

A Mighty Power against the Cost of Living: Canadian Housewives Organize in the 1930s

Julie Guard

University of Manitoba, Canada

Abstract

Consumer activists organizing in the 1930s against rising milk prices demonstrated the power of a strong grassroots movement to enlarge prevailing understandings of the political and to wring responses from an unwilling state. Their maternalism, combined with milk's emotional, social, and political meanings, attracted broad popular support and deflected criticism from the dairy industry, hostile public officials, and anticommunists. Their campaign for affordable milk became a synecdoche for broader demands that the state restrain business in the interests of consumers and protect ordinary people from the harsh injustices of the Depression. After winning immediate concessions, the Toronto Housewives Association failed to achieve their long-term goals, but their impact was nonetheless significant. Their campaign fueled and informed public debates about the political economy of food and government's responsibilities to protect citizens, pushing socialist policies onto the political agenda under the cover of maternalism. Participation in Housewives' campaigns transformed powerless victims into effective political actors. Housewife-activists challenged prevailing notions of normative feminine behavior, creating social space for ordinary women acting within their domestic roles to engage in direct political action.

In early November 1937, two hundred women, alarmed about rising milk prices, converged on Toronto's Board of Control. They urged the city government to support their demands that the province lower prices and investigate the high profits earned by the dairies. Speaking with the moral authority of concerned mothers, they blamed the prevailing high rates of childhood malnutrition and illness on the rising price of milk. Charging "big companies" with "making millions at the expense of our children," they demanded that "something be done" to end this "outrage." Their demands were endorsed by the city councilors and the mayor, who agreed that higher prices were "just another profit grab by the big companies." Their twenty-three-year-old leader, undeterred by an anonymous threat to the life of her infant son if she persisted, immediately launched the first salvo in the "war on prices." She called all concerned housewives to attend a mass meeting in Toronto's Labour Temple. In a hall filled to capacity, eight hundred women constituted themselves as Toronto's Housewives Association and pledged to reduce their household milk consumption to a bare minimum until the price dropped from thirteen cents to ten cents a quart. Banner newspaper headlines announced a "price war" as the Housewives began organizing a "city-wide union" of consumers, vowing to strike against every dairy in the city if their demands were not met.¹

Through the last two years of the Great Depression, Canada's Housewives Associations became a lightning rod for popular outrage about governments' failure to address the daily crises of unemployment, poverty, and hunger. They tapped the widespread frustration of working people who had struggled through seven years of hard times only to see prices rise with no increase in wages. Within weeks, the organization had 10,000 active members. Initially concentrated in Toronto, Housewives branches soon sprang up in cities throughout Ontario.² Shortly thereafter, Housewives Associations formed in two of the western provinces, Manitoba and British Columbia, and by the beginning of their second year, they had established the nucleus of a national organization. At its founding meeting, they resolved that the Housewives' Consumers Federation of Canada would become "a mighty power against the cost of living."³

Although they achieved few of their stated goals and were never the "mighty power" they aspired to be, these militant Housewives moved consumer politics from the margins to the mainstream. For more than a decade, the Housewives' Consumers Association (HCA) mobilized hundreds of thousands of supporters across the country.⁴ Even through much of the Cold War, with many of the HCA's leaders acknowledged or suspected communists, the organization's campaigns for postwar state control of prices, direct citizen participation in governance, and greater government accountability were endorsed by city councils, labor organizations, and community organizations as well as by Canada's anticommunist social democratic party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). At meetings with powerful government officials, Housewives' delegations criticized federal policies for representing only business interests and proposed more consumer-friendly alternatives. Daily newspapers and national radio reported on their activities while politicians debated their demands. Officials from all levels of government recognized the Housewives as a formidable political force and took pains to placate them, even if they rarely acted on their advice.

Through the twentieth century, women in Australia, Canada, the United States, the UK, Europe, Argentina, and Chile—politicized by hard times, war, and political strife—organized as mothers, housewives, and consumers around food shortages and inadequate male breadwinner wages, frequently calling on the state to control prices and prevent profiteering. In the United States, historian Dana Frank tells us, thousands of immigrant Jewish women in New York took to the streets in 1917 to protest a precipitous increase in food prices. They enforced a city-wide food boycott, using violence when they deemed it necessary, to drive home their demand that the city legislate affordable prices.⁵ In Britain, wartime food shortages motivated working- and middle-class women to collaborate around the "food supply question." While prewar efforts of the leading women in the British Socialist Party to demand lower prices from shopkeepers through a "trade union of housewives" had failed to gather significant support, war encouraged temporary alliances of women from a wide range of organizations.⁶ Wartime food shortages also provoked consumer

mobilizations in Germany, where, as Belinda Davis shows, tens of thousands of working-class women demonstrated in Berlin's streets against their government's inept efforts to manage and distribute supplies and to demand "peace, freedom and bread."⁷

Most militant consumers organized from the Left, but a minority of consumer movements claimed the right to a political voice and public space on the basis of a more conservative maternalism. The post-World War Two British Housewives' League and the longer-lived Australian Housewives' Association are two such notable exceptions.⁸ The Australian organization, as Judith Smart explains, was initiated in the early twentieth century by liberals and progressives. But by the mid-1920s, it had shifted to the right, dominated by conservatives who opposed state regulation.⁹

Women activists on both the Right and the Left have frequently used motherhood as a political strategy. In the 1970s and 1980s, Chilean and Argentine women took to the streets, symbolically invoking their domestic identities by banging pots and pans, demanding food and fair prices, but also expressing their resistance to the right-wing regimes that had abrogated their human and civil rights and "disappeared" their children. In her compelling analysis of these movements, Temma Kaplan argues that acting as "good women" who are fulfilling their familial responsibilities gives female activists licence to act politically and makes it difficult for their opponents, including the state, to silence them. Motherhood was a powerful strategy "wielded as a weapon" against the state by the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, but it could also be turned to advantage by the Right. Organized covertly by right-wing male leaders, upper- and middle-class Chilean women, claiming to speak as housewives motivated only "by simple material needs rather than political convictions," helped to erode popular support for the elected government and paved the way for the military coup.¹⁰

Organizing in the early 1960s, US women peace activists, Amy Swerdlow reminds us, cultivated a maternalist public image to avoid being dismissed as politically irrelevant "kooks" or "commies" even while refusing, on principle, to bar communists from their movement. When subsequently summoned before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), established to identify political subversives, they invoked supposed gender differences between the masculine and feminine mind to deflect their male interrogators' questions and justified their activities on the basis of a maternalist, and thus purer, form of patriotism.¹¹

The 1930s was a watershed for consumer activism, as politicized consumers, outraged by the egregious injustices of the Great Depression, shifted direct challenges to the market to the center of the political economy. Consumer protest tapped a vein of popular discontent, as radicalized women and their male supporters mobilized to demand state intervention in the markets that had failed so dramatically. Politicized consumers' claims on the state as shoppers, mothers, and homemakers challenged narrow definitions of the political, even while many pointed to their maternal identities as proof that their actions were well

within the range of normative femininity. Protests frequently failed to achieve their goals, but the impact of consumers' growing sense of their economic rights was far-reaching. Grassroots movements of ordinary women, insisting on direct participation in governance and reflecting growing popular expectations of state protection against emergent corporate capitalism, pushed governments to regulate business in the interest of consumers. Along with earlier maternalist movements for political and social rights, they helped lay the foundations of the postwar welfare state.

In the United States, consumer activists, politicized by the daily struggle to provide for their families, pushed their demands for "economic citizenship" to the center of the political debate. In her detailed examination of US consumer politics in the first half of the twentieth century, Meg Jacobs shows how middle- and working-class consumers, empowered by New Deal rhetoric in the early years of the Depression, organized to resist rising prices of milk, bread, and other necessities. Encouraged and supported by labor organizations and progressive public administrators, US consumers, according to Jacobs, insisted that increased purchasing power was essential to national economic recovery. Like their Canadian counterparts, most of the women in this movement were far from radical. Yet, Jacobs argues, they understood the "price problem" as rooted in unfair income distribution and monopoly control and framed their demands as "part of a larger structural critique of modern capitalism."¹² US federal and state investigations, reported in Canadian newspapers, confirmed government's responsibilities to ensure a constant supply of inexpensive, pure milk to consumers and to protect milk producers. In the midst of Toronto's own milk price debate, Canadian newspapers reported that the New York state inquiry found excessive profits in the dairy industry and promised to lower consumer prices.¹³ These and other victories by US consumers who, as Jacobs shows, framed their demands for state intervention in the economy as a matter of rights to which they were entitled as "economic citizens" inspired Canadian housewives.

Probably the most newsworthy consumer movements were those that arose within the Left, led by women who saw their domestic and maternal identities as fully compatible with violent street protests. In 1935, two years before Canadian women organized, housewife-activists in major US cities staged a "meatless summer," boycotting meat, picketing butcher shops, signing petitions, and marching on city halls demanding government intervention to bring down the price of meat. The press, as Annelise Orleck observes, was ambivalent about the way "housewife activists were politicizing the traditional roles of wives and mothers," as evidenced in the salacious detail it provided about the women's apparent transgression of proper feminine behavior. But the press also took the movement seriously, reporting housewives' street protests in major newspapers and magazines, even though many of their leaders had obvious ties to the Left. Like the Canadian Housewives, however, this movement's membership was politically heterogeneous. And in the midst of the Depression, even women who had no left-wing leanings saw street protests

and boycotts as more than an attempt to bring down high prices. As the hardships of the 1930s brought the inequities of capitalism into sharper focus, Orleck explains, they “campaigned to change the [capitalist] system they blamed for the ravages of the Great Depression.”¹⁴

Sympathetic news coverage and broad popular support were critical to the political legitimacy, and hence the effectiveness, of these grassroots movements. In Canada, communist-led Women’s Progressive Clubs and United Women’s Councils had protested through the 1930s against high prices and advocated for families on relief, demanding government intervention to bring down the price of milk, bread, and meat. Delegations of these women’s organizations, along with unionists and rate-payers’ groups, had preceded the Housewives’ delegation, confronting Toronto’s city council when the milk price increase was first announced to register their objections.¹⁵ But their numbers were small, and their leaders were readily identifiable as communists. Ignored by the mainstream press and without wide popular support, they remained marginal and politically inconsequential.

In contrast to these obviously political groups, Toronto’s Housewives Association was viewed with approval by the media and the political mainstream precisely because they emphasized their identities as respectable housewives and mothers. The organization’s claim to speak from the position of mothers and homemakers, although no doubt an accurate reflection of women’s lives, was also a conscious strategy. Like the antinuclear activists described by Swerdlow, who disarmed their opponents by justifying their political activism as simply an extension of their maternal responsibilities, the Housewives deployed their domestic roles to political advantage.¹⁶ The Housewives’ founder, Mrs. Bertha Lamb, along with her organizing committee of women from the same comfortable lower-middle-class neighborhood and her mother, encouraged Housewives to cultivate an appealingly maternal public image. Proper decorum, she insisted, was especially important. “We are housewives, not fishwives,” she reminded the noisy crowd at the organization’s founding meeting, pointing out that reporters were present. Clearly aware that demonized notions of communists implied the antithesis of respectable motherhood, spokeswomen asserted that the Housewives had “no strings attached . . . political or otherwise.” On the contrary, theirs was a “non-sectarian and non-political . . . union of ordinary housewives who, under other circumstances, take no part in organizational activities.” Observing that the press tended to describe organizations like theirs as “reds,” the founders insisted that the Housewives were not “political,” but were merely “a group of indignant housewives tired to death of trying to make both ends meet.”¹⁷

The Housewives’ diverse membership and broad community base reinforced their claims to be “non-political,” overriding, for a time, their friendly ties to the labor and political Left and the existence of communists among their membership. To be sure, communists were very active members, but there were no communists on the Housewives’ executive for the first year and fewer than ten or twelve at most among its core membership. Communists, in short, were

neither numerous nor dominant among the organization's heterogeneous membership. Middle- and working-class, radical, liberal, and socially conservative women worked side-by-side in Housewives' groups, achieving a political legitimacy that more overtly radical and working-class organizations could not. Unlike the clearly political protests identified with communists and other working-class activists who blocked evictions and demanded work for the unemployed, whose activities have been documented separately by Carmela Patrias and Pat Schultz, the Housewives framed their campaign for affordable milk as an expression of maternal love, and thus consistent with respectable femininity.¹⁸

Their maternalism, while authentic—virtually all of them were married and claimed responsibility for husbands, homes, and children—did not preclude their engagement in direct action or stifle their demands for political change. On the contrary, fueled by their moral indignation as mothers, they denounced government policymakers and corporate decision-makers, confronted powerful male authorities, and made claims on the state as citizen-consumers. Maternalism, as a significant historiography attests, is not the antithesis of female activism.¹⁹ As Orleck observes, “for many women in cultures around the world, motherhood is a powerful political identity around which they have galvanized broad-based and influential grassroots movements for social change.”²⁰

Women have often demanded rights and sought improvements in social welfare more generally without using the language of feminism. Indeed, the meaning of “feminist” and its relation to motherhood, as Ann Taylor Allen reminds us, is historically specific and changes over time.²¹ What counts as feminism may also be a reflection of relative privilege, including “race” and class. Consider, for instance, how African-American women worked for decades to secure civil rights without calling themselves feminists.²² Also omitted from feminist history are the US labor women who, as historian Dorothy Sue Cobble shows, struggled through the 1940s and 1950s for rights that reflected the reality of working-class women, including racial equality and the right to combine work and motherhood. Yet their demands, Cobble argues, were no less feminist than those of the more familiar equal-rights movement.²³

For centuries, as Sheila Rowbotham observes, women have engaged in struggles for social justice as mothers, housewives, and consumers, not as a rejection of domesticity, but as what they saw as its logical extension.²⁴ In their introduction to an anthology that contests the assumption that “true feminism” aims for the abolition of “traditional” gender roles, Gisela Bock and Pat Thane contend that domesticity is not inherently conservative or reactionary, but an “inescapable part of women’s historical experience.” Arguing that women’s struggles to improve that reality for themselves, their families, and communities have contributed significantly to progressive social change, they observe that those contributions have far too often been overlooked.²⁵ One important part of the effort to recover that history is the work on maternalist movements and the formation of the welfare state. Historians have begun to reveal the

many ways in which women in many countries, acting politically as mothers and consumers, made significant political gains, including pressuring governments to enact progressive policies that laid the foundations for the welfare state.²⁶

The Meanings of Milk

The Housewives' demand for affordable milk reflected the general desire for a more responsive state. Milk was a commodity with emotional, social, and political meanings, and its price, distribution, and availability captured a number of pivotal public concerns of the 1930s. Foremost among them was the state's refusal to protect ordinary people from the ravages of the Depression. Rising milk prices were a reminder that, although government had the regulatory power to constrain milk prices, it had refused to intervene in the market to protect the interests of working people. The state's role in regulating and pricing milk was made particularly clear in the 1930s, as provincial governments, anxious to protect their export-dependent dairy industries, enacted Milk Control Acts and created boards to police the industry. The Ontario Milk Control Board, created in 1934, regulated the dairy industry and, after 1936, set retail milk prices.²⁷ The Milk Board's approval of price increases was a slap in the face of people already struggling to cope on inadequate incomes.

The high price of milk—which rose while farmers dumped their unsold product—was a powerful synonym for the state's failure to ameliorate the slow starvation of the jobless, the underemployed, and their families.²⁸ Families' inability to buy sufficient milk for their children became a potent symbol of the injustice of an economic system that allowed businesses to earn hefty profits while ordinary people did without basic necessities. Rising milk prices amid continued deprivation highlighted the inequity of the recent economic recovery, which had benefited business but produced few improvements for wage-earners, the unemployed, and their families.²⁹

Prices of other commodities had also risen, and the Housewives campaigned for lower prices for items such as butter, bread, meat, and gas, but milk captured the public's attention. Perhaps more than any other food, milk represented parental love. Parents' diminished ability to provide milk to their children had an emotional dimension that legitimated public protest. Demands for universally available, low-priced milk were especially attractive when those promoting them were perceived to be ordinary wives and mothers concerned only about children's well-being.

If access to milk symbolized how parents cared for their children, conversely, impediments to access were evidence of an uncaring state. Hard-luck stories in the press provided powerful evidence of a heartless relief system that denied children the necessities of life. The communist daily *Clarion* informed readers about one such family that was offered only twelve dollars to cover burial costs for the son who had died of scarlet fever. Refusing the money that would buy only a "pauper's funeral," the grieving family opted instead for a "decent funeral" paid from the insurance policy they had

maintained only at “a terrific cost” by giving up milk.³⁰ Editorials reinforced the point by linking personal hardship to expert opinion on the inadequacy of relief. Citing scientific studies and internationally respected nutritional authorities, the *Toronto Daily Star* denounced the city’s relief system for “producing stout starvelings” who, although not “visibly dying through lack of food,” were surviving on diets that were “dangerously low in vitamins and minerals and high in carbohydrates (starchy foods).” To avoid becoming “damaged goods” because of poor nutrition, the experts advised, children needed “plenty of milk.”³¹

Milk, the Essential Food

Popular outrage at governments’ refusal to ensure that milk was universally available at low cost was fueled by the conviction that its consumption was critical to health. This notion was endorsed and promoted by the dairy companies themselves. In her social history of milk, historical sociologist E. Melanie DuPuis demonstrates that, by the 1930s, the belief that large quantities of milk were essential to health had become entrenched. By 1937, the US Department of Agriculture was recommending a quart of milk a day for every child up to age eighteen. Although the scientific evidence for this “ridiculously large” quantity was weak, DuPuis argues that because “no one questioned milk’s perfection” even public health officials did not suspect that the push to consume more milk was related to the surplus of milk on the market. On the contrary, she states, the close relationship between the dairy industry and the state, although unacknowledged and almost invisible, helped to create the perception that milk was an “unqualified good.”³²

Canadians also regarded milk as essential. Increased milk consumption by both children and adults was urged by a variety of authorities who linked the underconsumption of milk with rising levels of malnutrition and contagious disease. The Health League of Canada, formed in 1919 to combat venereal disease and reconstituted in 1936 around emerging concerns about public health, listed milk as one of the “four pillars” of public health.³³ To “ward off disease,” its spokespersons urged Toronto residents to consume at least thirty percent more milk.³⁴ Letters to the daily newspapers suggest that ordinary people concurred with the experts. “I believe,” wrote one such writer in November 1937, “a quart of milk per day per child is necessary for the health of a child, and a pint per person per day for an adult, and more is needed where there is illness. Already in Canada there is too little milk used.”³⁵

Milk’s health-giving qualities were touted by the dairy industry. Toronto Milk Producers’ Association president E. H. Clarke asserted confidently that “from the earliest record of the existence of the cow, human health and life has to a great extent been dependent on milk and milk products.”³⁶ Producers and distributors agreed that increased milk consumption would not only improve public health but would also solve the surplus milk problem.³⁷ The newly formed, dairy industry-supported Milk Foundation of Toronto urged milk consumption to provide better health, improve educational achievement,

increase energy, and even enhance social mobility.³⁸ Despite the obvious hyperbole, such claims were widely accepted as true. Those parents who could afford it bought more milk; those who could not must have experienced grave concern.

Milk and Maternalism

Maternalism gave the Housewives significant political advantages, just as it had benefited so many other women activists. Their aura of respectable middle-class domesticity assured them generous treatment by the media, local governments, and public figures. Their demands were affirmed by local politicians and their leaders were included in public discussions about policy with the provincial premier. Their campaign for affordable milk, combined with their emphasis on their domestic and maternal identities and their efforts to distance themselves from “politics,” also made the Housewives attractive allies for community organizations, faith-based groups, clergy, and local governments that sought similar social justice objectives. For these bodies, supporting the Housewives was like endorsing motherhood. East York Township trustee Fred Hazelton, for instance, did not “approve of boycotts generally,” but conceded that the Housewives-led milk boycott represented “the public interest.” “It is essential that our children have milk,” he explained, “and they can’t do that if the price is too high.”³⁹ Housewives took care to underscore their maternalist image by reminding the press that they were mothers and homemakers as well as activists. Bertha Lamb told reporters that she was delegating some of her organizational work to ward captains, who would henceforth “take some of the burdens of organizing [the Housewives] from her shoulders,” because her domestic and maternal duties took precedence. “I have a house and baby to look after,” she pointed out.⁴⁰ Housewife Dorothy Bland justified the delay in a planned picket to protest overpriced butter because “there’s too much housework to be done . . . to do any picketing this morning. . . . We can’t completely neglect our homes.”⁴¹

Consumption, along with food preparation and household management, as historians of consumer movements have observed, are powerfully coded as female.⁴² Organizing as mothers, housewives, and consumers, moreover, is consistent with women’s expected roles and makes it possible for even women without a radical consciousness to act politically. By stressing their unthreatening roles as mothers, the Housewives drew as well on what Temma Kaplan refers to as women’s maternalist self-representation as “an effective cover” for “unconventional public actions.”⁴³ Even women who organized around concerns that were not directly related to their domestic responsibilities have gained strategic advantage and attracted popular support by representing themselves as consumers. Some US women’s organizations of the 1930s and 1940s took pains to present themselves as “simple housewives” or as decorous “ladies” even when picketing in support of striking women workers, demonstrating against racist employment practices, endorsing boycotts of Japanese-produced silk, or lobbying legislators for price control.⁴⁴

Canada's activist Housewives, like those discussed by Kaplan and Swerdlow,⁴⁵ cloaked their political activism in maternalism and acquired what Kaplan would call "moral capital" by speaking as concerned mothers calling for lower-priced food in the midst of the Depression. Their campaign attracted a broad base of support, including community and religious groups, social agencies and labor unions, city councillors, medical authorities, and clergy. Speaking as housewives who were avowedly nonpartisan and, they insisted, not political, enabled them to recruit women who had no desire to challenge the social or gender order but merely wanted to "do something" to stop high prices.

Taking Action

What they did, according to the Housewives, was fully compatible with their domestic responsibilities. Describing herself as an "average Toronto housewife," Lamb explained the milk price campaign as a natural response to motherly concerns: "I feel the same as does every housewife in and around Toronto who sees her children suffering while the profits of the large milk distributors go sky high."⁴⁶ To address that suffering, the Housewives embarked on a demanding round of activities that mobilized women in every part of the city. They boycotted milk and then butter, advertising their campaigns with flamboyant street parades and demonstrations. They developed a broad understanding of the production, distribution, and marketing of milk and held countless public meetings to educate other women about the political economy of the dairy industry. They organized intensive lobbying campaigns, persuading dozens of unions, women's auxiliaries, city councils, religious and community groups, and individuals to send letters to members of parliament. They stood on busy street corners with petitions and handed out protest postcards for women to send to their elected representatives. They attacked the industry directly, publicly accusing dairies, meat processors, and bakeries of profiteering and forming illegal trusts. They demanded government investigation of high food prices and called on the federal government to prosecute the dairy industry under antitrust legislation. They demanded a voice in developing food policy and sought representation on the Milk Board. In addition to these efforts to correct the flaws in the existing system, they proposed radical change. Insisting that an adequate supply of staple foods was a right of all citizens, they proposed that the province make milk a public utility and take over its production, distribution, and sale.

Parades, delegations, and petitions captured the attention of politicians and the media, but Housewives also reached out to women in their communities and made personal contact with their neighbors. Local ward associations formed delegations and organized letter-writing. To promote "Butter Boycott Week," Housewives gathered cardboard and painted signs "advocating the aims of the association" for display in home and store windows. They canvassed door-to-door to gather signatures on petitions and surveyed women by

telephone, urging them to support the boycott by “using peanut butter, honey butter and jam” as substitutes for butter. Social evenings, afternoon teas, amateur concerts, and plays performed in school auditoriums dramatized the Housewives’ struggles, raised money, and recruited new members, while reinforcing their community ties.⁴⁷

Publicly, dairy industry representatives dismissed the Housewives’ boycott as a “flash in the pan” that, three weeks into the boycott, had already “blown over.” But sales of tinned milk had increased “tremendously” while those of the fresh product were down by seven percent, despite offers of free butter and cream to milk customers who placed regular orders. Small dairies began threatening to defy the Milk Board and cut their prices, and several municipalities began looking for legal ways to circumvent the Milk Board.⁴⁸ A few dairy industry representatives admitted publicly that Toronto milk prices were too high and confirmed the Housewives’ claims that the controversy had, in fact, stopped further price increases.⁴⁹ Meeting privately, the dairies began planning ways to make up their losses by forcing lower prices on producers and initiating new efforts to increase milk consumption.⁵⁰

Their enormous popularity, their ability to force unwilling political officials to meet with them, and their successful milk boycott convinced Housewives that they had the power to change the world. Writing to the populist *Toronto Daily Star*, Mrs. Bailey affirmed housewives’ unique power to halt unfair price increases: “Now is the time for the women to get together and stop all this profiteering. . . . If we housewives don’t stop them, no one else can.”⁵¹ Three months later, four thousand women at a mass meeting rose to their feet and pledged to buy no butter “until the price is 30 cents a pound or less,” a tactic designed to “show the big dairy interests we mean business.” Lamb then condemned the premier for his lukewarm support, noting with disdain that public officials were “afraid to face the ladies.”⁵² And at their first annual convention in November 1938, the Housewives approved a program of reforms that included direct negotiations with local governments to end gas meter charges and severely restrict the Milk Board’s powers, affirming that there was “nothing that a group of determined women cannot get.”⁵³

Their confidence was no doubt bolstered by the apparent success of consumer activists elsewhere. News coverage of consumer protests in the UK and the United States persuaded Canadian Housewives that rent, meat, and milk strikes could bring down prices and pressure governments to act in the public interest. They were clearly inspired by the remarkable success of their US counterparts, who participated in shifting the policies of the New Deal administration in ways that advanced consumers’ interests.⁵⁴ Speaking at the organization’s inaugural meeting, Mrs. Alice Cooke recommended the tactics used by US women, whose success she exaggerated: “They had a meat strike in Chicago and prices came down. In New York, they had a milk strike and the price was reduced within 24 hours.”⁵⁵ Letters to Toronto newspapers echoed her view. Pointing to the class relations behind the milk price increase, one writer asked, “Why should we working people give the dairies another cent a

quart?" Consumer support for the milk boycott, she suggested, would force the dairies to meet the Housewives' demands: "Just one week and no sales would make them all sit up and take notice." As evidence, she offered an optimistic assessment of the results of consumer activism in the United States: "Housewives in the States started a meat war, and in two weeks won out."⁵⁶

Housewives also hoped to replicate what they saw as a singular achievement of their American sisters—challenging capital's right to establish prices by forcing the state to intervene on behalf of consumers. Toronto's Housewives demanded their own rights as economic citizens, denounced the province's role in the dairy industry as "a dictatorship," and called for not just cheaper milk, but a change in the Milk Control Act to give consumers a voice in setting milk prices. Canadians, however, confronted a more intransigent government that lacked the many progressives who, as Jacobs and Storrs point out, played such an important role in creating the New Deal.⁵⁷ Their achievements, although significant, did not match those of the Americans they sought to emulate.

Milk, Malnutrition, and Municipal Budgets

The Housewives made demands on all levels of government, petitioning for an investigation of various food industries under the federal antitrust law—calling on the province to abolish the Milk Control Board, revise the Milk Act, control the price of butter, and investigate the dairy industry and urging the city to make milk a public utility. But like many other grassroots activists, they focused their efforts at the local level, where their relatively small numbers would have the most impact and they were most likely to find allies. Aware of consumer movements elsewhere, they may well have emulated the British Labour Party women described by Pat Thane, who organized before and during the Depression as workers, mothers, and housewives to oppose the reduction of state services, including subsidized food and milk. Thane notes that while Labour women struggled without much success to keep some national policies on the political agenda, they achieved much more at the local level, where they won improved medical and other services for women and children.⁵⁸

The economic and political pressures on local governments in the 1930s made them natural allies in the Housewives' campaign. Few of the programs were yet in place that would, by the 1960s, constitute Canada's welfare state. The federal government provided no unemployment insurance program and poor relief was a municipal responsibility. Local governments, therefore, shouldered much of the cost of the Depression.⁵⁹ Only the federal state had the fiscal resources to fund job-creation and relief programs, but, as James Struthers has demonstrated, successive governments refused to do so.⁶⁰ Responsibility for the unemployed and their families thus fell to towns and cities. Staggering under the burden and unable to raise revenues from eroded tax bases, they turned to their equally underfunded provincial governments for help. Less than five years into the crisis, hundreds of municipalities along with all four western provinces faced

financial collapse, averting bankruptcy only with the aid of emergency federal loans.⁶¹

Canada's Depression, like that of the United States, was both more severe and longer than industrialized Europe's, and the Canadian economy recovered more slowly than that in the US. Heavily dependent on exports, Canada's economy was particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in world trade and thus suffered disproportionately when its principal trading partners, the US and Britain, responded to the crisis by severely restricting imports—many of which were Canadian exports. The two pillars of the Canadian economy, foreign investment and resource production (eighty percent of which was exported), collapsed. By 1933, national income had declined to fifty-five percent of its 1929 level, and the value of exports had dropped by half. At the depth of the Depression, thirty percent of the labor force was unemployed; unemployment declined only moderately, to twelve percent, over the entire decade. At least a third of the population could not afford a nutritionally adequate diet. Yet the federal government refused to accede to strong popular demand for unemployment insurance and a public works program.⁶²

The poor were forced to rely on drastically underfunded emergency municipal relief and private charity. It was precisely this experience, historians argue, that led to the development of Canada's welfare state. Grassroots mobilizations, a strong labor movement, and electoral victories won by parties of the Left combined to pressure governments to enact social and economic reforms in the postwar period.⁶³ But in the absence of federal public works or income replacement programs during the 1930s, the unemployed fared worse in Canada than in the US.

Through the first years of the Depression, conditions were similar in both countries. Unemployment was about thirty percent and municipalities, townships, and counties buckled under the burden of providing even starvation-level relief benefits to a small proportion of the needy. But in 1935, US President Franklin Roosevelt brought in unemployment insurance, direct aid to states for unemployment relief, and a public works program that employed three and half million people at wages higher than relief payments, funded by an amount equal to ten percent of the total national income.⁶⁴

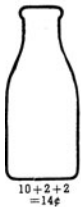
The US programs, which provided jobs for only one-third of the unemployed, have been criticized as inadequate.⁶⁵ But they compare favorably to the government's punitive response in Canada. Until 1935, single unemployed men were forced into remote relief camps, where they labored for twenty cents a day. A popular revolt that culminated in the infamous Regina Riot forced Prime Minister R. B. Bennett to close the camps. But his successor, W.L. Mackenzie King, offered only short-term farm labor at five dollars a month to single men and denied them (along with single women) access to municipal relief benefits. King also reneged on his promise to create unemployment insurance, delaying the program's start until 1940, by which time Canada's entry into war had virtually eliminated the need for it.⁶⁶ Following Roosevelt's reforms, the proportion of the unemployed eligible for relief increased from an

estimated one in seven in 1931 to more than half by 1936.⁶⁷ In Canada, local governments slashed their relief rolls by an average of sixteen percent in 1937 as the federal government, determined to balance the budget, reduced grants to the provinces by more than a third.⁶⁸

Just as relief funds were cut, the economy went into decline, creating further unemployment, and food prices rose, increasing the pressure on municipal budgets and further immiserating the poor. Extensive press coverage of hardship cases, medical experts' assessments of the inadequacy of relief diets, and concerns about public health politicized food cost. Reluctant in principle to hand out cash, municipal authorities were more likely to dispense relief in kind or as vouchers that could be redeemed only for designated items.⁶⁹ A one-cent increase in milk's price therefore had a direct impact on civic budgets, and it quickly became an issue in virtually every municipality. Milk had not always been among the meager groceries municipalities provided to relief recipients. In the early 1930s, for instance, Toronto parents needed a medical requisition to get relief milk for their children.⁷⁰ But by the late 1930s, under pressure from a variety of civic reformers, even economically distressed municipalities had conceded that milk was an essential food and provided it to families on relief.⁷¹ In Toronto, relief allowances included one pint per day for every child under the age of twelve and one pint between two adults. According to the city's welfare department, a one-cent increase in milk price added \$52,000 to annual relief costs.⁷²

While the actual impact on municipal budgets may have been small—Toronto disbursed \$7.2 million on relief in 1937, of which the city contributed \$2.4 million—the increase was a stick in the eye to local politicians already hard-pressed to cover relief costs from inadequate municipal revenues.⁷³ Like other municipalities, Toronto had borrowed to cover its share of relief costs. By 1937, its accumulated debt was over \$12.4 million.⁷⁴ Municipal budgets were simply inadequate to cover the costs of supporting the unemployed and their families, and hundreds of Toronto and area families on relief lacked enough food to maintain health and avoid malnutrition.⁷⁵ Constrained by inadequate provincial relief allocations and their own inability to raise more revenues from property taxes, municipalities blamed the Ontario government for starvation-level relief rates. The Ontario Milk Control Board was an obvious target.

The Housewives sparked a debate about milk prices that drew in provincial and local politicians, government officials, farmers, dairy company representatives, milk drivers and their unions, and, prominently, milk producers' and distributors' organizations. Events and public statements generated by these debates filled the pages of Toronto newspapers, educating consumers about the complex networks of production, transportation, and distribution that brought milk to their doorsteps and corner groceries. Representatives of the Milk Board and the Milk Producers' Association, both of them dominated by the dairies, attempted to assure consumers that milk price increases would benefit only underpaid and overworked farmers. Housewives and their allies in local government scoffed at these reassurances, which were also roundly



Mrs. HOUSEWIFE

the Price of Milk
Must NOT Go *Up!*



Yesterday we were paying 10 cents a quart.

Today we are paying 12 cents.

Tomorrow we'll be paying 14 cents.....

If You, the Housewife, Do Not Act... *Now!*

- SIGN THE CARD AND MAIL IT TO THE PRIME MINISTER TODAY!
- GET YOUR ORGANIZATION TO SEND A RESOLUTION OF PROTEST.
- JOIN THE HOUSEWIVES' ASSOCIATION—the organization which fights to protect our family living standards.
Its membership meets every 1st and 3rd Wednesday at 2.30 p.m. in the Y.W.C.A.
Membership fee 25 cents a year. For information, call Mrs. H. J. Benson, 1203 Monroe Avenue. Phone 91041.
- ATTEND THE HOUSEWIVES' RALLY at the TECHNICAL SCHOOL on SEPT. 12th.

PUBLIC PROTEST MEETING

TECHNICAL SCHOOL

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12th, at 8 P.M.

Speakers:

Representative of PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
Acting Mayor S. A. EARLY
and representatives of local organizations.

"WHEN THE PRICE OF MILK GOES UP THE HEALTH OF OUR CHILDREN GOES DOWN!"

Issued by Saskatoon Housewives' Consumer Association

Modern Press Limited, Saskatoon, Sask.

The Housewives Association continued its "war on prices" into the postwar period, establishing branches across Canada. Like the Saskatoon Housewives, who created this poster, the organization lobbied the government to lower retail prices, frequently with the endorsement of local officials. *Annie G. Ross Collection, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, P5941, file 6.*

challenged by small dairy farmers, the supposed beneficiaries of increased prices. On the contrary, the Housewives charged, the Milk Board used its price-setting power to protect suppliers' profits rather than to ensure a reasonable return for producers and affordable milk for consumers.⁷⁶

Wins and Losses

The Housewives' campaign got immediate and temporarily encouraging results. During the boycott and for months afterward, prices of milk, butter, and meat either declined or did not increase. A number of milk producers and dairy

industry representatives affirmed that the Housewives' boycott had forced the dairies to abandon plans for milk price increases. The Housewives jubilantly declared victory. The sudden resignation of Milk Board chairman and outspoken Housewives' foe J. E. Houck, followed by the federal Labour Minister's announcement of an investigation of food prices, seemed to confirm the Housewives' victory.⁷⁷ And although the federal inquiry was almost immediately aborted, the province created a Royal Commission in 1947 to investigate milk price, supply, and distribution—the same issues raised by the Housewives. Still active ten years later, Housewives Associations organized public meetings, submitted reports, and gave oral testimony at the inquiry.⁷⁸

Victory appeared imminent, confirming the Housewives' confident assertions of their power as organized consumers. But the campaign, which had begun with a simple demand for lower priced milk and expanded to include calls for direct democracy and socialization of basic necessities, failed to achieve all its objectives. Consumers did not become permanent members of government policy and price-setting boards, the Milk Board was not reorganized or eliminated, and milk did not become a public utility. Although several municipalities voted in favor of public distribution of milk, implementation was slow and the onset of war in 1939 shifted priorities elsewhere. Ironically, wartime exigencies achieved what the Housewives very likely could not. Milk prices remained between ten and eleven cents per quart through the war, its price and supply controlled directly by the state.

The 1947 Royal Commission on Milk was another disappointment. The commission rejected proposals for a consumer representative to the Milk Board, overriding the advice of dozens of labor unions, city councils, social democratic and communist political organizations, community groups, and individual consumers, including at least five Housewives' groups, who gave testimony and presented briefs. Indeed, rather than limiting the Board's powers, Commissioner Dalton Wells affirmed its right to set prices and recommended that its authority be expanded to include, among other things, encouraging efficiency in the dairy industry.⁷⁹

In time, moreover, the Housewives lost their immunity from right-wing attacks. In the late 1940s, Cold War anticommunism outflanked the maternalism that had insulated them from accusations of communist domination. Their attackers wondered publicly whether they were genuine housewives or Reds, identities that, in the logic of anticommunism, were incompatible.⁸⁰ Like other consumer activists, such as the League of Women Shoppers and the National Consumers' League, whose persecution by the anticommunist Right is described by Landon Storrs, they too suffered from the reputation-damaging effects of red-baiting.⁸¹ Discredited politically and no longer able to marshal broad popular support, by about 1950, the Housewives had become little more than a politically insignificant women's branch of the Communist Party.

Yet despite failing to achieve most of their goals—not uncommon for community-based social justice movements—the Housewives' campaign should nonetheless be considered a partial success because of its lasting

effects for consumers. In only a few weeks, the organization had grown from an upstart grassroots movement into a genuine political force. Its leaders had been transformed from “ordinary housewives” into well-known public figures who were quoted in the newspapers and invited, however grudgingly, to high-level policy meetings with the Ontario premier. Rank-and-file housewife activists had created a social movement that involved thousands of consumers, public officials, and unionized workers. Collectively, they had called powerful business leaders to account for their practices and forced an important industry to alter its pricing strategy. In the process, women who had begun wanting only to stop what they saw as a grave injustice had acquired organizing skills, experience in public speaking, and a working knowledge of grassroots politics. They were transformed from powerless victims into political actors, able to mount credible challenges to powerful men in business and government. They had demonstrated that consumers, acting collectively, could enlist the support of local allies for just causes and influence governments. They had educated their communities through public meetings and extensive press coverage about the political economy and class relations of milk and, in the process, popularized their critique of capitalism. By making it possible for many people to consider economic alternatives, they had altered the political imagination of their communities.

Although they would almost certainly not have called themselves feminists, the Housewives had also enlarged the sphere of activity available to women and, perhaps inadvertently, confronted prevailing notions of gender-appropriate behavior. Despite their overt maternalism and insistence on an identity grounded in domesticity, they challenged gender prescriptions that defined what it meant to be “good women.” At a time when women rarely participated in politics, they domesticated street protests and thus enabled other nonpolitical women to become political activists, while subtly shifting prevailing understandings of what constituted the political. By advancing socialist proposals for an expanded, more socially responsive state under the protective cover of their identities as mothers and homemakers, they claimed political space for radical ideas. And despite their subsequent demonization as “dupes” of communists and the derailing of their movement by anticommunists, they used the protective covering of maternalism and their womanly identities to disseminate and popularize notions of social and political rights that were normally the terrain of the Left.

NOTES

My thanks to Dorothy Sue Cobble, Silke Neunsinger, and the anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments on an earlier draft; to my diligent research assistants, Carl Klassen and Zachary Saltis, for their excellent work; and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding.

1. “Housewives Plan ‘High Prices’ Boycott: Plan City-Wide Union to Fight Food Costs Control Board Told,” *Toronto Daily Star*, November 3, 1937, 1; “Women Uniting Against Prices Mrs. Lamb Says,” *Daily Clarion*, November 8, 1937, 1.

2. “Spurn School Milk Boycott Say ‘Many Need It Badly’ . . . Approve Principle,” *Toronto Daily Star*, November 5, 1937, 6.

3. "Chart Great Crusade to Gain Lower Prices: Housewives' Resolutions Present Plan of Action," *Daily Clarion*, December 2, 1938, 2.
4. Julie Guard, "Canadian Consumers or Dangerous Foreign Women? Canada's Radical Consumer Movement, 1947–1950," in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History*, ed. Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa, (Toronto, 2004), 161–189.
5. Dana Frank, "Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests," *Feminist Studies* 11 (1985): 255–285. Jewish housewives in Canada also struck kosher butchers who raised their prices too high. See Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900–1939* (Toronto, 1992): 36–37.
6. Karen Hunt, "Negotiating the Boundaries of the Domestic: British Socialist Women and the Politics of Consumption," *Women's History Review* 9 (2000): 389–410.
7. Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, 2000).
8. According to historian James Hinton, the British Housewives' League advanced a program to the right of the Conservative Party, alienated almost everyone, failed to attract broad-based support, and faded away quickly. James Hinton, "Militant Housewives: The British Housewives' League and the Atlee Government," *History Workshop Journal* 38 (1994): 131–156.
9. Judith Smart, "The Politics of Consumption: The Housewives' Associations in South-Eastern Australia Before 1950," *Journal of Women's History* 18 (2006): 13–39 and "Consumption, Collectivism and Conservatism: Food in the Mobilisation of Housewives in Interwar Southeastern Australia," paper presented at Labouring Feminism and Feminist Working-Class History in Europe and Beyond, August 28–31, 2008, Stockholm, Sweden. On maternalist politics, see also many of the essays in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York, 1993).
10. Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy* (Berkeley, 2004): 40–72; 115.
11. Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 493–520.
12. Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, 2005), 95–135.
13. "Reveals Profits on Milk Reach 27 Percent in N.Y.," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 29, 1937, 19.
14. Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 215–249; Annelise Orleck, "'We Are That Mythical Thing Called the Public': Militant Housewives During the Great Depression," *Feminist Studies* 19 (1993): 147–173. See also Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, ch. 3. African American Housewives' Leagues also mobilized in major US cities during the 1930s around a somewhat different agenda. See Melinda Chateaufort, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana, 1998): 62–65; Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York, 1998): 245–247; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985): 215–216.
15. "Oppose Boost in Milk Price," *Daily Clarion*, January 28, 1937; "Rise in Food Cost Fought By Women," *Daily Clarion*, February 11, 1937; "Would Probe Spread Before Price Raised," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 3, 1937, 6.
16. Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol."
17. "Meeting Hectic as Women Vote to Force Milk Cut," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 9, 1937, 9.
18. Carmela Patrias, *Relief Strike: Immigrant Workers and the Great Depression in Crowland, Ontario 1930–1935*. (Toronto, 1990); Patricia V. Schultz, *The East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto, 1975).
19. In addition to those listed below, some useful anthologies include *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History* 3rd ed., ed. Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois (New York, 2000); *Women Resist Globalization: Mobilizing for Livelihood and Rights*, ed. Sheila Rowbotham and Stephanie Linkogle (New York, 2001); *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, ed. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and

Diana Taylor (Hanover, NH: 1997); *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax*, ed. Judith Fingard and Janet Guildford (Toronto, 2005).

20. Annelise Orleck, "Tradition Unbound: Radical Mothers in International Perspective," in *The Politics of Motherhood*, 3–20.

21. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (New York, 2005).

22. There is an enormous historiography on African American women's struggles. Some recent anthologies include *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York, 2001); *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1965*, ed. David W. Houck and David E. Dixon (Jackson, MS, 2009); *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941–1965*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Ann Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Brooklyn, NY, 1990).

23. Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, 2004).

24. Sheila Rowbotham, "Facets of Emancipation: Women in Movement from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," in *Women Resist Globalization*, 13–27.

25. "Introduction," in *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States, 1880–1950s*, ed. Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (New York, 1991); 1–20.

26. For example, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Policies and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York, 1993).

27. E.H. Clarke, *A History of the Toronto Milk Producers' Association, 1900–1966* (Toronto, 1966), 57–65.

28. A fine collection of anecdotes describing these hardships is Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Don Mills, ON, 1973).

29. Eugene A. Forsey, *Recovery—For Whom?* (Toronto, 1937). Reprinted in *The Dirty Thirties: Canadians in the Great Depression*, ed. Michiel Horn (Toronto, 1972), 3–76.

30. Alice M. Cooke, "Fate on the Dole," *Daily Clarion*, June 20, 1936, 5.

31. Margaret Gould, "Starvelings, 1938 Model," *Toronto Daily Star*, October 7, 1938, 4. For useful insights into the importance of decent funerals for poor families in a slightly earlier period, see Elytt Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto, 2008), 106–109.

32. E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York, 2002); James Giblin, *Milk: The Fight for Purity* (New York, 1986), 107–120.

33. Gordon Bates, "Health League of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 61 (1970): 60–62.

34. "Not Enough Milk Drunk, Says Doctor," *Toronto Daily Star*, January 17, 1938, 12.

35. "Important to Health," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 3, 1937, 4.

36. Clarke, *Toronto Milk Producers' Association*, 1.

37. "Drink More Milk Drive Urged on Jersey Breeders," *Toronto Daily Star*, July 11, 1938, 6.

38. DuPuis argues that advertisements suggest a related construction, nativism. DuPuis, 117–119.

39. "Spurn School Milk Boycott Say 'Many Need It Badly,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, November 5, 1937, 6.

40. "Housewives Limit Milk Boycott Meeting to Women," *Evening Telegram*, November 8, 1937, 26.

41. "Housework Comes First So Stores Unpicketed," *Toronto Daily Star*, February 26, 1938, 1.

42. See, for example, Lizabeth Cohen, "Citizens and Consumers in the United States in the Century of Mass Consumption," in *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, ed. Martin Daunton and Matthew Hilton (New York, 2001), 203–221; Davis, *Home Fires*, 1–7; Frank, *Purchasing Power*, 5–8; Meg Jacobs, "The Politics of Plenty: Consumerism in the Twentieth-Century United States," in *The Politics of Consumption*, 223–239; and the essays in *Edible Histories, Cultural Politics: Towards a Canadian Food History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, Valerie Korinek, and Marlene Epp (Toronto, 2010, forthcoming). In an interesting reversal of the phenomenon identified by historian Elizabeth Faue, in which women are erased from the historical memory of male-identified events such as strikes, even when men engaged in consumer-led activities, they tend to be

seen as women's protests. See Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945* (Chapel Hill, 1991).

43. Temma Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets: Women, Youth, and Direct Democracy* (Berkeley, 2004), 46.

44. Landon Storrs, "Left-Feminism, the Consumer Movement, and Red Scare Politics in the United States, 1935–1960," *Journal of Women's History* 18 (2006): 40–67; Landon Y.R. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism: The National Consumers' League, Women's Activism, and Labor Standards in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

45. Kaplan, *Taking Back the Streets*; Swerdlow, "Ladies' Day at the Capitol."

46. "Women Uniting Against Prices Mrs. Lamb Says," *Daily Clarion*, November 8, 1937, 1.

47. "Women To Present Protest to Hepburn," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 25, 1937, 6; "As a Woman Sees It," *Daily Clarion*, November 27, 1937; "Drive for Cheaper Milk Not Dead, Declare Women," *Evening Telegram*, December 10, 1937, 30; "Toronto Housewives to Publish Paper," *Daily Clarion*, April 6, 1938; "Housewives Hold Party Wednesday," *Daily Clarion*, April 27, 1938; "Housewives Assn. Will Hold Picnic," *Daily Clarion*, July 16, 1938; "Housewives Send Speakers," *Daily Clarion*, November 10, 1938; "Housewives Concert," *Daily Clarion*, April 13, 1939; "Housewives' Satire Depicts Campaign," *Toronto Daily Star*, April 15, 1939, 12; "Housewife Drama Produced," *Daily Clarion*, April 18, 1939, 3; "Housewives Garden Party On Saturday," *Daily Clarion*, July 8, 1939; "Housewives' Meetings Oppose Cadet Revival," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 1, 1939, 10.

48. "Suburban Dairies Form Association to Sell 12-Cent Milk," *The Evening Telegram*, November 18, 1937, 25; "Milk Producers Informed Boycott 'Flash in Pan,'" *Toronto Daily Star*, November 29, 1937, 6; "Toronto Milk Distribution Abominable, Says Hepburn," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 23, 1937, 7.

49. "Dairyman Defies Board's Milk Price Boost," *Evening Telegram*, November 5, 1937, 13; "Milk at Ten Cents is Possible Claim," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 8, 1937, 6.

50. "Trying to Weld Milk Producers in One Big Unit," *Toronto Daily Star*, February 17, 1938, 1.

51. "Appeal to Housewives," letters to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, November 4, 1937, 4.

52. "Won't Buy, Say 4,000 Women if Butter over 30 Cents," *Toronto Daily Star*, February 22, 1938, 5.

53. "Housewives Plan Boycott to Fight Gas Meter Fee," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 1, 1938, 22; "Chart Great Crusade to Gain Lower Prices: Housewives' Resolutions Present Plan of Action," *Daily Clarion*, December 2, 1938, 2.

54. Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*; Storrs, "Left-Feminism" and *Civilizing Capitalism*.

55. "Reeve Offers Housewives Support in Milk-Price War," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 9, 1937, 6.

56. "Up To Housewives," letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, November 3, 1937, 4.

57. Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*.

58. Pat Thane, "Visions of Gender in the Making of the British Welfare State: The Case of Women in the British Labour Party and Social Policy, 1906–1945," in *Maternity and Gender Policies*, 93–118.

59. Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver, 1980), 84–85, 142–165.

60. James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941* (Toronto, 1983); see also Pierre Burton, *The Great Depression, 1929–1939* (Toronto, 1990); *The Depression in Canada: Responses to Economic Crisis*, ed. Michiel Horn (Toronto, 1988); Michiel Horn, "The Great Depression: Past and Present," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 11 (1976): 41–50.

61. Struthers, *No Fault*, 110.

62. Guest, *Social Security in Canada*; Kenneth Norrie, Douglas Owsram, and J.C. Herbert Emery, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 4th ed. (Toronto, 2008), 317–339; Richard Pomfret, *The Economic Development of Canada* (Scarborough, ON, 1992), 237–243; Struthers, *No Fault*; James Struthers, "The Great Depression," in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=a1ARTA0003425>. Accessed May 13, 2009.

63. *Social Fabric or Patchwork Quilt: The Development of Social Policy in Canada*, ed. Raymond B. Blake and Jeffrey A. Keshen (Toronto, 2006); Alvin Finkel, *Our Lives: Canada after 1945* (Toronto, 1997); Guest, *Social Security in Canada*.

64. Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York, 1993), 58–96.
65. Nancy E. Rose, *Workfare or Fair Work: Women, Welfare, and Government Work Programs* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1995), 5.
66. Burton, *Great Depression*, 176–179, 326–329, 390–407; Norrie, Owrap, and Emery, *History of the Canadian Economy*; Struthers, *No Fault*, 95–103, 132–137, 142–146, 158–159.
67. Jeff Singleton, *The American Dole: Unemployment Relief and the Welfare State in the Great Depression* (Westport, CT, 2000), 10–12.
68. Struthers, *No Fault*, 168–169.
69. Guest, *Social Security in Canada*, 85.
70. Marcus Klee notes that doctors' requisitions were required for relief milk: Marcus Aurelius Klee, "Between the Scylla and Charybdis of Anarchy and Despotism: The State, Capital, and the Working Class in the Great Depression, Toronto, 1929–1940," (Ph.D. diss., Queen's University, 1999), 54; Burton, *Great Depression*, 103–104.
71. "Boost Cash Relief To Meet Milk Rise," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 17, 1937, 6; "Will Ask All Dairies for Relief Quotation," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 2, 1937, 6.
72. "Relief Milk Expense Raised \$1,000 Week," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 18, 1937, 1.
73. "Administration Body on Relief is Vetoed," *Toronto Daily Star*, November 30, 1937, 5; "Relief in Toronto Off \$1,570,100 in '37," *Toronto Daily Star*, January 26, 1938, 6.
74. "City's Tax Rate Seen Cut by New Relief Cost Plan," *Toronto Daily Star*, February 10, 1938, 1.
75. Struthers, *No Fault*, 173.
76. "Toronto Milk Distribution Abominable, Says Hepburn," *Toronto Daily Star*, December 23, 1937, 7.
77. "Houck Resigns Post as Milk Board Head," *Toronto Daily Star*, March 28, 1938, 1; "Demands of Housewives Granted," *Daily Clarion*, February 16, 1938; "Women Urge Federal Probe of Food Prices," *Daily Clarion*, February 19, 1938; "International Women's Day," "The Cost of Living and March the Eighth," *Daily Clarion*, February 28, 1938, 1.
78. Ontario, Royal Commission on Milk, *Report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Milk, 1947* (Toronto, 1947).
79. Ontario, Royal Commission on Milk, *Report* (Toronto, 1947).
80. Julie Guard, "Women Worth Watching: Radical Housewives in Cold War Canada," in *Whose National Security? Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies*, ed. Gary Kinsman, Dieter K. Buse, and Mercedes Steedman (Toronto, 2000), 73–88.
81. Storrs, "Left-Feminism."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.