

**Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019). 298 pp. Cloth \$60.00, Paperback \$22.46.**

Julie Guard's important new book, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth-Century Canada*, shines a spotlight on the fascinating group the Housewives Consumers Association of Canada (HCA). Guard's thorough examination charts the HCA's multiple campaigns from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. Through Guard's work, we learn about the people whose active involvement in the association led to important changes in government policies for price controls before and during the Second World War. The HCA was, indeed, an inclusive organization that invited all concerned citizens to join the fight for better price controls in the food marketplace, with many prominent Communist Party members also actively involved. Guard effectively demonstrates how the state ultimately weaponized Communist Party links to silence these housewives in the Cold War era.

*Radical Housewives* begins with the successful campaign that would become the origin of the organization (19). In 1937, frustrated Toronto mothers, appalled at the rising cost of milk, organized a city-wide boycott. After seven months of boycotts and protests, and despite threats from the Milk Board and other dairy industry leaders, the women were successful in bringing down the price of milk in Toronto (21). Guard points out that, even in these early years, the Housewives used their maternalism as a source of power in their campaigns. Maternalism is in fact a theme that appears throughout the book. Guard argues that it is this maternalism which the Housewives' Association and its members used to protect themselves from public scrutiny or police intervention, and also gave them a sounding board from which to rally support. Association members were portrayed as just ordinary Canadian housewives and mothers who were acting on behalf of their children's welfare (35). The HCA encouraged members to dress conservatively and bring their children to rallies and protests, to demonstrate their maternal identities. Milk bottle postcards were used as a form of protest to the Canadian government and would become a symbol of the movement in the early years of campaigning (89). In fact, milk was often at the centre of the movement, being seen as an essential food in the rearing of healthy growing children. Guard points out that children were often used in rallies to garner support for the cause. While this maternal image was a powerful tool used by the HCA to gain support and shield them from backlash, it was also used by opponents to undermine their efforts and reinforce female gender stereotypes. Guard addresses the way the press often portrayed women's activism as "inherently ridiculous" and suggested women were deviating from their feminin

ity by becoming politically active (138-9). This deviance could be viewed by the male establishment as especially dangerous subversion because it rejected gendered social norms (140).

The HCA welcomed concerned mothers from all walks of life. As a result, there were HCA members who were also members of the Labour-Progressive Party (LPP), the Communist Party in Canada at the time (5). Also included in the membership were members of ethnic minority groups such as members of the Ukrainian Labour Farmer Temple Association (ULFTA) and the United Jewish People's Order (UJPO), two groups that would also be criticized and stigmatized for their subversive communist influence. This inclusion of ethnic and political groups would haunt the organization throughout its existence but it was ultimately during the Cold War that the state used these communist associations against the group to bring down its credibility and power. Guard argues that communist connections to the HCA were marginal, but that those who were members of both groups often took roles of influence within the HCA because of their experience with activism. These roles of influence were at the heart of critics' concerns, as they viewed the HCA as luring naïve housewives towards the communist agenda. In this way, as Guard argues, the materialist angle was ultimately used against them.

The HCA drew the support of Canadians across the country. Despite the popularity of price controls with Canadian voters and consumers, Prime Minister Mackenzie King's federal government was determined to remove price controls to promote growth in the post-war Canadian economy (91). Guard argues that the RCMP's investigation into HCA's Communist activity was also a red-bait tactic to tear down the credibility and influence of a determined group of activists who spoke against the government's decision to lift price controls after the war. Moreover, the introduction of the Canadian Association of Consumers (CAC) in 1949, with its elite members and conservative approach to consumer affairs, effectively silenced the HCA, as well as the voice of the working-class consumer more generally.

*Radical Housewives* is a meticulously researched and well-documented look at an important aspect of Canadian history. Guard is careful to include information about the activities of the multiple HCA branches across Canada. The book is indeed exhaustive, highlighting details of the HCA's multiple campaigns and rallies throughout Canada. In fact, the inclusion of so many details might be considered by some a disadvantage, in that it becomes hard to keep track of the narrative. Events are described chronologically, jumping from city to city and person to person, making it difficult to identify with any of the people described. A more intimate look into the lives of some of the more influential players in the HCA story might have added depth to the narrative and encouraged further engagement in the cause and its struggles. Nevertheless, *Radical Housewives* is an important and valuable contribution to the study of Canadian consumer history. Most of all, it brings the Housewives' concerns and achievements to the centre of historical analysis, reveal-

ing that their endeavours to protect working-class Canadian families from inflation and profiteering were influential enough to trigger a formidable and ultimately oppressive response from the state.

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