

# **Ethical Purchasing Policies: Activist School**

Includes:  
**Final Report**

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# Ethical Purchasing Policies: Activist School

A Convergence of Students Working for Change on Campus  
Trent University, Peterborough, ON, February 1st-3rd, 2008



*Canadian Student Fair Trade Network*

[www.csftn-recce.org](http://www.csftn-recce.org)

In Partnership with:



*The Activist School of the CSFTN provided a great forum for fair trade practitioners, activists, and academics to meet and discuss fair trade – from practice to theory and back again. The lively dialogue that emerged pointed to key challenges facing fair trade today, and opened doors to new ideas and debates on how to deal with them.*

**-Dr. Gavin Fridell**, author of *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market Driven Social Justice*, & Professor, Politics Department, Trent University

**Abstract:** The Activist School brought together students from different post-secondary institutions who work locally to shift their schools towards ethical purchasing policies and practices. Throughout the weekend students were able to share their experiences and strategize on how to strengthen their local campaigns as well as networks between schools and organizations. The conference united students working at the grassroots on multiple issues of ethical purchasing with various group affiliations. The purpose of the weekend was to strengthen the capacities of student organizers and to develop a broader understanding of ethical purchasing, encompassing Fair Trade, No Sweat and local food, amongst other issues. The Activist School was a significant step in the ongoing process to build a network and a movement advocating for ethical purchasing on campuses across Canada.

## Overview



Left to Right: **Patrick Clark**, Student, Trent University & Coordinator, CSFTN; **Kat Reichel**, Coordinator, CSFTN & TransFair Canada Staff; **Ian Hussey**, Founder, CSFTN

**Participation:** 35 of 50 Pre-Registered Delegates

**Local Participation:** 45

**Allied Groups:** United Students Against Sweatshops Canada, World University Services Canada, TransFair Canada, Engineers Without Borders, Ontario Public Interest Research Group, Maquila Solidarity Network, The Seasoned Spoon Cooperative Café

**Schools Represented:** Trent University, York University, University of Waterloo, Fanshawe College, University of Toronto, University of Northern British Columbia, Queen's University, Canadian College of Naturopathic Medicine, Brock University, University of Ottawa.

**Registered, did not attend due to weather:** University of Guelph, McMaster University, Algoma University.

**Thank You to Our Sponsors:** TransFair Canada, La Siembra Cooperative Alternative Grounds

**In-Kind Sponsorship:** Ontario Natural Food Co-op, Equita, Équicosta, Ten Thousand Villages, Sol Cuisine, Ruth's Hemp Bars, Honey Bar, Harmony Organic, Alternative Grounds, La Siembra Cooperative, Chocoland.

Thanks to our sponsors, the CSFTN was able to provide food throughout the weekend and funding for participants who requested it. The CSFTN's local partner for the Activist School, OPIRG-Peterborough, did a great job arranging billets for those who required them. Admission to the Activist School was free.

Friday February, 1<sup>st</sup>

**James Whetung**

**Gatherer and Trader of Wild Rice, Curve Lake, Ontario**

James spoke eloquently about the history and significance of Wild Rice in the local region of Peterborough and the Kawarthas. The region is home to Rice Lake and was once the “rice bowl” of North America. James informed the group of the issues he faces as a gatherer of Wild Rice. He linked the lack of political will by the Ontario government to protect Wild Rice to the broader situation of racism and marginalization faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. He talked about how continuing to gather Wild Rice works to maintain a cultural tradition and form of knowledge. James sells his product locally at the Peterborough Farmers Market and he discussed the challenges which this poses. James’s fantastic talk added local and First Peoples elements to the Activist School, and inspired an important discussion on expanding domestic fair trade.



**Keynote Address: Dr. Gavin Fridell**

Author, **Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market Driven Social Justice**

Fridell focused his address on comparing the ramifications and politics of Fair Trade in and between the North and the South. He argued that while Fair Trade in the South is focused on cooperatives as an alternative development model, in the North it is much less alternative, with conventional corporate players, like Starbucks, dominating the market. Fridell purported that this is due to the market-driven and consumer-based development model of the Fair Trade network, which, he argued, is undemocratic. Fridell declared that we need to move beyond consumer-based goals toward more collective action of pushing for government policy change.

**Discussion:** Participants discussed the possibility of moving from consumer to collective or governmental solutions to unfair trade. Fridell affirmed that the short-term gains that can be made from the current model of “Fair Trade is compatible with free trade” are not worth it in long-term, and that we must work towards more state-based regulation. The possibilities of Fair Trade as a concurrent strategy with a more regulated trade regime were discussed. The current roundtable discussions being facilitated by the federal New Democratic Party with members of the Canadian Fair Trade and trade union communities were cited as a hopeful new development in this direction.

**Saturday February, 2<sup>nd</sup>**



**Meri Kim Oliver, Reykia Fick and Patrick Clark  
Ethical Purchasing Policy Case Study: Trent University**

This interactive session was led by Reykia Fick and Patrick Clark, who were both organizers of Fair Trade Trent - the student group which successfully lobbied Trent University to adopt a Fair Trade Certified Product Purchasing Policy. Meri Kim Oliver, Director of Student Affairs at Trent University, co-led the session and spoke from her perspective as the Trent Administration contact who worked to negotiate the terms of the policy. Fair Trade Trent focused on petition campaigns to raise-awareness and gain support from the student body. When Fair Trade Trent came together with the Trent Administration and foodservice provider, ARAMARK, to form a committee and negotiate the terms of a policy, taste testing days proved important to legitimate support for the policy and Fair Trade. The main barrier for ARAMARK proved to be re-negotiating ongoing contracts with their suppliers, such as Mother Parkers. Meri Kim purported that Fair Trade Trent's public education efforts as well as the letters of support they solicited from various levels of student government and other groups on-campus helped in ensuring the policy's development and passage. Understanding the governance structure of the university proved very important for Fair Trade Trent in this way.

**Four break-out discussions** followed the case study session. Reykia Fick led one on TransFair's Fair Trade Towns campaign, and talked with some local organizers interested in starting a campaign. James Douglas of United Students Against Sweatshops led a session on No Sweat campaigning and the Designated Suppliers Program. There was a break-out on how to mobilize Fair Trade education campaigns, and another which served as a workshop for students working on policy campaigns.

**Seasoned Spoon Cooperative Café Networking Meeting**

As an attempt to bridge the gap between local organic food and ethical purchasing, the Seasoned Spoon, a non-profit, student-led co-op at Trent led an info-sharing and networking meeting. This took place concurrent to the other sessions and served as a forum for students from other campuses to learn about the development of the Seasoned Spoon and consider starting similar initiatives on their campuses.



### **Dr. Jennifer Clapp, Local Initiatives in a Global Context**

Dr. Clapp is a Professor of Environmental Studies at the University of Waterloo, a former Trent faculty member, and a founder of the Seasoned Spoon Cooperative Café. She addressed the group on the globalized food system and the prospects for alternatives. She connected the situation of rising food prices globally to the recent negotiations deadlock within the World Trade Organization. She also related this to problems of growing monopolization and corporatization in food systems. Clapp talked about how re-localization of food systems is a significant way to address the current crisis in the global food system. This message hit home as participants had just finished enjoying lunch featuring tasty local foods catered by the Seasoned Spoon.

### **Claudia Quintanilla and Dean Neu, The Story of Just Shirts**

Claudia and Dean were both involved in founding and developing la Cooperativa de Madres Solteras, a sewing cooperative of single mothers in El Salvador comprising former sweatshop workers. The coop currently employs ten women and is hoping to expand production due to a large contract with the Canadian Federation of Students. Claudia and Dean talked about the current state of the global garment industry, the ways it has been shaped by neoliberal globalization and the “race to the bottom” logic which it perpetuates. The “race to the bottom” logic makes it very difficult to develop viable alternatives, and is why it is all the more important to support businesses like Just Shirts, the Canadian company that works solely with la Cooperativa de Madres Solteras to bring their products to North American markets.

### **Caitlin Peeling, La Siembra Cooperative**

La Siembra is a worker-owned cooperative based in Ottawa, ON, and is the first importer of Fair Trade sugar and cocoa in North America through the Cocoa Camino. Caitlin outlined La Siembra’s philosophy of Fair Trade. She explained that Fair Trade should be about much more than just paying a fair price to Southern farmers; it must be about developing coops and cooperation in and between both the South *and* the North. This premise is central to La Siembra’s business paradigm and, for the CSFTN and others, what Fair Trade should be.



**Sunday February, 3<sup>rd</sup>**



Exploring Anti-Oppression through Drama

### **Anti-Oppression Workshop**

**Facilitated by Lan Anh Ha and Brendan Bailey of OPIRG-Peterborough**

Lan Anh and Brendan led an interactive workshop exploring anti-oppression in the specific context of student groups organizing for Fair Trade on campus. Through the use of drawings and skits, the group deconstructed the oppressive relationships and politics which characterize Fair Trade and our role advocating for it as people with privilege. Several participants commented afterward that this was the most effective anti-oppression workshop they'd ever participated in. Way to go Lan Anh and Brendan!

### **Closing Session: Evaluation and Next Steps for the CSFTN**

Besides the weekend's snowstorm and the logistical confusion this caused, the group indicated that they found the Activist School to be a good balance of practical and theoretical sessions; though they suggested that more time to discuss issues around campus campaigns and policies would have been nice.

In the next steps brainstorming session the participants batted around ideas of how the next Activist School could be structured, and some of the logistics involved in carrying out another broad-based convergence. Some ideas the group discussed included more coalition-building to avoid re-creating the wheel, to update the CSFTN website with an open forum (which we plan to use the newly developed Activist Notes social forum for), and the need to work more with Quebec-based people and groups. The group talked about the possibility of having East/West regional Activist Schools in order to cut down on our ecological footprint, and include and train more of the grassroots. Some immediate next steps for the CSFTN included preparing this report and updating the guide we published last August on advocating the adoption of ethical purchasing policies at post-secondary institutions. We plan to update and expand the guide in the summer, including more case studies and instructional examples. We will post the updated and expanded guide on Activist Notes in an interactive format in which people can add comments and information on their own experience, local group and actions.