

Editorial Update

Dear friends of *CWS/cf*:

Since losing all our operational funding from the Secretary of State, Women's Program last February, *CWS/cf* has informed you through news releases, memos, editorials, and subscription, donation and political support requests, of our struggle to continue publishing. We don't have much news to add to the information you already have. Yes, our future is still in jeopardy, and yes, we are still working to raise the additional funds needed to support this publication. Our efforts are heartened by the overwhelming support you've shown through your subscription renewals, donations, letters and political action. Warm thanks, and with your continued support, we'll continue the fight.

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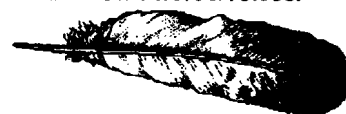
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By Judith Kjellberg Bell and Pamela Sayne

Housing is not prominent on the public agenda in Canada. No government or political party adequately acknowledges the centrality of the issue or the work that needs to be done. Neither has housing ever really been understood as a feminist issue. It hasn't made it on to the women's agenda in the way that pay equity, child care, abortion and violence have, in spite of its strong interrelationship with the concerns of the women's movement.

The complexities of housing as a subject and the way it interweaves with women's concerns cannot be explained in a single definition or even in a single publication. Instead, in this issue of *CWS/cf*, we offer diverse insights into how people evaluate and relate to the issue of women and housing, an issue that affects us all — women, men and children — fundamentally, and at the same time personally and intimately.

Together, the articles demonstrate how our understanding of housing is reflected in the ways we plan our lives; in our decision-making and experiences of family, work, community and the environment; in our choice — as far as we can choose — of where and how we live, with whom, and how we interact with our surroundings.

Housing is in many ways a reflection of women's status in society. The quality of one's shelter has to do with political, social and personal factors such as income, age, race and colour, physical and mental health and abilities, education, employment, marital status, access to child care, and the degree of control women exercise over these factors and their effects. Housing is one of the basic underpinnings of our lives, yet women, as Anne Other's account attests, are to a large extent excluded from the process of its provision. Women also have the most difficulty in getting housing, as is shown in the articles detailing the widely shared experiences of teenage mothers, single parents at any stage, single women on low and uncertain incomes, elderly women who can no longer cope on their own, women of colour, Native women and women with disabilities. In her discussion of current approaches to Canadian housing policy, Sylvia Novac points out that access is still governed by unreal concepts of what people's lives are like. People not living in the traditional family form (now a minority) are liable to be ignored or discriminated against, unless, of course, they have money. The commodification of housing connects access most directly to wealth, as Karen Wheeler argues, cutting another deep notch in the policy stick that systemically excludes the majority of women from the advantages of ownership.

Not only is the income barrier substantial, but land development, zoning, planning, building regulations, design and other sectors of the housing industry have not focused on what makes housing work for women and children — the majority of its inhabitants. Several of the articles demonstrate that consultation with women and their participation in design and management are key factors in women's satisfaction and support. We see this

particularly in Myrna Breitbart's account of the Women's Development Corporation and Birgit Krantz's piece on collective living. The importance of control, inclusion and participation is also reflected in the number of articles on various aspects of Canadian co-op housing — organizing and living in it. For all its warts, co-op living most closely expresses the ideas of community and mutuality that are important components of a feminist approach to housing.

Articles in this issue also express how housing forms common ground between women of the first and third worlds. Access to land and credit, control of the development process, division of labour, responsibility for child care — these are factors which not only link Canadian women to women in developing countries, but also link the first and third worlds in Canada. Winona LaDuke's article on Native peoples and housing links poverty and living conditions with marginalization and lack of control. Her timely contribution adds to our understanding of the collective actions of Native Indian communities in Canada this summer. Recent events demonstrate the powerful role of solidarity and organization in rocking the system and achieving recognition and change. These lessons reinforce the importance of the tenant organizing work that is a sub-theme of this issue, and of the movement for the right to housing, a theme which opens this collection.

We hope that this issue of *CWS/cf* will provide readers with a deeper understanding of housing as a women's issue, and lead to more conscious political attentiveness and participation in the processes that affect it.

We thank Jane Springer, Lorraine Gauthier and all the women of *Canadian Woman Studies'* editorial board and staff for the opportunity to make the women and housing linkage more visible to the Canadian women's movement. They and their supporters have shown great determination to keep the journal alive, despite recent funding cuts by the Conservative federal government. Their efforts in turn have allowed us to make this contribution to the struggle for affordable, quality housing within sustainable communities for all women.

An educator, researcher, administrator and activist, Pamela Sayne is currently a doctoral student in Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Pam teaches Women and Development at Trent University. She works with NAC's Housing Committee and is a member of the Habitat International Coalition Women and Shelter Group.

Judith Kjellberg Bell is Information Officer for the University of Toronto's Centre for Urban and Community Studies, where she was also managing editor of Women & Environments magazine from 1984 to 1989. She is a founding member of WEED (Women and Environments Education and Development) Foundation, a non-profit research and education organization, and is active in local community, women's and housing groups.