POLITICAL ORGANIZING AROUND HOUSING ISSUES:

A CASE STUDY OF

HAMILTON'S HOUSING HELP CENTRE

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines political organizing around housing issues and the role of working class backgrounds in the development of alternative approaches to housing. This is done within the context of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre, located at 135 Rebecca Street. It also documents the origin of the Centre up until the development of the Board of Directors. From a theoretical perspective, the study confirms the contribution that Political Economy theory makes to the understanding of alternative approaches to housing.

Generally, this paper affirms the importance working class backgrounds and views of housing issues played in the development of the Housing Help Centre. In addition, it also identifies the importance of advocacy, as identified by those involved in the Centre's origin. Issues pertaining to the Housing Help Centre that need to be further explored are also identified.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Overview and Objectives

In today's society the provision of housing is an issue of great concern for many people throughout the world. At a minimum, we, as Canadians, should be concerned by the growing number of people who are homeless and in danger of being homeless. For, as Shelley Rempel of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre puts it, most of us are just one pay check away from being homeless. However, concern alone is not enough to meet the needs of those people on the 'margin' of our society. For many, the availability of housing can be as serious as a life and death issue. Therefore, as we are members of an allegedly humane society, we must ask ourselves what can be done to curb the devastating, and often widespread, impact of the housing crisis.

In Ontario, one of the newer solutions that has been put forward is the development of housing help centres. However, in that they are a fairly new solution to the housing crisis, little has been done to document the development of such centres and to identify why there was a need for them in their communities.

In order to better understand the development of alternative approaches to solving the housing crisis, such as that of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre (HHC), the following research questions have been developed:

(1)   Do working class backgrounds and views of
housing issues play a role in the establishment of
centres such as the HHC?
(2)   Did people involved in the development of
the HHC see part of their objective as promoting
political capabilities of working class people to
struggle against the present housing crisis?

It is hoped that by identifying and documenting the
aforementioned a clearer understanding of the rise of
alternative approaches to housing will be developed.   As
well, it is hoped that the validity of Political Economy
theory will be illustrated through this study. Further, this
paper will document the origin of the Centre so that
knowledge of its' beginning will not be lost with changes in
personnel, Board and committee members.

1.2   Methodology

In general, the research for this paper was purely
qualitative and for a paper of this nature that is thought to
be the appropriate method. For each of the two parts of this
research different methods of data collection were used.

For the purpose of documenting the origin and
development of the centre, files at the HHC and the Region's
Social Services Department, Social Planning Division, were
consulted. Gaining access to this information proved to be
a very cumbersome and time consuming task. Initially the
Board of Directors had to be approached to receive permission
to conduct the study. While the Board of Directors did
approve the study, it was in principle only. The final

decision was passed on to the Program Committee. This process required going before the Program Committee to explain why I wanted to conduct the research, what I wanted to investigate and how I proposed to do the study. After more than half an hour of questions and answers I was asked to leave, allowing them to discuss the research proposal and make their decision as to whether or not to allow it to proceed.

A few days later I was contacted by the Executive Director of the HHC, Walter Mulkewich, and notified that the study had been approved. However, as I was the first person external to the Centre to request access to the files it still had to be determined which files could be accessed. The official list of accessible was made available in January of 1991. Unfortunately, however, most of the files were confidential, therefore requiring consultation at the HHC during offices hours. However, having gone through the appropriate "red tape", the staff at the HHC was very congenial.

After having reviewed the suitable files at the HHC, it then became apparent that additional files needed to be accessed. These files were the earliest records of the HHC's development, as kept by Maggie Fischbuch, and were located at the Social Planning Division of the Region's Social Services Department. Arranging to access these files proved to be quite the task in itself due to changes in personnel and the

busy schedule of the Social Planning's personnel. However, after a few weeks of trying I was able to find an agreeable date and began to review the records. These records were instrumental in identifying who was originally involved in the centre and the chain of events that led to its' opening.

Where answering the research questions was concerned, a questionnaire of over thirty questions was developed and administered. The questionnaire and research questions were formed to test not only the research questions, but the validity of the implied Political Economy theory. Originally it was hoped that the questionnaire would be responded to by seven key people involved in the development of the HHC. Unfortunately only five of the original seven were either available or willing to participate.

To ensure as much accuracy as possible in the answers to the questionnaire, all interviews were recorded and then transcribed to paper. This was a very laborious task, but proved to be invaluable when comparing responses. Unfortunately equipment malfunction meant relying on notes for one of the interviews, however, hand written notes to each question were fairly extensive.

While it is thought that Part A if the questionnaire provided considerably reliable results, there was a notable problem in Part B. Testing for a "working class" background is difficult at best as one may encounter a variety of perspectives with respect to what a "working class"

background is. Thus, income and personal experiences were considered in an attempt to explore this as broadly as possible. Regardless, there were difficulties encountered. For one thing people often had no idea what their parents incomes were when they were children. Even when they did, "working class" experiences very much depended on the communities each individual was raised in and the prevalent attitudes and standards of living. However, through often lengthy discussion beyond the questionnaire, it is believed the class backgrounds of those interviewed were reasonably identified. Unfortunately, due to the confidential nature of peoples backgrounds this information cannot be revealed in any detail.

It should also be noted that the sample size in itself presents questions as to the reliability of the study. However, of those interviewed there was an overwhelming consensus throughout most of the questionnaire. Hence, it is thought that, despite the sample size, the study was able to make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the development of alternative approaches to housing.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, literature relevant to housing issues will be discussed. Within the academic world there exists a variety of theoretical approaches that can be used to explain urban change and housing strategies. However, in an attempt to provide a basic overview of these approaches only Behaviouralism, Managerialism, and Political Economy theory will be examined. While all three of these theoretical approaches are drawn upon in the academic world, it will be argued that the Political Economy approach is a promising one for explaining the development of **alternative** housing strategies in cities. As such, various elements of Political Economy theory will be carefully explained to provide the theoretical basis necessary for the study.

2.2 Behaviouralism

In general, behaviouralist geography is concerned with the relationship between environment and human behaviour. It is thought that from their environment people develop certain perceptions and that these perceptions are later used in the decision making process (Gold, 1980, p.40). More specifically, the behavioural approach is concerned with the "cognitive processes through which individuals codify, respond to and react upon their environments"(Goodall, 1987,

p. 37). Thus, with respect to urban change and housing strategies, the argument might be that peoples' perceptions and choices develop in specific environmental contexts and, in turn, based on their perceptions they make their housing choices or decisions.

Unfortunately this theoretical approach is relatively limited as it emphasizes "'mechanical' responses to spatial and social structures" rather than the motivations and processes underlying behaviour (Goodall, 1987, p. 38). Thus, for our purposes this approach seems to place too much emphasis on conscious decision making and not enough on the processes which inherently limit the individuals choice.

2.3 Managerialism

Managerialism largely draws on the writings of Max Weber and his view of class relations and social differentiation. The development of social systems is seen to be a function of the institutional decision making process. More specifically, it is argued that social constraints (eg. access to housing) are determined by the relationship between households and the key actors within the institutions and agencies involved in housing. Hence, the institution managers or 'social gatekeepers' are charged with shaping peoples opportunities within the housing market.(Knox, 1987, p. 227) However, we know that these managers are not the only factor that limits peoples' housing

opportunities. This, effectively is a short coming of this approach.

As Knox points out (1987, p. 245), the managerial approach examines the allocation process but fails to explore why housing, for instance, is in scarce supply. In addition, while Weberian analysis accounts for the development of the housing class within any market situation, Bassett and Short argue that property ownership within the managerialism framework is, by itself, an inadequate basis for class formation. They argue that the Marxist analysis of class is more appropriate as it links class formation "to the extraction of surplus value in the process of production."(Bassett and Short, 1980(b), pp. 172-173). Thus, while managerialism is thought provoking and appropriate to some extent, a more all encompassing approach to explanation can be found in Political Economy theory.

2.4 Political Economy Theory

A third and more innovative approach to explaining housing issues within capitalist societies is the Political Economy approach. It is especially useful when trying to explain the development of alternative housing strategies in capitalist cities. However, in order to understand the processes which give rise to alternative housing strategies such as Hamilton's Housing Help Centre, one must first examine the general issues which pertain to the provision of

housing within a capitalist economy.

First of all, capitalism is a specific mode of production (see Appendix A) characterized by the relationship between classes. Within capitalist economies there tend to be two different classes, a dominant class and a subordinate class. Respectively, they are often referred to as the bourgeoisie (owners of capital) and proletariat (wage earners).

The overall goal of the owners of capital is to organize society and urban space such that profit maximization and surplus value is enhanced. This is accomplished through the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. In turn, the wage earner is interested in organizing society and urban space in a manner which assures the humane and rational consumption of goods.(Sawers, 1984, p. 6) Hence, this contrast in orientation leads to class conflict between the capitalists and working class. In turn, this creates a crisis and produces the conditions necessary for an ever changing urban environment (Edel, 1981, p. 36).

In addition to the division of classes, capitalism is based on a system of production, exchange and consumption of commodities by the consumers and producers, as already touched upon. In this system, a worker's ability to sell their skill for a wage and exchange the wage for commodities determines their level of well being.(Harloe, 1981, p. 20) However, for those members of the working class who are

placed in a 'marginal' societal position due to low wage employment, or lack thereof, their ability to compete for commodities is drastically reduced.

As Bassett and Short note, housing within a capitalist system is generally viewed by the capitalist as a commodity and a **source of surplus value**.(Bassett and Short, 1980(b), p. 174) Moreover, from the viewpoint of the worker, the consumption of housing is central to the **reproduction of labour**.(Chouinard, 1989, p. 223) Hence, housing is seen by the worker as a **social good**.(Bassett and Short, 1980(b), p. 174) However, the idea of housing as a social good is contradictory to the conception of housing as a commodity. Thus, to reiterate, working class interests in the 'use-value' of the urban environment (e.g. in affordable housing for their families) tends to be in conflict with the goal of maximizing returns from capital investments.

Accordingly, the provision of housing within a capitalist system creates conflicts between social classes which, in turn, demands **state intervention** to solve the conflict.(Bassett and Short, 1980(a), p. 188) This state intervention is most noticeably manifested in the form of government agencies and policies which deal with the unequal allocation of housing within society. However, while the state is theoretically a neutral body, it should be noted that historically the state has tended to favour the development of policies that enhance the position of the

capitalists and the accumulation of surplus value. At this point it is, perhaps, useful to further examine the role of the government as set out in Political Economy theory.

Generally, as theory predicts, the government will play an active role in class struggle, and government policies will express the interests of the capitalists, as already noted. This is due to a variety of reasons, one being that most of the high governmental positions are held by wealthy individuals, many of whom have come from the property-owning class. Nevertheless, it is argued that those who do not come from this class can be easily controlled by bribes and campaign contributions. (Sawers, 1984, p. 7) Therefore, it might be said that many political decisions are, in essence, made by the capitalists. Through understanding this process (i.e the control of political power), one can begin to develop tactics to counteract this, one such tactic being political organizing at the grass-roots level (Sawers, 1984, p. 13).

Power, at the political level, is accomplished by the bourgeoisie through reinforcing and reproducing working class stratification (Sawers, 1984, p.13). Thus, for the working class to gain political power, in essence they must combat this stratification within their class and organize, at the community or grass-roots level, around issues of common concern. Through cohesive community effort, it is then possible to increase community consciousness, and gain

political power and control over the built environment.

It has only been recently that organization along class lines and at the community level has arisen within conflicts over housing. Thus, the Political Economist, in exploring "neighbourhood activism", is primarily concerned with its' link to class relations (Cox, 1989, p. 61) and how this brings about political legitimacy and subsequent influence over the built environment.

In Chouinard's study on cooperative housing she notes the importance of exploring the connections between "experiences of the state and service provision, and political mobilization" around housing issues (Chouinard, 1989, p. 234). Moreover, by understanding how peoples' experiences of the state and class position may influence their involvement in the development of alternative approaches to housing within capitalist societies, we can better understand why such alternative approaches are needed.

2.5 Conclusion

Fundamentally then, Political Economy theory, and its' ideas of class conflict, housing as a commodity versus social good, community consciousness and political organizing at the grass roots level, provides us with the required theoretical basis to understand the processes which necessitate the development of alternative approaches to housing. Inadvertently, the formation of centres such as Hamilton's

Housing Help Centre may be an outcome of peoples' response to the negative outcomes of the capitalist process of accumulation within the housing market. Whether or not this is the case will be further examined in the case study of the Housing Help Centre.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Origin of the Housing Help Centre

In a general sense, Hamilton's Housing Help Centre
(HHC) stemmed from a review of a Ministry of Housing report
in 1987 on roomer boarders and lodgers which suggested the
provision of storefront housing help centres. This document
was followed by a final report of the Minister of Housing's
advisory committee on the International Year of Shelter for
the Homeless which stated:

> "The Ministry of Housing should fund as a
> regular program the establishment of 'housing
> help' centres in neighbourhoods and communities
> where the greatest need exists across Ontario."
> (Ministry of Housing, 1988, p. 191)

It was Maggie Fischbuch, then Housing Policy Development
Officer for the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth, who reviewed
one of the preliminary Ministry of Housing's documents and
developed a brief for the Region's Food and Shelter
Assistance Advisory Committee (F&SAAC).(Interview with Maggie
Fischbuch) At this point it may be useful to explore the
role of the F&SAAC as members of this committee have
periodically been involved with the HHC.

The F&SAAC is an advisory committee that was
established by the Regional Chairman during the 1981-1982
recession. It is comprised of representatives from the
providers of emergency food and housing in the Hamilton-
Wentworth area. Examples of agencies that are active on the

F&SAAC are the Good Shepherd Centre, St. Matthew's House, Wesley Urban Ministries, Mission Services, the Salvation Army and Neighbour to Neighbour. Women's shelters are notably not represented which is unfortunate as gender specific problems do exist within the issues of food and shelter. However, women's organizations were invited to participate. The lack of their involvement may be due to a lack of time and to political differences between them and the F&SAAC, which is characterized by charitable and religious groups. (Interview with Maggie Fischbuch)

Following the presentation of Ms. Fischbuch's summary of the Ministry of Housing's report on roomers, boarders and lodgers to the F&SAAC, it was decided that a sub-committee, or adhoc working group, of the F&SAAC should be created to develop a proposal for a housing help centre in Hamilton. It was with the creation of this working group, the Housing Help Centre Working Group (HHCWG), that the idea of a housing help centre would begin to grow into the present day Housing Help Centre at 135 Rebecca Street in downtown Hamilton.

3.2 Early Development of the Centre

The HHCWG consisted of people who had volunteered from the F&SAAC and who had been suggested by the F&SAAC. In the end, the HHCWG was comprised of six people from a cross-section of backgrounds, those being Kathy Rankin, Ida Thomas, Reverend Marty Carl, Anne Stewart, Gary Quart and Maggie

Fischbuch. (See Appendix G)

The development of the proposal for the HHC by this group was a brief project, with the first meeting being held August 17, 1987. The concluding meeting was held the spring of 1988 for the purpose of tieing up loose ends. On April 28th, 1988 the final proposal for the HHC was passed by the F&SAAC. Further, the Centre's proposal also received the crucial backing of the local Access to Permanent Housing Committee. It was the Access Committee's responsibility to examine the local funding proposals and then recommend those best suited for funding. Essentially then, the Access Committee was the 'gatekeeper' that controlled the funding of the HHC to a certain degree. In addition, the proposal was also supported by a wide cross-section of local agencies and political representatives. (Files at Social Planning)

With respect to who the Centre should be associated with, the F&SAAC concurred with the HHCWG's recommendation to establish a new non-profit corporation to run the Centre. (Memorandum from M. Fischbuch, 1988-04-29) Prior to this decision, discussion ensued to weigh the strength's and weaknesses of associating the HHC with an already existing agency or a new one.

In the end the benefits of developing the HHC as an autonomous body clearly outweighed the benefits of associating it with an already existing body (See Appendix D). Ms. Fischbuch elaborated on this during an interview

when she stated that there was a strong political element to the decision. It was felt that if one agency was to sponsor the Centre it might not be supported as strongly by others due to the politics between them. As well, there was also the issue of how to choose between agencies, an issue which had no simple solution. In that the idea was to bring the community together as a collective, the autonomous body was overwhelming the best choice.

3.3 Development of the Board of Directors

Recruitment of Board members was both direct and voluntary. Initially a list of people to be approached for Board membership was developed by Maggie Fischbuch, Norma Walsh (Director of Social Planning Policy Development) and Mike Schuster (Commissioner of Social Services). In addition, those people who had indicated an interest in being on the Board were approached. From these people the initial founding Board was developed (See Appendix E). However, the Board continued the recruitment process to bring it to a total of ten members, Kathy Rankin being the tenth. (Interviews with Maggie Fischbuch and Walter Mulkewich)

To assist the Board members in further recruitment, the United Way made a presentation concerning how to recruit new Board members and who the ideal Board should be composed of. Unfortunately, scepticism seems to exist among some of the people interviewed as to whether or not the present Board

of Directors reflects the recommendations of the United Way. In that the author is not aware of the United Way's Board selection criteria, it is not possible to comment further.

Some of those interviewed argue that the Board has evolved to be representative of a diversity of groups that do not necessarily possess knowledge of social housing issues and represent the interests of those experiencing the housing crisis. While diversity within the Board is seen to be favourable where the funding sources are concerned, there was some indication during the interviews, again by a minority, that this is perhaps undesirable (See Appendix H). The concern seems to lie within the fear that a diverse Board of Directors may become coopted and loose sight of the Centre's original objectives. However, despite the diversity that exists within the Board, throughout time all members of the Board have been said to possess, at a minimum, a social conscience.(Information from a cross-section of interviews)

On May 13th of 1988 the initial meeting of the HHC's Board of Directors was held. One year and ten days later, May 23rd, 1989, the Centre opened its' doors for service.

3.4 Origin of the Centre's Service Approach

The service being provided by the HHC could be characterized as unique, within the context of the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth. This is largely due to the fact that no one agency deals with housing issues to the extent of the

HHC. It is also unique due to the type of service provided at the Centre.

Based on this research, it is this author's opinion that Maggie Fischbuch and Kathy Rankin were in large part responsible for the Centre's approach to service provision. Further, from a memo submitted to Maggie Fischbuch from Kathy Rankin on September 24, 1987, one might say that Ms. Rankin's input was most dominant as the majority of her suggestions exist within the Centre's present service domain.

Ms. Rankin's involvement in the Adolescent Community Care Program seemed to be central to her input into the development of the HHC. Involvement in the development of and ongoing service at Adolescent Community Care provided Ms. Rankin with invaluable insight into the services needed by the homeless and hard to house. Ms. Rankin's suggestions were very valuable as many of the positive attributes of the centre that were identified by those interviewed were ideas that originate in a memo from Ms. Rankin to Ms. Fischbuch. The positive contribution made to the HHC by Ms. Rankin clearly illustrates the importance of having front line service providers involved in the development of community oriented services. To further understand why the centre takes the form it does, the following chapter will consider the opinions and backgrounds of a select group that was involved in the development of the centre prior to its' opening. (See Appendix F)

CHAPTER 4

4.1   Introduction

In addition to documenting the origin of the Centre, the proceeding chapters have illustrated the foundation of Political Economy theory and its' use in explaining alternative approaches to housing. The purpose of this chapter is to answer the research questions, as outlined in chapter one, and in turn identify the characteristics and attitudes of those involved in the development of the HHC.

4.2   Addressing Research Question #1

The first research question, as identified in chapter one, is: Do working class backgrounds and views of housing issues play a role in the establishment of centres such as the HHC? To address this question it is necessary to break it into two parts. Thus, the role of working class backgrounds will first be addressed, followed by the role of working class views of housing issues in the development of alternative approaches to housing. However, before proceeding to this it is necessary to establish the validity of referring to the HHC as having an alternative approach to housing.

In order to identify whether the HHC had an alternative or a status quo approach to housing, the Centre's records were consulted. They seemed to indicate that the

Centre has an alternative approach based on: (1) the type of service they provide to the community on a day to day basis and; (2) their involvement at the political level to lobby for changes in housing policies. However, those interviewed were also questioned as to the unique features of the Centre and how they would generally characterize the Centre.

To assist in identifying whether or not the Centre has an alternative approach to housing, in comparison to other agencies offering housing assistance, those interviewed were asked to identify what community needs the HHC is meeting that are not being met by other organizations. A variety of points were mentioned. The "store front" and "one stop shopping" approach to community service were generally points of mention.

It was also pointed out that the Centre's approach to assisting the community lends itself to fostering dignity in those using the Centre. As a result of the way the Centre is set up the clients have free access to telephones, housing listings, coffee, and housing brochures. There is not the same stigma attached to the Centre as with most social services. In fact, the Centre does not like to be labelled as a social service, but more a community resource centre. Thus, the users are able to develop a sense of control over their housing destiny at the HHC to a greater degree than most agencies assisting with housing.

Additionally, the **magnitude** of the research conducted

by the Centre and subsequent advocacy were noted to be unique in the Hamilton-Wentworth area. The Centre is very concerned with documenting the extent and characteristics of the housing crisis in Hamilton, in turn using this information towards advocacy for change of present policies. Further, the Centre stresses the importance of cooperation among agencies dealing with housing issues to eliminate duplication of services and therefore wasted resources. (From a cross-section of interviews)

With respect to the approach the Centre takes, all but one of the five people interviewed were initially reluctant to characterize the HHC as having a "left-wing" approach to housing. In this context, left-wing might be characterized by: (1) a community based, 'store front' housing service agency that evolves to meet changing community needs; (2) an agency that sees 50% of its' objective as conducting research and advocacy, and 50% of its' resources on direct service; (3) critical analysis of housing issues from feminist and socialist perspectives and; (4) an agency that sees the education and empowerment of the community as a vital part of their service.(As defined by the author based on knowledge of the HHC and interviews)

Despite the initial hesitance of four of the five interviewees, it was agreed upon, after lengthy discussion, that the centre is indeed left-wing in comparison to other housing services in existence. It was also acknowledged that

the HHC is a unique and badly needed service that fills
previously existing gaps in the social service network and in
turn helps to catch those people who fall between the cracks
of the system. Accordingly, one is safe to conclude that the
HHC provides an alternative approach to housing. Having
established this, let us now examine the role of working
class backgrounds.

Political Economy theory, as outlined in chapter 2.4,
predicts that working class backgrounds will play a
predominant role in the establishment of alternative
approaches to housing. As outlined in chapter 1.2, there
were inherent problems encountered while testing for working
class backgrounds. However, in general terms, four of the
five people interviewed had fairly strong working class
backgrounds (i.e. moderate to low family incomes, fathers
who were blue collar workers or general labourers), with the
fifth person being best characterized as having come from a
"working middle class" background (i.e. family income more
mid-range but predominantly working class family attitudes).
Consequently, it is clear that Political Economy theory
correctly predicts the existence of working class backgrounds
in those involved in the development of the Centre.

It follows that one would expect those who were raised
in working class families to have working class views.
However, fundamental conflicts were found. Based on the
responses to part B of the questionnaire and additional

discussion with the interviewees, it is believed that four of the five interviewees were raised in settings dominated by working class views. Nevertheless, it appears that all five had working class views instilled upon them. Further, it seems that working within bureaucratic systems has, to various degrees, coopted them; coopt being defined as "to make ineffectual as an instrument for radical change by incorporating within the established order".(Funk & Wagnalls, 1986, p. 298)

At one extreme, one of the five does not seem to have been coopted in the least. In fact, this person appears to prefer to resign from positions that threaten cooptation, rather than compromising working class values. However, on the opposite end of the scale is a person who, while possessing a very strong social conscience, as all interviewed do, tends to have an internal conflict between the idea of housing as a market good or social commodity.

Part of this cooptation may be attributed to the funding arrangements for the Centre where some people are concerned. It seems that to ensure the continued funding of the Centre by the government agencies (i.e. Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth), there are certain unwritten guidelines that must be adhered to, such as advocacy to a level that funding sources are comfortable with. While most of those involved in the development of the

HHC would like to see the Centre play an even stronger advocacy role, conforming to funding source expectations seems to lessen the degree of advocacy. Therefore, while working class backgrounds and views are predominant in those interviewed, one must keep in mind the effect of cooptation.

4.3 Addressing Research Question #2

The second research question to be addressed is: Did **people involved in the development of the HHC see part of their objective as promoting political capabilities of working class people to struggle against the present housing crisis?** This is a very important question as it helps to identify what action is seen to be needed by those involved in the development of the centre. As well, responses in the interviews also help us to understand the importance of political organizing where social housing is concerned.

Central to the political organizing around housing issues is whether or not housing is a right and social good or a market commodity to be bought and sold at the going price. Political Economy theory predicts that those with working class backgrounds will identify housing as a social good (i.e. they view housing as a fundamental right of all people and therefore a good who's availability should not be dictated by market forces).

Those interviewed proved this to be true, all generally stating that housing is 'absolutely' a social good.

However, four of the five interviewees mentioned that landlords also have a right to make a living from housing, but this did have certain restrictions which varied in severity between the people. Three of the four thought that there should be restrictions as to the amount that landlords should be able to profit from other's housing needs. However, one person, while agreeing that housing is a social good, also felt that it was best to let the market function independently without government interference. Given the nature of capitalist economies, these ideas seem to conflict with each other.

Kathy Rankin best emphasized the importance of treating housing as a social good and a right. She stated that "social housing and adequate housing for everybody has benefits for everyone. Those people are better able to function productively in society if they're not crawling out of a cardboard box every morning"(Interview with Kathy Rankin). Rankin also believes that there should be restrictions placed on big businesses who are reaping tremendous profits from the rental housing market. Thus, while housing is seen as a right and a social good, there exists a slight conflict as to what housing strategies that translates into and the degree of government intervention that should occur.

To identify the degree of importance of promoting the political capabilities of the working class to organize

around housing issues at the HHC, those interviewed were asked a variety of questions. When asked if uneven power relationships limited people's ability to compete for housing, all responded yes. In this context, uneven power relationships refer to the lack of political legitimacy and lack of power to compete in the housing market (i.e. lack of money) experienced by those people on the margins of society. Therefore, one's inability to have a voice at the political level is an example of uneven power relations.

The interviewees were asked if lobbying the government for change in housing policies was necessary and effective. All five responded that lobbying the government is necessary. They also noted that to be effective all levels of government must be lobbied and they must be lobbied by community members as well as agencies. Rankin summarizes the need for lobbying by stating: "...the bottom line is that governments want to be re-elected and if community consciousness is raised and effective lobbying takes place then governments are obliged to implement different policies"(Interview with Kathy Rankin).

Those interviewed were then asked how important advocacy for social housing at the political level is and why. Again the answer was unanimously that advocacy is very important. There was a general agreement that the government has to intervene in the housing crisis, with intervention translating into the allocation of money for social housing.

However, without the political will of politicians, very little money gets allocated to social housing programs (Interview with Brother Richard McPhee). As Maggie Fischbuch puts it, advocacy's "probably the only way we're going to see major commitment to social housing" (Interview with Maggie Fischbuch). In addition, those interviewed noted that there is a need for both HHC employees and community members to advocate for housing as it is a combination of the two that best captures the politician's attention. This supports the principle of community or grass-roots organizing to increase control over the built environment, as outlined in chapter one.

When asked to identify the most important roles of the Centre, four of the five considered advocacy to be one of the most important functions. Maggie Fischbuch sums this up well be saying that "direct service is helpful but it's fairly limited in that it doesn't create new housing and it doesn't allow people to organize collectively". Thus, research and the subsequent advocacy, based on the indisputable data, is best for bringing about long term change. Kathy Rankin noted that it is hard for politicians to ignore statistics as numbers are irrefutable.

Hence, we see that throughout the interviews there was considerable emphasis given to the importance of advocacy. It is thought that the only reason the one interviewee did not over emphasize the need for advocacy is due to the

conservative nature of the organization the person is associated with. When this person was questioned as to their political involvement in housing issues their initial response was that they don't get involved in politics. However, further exploration revealed that the person is involved in advocacy but was reluctant to consider it political involvement.

Also identified as being an important part of the service provided by the HHC was educating the members of the community with respect to their rights and how to gain more control over their destinies. The role of direct service was strongly emphasized by those interviewed. Generally, there seemed to be a consensus that the needs of the community members should shape the service being provided by the Centre's staff.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that four of the five interviewed saw promoting the political capabilities of working class people, or the disadvantage segment of the population, to struggle against the present housing crisis as a crucial objective; the fifth acknowledging its' role to a lessor degree (See Appendix I). The idea of assisting the 'working class' is central as they are the disadvantaged segment of the population due to their exploitation by the ruling class of capitalists.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to reiterate the findings of this study and the implications they may have for further research. However, before reviewing the key findings it is important to reiterate that the findings of this study are based on a small sample group that is limited to the experiences of one organization. As such, while the conclusions drawn in this study have widespread implications, they are specific to the experiences of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre.

5.2 Conclusion

Generally, one may conclude that Political Economy theory is particularly useful in explaining the development of alternative approaches to housing, as this study has illustrated. From the onset it was expected that those involved in the development of the Centre would have working class backgrounds or views and in fact the research seems to indicate that working class backgrounds and views of housing issues did play a large role in the development of the centre. In addition, it was expected that those involved in the development of the Centre would consider advocacy and promoting the political capabilities of working class people to struggle against the present housing crisis as a central

goal of the Centre. Indeed this proved to be the case.

While it is encouraging to see the existence of these attitudes and goals in the developmental stages of the Centre, one must be cautious to not assume that they still exist today. As such, future research would be useful to examine the present day characteristics of those involved in the HHC and how that has effected the direction the Centre is presently taking. This would also lend to an evaluation of whether or not the Centre is meeting its' original goals, as set out by its' developers, and if not, why. Further, other interesting topics would be to study the effect that cooptation has on the Centre over the long term, and how successful the HHC is at drawing the community and other organizations together.

In a more general sense, additional work needs to be done on the role of working class backgrounds in the establishment of other alternative approaches to solving problems in society. This would increase the reliability of these findings. In addition, there must be further investigation into the effect that political organizing at the grass-roots level can have on the built environment.

One general implication of this study is that through political organizing at the community level people are likely to be able to have some control over the built environment. At a time when people increasingly feel that they are losing control over their destinies, this is an important finding.

It illustrates that even the most disadvantaged people living on the fringe of society potentially have a voice.

In the end we can only hope that the need for alternative approaches to housing is eliminated for, as Brother Richard McPhee, member of the HHC Board of Directors, puts it, the Housing Help Centre's primary long term goal is to put itself out of business. Unfortunately, however, in a capitalist society this will, undoubtedly, remain a utopian goal of those involved in alternative approaches to housing.

Appendix A

DEFINITIONS OF COMMON POLITICAL ECONOMY TERMINOLOGY

MODE OF PRODUCTION: on a macro scale the mode of production
is seen to be the type of economic
process and the relations between
people in the production and
appropriation of surplus. On a micro
scale it could be as simple as the type
of mechanizational organization used in
the production and appropriation of
surplus. (p. 336) "The mode of
production in material life determines
the general character of the social,
political and spiritual processes of
life." (p. 334)

SURPLUS VALUE:= amount of surplus produced
variable capital laid out

= surplus labour
necessary labour

= hours worker spends working for capitalist
hours worker spends working for personal
consumption

CRISIS: "the undermining of the core or organizational
principle of a society: that is, to the erosion
or destruction of those societal relations which
determine the scope of, and limits to, change for
(among other things) economic and political
activity. Marx identified the organizational
principle of capitalist society as the
relationship of wage labour and capital; and he
formulated the **fundamental contradiction** of this
type of society as that between **social production**
and **private appropriation**, that is social
production for the enhancement of particular
interests." (p. 102)

EXPLOITATION: "the extraction of surplus value by the
class of industrial capitalists from the
working class." The production of a surplus
makes exploitation possible. (p. 157)

con't...

Appendix A (con't.)

CLASS CONFLICT: the conflict   that   arises   between   the
                   capitalist and the working class, in the
                   case of a capitalist society, as a result of
                   their conflicting goals in society (i.e.
                   profit orientated goals   vs. humane and
                   rational goals (Sawers, p. 6).

SOURCE: Bottomore, Tom. A Dictionary of Marxist Thought,
               Cambridge: University Press, 1983.

Appendix B

The Location of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre
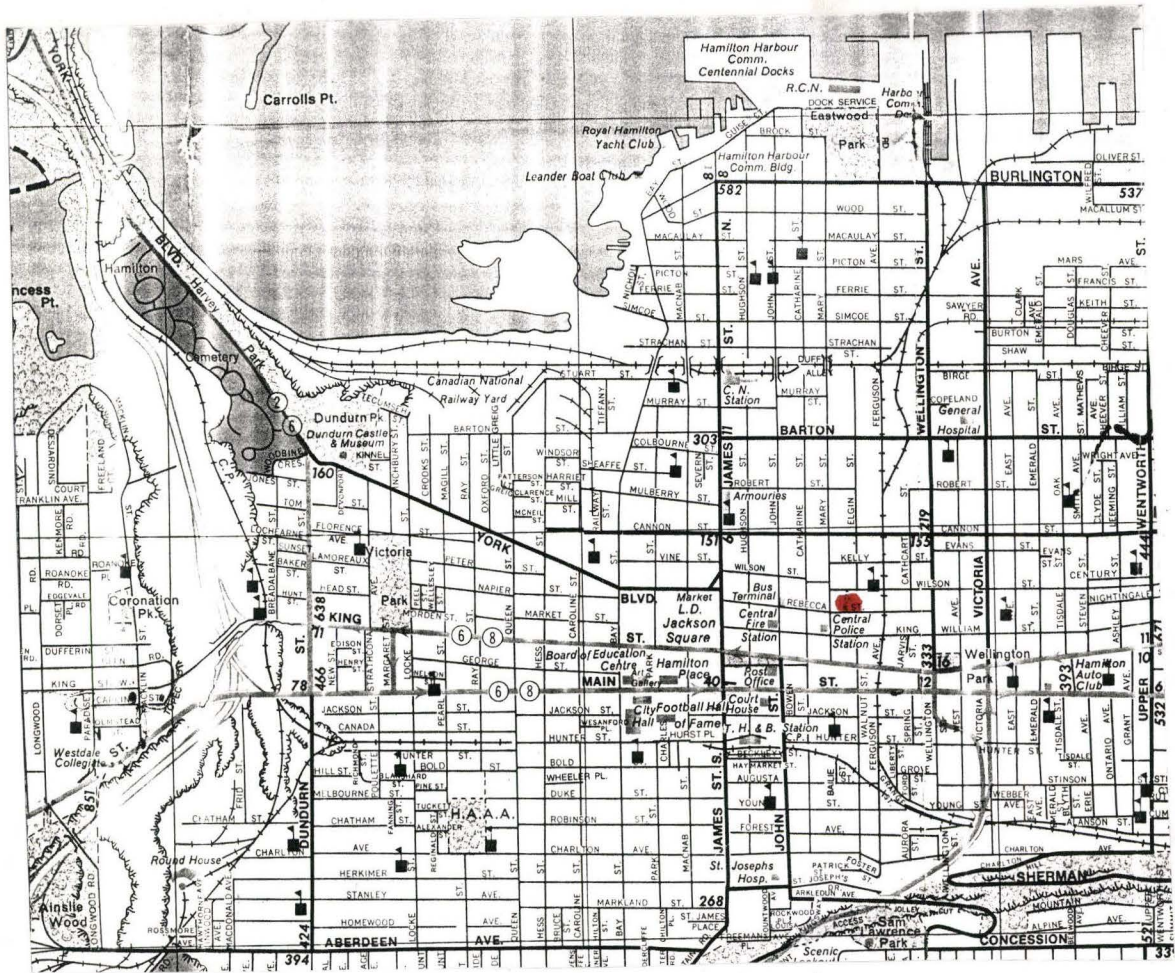
Legend: Location of Hamilton's Housing Help Centre.

SOURCE: Source of map unknown.

Appendix C

Research Questionnaire

PART A:

1. What past involvement have you had in housing advocacy and political organizing around housing issues? (ie. past involvement in housing issues - # of years, organizations involved with and extent of involvement)

2. Do you think that uneven power relationships (i.e. lack of political legitimacy and lack of power to compete in the housing market) limit people's ability to compete for housing and mobilize around housing issues?

3. If you had to list **the most important functions** of the centre, in your opinion what would they be and **why**?

4. How important do you feel **advocacy for social housing** is at the **political level** and **why**?

5. What types of advocacy do you see as being most promising for combatting housing problems?

6. In your opinion, what community needs is the HHC meeting that are not being met by other organizations?

7. To effectively tackle housing affordability, should non-profit housing be a feature of our built environment?

8. What housing strategies do you support to solve the current housing crisis? (ex. market or non-profit)

9. Should housing be treated as a right and a social good, or as a market commodity?
   - why?

10. Who should be responsible for the provision of housing to the homeless and those in danger of being homeless? (ie. gov't, natural mkt forces, charities)

11. Do you consider the HHC to be conservative, liberal or left-wing in their approach to housing issues in comparison to other government funded agencies?

(con't...)

Appendix C (con't.)

   - what reasons do you have for characterizing it that way?
   - do you agree with their approach as you view it?

12. Do you think society has a responsibility to provide housing to all Canadians?
   - if so, what is an acceptable level of provision (ie. a roof or a home?)

13. Why did you get involved in the HHC?

14. What do you hope to contribute to the centre?

15. Do you think the centre is meeting its goals/objectives?

16. Do you think the HHC is a unique service and if so why?

17. Why is the HHC a necessary part of the present social services network?

18. In the long term, what contribution or changes to the present housing crisis do you see the HHC making?

19. Do you think that increasing community consciousness of housing issues will lead to changes in present housing policy and if so why?

20. Do you think that lobbying for changes in government housing policies is necessary and effective?

21. For an organization such as the HHC, do you think that the employees should play a central role in determining the centres future direction, and if so why?

PART B: (Testing for working class background)

Parents:

1. What occupational background were your parents?

2. What household income range would your parents fall in?
(con't...)

Appendix C (con't.)

```
                    a) under $10,000        When a child _____
                    b) 10,000 - 20,000
                    c) 20,000 - 30,000
                    d) 30,000 - 50,000
                    e) 50,000 - 100,000
                    f) over 100,000

                    a) under $10,000        Present day _____
                    b) 10,000 - 20,000
                    c) 20,000 - 30,000
                    d) 30,000 - 50,000
                    e) 50,000 - 100,000
                    f) over 100,000
```

3.   Was this a dual or single income family and if dual
        was it out of choice or financial necessity?

Personal:

4.   What level of formal education have you attained
        (including professional certification)?

5.   What jobs have you worked at?

6.   What has been your lowest personal household income
        when supporting yourself?

```
                    a) under $10,000        Approximate date_____
                    b) 10,000 - 20,000
                    c) 20,000 - 30,000
                    d) 30,000 - 50,000
                    e) 50,000 - 100,000
                    f) over 100,000
```

7.   What is your current household income and is it dual
        or single?

```
                    a) under $10,000            Current _____
                    b) 10,000 - 20,000
                    c) 20,000 - 30,000
                    d) 30,000 - 50,000
                    e) 50,000 - 100,000
                    f) over 100,000
```

(con't...)

Appendix C (con't.)

8.   Have you personally had any negative housing
      experiences or close calls with such an experience?
      If yes, briefly what were they and did they help you
      understand the plight of the homeless and those in
      danger of being homeless?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:

a)   Why was the HHC made an autonomous body?

b)   Who do you think the board should ideally be composed
      of?
      (ie. what interest groups should be represented)

c)   What committee do you think has the most input into
      the direction the centre will take and why?

Appendix D

Strengths and Weaknesses of an Existing Sponsoring Agency Versus a New Board of Directors

EXISTING SPONSORING AGENCY

Strengths:
- already incorporated

Weaknesses:
- "ownership by one agency of a sensitive community service

PARTICULAR SPONSORING AGENCIES:

1. St. Matthew's House
- experience with this type of service
- space to house the Centre
- good history of accessing funding

- identified as a neigh-bourhood service, not a Region-wide service

2. Wesley Urban Ministries
- some space to house the Centre

- structure would allow rel-ative autonomy of Advisory Group

- space at Wesley Centre and Kirkendal-Strathcona not central or store front or accessible
- identified as a service for a particular client group

- has a large program agenda at present and minimum staff component to develop it

3. YWCA
- large number of drop-in visitors

- might have space to house centre

NEW BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Strengths:
-only focus is practical assistance with locating housing

- more autonomy, no con-straints from existing agency policy
(con't...)

Weaknesses:
- need to incorporate: time and cost factors

- may have difficulty finding alternate funding because of newness

Appendix D (con't.)

(Strengths con't.)
- fresh group with incentive
and energy

- not restrained by an exist-
ing agency, can thus play a
strong advocate role

- non-denominational

- can locate centre in most
appropriate location

- generic service, i.e. not
client group, neighbourhood
or gender identified

-housing "resource" vs. client
"service"

SOURCE: Maggie Fischbuch's notes from Social Planning
            Office

Appendix E

Original Housing Help Centre Board of Directors

CHAIRPERSON
Norm Westbury
Alec Murray Real Estate
891 Upper James Street
Hamilton, Ontario
L9C 3A3

VICE-CHAIRPERSON
Barbara Miller
Home Care Program
Victorian Order of Nurses
414 Victoria Avenue North
L8L 5G8

BOARD MEMBERS

Ed Castonguay
Chartered Accountant
(Business Address Unknown)

Cheryl Lafreniere
Martin & Martin Lawyers
P.O. Box 970 - Station 'A'
4 Hughson St. S., 4th Floor
Hamilton, Ontario
L8N 3P9

Peter Lampman
Building Department
City Hall - 3rd Floor
71 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario
L8N 3T4

Brother Richard MacPhee
Good Shepherd Centre
135 Mary Street North
Hamilton, Ontario
L8N 3R1

Canon Joe Rogers
St. Matthew's House
414 Barton Street East
Hamilton, Ontario

Gil Simmons
(Business Address Unknown)

Michael Wheeler
(Retired Professor of Social Work)
(Business Address Not Applicable)

CONSULTANTS

Maggie Fischbuch
Former Housing Officer
Regional Social Services
Hamilton-Wentworth

Lindsey George
Social Planner
Regional Social Services
Hamilton-Wentworth

SOURCE: Housing Help Centre Files

Appendix F

<u>People Research Questionnaire Was Administered To</u>

Shelley Rempel
- Bachelor of Social Work, Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Master of Arts in Social Welfare Policy
- currently working as a community worker and researcher for Hamilton's Housing Help Centre, and member of Centre committees

Kathy Rankin
- Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology
- currently working for a Member of Provincial Parliament in Simcoe, Ontario

Maggie Fischbuch
- Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and currently completing her Master's degree in Social Welfare Policy
- currently working for the Health Priorities Unit of Chedoke-McMaster Hospital, and member of two committees at the Housing Help Centre

Brother Richard McPhee
- Bachelor of Nursing degree
- currently the Executive Director of the Good Shepherd Centre and active on the Housing Help Centres Board of Directors

Norm Westbury
- graduate from an undergraduate program at the University of Toronto
- currently working as a Real Estate Agent and active on the Housing Help Centre's Board of Directors

SOURCE: Interviews with various people involved with the Housing Help Centre

Appendix G

People Involved With the HHC and the Agencies They Were Involved With at the Time:

HOUSING HELP CENTRE WORKING GROUP

Kathy Rankin   - Community Worker, Adolescent Community
                        Care and member of founding staff

Ida Thomas   - Regional Social Services, Support
                        Services Division

Reverend Marty Carl   - Founder and Executive Director of
                        Mission Services

Anne Stewart   - Real Estate Agent

Gary Quart   - Executive Director, Jubilee Consultants
                        (Non-profit Housing Corporation)

Maggie Fischbuch   - Social Planning Division of the
                        Department of Social Services,
                        Hamilton-Wentworth

FOUNDING BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Norm Westbury   - Real estate agent and extensive involvement
                   in community (Foster Parents Association,
                   Mountain Legal Clinic, Child Welfare and
                   Golden Horseshoe Committee)

Barbara Miller - Manager, Home Care Program

Ed Castonguay - Chartered Accountant and active in community
(Resigned)

Cheryl Lafreniere - Family Law Lawyer
(Resigned)

Peter Lampman - Assistant   Commissioner   of   Building
                 Department

Brother Richard McPhee - Executive Director of Good Shepherd
                         Centre

Canon Joe Rodgers - Head of St. Matthew's House, housing for
(Resigned)   low-income people

Michael Wheeler - Retired Professor of Social Work

Gil Simmons - Citizen Activist, involved in community boards
(Resigned)   and committees
(con't...)

Appendix G (con't.)

<u>ADDITIONAL MEMBERS OF THE PRESENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS</u>

Christine Wilson-Whitehouse - Rental coordinator for Victoria
                             Park Community Homes (housing
                             of low-income people).

Shirley Tye - Administrative Assistant, McMaster Association
              of Part-time students. Also brings to the
              Board her experience of raising children as a
              single mother on a low income.

Brian Gough - Accountant and Controller of the Allen-Candy
              firm. Involved in community daycare.

John Wegener - Senior Administrator at Chedoke-McMaster
               Hospital. He brings a management perspective
               to the Board and is involved in one of the
               committees of the Social Planning Council.

Denise Dickie - Public Relations person for CHCH TV and
                therefore brings public relations expertise
                to the Board.

SOURCE: Telephone interview with Walter Mulkewich and
            assistance from Maggie Fischbuch.

Appendix H

Interview Comments on the Ideal Composition
of the Board of Directors

1. - tenants
    - someone who has experienced homelessness
    - staff (at least in an advisory capacity)
    - someone to represent the shelters
    - representative from General Welfare so that they can
    be aware of what policies need to be reviewed and to
    ensure the flow of information from the HHC back to
    welfare administration
    - interest groups (e.g. labour, other poverty groups)

2. - more in the way of housing activists
    - people working in the housing field
    - consumers of housing
    - need more experts on the Board

3. - who the Board should ideally be composed of depends
    on the Chair of the Board as to how big of a deadlock
    might exist
    - the Board should be as diverse as possible. You
    can't have just advocates and people with a social
    conscience
    - a 'reformed' Board member is best, i.e. get him/her
    to appreciate the housing situation

4. - need to have consumer representation; none exists at
    present
    - Boards are more effective when they understand the
    issues and social services that are directly involved
    in services.
    - people outside may bring resources but a Board that
    is in touch with the service will bring a better
    service and will speak in an informed way and be
    advocates for the service.
    - a diversified board is less effective and less
    supportive of the Centre and its' goals.

5. - at some point consumer groups need to be involved,
    but they haven't been up to this point. They're
    involved as committee members but not at the board
    level.

SOURCE: Interview responses from the five people
           interviewed.

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