part of a larger gender politic to transform labour as a social movement will not alter the politics and practices of trade unions. (Kainer, 2009, p. 32)

U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) discusses a number of inter-related reasons for what I have named the pragmatic anti-racist mobilizing of the 2007 minimum wage campaign. As union density continues to decrease, unions are “not using creative strategies, we’re not reaching out to people wherever they’re at, we’re not connecting with them in ways [in which] they can trust the labour movement.” She notes that some officials know this and so are trying to organize differently. They are not compelled by a desire for social transformation; they are coming from “a dues-based place.” A basic and long-eroded employment standard like the minimum wage thus offered an opportunity “to start to…build partnerships and start to build the unions’ profile with those communities,” communities which are also reflective of a number of affiliates’ members. In her union, “the majority were workers of colour…a lot of women.” The bottom line for the labour involvement in the OMWC for U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) was thus the relationship between appearances of reality, current officials desire to maintain power, and union renewal:

I think definitely a phenomenon would be that the union at least had to look more reflective of its membership to continue to grow, to continue to keep its members happy. I mean, we’re nowhere near being reflective of our memberships across the trade union movement…otherwise those members will just organize against the people in power [in unions] and take away their power base. So I think they had to appear to be strong on those issues.

Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) agrees, “They really realized, if we don’t get on board around these issues, then we will die. And so it was definitely about renewal...the old way [of organizing] was
not going to work.” As discussed in previous chapters, a key part of how “getting on board” has been happening is in officialdom’s contradictory responses to demands and self-organizing of racialized members. As Lukas and Vashti Persad (2004) note,

the structures of organized labour changed only after workers of colour organized, pushed for, and forced change. Workers of Colour did most of the anti-racism work. They were responsible for putting racism on the agenda of unions and labour bodies, and the development of initiatives, policies and programs to address racism that were implemented within organized labour. These activists faced tremendous resistance and experienced isolation. (p. 19)

Walker (2009), Wall (2009), and Das Gupta (2007) all discuss how one of the aspects of change, designated equity or affirmative action seats are or become tokenistic. Designating seats has not been the TYRLC approach however, as John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) explains when changes in representation started at the Council,

The Labour Council executive was first on it when Linda Torney was president. I think [we] had a third leaders of colour at that time, and the majority were women, and has been almost since then. It went down for a little while...and [we]...suffered after the Harris election, and some of the push-back on equity was just happening all over the place. After 2002, we consciously said, “That’s going to be... the future of the working class in this city, [it] is going to look different than it did 20 years ago and 10 years ago, and we’ve got to be proactively engaging leaders and activists in that changing working class. And we’ve got to make space, and we’ve got to provide leadership roles, and we’ve got to provide the connections and make the bridges.

As significant as these changes are, one question that arises for me is, when do such pragmatic actions help set in motion broader changes and when do they create an appearance of change that assists in institutional reproduction? As CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) comments, “It’s all well and good to diversify your board by figures. What my interest would be to see what the agenda is. What’s
the agenda, what the business of this board? Because, that’s the real question.” From his union experience, CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) also comments that “their methods get in the way. I’ve seen that time and time again, dealing with the labour movement. They don’t know how to collaborate.” Thus, as noted above, having “bridge builders” who cultivate relationships between labour and community to build effective and strong coalitions that have legitimacy in both institutional worlds is often identified as key to union renewal. Given what has been reported of the TYRLC and what Palmer (1992) refers to as top union officials’ almost “charismatic control” (p. 373) of their organizations, in the TYRLC context being a racialized person and an effective bridge builder is revealed by NUG3 (July 31, 2009) to be fraught:

I get the sense that it is an ongoing struggle, in terms of how the decisions get made by racialized people that are in the leadership and on the staff. I suspect that challenging those institutions and processes of racialization are ongoing, and that we haven’t seen a wholesale transformation, but that it’s still very much a process and a struggle [for]… people who do come from that kind of union/community, sitting-on-the-fence, a-foot-in-each-side [experience]… Cartwright has [approached] the Good Jobs Summit [organizing], supporting that tactic in the same way that he supported the minimum wage [organizing], as a kind of media opportunity to profile the labour movement and build support for the labour movement. [But] you’ve got people who kind of push it a little more to open up the space and involve different communities and folks that, despite Cartwright, pushes the agenda forward a little bit.

CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) echoes some of this, noting how the efforts of one racialized staff person have been effective in disturbing the social relations of everyday Council activity:

I think [that person] has really done a lot to push John Cartwright to slow down and make sure that decisions are made by the [Good Jobs For All] coalition and not just [behave as if] “This is a Labour Council thing and we’ve got the money and we’re just going to do it.”
NUG4 (July 19, 2009) also sees that same successor coalition as perhaps having more potential than the OMWC because of well-respected racialized women – with long histories of bridge-building activity – insisting on having a meaningful presence, for themselves and non-union workers rights groups with a political capacity-building orientation. Women of colour who have fought to be both inside and out of the union movement, who have and continued to navigate bureaucratic social relations can be powerful pragmatic bridge builders:

[T]hey also wanted to send a clear message to the trade union movement that they have to be part of it, and you can’t fuck with them, right? They’re legitimate, they’re part of it, and once you’re working together, [officialdom] can’t say, “Oh, I didn’t know."

U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) reveals how being such a bridge builder in white- and bureaucratically-dominated officialdom requires a number of navigational techniques, including “dress[ing] up” messages for officials who are “not all open-minded to the concept of embrac[ing everyone].” Such messages include basics for even pragmatic anti-racism, such as the “lack of… recognition in the movement still…that the membership needs reps, [and] representatives needs leadership [and] that’s not just English-speaking folks.” CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) also uncovers how limited pragmatic representation is not enough given how the social relations of labour tend to happen:

Why are [they] so uneducated about race issues? Why is it that a [racialized] worker can be victimized…[and’ when we come in and do the investigation, and they know here’s a third party coming to present the facts, all of a sudden then, okay, it’s recognized that the situation was wrong... People getting bullied and being fired because they spoke up, that kind of thing.
Through analogy, CG2 (July 17, 2009) analyzes how the variation in content but general consistency of form in bureaucratic social relations in institutional functioning is a fundamental barrier to anything but pragmatic change in unions:

It seems that they’re more reflective and more representative than 8 or 10 years ago, but having more people of colour, people from [various] backgrounds sitting [on the executive] or being a staff is one thing but that doesn’t mean that…it’s a better movement. The labour movement is very different than [the] police [but] it’s like, [the] police have more people of colour [but] we’re talking about the [whole social] system needing to be changed. I’m thinking that even though the Labour Council cannot be compared to…the police…at the same time we don’t want just some [change in it]; we want total changes.

Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) also notes “structurally and systemically, the labour movement is no different than a corporation.” For CG2 (July 17, 2009) as well, unions are more corporations than a “movement against capital, against the system” and their mandate is to work within the system…the way that businesses are functioning, [unions] also function. The way corporations are treating their employees, [unions] are treating [their] employees…I think it's very deep and rooted…and so that the changing is going to have become more transparent and more grassroots and more participatory and all that; you can't just go around saying, “We are looking for more direct multiple participation, more democracy, members involvement”, but everything that you do [must change].

John Clarke (Sept. 25, 2009) explores the issue of such institutionalized union social relations and the lack of real challenge to them, both from within and without:

A couple of years ago, I was at an event where [labour historian] Bryan Palmer was speaking and he made a point that I thought was very, very good. He said that within the Left at the moment…there was so much lack of clarity around the issue of bureaucratization within the trade unions. There was always,
traditionally, a strong left current that was active at the rank-and-file level, both in communities and in unions that actually had a critique and an analysis of why the unions were bureaucratized and why their leaderships were inadequate and … in many ways, on the other side. But [I think] that has fallen to a very low level. And the notion of “loyal opposition” has become the dominant model of left activity within trade unions… By and large, those people who are close to the union leadership are suffering from overexposure to hospitality suites and per diems and they’re politically compromised and don’t have the fire in their bellies necessary… [for] defying the… bureaucratic mis-leadership in unions.

Challenging bureaucratic perks and practices also includes interrupting the idea that democracy happens simply by attending union meetings and following resolution-making procedures to have a voice, to tell your individual or collective story. In a profoundly institutionalized dominant and local social reality, disrupting bureaucracy by members doing things like organizing a march to their union office and taking it over when officialdom fails to represent them becomes synonymous with being anti-union (Clarke, Sept. 25, 2010). As such, as Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) notes “we need to create a culture where we frankly challenge our activists to do this as work that needs to be done without necessarily demanding compensation for it.” Given that need in the context of ongoing predominating union bureaucratic social relations, I will now turn to a look at the tensions this conditions in the labour-community coalitions of the OMWC.

**Labour-Community Coalition Tensions**

The Labour Council’s kind of like a moving train. You’re on the train or you’re off the train but you’re not steering the train. (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009)
Frege et al. (2004) define labour-community coalitions as “involving discrete, intermittent, or continuous joint activity in pursuit of shared or common goals between trade unions and other non-labour institutions in civil society, including community, faith, identity, advocacy, welfare, and campaigning organizations” (p. 139). Yet CG7’s above remark reflects what Tattersall (2010) has found in other local and national contexts, “Popular union conceptions are that coalitions are a means to supplement union goals, that community organizations are an add-on to union power and strategy” (p. 161).

Both Nissen (2004) and Tattersall (2005) propose four types of labour-community coalitions that are a combination of actual practices and ideal models. Following Frege et al. (2004), Nissen (2004) lists the forms as, “vanguard” (led and defined by labour), “common-cause” (overlap of a shared interest), “bargained coalitions” (negotiation occurs to define a mandate), and “integrative coalitions, where unions offer unconditional support to coalition partners” (p. 50). On this last type, Frege et al. (2004) note that they “may arise when activists from new social movements achieve positions of influence in trade unions” (p. 143). Tattersall’s (2005) “ad hoc coalition” is episodic and instrumental; the “support” type is labour-driven; the “mutual-support” form is similar to the “common-cause” type, and; she uses the term “deep coalition” to describe an ideal type of democratic structure with a “long-term strategic plan to build power” (p. 108). Thus, each author identifies a range of depth, mutuality and shared purpose among their types. While J4W, the ONR coalition and some individuals in the TYRLC-driven coalitions were seeking deep or integrative coalition development, throughout the 7 years of the OMWC the practice can be said to have oscillated different versions of ad hoc, bargaining and vanguard. As Tattersall (2005) notes, “Before unions are able to engage in deep coalitions and truly harness the capacity of union-community coalitions they must engage in a process of
internal change” (p. 109). And, as I discussed above and in Chapters Five and Six, pragmatic anti-racist changes may appear significant but do not fundamentally democratize union structures to make way for building such integrative or deep relationships.

How labour officialdom uses its power in relation to its own members and community people and groups is historically conditioned, legally, politically and socially. I have looked above at some of the specific challenges of labour to revitalize itself in a coherent, effective and non-instrumental way. The combination of the corporate, mega-merger approach and the lack of labour council power given the affiliation of independent unions system, conditions an instrumental, institutionally driven orientation to communities regardless of what individual union staff might wish to do. And as CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) suggests, supportive low-level union staff and stewards acting as individuals in community meetings and coalitions are not enough to build a real bridge, since “these are the guys on the ground, they’re not the ones who’re pushing policy.” Steve Watson (Aug. 13, 2009 reveals how this played out for him in the OMWC:

The CAW at the time was in a kind of a weird space and I worked for the CAW and it’s hard for me to say this, but it seemed at the time that [President Buzz] Hargrove wanted to shift the focus to lobbying politicians. It was difficult to know exactly how to put my finger on this but it wasn’t that they opposed the work we were doing around the minimum wage and the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign, otherwise I wouldn’t have been able to do anything at all if the answer was simply no. The issue was to what extent was it recognized in the union as important. Well, we sent the petitions out. A letter went out from Hargrove to all the local unions in Ontario in the CAW with the petitions and it was supported. Were huge resources put into it? No. Were some resources put into it? Yes. Was it primarily led by the union? Not really, because I’m just a national representative in the education department. I’m not an assistant or a director. I don’t have my own department with staff and resources and so on. So was the Ontario Needs a Raise campaign as high profile as it could have been? No, but it did have some profile.
In such limited bridge-building efforts, who is the “community” that unions as institutions an/or individuals are reaching out to? While communities do exist locally based on race, culture, and geographically driven realities that can generate solidarity (Cranford & Ladd, 2003), Kelley (1999) points out that “community” is not reducible to “locality”, particularly for many racialized people. “Workers from China, Japan, the Caribbean, Mexico, Ireland and so on are often still bound up with the politics of their home country” (p. 55). Unions’ frequent tendencies towards an uncomplicated “save Canadian jobs” nationalist messaging belies the lived reality of an increasing number of people that spans the local, national and international. Tattersall (2010) also offers a way out of the “colloquial and vague” use of “community.” She models three interpretations of community as intersecting and reinforcing: community as organization, as place, and as shared identity or interests (pp. 18-19).

Most simply, some workers organize in community (since it is “not union”) but all workers live there. Yet the OMWC experience of most research participants is that the TYRLC as an organization has not made it a priority to understand communities as complex and actually made up of people, even though building community power is one of their strategic policy objectives. Given what I have discussed in previous chapters, this is due to the collective officialdom interest and will in perpetuating the union as a bureaucratically organized institution. Increasing social and economic and social marginalization of working people, and the associated pressure on unions to be relevant for them, nonetheless creates the need for at least creating an appearance of putting humanity before institution.

In terms of financial support of community organizing, CG3’s (Sept. 4, 2009) OMWC involved community-based group received funding from the TYRLC and a range of other unions. As revealed in Chapter Six, her group works under the wing of labour, allowing them to
shape her group’s approach. The non-union workers rights group of NUG4 (July 31, 2009), with its determination to do capacity-building organizing with the most marginalized and precarious workers on a range of workers rights issues is funded almost entirely through foundations and individual supporters.

Related to this, Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) finds that “because of the resources or connections they have, [labour] can bully communities, or can be really aggressive around how things get done, and who does what, and what’s everyone’s role.” This kind of orientation left NUG1 (July 24, 2009) “quite suspicious and dubious” about the TYRLC 2007 campaign phase and the possibilities for movement building beyond it: “the goal for [J4W] when we were organizing was to try to build leadership amongst low-wage worker communities, and I didn’t have the sense that that was what was going on with the 2007 campaign.” Similarly on the 2007 phase, U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) states, “The community consultations are very crass. I’d get a call from Julius or John, ‘Can you meet in 2 days for 6 hours? Can you speak at this forum with us now?’ And so, there’s a loss of authenticity there.” CG7 (Aug. 13, 2009) comments similarly,

I think they saw a political opportunity and I think sometimes when people are playing politics there's an urgency…[but] sometimes if things are done right it's the grassroots mobilization that creates the political opportunity… so I think there was just a little bit of a disconnect in how certain organizations and individuals kind of got bulldozed as this window was opening up and they felt that if they didn't take advantage of it, then the window would close.

She also thinks, “sometimes Labour Council is more about flash and gloss and marketing” than really building relationships and “it does take, stepping back and having that conversation and I don’t think they really take that time.”
Tensions also arise when labour becomes interested in or concerned about community groups that have some success on workers rights issues. NUG4 (July 19, 2009) describes this as “territorialism [and] cautiousness.” And even as more coalition-building strategy discussions are had, labour still remains in a reactive mode, in relation to strikes and elections; with staff overwhelmed. On this she notes, “we have the same conversations over and over and over again, and I think, they’re just not building those relationships and those connections and a way of really having a long-term vision.” With groups in the US reporting similar experiences to the TYRLC campaign phase, Nissen (2004) arrives at some generalizable conclusions from his South Florida living wage campaign study and his review of labour-community coalition literature. While bridge-builders, resource injection and choosing widely-resonant projects are coalition developers, labour control of projects, of community allies’ activities in them and of their dissenting opinions are common practices that ultimately stifle movement building through labour-community organizing. He also concludes that a resurgence of social movement activism more broadly is what is ultimately needed for labour-community coalition growth (pp. 52, 58-59).

I have looked at the activities of the OMWC and what people involved understood about the connections between such a workers rights project, class struggle in general and the contemporary focus on union renewal by labour councils and federations. I will now focus in Chapter Eight on the issues of education activities and learning through the OMWC, particularly in terms of the content and the relationship with the organizing and mobilizing by different groups during the campaign.
Chapter Eight:
Workers’ education and Learning in OMWC Organizing

Introduction

For more than a century, before modern unions existed, what falls alternately under the name of labour education, union education, labour studies and workers’ education (Taylor, 2001) has been important in Canada in different forms and to varying depths, for “teaching people about justice, decent work and ways to overcome discrimination” (LEC, 2007, p. 6). “Union” and “labour” education are generally used interchangeably and does not include workers’ education taking place in non-union related settings. While generally overlooked as organizations providing labour education, because of their institutionalized location outside of unionized labour, workers centres also provide a range of education (Fine, 2006; Jayaraman & Ness, 2005) of both the non-formal and informal learning types.

Spencer (2006) estimates unionized workers’ education participation numbering approximately 120,000 (p. 85) in activities that can be categorized generally into both non-formal adult education and informal learning (Gereluk, Spencer, & Briton, 1999). Non-formal education is defined by Spencer (2006) as that which is non-credentialed yet organized as an educational session on evenings, weekends or in weeklong schools. According to Newman (2000), social action-based non-formal learning is unplanned but “very consciously done” (p. 268). Informal education is essentially informal learning that goes on all the time as people engage in individual or collective activities in groups or organizations (Spencer, 2006, p. 10). The workers’ education occurring through events, conferences and campaigns like the OMWC is generally a mix of these two forms.
The relationship between worker organizing and education varies between union and community organizations, as well as among unions themselves. In the union renewal context, there is often value placed on not simply training workers to carry out the day-to-day functions inherent to unions as institutions, but of creating opportunities for building the critical thinking and knowledge basis needed for challenging an economic and social climate increasingly not in workers' collective favour. Given that and the prominence of education content and practice in the OMWC, I explore in this chapter that relationship between workers rights organizing and the various worker-education projects and activities undertaken, especially in the labour-community context. I argue that popular education techniques, the bringing together of multiracial groups of workers, and the post-campaign text-based coordination discussed earlier have all had the effect of giving educational practices an appearance of education/organizing praxis. I will explore the types of union and community non- and informal learning activities during the period of the OMWC, by organizations involved in the OMWC, to see the relationship between educational events or moments and workers organizing. Through this I will explore what kinds of education disrupted or reproduced predominating ideological practices, social relations, and mobilizing and capacity-building organizing approaches. The sections are organized as Union Educational Activities: Types and Purposes, Labour Councils and Education for Organizing, and Learning for Mobilizing and Capacity Building.

**Union Educational Activities: Types and Purposes**

**Training on “Tools” and “Issues”**

Today unions provide most of the labour educational work, although there are a number of college and university Labour Studies diploma and degree programs that do overlap and
collaborate with unions and their organizations. Most labour education – offered to union staff, official and members – has three main purposes (Spencer, 1994, p. 46):

1. to prepare and train union lay members to play an active role in the union;
2. to educate activists and members about union policy, about changes in the union environment such as new management techniques or changes in labour law;
3. to develop union consciousness, to build common goals and to share organizing and campaigning experience.

While adult education may also have vocational, recreational and self-development purposes (Spencer, 2006), labour education has an implicit social rather than solely individual purpose. That is, the skills, techniques and perspectives learned are meant to be applied to support members collectively, and to promote and develop the union as a whole. As such, it is “one of the few remaining adult education practices that challenges the notion of self-interested subjects competing for a limited supply of objects” (Gereluk, Spencer, & Briton, 2000, p. 75).

Most education provided by unions is seen to fall into three broad types (Spencer, 1994, p. 48):

*Tools* courses such as shop steward training, bargaining and health and safety;
*Issues* courses, which include workplace violence, harassment and discrimination;
*Labour studies*, which examines broader social, political and/or economic topics that affect the context unions are functioning in.

Given the (actual and politics of) cost, time and availability of many issues and labour studies courses the vast majority of members getting access to education are getting the “tools” training variety, paid for by their locals, to prepare them for day-to-day active union roles. For example, at the annual CUPE Ontario School – a 1-week, daytime, workshop-based, educational series for members – 20 of the 24 courses offered were tools based (CUPE, 2007). Some of these courses may or may not include a focus on issues. This will vary with the course level (such as,
introduction to or advanced stewarding) and from union to union. It will also vary with the type of union practice followed by the union. For example, Martin (1995) notes how union education has an important role to play in developing the social unionism orientation of members taking such tools-type training, to build the necessary “enthusiasm and provide the skills needed” (p. 45) to work with the “tension between service and mobilization, between the need for practical help and the desire for broader social transformation” (p. 44).

Working for a large (but shrinking) private sector union that takes up such a social unionism approach, Steve Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) has been involved in the delivery of the union’s unique CAW Paid Education Leave (PEL) program for rank-and-file workers. The PEL creates “lifelong activists” in the union who go on to participate in various issues (Watson, Aug. 11, 2009). The collectively bargained and so employer-paid, 1–4 week programs are held at the CAW’s own centre in Port Elgin. There is a range of tools, issues and labour studies topics addressed, including labour community liaising (CAW, 2010).

**Learning Beyond “Tools” and “Issues”**

To develop a more thorough understanding of the social importance that both non- and informal learning moments have in contemporary labour-community workers-rights organizing, it is useful to look beyond the historical trajectory of tools, issues and labour studies types of labour education in Canada. With some exceptions (for an example, see Lopes & Thomas, 2006), while discussing racialized, gendered and classed social relations as serious issues for unions, the labour education literature tends either to not address or to underplay the significance of the historically-driven bureaucratic functioning of unions today, and the strategic relationship between education and democratically-driven labour and community organizing (LEC, 2007; Taylor, 2001).
Our struggles to learn and understand do not happen externally to our lives, and the time we spend in unions, communities and workplaces, even if educational moments are created that make this seem to be so. Our learning does not happen either before or “after reality has occurred” (Williams, as cited in Martin, 1995, p. 27). As such, the scope of the content of organizing-oriented education, and its purpose and participant involvement, needs to be looked at relationally with workers' ongoing consciousness development and democratic union/community involvement, to see the actual quality of workers becoming “active in the flow of social history” (Newman, 2000, p. 277).

Under social-movement influence, originating in Latin America in the 1970s (Newman, 2000) labour education in many unions of the late 20th century took on a Freirian, popular (Spencer, 2006) or radical democratic (Martin, 1995) orientation in style, technique and, to varying degrees, goals and outcomes. *Praxis* became a common orientation, with educators taking up some understanding of the integration of reflection and action, with social transformation as the ultimate goal of an inseparable thinking and doing (Freire, 1996). Publications such as *Education for Changing Unions* promote a related worker-centred orientation to learning, foregrounding all activities in the experience and knowledge of participants, from which patterns are recognized, and to which new analysis is added, followed by the offering of practical information about services, with the final step being planning for action (Burke et al., 2002, p. 75). Martin (1995) notes that the union context in which this education occurs is one of many layers of power dynamics: coercive power, information power and reward power (p. 81). He also points out that the elected leadership sponsors union education initiatives so the education must “take into account the tensions in the union structure itself” (p. 114). Yet forums in which such valuable skills- and consciousness-building education occurs are
separate from decision-making forums of labour officialdom. And given that activity and consciousness development are relational, mutually-conditioning and inseparable, the degree and depth of educators' ability to “weaken...the hold of dominant ideas on participants” (p. 115) and the effect on new collective, transformative-oriented praxis after such sessions is questionable. Radical methods applied in institutionally delimited settings and moments could well lead to generally recreating and reinforcing existing overall bureaucratic relations of labour even as the course material and educators inspire (for example) important and risky anti-racist and anti-oppressive change in elected official and staff positions. Spencer (2006) notes that these tensions and contradictions are reflected broadly in the field of adult education as a whole today, as the diverse goals reflect a range of values and philosophies, making it unclear whether “most adult education today is geared towards emancipation and democracy” (p. 11).

In relation to this, Watson (Aug. 11, 2009) discusses exploring the learning and organizing potential of addressing working class relations and biases in one of the CAW PEL sessions:

They’re deep seated; they go back generations… to Victorian times and… when the poor laws were abolished in the 1830s. From that point on it was [being said]… “Society won’t support people being idle. You either work or you emigrate or you join the army or you commit suicide but we’re not going to support people being idle.” And that’s that ideology has been with us for a long time and it’s deeply ingrained in our society, in our psyche. It takes a lot of conscious effort to confront that and to educate people around it. I think the work can be done to turn people around on that… my theory [is that] if you can mobilize workers around an issue where they actually are confronting one of their most deep seated prejudices… then you are creating a kind of class consciousness that is deeper than is just happening when it’s something obvious like they’re going to take your frigging pension away … So there’s that kind of consciousness
when you mobilize around a direct attack on you but if you can mobilize around 
[an issue] where you have to actually confront …one of those deep seated 
prejudices and you still come out and march, then you’ve got a group that are 
acting on a deeper, more anti capitalist, more revolutionary understanding of 
society.

This participant also makes connections between learning moments and educational practice 
with the specific community-based Ontario Needs a Raise (ONR) organizing he was part of:

We… drew the connection between…OW and ODSP. [That people on them] 
have a reason to support a minimum wage campaign because unless the minimum 
wage goes up there's no room, there's no space created for raising welfare…By 
the same token, you know people who are on minimum wage or on very low 
wages would have to have a reason to support welfare increases because one of 
the…dynamics that keeps those wages low is the insecurity those workers face 
and if they get fired [or] laid off…So there was an actual connection between the 
two issues although it would require some education to actually make the 
connection for people and we designed the campaign in such a way that 
people…could take [the raise social assistance or the raise minimum wage]
petition or both and use them in different contexts.

Working class conditions are varied, organized materially and ideologically, challenging 
solidarity amongst working people. There is also ground for building solidarity when workers 
understand how their different conditions are similarly extralocally organized. What I suggest is 
also revealed here is not only that education on such complex social issues takes time but it is 
also more comfortable and less risky to do so in an institutionally circumscribed moment that 
allows for it. Workers attending a PEL course are expecting a certain kind of content and 
officials are authorized to deliver it. But workers attending a union meeting do not expect to be 
handed an ONR petition to raise social assistance rates, and may well poor bash if you do give
them one. With the limited and unclear support Watson had for OMWC involvement discussed in the previous chapter, causing such friction might not have helped his relationship with officialdom. Thus bureaucratic social relations and associated class-bias ideologies drive what I see as a limited risk taking, and lead to handing out petitions in safer contexts. I see this as a case of individual consciousness coordination by institutional power, and how the social relations of education and organizing thus separate them in practice, a separation that shapes how we are able to understand the relationality of the content that we are learning or doing.

U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) got involved in the OMWC by taking it up as an organizing project in one of the multi-week union educational programs she was accepted in. Topics include global and local issues, government, homophobia and racism, and public speaking. She notes that the program has been scaled back because a lot of union locals’ collective agreements have suffered and so funding has decreased. The course and project were meant, “to build your skills around political activism [and] lobbying.” While she was told she could pick one of a set of topics or choose her own she says that a supportive labour educator who also did “some really good work around poverty issues and homelessness…probably was an important part of deciding why I wanted to be involved in the campaign.” She and a couple of other women in her local also in the course took it up together.

Something she talked about having learned is key to the capacity building for dissent approach discussed in Chapter Six. U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) describes learning through the organizing project to have been both “very painful” and “fun”. She explains that for dialogue to be effective it needs to be thoughtful:

You really needed to know what people thought about the issues so that you could formulate a social justice argument...to have the responses, because if you bring up an issue like that and you get resistance or opinions that you don't necessarily
agree with you need to have your own perspective [in reply], and yet do it in a way that's respectful and that understands that people don't change their minds overnight about anything. But if you can give an educated response then sometimes... people go away with your ideas, you go away with theirs, and sometimes you change your mind about things or see things differently.

This research participant’s group’s main tactic was sending letters and speaking to city councils about passing a motion to support a minimum wage increase and then to push the province to raise it. Through this educational project, while many of the activities were the same as in an actual campaign, since the focus for her group was to learn, the meaning seemed to be different. Reflection and follow through were expected and the project had a limited time frame, a clear ending. Success was not defined in raising the minimum wage; indeed, there was no connection made or follow-up done translocally to union or community groups after the council letter was sent province wide and the project wrapped up. This was even though one of their events apparently served as a launch for the CAW’s and NDP’s demand for an $8 minimum wage (in undated newspaper article shown to me by U3, Nov. 26, 2009). Fellow union members would later mention to her that they noticed the request being debated by their local council and once she saw on the news some time later that a motion had been passed. Success was defined though through learning to carry out activities, speaking to issues well and evaluating the work done.

Labour Councils and Education for Organizing

Central labour bodies that bring together affiliated unions frequently offer a range of educational programs. John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) reports that the Canadian Labour Congress is coordinating various “political bargaining” educational efforts, with only a few local councils across Canada taking this up with the TYRLC-type of equity orientation,
The Vancouver Labour Council has held its first Aboriginal Workers/Workers of Colour conference last year. We’ve been talking to them about that for 7 or 8 years now and they’ve finally managed to pull one together. We’ve worked with Montreal Labour Council, and they’re trying to figure this out, and...we’re talking about what can we learn from each other, because they do much better work around the jobless coalition and other kinds of things than we do, and also better work around the economic development than we do, partly because it’s a whole national project that they’re able to be part of….So there’s a learning process that’s going on, and the CLC has been trying to establish a whole series of… courses and seminars and meetings of labour councils across the country, to help look at some of the practices that we’ve been able to develop here, or that other ones [that have] been quite successful [elsewhere] then share that [because]….They want labour councils to be the best political bargaining agents they can, in their local community.

The Labour Education Centre (LEC) was created by the Toronto and York Region Labour Council (TYRLC) in 1987. As a sub-institution of the TYRLC it has as its mission “to build the capacity of unions to plan, develop and deliver training, adjustment and labour education programs that transform the lives of individual members and build strength, solidarity and equity of their unions” (LEC, 2007, p. 3). Both the preceding decades’ anti-racist labour-related organizing (Das Gupta, 2007; Lukas & Vashti Persad, 2004) and the deepening gendered and racialized poverty of working people in Toronto led in 2005 to the LEC “activating a coherent labour education framework...informed by an understanding of power relations based on a critical analysis of class, race, and gender in a globalized economy, and seen from an anti-oppression perspective” (LEC, 2005, p. 1). They carry out organizational change programs, and conduct various train-the-trainer and equity workshops. They also do “Popular Education workshops...as applied to training and development, as well as applied to other union activities
like organizing, political action, and coalition building” (LEC, 2008). An example of the latter was their involvement in the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign. Ultimately, the LEC's stated goal is to assist labour in being a “strategic, critical, transformative” vehicle for change and to “help achieve the resurgence of a labour movement that is militant, progressive and democratic” (LEC, 2005, p. 2).

In the era of union renewal, such labour council and union-delivered capacity and consciousness building programs as well as campaigns and conferences, meetings and events are seen as increasingly important forums in which members and staff share moments of social-justice related informal learning (Gereluk et al., 1999). While it takes many forms and “organizing” has many definitions within various unionism practices, the LEC kind of labour education is clearly intended to be organizing-oriented. Yet, as in the other types of union education listed above, the full purpose and of relationship between educational planning, delivery and movement-building activities are not always clear.

Three areas of LEC work was related to TYRLC-led minimum wage campaign: they facilitated/coordinated the neighbourhood town hall events, they brought the OMWC into their workshops and they facilitated/coordinated the fifth annual Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers Conference of May 2007. On the participation of people in town halls John Cartwright (July 10, 2009) says,

There were two places where people said stuff in those town halls. One was, we made sure in the panel there was a mix of people from the local communities. But secondly, in the round table discussions… Jojo Geronimo, who heads up Labour Education Centre, is a fabulous adult educator, and popular educator, out of the Philippines, had basically put together a whole facilitator’s process. So it wasn’t just round tables – it was round tables with facilitators - and talked about, “Well,
what is it we could do in this neighbourhood? How could we impact on our MPP? How do we share the message, how do we go out and do the outreach?”

As I have been arguing, I think that skilled mobilization unionists like this official understand the contemporary importance of workers being seen to be involved. As discussed in earlier chapters, this is because of the reality of the increasingly racialized urban working class and also the result of ongoing anti-racist struggles in unions, especially with the presence now of politically skilled racialized people who insist and fight for on inclusion (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009; NUG4, July 19, 2009; Wall, Oct. 1, 2009). But when the Council president’s participation description is looked at in light of the previous chapters’ discussion, a lack of real integration of workers into the OMWC strategy and decision-making involvement is seen. Campaign tactics were pre-planned and the moments of giving space for participants’ contributions were limited to how they might carry out the pre-decided methods and an opportunity to share their stories. Nicole Wall (Oct. 1, 2009), a LEC facilitator of one town hall in particular, does not know what happened with the notes taken in the round tables but believes they were “fed into” the Good Jobs For All Summit – at which more of us wrote our names on a list and more flip chart notes were taken. (NUG2 does not know what happened with the notes from her workshop in the Summit either.) This leads me to a fundamental question about the purpose of recording names and words, not to mention who is accountable for answering such questions.

The collecting of contact information when bodies come into the room and the recording of their words as they talk in small groups is a very minimal level of participation in relation to how it is being portrayed. And it is a participation that is far from being part of actual decision-making processes. What is remembered and promoted in conversation and text after the fact is
the moment of multiracial union-community coming together (Cartwright, July 10, 2009; TYRLC, 2008a).

Along with this, an official’s learning about class-stratified realities through a hearing a woman’s story gets turned into a translocal consciousness coordinating tool, as part of the pragmatic anti-racist practice:

One [highlight] is being at the Stop on Davenport, and being beside a South Asian woman who’s a single parent now, with two young kids, who was saying, “I work at Wendy’s. I started at minimum wage, but now I have a position of responsibility. I earn $9.26 an hour. But I can’t raise my two kids on $9.26 an hour, so on Saturdays and Sundays, I work at Value Village.” And I just looked at her, and thought, “What family life do you guys have together?”

These town halls may have been powerful informal learning opportunities, with the LEC facilitators’ participatory process drawing out people, getting people involved. But given the previous chapters’ analyses, the learning did not seem to fundamentally change what the TYRLC actually does in labour-community organizing. Rather, for some, it merely changed the appearance and provided a hopeful link (in ideas not practice) to some better future. As Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) notes,

I definitely learned that mobilizing people at a real local level about an issue that can be a global issue is very powerful. Connecting people across communities... across class is powerful to make change happen. Because you would see very, very low waged workers coming together with higher wage unionized workers to fight for an issue like the $10 minimum wage campaign that would impact everybody. And…it was powerful and it was inspiring and I think, even with some of the tensions and issues around labour and community groups working together that it did build a bridge, even if not a stable bridge, it built a bridge that, we can keep working on.
This also happened in the workshops that the LEC designs and facilitates for affiliate unions and community organizations. As Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) discusses, the LEC strategic goals made the OMWC an important education-organizing nexus:

Wherever we could and whenever appropriate, we drew in the campaign to our conversations and our curriculum and our materials. And we… always gave people information about upcoming town halls, postcards they could send to various politicians, ways they could get involved, and we always used the… $10 Minimum Wage campaign as a campaign that tried to actively create a partnership and a bridge between labour and community.

The day-to-day educational work with moments of linkage to organizing can encourage a feeling of hopefulness and a sense of change. Some of the work Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) does focuses on globalization and looking at some of the positive examples from around the world where communities have been able to push change, [which] is exactly the model that the Workers’ Action Centre is using. It’s building leaders on the ground. And it’s not a top-heavy approach, and it’s very collective.

Working with WAC in “equal partnership” on educational work is valued by Wall (Oct. 1, 2009) given her own political perspective on the need to build deep labour-community coalitions for broad-based organizing. Tattersall (2009) has also reported a relationship between union education, member politicization and deep coalition formation (p. 501). Partnership is also valued by the TYRLC as an institution – which is also in a position to allow this relationship or not – because of the work WAC is “doing in the community, and the changes that they’ve been able to push from the ground, and the leaders that they’ve been able to build in communities across the city” (Wall, Oct. 1, 2009). Thus, through the work of the LEC, an appearance that the Council as a whole has a mutual relationship with that group is generated. The institutional distance provided by the separation of the decision-making body, the one that leads on
organizing (the Council) from the sub-institutional educational body (the LEC) helps facilitate this. The LEC is indeed “neatly positioned” – with access to affiliate officials and a freedom to work with community–based staff – as a “bridge facilitator” (Wall, Oct. 1, 2009). The LEC connects institutional leaders through educational moments. Yet, while those moments are indeed important and valuable for many people involved, the activity happening there is institutionally delimited even as the reproduction of the idea of what they are doing is not. Thus, an appearance of reality can be created, that the LEC is supporting a democratic and militant new movement building when it is really supporting pragmatic anti-racist mobilization practices. This is managed as such by officialdom; and there is little threat to TYRLC bureaucratic social relations coming from that popular education work in which ideas and practices of power relations are critically analyzed but ultimately in a separate and so ideological way in relation to organizing activities.

In a similar vein to this analysis, Fletcher and Gapasin (2008) discuss at some length such related issues of education, debate and member participation in the AFL-CIO split. They note how the SEIU and Teamsters mobilizing for the CTW split discussed in the previous chapter put together public relations-style presentations and distributed them to locals which were “not part of a comprehensive education process to provoke debate and further insight...education was simply a matter of informing members of the views of the leadership” (p. 153). Various blogs and websites were developed that solicited and received a lot of perspectives and feedback. It seemed however that members' participation at this level was empty, generating a union moment of the appearance of democratic involvement through the application of technological tools that brought forth participation. As the authors point out, “The submission of comments, suggestions, or proposals works only if is part of a larger process that factors these views into a final decision
or outcome. The circulation of varied points of view is meaningless if no one's position changes as a result.” (p. 156). The racialized and gendered character of the gap between rank-and-file contributions and union officials decision-making was also apparent in the CTW development process (p. 157).

The TYRLC Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers conferences in general, and the 2007 in particular, are also interesting to review in light of these practices and in relation to the OMWC. As discussed in previous chapters, these annual forums started in 2002 as part of the equity strategy of the TYRLC. Themes have included “Organizing for Strength in Toronto's Diverse Communities” (2002), “Building Power” (2003, 2004, 2005), “Equity in a Global Economy (2007), “Building Equity, Building Power” (2008), “Organizing for Economic and Racial Justice” (2009), and “Workers Connect Globally” (2010) (TYRLC, 2010). These conferences attract a few hundred unionists and community organizers each year, the vast majority racialized. There are plenary presentations and thoroughly prepared small group workshops. Many people at the May 12, 2007 conference I attended clearly valued the opportunity to discuss local racialized workplace and community issues in a global context, with other unionists with similar and different experiences. Yet, I do not recall the conference being hooked into the OMWC work at all, even though the focus was “Equity in a Global Economy.”

The McGuinty government had just recently announced the phased-in increase to $10.25 per hour, but the campaign was still nominally continuing as the fall election was still to be had. The one-page final report does not mention the minimum wage at all (TYRLC, 2007). This pragmatic anti-racist educational moment was valuable and meaningful for many people. Yet, I contend that the popular education techniques, the coming together of racialized people and the post-
conference photo displays and pronouncements combine to give educational practice a feel of education/organizing praxis. As NUG4 (July 19, 2009) notes,

    They have a Workers of Colour Conference that brings in regularly 2 to 300 workers. But there’s nothing built-in to those conferences that I can see… where workers who are part of the affiliates, can actually get involved in a campaign. So, that’s where I find it incredibly frustrating, because…I mean, I’d love to have thousands and thousands and thousands of members who are connected to us through organizations. I mean, even if you had 3% of the affiliate membership involved in a campaign, a community labour campaign around something, that would be incredible.

U4 (Sept. 24, 2009) also speaks to this,

    The affiliates support the [Workers of Colour Conferences]… on paper…or they will send a few delegates to this leadership conference, the leadership trainings that they do where they’re trying to target members from equity groups, because then they can say, “Hey, look what we are doing for members. The union is a place for you.” But in reality, I don’t know how much that translates into actually what they do internally, but … it visibly makes them look more accessible, more open, and more welcoming.

The conferences are packaged off educational moments in which issues needing organizing are discussed but without an organizing orientation to the day. Popular education here is thus literally de-radicalized, pulled up from its praxis-based roots as dialogue is severed from organizing. I think that people are so accustomed to ideological practice though that the appearance of organizing can be created. Changing our consciousness can also thus appear to lead to – with hope mixed in – a future change in what we collectively do. Thorough critical analyses of global capitalism can co-exist with no discussion or movement towards political capacity building for dissent. And, most simply, a labour council can be leading a minimum
wage campaign yet not integrate it into a conference on racialized economic injustice. Bureaucratic officialdom had achieved by then what it needed; promoting the OMWC at that point might only have disturbed locally bureaucratically controlled social relations even as we collectively had assembled to learn more about and promote the disturbing of extralocally determined ones.

Ahead of the 2008 conference I overheard a couple of unionists talking about attending the event or not. One quite active in his community said kindly yet wryly that they do a nice lunch. But even if such attendees see another layer of reality under the appearance generated, the tight institutional organization and the normalcy of ideological practice make it difficult to imagine how one might intervene.

Through this discussion and in looking at the various formulations of what adult education proposes to do (Spencer, 2006) we can see that social-purpose labour education is not necessarily synonymous with a social-transformation orientation. Education may have some sort of important social change content and intent (such as, “sensitizing” members on Aboriginal workers’ realities (Dugale, 2006, p. 26)), and lead to materially positive bargaining outcomes (such as, effective anti-racial harassment language). Nonetheless, such efforts often function overall in a socially reproductive way because of the existing dominant social relations of labour in which the education and application of the learning are carried out. Ideological practice is integral to these relations, thus deeply affecting how people’s consciousness processes develop. Such conditions allow for the contradictory coexistence of important incremental change moments that still (whether intentionally or not) reproduce existing social relations and systems. As Newman (2000) notes,

People's everyday experience and learning can as easily reproduce ways of thinking and acting which support the often oppressive status quo as it can
produce recognitions that enable people to critique and challenge the existing order. And even when learning is emancipatory it is not so in some linear, development sense: it is complex and contradictory, shaped as it is by intrapersonal, interpersonal and broader social factors. (pp. 275-276)

This is noteworthy for labour education in the union renewal context, in which contradictory goals and purposes among officials, educators and workers are often vibrantly at play. Martin (1995) provides an example of these tensions, a radical democratic unionist and labour educator, who understands unions as relations among people and has often taken risks in his contributions towards “shaping the union and the society” (p. 78). Yet, he also has taken on an apologetic frame for the adversarial orientation of unions and “occasional public outbursts by union leaders” (p. 39). Departing from an understanding that such confrontations are fundamentally about and an inevitable part of class struggle, he turns the issue into one of decorum, a behavioural matter arising from the lack of respect workers are treated with which makes it not “safe” to be non-adversarial. Problematizing workers “behaviour” in such a way is not inconsistent with the policing function of officialdom but would seem inconsistent with radical democracy.

In the final section of this chapter, I will extend the discussion on learning through the OMWC to an exploration of the differences in the kinds of learning for mobilization and for capacity-building practices of organizing, and the opportunities made and taken for these.

**Learning for Mobilizing and Capacity Building**

The institutionally organized separation of the fullness of material reality from our ideas and understanding about this social organization – even as we participate in reproducing and challenging it – is a well-established part of life in capitalist social relations. In such an environment, consciousness development, learning the “how to” skills of carrying out strategies
and tactics, and integrating both the thinking and doing into organizing activity can be easily conflated or compartmentalized. Learning “to understand” can focus on the results of social relations rather than on the ongoing relations themselves thus also losing the materiality of our own individual and collective being within them (Allman, 2001). Consciousness thus is experienced not as social process; it appears instead as a thought product in developing “skills” for “action”. I suggest that the self-reflexive, political capacity-building approaches I participated in and uncovered in this inquiry attempted to some degree to integrate learning ‘to do’ and learning ‘to understand’ in individual and social “dialectical unity” (Freire, as cited in Elias & Meriam, 2005, p. 156) and so to integrate educational activities into organizing processes. With such an orientation, the effect of a given set of activities, and what and how much is accomplished through them, can be understood to be profoundly conditioned and coordinated by extralocally organized social relations. In addition, participants’ learning is conditioned by our abilities to be reflexive, by our openness and willingness to undermine our own tendencies towards ideological practice. I thus continue to build in this chapter an understanding of why I believe that such attempts were, by far, unsuccessful.

While many OMWC organizers who participated in this inquiry had both a critical and self-reflexive analysis of their individual and collective activities, others tended towards a linear evaluation of events based on whether tactics were “successful” or not. While the former set of participants tended more to a capacity-building for dissent approach and the latter were more consistent practitioners of mobilization organizing, this was not always so. Individuals can – and do – have a committed self-reflexive orientation yet be unconsciously dedicated to pragmatic practices because that it simply what we are collectively conditioned to do and so it is what is available to participate in and as a way of understanding our world.
U1 (Oct. 1, 2009) is an example of this. At the same time as she spoke about developing and caring for relationships as being important, I suggest that her method ends up being more pragmatic given that she and the ONR had centrally developed a campaign to be translocally coordinated. Capacity building thus becomes a local responsibility, if done at all:

In many communities I went and did a workshop, and walked through a process where we did a scan of what was going on in the community, who were the allies, what were the opportunities, what were the strengths and interests of the local group, and people would decide what they thought they could achieve and how that would relate to this broader campaign. We included in the scan… what’s going on in different communities across the province, and then sort of what was happening in our efforts centrally at Queen’s Park.

Other participants demonstrated an education/organizing orientation that was linear, empty of any dialectical sense. U2 (Dec. 12, 2009) reveals how learning and the development of consciousness can be conceived as sequential, textually coordinated activities:

So the first thing that we wanted to do at the town hall was to raise public interest and then the second thing is to talk about how we can get signatures, because signatures [are] the pathway to raise awareness. Because why do people sign something? You have to explain to them, right? And that's how we…spread the seed of information.

In more of a practice of “activism” than a praxis mode (Freire, 1996, p. 69), CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) believes that learning while doing will change people’s consciousness in the way that organizers wish to: “we'll run a campaign to win repairs in a building. And so, for people actually learning while they're doing, it actually shows them that this works.” A fuller meaning of her remark comes through when she is asked how the group takes time for evaluation and reflection: “because of funding restrictions, we never have money to do that. We only have
money to run the campaigns.” Similarly her discussions of leadership schools are focused on activity, on tactical skills, not on learning how to think politically. While campaign decisions are informed by “discussions that have happened at the chapter meetings”, trained board members make “a city-wide or a provincial decision on a campaign” and then “go back to their local chapters and deliver it to the membership.”

Our whole leadership school development program is teaching people how you run a campaign, what actually makes an organization win a campaign. So, we've applied those tactics that we teach at leadership schools to this campaign. Some of our…members have actually been down to leadership schools in the States, too.

I contend that this belief in educating people for mobilization organizing, the skills building without complex thinking, is conditioned by an ahistorical, limited and ideological view of social change. It paves the way for a vindicating feedback loop rather than reflection and reflexivity, as any positive outcome is a win showing all that has been tried was the right formula, thus encouraging the same kinds of efforts in future. Of the 2007 OMWC CG3 (Sept. 4, 2009) says,

I guess I learned that you can force a government that doesn't want to do something to do something, and it's actually really not that hard. You just need to be able to get people to lobby them...lobbying actually works.

In contrast, although not involved in a capacity-building type of organizing, U3 (Nov. 26, 2009) is thoughtful about her own consciousness development and why she became interested in issues outside her union and well-paying factory job in a small Ontario city:

I was going to university part-time at that time [of the education project]…and…the differences between various groups of people socially and economically was really coming to light for me. I was looking around and I would go get a coffee or [to] a fast food restaurant or retail place and it was always women working, you never see any grown men in those places, unless they're the
manager. So, it was really sticking out to me. I tend to live in a really white, homogenous community so you don't see it as much, I know that the statistics are there on people of colour and immigrant people. But for me, it was all women, and if you saw any males, they were teenagers…And then you know, just looking at the way that jobs or training and education was still broken up at the university level and I was seeing it with my daughter who was getting ready to enter high school, the way girls and boys were still being streamed even though they say that they've dealt with that problem. So, I think it was all just coming together: Something's going wrong here. You would see the posted profits of places like Tim Horton's and Starbucks and McDonald's and all those places and should they really make $3 billion dollars a year while their employees make not enough to live on?

J4W’s worker-centred orientation is discussed in Chapter Seven and the challenges of understanding capacity building as more than a linear “engagement with community” is reviewed in Chapter Five. In that light, NUG1 (July 24, 2009) is clear to distinguish her praxis-based orientation:

We can send people to workshops and trainings until their heads are spinning, [but the important thing] is to be able to use it and to do it in motion, while learning, while we’re doing, and to be reflective on that and sharing it; it’s not just a process for a process in itself. So capacity building, sums it up but it’s not a term that I’m that comfortable with, and certainly it was not language that we used at the time.

For CG6 (Aug. 27, 2009), leadership training in a capacity-building context has a praxis orientation, including

a critical analysis and people using their own experience to understand the world around them and to take ownership and leadership on these issues… [We]
struggled with some of those contradictions of people not just being victims but recogniz[ed] the way they are victimized and fighting back on those issues.

Similarly to CG6’s (Aug. 27, 2009) organization, workers centres that are organizing-oriented tend to try to link up practical service-provision with popular education and organizing. The Chicago Interfaith Workers Rights Center has “an interactive workshop on workplace rights and regularly offers it at scores of ESL classes” in the city, instead of setting up their own ESL classes (Fine, 2006, p. 49). CAFÉ does statewide workshops on low-income worker related employment issues. When workers come to them they are invited to join CAFÉ (Fine, 2006, p. 49). Education and outreach is combined through comic and workbooks that explain workers rights, including the specific wage claims process. Workers have called their hotline as a result.

Many of the women’s committees and projects in US workers centres have strong consciousness-raising and confidence-building components because the organizations understand that these issues have to be dealt with as integral part of organizing women workers. For example, women deferring to men in meetings, women not seeing their domestic work as real work, either due to gender-based undervaluing or a class/gender combined stigma because of an experience of a shift in class location caused by immigration. For women, workers' centres like Fuerza Laboral Femenina (out of the Workplace Project in Long Island, NY) have been a place “where women meet, discuss their lives, particular workplace issues they faced, build community, and plot strategy” (Fine, 2006, p. 71).

Like these organizations, NUG6 (Sept. 24, 2009) speaks about how she has learned since the campaign that “political education or leadership building” needs to be a fundamental part of organizing so that people are able to “really meaningfully… contribute to deciding okay, what is
the next step for this campaign.” Similarly, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) explains the intention to make links between various activities and planning in the J4W events:

[We planned] to do politicization about the issues, have people from those communities speak, to be involved in the planning of those forums, to be thinking through educational information, getting it translated, working with community front-line workers from those neighbourhoods, trying to get them to think about how they might want to work with those residents afterwards.

My analysis in Chapter Five of a J4W activity as one I assisted in facilitating on an ideological practice basis is seen in a different light by NUG1 (July 24, 2009) as having been turned into a politicizing social relations uncovering opportunity. She talks about the same visit to the local MPP’s office as an informal “negative learning” moment:

Certainly the women who were at that meeting came out really, really pissed off. I mean it was an uncomfortable experience for people in the room, but I don’t think it was an unproductive one…we talked about it and I think we tried to depersonalize it in a way. It is personal definitely because you’re a woman of colour, and not of high socio-economic status, but if it had been another person of those same characteristics the MPP would have treated them the same. So depersonalizing in the way that, you know, someone can walk away with their dignity intact, but also politicizing in that this is part of the lobbying and advocacy process where you’re dealing with people [like that MPP] who are so disrespectful and disconnected and don’t really give a shit. So I think that kind of learning happened, I can’t say what people did with that.

J4W participants also talked about themselves learning as organizers, from preparing for, “when we hear all the counter-arguments, to actually tool ourselves up to be able to respond,” to how
to encourage and support involvement of community members who maybe haven’t been active in working on their own issues before, the kind of creativity that goes into thinking through how people can get involved and how you can support them in getting involved. [And also] being a little bit more conscious about what it means to be an ally, because of our conversations and then moving on through the [local developing non-union group] which I remain involved in… But for me it was kind of an ongoing learning… to be really conscious and self-conscious about what that means to be an ally. (NUG1, July 24, 2009)

The group’s efforts in that regard included the frequent building of workshop-style discussions into large events and neighbourhood-based J4W meetings. One activity I helped design and facilitate was a “Questions and Answers Role Play,” to help prepare all activists in the group for public events, MPP meetings and media moments (Justice for Workers, personal communication, July 15, 2002). We took notes during those meeting workshops on gaps in our knowledge and the core J4W did follow-up research later. We were trying to do something very different than the kinds forums that continue to facilitate learning about social problems as separate from doing. Such events also manage the reproduction of the simple binary of employer-as-enemy/union-as-friend, distracting from the complex reality of what union and community are.

Yet, similar to U4’s (Sept. 24, 2009) discussion in the last chapter about officialdom never asking workers what their issues are, NUG3 (July 31, 2009) now sees the same flaw with the J4W work. Since then, with consistent contact with more workers in a developing non-union group, they were able to start having open dialogues over a period of time, in connection with political trainings around the system and how it works and… it gave those of us that were doing the work… more opportunities to really hear what people were saying [about] notions of fairness and ways of connecting… what they get out of work, to how the system
treats them… [And there is a] cross-fertilization that takes place among workers coming together to talk about issues in terms of campaign development.

NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) spells out how this is different from working with people to speak publicly about their experiences, and also how leadership development requires going even further still. She makes clear the difference between learning “skills to speak to the media,” and being able to “understand the issues” enough to facilitate strategizing meetings and, “take a leadership role in our campaigns.” Even as a political capacity-building type of organization, for her the latter does not receive enough attention:

I think that [when], you’re working with someone to prepare them to speak to the media, one day, and then maybe a couple of weeks go by, and you’re [later] preparing someone to speak at a conference [that is different from] doing that underlying political education, where people are… able to talk about…what is really happening, what the big political picture [is], why wages [are] low, and what the forces [are] that are keeping wages low. I think we talk about the impact low wages have on us…so people can relate to that. But I don’t think we’re sitting around and having those bigger political discussions.

In his organization during the early OMWC phase, CG4 (Aug. 19, 2009) tried to expand a limited form of capacity building by uniting organizing with education:

[Given our organization’s funding for] civic engagement…educating the public about workers rights [fit into my job]. So Justice for Workers would come to the drop-in and do education session on workers rights, and in turn they got a chance to talk about the minimum wage campaign. Members who were interested, came on board… because [J4W had] set up a committee of activists and agency workers. And one of the objectives was to get, … the people themselves involved. And that did work at [my organization with some members]… that were already politically active, but there were other people too that got interested because of the idea of having a raised minimum wage. So it was a sort of an introduction to
the whole world of politics and how to advocate for something that you want. So, in that way it helped a lot of people to come out...like they say poor people don’t vote? I think that that … direct sort of educational movement pulled some people out.

His organization was unusual in the conditions of the first phase of the OMWC. As discussed in Chapter Five, NUG4 (July 19, 2009) points out how the extralocally driven social relations of the time – and the level of fear in people and groups that was part of them – made education with even a self-advocacy purpose extremely difficult. She notes the kinds of questions her organization was grappling with in that context:

- How do you connect with workers in precarious jobs? How do you talk about these issues that are affecting low-wage workers? How do you deal with this stuff when you’ve had the Harris government in for, at that point, into the second term, and an incredible conservatism had become almost embedded in community organizations...Back then, just even going into a community centre that was providing pre-employment training programs for workers... and saying, “There’s a huge rise of temporary contract jobs, this might be a problem,” was almost a subversive act. And people would kind of sneak me into their community organizations to do an Employment Standards workshop with the workers. It seems kind of crazy when you talk about that now, but that was definitely the culture.

Looking back, the challenges of doing basic education and advocacy work at the time shed light on the unlikelihood of a political, dissent-building worker-centred project like J4W being able to succeed. NUG1 (July 24, 2009) tearfully reflects on the group having done “powerful” and “brave” thinking and work with “lots of celebrations, lots of connections, lots of challenges, [and] lots of intellectual challenges.” With so much attachment to what could be, it took 2 years of efforts before some collective reflection happened and the group “took a sober
look at” the fact that J4W was not “actually seeing more workers become involved and take leadership, and [not seeing] traction in the communities with this issue” (NUG1, July 24, 2009). NUG4 (July 19, 2009) echoes this:

I don’t think we had those really honest conversations with the [two community organizers who became involved in a neighbourhood-based J4W] about [if this was] something they really could support in a fundamental way integrated in the organization, integrated in the way they functioned in terms of people coming in through their programming….I think that [having those conversations] hopefully would have led us to a different strategy. But it was a different context then too; there wasn’t a lot of organizing happening.

Others in the OMWC learned about telling people leading organizing in future “to back off” if people need more time to think something through, and about how partnerships and coalitions work (CG7, Aug. 13, 2009). For NUG2 (Oct. 15, 2009) the “big learning curve” which continued out of the campaign was how to make outreach, relationship building, leadership development and implementing organizing tactics fluid and inseparable.

In concluding this chapter, I would say that it is important to create educational events for workers to discuss and learn about how their lives and opportunities are conditioned by complex, institutionally organized extralocal-origin relations, much of which are often out of people’s view. It is also important to discuss how people might intervene collectively and democratically to disrupt and change these social relations. I have argued here that the OMWC was not successful in building educational/organizing praxis in this regard, even if there was an appearance that this was happening at times. This was either because it generally was not the intent of the groups involved or it was beyond their ability the conditions that prevailed.

After four chapters of building an analysis of the social organization of the OMWC, I will next turn to the conclusion. I will discuss lessons from this research on the interconnection of the
social relations conditioning multiple layers of reality, locally live and extralocally conditioned, locally and translocally controlled, produced and challenged, with how different orientations to organizing are taken up, and the possibilities for integrated learning, doing and consciousness as part of them.
Chapter Nine:
Conclusion

[In] the moment, it felt like we were on the right track and… a specific event… allowed us to try to be putting into place all the things that we had talked about. So if I feel like that, we actually had done that, and still the follow-up was really difficult. But I can’t really explain why ABCDE didn’t lead to FGH, you know? But it didn’t really. (NUG1, July 24, 2009)

Introduction

Throughout my research I have been analyzing the ways in which the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign was socially organized by racialized, gendered, and bureaucratic class relations. Within this, I have also been arguing that the local individual and social activity and consciousness of volunteers, members, clients, educators, officials and staff that partially comprises these relations – in both their reproduction and resistance – was extralocally conditioned and translocally coordinated in an essentially institutionalized way. This organization was also fundamentally coordinated by historically driven state and labour-market based laws, rules, policies and practices. The minimum wage itself, as an employment standard, is itself one of these class relations. As in any time and place, there were specificities to how these relations of political economy happened in Ontario during this 2001 to 2007 period that had much to do with the campaign’s trajectory and outcome. I see all of these aspects coming together as the social relations of class struggle in the OMWC.

The most fundamental piece of shared reality amongst people and organizations of the OMWC and after is simply that people’s wages and incomes are being eroded and more people are sliding into poverty. Many people in the campaign either live or have lived this defining
material reality on a day-to-day basis, or they work with people who do. As such, the reality exploration questions have not been about what reality is in relation to human well-being and dignity; instead, what I have researched is how some people are understanding, challenging and reproducing it, and why they and their groups would choose this campaign when they did, as a critical labour-community workers-rights organizing initiative. Application in my research of social relations, ideology, ideological practice and pragmatic/transformative anti-racism as analytical concepts has assisted me in uncovering much about the complexity of this how and why.

In this concluding chapter I will first summarize my findings on the same thematic basis in which Chapters Five through Eight were organized. In the first section Reality Fragmentation, Coordination and Appearance, I summarize some key features of the relationship between local campaign activity, ideology, demand texts as translocal coordinators and the different participant perspectives on the outcome. Another look at Pragmatic and Transformative Organizing in the campaign follows, as I review how and why I contend that pragmatic anti-racist mobilization was predominant. In Unions and Revitalization, I briefly again locate the OMWC in the labour-community coalition literature in relation to the campaign’s role in union renewal. Education as Practice or Praxis will summarize the relationship between different types of labour and workers’ education and learning in and around the campaign, in relation to the organizing work that was done. Having presented a synopsis of the themes for the data, in the next section, Individuals, Institutions and Ideology, I will propose a foundational feature of contemporary social coordination that I see as a fundamental challenge to movement-building organizing today. Following that, in Consciousness, Agency and a Key Contradiction, I further discuss the question of agency in light of how I discussed this in Chapter Four, and given what I discovered
through the dissertation work. Finally, in *Building Beyond the Case of the OMWC*, I will both locate the OWMC case in the literature on labour-community workers-rights organizing and propose possibilities for comparative research with a multi-scalar orientation that might expand the translocal uncovering and understanding of organizing practices, processes and thus of movement-building potentials.

*Reality Fragmentation, Coordination and Appearance*

Local campaign realities were compartmentalized in numerous ways and OMWC involvement met different institutionally specific and coordinated needs. And while coalitions generally arise as vehicles to transcend the institutional separation, the campaign was challenged to materially bridge such compartmentalization. The fragmentation of reality amongst institutions and how it was managed in practice affected how collaboration, participation, involvement and decision-making happened and appeared to have happened. A key part of paramount reality is that our social system works in a certain way so organizers must work with it as it is. Thus, the translocal coordinating effect of the elections cycle as a social relation was a powerful orienting force for organizers and their groups, generating periods of “coalitions of protests” in pre-election periods (Frege et al., 2004).

Discrete and simple demands with specific targets were focused on not just for strategic reasons in relation to the achievement of reforms but also because shared reality was very limited. Ideological practice also both supported and conditioned the need for such simplicity. Not in a moral sense but in the actually coordinated functioning of the campaign, ideas about institutional development, perpetuation or ownership of the campaign often became more important in practice than the human beings that would benefit from social changes brought about by organizing. Ideological practice, the challenges of textual coordination, institutional
power dynamics, competing institutional realities and the threat of reality-disintegrating political discussion combined, for example, in the ONR coalition to lead to its withering demise.

The OMWC was an extended time/space moment in which various groups could be together in varying degrees of connection. The demands were the method by which it was made somewhat possible. The creation of the demand texts and the acting on them required putting aside the complexity of local sub-realities while in the coalition moments. The simple, clear demands then became often-reproduced textual glue for the campaign’s and coalitions’ existence. The mere existence of a piece of text – made powerful to greater or lesser degrees by who was involved in creating it – and the involvement in the creation of the text, had a reality coordinating effect. But gluing together temporarily was not the same as uniting the groups, not the same as actively creating some lasting praxis-based shared reality. Substitutionism functioned to greater and lesser degrees as a translocal coordinating dynamic within coalitions to give the appearance of the campaign’s or a coalition’s cohesiveness. Some individual bridge-builder practice served in this substitutionism. Substitutionism, individualism and reproduction of institutions were thus often mutually reinforcing.

Textually coordinated organizing was also in reality often disparate, isolated activity, and a staff person often embodied a link between the translocal discourse and the local tactics, whether across Toronto or across Ontario. For J4W, the 60-hour workweek became an important piece of legitimizing text for the group, one that had an historical, material and extralocal origin. TYRLC-origin texts have been employed as retrospective translocal coordinators allowing officials, in text and activity, to produce apparently paramount versions of reality and then maintain them. “Political bargaining” is a notable piece of ideological practice in the OMWC
retrospective that a top labour official continued to bring home for some time after the campaign finished.

The ways in and degrees to which translocally organized forces generally pushed workers’ organizing back had an impact on the viewing of the OMWC outcome as a victory. And the greater the social distance there was between social change organizers’ and activists’ lived reality and that of people who were the would-be beneficiaries of the campaign’s demands, the easier it seemed for people to accept the appearance of meaningful activity and reform as actually more meaningful than it was. Conditioning this was also the fact that even though minimum wage and welfare rates are historically interconnected relations, they are actively politically separated by individuals and sub-institutions holding various levels of state and labour-market power. Our day-to-day existence in an institutionally compartmentalized society allows the co-existence of often-stark layers of both humanity and reification across the realities participants related. The campaign could thus be deemed a victory and the appearance has been allowed to publicly stand to a great degree.

Once there was a minimum wage increase achieved it became important for many participants to say that the organizing orientation they engaged in worked. Thus, there is a vindication element associated with the ideology of agency-based social change. That is, since a change happened that is related to a demand we have made and fought for, we are shown to be doing the right thing. I argue that people are engaged in ideological practice in this regard because participants retrospective look at the $10.25 achievement seems overly conceptual and linear, detached from a myriad of realities previously considered as at least as important as achieving the reform. I suggest people are oriented to this way of thinking by the conditions in which we live.
Another ideology uncovered was that of fairness. The idea of being fair can serve as an important social change coordinating concept even as the complexity of racialized and gendered class relations is only partially visible to many organizers and social change advocates and the historical evolution of ideas detached from material practices is naturalized. Inequality can thus become not inherently unfair; just too much of it is. As precarity for some and security for others became normalized in the period after the post-war compromise, the meaning of fairness has become conditioned by specific labour-market and state-regulated relations, as well as by individual experience of them. This evolves from, and can further lead to, a lack of integration of the everyday material reality of how labour markets and so waged work are organized, thus preventing a full analysis of who particular campaigns might involve and who they might affect.

**Pragmatic and Transformative Organizing**

I have proposed that the campaign activities, the mechanisms of their coordination and people’s understandings about what they are doing can be understood as reflective of two types of organizing practices: *pragmatic anti-racist mobilization* and *transformative anti-racist political capacity-building*. While the group described it differently, the J4W campaign organizers had an explicit capacity-building orientation with a limited pragmatic outcome, the ONR phase organizers had an implicit mix of approaches but tended towards mobilizing, and the TYRLC campaign entirely followed mobilization unionism practice. Nonetheless, the campaign outcome as well as the ideological managing and mobilizing of the presence, voice and activity of – in particular – racialized workers, staff and officials in the 2007 phase gave pragmatic anti-racist mobilization organizing practices a degree of transformative capacity building appearance. One way this happened was through creating coordinating texts from workers’ stories.
Pragmatic mobilization practice can and does fit with life in the complex social articulation we labour within. Staff and officials plan various events and activities, and then activate attendance. Complex and contradictory relationships can be left unexamined, as can the overall purpose of the mobilizing moments. And some level of anti-racism is simply good sense in unions today and so the whiteness/institutional power nexus can welcome some racialized people in official or staff roles as a means to an end. Even as racialization processes marginalize people into apparently homogenous groups and even as there are varying degrees of collectivity-based ways of life within and amongst different ethnoracial groups, everyday living in a highly individualistic society increasingly promotes and supports the pragmatic approach, bringing with it as it does the notion of individual agency and determination trumping all. While a collection of individuals in a campaign is not a collectivity, many us who spend any time in Canadian society are nonetheless deeply institutionally organized and socialized to orient ourselves as first and ultimately individuals to a collectivity. Our union institutions in particular reproduce this as union renewal-type activity often focuses on official leadership replacement.

What I have named transformative dissent-based capacity building is in practice conceived of as a direct challenge to fundamental ways in which social life is organized. This anti-racist practice is process oriented. I have contended that such practice would need to go beyond localized effort and have great translocal support, as organizational capacity cannot be built in isolation from that of translocally coordinated movement capacity. Although the intentions varied, different groups in the OMWC seemed to take up building capacity on an individual, worker-by-worker, campaign or institution specific basis. Yet, given the goals of this approach, one organization cannot on its own be responsible for or effective at this practice in our current social reality.
I contend that no one group’s efforts can be effective without labour-community coalitions building their capacity to take direction from below. In addition, such a movement-building practice successfully applied in labour-community workers-right campaigns would necessarily partially dissolve the institutional boundaries between union and community, between unionized and non-unionized worker, and would prioritize the creating of shared reality for movement building; that is, it would not implicitly prioritize union renewal nor effectively materially relegate all workers concerns – such as employment standards regulations and enforcement – to “the community” until such time as labour decides they are important.

Dissent-oriented capacity-building praxis also recognizes that movement building cannot focus on skills and abilities development abstracted from relational individual and collective consciousness processes. Consciousness is not a finite set of knowledge to achieve, that organizers have and must download to a mass of workers. I contend that the successful application of this practice requires a different, anti-ideological way of being in order to have a different way of doing things, one that is fully inclusive, at all levels of activity, of thinking, planning and doing. I would suggest that union renewal strategizing needs to foreground such praxis-oriented questions.

**Unions and Revitalization**

How labour officialdom uses its power in relation to its own members and community people and groups is historically conditioned, legally, politically and socially. I have looked above at some of the specific challenges of labour to revitalize itself in a coherent, effective and non-instrumental way. The combination of the corporate, merger approach and the lack of labour councils’ power given the affiliation of independent unions system, conditions an instrumental, institutionally driven orientation to communities regardless of what individual union staff might
wish to do. In such conditions, agency and decision-making become “things” in relation to rank-and-file workers, even as they are active in trying the achieve the demands. Such pragmatic anti-racist mobilization unionism can co-exist with narrow social unionism or business-oriented practice quite well.

As I have discussed in this thesis, the growing of unions through consolidation and capture of market share is the predominant union institutional drive for coalition building. While J4W, some ONR coalition participants, and some individuals in the TYRLC-driven coalitions can be said to have been seeking deep or integrative coalition development, a political capacity-building orientation to community and rank-and-file workers seems to have been far from achievable on that context. Given that reality, it is not surprising that throughout the 7 years of the OMWC the practice can be said to have oscillated different versions of ad hoc, bargaining and vanguard (Frege et al., 2004; Tatersall, 2010).

**Education as Practice or Praxis**

Workers’ education, particularly of rank-and-file union members, is often put forward as a partial solution to contemporary organizing and unionizing problems. Yet, the full purpose of and relationship between educational planning, delivery and movement-building activities are not always clear. As discussed in the preceding chapter, radical methods applied in institutionally delimited settings and moments could well lead to generally recreating and reinforcing existing overall bureaucratic relations of labour even as the course material and educators inspire (for example) important and risky anti-racist and anti-oppressive change in elected official and staff positions. Such tensions and contradictions are reflected broadly in the field of adult education as a whole today (Spencer, 2006).
I have submitted that radical education was, in effect, institutionally managed in and around the OMWC by parceling it off from active organizing spaces and decision-making bodies. There is little threat to bureaucratic social relations arising from the kind of popular education work in which ideas and practices of power relations are critically analyzed but ultimately separated from organizing activities. Pragmatic anti-racist moments like the TYRLC 2007 Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers conference are often valuable and meaningful for many people. Yet the popular education techniques, the coming together of racialized people and the post-conference photo displays and pronouncements combine to give educational practice a feel of education/organizing praxis. Such conferences are packaged off educational moments in which potential organizing issues are discussed but without an organizing orientation to the event. Popular education here is thus literally de-radicalized, pulled up from its praxis-based roots as dialogue is severed from organizing. People are so accustomed to ideological practice though that the appearance of a more direct education/organizing connection can nonetheless be created through such events. Thorough critical analyses of global capitalism can co-exist with little to no discussion or movement towards political capacity building for dissent. New information and collective discussion amongst workers can indeed lead to new consciousness. And the education process can also appear to lead to – with vibrant expressions of hope mixed in – a future change in what we collectively do. But even if education event attendees see another layer of reality under the appearance generated, the tight institutional organization and the normalness of ideological practice make it difficult to imagine how one might intervene.

Social-purpose labour education is thus not necessarily synonymous with a social-transformation orientation. This belief in education for mobilization organizing, the skills building without encouraging a range of focal points for critical thinking can pave the way for a
vindicating feedback loop rather than collective reflexivity, as any positive outcome can become a win showing all that has been tried was the right formula, thus encouraging the same kinds of efforts in future.

The institutionally organized separation of the fullness of material reality from our ideas and understanding about this social organization – even as we participate in reproducing and challenging it – is a well-established part of life in capitalist social relations. In such an environment consciousness development, learning the “how to” skills of carrying out strategies and tactics, and integrating both the thinking and doing into organizing activity can be easily conflated or compartmentalized. Learning “to understand” can focus on the results of social relations rather than on the ongoing relations themselves thus also losing the materiality of our own individual and collective being within them (Allman, 2001). Consciousness can thus come to be understood not as integral to social process; it can appear instead as thought products, newly developed “skills” for “action”.

In looking at recent literature that might explore further this question of education and organizing as praxis, it is unclear to me how such contemporary efforts to re-radicalize education practices might fundamentally assist in building social movements. Prefigurative efforts seem to focus on an ideal, future society as if it "is" or "will be". In doing so, the focus on the learning of how to be/do now in relation to that ideal can become detached from the materiality of the world as we now live in it. There is no certainty of achieving such a society, and understanding how the world actually works is at least as important as planning for how it might work if relations were to evolve as we might hope they would (for an example, see Brookfield & Holst, 2011).

Having summarized the main points of my thematic analysis, I now turn to discussing a theoretical proposition I have come to as a result of my research on the OMWC.
Individuals, Institutions and Ideology

Through this investigation I have contended that the complexity of contemporary society poses great challenges for the possibilities in advancing the kind of human-agency based social change in labour-community workers-rights organizing that would have a broad-based movement building orientation. Building on D. Smith (1990, 2005), I suggest that this is largely so because the social coordination of what we do and what we understand about what we do turns on at least three components of social reality: an institution-based organization of multi-layered social relations that is generally locally circumscribed but extralocally driven; a conditioned individually-driven orientation to meeting human needs, and; an ideological orientation to both the content of our thinking and the process of that reasoning. These entwined processes of social engagement may be conditioned by the powerful but are not limited to them. Social relations and social and institutional conditions are realities that union and community organizers are inextricably materially within and of. The only way to confront them from outside is to do so in an idealist way.

All individual and institutional perspectives, orientations and activities are not socially organized equally; they do not have the same amount of social space in which to be expressed and so are objectified translocally to greater or lesser degrees, if at all. And, even though the TYRLC has much greater relative power in the social relations of workers-rights organizing than community groups do, this does not translate to officialdom’s ideological practice as having a uniform objective effect on people’s consciousness, in union or community. Nonetheless, that relative power of officialdom, in combination with the imperatives of bureaucratic social relations, condition non-union and community groups’ general silence about their different perspectives and their varying degrees of acceptance of this reality. Groups do not want to risk a
rift in tenuous or narrowly defined labour-community connections. As I have discussed in this thesis, labour officialdom does not tolerate well threats to its reality perspective, either from within or without. Largely anonymous individual participation in this investigation has thus led to a more public disclosure of shared finite realities, a range of different views on the challenges of labour-community workers-rights organizing, and a more full sense of the (multiple) OMWC’s social organization over its 7-year life.

I argue that trying to transcend the relational individual/institutional complexity with simple demands and clear targets is rarely possible in lived reality. I can illustrate further what I contend about this institutional/ideological/individual relationship though an analysis of the complex conditioning effect of extralocally-generated (ruling) political-economy relations on people’s lives.

More than 100 years after capitalist expansion escalated, the social division of labour in its various forms continues to condition a separation of “politics” and the “economy” (Smith, D., 1990; Wood, 1995) on a profoundly institutionalized basis. It is a separation that is both real and apparent. Just as bureaucratic social relations organize happenings in and around unions, so too are “politics” and “economy” socially organized, with immigration, health, education and workplaces being some of the sub-institutions within them. Across and within institutions, such relations thus have similar forms with different content. Institutional overlap necessarily occurs, for example, due to how the post-war compromise has led to coordination amongst the state, workplaces and unions, albeit with quite a power differential amongst them.

This separation of the institutions and sub-institutions of politics and economy can be said, on one hand, to be apparent because of how the class relations that actually organize them confer power to those individuals and collectivities that have ongoing access to the upper social
echelons, to coordinate the overlapping functioning of those institutions. As such, politics and economy are not fundamentally separate. The apparent separation generates an illusion, for example, that politics may choose to regulate economy, that economy may choose to have it do so, masking the reality that capitalist class relations ensure state and market activities are intertwined. A contradictory level of appearance is also generated in that politics appears to be controlled by government, and economy seems to be controlled by market activity. Ruling class decisions are a deeply conditioning part of how human activity is coordinated. But, while it is a fundamental illusion of our time, control over future events is not actually humanly possible (King, 2009).

Yet, while the processes and practices of ruling individuals and the institutions they dominate cannot determine the future, they have a profound degree of control over working people’s lives. Herein lives the realness of the separation of institutions and sub-institutions of politics and economy. While our existence as real beings in real bodies means that people do not live the effect of this sub-institutional organization separately, the material activity of accessing all these institutions is compartmentalized for working people and so consciousness can partially develop in an associated way. Most people in everyday life are socially organized to meet needs or express limited dissent through institutions as actually existing separate places to go. We must be born into or apply as individuals to one sub-institution for papers to give us status as people; we must make largely individual “complaints” about individuals or specific organizations to state sub-institutions when we disagree with being inhumanely or unjustly treated. We must cast individual votes to participate in politics; economy has us apply and compete with other individuals for waged labour. There are limited collectivity moments of course: immigration allows sponsorship, education provides for parent-teachers associations and the nexus of labour
relations allows collective bargaining, to negotiate over our dissent. But in our deeply (and increasingly) privatized, fragmented and institutionally organized society the most important unit in relation to human well-being is the individual responsible for their own needs. Access to organized social life is generally as an individual and happens through these demarcated places at a great social distance from working people’s everyday lives. People do things in each of these places but, largely, things are done to people.

Trying to transcend this with simple demands and clear targets is rarely possible in lived reality. The ability of people to collectively surmount and come out of this reality to “go to” the state, with a demand like the $10 an hour minimum wage is profoundly limited by the powerful, coerced functioning of these social relations, even if we have some or even a great deal of consciousness of the sources of our exclusion. While we may ideologically “jump over” complex layers of institutional functioning that keep people away from power, materially we cannot do so. The “right” politics and people with the “best” demands are not enough to make such a reality jump. Ideological practice is the frequent source and outcome of believing we can do so, as social change and justice beliefs – such as “ally rules” – become infused with a codified morality.

As a case in point, it thus makes a great deal of sense that CG5 (June 24, 2009) (discussed in Chapter Five) – while never an organizer or participant in the OMWC as “politics” – saw herself and was indeed very much so in the “economics” of the campaign. Further, the social relations of her economic coercion, as organized by ongoing state re-regulation of employment standards and international corporate takeovers, are forcing her into an increasingly part-time, low-waged and racially abusive and sexist workplace environment. Politics feels like it has its location in the workplace for her because it really does live there for her. Her self-
advocacy efforts prior to our meeting were completely unsatisfactory even as she went to the logical political sub-institutions (the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Labour) in search of support.

My analysis of people’s contemporary complex social engagement within this institutional/ideological/individual nexus leads me now to the question of the challenges for human-agency based social change in such a context.

**Consciousness, Agency and a Key Contradiction**

I suggested in Chapter Four that the inability for people to make the ultimate choice to free themselves from waged labour has become unconsciously conflated by people as an inability to go against the grain at all. I said this because of thinking that our consciousness is so captured by the combined material and ideological onslaught we live and labour under. I would add now, at the end of this research, that this captured consciousness is lost in a key contradiction of our contemporary lives I have just explored: the individual is the apparent agent, carrying all our rights and responsibilities to act, yet it is institutions that effectively decide for us, organizing and overwhelmingly influencing our consciousness and activity. Through combined individual/social processes (in activity and thought) of externalization/objectification/internalization, institutionally specific rules, practices, programs are created by people but then develop a life of their own. We reproduce them even as we would not wish to and even as we often try to resist them.

Although many organizers would understand agency as I discussed in Chapter Four, I suggest that such agency potential is often not looked at in light of these complex conditions I argue such activity must inevitably happen within. In relation to this, my research uncovered another contradiction I have commented on before (Wilmot, 2005): when a section of the
working class does something organizers or academics think is “good”, we credit the power of human agency. But when the working class does not behave in their collective interests as we would wish, we have the constraints of social conditions to blame. We want to have it both ways. This contradictory believing is perhaps a necessary part of maintaining the ideology of social change in our current social reality. This focus on agency as the good things we are bound to or at least will hopefully do is generally one without a dialectical relationship to the deeply institutional organization of our society and ourselves within the racialized and gendered class relations of this organization. This is not inconsistent with capitalist individualism. I suggest it also breeds the often-narrow self-reflexivity, and meaning and practice of being an ally that I found through this research.

Learning and the development of consciousness can thus easily be conceived as sequential, textually coordinated activities. Individuals can, and do, have a committed self-reflexive orientation yet can be unconsciously dedicated to pragmatic practices because that is simply what we are collectively conditioned to do. It is what is available to participate in and as a way of understanding our world. As I move now to closing this chapter, I speculate about future research that might assist in furthering a collective understanding of the contemporary challenges in social organization of labour-community workers-rights organizing.

**Building Beyond the Case of the OMWC**

Union and community, officials and staff located within bureaucratically organized social relations are not individually and/or institutionally inclined to share the power and control they have developed. And little seems to be happening to change their practice and create more of a shared reality. With other groups reporting similar experiences to the TYRLC campaign phase, Nissen (2004) arrives at some generalizable conclusions from his South Florida living wage
campaign study and his review of labour-community coalition literature. While bridge-builders, resource injection and choosing widely-resonant projects are coalition developers, labour control of projects, of community allies’ activities in them and of their dissenting opinions are common practices that ultimately stifle movement building through labour-community organizing (pp. 52, 58-59). Thus, in order to work in a meaningfully collaborative and democratic way with community, the union as an institution must not just appear to change but must fundamentally do so (Tattersall, 2005). At the same time, I have argued that the community reality would also have to internalize more of a newly formed coalition reality, and so partially dissolve its reality into that of labour. For a degree of real unity, fundamental local institutional reality changes would need to happen as a result of internalizing coalition reality moments, a process which in turn might make a coalition that is something different than varying degrees of limited moments of institutional overlap, one that would do more than “enhance a union’s ability…to advocate for legislation and social policy” (p. 98). This would require both being and doing differently. People and their groups would have to seek and accept the disruption of the locally reproduced and institutionally objectified reality as the reality. Nissen (2004) also concludes that a resurgence of social movement activism more broadly is what is ultimately needed for labour-community coalition growth (p. 59).

I propose that a comparative institutional ethnographic investigation across differently coordinated social spaces could be employed to explore this articulation of social relations organization more broadly. As part of this, I would suggest integrating labour geographers’ conceptualization of the multi-scalar nature of contemporary political economy as it happens, and union responses thus being that of re-scaling to adapt (Bergene et al., 2010; Tufts, 2009). This might involve investigating the processes and actual practices various institutions have
developed for: making decisions (in terms of both how and by whom); developing mandates (for instance, to see how ideas become enshrined in text and influence ideological practice), prioritizing certain kinds of activities and relationships, and marginalizing others, and; how, when, and who is acting and making decisions on an inter-institutional basis. Uncovering how these processes are related to or conditioned by translocal relationships, or the lack thereof, would be key to such an investigation.

One empirical focus could be an expanded US/Canada local/translocal study. Across Canada, labour-community activity happens locally, with labour councils involved to varying degrees. Despite the existence of the Canadian Labour Congress and its textual commitment to coalition building (Tatersall, 2010) there seems to be little translocal coordination of such local activity. The Vancouver and Montreal councils were noted by one research participant as having similar goals to those of the TYRLC (Cartwright, July 10, 2009). It would be interesting to investigate if and what kind of change is happening in those institutions, how this conditions labour-community activity locally, how community groups – particularly workers centres – are involved in workers organizing, and the material existence of any orientation to national coordination of union or community. What organizers and their organizations understand about their (in)activity would also be important to uncover. As well, Milkman, Bloom, and Narro (2010) suggest Los Angeles (L.A.) workers rights organizing has distinct features from those of other localities also labouring under the political project of economic re-regulation. Comparing the multi-layered social relations of low-wage workers movement building in L.A. with the much less active urban Canadian context in a way that uncovers activities, ideologies and types of organizing practices could bring to light a range of similarities and differences that would contribute to better understanding of the articulation I argue exists.
I have said in this thesis that ideological practice is really an unconscious social problem reproduced by organizers who believe they can step outside and transcend predominating social relations, making class struggle somehow happen outside of the very relations that define it. This seems to be believed to be possible through the determined building of agency-based, subject-to-subject relationships, across different conditions. And given what I argue about ideology’s articulation with individual/institutional social relations organization, it would seem that new approaches to research as well as collective discussion could be more broadly undertaken to understand better what NUG1 questions in the quote at the start of this chapter. That is, for my research participants and many others, neither working within unions, working around bureaucratic social relations, nor doing “good” community-based organizing with the “right” ideas while remaining positive and hopeful, is building momentum. Nor are the many campaign moments adding up, as many organizers generally seem to think they ought to, to the movements they seek to build.


Appendix A
Abbreviations

ACORN – Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
AFL – American Federation of Labor
AFL-CIO - American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations
CAW – Canadian Auto Workers union
CLC – Canadian Labour Congress
CBO – Capacity-Building Organizing
CAFÉ – Carolina Alliance for Fair Employment
LC – Central Labor Council
CTW – Change to Win
CEP – Communication, Energy and Paperworkers union
CCF – Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CSJ – Centre for Social Justice
COSATU - Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTW – Change to Win
CUPW – Canadian Union of Postal Workers
CUPE – Canadian Union of Public Employees
CUT – Central Única dos Trabalhadores
CU – Community Unionism
DRUM – Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement
E.I. – Employment Insurance
ESA – Employment Standards Act
ESWG – Employment Standards Working Group
IE – Institutional Ethnography
J4W – Justice for Workers
LIUNA – Laborers International Union of North America
LEC – Labour Education Centre
LWC – Living Wage Campaign
LACFL – Los Angeles County Federation of Labor
LICO – Low-Income Cut-Off
Appendix B

Chronology of the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign

The following details on groups and their OMWC-related activities were compiled from documents in my personal as well as a participant’s archives. The documents include meeting minutes, flyers, internal reports and one TYRLC booklet. The events and activities are arranged in chronological order from late 2000 to late 2007.


- Lobbying and organizing to fight Bill 147, the provincial Tories’ amendments to the Employment Standards Act (ESA). The Bill passed in less than four weeks
- Made up of non-union workers rights organization staff, a couple academics and workers rights activists like myself.
- ESWG action leafleting carried through into 2001

“Stop the FTAA” Demonstration  April 3, 2001

- Brought together ESWG working on local issues with anti-globalization groups having a more global focus.
- Jointly planned activity. “Free Trade = Longer Hours for Less Pay. Workers Speak Out about Free Trade and how it is being brought into our workplaces and labour laws”.
- CLA, CAW and CLC only labour endorsement.
- Preparations done for arrest. Heavy police presence but non-violent

ESWG Campaign Committee  May 14, 2001

- Group meets and sets out short (stop Bill 147), medium (raise minimum wage frozen in 1995 at $6.85 to $8.45) and long-term (build a broad-based movement of low-waged workers) organizing goals and an Action Plan to achieve these.
  May 21, 2001
- Committee looks at background on minimum wage, compares fair wage and living wage campaigns, and discusses testing different strategies and political targets in community meetings with workers.
  May 25, 2001
- Coordinated outreach to union and community groups to a) sign-on to fight Bill 147 b) endorse a living wage campaign
  May 29, 2001
- Living wage language related to City of Toronto fair wage policy and connections to US organizing on living in wage; some group members had connected with Stephanie Luce,
ESWG Demonstration at the Ministry of Labour       June 26, 2001
• Planned over a number of months. Direct action/sit-in plan failed due to lack of people
  signing on. A few dozen in attendance. Little to no official labour presence (a flag or
  two), even though outreach done.
• ESWG notes in letter delivered to Labour Minister Chris Stockwell that Bill 147 “goes
  entirely against the direction of most western countries where work weeks are being
  shortened and minimum wages are being increased”.

Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)       July 13, 2001
• Internal campaign planning workshop done with the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil
  Society (IMPACS) on “challenges and opportunities presented by a Living Wage
  campaign”. Workshop assumption was that objective was to raise minimum wage to $10
  by 2005. Campaign conceived of as education- and messaging-based for populace and
  media. Materials do not indicate any contemplation of specifically how this might happen
  or who might do what.

ESWG/ESA Committee Meets with Stephanie Luce       July or August 2001

                      August 27, 2001
• Draft minimum wage demands prepared and reviewed by ESWG activist group.

                      October 10, 2001
• The ESWG/ESA committee/activist group becomes Justice for Workers (J4W).

Justice for Workers       October 25, 2001
• Staff at a non-union workers rights group gets call from TYRLC staff person to get them
  to attend their “issues committee”. A discussion is had at the J4W meeting about what to
  do about labour moments like this. It was decided to have them come to our meeting if
  they wished. I do not recall them doing so.

“New Employment Standards Act” Training Workshop       October 30, 2001
• I attend a workshop for community agencies put on by TOFFE.

National CEP Women’s Conference       November 2001
• As a member of that union, I am on a panel at the. I give a presentation critical of
  labour’s lack of involvement in Bill 147 fightback and low-waged workers organizing in
  general, pressing for unionists to join in labour-community organizing efforts, making the
  pitch that it benefits unionists too. It is my first union and last experience in CEP with
  paid hotel rooms and per diems.

J4W Presentation to TYRLC Affiliates Meeting       March 7, 2002

Local Neighbourhood J4W Group       April 9, 2002
• Group meets. Mix of non-union and community group staff plus one union staff.
**J4W Media Release**  
April 22, 2002  
- Announcement of OMWC start and message that “now more than ever low-wage workers in Ontario need a raise” to $10 and that “it’s not asking too much for the minimum wage to be raised to the poverty line.”

**J4W Campaign Launch in Toronto Neighbourhood**  
May 1, 2002

**J4W May Day Follow-up Meeting in the Neighbourhood**  
May 13, 2002  
- 17 people attend

**J4W Evaluation Meeting “Step Back to Go Forward”**  
June 26, 2002  
- Six “core goals/values” reviewed, the last one being to increase the minimum wage.

**J4W Write-up for Group “What We’ve Done So Far”**  
Sept. 30, 2002

**Leaflet and Media Event outside Eaton Centre**  
Dec. 10, 2002  
- OCASI and OFL speaker. Wayne Samuelson (then OFL President) given “suggested areas of focus” for the speak: 1 in 4 in ON make poverty wages and that’s over a million people. Link to Christmas season made for shoppers. Santa and his elves (popular theatre) are present.

**New Democratic Party (NDP)**  
Early 2003  
- NDP position on minimum wage increase is to $7.50. Later becomes $8.00.

**Idea for ONR Discussed at J4W**  
Jan. 28, 2003  
- The idea of a new coalition is discussed as a way to do joint campaign work in the upcoming provincial election,

**Ontario Needs a Raise (ONR) Coalition Formed**  
On or about Mar. 13, 2003  
- The ONR is a means to bring (labour and community) groups together that would link through organizing low social assistance rates, cuts to social programs and effective cuts to minimum wage.

**CSJ Meeting**  
March 25 2003  
- Billed as “Living Wage Forum/Minimum Wage Campaign” J4W and ONR members going were very opposed to living wage orientation. Arguments were both about vision and control. OFL, CAW and OPSEU staff present. No TYRLC. CSJ was getting CAW money for a media-based LW campaign. CAW leadership chose to give this to CSJ instead of the coalitions. This was seen by J4W to be due to 2003 election lead-up.

**ONR Clarifies Demands**  
April 10, 2003  
- The demands are: 1) to raise the MW to $10 an hour; 2) to raise shelter allowances to match average local rents; 3) to index the minimum wage, Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Pension (ODSP) to the cost of living. A flyer is created.

**J4W May Day event** in Toronto neighbourhood  
May 1, 2003
**ONR Press Conference**  
**June 5, 2003**
- Called by some ONR members to demand the province “Give Ontario a Raise”, for both $10 minimum wage and increase welfare rates. OCSJ coordination. There were province-wide events in more than 25 communities during which more than 50,000 flyers were distributed.

**Statement by Ontario Economists on Minimum Wages and Income Security**  
**Draft July 21, 2003**
- They called for three ONR demands and shared draft on this date.

**ONR**  
**Sept. 10, 2003**
- ONR calls province-wide rallies outside MPPs offices. Communities were “encouraged to be creative and determined”

**Elections**  
**Oct. 2, 2003**
- Liberals (Dalton McGuinty) defeats Progressive Conservatives (Ernie Eves) in Ontario elections
- McGuinty's government raises minimum wage from $6.85/hr to $7.15/hr on February 1, 2004 and annually to $8.00/hr by in February 2007. Announcement made late 2003 after taking office.

**ONR**  
**Aug. 12, 2004**
- The coalition plans province-wide activities for the Oct. 2, 2004 one-year anniversary in office of McGuinty Liberals. These included letter writing and visits to MPPs and workshops at schools. Organizing was locally determined. OFL agreed “to distribute materials to 47 Labour councils across the province … to encourage local unions to make contacts with anti-poverty groups involved with the ONR” locally.
- ONR meetings in 2004 and 2005 had report backs from community groups across Ontario planning hunger marches, international women’s day events, at which petitions and postcards were signed.
- ONR adds demand to stop the National Child Benefit Supplements clawback from social assistant recipients monthly payments.
- ONR “Walk, Wheel and Ride Event” organizing starts. The group decides to focus all efforts on the walk
- ONR “Walk, Wheel and Ride Event”
- ONR meeting discussion focuses on municipal elections
- ONR organizes an “Action Against Poverty” meeting
- Last minutes available from group that was ONR has no mention of ONR, just a new focus/project “Action Against Poverty”,

**May 27, 2004**
- ONR adds demand to stop the National Child Benefit Supplements clawback from social assistant recipients monthly payments.

**June 22, 2005**
- ONR “Walk, Wheel and Ride Event” organizing starts. The group decides to focus all efforts on the walk

**Sept. 29, 2005**
- ONR “Walk, Wheel and Ride Event”

**April 26, 2006**
- ONR meeting discussion focuses on municipal elections

**August 11, 2006**
- ONR organizes an “Action Against Poverty” meeting

**October 2, 2006**
- Last minutes available from group that was ONR has no mention of ONR, just a new focus/project “Action Against Poverty”,
NDP  November 5, 2006
- MPP Cheri DiNovo introduces her Bill 150 to raise the minimum wage to $10, (TYRLC, 2008a)  January 29, 2007
- By-election campaign NDP Paul Ferreira won.

TYRLC  January 24, 2007
- TYRLC re-launches $10 campaign at Parkdale town hall event, (TYRLC, 2008a).  Feb./Mar. 2007
- York-South Weston neighbourhood Town Hall (TYRLC, 2008a).
- Over next five weeks 12 more community meetings which 870 people attended. Unions and community groups disseminate petitions, buttons and stickers.

Provincial Government  March 20, 2007
- Queen’s Park resumes after spring break  March 21 2007
- Toronto Star reports McGuinty government’s announcement of Three-year phased in increase in minimum wage from $8.00 to $8.75 on March 31 2008, $9.50 in 2009 followed by $10.25 in 2010, included in the provincial budget (TYRLC, 2008a).  April 2007
- Final reading of Bill 150 was to have been two months after Jan. 07 re-launch

TYRLC  April 2007
- TYRLC communiqué goes out with 28% increase message and promise campaign will continue.  May 12, 2007
- TYRLC Workers of Colour/Aboriginal Workers conference  Spring/Summer 2007
- TYRLC ‘Million reasons why’ website still up, stickers and buttons still available.

- Dalton McGuinty government re-elected

Good Jobs for All Coalition  2008
- Starts in early 2008
Appendix C
Interview Guide

**Theme One: Participants’ Initial Involvement in the Campaign**

1. When did you get involved in the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign and how long were you involved?
2. Through what person, group or event did you get involved?
3. Why did you get involved?

**Theme Two: Understanding the Activity and Work of the Campaign**

4. How did the campaign work get done?
5. Why was it done like that?
6. What were you doing as part of that work and why were you doing it?
7. What other things would you have liked to be doing?
8. Why didn’t that happen?

**Theme Three: Uncovering of the Participants’ Analysis of the Campaign Process and Outcome**

9. Who decided how the campaign would be carried out and how were those decisions made?
10. What stands out as a high point in the campaign for you and why?
11. What do you think about the result of the campaign?
12. Why do you think the campaign turned out like it did?
13. When you got involved, what other goals did you have besides raising the minimum wage to $10 an hour?

Below is the table that appears in Chapter Four, in which the demographic distribution of research participants is summarized. It is reproduced here to make the questions more concrete.
Table 2  
*Research Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community Groups (CG)</th>
<th>Non-Union Workers Rights Groups (NUG)</th>
<th>Unions (U)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Officials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers/Activists</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (white)</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>6 (4)</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (white)</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of 21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hello _______, my name is Sheila Wilmot. You may remember me from the community or union organizing work we have both been involved in. I am contacting you right now to see if you would like to participate in a workers’ rights focused research project I am doing as part of my doctoral studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto. I am hoping to speak with you about your participation and involvement in the 2001-2007 Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign (OMWC) to raise the minimum wage to $10 per hour. I was one of the community organizers involved in the initial phase of the campaign that started in 2001. Both the union that I work for and the one I am a member supported the campaign in the 2007 phase.

I am interested in exploring the effectiveness of labour-community workers’ rights campaigns. My specific project is to look at how people like you were involved in the OMWC, what you were doing, what your thoughts are about your participation and how this relates to your ideas and efforts in workers’ rights organizing in general. I would like to talk with a range of people, including officials, staff and unpaid activists who are in or do work with unions, non-unions workers’ rights advocacy organizations or community social service agencies.

I will not ask you for any personal information and your name or organization will not be reported. If you would like, I will meet with you in advance to explain the project in greater detail before you commit to participating. If you decide to participate I will be happy to arrange a convenient and comfortable location for you, at a time that fits with your schedule. There will be $10 compensation for your time talking with me if you are low or unwaged. Your participation will be voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time with no loss of benefits or other consequences.

I hope you will consider participating in the research. If you are interested or have more questions, please let me know at swilmot@oise.utoronto.ca or 416-856-9636.

Thank you
Appendix E
Letter of Information and Consent

[Printed on OISE/UT letterhead]

Date:

Dear ______________,

My name is Sheila Wilmot and I am a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education and Community Development program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto. I want to ask you some questions about your participation in the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign (OMWC). My research study is *The Social Organization of the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign*.

The purpose of the research is to explore the effectiveness of labour-community workers' rights campaigns. My specific project is to look at how people like you participated in the Toronto part of the OMWC any time in the period of 2001 to 2007. That is, how you were involved, what your thoughts are about your participation and how this relates to your ideas about and efforts in workers’ rights organizing in general. You have been selected because I would like to talk with a range of people, including elected officials, staff and unpaid activists who are in or do work with unions, non-unions workers’ rights advocacy organizations or community social service agencies.

*The interview will be digitally audio-recorded and may last one to two hours.*

**Confidentiality, Risks and Benefits**

The information that I collect will be kept confidential unless you choose in the attached Consent Agreement to identify myself. If you choose anonymity I will identify you by a letter and number, and your name will never be used in any public manner.

I plan to share my research with other people in the labour and community workers’ rights organizing field through presentations and publications based on this study. I will carefully ensure that you cannot be identified from the content of paraphrases and direct quotations from the interviews used in any reports, papers and publications. At the same time, I can make no guarantees that people familiar with the OMWC and the organizations and people involved will not figure out who some of the anonymous participants might have been. There are minimal risks associated with such potential public knowledge of your participation in this research.

Transcripts of all interviews will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The digital recordings will be kept until one year after this study is completed and then destroyed.
There will be $10 compensation for your time if you are low or unwaged. All participants may receive indirect benefits from this opportunity for reflection on their campaign involvement.

**Participation and Withdrawal**

Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time with no loss of benefits or other consequences. You do not have to answer any question that you do not want to. You can withdraw by letting me know during or after the interview. If you withdraw the data will be kept.

Thank you very much for your time and your assistance with this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me any time at swilmot@oise.utoronto.ca. My thesis supervisor’s name is Dr. Shahrzad Mojab. You can also contact her at any time at (416) 978-0829 or by email at smojab@oise.utoronto.ca.

At any time, you can feel free to contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or (416) 946-3273 if you have any questions about your rights as a participant.

Sincerely,

Sheila Wilmot  
Ph.D. Candidate  
OISE/UT, Adult Education and Community Development Program  
swilmot@oise.utoronto.ca
CONSENT AGREEMENT

I, __________________________________ , I have read and understood the accompanying Information Letter and, therefore, consent to participate in the research study *The Social Organization of the Ontario Minimum Wage Campaign.*

Participant Signature: ___________________________________

Date: __________________________

Researcher Signature: ________________________________

Date: __________________________

I choose anonymity ______ OR I choose to identify myself ______

(initials) (initials)

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings:

YES    NO

Regular Mail (please provide full address): __________________________

Email (please provide full address): __________________________