THE KITCHEN AND THE MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION:

THE LINKS BETWEEN THE HOUSEHOLD AND GLOBAL CORPORATIONS

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L'auteure examine les rapports entre les sociétés multinationales et le travail non rémunéré que font les femmes au foyer. Elle discute des dangers auxquels ces dernières doivent faire face dans leur vie quotidienne: le foyer et le quartier sont devenus un terrain de décharge pour des milliers de produits chimiques qui mettent en danger la santé et la sécurité de leurs membres.

Pour faire face à ces dangers, des milliers de mères et de femmes au foyer se sont engagées dans la politique. L'expérience d'une des ces alliances populaires dans une petite communauté ontarienne et ses confrontations avec les grandes compagnies et le gouvernement sont décrites. En dernier lieu, l'auteure propose une alliance de groupes de consommateurs différents, des associations d'avocats, d'écologistes comme un moyen efficace pour s'attaquer aux pratiques des multinationales qui veulent faire des foyers un terrain de décharge.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore certain relatively unstudied aspects of the relationships between multinational corporations and the unwaged work that women do in their households. The activities of multinational corporations since the 1930's – but especially in the last two decades – have pushed them into far-flung areas of the world. This process of global penetration has seen pesticides, pharmaceuticals, chemical and nuclear wastes dumped in Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The Bhopal disaster is one horrifying example of the implications of this process: smaller-scale events occur on a daily basis. The Third World is not alone in being a dumpsite for global corporations. The household right here in North America is also intimately linked to this global process of commoditization and danger. In large part it has been the unwaged workers within the household who have come face-to-face with the contradictory tasks of trying to do their jobs as housewives and mothers, while encountering life-threatening hazards.

The social relationships that women manage in the home, especially as caregivers, are not commoditized for the most part even under the advanced capitalist conditions of North American society. This separation from the commodity sphere has facilitated the mystification that the home is a haven from outside dangers and is protected from it by the power of love, reciprocal human feelings, and kinship obligations. But the home is *not* a private fortress: it is a sieve, open to all the excesses of industrial development. The household and its environment are a dumpsite for thousands of untested, or undertested chemical products which endanger the health and safety of its members. And since the sexist gender division of labour in North America has designated women as primary caregivers it is women – wives and mothers – who are responsible for the health and safety of household members. Women confront the contradictions of trying to do their unwaged work of nurturing while being undermined by the dangerous products and practices of capitalist industrial production. The confrontations that these contradictions produce usually come as great surprises to women who may have heard of health and safety dangers in factories or offices, but have felt secure and protected in their own homes. Nevertheless, it is in their homes that women begin to piece together the statistics on local miscarriage rates, on high incidences of birth defects and chronic illnesses in the neighbourhood. It is over cups of coffee in their kitchens that women have mobilized and found themselves taking on some of the most powerful forces in our society.

Part I of this paper deals with households' exposure to external dangers such as chemical waste dumps. Part II concerns exposure to less visible and less understood hazards stemming from the penetration of the home by the household products industry. In both cases the household will be analyzed in terms of its relationship to global corporations.

PART I: THE HOUSEHOLD AS A DUMPSITE: PRELUDE TO CONSCIOUSNESS AND ACTION

Across the United States and Canada, thousands of housewives and mothers have become political activists. They have left their homes to become collectors and analysts of health statistics, writers of briefs, organizers of press conferences, public speakers, agitators and demonstrators. In Hardeman County, Tennessee; Rutherford, New Jersey; Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota; Alsea, Oregon; Harlem, New York; rural Nova Scotia; Niagara Falls, New York; Scarborough, Ontario; and Whitchurch-Stouffville, Ontario, women have found their households exposed to toxins and pollutants. Their houses have been found to be built on or near nuclear waste dumps (Scarborough and Pine Ridge Reservation); they have found deadly pesticides blowing into their windows (Alsea and rural Nova Scotia), and chemical residues seeping into homes and schools (Love Canal, Niagara Falls, New York). They have found their air and their water contaminated by lead, PCBs and dioxin. Women have miscarried at alarmingly high rates, and have seen their children born with defects or die of leukemia at early ages.

The women who pieced together the evidence of these disasters and organized grass-roots movements have been, for the

most part, unwaged, full-time housewives. Those housewives from white middle class backgrounds rarely had any previous political experience and began their inquiries assuming that government agencies were on their side – and would support them (black and native women began with no such trust for politicians and bureaucrats). These women soon became disillusioned with local and national politicians who treated housewives dismissively and sided with the large corporations. Encountering male dominated "realpolitik" was a bitter but also energizing experience for many of the women involved in neighbourhood coalitions. They frequently became tougher and more self-confident in their own organizational and political abilities. The political implications of this transformation from isolated housewife to activist has had an important personal impact on the lives of many of the participants and is also an important area for socialist/feminist analysis.

Let us consider in more detail the experiences of one such grass-roots alliance and trace out the course of events which brought housewives out of their kitchens and into major confrontations with big business and big government. My example is drawn from the Concerned Citizens of Whitchurch-Stouffville Inc.

Whitchurch-Stouffville is a small Ontario community just north of Toronto. Between 1962 and 1969 thousands of tons of toxic liquid industrial wastes were poured into a farmer's field never designed as a landfill (no liners were used) near the community.[1] One particular site was called a "garbageman's delight" because "you could pour stuff in one day and when you came back the next it was empty" (Cited in Jackson and Weller, 1982, 62). For years local women who constantly used the water in their domestic routines asked the Ministry of the Environment about the impact of the dump on their water supply. Groundwater was only 100 feet below the dump and supplied residents' wells and the town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. In the spring of 1981, a group of Stouffville mothers conducted a health survey and noted an unexpectedly high number of miscarriages. Like their concerned counterparts in Oregon, Nova Scotia, New Jersey and Niagara Falls, New York, they went to what they thought would be the appropriate government agency with their health survey of the area. Except for one member of the group who had been vice-president of the Scarborough Progressive-Conservative association, they had had no previous political experience: "We were just your average Joe Citizen." They have since come to the conclusion that "government is nothing but bullshit and baffling brainlessness" (Interview, April 1984).

The group began as a Moms and Tots meeting in a United Church basement. Before they changed their name to the 'Concerned Citizens of Whitchurch-Stouffville' they called themselves 'Concerned Mothers' and conducted a health survey of a quarter of the homes in Stouffville. They found that the town's miscarriage rate was 26% compared to the provincial rate of 15%. Another survey within a two-mile radius of the dump found 37 cases of cancer, 11 miscarriages, 7 cases of birth defects and 4 cases of thyroid problems (*Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1982). Despite constant statements by the Ministry of the Environment that the water was safe, the group was far from reassured and decided to hire independent scientists to test the water. They raised money in the ways in which women raise money – through bake sales and entertainment shows – and spent between $10,000 and $15,000 on tests whose findings were at complete odds with the Ministry's.[2] Furthermore, the Citizen's group protested that the government was trying to intimidate them with wiretaps and threats (*Toronto Star*, 10 March 1982) and a barrage of demeaning remarks about housewives. One member of the group dealt with the pressure by wearing a T-shirt to meetings which read: THIS IS NO ORDINARY HOUSEWIFE YOU ARE DEALING WITH.

The housewives of Whitchurch-Stouffville see themselves as fighting for life. "Our kids could get cancer . . . and that's a crime" (Interview, April 1984). Like their counterparts in other areas of Canada and the U.S., they soon realized that they had to form alliances with other groups (there are about 100 Environmental Non-Government Organizations in Ontario); they had to find out more about government, about power, and about Waste Management Inc. (WMI), the multinational that was polluting their neighbourhood.

Many people in Whitchurch-Stouffville no longer trust the Government of Ontario. They believe in ways that they never understood or believed before that the government is serving the interests of big corporations and finds the housewives to be a nuisance. Said one member of the group protesting the dumpsite: "Certain people had the rough luck to be situated near a landfill. Are they expendable because of that?" (Fran Sainsbury, cited in Jackson and Weller, 1981, 66).

The Household and the Multinational Corporation

This question is the crux of the problem. Global capitalism has developed a new service – the disposal of dangerous industrial waste products. The corporations that deal in this service are enormously powerful in terms of size and profit margins. They view the world in terms of cheap and easily accessible dumpsites. They are "not in business for their health," as the saying goes, they are in business to make a profit. Here is a direct contradiction between the needs of capitalist accumulation and the needs of social reproduction: this is what pits the housewife and mother doing her unwaged job against global corporations.

It takes a great deal of digging to find out about such corporations. They purposefully keep very low profiles, and count on the fact that the average citizen is not an investigative reporter and will not be able to identify the dangerous cargo moving through her community in large, virtually unmarked trucks.

The company that the people of Whitchurch-Stouffville were dealing with was called York-Sanitation and was a subsidiary of Waste Management Inc. (WMI). WMI of Oak Brook, Illinois is currently the largest waste disposal company in the world. The company had a profit margin of 20.4% in 1980, representing $54.9 million (U.S.) of revenue in excess of expenditures (Moddy's Handbook of Common Stocks). WMI has contracts for waste disposal all over the world including Venezuela, Argentina and Saudi Arabia, where they recently signed a $380 million (U.S.) contract. In 1983 WMI purchased Chemical Nuclear Systems and is now involved in the disposal of nuclear wastes.

The corporation has been investigated and sued many times. Because WMI operates around the world it can offset the problems caused by lawsuits in one place by new deals in another, and can count on the fact that there is very little communication between the people of the different areas where it operates. Furthermore, WMI has the money and power to launch appeals when and where it wants to. And, as in the case of Whitchurch-

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Poster for the "Women and the Invisible Economy" Conference at which Harriet Rosenberg presented her paper.

Stouffville, it has continued to operate while appeals are pending. In fact, in this Ontario community residents have been greeted with the following picture since 1977 (as the 1978 Hughes Commission Report put it):

> *There is no doubt in my mind (Hon. S.H.S. Hughes) that a great deal of justifiable public resentment was occasioned by the spectacle of the dump trucks rattling past the building where a hearing was convened to entertain an application for authority to do what their owners were doing without any authority whatsoever, and by open violation of orders made by a ministry of the government on the grounds that either an appeal was pending or the officers of the ministry were trying to coax a recalcitrant operator into a mood of compliance with what had been ordered* (pp. 60-61).

Today the dumptrucks are still rattling through Whitchurch-Stouffville, but the housewives have not given up. They are still concerned, still want the dumping to stop, and they are willing to continue pushing public authorities to serve what they see as being the interests of the citizens rather than the multinational corporations. They still want regular health surveys of the region to test for changes in the levels of diseases and birth defects, and they still want their water tested for mutagenicity and carcinogenicity. And they say, because they see the issue in terms of the health and lives of their children, that they have no intention of quitting their fight.

Politics

One of the most ingenious mystifications of capitalism has been to separate ideologically the economic from the political, making it appear as though power – the essence of politics – were somehow outside the realm of the process of capital accumulation. Companies as large as WMI control enormous financial, legal and political resources. Compared to the millions that companies like this take in profits a year, the 'Concerned Mothers' of a small Ontario community have very little in the way of resources. WMI, in an uncharacteristic breech of silence concerning their activities, once accused the Whitchurch-Stouffville group of being "political elements" – clearly the most negative epithet they could come up with (*Globe and Mail*, 14 May 1982). And, in essence, the company was quite right even though what they meant to imply was that the women of Whitchurch-Stouffville were using emotional pressure tactics to press their position with the Ministry. The "politics" of this grass-roots organization go well beyond such petty accusations. Lois Gibbs, the mother/housewife who was president of the Love Canal Homeowners Association and discovered that 56% of the children born near the site were mentally or physically disabled has said, "Birth defects have become a political issue" (Cited in Norwood, 1985, 16).

Gibbs, who has now become a full-time activist, is involved with The Citizen's Clearing House for Hazardous Wastes (Arlington, Virginia) in the United States. This group has pressed for fuller studies of links between residential proximity to chemical dumpsites and birth defects. She has argued that public health officials are deliberately refusing to continue monitoring hot spots, because epidemiological surveys may in fact confirm that industrial wastes are heavily implicated in causing birth defects (Norwood, 1985, 16).

If such correlations were confirmed the findings would be explosive. They would raise questions about the sanctity of the home – a discourse thus far staked out by political conservatives. The Conservative symbolic geography of private home and safe family life separated from public and workplace activities is based on the image of home as reward for hard work and law-abiding (i.e. non-militant) habits. What Whitchurch-Stouffville, Love Canal, and other activist groups have done is to challenge that ideology and to show clearly that the home is no sanctuary and no reward and that industry and government have lined up to attack, not defend it.

PART II: THE PENETRATION OF THE HOME BY THE HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

In this section I will discuss factors which contributed to the creation of the isolated housewife and facilitated the household's colonization by home products manufacturers. I will analyze how the home came to be a dumpsite in which women/consumers have been actively and successfully encouraged to purchase large quantities of potentially hazardous substances in the belief that they are fulfilling supposedly innate feminine caregiving functions. The marketing of these products has involved the development of costly advertising campaigns, but has also produced extremely high profits for multinational corporations who are among the largest and most powerful companies in the world. I will conclude by looking at some alliances and coalitions that have developed to resist the dumping of dangerous products in the home.

The Mortgage Holding Husband/Consumerist Wife Ideal: "because cleaning is caring."[3]

The home products industry began actively expanding in the 1920's and 1930's. Its development was intertwined with political and ideological trends which devalued collectivist movements in relation to domestic labour. Anything other than the isolated housewife managing her domestic world alone came to be identified as politically subversive. The imagery and symbols of these decades have come to have profound effects on how domestic labour is organized and carried out today, and to influence what has and what has not been problematized in relation to domestic labour in both personal and theoretical terms.

Extremely significant for Canadian and American domestic life has been the defeat of the collectivist branch of the home economics movement which, since the late 19th century, had developed models of co-operative solutions to the problems of housework, food distribution (consumers' co-operatives) and preparation (co-operative dining clubs and cooked food delivery services) and childcare (daycare). By the 1920's individualist trends among home economists were in the ascendancy, presenting models of the home as a private, feminized and isolated domestic sphere. The model of the private home paid for by the male breadwinner in long-term installments, and the female unwaged caregiver who maintained the home and raised children by herself, became the dominant model in North America in opposition to collectivistic models being developed in Russia after the 1917 revolution.

The concept of the mortgage-holding male appealed to industrialists, who saw it as a way of taming an increasingly radicalized and militant labour force. In 1919 when over 4,000,000 workers were involved in demonstrations in the U.S. (and major strikes in Canada as well as mass rallies of unemployed veterans), industrialists became intrigued by the idea that labour peace could be bought through making small suburban homes available to white male workers. Representatives of the housing industry

phrased it this way:

> *Happy workers invariably mean bigger profits, while unhappy workers are never a good investment . . . A wide diffusion of home ownership has long been recognized as fostering a stable and conservative habit . . . The man owns his own home but in a sense his home owns him, checking his impulses* (Industrial Housing Associates, 1919, *Good Homes Make Contented Workers* cited in Hayden 1982, 283-4).

By 1931, this approach had been institutionalized in U.S. public policy. That year President Hoover convened the "Conference on Home Building and Home Owning" which put government support behind a national strategy of home ownership for men ' "of sound character and industrious habits" ' (Cited in Hayden, 1982, 286). The coalition of those who favoured this policy included former campaigners against slums and even some feminists. But most of the backing came from real estate speculators, housing developers and *the manufacturers of consumer goods.*

The involvement of this latter group is significant because the move to cheap urban housing – which aimed at tying men to long-term mortgages – also aimed at tying women to consumerism. The gendered social division of labour was to work as follows. Men were to be breadwinners and homeowners, able to liberate their wives and children from the evils and hazards of the workplace. The *dependent-wife family* meant not only the demobilization of women from the workforce and the closure of wartime daycare centres, but the possibility that working class women could devote themselves full-time to domestic tasks. Higher steady wages for husbands were still too small to pay for servants to help with the childcare and the housework; but North American industry, in combination with the teaching of home economics in schools and community centres, would create a class of ' "scientific household engineers' " who did not need servants or collective social supports (Hayden, 1982, 386). Each woman was to become the epitome of Taylorist efficiency, alone, in her own home (See, for example, Frederick's *Household Engineering: Scientific Management in the Home,* 1920).

It has been pointed out that Taylorist techniques of efficiency were logically impossible in the home since scientific management required scale, specialization and the division of labour while the essence of privatized housework is precisely its isolated unspecialized character (Hayden, 1982). Efficiency was in fact a *smokescreen,* for the real aim of the home economics movement, as developed by Christine Frederick and her colleagues, was to turn the household into a unit of consumption.

Illustration: Jane Northey

Frederick and others worked as consultants to large corporations and advertising agencies, becoming specialists on how to sell things to women, and developing advertising techniques aimed at women's supposed suggestibility, passivity and inferiority complexes (See *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, 1928, dedicated to Herbert Hoover; and later, Janet Wolff, *What Makes Women Buy*, 1958).

The world in which men earned and women bought did not become a widespread reality until the post-Second World War boom of cheap suburban housing supported by government policy in both the U.S. and Canada in the 1950's. The image of women's domesticated role which preceded that boom had had decades to spread and fix itself in popular consciousness. Since the 1920's, advertising and the household products industry had worked hard to stereotype housework as an extension of the feminine role, an expression of love of family and not socially useful work that could potentially be organized in a variety of different ways. Housework became conceptualized as a personal task made easier by the purchase of an ever-increasing array of products which women bought because they wished to care for their families in the best, most modern way possible.

An ironic boon to advertisers was the fact that, despite it all, women did not always seem to love isolated housework and often yearned to find ways to involve others – even though this upset the social conventions of a male-female division of labour. Colgate-Palmolive hit upon the sales advantage of this discontent years ago with its ads for a home cleaner that was symbolized by a white knight. A Colgate vice-president explained the significance of the ad this way:

> *We believe that every woman has a white knight in her heart of hearts. To her he symbolizes a good powerful force that can enter her life and clean up that other man in her life, her husband, who symbolizes exactly the opposite of what the white knight stands for* (Printer's Ink, *1966, 85).*

In the isolation of their housework, while serving their families women have been encouraged by advertisers to fantasize about other men – but in ways that are not a threat to marital stability. The figure of Mr. Clean is not a problem because he is consciously portrayed by advertisers as being a eunuch.

While themes and variations of this world of fantasy domesticity are endlessly developed and refined one theme is never raised: *women are discouraged from asking any questions about the safety of the products they buy.* They are to concentrate on "ring around the collar," extra-moist cake mixes, and shiny floors that never yellow. They are *never* to ask questions about the chemicals used to attain these dazzling effects. They are *never* to ask questions about the unsafe and toxic qualities of what they bring into their homes, because otherwise the whole myth of the home as separate sanctuary and reward might crumble.

Let the Buyer Beware

The development of the mortgage-holding consumerist household ideal has permitted manufacturers to dump an enormous variety of virtually untested chemicals into the home and to shift the responsibility for product safety onto the consumer rather than the producer. There are literally thousands of products that one could discuss. In the area of food, for example, housewives and health activists have been concerned with the issue of food additives – everything from salt, sugar, preservatives, artificial colours and flavours, to lead leeching out of the solder of evaporated milk cans, to hormones and antibiotics in meat. These are not simple issues of the kind that public health officials deal with: these are issues which lead to the heart of major world corporations – plantations, agribusinesses and food processing companies – and also have to do with the most fundamental organizational structures of production, advertising, distribution, and health. 'Who is pushing fat, sugar, salt, caffein, BHA, BHT, pesticide residuals on whom and why' are the key questions here and, I would argue, probably some of the most significant public health issues of our time. This is an area that has received considerable attention.

Other areas of concern are the dumping of pesticides, asbestos, lead, PCBs, formaldehyde, aerosols, vinyl chloride and appliances which pose carbon monoxide and radiation hazards in the home.[4] Also of concern are the products we use to clean our homes – the soaps, detergents, softeners, and polishes. It is this latter category that I will now discuss in some detail: these products are usually viewed as benign and the hazards they pose are generally unknown, as are the connections between these products and multinational corporations.

I have argued that, for the last 50 years the notion of the isolated housewife fulfilling her feminized caregiving destiny has been developed, used and refined to facilitate the dumping of mountains of unsafe products in the home. What is known about these products is that they are supposed to make women feel satisfied in the thought that they are creating comfortable happy homes. (Of course we also know that a large percentage of women hate doing housework.)

I have written about the health and safety problems that detergents, polishes and cleaners pose in the home elsewhere (Rosenberg, 1984).[5] What is not known and, as far as I can tell, not being studied is what the impact of long term exposure to these products might mean. If two ounces of dishwashing detergent is lethal to a small child, what is the health outcome of 30 years of exposure to detergent residue? If one or two drops of furniture polish can be fatal if ingested, if aspiration can cause a form of chemical pneumonia, if some products are routinely contaminated by cancer-causing nitrosamines; then what are the long term effects of spraying and inhaling as you clean your dining room table? If a fifth of an ounce of disinfectant can kill a small child, which is more dangerous in the long run: the microbe or the disinfectant? And finally what are the combined effects of these cleaners, sprays, and pesticides?

The success of advertising in directing women away from health and safety questions is in large part attributable to the enormous size of the advertising budgets available to these corporations.

Soap Business: Harvesting Profits in Households

Proctor and Gamble (as of 1978) is the biggest advertiser in the United States, spending $554 million (U.S.) a year. This is more money than such major corporations as General Motors, AT&T or Gulf and Western spend in a year on advertising (Moskowitz, et al. 1980; 359). Proctor and Gamble harvests enormous profits in the kitchens of the world. As of 1980, its sales were estimated at $9.3 (U.S.) billion, with profits at $557 (U.S.) million (*Ibid.* 499). In the United States Proctor and Gamble is the largest manufacturer of bar soap, cake mixes, laundry detergent, toilet tissue, toothpaste, diapers and deodorants, and the third largest producer of mouthwash, salad, cooking oils and coffee (*Ibid.* 355). Its products are sold under a variety of different names,

suggesting to consumers that they are actually choosing from a variety of different products. However, only the names are different: the products are essentially the same.

Most of the home cleaning and bar soap market is controlled by only three corporations: Proctor and Gamble, Colgate-Palmolive and Unilever. These three corporations accommodate each other and do not compete; the fiction of competition is maintained within the differently named soaps and detergents produced by each conglomerate. The real aim of advertising is not to promote Tide over Cheer, but to constantly assert the need for these products.

In the past the advertising industry has expressed concern about the fact that there was very little difference between the products on the market. *Printer's Ink*, a leading journal of the United States advertising industry, noted in 1966: "Is such advertising an economic waste – a drain on society? The differences in scents and the amount of chemical brighteners among brands are not regarded by many economists as justification for spending millions on advertising [just] to establish brand preferences" (p. 85). The article went on to predict that the advertising structure, as it then existed, would inevitably collapse. Instead it has expanded. This is due not only to the expansion of selling techniques and the development of new "needs" and new products in North America, but to the expansion of activities in the Third World.

In sales to the Third World it is the Unilever corporation which dominates, through its subsidiaries Hindustan Lever and United Africa Company. On a world scale the Unilever Corporation is the ninth largest corporation on the globe, just after the major oil corporations. Women were from the beginning (1885) linked to this international empire. Unilever, formerly Lever Brothers, was among the pioneers of market research. Between 1885 and 1905 Lever Brothers spent the sum of £2 million in advertising – an unheard of amount in those days, in campaigns directed against working class housewives.

Today Unilever, with over 800 subsidiaries, has rarely identified itself as the parent company. Unlike the Nestlé Corporation, for example, it has striven for a policy of anonymity so that workers and consumers in different areas rarely know with whom they are dealing. The company's activities range from owning plantations that supply palm oil, cocoa, tea and coffee, to companies trading in agricultural commodities, shipping lines, warehouses; they own factories processing primary products into margarine, cooking oils and, of course, detergents, soaps and other cleaning products. They own supermarkets chains and marketing organizations which distribute their products. Their subsidiaries handle every imaginable level of production, distribution and marketing from growing timber to designing wallpaper. They have a network of laboratories producing pesticides and conducting genetic engineering projects (*Unilever's World*, 1975, 8). Unilever is the largest food company in the world. It has over 1000 products on the market; none of which bears the name Unilever.

This company, which touches the daily lives of millions, amassed sales to third parties (i.e. excluding intracompany trading) in 1978 in the amount of £9,842 million – "an amount roughly equivalent to the GNP of Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burundi, the Central African Empire, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland, Togo, and Upper Volta" (Dinham and Hines, 1983, 167).

Politics

What have been the responses to such power? In North America we often see the small-scale skirmishes between mother/housewives and these major corporations acted out in women's pages of our local newspapers. Women write in to complain about faulty pouring spouts on bleach containers, or lung irritations caused by cleaning the oven, or baby bottle nipples contaminated by cancer-causing nitrosamines (Fishbein, 126-127). The "consumer experts" hired by local papers treat each issue as an isolated problem. Consumer objections of this sort are easily absorbed into the mythology that corporations will always try to make their products better and safer if concerns are pointed out to them.

More subversive are public education activities carried out by ecology groups who are not dependent on advertising dollars for their existence. In this context just naming names and pointing out some of the dangers of these products can be very effective. It has been because of alliances between consumer groups, legal groups and ecology groups that such dangerous products as the fungicide Captan have come under government scrutiny and may eventually be banned.

Other effective alliances have come from the international sphere in which organizations like the International Organization of Consumers' Unions operate. In 1981, for example, the IOCU (with head offices in Brussels and Penang) launched Consumer Interpol. There are about 52 groups working in 32 countries which are actively participating in this network. They are also in close contact with other highly successful coalitions like the International Babyfood Network, and Health Action International, which coordinated an informal grapevine of about 200 groups working on pharmaceutical issues and is in contact with Pesticides Action Network, which itself represents about 50 working groups. It is clear to Third World health activists that the multinationals are using their countries as dumpsites for hazardous wastes, for untested or banned pharmaceuticals, for toxic pesticides and for dangerous consumer products. This model of coalition formation in the Third World and in Canada has the capacity to expand and attack the practice of the multinationals of turning the home into a dumpsite.

CONCLUSION

Health issues and consumer issues have come to be defined as women's issues, because we act as principal caregivers and are seen as being responsible for the reproduction of non-commoditized reciprocal relations in the home. Mothers and wives are supposed to keep the family safe and to nurture human feelings of intimacy, sharing and security. But we do not do this caregiving work in a vacuum. Whether we live in Jakarta or Montreal, we live in a world system dominated by capital accumulation and the spread of commoditized relationships.

This process has been resisted in a variety of ways, as people have confronted not only exploitation in the workplace but also threats to themselves and their families at home. Love, attachment and security are still highly valued and these values, in relation to the home, have been politicized. The New Conservatives have characterized the discourse in terms of a defence of home and family as a private, feminized sanctuary apart from the public masculinized domain. Separation of spheres and of gender roles are crucial to this conception. The New Right

has attributed problems within the family to feminists – wrong-headed women who want abortions, sex-education, day care and non-gendered division of labour in the home and in the workplace (Freudenberg and Zaltzberg, 1984; Harding, 1978).

But the activities of the people and groups discussed in this paper have the potential for shifting the locus of the discourse and focussing attention on capitalist organization and the responsibilities of democratic governments. Environmentalist, consumer and health groups – dealing with essentially the same issues of life and non-commoditized caregiving – have identified different enemies and are forging a different political discourse. They have found the home to be a contrived and inauthentic refuge.

Such groups are amorphous; they do not form a coherent social movement. Often group structure is decentralized and non-hierarchical. But the groups, in their very existence, provide lived alternatives to the alienating and oppressive conditions surrounding them. Because they are usually composed of society's less powerful people, they are rarely taken seriously by those with power. Such grass-roots groups are like social guerrillas who deal in localized hit-and-run operations, not full-fledged battles. But herein may lie their advantage. They are harder for power structures to define, locate, co-opt or eradicate. They may be suppressed in one place but reform and reappear in another. They have the weapons of ridicule and embarrassment, and the potential for forming coalitions and drawing on wide networks of social and personal resources. Some day these coalitions may extend and draw together Canadian housewives, Third World people, and First World minorities in new and undreamed of ways.

[1]On 11 December 1979 the *Globe and Mail* reported that the government had found 800 previously unrecorded dumpsites in southern Ontario; the research team making that survey also estimates that there may be between 2,000 and 3,000 unrecorded dumps in Ontario as a whole. In 1979 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimated that there were 50,000 chemical dumps in the U.S.; between 1,200 and 2,000 are thought to pose significant dangers (Hart, 1979, 25). In the U.S., it has been argued that 125 billion pounds of hazardous wastes were produced in 1980 – enough to fill 2,000 Love Canals (Brownstein, 1981). In Canada, the federal government has estimated that as of 1982, there are 3.2 million tonnes of toxic wastes generated in this country (Environment Canada, 1982, vol. 3, 8). About half of these wastes come from Ontario, which produces 1,605,107 tonnes annually (Waste Management Corporation, 1982, 58).

[2]The Minister of the Environment (Ontario) Keith Norton stated in 1981 that, on the basis of "the most comprehensive testing of any water supply in the history of this province using some of the most sophisticated methods available to us," there was "outstanding water quality in the community" of Whitchurch-Stouffville (Legislature of Ontario, Legislative Debates, 11 June 1981, p. 1486 and 16 June 1981 p. 1650.)

[3]T.V. advertisement for Pinesol cleaner (March 1985).

[4]See Rosenberg, 1984 for a discussion of these hazards.

[5]For a Table which summarizes the author's findings on the dangers of home-cleaning products, readers may write to *CWS/cf*, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

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