Introduction: Contradictions of Globalization

Since the 1980s, economic globalization — that is, the integration of national economies into a single, integrated market — has accelerated at an unprecedented rate. Proponents see it in positive terms, arguing that globalization is bringing prosperity to all concerned. Organized labour and the antiglobalization movement, on the other hand, argue that it has led to the impoverishment of working people. Certainly, we have seen processes of transformation, especially though not exclusively in large cities: there has been a decline in manufacturing and a corresponding growth of the high tech and service sectors. However, it would be too simplistic to see this trend as a straightforward process of deindustrialization. Saskia Sassen, a well-known analyst of what she terms “world-class cities,” argues that cities are not only nodes for the coordination of finance and capital, they are also centres for production; they are sites where certain kinds of work get done that goes beyond the dichotomy between manufacturing and services. What occurs in cities, as well as other sites, is a new contradiction of the tension between capital and labour.

This paper focuses on the garment industry and its workers in the Canadian context. I argue that garment production illustrates the contradictions generated by new forms of capitalist accumulation, exploitation, and work reorganization that are partly facilitated by the state. As a mainstay of Canadian manufacturing, the garment sector has been undergoing dramatic changes since the 1980s. According to 1996 Industry Canada figures, the sector experienced a staggering loss of 800 plants and more than 33,000 jobs between 1989 and 1993. This trend corresponded to the signing of the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the current period of
economic globalization. Many people, including manufacturers, government officials, and policymakers, have written off the sector as a “sunset” industry and have spent little effort reviving it, let alone tracking changes within it. Garment production has not been decimated, however, even according to government figures. Since 1996, the garment workforce has declined somewhat more slowly: there were modest increases from 1997 to 2002 then slight decreases in the next two years, according to the latest available statistics. Furthermore, Industry Canada export figures show that the garment sector has been growing since the 1990s. In spite of the massive restructuring that has occurred in garment production, it remains part of Canada’s metropolis landscape. It is found in four major cities: Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. Thus, we need to take a closer look at the configuration and trajectory of this sector, as well as the processes that shape it. Examining the contradictions of garment production will shed light on new fissures in the present regime of capitalist accumulation that we call globalization.

What follows is, first, a discussion on the present configuration of garment production in Canada, paying particular attention to contradictions inherent in this sector. I then identify major interlocking processes occurring at the global, national, and local levels that produce these contradictions. The article ends with the social and political implications based on the analysis presented.

Configuration of the Garment Industry The garment industry is complex. It is characterized by local variation and diversity, and defies generalization. Technically, it is referred to as the apparel or clothing industry, and comprises 21 subsectors that produce clothing and leather products. In addition to the commonly known products such as men’s, women’s, and children’s wear, it also includes sports’ wear, uniforms, and footwear. There are also many local differences in terms of what is being produced. For instance, Montreal and Winnipeg tend to have larger operations because of the types of garments produced there (men’s wear and heavy garments); Toronto is distinguished by the movement of workers between factories and home-based operations; Vancouver is experiencing a boom, making use of the increasing number of
newcomers from Asian Pacific Rim countries as well as undocumented workers. It is also emerging as a warehousing site for imports from Asia. These are gross generalizations; within each city, other types of production and work organization also exist. In addition to demographic, immigration, and geographic variables, the administrative and legislative framework of each province and city (e.g., employment standards legislation and service delivery system to newcomers) also affects the work organization of the industry. Based on common sense understanding and accessibility of data, this paper describes trends primarily related to the clothing subsectors.

While no absolute consensus exists, there is general agreement that the industry has undergone dramatic restructuring in the last two and a half decades, with contradictory results. Despite staggering job losses between 1989 and 1993, the employment level remained fairly constant up to 2004. Export figures suggest that the industry has been growing because, from the mid-1990s onwards, both shipments and employment have been increasing. Some segments of the industry (for example, private label manufacturing such as designer wear) are booming.

One of the most dramatic changes to occur over the last two decades is the shift in control within the industry, from manufacturers to large retail chains such as the Bay (which also owns Zellers). Moreover, the Canadian retail market is increasingly dominated by transnational retail chains such as Wal-Mart. The concentration of the retail market has produced progressive fragmentation of garment production. Here, “fragmentation” refers to the subcontractual nature of most garment production, especially in subsectors such as ladies’ and children’s wear. In response to their loss of control, manufacturers scale down production by reducing plant size but retaining a couple of cutters, thereby becoming contractors to retailers. Sewing is contracted out to a network of subcontractors, called jobbers, who may use home-based workers or sweatshop operations to minimize operating costs and maximize profit margins.

Research done by the Maquila Solidarity Network, a research and advocacy group in Toronto that tracks Canadian garment production worldwide, found that in the early 1970s, only 22 percent of the sector was made up of factories with fewer than 20 workers. By the early 1990s, this picture
had reversed and more than 75 percent of clothing was produced in shops with fewer than 20 workers. In Ontario, as of 1991, contractors made up more than 50 percent of the industry. More than half of those contractors employed four workers or fewer.\(^{11}\) The effects of this restructuring are job loss and the reemergence of home-based work and sweatshop operations in the Canadian context.\(^ {12}\) This trend resonates with employment statistics, which indicate that the employment workforce has been dropping. However, it contradicts export figures, which, although experiencing a decline since 2002, are well above the early 1990s level.

Within the garment industry, the effects of restructuring vary in each subsector. Men’s wear, especially suits and heavy winter garments, can be produced in a more “uniform” way than other types. These garments lend themselves to mass production in larger factory settings, thus enabling greater mechanization and technological innovation. This also means that once a manufacturer invests in a plant, it is less likely to downsize or relocate. Women’s and children’s wear, on the other hand, is subject to seasonal fluctuation and changes in fashion from year to year. Subcontracting is prevalent in this latter subsector. Instead of investing in technologies to render production more efficient, small contractors and jobbers tend to take advantage of cheap labour provided by (mostly female) immigrant and undocumented workers, and/or to use homeworkers as a cheap alternative to innovation and capital investment in the production process, thereby reinforcing the existing gender and ethnic/racial hierarchy. Another scenario is the relocation of production units to developing countries with lower labour costs.\(^ {13}\) Paradoxically, the seasonal and constantly changing nature of the fashion industry also enables high-end designers and their workers in Canadian cities to survive in a climate of intense global competition. In this subsector, each designer and private-label producer attempts to deliver the most fashionable clothing to the market ahead of competitors, taking advantage of local rather than off-shore production. Meanwhile, the skill level required also favours Canadian workers who have been in the industry for a long time.

A distinct feature of the garment labour market is the decline in real wages and the deterioration of working conditions. Whereas unionization had seen the improvement of Canadian garment workers’ wage level and
working conditions from the 1930s onwards, since the 1980s, as mentioned earlier, sweatshops and home-based production have reemerged. A close scrutiny of wages, by comparing official statistics and interview data, reveals contradictions and variations in workers’ wages. For example, Statistics Canada figures indicate a gradual but progressive rise in average weekly earnings between 1996 and 2004, from $449.15 to $590.13. However, several studies, including my 1999 study, on the wage level of factory and home-based workers indicate that there was no increase in the piece rate over the last two decades. My most recent study on changes in the garment industry suggest great variance in wages, from a high of $1,700 per month for a presser/packer to a low of $800 per month for a sewer. Some workers in another study in which I was involved reported daily wages as low as $10. This contradiction points out a gap in our present knowledge and understanding of the determinations of wages in this sector. The following quote by a home-based sewer from my 1999 study demonstrates the elasticity and indeterminacy of wages in this sector, as well as employers’ maneuvering to keep wages down:

The lowest salary I earned was about $3 per hour, with the same employers I’m now working. [I asked why she didn’t complain about the low rate.] I didn’t say anything at the beginning. I dared not. But now I start to talk to them about this. The kind of pocket-cover sewing I’m now doing also requires me to cut certain fabric before I can start sewing. But the employers don’t count the cutting time. I told the employers about this. But they said that almost every homeworker asks them for a raise. But they get no raise from their contractor who gives them the fabric. I don’t know other homeworkers who also work for them. It would be better if I know. Their factory is very small. They only have two workers in their factory, plus some part-timers, and the two owners.

The highest salary I earned was around $8 per hour. That was the beginning when I first worked for these employers, when they let me know the piece rate before I sewed. But now they don’t tell me the piece rate before I sew.

Every time I ask them for the piece rate, they always say they haven’t had time to think about it yet. At the beginning they gave me the piece rate before I sewed. But now they don’t. They never tell me the piece rate until I finish sewing the garments.
Historically and currently, a notable feature of garment production has been the use of immigrant labour, and the gender and racial hierarchy within the garment workforce: it is internally differentiated by race, ethnicity, and gender. While it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics on gender and racial breakdown in this workforce, a recent study estimates that it comprised about 50 percent immigrants and 76 percent women.20 The large retailers are controlled and dominated by US and Canadian corporate elite, consisting largely, though not exclusively, of white men. Further gender and racial differentiation is apparent as we move down the garment production hierarchy. In the period immediately after World War II, many garment workers were immigrant men from Europe. As they acquire skills and seniority and move up the production hierarchy (e.g., by becoming cutters, who are seen to be more skilled than sewing machine operators), women replace them as sewing machine operators at the bottom of the production hierarchy. Although garment workers can be found across ethnic and racial groups in Canada, increasingly younger immigrant women from Asia (and, in Toronto, from Southeast Asia) predominate. My recent study found that, in general, immigrant men tend to be jobbers, or occupy the higher paying and skilled jobs (such as cutting and machine maintenance) in garment production, whereas women are sewing machine operators, pressers, and packers.21 For immigrant women employed as sewing machine operators, the skills they have acquired (such as mending and sewing) in domestic settings can be readily transferrable to the industrial context; it is noteworthy, although not surprising, that these workers are seen by employers as unskilled or semiskilled (vis-à-vis cutters who are seen to be skilled). This organization of the garment labour force produces interesting tensions along lines of gender, ethnicity, age, and immigrant status. The relocation of garment production to the developing world with lower labour costs further enhances this division, which will be discussed later.

This discussion indicates that garment production evades generalization and statistical capture. Apart from the cyclical production process, increasing fragmentation and the use of casual, home-based workers make it difficult to track production in smaller plants and to track the size of the workforce. The contradiction pointed out earlier — namely, increasing levels of export
vis-à-vis a shrinking workforce based on an examination of available statistics — indicates that much goes on beneath the surface. How do we understand the dynamics and change in this industry and what do these changes tell us about this period of capitalist accumulation? These questions will be explored next.

Interlocking Global and Local/National Processes The changing configuration of the garment sector and the composition of its labour force are shaped by external global, national, provincial, and local processes. Here, I outline five sets of interlocking processes that work together to produce the shifting reality described above. While they are presented separately for analytical and discussion purposes, in actuality they work in concert, albeit not necessarily intentionally, to create particular effects.

Corporate Mergers and Shifting Control The increasing concentration of capital through corporate mergers and takeovers has had a tremendous impact on the garment industry. As mentioned, the shift of control away from manufacturers to large Canadian and transnational retail chains has centralized control of the industry and decentralized production through the subcontracting system. This way of organizing production is made possible by the electronic revolution, especially electronic data interchange. This kind of computerized technology enables retailers to control production by keeping better records of their stock and keeping fewer garments in stock. Garment sales on the rack in retail stores can be communicated to production plants almost instantaneously anywhere in the world. This enables retailers and large manufacturers to cut down on mass production, storage, and other overhead costs. Retailers also demand quicker turn-around times for production and want suppliers to provide garments on consignment, and/or at last year’s price.22

Locally and globally, the subcontracting system not only deepens exploitation (because each level of contractor needs to extract profit from the next level), it creates new classes of employers and workers locally and internationally, and reinforces dominant-subordinate relations between men and women, and between majority and minority groups. Elsewhere, I named
this process the recolonization of the Third World, which now exists in every corner of the globe.  

**Shifting Policy Context of the Canadian State at Different Levels**  
The adoption of the concept of “globalization” has been accompanied by a shift by states at all levels in how to think about economic development. Analysts suggest that, whereas in the 1950s and 1960s there was widespread consensus that national governments needed to play a key role in economic activities, the opposite assumptions have been operative since the 1980s. The new neoliberal discourse subscribes to the view that the markets are uncontrollable, and that the only way to avoid being a loser is to be as competitive as possible. According to du Gay, this discourse both “defines the circumstances in which states find themselves and advocates particular mechanisms through which security might conceivably be obtained under those circumstances,” suggesting that “survival is only possible by devolving responsibility for the ‘economy’ to ‘the market.’”

The devolution of state responsibilities has led, at the provincial level, to legislation and policies involving cutbacks or the privatization of social provisions, deregulation of industries and services, and liberalization of employment standards. For example, in spite of the increasing prevalence of home-based work, the Ontario government has consistently resisted reforming labour legislation to enable home-based workers, such as domestic and garment workers, to unionize across work sites. Furthermore, in Ontario the legal working hours for the work week have been extended to sixty, effectively lengthening the work week of workers without giving them protection against possible employer exploitation. In Quebec, the Decree system, which offered sector-wide rather than plant-by-plant protection to garment workers, has been lifted, thereby weakening the workers’ ability to bargain on a sectoral basis. These measures have served to destabilize the sense of security enjoyed by Canadians.

This development works in concert, albeit not in deliberate coordination, with federal policies that support the mobility of investors and entrepreneurs while limiting that of workers and their families. For example, the expansion of the independent class category and contraction of the
family class category in Canada’s immigration policy has served to produce and reinforce a workforce that meets the short-term need of industries and businesses. The lack of social and educational provisions for family class immigrants means that the capacity of a whole sector of the immigrant population is underutilized. Indeed, existing immigration policy has been concerned only with recruitment with little consideration for longer-term strategies aimed at building the capacity of workers to meet the challenges of a global economy. Among other things, building worker capacity involves building stable family and community structures, as well as ongoing training and skill development.

This kind of move is exacerbated by the further tightening of immigration and refugee policies since the 11 September 2001 “terrorist” attacks on the United States. Accompanying the trend of restricting immigration and increasing surveillance of immigrants and refugees is the increasing use of workers on work permits, effectively restricting the mobility and citizenship rights of groups of workers, frequently from Third World countries. This means that workers, especially workers on work permits, are vulnerable to the whims of employers. State measures, coupled with the shifting control within the garment industry, serve to both deepen existing and create new forms of exploitative relations.

The Transnational Movement of Labour  In spite of increased and more vigilant monitoring of national borders, international migration — people relocating in search of paid employment and better living conditions — is an inevitable result of globalization. This is true whether people are allowed to migrate through proper channels or not.

Since globalization became widely accepted, in addition to the acceleration of im/migration of people around the globe, there have been increasingly coordinated international networks of human trafficking across national borders. Indeed, analysts monitoring this situation assert that human trafficking is the number one illegal activity around the globe, surpassing the illegal traffic of drugs and firearms. Illegal migrants are used to supply industrialized countries, such as Canada and the United States, with a cheap labour source, thus creating a new category of workers called
“undocumented workers.” Frequently, undocumented workers and illegal migrants are seen as a Third World phenomenon arising out of the appalling economic, social, and political conditions of southern countries. In reality, it is precisely the demand for cheap and docile labour in the developed and industrialized countries that creates the impetus and incentive for illegal migration and for people to act as intermediaries in this activity. Often, illegal migration is seen as an accidental phenomenon. In fact, it is an activity that requires a great deal of planning, coordination, and cooperation among groups of people (e.g., the intermediaries and those working in transportation companies and border control, to name only a few players). It is, therefore, an integral part of the present condition that we call globalization.

Indeed, although official data are hard to come by, we know that undocumented workers represent a large portion of the workforce in selected sectors, including garment production, in the United States and Canada. Moreover, intended or not, the movement of people, legally sanctioned or not, forms part of the infrastructure for low wages in a global city.

**Trade Agreements Between Nation-States** The capacity of retailers and manufacturers, as the embodiment of capital, to move across national borders in search of cheap labour and profit is facilitated by trade negotiations between and among nations and international trade organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). These negotiations, leading to the signing of trade agreements, govern trade and investment between and among countries. The Canadian state has taken a progressively active role in these trade agreements for almost two decades, beginning notably with the negotiation and implementation of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (the CUSFTA, or simply the FTA) in 1989.

Until the 1980s, Canada’s garment industry was relatively protected by tariffs and quotas. Trade liberalization in the garment sector began with the 1989 signing of the FTA, a bilateral agreement between Canada and the United States. Before the FTA, Canada’s major apparel suppliers were China, Hong Kong, and Korea. Since the signing of the FTA, there has been a huge jump in the value of US garments imported to Canada. According to Industry Canada statistics, between 1988 and 1995 apparel imports from
the United States increased at an average rate of more than 25 percent. The United States continues to be Canada’s largest trading partner. Although, as a bilateral agreement, the scope of the FTA was limited, it is an important legal document because it set precedents for future trade negotiations, such as negotiations related to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Trade liberalization was accelerated with NAFTA, which came into effect in January 1993. This agreement played a major role in the reconfiguration of the garment sector because it enabled greater freedom of movement for production and goods among Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Specifically, it enables manufacturers to invest in, set up, or outsource to garment plants in Mexico, where labour costs are much lower relative to US and Canadian wages. Indeed, major Canadian manufacturers (e.g., Nygard International, which manufactures women’s wear, and Gildan Activewear, the largest T-shirt manufacturer in Quebec and in Canada as a whole) began to build or subcontract to plants in Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean Basin. This has led directly to job loss, depression of Canadian wages, and the restructuring of garment manufacturing in the Canadian context. One strategy used by US manufacturers, for example, is to ship US-produced textiles to Mexico, where garments can be made much more cheaply, and then import the finished products back to the US market taking advantage of the free tariff and quota agreement of NAFTA.

Since the signing of NAFTA, Canada’s apparel export to the United States has also increased. However, the advantage of NAFTA to Canadian manufacturers is contradictory. According to one analyst, the “rules of origin” in NAFTA limit Canadian manufacturers in two ways. First, these rules stipulate that duty is exempted only for products containing textile made in North America. The high-end clothing produced in Canada, however, is made mainly with textile imported from Europe (and now from Asia). Since many Canadian-made garments would be considered non-originating, the work of Canada’s apparel manufacturers and their employees are effectively devalued. Thus, according to Leah Vosko, NAFTA sets unfair export limits and duties on Canada’s most competitive garments. Second, the same rules also force Canada and Mexico to import yarn from the United States, thus
giving US textile and apparel manufacturing an unfair advantage. In terms of international agreements, Canada first participated in the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) negotiated through the WTO in 1974. The MFA involved negotiating, country by country, bilateral quotas concerning the quantity of garments that exporting countries from the economic South could send into Canada and other northern countries. This has protected the Canadian industry from southern countries with a competitive edge in terms of lower labour costs, lower labour standards, and fewer workplace health and safety requirements. In 1995, the Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) came into effect, which replaced the MFA. Under the ATC, worldwide apparel and textile quotas would be phased out by 2005. This would enable countries such as China to dramatically increase apparel and textile exports to western markets, thus significantly affecting garment production within Canada.

Since the ATC came fully into effect, the garment workforce has been drastically reduced as plants either moved to Asia, notably China, or manufacturers closed plants in favour of local subcontracting. My recent study documented the closing of a major contracting plant for Roots Canada at the start of 2005. Rumours in the Chinese community indicated that the employers were subcontracting, but finding the subcontractors of this company has been next to impossible. Thus, while trade agreements have facilitated the flight of capital in search of cheap labour, they have served to impoverish Canadian workers, leading to more proliferation of sweatshops and home-based sewing. In other words, globalization has created Third World working conditions within the geographical boundaries of the so-called First, or developing, world.

**Global/Local Resistance** The desire of investors and employers to augment profit by depressing wages and working conditions, and the state’s role in facilitating global economic integration are not without resistance. The most obvious instance of this is the antiglobalization movement, which is gathering momentum as economic integration, manifested by increasing frequency of meetings and trade negotiations among heads of states, transnational corporations, and trade organizations (e.g., the WTO), intensifies. This
movement and other protests serve to limit the flight and exploitation of capital, and redirect our attention to a more holistic conception of economic development.

In terms of garment production, this resistance is expressed as the antisweat movement, both within North America and globally. This movement, consisting of coalitions of unions; church, community, and social justice organizations, as well as women, students, and consumers, has grown dramatically over the past 10 years. Practically every university campus in North America has an antisweat campaign. Students, with support from external groups, have managed to alert university administrations to the appalling working conditions of garment workers, especially in Third World countries. Many universities, like some manufacturers, have responded to this kind of pressure by developing codes of conduct for suppliers. For example, the University of Toronto administration learned about allegations directed at Gildan Activewear regarding their unethical treatment of workers in the Third World through the CBC-TV program Disclosure, aired on 22 January 2002. The administration then asked Gildan to account for allegations of poor working conditions in its factories. This kind of pressure keeps manufacturers and retailers accountable and responsible employers. Ironically, this kind of initiative has come from private citizens and other institutions, rather than from the state.

In Canada, the Ethical Trading Action Group (ETAG), a coalition of labour, human rights, church, and development organizations coordinated by the Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), has launched a number of campaigns to pressure the federal government and educate the Canadian public about the global network of garment production. These pressures are the result of the intensification of economic globalization, and will increase in momentum along with globalization itself.

Social and Political Implications In light of the foregoing discussion, how may we, as researchers, educators, and policy analysts, think about garment production in a forward-looking, proactive (rather than reactive and short-term) manner? I conclude with the following thoughts.
Research Given the dramatic and continuous changes in the garment sector, we need more and better research done to track the global production and organization of apparel and textile. Due to the private nature of ownership and the secretive character of garment production, it is very difficult to trace the extensive network and chain of garment production in Canada and around the globe. Tracking the global interconnections among garment plants, therefore, requires researchers with different knowledge and skills. For example, statistical analysis of export and import figures for garment manufacturing combined with interviews with garment workers illuminate the multifaceted and contradictory nature of garment production. Tracking the investment patterns of manufacturers indicates the movement and location of garment production across national borders. It is only through collaboration and partnership among researchers in different locations (e.g., in the government, in the academy, in unions, in the community) that we may unravel the complex nature and organization of garment production in Canada and elsewhere. A clearer picture of garment production will enable researchers and policy analysts to identify areas that require attention.

Trade and Labour Standards Trade agreements that facilitate cross-border trade need built-in safeguards to protect workers. This means analyzing how existing agreements produce inequity in order to develop measures to address this problem and, based on the present situation, to consider the social consequences of trade agreements to be developed in the future. The state can learn from the problems encountered in the present time to guide its action in the future.

My description of the changing configuration of the garment sector points to a major problem in our existing system: labour issues and labour rights in relation to garment production, namely jurisdictional rigidity. By this, I mean that each level of the state has jurisdiction over a limited area, but the long-term health of the sector and its workers requires an overall, rather than piecemeal, strategy.

For example, labour standards fall under provincial jurisdiction. Apart from government monitoring, which is increasingly ineffective due to cutbacks, responsibility for reporting violations has been put on the shoul-
ders of workers. However, given the vulnerability of workers in this sector, it is clear that this bottom-up approach will never address the widespread problem of sweating in the garment sector. To ensure ethical practices, the onus must be put on retailers and manufacturers, who have control over setting prices and wages. Since retailers and large manufacturers operate beyond the provincial or municipal level, coordinated efforts among different levels of government are needed to ensure the adherence of labour standards and fair employment practices at the top. While codes of conduct developed by universities and other institutions are good practices that can be extended more widely to other organizations, they are most effective if not left to the good will of individual organizations and companies. In this regard, state support in, and requirements for, the development of ethical employment practices will go a long way in lending legitimacy to initiatives already adopted by other organizations. However, support for the development of codes of conduct must go hand in hand with better monitoring and enforcement of employment standards provincially.

Disclosure requirements represent another arena in which the state can intervene i.e., requiring manufacturers and retailers to disclose their supply chain. ETAG’s disclosure campaign to amend the Textile Labelling Act is one example of a way to make garment production more transparent — a good practice for research and monitoring purposes. This kind of legislative reform is completely feasible. Indeed, garment production highlights the true character of globalization: far from being a natural and inevitable process, it is a deliberate orchestration by stakeholders, including nation-states.

**Education and Training** The third implication concerns policies and practices around education and training. These involve at least two aspects. The first is what I call “education for citizenship” and involves educating citizens, including immigrants, about ethical employment practices to which all employers should adhere. The Clean Clothes campaign, launched by the Coalition of Fair Wages and Working Conditions for Homeworkers in 1991 and 1992, and the Behind the Labels campaign, launched by ETAG, are example of public education efforts that should be supported, indeed undertaken, by educational institutions. This kind of information should be part of any good citizenship education program.
Secondly, at present there is little education and training available to workers in the garment sector that would enable them to understand their rights and contributions to Canadian society (as part of citizenship education for instance), and to improve their skills and hence their productivity and efficiency. The low-wage strategy that employers rely on is not really viable, since Canadian employers who produce locally can never compete with the Third World in this regard. The promotion of private-label design and focus on high-end fashion adopted by designers and city governments requires work with a high skill level. This lends itself readily to the development of training programs for laid-off garment workers. The Garment Industry Development Corporation (GIDC) in New York City, which promotes “high road” strategies for apparel manufacturers, and the one percent training levy in Quebec are examples of how different levels of the state can design policies and programs regarding training and education for the manufacturing sector, as well as on an industry-by-industry basis. While education and training normally fall within provincial jurisdiction, the life-long learning initiative by the federal government can make special funding available for this and other kinds of initiatives. Researchers and educators can add to these efforts by lending their expertise.

Final Words The concept of globalization has shifted common-sense thinking to focus exclusively on the market as a major arena of meaningful activity. In this discourse, human capacity has become a resource solely for economic development, for the extraction of profit. My examination of the garment sector indicates the human costs involved in this kind of strategy, namely the impoverishment of working people and disruption of community and social cohesion. National states have been propelled towards this side of globalization. But there is another equally important side of this equation — human development. Ultimately, to make globalization viable for the majority of the world’s population, we need a vision that makes the development of human capacity central to the core of economic activities.
Notes

1. This paper draws on my research about the impact work restructuring and globalization has had on garment workers in Toronto since 1990. I thank members of my research team, especially Anne O’Connell, Khaleda Siddiqui, and Hongxia Shan, for their assistance with statistical data, and Rianne Mahon, Leah Vosko, and Gillian Creese for comments on an earlier draft of the paper.

2. See, for example, Dudley Fishburn’s editorial in the 2001 Special Edition of The Economist. He says: “2001 will be a year in which the world becomes a richer and sharply more decent place. Europe expanded its wealth at the fastest rate for a decade. ... the 2.3 billion people of China and India will organise their societies so as to double their prosperity every ten years. ... Globalisation will raise the standards of human rights, law, ethics and corporate governance around the world, even in dismal Africa. The revolution in communications lies behind this imperative. ... No pollution, no barriers, no dogmas, no sweatshops exist in the freer exchange of information” (p. 9).

3. This claim has been made since the early 1990s by theorists such as Saskia Sassen. See Saskia Sassen, Globalization and its Discontents (New York: The New Press, 1998). In Canada, this trend has been proven empirically by researchers doing work under the TARP (Technology Adjustment Research Project) umbrella. See Christopher Schenk and John Anderson, (eds.), Re-Shaping Work: Union Responses to Technological Change (Toronto: Ontario Federation of Labour, 1995).


5. Some figures to illustrate: in 1996, the workforce consisted of 85,886 employees. It peaked in 2001, with 94,450 employees. In 2004, the total number of employees dropped to 71,423. There was a further drop in 2006, bringing the numbers to 60,312 (Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Table: 281-0024).

6. Textile and garment manufacturing is more spread out in Quebec compared to other provinces. However, Montreal is historically a major centre for garment production.

7. This is based on our research conducted in 2001. One difficulty of studying garment production is that it is a moving target, so to speak, and is highly sensitive to forces of globalization and local conditions. Changes can occur almost overnight, and even manufacturers and those closest to the industry are stymied by the rate of change. For example, since 2005 when the Agreement on Textile and Clothing (ATC) came fully into force, there have been even more rapid changes that will be discussed later on in this paper.

8. This may no longer be true after the full implementation of the ATC in 2005 (mentioned above) because manufacturers are moving production to other countries, notably China, in search of cheaper wages. At the time of the rewriting of this paper, official employment statistics for 2005 were unavailable.

9. This is based on Industry Canada figures on exports. In fact, export of clothing peaked in 2000 with more than $3 billion. While export has been dropping since then, in 2005 the export figure was more than $2 billion, which is still a healthy figure compared with the early 1990s. (<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_mrkti/tdst/tdo/pho#tag>, accessed 21 June 2006).

10. According to Laura Johnson, this phenomenon was evident in the 1980s. Home-based work was documented in her classical study The Seam Allowance: Industrial Home Sewing in Canada (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1982). See also Roxana Ng, “Homeworking: Dream Realized or Freedom Constrained? The Globalized Reality of Immigrant Garment Workers,” Canadian Woman Studies 19/3 (Fall 1999), pp. 110–114.


12. Roxana Ng, “Homeworking: Dream Realized or Freedom Constrained? The Globalized Reality of Immigrant Garment Workers.” This is also documented by a CBC documentary called Made in Canada, aired in November 2003 (in French) and in January 2004 (in English).
13. A poignant example is Levi's Jeans, which had two plants in Canada (in Stoney Creek, Ontario and Edmonton, Alberta). After almost a century of local production and claiming intense global competition, it closed these plants in 2004 and moved production offshore.

14. For an interesting historical account of workers' struggles, see Mercedes Steedman, Angels of the Workplace: Women and the Construction of Gender Relations in the Canadian Clothing Industry, 1890-1940 (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997). I thank Jonathan Eaton for supplying this information.

15. Statistics Canada, CANSIM, Table: 281-0027.


17. The project, which covered the period from 2001 to 2004, is entitled Changing Work, Changing Lives: Mapping the Garment Industry. The financial assistance of SSHRC is gratefully acknowledged. It should be pointed out that it is not easy to calculate workers' wages in the garment industry because many sewers work on piece rates. To arrive at a monthly rate for workers working on piece rate, we asked the interviewees to estimate their average monthly income. Wages also depend on the position the worker occupies. For instance a cutter, who is usually male, makes much more than a sewer, who is usually female, pointing to gender inequality within this sector.

18. The study, which began in 2002, is entitled “Skilled in Vulnerability: Work-related Learning Amongst Contingent Workers,” funded by SSHRC. Dr. Kiran Mirchandani is the principal investigator of the study. All garment workers interviewed for this project were sewers. Most were paid by piece rate.

19. Ng, Homeworking: Home Office or Home Sweatshop? Report on Current Conditions of Homeworkers in Toronto’s Garment Industry. This interview was conducted in Cantonese and translated into English.


22. Liz Claiborne is a prime example and pioneer — in the subcontracting system as well as in the use of electronic technology — who made it to the top of the retail chains. For an excellent ethnographic description of the organization of Liz Claiborne, see Jane Collins, Threads: Gender, Labor, and Power in the Global Apparel Industry (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), Chapter 4.


27. Michel Grant (1999).

28. Some of the impact of welfare cuts has been documented by a study in Ontario. See Louise Noce and Anne O’Connell, Take It or Leave It: The Ontario Government’s Approach to Job Insecurity (Speaking Out Project: The Consequences of Policy Changes for Ontario Households (Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy, 1998). For further reports on cutbacks and changes to education, health, and income support programs, see <http://www.caledoninst.org>.


31. I am using the terms “Third World” and “the economic South” or southern countries interchangeably to refer to the common-sense understanding of the relationship between the developed and developing worlds. I recognize that these terms are problematic because they reinforce, rather than name, power differential between and among nations. Indeed, elsewhere I have argued for a rethinking of these categories with the advent of globalization. See Roxana Ng, “Work Restructuring and Recolonizing Third World Women....”


33. This argument is made convincingly by Saskia Sassen in *The Global City*.

34. Cited in Lynda Yanz et al., *Policy Options to Improve Standards...* p. 79, note 12.


36. *Changing Work, Changing Lives*. The Maquila Solidarity Network (MSN), a Toronto-based research and advocacy group, also tried to track the subcontracting network, with no result.

37. While the phenomenon of terrorism is too complex to be attributed to a single cause, certainly the terrorist attacks on the United States can be seen as a form of reaction to globalization — in this case, the preeminence of the United States and the western world in the world economic order.

38. As a result of lobbying by students and other concerned citizens, the University of Toronto developed, in 1999, a Code of Conduct for Trademark Licensees to ensure that suppliers of the university’s trademarked merchandise (such as T-shirt, sweatshirts, and souvenirs) meet minimum employment standards for issues such as wages and benefits, working hours, and overtime compensation. Many universities now have codes of conduct holding their suppliers accountable for ethical employment practices.

39. Within the state, municipal governments have been the most proactive. The City of Toronto adopted, in April 2006, a no-sweat policy regarding the manufacturing of uniforms for city employees.


41. The Disclosure Campaign mounted by the ETAG is trying to get the federal government to amend the Textile Labelling Act so that the “CA number” on clothing labels would have to reveal where the article is actually made. This would enable researchers and activists to trace the global network of garment production by Canadian manufacturers.


44. I thank Jonathan Eaton for providing this information.