

Bringing Research to LIFE

In Brief

Got something to say?

The deadline to submit comments on a policy document to the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics has been extended to June 30, 2009.

The organization – which has members from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) – is revising the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

It is part of their ongoing effort to ensure the document keeps pace with research and societal changes. Starting in December of 2008, the interagency panel went across the country, meeting with over 800 people in 17 cities.

They are requesting feedback on the draft they prepared as a result of this cross-country tour.

The Panel will release a revised version of the document in October 2009, making it again available for comment for 45 days, after which they will prepare a final report in February of 2010; this draft will go to the three research councils for their consideration.

To file your comments or order a copy of the latest draft, contact Secretariat@pre.ethics.gc.ca, or the Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics, 350 Alberta St., Ottawa, ON, K1A 1H5 or send a fax to 613-996-7117.

Upcoming

MCNHR - Research Seminar Series

Social Assistive Technology with Older Adults in Long-Term Care

By: Dr. Elaine Mordoch, Dr. Kerstin Roger and Dr. Lorna Guse

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

Room 370 Helen Glass Centre for Nursing

Creative Works Grants Program

Deadline to apply is May 1, 2009

To provide support for high-quality creative works at the University of Manitoba.

For further information visit:

http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/internalfunding_deadlines_forms.html

Studying radical housewives

BY SEAN MOORE

It was milk that set them off.

In early November of 1937 a housewife named Bertha Lamb from the Beaches area of Toronto went with some friends to city hall to warn the Board of Control that something needed to be done about the price of milk and that she was going to call a public meeting about the matter.

The price had recently jumped one cent, equivalent to 15 cents today, but it occurred at a time when one-third of people's earnings went to buying necessities – a ratio we use today to help define poverty. It occurred at a time when the federal government campaigned for people to drink more milk, up to a quart a day. It occurred at a time when cookbooks had milk replacing meat in some recipes. And it occurred at a time when the Milk Board controlled the price of the stuff and producers were earning record profits.

Lamb and others wanted the price of milk to meet consumer needs rather than producer needs. So on November 8, the meeting was held in Toronto's Labor Temple with 800 people stuffing its insides and hundreds more swarming outside. It got front page news and the *Toronto Telegram* published the death throes Lamb received hours before the meeting. She refused police protection, and the meeting adjourned without any deaths. The Housewives Consumers Association, or HCA, was taking shape.

"So there was quite a bit of high drama around the organization of this meeting," Julie Guard, labour studies, said. "But it was enormously popular. What was really striking about it for me was the people. Although there were lefties in it including women from the Communist Party, it certainly wasn't seen as a left organization."

Guard studies social movements and is currently writing a book with the working title *Consumers Against Capital*, which examines the history of the Housewives Consumer Association. The HCA was known to exist in the 1940s, but Guard's search through old newspapers



Photo from the *Westerner* newspaper RCMP bar Rae Luckcock from entering the Parliament Building in 1937. She wanted to deliver a petition.



Photo by Sean Moore

Labour studies associate professor Julie Guard studies a radical women's movement that organized in response to high milk prices in the 1930s.

and archival records uncovered the fact that they were operating in the 30s too.

Many social movements don't work, and if they do, they average only six years. These women lasted about 11 years.

"They were lucky in a sense that it was a popular issue. People really could get their heads around milk. It has a symbolic as well as material meaning so it was just a really good issue they got started off on, which is part of why it worked, but they were creative too."

Indeed, they were great at getting press coverage. In Ottawa they went to Parliament Hill armed with rolling pins, baby carriages, and lapel pins that looked like rolling pins, which they gave to politicians.

Newspapers gave the group much space and Guard's collection gives a retrospective glimpse of their fight's evolution: "800 Women in Labor Temple Agree 10 Cents a Quart Enough", "Housewives Launch Boycott On Milk To Force Three Cent Cut", "School Club Joins in Milk Protest", "Urge Study of Milk Price", "Expect 8,000 Wives to Boycott Butter", "Housewives Force Lower Meat Prices".

Their popularity grew and mayors, faith-based groups, social workers and provincial politicians supported them. They had support in Toronto, Montreal, Edmonton, Windsor and Winnipeg. Peggy Laurence, now known as Margaret Laurence, wrote for Winnipeg Housewives news, their newsletter. And they kept such a visible presence protesting the prices of goods that the T. Eaton Company kept a file on them in their Head Office.

In 1946 the group got their children to picket the increased price of chocolate bars, which jumped three cents overnight to eight cents. CBC Radio played coverage of it across the country.

It was around this candy-bar time though that the Cold War began. The hunt for "reds" was on and it became socially and politically unattractive to belong to a group like the HCA, which was stained

red by its opponents and the media, Guard said. So the HCA began to die like a toy with low batteries.

In one of their last bouts, Rae Luckcock, one-time president of HCA and one of the first women voted into legislature (she should have been the first since the swearing in follows alphabetical order but she let Agnes McPhail go first and now history better remembers the latter) went to Ottawa. It was 1947 and she wanted to deliver a 709,000-signature petition to Mackenzie King's government but RCMP barred her from entering the buildings.

"It was extremely politically inconvenient for the government to have a bunch of these women come to see them dressed in their nice frocks and hats, taking the train to Ottawa to embarrass the government. So the government would say, 'well, these people are just a bunch of reds.' And the woman returned, 'well, your economic policy doesn't seem to be working for ordinary people. What are you going to do about it?'"

What came, eventually, was the Ontario Royal Commission on Milk, which, Guard noticed, asked the same questions the HCA had long been raising. At the hearings, many consumers submitted reports to the Royal Commission, the HCA among them, but if you go to a grocery store today you will not see remnants of the HCA impact.

"I don't think it affects our lives today. There is no direct impact. But as a historian I think it's important to look back as our history reminds us that things change because people make things change," Guard said.

"And at this moment in history we have basically all the notions of how the markets work, and the regularities and systematic nature of capitalism are being shaken up. We have a little bit of a moment here. This is the kind of moment they were looking at in the 1930s. People were really annoyed in the 30s and they knew who was at fault. It's a bit like now."

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