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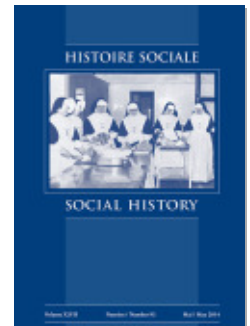
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Conservative Consumerism: Consumer Advocacy in *Woman's Century* Magazine During and After World War I

DONICA BELISLE*

*Whereas most historical research into Canadian women's consumer advocacy presents that activism as progressive, many Canadian women have organized as consumers to serve conservative ends. References to consumer issues that appeared in *Woman's Century*, the official magazine of the National Council of Women of Canada between 1914 and 1921, reveal that the magazine's contributors advocated consumer activism to protect their own pocketbooks and to advance the interests of Canadian manufacturing and the federal state. The consumer politics evident in *Woman's Century* would suggest that scholars reconsider the political motives of consumer activism. Maternalism influenced many twentieth-century Canadian women's consumer movements, as it did those articulated in *Woman's Century*. Yet, while many leftist and liberal Canadian women become involved in consumer politics to create broader material equality, *Woman's Century's* writers engaged in consumer advocacy to entrench Christian, Anglo-Celtic, and bourgeois national dominance.*

*Si la plupart des recherches historiques consacrées à l'action militante des Canadiennes dans le domaine de la consommation présentent ce militantisme sous un jour progressiste, de nombreuses Canadiennes se sont pourtant organisées comme consommatrices à des fins conservatrices. Les textes relatifs à la consommation parus entre 1914 et 1921 dans *Woman's Century*, le magazine officiel du National Council of Women of Canada, révèlent que c'est afin de protéger leur propre portefeuille, d'une part, et de promouvoir les intérêts des manufacturiers canadiens et ceux de l'État fédéral, d'autre part, que les collaboratrices au magazine préconaient un militantisme sur le plan de la consommation. La politique en matière de consommation manifeste dans *Woman's Century* donne à penser que les chercheurs devraient réexaminer les motivations*

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politiques qui sous-tendent le militantisme au chapitre de la consommation. Le maternalisme a influé sur bon nombre de mouvements de consommatrices canadiennes au XX^e siècle, comme il l'a fait dans le cas de ceux qui sont exposés clairement dans Woman's Century. Certes, bien des Canadiennes de gauche ou libérales s'intéressent à la politique en matière de consommation pour accroître l'égalité matérielle, mais les rédactrices de Woman's Century se sont quant à elles engagées dans la politique relative à la consommation afin de consolider, à la grandeur du pays, une domination chrétienne, anglo-celtique et bourgeoise.

THE NATIONAL Council of Women of Canada (NCW), Canada's largest historical women's organization with 150,000 members in 1914, is not usually viewed as a consumer organization.¹ Yet, during the early decades of the twentieth century, this association's national executive, together with each of its 32 local and nine provincial chapters, was involved in consumer advocacy. Research by Veronica Strong-Boag, N. E. S. Griffiths, Marjorie Norris, and Anne-Marie Kinahan reveals that from the late nineteenth century until World War II, Council women participated in such consumer initiatives as farmers' markets, cooperatives, boycotts, and lobbying for state regulation of product availability and prices. More conservative initiatives were also pursued. The reduction of spending on alcohol, tobacco, salacious movies, and sensationalist novels was important to many Council women, as were "Made-in-Canada" campaigns and, during World War I, support for state regulation of fuel and food.²

Scholarship on Canadian women's consumer activism demonstrates that between 1920 and 1960 women often organized around consumer issues. Their motivations for doing so, as Joan Sangster, Julie Guard, Joy Parr, and Magda Fahrni separately argue, arose partly from women's roles as wives and mothers within Canada's capitalist political economy. Charged with managing their households and feeding and clothing their families, many of Canada's activist housewives sought to make high-quality consumer items accessible to cost-conscious women. Desire for greater public recognition was also at stake. Montreal's female-led food boycotts in 1947 and 1948 were spurred partly by the sense that Canadian citizenship included material security. Similarly, the involvement of leftist and liberal women in the Canadian Association of Consumers, established in 1947, was indicative of some women's wishes for representation in policy-making.³

1 N. E. S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), p. 111.

2 Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976), pp. 315-318, 363-367; Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision*, pp. 131, 142; Marjorie Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies: A History of the Calgary Local Council of Women* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1995), pp. 187-195; Anne-Marie Kinahan, "Cultivating the Taste of the Nation: The National Council of Women of Canada and the Campaign against 'Pernicious' Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 32 (2007), pp. 161-179.

3 Joan Sangster, "Consuming Issues: Women on the Left, Political Protest, and the Organization of Homemakers" in Sharon Cook, Lorna McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, eds., *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pp. 240-247; Julie Guard, "A Mighty Power Against the Cost of Living: Canadian Housewives

Other motivators were more religious. Women's involvement in temperance and censorship campaigns, which can be considered consumer-oriented in that they sought to change Canadians' spending behaviour, was spurred by evangelical impulses to bring about a holier world order.⁴

This study deepens historical understandings of Canadian women's consumer activism by examining representations of consumption in the NCW's official magazine, *Woman's Century*, between 1914 and 1921. Whereas historians usually treat cost-of-living activism, patriotic purchasing, and moralist consumer campaigns as separate issues, this article demonstrates that between 1914 and 1921 several English Canadian female activists were interested in all three types of endeavours. The multiple forms of consumer advocacy voiced by *Woman's Century's* writers highlight the ways maternalist feminism—or the notion that woman's "role as guardian of the home" made her responsible for "ensur[ing] the well-being ... of the country"—complicated activists' political allegiances.⁵ For, just as Australian female activists during this period promoted both "conservative" and "radical" approaches to consumer issues, so did *Woman's Century's* writers advocate elitist and grassroots solutions to what they perceived as Canada's consumer problems.⁶ The tendency of *Woman's Century* to slide back and forth along the political spectrum in relation to consumption arose partly from the diversity of women, including bourgeois reformers, western populists, and radical feminists, who wrote for the magazine. The magazine's "permeability" around consumer issues also stemmed from otherwise disparate female activists' tendencies to agitate against high prices.⁷

For a brief but prolific period, *Woman's Century* was the leading voice of the English Canadian female reform movement. Published in Toronto between 1913 and 1921, *Woman's Century* circulated across the nation, peaking at 28,600 subscribers in 1921.⁸ This figure was lower than that of Canada's leading mass-market women's magazine, *Everywoman's World*, which had 100,000 readers during this period.⁹ It was, however, similar to that of the American suffrage movement's leading periodical, *The Woman's Journal*, which had 20,000 readers

Organize in the 1930s," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 77 (Spring 2010), pp. 22-47, and "Canadian Citizens or Dangerous Foreign Women? Canada's Radical Consumer Movement, 1947-1950" in Marlene Epp, Franca Iacovetta, and Frances Swyripa, eds., *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 161-189; Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 84-100; Magda Fahrni, "Counting the Costs of Living: Gender, Citizenship, and a Politics of Prices in 1940s Montreal," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 83, no. 4 (December 2002), pp. 483-504.

4 Sharon Anne Cook, "Through Sunshine and Shadow": *The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Kinahan, "Cultivating the Taste of the Nation."

5 Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Naomi Black, Paula Bourne, and Magda Fahrni, *Canadian Women: A History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Nelson, 2011), pp. 217-218.

6 Judith Smart, "The Politics of the Small Purse: The Mobilization of Housewives in Interwar Australia," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 77 (Spring 2010), p. 9.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

8 "Woman's Century," *Woman's Century*, November 1921, p. 1.

9 Fraser Sutherland, *The Monthly Epic: A History of Canadian Magazines* (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1989), pp. 143, 119.

in 1912.¹⁰ In terms of Canadian women's political journals, 22,600 more people subscribed to *Woman's Century* than they did to the magazine of another major English Canadian women's organization, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which had 17,000 members in 1914.¹¹ Whereas the WCTU's journal was primarily read by Ontario subscribers, *Woman's Century* was sent to NCW locals across the dominion (Figure 1).¹²

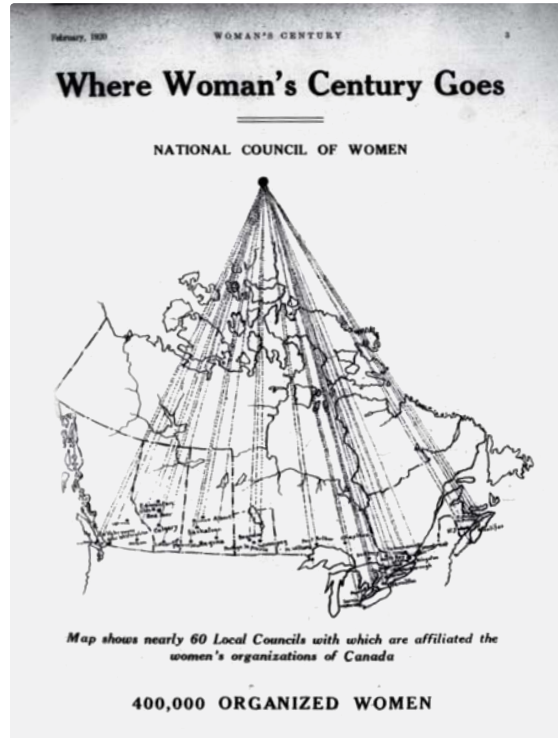


Figure 1: "Where Woman's Century Goes." *Woman's Century* (February 1920), p. 2.

- ¹⁰ Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 147. In 1917 *The Woman's Journal* was renamed *Woman Citizen*.
- ¹¹ Cook, "Through Sunshine and Shadow," p. 61; Ontario Archives, microfilm collection, *Canadian White Ribbon Tidings*, April 15, 1908, p. 1146. *Woman's Century* also had 26,600 more readers than did the official magazine of the Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste, though when one considers that the FNSJB had 12,000 members, *La Bonne Parole's* figure is significant. See Marie Lavigne, Yolande Pinard, and Jennifer Stoddart, "The Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste and the Women's Movement in Quebec" in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada: 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), p. 74.
- ¹² "Where Woman's Century Goes," *Woman's Century*, February 1920, p. 3. This illustration suggests that the NCW had 400,000 members in 1921, whereas Griffiths states that the NCW had 150,000 in 1914 (*The Splendid Vision*, p. 111). *Woman's Century's* editors probably included members of NCW affiliates within this figure, whereas Griffiths' figure includes only NCW members.

Founded by Jessie Campbell MacIver, a member of the Toronto Local Council of Women, *Woman's Century* was adopted in April 1914 by the NCW as its official organ.¹³ After this date the NCW began preserving each issue of *Woman's Century*; today, a full run dating between April 1914 and November 1921 is housed at Library and Archives Canada.¹⁴ After *Woman's Century* received the NCW's endorsement, it continued operating independently, both financially and editorially. At the same time, its editors also began working closely with the NCW and other feminist and reform organizations.¹⁵ Until its demise, the magazine's executive was dominated by Council women and other reformers. Flora "Lady" Eaton, wife of Toronto department store magnate Sir John Eaton and noted philanthropist, was perhaps the magazine's wealthiest director; her financial support proved crucial for the periodical.¹⁶ MacIver's co-editors were Mary Morgan Dean, Constance Hamilton, Mrs. U. A. Gurnett, and Gertrude Lawlor, all of southern Ontario. Prominent author and reformer Emily Murphy of Edmonton joined the editorial team after World War I, though her contribution may have been more symbolic than actual since she rarely authored articles.¹⁷ By 1915 *Woman's Century* had grown from 25 to approximately 40 pages per issue; by 1921 it contained 55 pages monthly. Each issue started with editorials, readers' letters, and Council news. Articles on feminism and reform followed, as did recurring columns on art, literature, health, housekeeping, food, citizenship, childrearing, education, philanthropy, employment, laws, immigration, morality, domestic service, temperance, censorship, and Christianity. Advertisements for consumer goods, together with government notices pertaining to war and reconstruction, were interspersed throughout this content.¹⁸

In the early twentieth century in Canada, as elsewhere, there were two main, sometimes intersecting, often diverging strands of the woman movement: "equity feminism" and "maternal feminism." The former postulated that it was "unjust" that women should "have fewer rights" than men, while the latter argued that women's motherhood roles made them responsible for elevating the morality of the nation.¹⁹ A few independent feminists such as Flora MacDonald Denison of Toronto advocated equity feminism, but most, including Emily Murphy of Edmonton and Nellie McClung (who lived in several locations across western Canada), came down on the side of maternalism.²⁰ Especially within the anglophone women's movement, advocates suggested that white women's status as mothers within the

13 Bessie McLean Reynolds, "History of 'Woman's Century,'" *Woman's Century*, September 1918, p. 19.

14 This article's analyses are based on a careful reading of these 77 issues. Issues dating before 1914 have not been located.

15 Reynolds, "History of 'Woman's Century,'" p. 19.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

17 Masthead, *Woman's Century*, August 1915, July 1916, February 1918, and January 1921.

18 This article represents the first sustained scholarly inquiry into *Woman's Century*.

19 Cuthbert Brandt *et al.*, *Canadian Women*, pp. 217-218; see also Linda Kealey, "Introduction" in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 7-14.

20 Deborah Gorham, "Flora MacDonald Denison: Canadian Feminism" in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 47-70; Jennifer Henderson, *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 159-208; Cecily Devereux, *Growing a Race: Nellie McClung and the Fiction of Eugenic Feminism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

heterosexual, Christian, and nuclear family justified their bids for equality.²¹ This racialized position sought to secure white female participation in politics and civil society and to entrench existing class, ethnic, and racial hierarchies.²²

Many articles in *Woman's Century* engaged in this racializing maternalism. In 1919, contributor Constance Lynd of Calgary wrote that white women's civic responsibilities contributed to the "rise" of the "race."²³ Another 1919 article quoted British suffragist Maude Royden, who argued that white women had a duty "as white women[,] towards the backward native races." "We justify our rule over these races on the grounds of ... true justice.... We women must stand in an elder-sisterlike [*sic*] relation to these people, rejoicing in their growth, shielding them in their weakness." In her view, Christian women's "moral leadership" would illuminate "dark questions of morality" and the "tangled problems of labor" throughout the British Empire. Indeed, women's civilizing influence was the reason for which they "have come into the kingdom." Whether Royden meant the Christian or the British "kingdom" was not stated; regardless, the distinction was moot as she probably viewed them as synonymous.²⁴ Echoing this maternalist advocacy, many articles in *Woman's Century* suggested that white women's claims to legal, political, and civil legitimacy rested on their identities as morally and racially superior beings within the British Empire.

Scholars have begun excavating the racialized visions of early-twentieth-century feminists, not only exploring how "first-wave Canadian feminism denied the personhood of racial 'inferiors' while it claimed that status for Anglo-Protestant women," but also "analysing how feminism actually participated in the elaboration of technologies of personhood."²⁵ This article contributes to that task. Many *Woman's Century* contributors characterized British, Christian, and middle-class women as consumer experts, justifying these women's claims to citizenship by referring to their national purchasing roles. Importantly, however, subtle assertions that low-income, ethnic, and racialized Canadians were inferior pervaded such arguments. Several of *Woman's Century's* writers suggested that workers and non-British immigrants were wasteful, spendthrift, and ignorant. People from these communities, it was implied, did not know how to budget, shop for provisions, or spend their leisure time. Fortunately, white middle-class women could solve these problems. By teaching Canada's inhabitants how to spend their money in ways that benefited nation and empire, members of the NCW could elevate national morality and strengthen the drive for Victory and prosperity.

21 Mariana Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race is Free': Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism" in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), pp. 2-26.

22 Anne-Marie Kinahan, "Transcendent Citizenship: Suffrage, the National Council of Women of Canada and the Politics of Organized Womanhood," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (Fall 2008), pp. 5-27.

23 Constance Lynd, "Women's Independence for the Sake of the Race," *Woman's Century*, October 1919, p. 16.

24 Maude Royden, "British Dominions and Sisterhood," *Woman's Century*, July 1919, p. 7.

25 Henderson, *Settler Feminism*, p. 211. See also Mariana Valverde, "'Racial Poison': Drink, Male Vice, and Degeneration in First-wave Feminism" in Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine, eds., *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 33-50.

In addition to demonstrating connections among consumption, citizenship, and whiteness in female reform activism during the early twentieth century, a study of *Woman's Century* highlights the extent to which white anglophone women's groups viewed consumption as political. Today, as Lizabeth Cohen notes, many critics depict "citizens and consumers" as "opposites." Whereas the former "are assumed to embrace a larger public interest," the latter are seen as "concerned with satisfying private material desires."²⁶ Nevertheless, for over 300 years purchasers have mobilized in defence of what they saw as the public good. From eighteenth-century American patriots who boycotted British commodities, to nineteenth-century British and American abolitionists who boycotted the products of the slave trade, to early-twentieth-century members of the Australian Housewives' Associations who protested government regulation of food prices, a range of activists throughout the anglophone world have engaged in consumer advocacy.²⁷ Equally importantly, the entire twentieth-century political landscape of Canada, the United States, and capitalist Europe was punctuated by labourist, leftist, and liberal arguments contending that consumer goods were integral to civic belonging within democratic countries.²⁸

In that they drew connections between consumption and citizenship, contributors to *Woman's Century* may be placed among the international groupings that have treated consumption as a public subject. During the early twentieth century, white Canadian female activists—along with their counterparts across the democratic global North—were struggling for enfranchisement. When the British Empire declared war on Germany, many Anglo-Celtic Canadian women seized the opportunity of total war to demonstrate their support for the state. They campaigned for military recruits, put together soldiers' care packages, held fundraisers, publicized government messages, and mobilized women's consumer responsibilities.²⁹ The Canadian government, like those of Britain and the United States, imposed regulations that mandated conservation of wheat, meat, dairy products, and produce. Simultaneously, it encouraged consumers to purchase Canadian-made goods. Hundreds of Anglo-Celtic women answered these calls. By studying how these campaigns played out in the pages of *Woman's Century*,

²⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003), pp. 8-9.

²⁷ Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), pp. 117-152; Clare Midgley, "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture," *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 17, no. 3 (December 1996), pp. 137-162; Smart, "The Politics of the Small Purse," pp. 48-68.

²⁸ Lawrence Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*; Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Fahmi, "Counting the Costs"; Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance Through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Rebecca Pulju, "Consumers for the Nation: Women, Politics, and Consumer Organization in France, 1944-1965," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 18, no. 3 (Fall 2006), pp. 68-90; Daphne Berdahl, "The Spirit of Capitalism and the Boundaries of Citizenship in Post-Wall Germany," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 47, no. 2 (April 2005), pp. 235-251.

²⁹ Joan Sangster, "Mobilizing Women for War" in David MacKenzie, ed., *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 157-193.

it is possible to highlight the connections that English Canadian suffragists and reformers made among femininity, consumption, and citizenship.

During World War I and the postwar years, food shortages and “wartime finance” caused prices to skyrocket across the capitalist North.³⁰ Prices rose especially high between 1917 and 1920 due to shortages and to policies aimed at reinvigorating domestic economies. Only at the end of 1920 did markets stabilize, and only in 1921 did shoppers see more reasonable prices.³¹ Meantime, increased food prices sparked international protests.³² *Woman’s Century* demonstrates that such activism occurred in Canada too. Significantly, the magazine also indicates that class and region influenced such protests. Bourgeois women advocated increased consumer organization so that expertise could be gathered; they also occasionally lobbied for government intervention into pricing. In contrast, rural and low-income women advocated government regulation and the formation of cooperatives. Hence even as English Canadian female reformers shared racial, ethnic, linguistic, and organizational ties, their responses to inflation varied.

A study of *Woman’s Century*, then, demonstrates that the consumer activism of English Canadian women between 1914 and 1921 was multi-faceted. Whereas most research on Canadian women’s consumer advocacy has depicted such agitation as leftist or liberal, *Woman’s Century* is an important reminder that many women have harnessed consumer politics in pursuit of conservative goals. Many *Woman’s Century* contributors were motivated by maternalist concerns, as were the leftist and liberal women who mobilized later. Yet they were also spurred by desires to advance the white and capitalist bourgeoisie and specifically to advance their own moral authority. Although a few of *Woman’s Century*’s western and leftist contributors challenged the elitism that pervaded the periodical, none of them convinced the majority of its writers to change their politics.³³ Throughout its existence, *Woman’s Century* remained a conservative magazine dedicated to Anglo-Celtic, Christian, and capitalist national dominance.

30 Douglas McCalla, “The Economic Impact of the Great War” in David MacKenzie, ed., *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 145.

31 Smart, “The Politics of the Small Purse,” p. 54; Helen Zoe Veit, “‘We Were a Soft People’: Self-discipline and American Food Conservation in the First World War,” *Food Culture and Society*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2007), p. 170; McCalla, “The Economic Impact,” pp. 145-147.

32 Belinda Davis, “Food Scarcity and the Empowerment of the Female Consumer in World War I Berlin” in Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, eds., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 287-310; Judith Smart, “Feminists, Food and the Fair Price: The Cost of Living Demonstrations in Melbourne, August-September 1917,” *Labour History*, no. 50 (May 1986), p. 113; Karen Hunt, “The Politics of Food and Women’s Neighborhood Activism in First World War Britain,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 77 (Spring 2010), pp. 8-26; Sheila Rowbotham, “Consumer Power: Women’s Contribution to Alternatives and Resistance to the Market in the United States, 1880-1940” in B. Einhorn and E. J. Yeo, eds., *Women and Market Societies: Crisis and Opportunity* (Aldershot: E. Elgar, 1995), pp. 11-29; Dana Frank, “Housewives, Socialists, and the Politics of Food: The 1917 New York Cost-of-Living Protests,” *Feminist Studies*, vol. 11 (1985), p. 259; Barbara Alpern Engel, “Not by Bread Alone: Subsistence Riots in Russia during World War I,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 69 (1997), pp. 696-721; Cuthbert Brandt et al., *Canadian Women*, p. 266.

33 These are discussed in more detail below. See, for example, Violet McNaughton to the Editors, *Woman’s Century*, March 1915, p. 8; Christabel Pankhurst, “Industrial Salvation,” *Woman’s Century*, June 1919, p. 46.

Patriotic Purchasing

Patriotic consumerism was the most prevalent form of consumer advocacy to appear in *Woman's Century*. Present throughout the magazine's run, this mode of activism suggested that Canadians should make purchasing decisions based on the wishes of the federal government. Implicit in this form of consumerism was the assumption that strengthening the Canadian state would contribute to the progress of the Canadian citizenry. Citizenship claims were also integral. *Woman's Century's* patriotic consumerists suggested that, through their buying activities, women would demonstrate their economic importance to the Canadian nation. They would thus prove their worth to lawmakers and legitimize their claims to citizenship.

By calling on consumers to purchase for the state, *Woman's Century's* writers demonstrated certain similarities with international consumer patriots. As Karl Gerth notes, consumer issues have often "served as a battleground in the creation of the modern nation."³⁴ From anti-imperialists in late-eighteenth-century Ireland, who urged consumption of domestic products to weaken British imperial power, to early-twentieth-century Chinese nationalists who boycotted foreign goods to boost Chinese industrial might, activists have long connected economic nationalism with national independence.³⁵ Through their advocacy of patriotic purchasing, *Woman's Century's* writers hoped similarly to strengthen the Canadian nation. At the same time, *Woman's Century's* contributors were also distinct in that they were avowedly imperial. An economically strong dominion, they maintained, would enhance both Canada and Empire.

During the same year that the British Empire declared war on Germany, both the NCW and *Woman's Century* adopted "Made-in-Canada" as an official platform. The former endorsed it politically, while the latter both endorsed "Made-in-Canada" and suggested that the journal itself was a Canadian product worth purchasing.³⁶ Women should support "Made-in-Canada," stated *Woman's Century* contributor Mrs. Wilson, because "women do the principal part of the purchasing of all articles used in the home."³⁷ Editor-in-chief Jessie MacIver agreed, stating that economic nationalism would boost Canadian employment and manufacturing as well as "strengthen the power of the Empire."³⁸ Despite claims of non-partisanship on the part of both the NCW and *Woman's Century*, "Made-in-Canada" was profoundly partisan, as Veronica Strong-Boag also notes. It

34 Karl Gerth, "Consumption and Nationalism: China" in Frank Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 418.

35 Padhraig Higgins, "Consumption, Gender, and the Politics of 'Free Trade' in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1 (Fall 2007), pp. 87-105; Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion*, pp. 117-216; Gerth, "Consumption and Nationalism," pp. 418-432. For a later period, see Laura Nelson, *Measured Excess: Status, Gender, and Consumer Nationalism in South Korea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

36 Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, p. 317; "Canadian Photo-Play Production," *Woman's Century*, January 1920, p. 33.

37 Mrs. Wilson, "Made-in-Canada," *Woman's Century*, March 1915, p. 10.

38 Jessie MacIver, "Made in Canada," *Woman's Century*, November 1919, p. 18, reprinted from *Woman's Century*, November 1914.

echoed the federal government's platform as well as the publicity of the Canadian Manufacturers' Association.³⁹

In 1915, *Woman's Century's* support for this policy grew forceful. The magazine introduced a column called "Made-in-Canada," in which it lauded the movement.⁴⁰ Such articles complemented the work of local Councils, which conducted "Canadian made" campaigns.⁴¹ Nevertheless, not all of *Woman's Century's* readers supported patriotic purchasing. In April 1915 the organ published a letter by Saskatchewan populist Violet McNaughton. "The most striking thing" about "Made-in-Canada," she wrote, was that "many of the women who are backing it are doing so purely for reasons of sentiment." If they would study the facts, they would discover that "Canadian flour, bacon, cheese, and salmon" were cheaper to buy in Britain than they were in Canada. They would also determine that Canadian farm implements were more expensive to purchase in western Canada than they were in the United States and Russia. "Made-in-Canada" thus harmed both consumers and farmers.⁴² In staking out her free trade position, McNaughton revealed an affinity with some American consumer advocates. Stated American activist Will Atkinson in 1929, "Tariffs always and everywhere plunder consumers."⁴³

Despite McNaughton's and a few others' dissent,⁴⁴ *Woman's Century* pushed ahead in promoting Canadian industry. According to MacIver, it was "difficult to understand" McNaughton's "opposition," for buying Canadian simply meant giving "the home-made article the preference over the imported article." Such practices, she said in a statement sure to anger Canada's agrarian women, would enrich "Canada's business community" and strengthen the Canadian nation.⁴⁵ Another article, this one anonymous, stated that free trade would weaken Canadian manufacturing and throw thousands out of work. Industrial unemployment moreover went against the interests of wage-earning women and working-class housewives.⁴⁶ Indicating a disinterest in rural women's concerns, these authors placed their priorities ostensibly with factory women, but also with urban manufacturers.⁴⁷

After the war, *Woman's Century's* economic nationalism reached its peak. Excepting the occasional piece of criticism, such as a 1921 contribution arguing

39 Mrs. Wilson, "Made-in-Canada"; "Canadian Products," *Woman's Century*, June 1920, p. 3; Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 364-365.

40 "Made-in-Canada," *Woman's Century*, April 1915, p. 12; for example, "Economic Epigrams," *Woman's Century*, March 1915, p. 5.

41 For example, the London council had a Canadian toy exhibition (*Woman's Century*, December 1916, p. 9).

42 Violet McNaughton to *Woman's Century*, April 1915, p. 8.

43 As quoted in Lawrence B. Glickman, "Consumer Activism, Consumer Regimes, and the Consumer Movement: Rethinking the History of Consumer Politics in the United States," in Trentmann, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, p. 415.

44 "We Don't Do it Now," *Woman's Century*, April 1915, p. 5; "Canadian Made Goods," *Woman's Century*, April 1920, p. 14.

45 Mrs. J. Campbell-MacIver, "Made in Canada," *Woman's Century*, April 1915, p. 1.

46 *Woman's Century*, April 1915, pp. 12-13.

47 This conflict over free trade was part of the wider rift developing between agrarian and western female activists, on the one hand, and affluent, central Canadian female reformers, on the other. See Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 117-132; Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 365-292.

that lower prices would better convince consumers to buy Canadian than would any patriotic invective, *Woman's Century* ran article after article calling on women to "do effective service for their country" by purchasing "Canadian products."⁴⁸ So invested were many contributors in "Made-in-Canada" that they had difficulty understanding why people purchased imports. "There is something pitifully absurd in the spectacle of citizens ... feverishly searching through stores for productions which bear the import label," stated a Miss G. Kennedy in 1920. Shoppers who purchased non-Canadian goods were "cheating" themselves and were "highly unpatriotic."⁴⁹ In casting buyers of imports as "feverish," ignorant, and immoral, Kennedy demonstrated a central aspect of the magazine's consumer vision: that ignorant shoppers harmed the nation.

If *Woman's Century's* "Made-in-Canada" campaign indicated that some writers were oblivious to low-income women's concerns around affordability, so did the arguments that many contributors made about conservation. In 1915, the federal government launched a campaign to free up as much domestic beef, pork, poultry, dairy products, sugar, and wheat as possible for shipment overseas. This campaign resulted in the 1917 creation of a Food Controllers' Office, renamed the Canada Food Board in 1918. It called on Canadians to reduce their consumption of meat, butter, sugar, and wheat and to increase home garden production as well as purchase fish, beans, barley, and other foodstuffs. As part of its efforts, the government urged Canada's major women's organizations to publicize conservation. Many responded enthusiastically. By war's end, the Food Controller had worked with the National Council of Women, the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the Canadian Suffrage Association, the Canadian National Association of Trained Nurses, the Women's Auxiliaries of the Win-the-War Leagues, the National Equal Franchise League, the Girl Guides, the Canadian Women's Press Club, the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Women's Canadian Clubs, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, among other organizations.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, English Canadian middle-class women's groups were not unique in supporting conservation. Shortly after the United States entered the war, its government created a Food Administration whose purpose was similar to that of Canada's Food Controller.⁵¹ In response to President Woodrow Wilson's appeal to "the nation's housewives to plant and can their own vegetables," women all over the US became involved in conservation.⁵² For American as for

48 "Remedies – Buy in Canada?" *Woman's Century*, November 1921, p. 14; "Canadian Products," *Woman's Century*, June 1920, p. 3.

49 Miss G. Kennedy, "Canadian Products, Are We Ashamed of Them?" *Woman's Century*, February 1920, p. 50.

50 Stacey Barker, "'Save Today What Our Allies Need Tomorrow': Food Regulation in Canada During the First World War" (MA thesis, Department of History, Carleton University, 2003); *Women's War Conference* (Ottawa: J. De Labroquerie Taché, 1918), p. 2. Canada's regulation of foodstuffs during World War I, together with organized women's responses, is explored in my forthcoming manuscript, "Contesting Consumption: Women and the Rise of Canadian Consumer Modernity."

51 Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, p. 56.

52 *Ibid.*

Canadian women, patriotic food activism became a way to support the war. It also became a method by which women could demonstrate their citizenship.⁵³

Woman's Century endorsed this effort. Beginning in 1916, it ran articles that informed readers of the government's calls for economy. "Canada is following the lead of the motherland by the opening of a Dominion-wide campaign of 'thrift and production'," announced MacIver. In this campaign, women—who were "in charge of the domestic spending departments and are by far the biggest buyers in the country"—were key. By cooperating with the state, women "will not only have ensured victory in battle but the future prosperity of the Dominion."⁵⁴ Through this editorial, MacIver articulated her vision of white women's consumer citizenship. By becoming responsible purchasers, women would demonstrate their roles within nation and empire. Other writers made similar claims. According to Mrs. Edwin Long, women were the "purchasing agents for Canadian homes"; their wise spending decisions would help Canada in its fight for victory.⁵⁵ Until war's end, *Woman's Century* printed articles about how to conserve beef, bacon, butter, sugar, flour, fruits, and vegetables. As countless contributors pointed out, soldiers and victims of war needed these foods more than Canadians at home did. By observing meatless and wheatless days, substituting whole wheat for white flour, reducing sugar intake, growing one's own produce, purchasing in-season produce, doing one's own canning, avoiding restaurants, and eating more fish and rice, Canadians could reduce import expenditures, conserve domestic resources, keep prices down, and ship more food overseas.⁵⁶

Conservation efforts did provoke some criticism. In 1916, *Woman's Century* published a cartoon titled "A Woman's Job" in which an exhausted woman is scrubbing laundry while one child pulls on her dress and another tips over a pail of water. In the doorway, a man is holding a poster, on which are printed suggestions on how "Housewives May Reduce the Cost of Living." Recommendations included "Baking Their Own Bread," "Doing Their Own Sewing," "Trimming Their Own Hats," "Knitting Stockings for the Family," "Shopping in Person," and "Sifting All Ashes." The caption of the cartoon articulates the "Tired Housewife's" response: "Oh! Thanks," she says (Figure 2). Poking fun at the men who urged conservation, this cartoon indicates that some women were weary of thrift. While not implying that women should abandon their wartime duties, it does suggest that the campaign was unrealistic.

Other writers were more critical. In 1917 and 1918, the NCW and other women's organizations launched numerous thrift card campaigns. The largest of these occurred in 1917, when the Food Control Office created a conservation pledge card. The idea was to have as many housewives as possible sign the cards and post them in their windows.⁵⁷ By December over one million cards had been

53 Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 315-317; Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage*, p. 42.

54 Mrs. Campbell-MacIver, "Thrift and Production," *Woman's Century*, April 1916, p. 3.

55 Mrs. Edwin Long, "Let Us Conserve Our Available Strength," *Woman's Century*, September 1916, p. 18.

56 For example, "Report of Food Conservation Committee," *Woman's Century*, September 1917, p. 5; "Who Shall Go Short in 1918?" *Woman's Century*, February 1918, p. 15.

57 Food Service Pledge, 1917, as reproduced in "Food Controller Looks to Housewives," *Woman's Century*, September 1917.



Figure 2: "A Woman's Job." *Woman's Century* (December 1916), p. 6.

distributed by members of Canada's major women's organizations.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, not all *Woman's Century's* readers supported the campaigns. In 1918, the magazine published a piece called "Pledge Card for the Deserving Rich," submitted by Margaret Graham Horton. Taking the form of a pledge, this contribution satirized the campaign and drew attention to the class gulf that separated canvassers, on the one hand, and the majority of Canada's housewives, on the other. Horton's card included six items.

1. I hereby pledge myself not to wear fox or any other kind of furs in July and August, nor the \$4,100 Russian sable muff and stole listed in one of this season's catalogues[.]
2. ... I promise to assist the canners of [peas and tomatoes] to conserve the supply of tin ... by refraining from smoking any cigarettes sold in tin boxes[.]

⁵⁸ Barker, "'Save Today,'" p. 143.

3. I promise not to attend horse races[.]
4. I promise not to add my name to the 25,000 motor car licenses issued this year in Ontario alone....
5. I promise not to blame Providence every time food prices shoot skyward.
6. Finally, I will not insult the poor by urging them to practice any further food economy.

At the end of her article, Horton included a postscript. "Copies of my pamphlet on 'How the Worthy Rich can Live on Three Meals a Day,' showing how the omission of afternoon teas, late suppers, superfluous sweets ... will conserve many thousand calories of food energy," she wrote, "may be had on application."⁵⁹ Drawing attention to the spending of the rich, Horton's card offered a class critique of the wealthy. In this way, her contribution resembled certain other anti-bourgeois writings from this period, including a 1923 novel about postwar Winnipeg, titled *The Magpie*. In this book, author Douglas Durkin held up the elite's materialism as proof of that class's immorality.⁶⁰ Horton's piece also indicates that some *Woman's Century* readers were insulted by the suggestion that housewives should scrimp. If resources were scarce, then the nation's affluent should not be wearing expensive clothes, smoking tinned cigarettes, attending horse races, driving cars, and eating sweets. Asking housewives to sign conservation pledges shifted the burden of conservation onto individual women as well as sidestepped broader issues of resource mobilization.

In speaking out against food control, Horton voiced similar criticisms as other left-wing Canadians, who argued that the Food Controller should not regulate distribution, but rather intervene in prices.⁶¹ Nevertheless, and despite readers' critiques, *Woman's Century's* editors remained in favour of patriotic thrift. This view was congruent with that of the NCW, which interpreted conservation as an opportunity to demonstrate women's civic worth. As the NCW's executive correspondent proudly reported in *Woman's Century* in 1918, a "letter was recently received from Ottawa expressing appreciation ... and satisfaction with" members' "efforts" on "food conservation."⁶²

Shaping the Consumer Nation

In addition to patriotic consumption, many *Woman's Century* writers supported a more diffuse form of consumer advocacy. Specifically, they sought to curb those consumer behaviours that they regarded as immoral and to replace them with consumer activities deemed uplifting. In these efforts they were guided by Protestant, racist, and maternalist feminist principles. Consumer behaviours that supported the vision of a white, Christian, and mother-centred culture received authors' approval while those that did not received contempt.

⁵⁹ Margaret Graham Horton, "Pledge Card for the Deserving Rich," *Woman's Century*, April 1918, pp. 12, 14.

⁶⁰ Douglas Durkin, *The Magpie* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974 [1923]).

⁶¹ *Voice of Winnipeg* was particularly critical. See "Food Controller," *Voice*, November 16, 1917, p. 1.

⁶² "National Council of Women," *Woman's Century*, March 1918, p. 10.

From the 1850s onward, as Margaret Finnegan notes, American suffragists had debated the “morality of consumption.”⁶³ In journals, speeches, and private writings, feminists discussed the merits of fashion, alcohol, and such “commercial temptations” as dance halls and vaudeville.⁶⁴ Critics of luxury and “amusement” fought for increased moral regulation of Americans’ dress, drink, and leisure. Yet, and as the case of bloomer advocacy indicates, a few also argued for women’s release from social restrictions.⁶⁵ By the 1910s, leading American suffragists had become less “puritanical,” assuming that the pursuit of liberty meant being tolerant of display, drink, and fun. This acceptance of consumer choice coincided with a broader feminist embrace of consumption. Aided in part by the domestic science movement, which advocated increased access to domestic goods, and in part by a growing interest in fashion and leisure among suffragists, this lessening of censure toward consumption was part of a broader turn toward consumption in mainstream America.⁶⁶

Woman's Century's articles on fashion, temperance, cinema, literature, and leisure indicate that for many English Canadian female activists, the journey from moral regulation to tolerance was not so clear-cut. Several pieces suggested that Canadians’ dress, drinking, and leisure habits required ever-increasing amounts of censure, not less. In making such observations, contributors demonstrated the fervent commitment that many white, bourgeois English Canadians made to regulating issues of gender, class, and race. They also reveal the extent to which some social critics took advantage of wartime austerity to legitimate their demands for thrift, modesty, and sacrifice.

How women adorned themselves came under particular scrutiny. During the war, several commentators contrasted supposedly fashion-obsessed North Americans with bedraggled, war-ravaged Europeans. In 1916, M. Alberta Deards argued that “we women ought to ... be content with plain, inexpensive dress.” The energies saved on following fashion could be “spent in knitting socks,” and the monies conserved could be “devote[d]” to “the starving Belgians” and “the boys in the trenches,” whose plight should make “extravagance an offence to all right-thinking people.”⁶⁷ After the war, writers continued criticizing fashion. According to the secretary for the Economic Committee of the Woman’s Citizens’ League of Hamilton, right-minded women should be “brave enough to live [as] a rebuke to the woman who excites envy in others by her selfish spending.”⁶⁸ In addition to claiming that fashion indicated pride and greed, some writers suggested it implied promiscuity. Fashion was so expensive, many argued, that working women had to prostitute themselves to obtain it. To purchase the “georgette blouse,” said one contributor, impoverished women and girls “sell themselves to whoever will buy.”⁶⁹ So concerned were many reformers about improper dress that in 1921 the

⁶³ Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage*, p. 16.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 23.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁷ M. Alberta Deards, “A War Suggestion for Women,” *Woman's Century*, July 1916, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, July 1920, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, July 1920, p. 20.

Montreal League Against Indecent Fashions reported that it had convinced over 10,000 women—both Protestants and Catholics—to sign a pledge to not “exceed the limits of good taste in a desire to be fashionable.”⁷⁰

Most of the invocations to dress reform appearing in *Woman's Century* cited moral issues, but a few articulated other concerns. According to four different contributors, high heels warped women's feet, created bunions, and restricted mobility.⁷¹ Such arguments possibly demonstrated writers' own bitter experiences; they also indicated some contributors' familiarity with the nineteenth-century dress reform movement that had equated restrictive clothing with ill health.⁷² Interestingly, a Toronto dressmaker—Flora MacDonald Denison—penned the most sustained argument against fashion in *Woman's Century*.⁷³ A financially independent suffragist who was critical of the conformity that characterized English Canadian feminism, Denison in 1918 contributed a piece that suggested women should overthrow the “slavish attitude towards the dressmakers' authority.” In Denison's view, garments should be judged on both beauty and “utility.” Yet she also admitted that it was unlikely that women would reject restrictive fashions. Women wore corsets and heels because they had to secure men's financial support and please the male gaze. Only when women became “economically free and self-supporting” would they be able to enjoy comfortable clothing.⁷⁴

In addition to dress reform, contributors to *Woman's Century* sought to eliminate spending on alcohol. Demonstrating its close ties to the temperance movement, the magazine often ran columns for the WCTU.⁷⁵ Prohibition advocacy can be viewed as anti-consumerist in that it attempted to restrict people's ability to purchase goods. In the hands of some of *Woman's Century's* writers, though, it was also explicitly about consumption. According to one advocate, the money saved on liquor could be spent on “pianos, and victrolas, good clothing and many home comforts.”⁷⁶ In this perspective, alcohol was a poor consumer choice. Domestic goods, however, were appropriate. Suggesting that temperance would take money out of the hands of male drinkers and put it into those of women, this quotation indicates that gendered conflicts over family finances accompanied the prohibition movement. As consumer spending became more important to married women, so did it become more pressing to limit the family's alcohol. The recommendation that families should purchase household goods instead of alcohol points to writers'

⁷⁰ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, May 1921, p. 16.

⁷¹ V. E. Taplin, “A Foot-Crippled People We Are,” *Woman's Century*, November 1917, p. 20; Mrs. E. M. Murray, “Footwear Reform,” *Woman's Century*, October 1918, p. 23; “Editorial,” *Woman's Century*, July 1918, p. 1; Flora MacDonald Denison, “Reform in Woman's Dress,” *Woman's Century*, September 1918, p. 45.

⁷² Eileen O'Connor, “Constructing Medical Social Authority on Dress in Victorian Canada,” *Canadian Bulletin on Medical History*, vol. 25, no. 2 (2008), pp. 391-406; Barbara Kelcey, “Dress Reform in Nineteenth-Century Canada” in Alexandra Palmer, ed., *Fashion: A Canadian Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 229-247.

⁷³ Gorham, “Flora MacDonald Denison,” pp. 47-70.

⁷⁴ Denison, “Reform in Woman's Dress.”

⁷⁵ Blanche Read Johnston, “W.C.T.U.,” *Woman's Century*, August 1917, p. 12.

⁷⁶ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, July 1919, p. 6.

attempts to direct consumer spending in ways that promoted a Christian, family-oriented nation.

A similar process occurred in *Woman's Century's* criticisms of Canadians' leisure habits. Writers were not against leisure *per se*; rather they wanted Canadians to exchange immoral practices for those deemed suitable. Pieces about dance halls, cafés, and movie houses were indicative of this imperative. According to Mrs. W. L. Hamilton of Lethbridge, she and other Council members "had the courage to peep into our dance halls, and into our Greek restaurants." They were "shocked" to learn of the "facts" that went on in these "menaces." She did not elaborate, but she did argue that Lethbridge's Christian women should provide alternative recreation for young people, particularly for young, "indifferent women."⁷⁷ As Hamilton's contribution makes clear, the Lethbridge Council viewed the city's Greek restaurants and Christian women as incompatible. Moreover, just as many western Canadian reformers viewed Chinese restaurants as sites of sexual danger, so did some Lethbridge Council women imply that Greek restaurants threatened the morality of young white women.⁷⁸ By providing alternative amusements to dance halls and Greek eating spots, the Lethbridge Local Council sought to save the purity of the city's young white women and to protect the future of the white, English nation.

The Toronto Big Sisters Association and the Montreal Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) also perceived a need to regulate young white women's leisure activities. According to the latter's *Woman's Century* correspondent, salacious movies caused "young girls to indulge in sex experiences"; dance halls also caused "temptation."⁷⁹ Neither of these statements mentioned race or ethnicity, but reports in *Woman's Century* from the Toronto Big Sisters Association and the Montreal YWCA did articulate a common refrain of middle-class reformers: that it was up to Christian mothers to save young women from impropriety.⁸⁰ They are also significant in that they hint at the consumerist vision underlying this impulse. Both reports suggested that well-appointed living quarters would divert young women's attention away from illicit encounters. Girls who visited the Big Sisters' Girls' Club in Toronto in 1920, for example, could enjoy "the glee clubs, library, billiard tables, dancing class, dramatics, parties, skating rinks and Friday night dances," along with "Instruction in the domestic arts" and an "emergency bedroom."⁸¹ Such amenities were out of the reach of working women's budgets, yet the Big Sisters considered them essential for respectability. This was a class-prejudiced vision; it was also a consumerist one.

If better material appointments improved young women's morality, so did they elevate that of the nation. By 1910, and due to rapid urban growth, housing

77 "Lethbridge," *Woman's Century*, December 1917, p. 4.

78 Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 132-172.

79 J. S. Rutherford, "Quebec," *Woman's Century*, April 1918, p. 27.

80 "The Work of the Big Sisters Association," *Woman's Century*, May 1920, p. 36; Rutherford, "Quebec"; Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

81 "The Work of the Big Sisters Association."

shortages had become acute in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal. World War I exacerbated the problem. Inflation caused building costs to skyrocket, and municipal governments put housing plans on hold.⁸² In response, many English Canadian reformers took up the cause of “decent” housing, by which was meant, as W. Van Nus puts it, the creation of “individual privacy” and “sanitary surroundings.”⁸³ In 1911, for example, Dr. Charles Hastings of Toronto stated that housing that was “overcrowded, insufficiently lighted, badly ventilated, [and that had] unsanitary and ... filthy yards” gave rise to “deviants and moral lepers.”⁸⁴ The NCW was interested in housing reform because members viewed proper housing as key to moral improvement.⁸⁵ According to many *Woman's Century* contributors, Canadians were living inadequate material lives. As the title of A. M. Riley's *Woman's Century* article on child welfare put it, “The Right of the Child to be well born, well treated, well housed and well fed” was of pressing importance.⁸⁶

Particularly indicative of *Woman's Century's* housing approach was its column “Home Hygiene,” which appeared during the periodical's early years. More than any other component of the magazine, this column articulated contributors' assumptions that bourgeois standards of cleaning, shopping, and cooking promoted propriety. According to a 1916 contribution, “the prosperity of a nation depends ... on the homes and the home makers”; every community needed to improve the “health” and “welfare” of its homes. Linking material practices with morality, this article argued that poor and immigrant mothers required home nurses and domestic science classes. Such services would teach skills required for modern Canadian life, including “the best methods of cleaning woodwork”; taking “care of garbage”; storing “all kinds of foods, especially milk”; the “most economical way to purchase their supplies”; “the different cuts of meat and how to cook them”; “how to choose fish”; “cooking fish, rice, cheese and macaroni”; “the planning of meals for children”; “the economic use of fuel”; “how to pack” the “man's dinner pail”; the planning of the day's work”; “how to wash dishes properly”; the “correct use of the sink”; and “the importance of the meals in the home being made a matter of social gatherings for the family.” In other words, the homemaking practices of poor and immigrant mothers were sub-par. As the article stated, only “when the women of a community take pride in their possessions and in the cleanliness of their homes” would they be able to “raise the standard of a community.”⁸⁷ Speaking from the position of white, bourgeois feminism, this piece articulated the view that Canadians' consumer habits needed to be brought in line with middle-class values.

82 W. Van Nus, “The Fate of City Beautiful Thought in Canada, 1893-1930,” *Historical Papers*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1975), pp. 199, 204.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 199.

84 As quoted in Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), pp. 132-133.

85 Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision*, p. 118.

86 A. M. Riley, “The Right of the Child to be well born, well treated, well housed and well fed,” *Woman's Century*, October 1919, p. 38.

87 “Home Hygiene,” *Woman's Century*, January 1916, p. 18.

Given *Woman's Century's* tendency to offer moralist commentary, it is somewhat surprising that its editors chose, in 1919, to publish an article by British socialist Christabel Pankhurst. Nonetheless, an examination of Pankhurst's piece reveals that despite this author's political differences with most of *Woman's Century's* contributors, she shared their assumption that increased living standards were desirable. According to Pankhurst, the housing problem would not be solved until the proletariat itself was eradicated. In her view, the bourgeoisie enjoyed all "the advantages which are required to develop and utilize the best human qualities," including "good pre-natal conditions, a well-nursed infancy ... a good ... education ... [and the] material conditions of comfort and refinement." Thus "the conditions under which the manual workers live ... must be brought to an end, and they must enjoy the same advantages as the Bourgeoisie, so that the two become indistinguishable." Pankhurst did not specify which goods were required for "refinement," but her point was that when some people had material goods and others did not, inequality existed.⁸⁸ Pankhurst's piece hence foreshadowed arguments advanced by Canadian social democrats during the interwar years. As Bettina Liverant notes, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF)'s platform was based on the assumption that "public welfare" depended on "increased consumption of goods."⁸⁹ At the same time, Pankhurst's piece also reveals an affinity between early-twentieth-century leftists and moralists on housing. These groups differed as to why people should have more material goods, but they also each supported the view that greater living standards created progress.

Protecting Female Consumers

A final form of consumer advocacy present in *Woman's Century* can be referred to as consumer protection. Many contributors argued that female purchasers should organize to protect their economic interests, particularly regarding quality and prices. Of *Woman's Century's* consumer references, those that belonged to this category were the most complex. Invocations for patriotic and moralized purchasing were voiced primarily by women of bourgeois and central Canadian backgrounds, but calls for protection were articulated by women of diverse backgrounds. Especially when food and clothing prices started to climb, a range of *Woman's Century's* writers advocated a multiplicity of solutions to living costs.

Calls for food "healthfulness," often referred to as "purity," appeared occasionally.⁹⁰ During the periodical's early years, the editors ran a column called "Pure Food" featuring the writings of Mrs. Julian Heath, president of the American-based National Housewives' League.⁹¹ In these columns, which may have reproduced copy from American publications, Heath advised readers on such matters as "the different grades" of such foods as coffee and butter and the

⁸⁸ Christabel Pankhurst, "Industrial Salvation," *Woman's Century*, June 1919, p. 46 (emphasis in original).

⁸⁹ Bettina Liverant, "Buying Happiness: English Canadian Intellectuals and the Development of Canadian Consumer Culture" (PhD thesis, Department of History, University of Alberta, 2008), p. 226.

⁹⁰ Mrs. Julian Heath, "Pure Food," *Woman's Century*, December 1915, p. 11; Mrs. Wilson, "The Canadian Housewife," *Woman's Century*, December 1915, p. 20; Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision*, p. 131.

⁹¹ Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 49.

"different blends of tea, spices, etc."⁹² She also urged greater quality control. A 1916 contribution noted that "the women of Kansas" were pressing for mandatory physical exams of "clerks working in grocery stores, meat markets and other shops, and all employees in hotels and restaurants" in order to ensure they were not infecting food with illnesses.⁹³ This assumption that disease could be passed through food was linked to broader concerns about working people's health during this period, which sometimes arose from prejudiced views about racialized and low-income people's inferior moral and physical fitness.⁹⁴ Indeed, the American National Consumer League's lobbying around working conditions, also taking place during this time, was inspired both by a sense of compassion and by fear of disease.⁹⁵

Food protectionists also called for factory packaging. When employees weighed and wrapped bulk foods, stated Heath in 1915, they used excessive paper and twine. This practice created higher prices: far better for goods to arrive pre-packaged. Not only was it more sanitary, but it was also more efficient. Packaging allowed manufacturers to put their brands, together with nutritional and other information, on their products. Such information enabled purchasers to make wise decisions.⁹⁶ Unlike today's food security activists, who connect packaged food with poor health, Heath articulated an early-twentieth-century argument in favour of packaging, one which sought to enable housewives to make wise food choices.

Beginning in 1917, and accompanying inflation, affordability became the single most pressing consumer issue around which *Woman's Century's* protectionists rallied. As one writer said in 1920, "The average woman is only interested in politics, as they affect the prices of the necessities of life. The burning political questions of the day ... are nothing to her, compared to the prices of milk, and bread and meat."⁹⁷ In expressing outrage against rising costs, *Woman's Century's* contributors echoed the concerns of other female activists. During World War I, as Cuthbert-Brandt et. al. note, the Household Leagues in "Victoria, Halifax, and northern Ontario," the Consumers' League in Calgary, and the Housewives' League in Quebec City organized against higher prices. *Ad hoc* protests arose, too, including a 1917 boycott led by Jewish women in Toronto against increased bread prices.⁹⁸

Canadian women were not the only women to agitate against rising costs during this era. In Britain, Austria, Germany, Spain, Russia, Australia, and the US, women demonstrated against the rising cost—and, in some cases, the shortages—of food.⁹⁹ In most cases, women's politicization arose from their responsibilities to feed their families. Elite women as well as women of socialist, rural, and low-

⁹² Heath, "Pure Food."

⁹³ "Pure Food," *Woman's Century*, April 1916, p. 13.

⁹⁴ Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 158.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁹⁶ Mrs. Julian Heath, "Pure Food," *Woman's Century*, August 1915, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁷ Anonymous, "Comment and Review," *Woman's Century*, November 1920, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Cuthbert-Brandt et al., *Canadian Women*, p. 266; see also Stephen Speisman, *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979), pp. 196-197.

⁹⁹ Hunt, "The Politics of Food," pp. 8-9.

income backgrounds participated in price-lowering efforts.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, given the diversity of this activism, it is difficult to assess its political significances. As Hunt puts it in her study of British women's price agitation, "such collective action to secure rights derived from the sexual division of labor might appear conservative or antifeminist." However, "it can also have revolutionary consequences insofar as it politicizes the networks of everyday life."¹⁰¹

References to price activism in *Woman's Century* underscore the difficulties of assessing women's price advocacy. Among Canadian scholars, price activism has generally been interpreted as progressive. Julie Guard's research on the Communist-led Housewives' Consumer Association, active during the late 1930s and 1940s, finds that the association's actions on prices, which included the argument that milk should be made a "public utility," had favourable consequences. The group "enlarged the sphere of activity available to women," "claimed political space for radical ideas," and "populariz[ed] notions of social and political rights that were normally the terrain of the left."¹⁰² In her study of Communist and CCF women's consumer organizing between 1920 and 1960, Joan Sangster acknowledges that these women's maternalist "appeals ... tended to reproduce an image of women that was linked solely to domesticity." At the same time, there was a "radical critique inherent in these protests" in that these women saw consumer issues as "related to the rights of poor and working-class families to health, dignity, and material well-being."¹⁰³

Since the Communist Party and the CCF were committed to levelling class inequality, it is perhaps apt to view their work as progressive. Yet how do historians interpret women's price activism when activists' political leanings are unknown? In her study of the involvement of middle- and working-class women in the 1947 food boycotts in Montreal, Magda Fahrni argues that these activists displayed a "sense of economic citizenship" that "include[d] such tangible benefits as an acceptable cost of living."¹⁰⁴ Such mobilizations indicated protestors' wishes for "a more democratic public sphere."¹⁰⁵ Certainly, *Woman's Century's* contributors viewed prices as a public issue. As MacIver stated in 1917, "since ninety per cent of the buyers of the nation are women, we, of necessity, must endeavour to learn what is causing the unparalleled rise in prices."¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, and as we have seen, MacIver was also politically conservative. Given that she was committed to moral reform, the Canadian state, and the empowering of Canadian business, how does one interpret her commitment to reducing living costs?

In fact, according to MacIver, rising prices were a moral problem. "We must realize that home life is the basis of civilization.... We must then of necessity use

¹⁰⁰ Hunt, "The Politics of Food"; Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics*, p. 7; Smart, "Politics of the Small Purse."

¹⁰¹ Hunt, "The Politics of Food," p. 11. Hunt is referring to Temma Kaplan's argument in "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910–18," *Signs*, vol. 7, no. 3 (Spring 1982), pp. 545–566.

¹⁰² Guard, "'A Mighty Power,'" pp. 36, 43.

¹⁰³ Sangster, "Consuming Issues," p. 247.

¹⁰⁴ Fahrni, "Counting the Costs," p. 10.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ MacIver, "Women and the Cost of Living," *Woman's Century*, January 1917, p. 5.

all our intelligence to combat the unscrupulous power behind the market," she said. If women did not, "we shall neither be fulfilling our obligation to society nor supporting our boys abroad." In her view, the National Council offered the "recognized authority" necessary to "supervise and direct" action on the cost of living. Through the Council, women could "solve this problem for the benefit of our Canadian homes" and secure Canada's dignity abroad: "The exercise of our intelligence in buying is necessary to establish a reputation for our Dominion in other countries." MacIver did not state precisely how women could solve inflation, but she suggested that organized women's "co-operation with producer and manufacturer will be the ground work" in addressing the "monopolists' stronghold in the national market." She also declared that "intelligent buying," which included buying Canadian-made products, was key. Through coordination, women could contribute to the "common good and name of Canada."¹⁰⁷

According to MacIver, profiteering was endangering the nation. Her commitment to lowering costs was borne of a determination to be of national service, a duty that included bettering "the masses," promoting honesty in Canadian business, and contributing to Canadian political and economic security.¹⁰⁸ Her vision was very different from that advanced by the Communists and the CCF, which aimed at material equality. Moreover, MacIver was also attempting to gain more power for middle-class women. By positioning NCW members as consumer experts, ones with "authority" to supervise spending, she portrayed bourgeois women as intellectually superior to other consumers. In this way she buttressed the view that white, middle-class women were Canada's moral leaders.

Other contributors to *Woman's Century* offered similar perspectives. According to a 1920 article by the Toronto Consumers' League, the organization's recent meeting gave a "slap ... to the buying of food in packages." Especial condemnation was reserved for women who purchased food in "boxes with expensive colored printing," for, as the League claimed, these packages drove up prices.¹⁰⁹ Rather than castigating manufacturers for putting food in packages—or the government for allowing them to do so—the League suggested that women who purchased packaged food were at fault. In its opinion, changing individual consumers' behaviour, rather than changing that of the state or business, was the best path toward cost reduction. The Local Council of West Algoma would have agreed. In 1919, this organization reported that it had recently conducted a local investigation into the rising cost of living. Members visited "managers and proprietors" of businesses that sold milk, baked goods, meat, clothing, accessories, food, hardware, pharmaceuticals, flour, feed, hats, furniture, plumbing supplies, and coal to determine the cost of mark-ups. Expecting to find rampant profiteering, they instead learned that there had not "been any combination to restrain trade, nor to fix or maintain prices, nor ... that any unfair or undue profit has been collected from the consumer." This caused the Local to conclude that "the high cost of living is ... due to unnecessary and extravagant buying on the

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ MacIver, "Women and the Cost of Living."

¹⁰⁹ "The Producers' and Consumers' League," *Woman's Century*, October 1920, p. 3.

part of the people.”¹¹⁰ Presumably, buyers who purchased goods in excess of their requirements artificially inflated the market and drove up prices for all.

Arguments about ignorant female shoppers causing inflation also appeared in articles by the NCW's Home Economics Convenor, Georgina Newhall of Calgary. In 1916, she stated that although most homemakers knew how to serve leftovers, domestic servants “will not or cannot devise dishes from scraps.” Instead, they prepared new foods every single night. To combat this “failure in economy,” they needed to be provided with “domestic science ... training.”¹¹¹ In 1920, Newhall similarly contended that young women “earning [their] own living,” together with “the children of poor people,” were in need of consumer education. Too often, they were “fooled” by “cheap dressing,” which they confused “with economical dressing.”¹¹² To instruct working women in proper buying, she herself would be providing the Calgary Business Girls' Club with “a course of educational lectures” on how “to judge fabric intelligently.” This work would help reduce expenditures on marked-up goods and decrease the cost of living.¹¹³

Contributors' tendencies to blame “extravagant” and low-income consumers for rising prices demonstrate that even though they were committed to cost reduction, they were not interested in cross-class female activism. Indeed, many cost-of-living advocates held fast to notions about Council women's superiority. In the same article in which Mrs. Hamilton of the Lethbridge Local Council reported that her organization had visited the city's Greek restaurants and found them to be a “menace,” she also stated that her Council had recently “petitioned the City Council to investigate the rising price of milk and bread.”¹¹⁴ Given her characterization of Greek people as immoral, Mrs. Hamilton's cost-of-living commitments obviously did not translate into increased tolerance toward people who hailed from backgrounds other than her own. Rather, Hamilton viewed price advocacy and reform work as part and parcel of the broader civic responsibilities of white, middle-class women.

When the nationalist, classist, and moralist imperatives behind many contributors' price advocacy are apparent, it becomes easier to understand these women's motivations for engaging in cost-of-living work. It also becomes easier to understand the elitism that pervaded some of *Woman's Century's* articles about boycotts. Although women-led boycotts are generally interpreted as progressive in that they offer evidence of female collective action against inequality,¹¹⁵ passages from *Woman's Century* indicate that not all female boycotters have adhered to egalitarianism. In 1920, the magazine ran an article about the cost of living arguing that “women at the top” must lead the price revolution, starting by boycotting butter. Through this action, the “price of butter would come down,” demonstrating that the “sisterhood between the women of Capital and Labor ...

¹¹⁰ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, November 1919, p. 14.

¹¹¹ Georgina Newhall, “The Canadian Housewife,” *Woman's Century*, October 1916, p. 23.

¹¹² Georgina Newhall, “The Canadian Housewife,” *Woman's Century*, February 1920, p. 4.

¹¹³ Georgina Newhall, “The Canadian Housewife,” *Woman's Century*, March 1920, p. 24.

¹¹⁴ “Lethbridge,” *Woman's Century*, December 1917, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ Rowbotham, “Consumer Power,” pp. 11-29.

will have come before the Brotherhood of Man.”¹¹⁶ While the emphasis on cross-class solidarity seems to suggest that this author had an inclusive perspective, her argument that bourgeois women bore responsibility for leading women into better times belies this interpretation. For this contributor, as for many others, bourgeois women were moral exemplars whose authority permeated all realms of advocacy.

Newhall, as we have seen, shared this author’s elitism. At the same time, she would have taken issue with the usefulness of boycotts. In 1917, she argued that this form of protest represented little more than the “spasmodic” actions of “little groups of somewhat hysterical women.” Recent Chicago boycotts of eggs, turkeys, and potatoes, along with a Montreal boycott by “housewives” of potatoes, Newhall said, “did no permanent good.” Indeed, even in the midst of boycotts, food suppliers found ways to make money, including by laying in “over 118,000,000 eggs” in cold storage in Chicago and waiting for the egg boycott to subside. Instead of pursuing isolated activism, therefore, consumers needed “complete organization ... from coast to coast.” A “linking together of leagues with a central executive” was specifically required.¹¹⁷ In making this claim, Newhall echoed the views of self-styled consumer experts in the United States, who were also beginning to advocate national organization.¹¹⁸ Simultaneously, Newhall sounded a familiar *Woman’s Century* theme. Individual buyers, even local groups of buyers, could not be trusted. It was up to female consumer professionals, especially those represented on the executive of the NCW, to dictate female consumer activism.

Despite *Woman’s Century*’s pro-capitalist outlook, the magazine did often suggest that profiteering caused inflation. One contributor, for instance, was outraged “that ten bakers can get together on a Monday morning and [decide] to raise the price of the simple family pie—apple, raisin, and what not, from fifteen cents to twenty cents, and two cents added to a loaf of bread, seven cents suddenly without any sort of reason forced from the purse of the already over-strained housewife, is a fact that should not be calmly tolerated.”¹¹⁹ Another correspondent, in 1920, called on “Canadian women” to “get together” and eradicate “profiteering, exorbitant overcharges, and other bad habits.”¹²⁰ Meanwhile, the Calgary and Regina Councils of Women noted in 1919 and 1920 respectively that their Locals were lobbying to make it mandatory for manufacturers’ products to “bear a tag or label showing in plain words or figures the manufacturer’s or wholesaler’s selling price per unit.” This measure would enable consumers to see the relative mark-up of goods and make decisions accordingly.¹²¹ Contributors also condemned the storing of foodstuffs in artificially cooled warehouses so as to release them to the market during shortages.¹²²

¹¹⁶ “What We Need,” *Woman’s Century*, March 1920, p. 17.

¹¹⁷ Georgina Newhall, “The Canadian Housewife,” *Woman’s Century*, January 1917, p. 22.

¹¹⁸ Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 190.

¹¹⁹ M. M. D., “Inflated Prices,” *Woman’s Century*, June 1919, p. 56.

¹²⁰ “Canadian Made Goods – The Price Behind the Can,” *Woman’s Century*, April 1920, p. 14.

¹²¹ Georgina Newhall, “A New Jeanne D’Arc,” *Woman’s Century*, September 1919, p. 25; “National Thrift Conference,” *Woman’s Century*, June 1920, p. 23.

¹²² “Cold Storage Perverted,” *Woman’s Century*, October 1919, p. 9.

In her study of the Australian Housewives' Association (AHA), Judith Smart argues that its anti-profiteering stance during the interwar years did not translate into a leftist perspective. Rather, the AHA's position arose from a Christian "ethic" that disparaged selfishness, as well as from a sense that governments and businesses "ignored the interests of women and the home."¹²³ *Woman's Century's* contributors' critique of profiteering may also be understood in this manner. Some of the magazine's authors were against practices that increased prices, but they were not against business *per se*. Instead, they wanted to eliminate marketplace greed and gain more power for consumers. This was a reformist position, but it was not socialist. In that they called for greater individual purchasing power, *Woman's Century's* anti-profiteers can best be categorized as liberal.

Cooperation was a final topic mentioned in *Woman's Century*. The cooperative movement first appeared in Canada during the late nineteenth century, when mining communities in Nova Scotia, union and leftist groups in Ontario, and farming communities across the country created producer, distributor, and consumer collective organizations. By the 1920s, men were dominating the Canadian cooperative movement, but a few women—including Violet McNaughton, "Nellie McClung, Francis Marion Beynon, Agnes MacPhail, and Irene Parlby"—were also well-known advocates.¹²⁴ Several *Woman's Century* authors, too, supported cooperation. In 1917, prominent social reformer Dr. Elizabeth Shortt of Ottawa suggested that there were two ways to reduce the "spread between the producers' selling prices and the consumers' buying price." Consumers could either create "public market[s]" or form "co-operative association[s]." Not wanting to constrict the free market, Shortt argued that she supported both producers' rights to sell high—the "high or low cost of living will continue to be largely controlled by the individual or family in the use or disuse of the soil"—and consumers' rights to buy low. In her view, government intervention was not an option.¹²⁵

Whereas some writers waxed philosophical about cooperation, others sent in reports about cooperative organizations. In 1915 a Halifax correspondent noted that "a few members of the Halifax Household League, which is a committee of the Local Council, have been successful in buying country produce at wholesale rates, and ... are hoping that [this activity] may eventually lead to something bigger."¹²⁶ The next year, a Calgary author reported that the city's Consumers' League was "importing flour in carload lots" and "selling to the members for home baking."¹²⁷ Also in 1916, Georgina Newhall published an article summarizing her own correspondence with Canadian female cooperators. Edmonton's Consumers' League was "arranging for a flour day, when Edmonton-made flour will be sold at great reduction to members of the league." Meanwhile, Ottawa's Housewives'

¹²³ Smart, "Politics of the Small Purse," pp. 49, 52.

¹²⁴ Ian MacPherson, *Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945* (Ottawa: MacMillan of Canada 1979), p. 110. See also Georgina Taylor, "'Let Us Co-operate': Violet McNaughton and the Co-operative Ideal" in Brett Fairbairn and Ian MacPherson, eds., *Co-operatives in the Year 2000: Memory, Mutual Aid, and the Millennium* (Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, 2000), pp. 57-78.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Shortt, "The High Cost of Living," *Woman's Century*, January 1917, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Untitled, *Woman's Century*, March 1915, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Anonymous, "The High Cost of Living," *Woman's Century*, December 1916, p. 6.

League had been operating a cooperative store since 1914. Members “bought in bulk, and sold at corresponding prices ... Only necessities [are] handled, such as flour, oatmeal, sugar, rice, beans, tea, currants, baking powder, salt, syrup, eggs, etc.”¹²⁸ Finally, according to an anonymous 1920 article, a cooperative organization had emerged in Montreal. That city’s Council of Women had joined forces with “far-seeing men of the city” to create a Collective Buyers’ Association Limited. It had been successful in realizing savings of “5% to 70%” for “groceries” and was expanding into “drugs, clothing, [and] hardware.”¹²⁹

Despite the promise of cooperation to reduce expenses, Newhall was pessimistic. In 1916, she wrote that while cooperatives could potentially reduce short-term living costs, they would never achieve long-term success. Canadian women were simply too pampered. “Money has been too easy, and neither the Canadian nor the American housekeeper has had sufficient pressure put upon her to quicken her to the advantage of looking after such small items as pennies.”¹³⁰ In 1917, she elaborated. Most Canadian consumers were uninterested in cooperation because they were too enthralled by major retailers, too indebted to local creditors, and too politically indifferent to high prices.¹³¹ After the war, her critique continued. Noting that “Calgary’s last co-operative store has passed its last cheque book,” she said that it had died because it could not satisfy “the tastes and appetites of Canadians.” Indeed, cooperative stores would never attract the majority of Canadian spenders because their “liberal style of dressing” is such that it “prompts the housemaid, in our democracy, to hunt the town if necessary, to get similar shoes as those worn by her employer.”¹³² A year later Newhall made a similar statement. The “inability of the ‘co-operative store’ to cater to diverse markets meant that ‘it can never hope to cope successfully with the glittering temptations of the department store.’”¹³³

Hence, in Newhall’s opinion, Canadian shoppers’ ignorance, indifference, and penchant for extravagance were responsible for the cooperative movement’s inertia.¹³⁴ As a result, cooperatives were doomed to fail. Newhall’s views on cooperation were similar to those she had espoused on inflation and boycotts. Individual consumers could not be trusted to shop properly, nor even to organize properly. They would therefore be much better served by one large national organization. As Newhall put it, “the only course which promises a continued amelioration of conditions ... is organization on a large and complete scale.” Though she did not elaborate upon who would oversee such an organization, it is clear that she envisioned women such as herself at the helm. During the years 1915 and 1916, she worked hard as president of “the first Consumers’ League of Canada” by liaising with local Household and Consumers’ Leagues, publicizing the Consumers’ League’s initiatives, and writing to prominent female activists.

¹²⁸ Mrs. Georgina Newhall, “Home Economics,” *Woman’s Century*, June 1916, p. 2.

¹²⁹ “Quebec: A Hit at the High Cost of Living,” *Woman’s Century*, April 1920, p. 32.

¹³⁰ Mrs. Georgina Newhall, “Co-operation and Canada,” *Woman’s Century*, July 1916, p. 15.

¹³¹ Georgina Newhall, “An Organization for Consumers,” *Woman’s Century*, February 1917, p. 5.

¹³² Georgina Newhall, “Old Tales for New,” *Woman’s Century*, April 1919, p. 25.

¹³³ Georgina Newhall, “A Lost Society,” *Woman’s Century*, June 1919, p. 20.

¹³⁴ Newhall, “An Organization for Consumers,” p. 5.

By 1917, however, she had grown frustrated. Tired of what she saw as Canadian consumers' indifference to inflation, she "retired" from the position.¹³⁵

Conclusion

In her study of the divisiveness that characterized the National Council of Women's debates on the 1917 federal election, Tarah Brookfield notes that members of the "women's movement" had "varied and sometimes conflicting beliefs" related to "the ideals of maternalism, sisterhood, equal rights, nationalism, imperialism, pacifism, and party politics."¹³⁶ A study of consumer references within *Woman's Century* supports this observation. When it came to issues of consumption, English Canada's female activists adopted a variety of positions, most of which indicated greater allegiances to race, ethnic, class, religious, and regional interests than they did to any kind of pan-female solidarity. Indeed, although MacIver had claimed that her paper would be a "mouthpiece and means of intercommunication" for Canada's "earnest women," what in fact came into fruition was a magazine that aired ethnocentric, racist, bourgeois, and central Canadian perspectives.¹³⁷ These viewpoints, in turn, reflected those of the NCW's national executive, which was rooted in bourgeois, urban Ontario.¹³⁸

Echoing broader developments within the NCW, a few agrarian writers did try to convince *Woman's Century's* readers that middle-class perspectives did not always serve all Canadians' interests.¹³⁹ In contrast to *Woman's Century's* support for "Made-in-Canada," Violet McNaughton urged free trade. A few authors also argued that support for federal conservation campaigns was tantamount to gender and class treason. In these contributors' opinions, housewives already knew how to be thrifty. Rather than convincing penny-pinching women to introduce further economies, they called for greater state intervention into prices.

Living costs were of pressing concern in *Woman's Century*. From 1917 onward, and reflecting the rapid inflation that characterized the late war and postwar years, *Woman's Century's* contributors advocated a range of solutions to rising costs. A few of these, such as the urging of cooperative stores, directly criticized the for-profit marketplace. In that they urged government regulation of profiteering, a few of *Woman's Century's* references to prices also indicated a willingness to criticize profit-seeking. Nonetheless, most price activism advocated in *Woman's Century* arose from conservative impulses. Specifically, *Woman's Century's* contributors suggested that inflation needed to be tamed so that the morality of "the masses" could be improved and Canadian business and government could be protected.

Demonstrating that conservative women were intensely interested in consumption during World War I and the postwar years, *Woman's Century* is an important reminder that not all consumer advocacy has been progressive. *Woman's Century's* contributors, to be sure, were interested in promoting the interests of

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Tarah Brookfield, "Divided by the Ballot Box: The Montreal Council of Women and the 1917 Election," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 89, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 478.

¹³⁷ "Our Birthday," *Woman's Century*, May 1920, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 168, 227.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

Canada's female consumers. They viewed consumption as a civic issue in which women should engage to prove their worth as valuable, contributing citizens. Yet, and unlike other female consumer groups that have received attention from Canadian historians, the majority of consumer advocates writing in *Woman's Century* were not interested in creating material equality. Their activism instead sought to advance Canadian business and the federal state, to convince working people and newcomers to adopt bourgeois values, to promote white women's political leadership, and to affirm the ascendancy of Christian morality. Such objectives were in line with the broader principles of the National Council of Women of Canada during this period. As the case of *Woman's Century* reveals, women's historical consumer advocacy could serve progressive ends, but so too could it entrench existing social hierarchies and work to normalize ethnic, racial, and class privilege.