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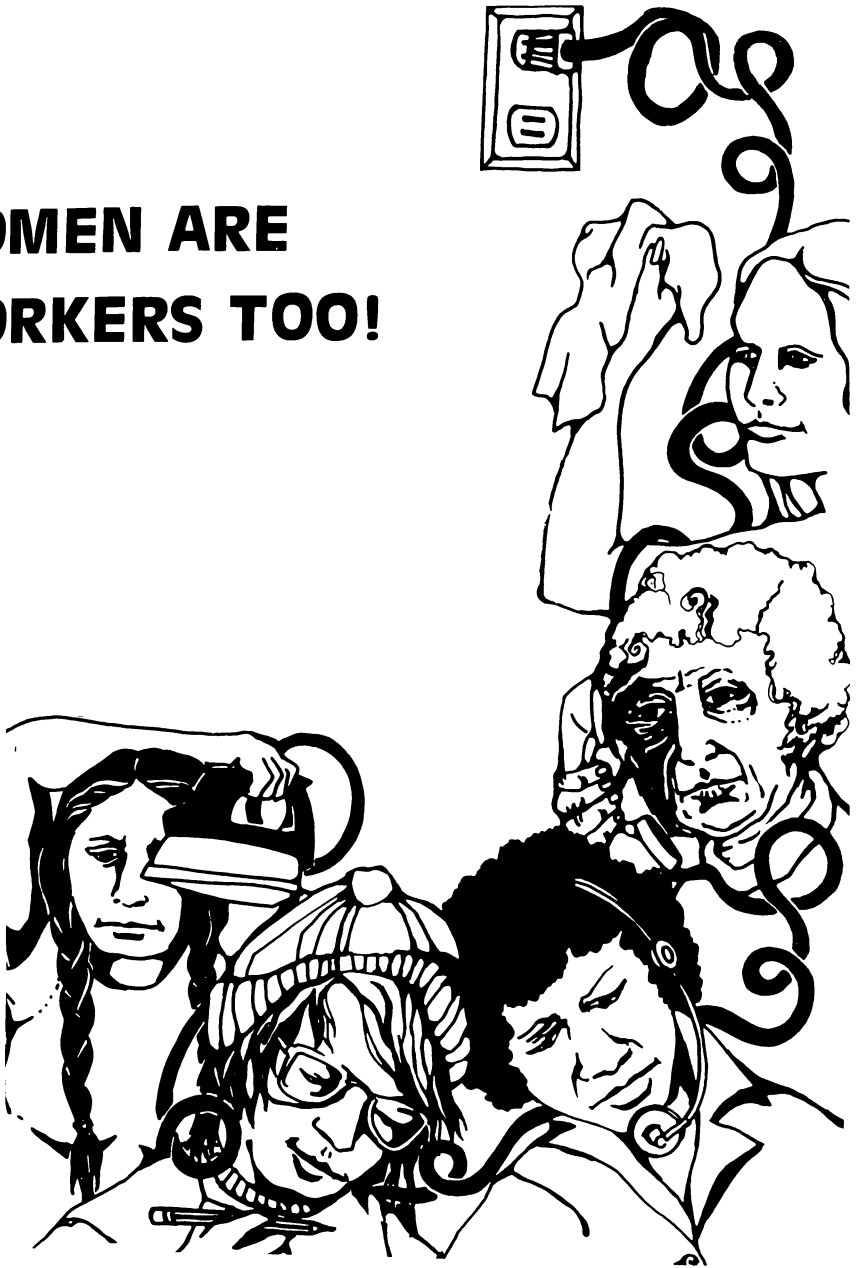
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WOMEN ARE WORKERS TOO!



Editorial

For the first time in the fourteen-year history of the *Activist*, the staff is composed entirely of women. This situation is neither arbitrary nor incidental. It is significant because it manifests both the increasing amount of power which women are gaining for themselves and consequently, the increasingly important role the women's movement is playing in left politics and working class struggles.

The women's movement is not a corollary, aid, support or adjunct to working class struggles; it is a working class struggle! It is neither "relevant" nor "irrelevant" to the movement; it is the movement! We reject the idea of a "woman question", just as we reject that of a "national question", for such ideas imply that women and minorities are somehow peripheral to the movement. The women's movement, like that of minority groups, is an inextricable, vital, central aspect of the struggle for socialism.

The spectrum of goals which the women's movement encompasses, however, is a broad one. We support efforts to improve the position of women under capitalism while maintaining that true liberation can be achieved only through struggling for and building socialism. This issue of the *Activist* focuses exclusively on Wages for Housework because it is the most revolutionary strategy which the women's movement can pursue at this time.

On viewing the struggle of women as a working class and revolutionary struggle, we are rejecting the traditional left definition of the working class. This definition is based on a narrow concept of who produces for capital and who therefore has the power to destroy capital.

The first article in this issue, "The Social Factory", presents a redefinition of the working class, which means a redefinition of the potential forces for revolution. This redefinition is an essential aspect of the Wages for Housework perspective. For we direct our attention and our strategy not only to the factory but also to the community: schools, prisons, kitchen, bedrooms. In working for socialist revolu-

tion we aim, not only for a change in the organization of labor in the factories, but for a radical restructuring of the total society.

The Wages for Housework perspective, by redefining work, the working class, and the process of revolution, is of central importance for all members of the international working class. We address ourselves to women's unpaid labor, but in doing so we begin to uncover all the unpaid labor which the class as a whole performs for capital. Wages for Housework is a struggle, on the part of women, for power; but we demand this power - time and money - not from other members of the class but from capital itself - the state.

We do not seek a redistribution of the wealth which the class already possesses, i.e., women and other unwaged workers taking wealth from men and other waged workers, but rather, we seek the repossession of the wealth which we have created that capital has stolen from us. Through this struggle power relations within the class will be restructured to the benefit of the class as a whole and to the detriment of capital. Thus we see Wages for Housework as a source of strength for the entire class.

However, although our fight is the fight of the whole class, we cannot join with men at this point to wage a "united" struggle for Wages for Housework (see article on the history of our collective in this issue). This would be to simply ignore the divisions within the class which capital has created (divisions which are a source of profound weakness in the class and of great strength for capital), rather than to fight against and eventually to abolish them. In other words, we fight autonomously as women because not until each sector of the class has wrested power for itself from capital can it ally with other sectors of the class from a position of real strength. Only through autonomous struggles can the unity of the class be achieved.



WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK



Great Speckled Bird/epf

*IF WOMEN WERE PAID
FOR ALL WE DO
THERE'D BE A LOT OF WAGES DUE*

Why should a housewife work a 24 hour day, 7 days a week? Why, after all that work, should she get no recognition, and no money she can call her own? Why should women nowadays be forced to go out to work, on top of all we have to do at home? Why should we go home from a job to work in our kitchens for free while men doing overtime are earning extra money?

Some people will say it's because we do this work for ourselves and for our families. *We do.* But a lot of other people are making money out of our labour. If we didn't do housework and raise children, industry, government, and everything else would grind to a halt. The money for wages for housework must come from the government and from all the employers who couldn't do without our work. They may say they can't afford it, but they're holding on to the wealth that we create, which we need now more than ever.

While we're gathering the strength and numbers to win this we will fight for the time and money we're entitled to wherever we can get them.

Women are always struggling for time and money. Women have been protesting and backing up their claims in various ways. Sitting in with children at Social Security and Welfare

Offices, non-payment of rent and utility bills, demanding paid time off from outside jobs to do shopping and to look after the children are just a few examples. Women have learned to fight back.

*No woman should be forced
to depend on a man*



ALL WOMEN ARE HOUSEWIVES

BEGINNINGS

Welfare mothers are women who have already won some money from the government for their work in the home. But welfare money is not nearly enough, it is hardly enough for a woman to live on. But it is money she gets independently from any man. If *all* women demand money for housework, we will have the power to refuse supervision by case workers or inspectors.

The government tries to make us believe that women should be ashamed to be on Welfare; they say these women are lazy, and that they get money for no work. But the only difference between Welfare mothers and all mothers is Welfare mothers have no husband. The money which the government gives a woman on Welfare is not just for her children, it is so she can and will do the work to raise her children. Housework is a full-time job for all of us, and whether we are married or have children, or work outside the home, or not, we *all* want to be paid for this job.



OUR WORK

Housework is a full-time job; we can't punch in or punch out. We are on call from the time we get up in the morning till we go to bed at night. Because our work is unpaid, it is stretched out to cover the entire day. Our time is not our own; we are always cooking, cleaning, fixing, babysitting, shopping, comforting, fighting to make ends meet. In 1975 women are still using a rag to dust the furniture; we are still sweeping our houses with a broom! But because we don't get paid for the work we do, since it is 'natural' to us, nobody cares how long it takes.

When we go out to work because we need money, we are forced to do a double shift. We work two jobs for half the price of one! Because women are used to working without wages, the bosses can pay us less and get away with it. We work in jobs that are extensions of housework, as secretaries, nurses, teachers, waitresses, social workers. On the job we are expected to smile, be sexy, be good listeners, make coffee for our bosses. And at night, we go home to more work, to our full-time job in the home.

OUR "NATURE"

In addition to all our home-making skills, our "natural" woman's role demands that we hold together, both materially and emotionally, the lives of the men with whom we live and work. We are told we're good managers of the *tedious* - family budgeting, day to day conflicts, maintenance of our homes. Whatever our status at the workplace, whether we are secretaries or executives, we are expected to bring with us these "womanly" skills. We bolster our bosses' egos, and keep things running smoothly. We are responsible for both the physical (is there coffee? is the office neat and cheerful?) and spiritual environment in our work both inside and outside the home.

Yes, we care about our families, our mates, our bosses. What we fight are the expectations, and guilt we feel when we put ourselves first. Our role cuts our own throats. When we are good-natured and loving, we are manipulated. When we act upon our own impulses - admit we are tired, display our dissatisfaction - we are condemned as selfish.



GETTING TOGETHER

As housewives we are separated from each other in our many individual homes. Even if we work outside the home we have no time for meetings or just socializing with other workers because we have to rush home to fix dinner or pick up the kids. But as women, we all share the same frustrations because we *all work as housewives*. By finding the time to get together and talk we can explore our common experiences and our differences. We can discover strengths in our various situations; whether we are at home, at an outside job, married or single, mothers or childless, we can use our power in these various situations - *together* - to make changes for all of us. We may have to begin by demanding time *off* from home or office or free daycare for our children just so we can all meet together. *Each step is a struggle* but each struggle builds our power to refuse that work we have been doing all our lives for free. When we demand Wages for Housework, *every step we take together* will make us stronger!

IF WE HAD A WAGE:

- we could spend more on food; high prices means more work for us--we have to search for the cheapest supermarket and then find a hundred ways to make hamburger interesting.
- we could send the drapes to the dry cleaners.
- we could go *out* to dinner when we're tired of cooking.
- we could take a course, or get the education we never got before.
- we could send our children to camp for the summer.
- we could buy a washing machine instead of going to the laundromat.
- our husbands could take a day off to be with the family.
- we would have the choice whether or not to work outside the home.
- we would have the money to take a bus and leave for a while (and take a *real* vacation) or leave for good.
- we would have the choice *not* to have children or to be able to afford *to have* children.
- men would realize that even though we love them, doing their housework is work and we *don't love it!*

MONEY IS POWER!

MONEY IS CHOICE!



ALL OVER THE WORLD WOMEN ARE FIGHTING AGAINST THE WORK WE DO

In England: Women are refusing to pay rent on the houses they have kept clean for years. When the government tried to take the family allowance away from women, a national campaign was mounted which stopped them.

In Germany: Three thousand women went out on strike to win one paid day a week to do their shopping and laundry, etc.

In the U.S.A.: Women in a psychiatric hospital in New York demanded and won one hour off a week to organize for better wages. When that wasn't enough they demanded and won another hour.

In Canada: In Ottawa secretaries went out demanding to be paid for the amount of work they do rather than by the status of their bosses. In Toronto the Mother-Led Union, an organization of welfare mothers, is demanding parity with foster mothers who get a lot more money for the same work.

In Northern Ireland: Women are waging rent strikes and are self-reducing utility rates. They are daily facing the violence of British troops and although hundreds of women have been jailed, resistance is growing.

In Spain: Women are in the forefront in the resistance against fascism. They face torture and death. Two feminists have recently been accused of assassinating the prime minister.

In Italy: Some women in Trento are on trial for announcing that they have had abortions. An abortion clinic was closed in Florence and the women and doctors arrested. Ten-thousand women marched in protest in Rome.

In India: The State is bribing women with transistor radios to submit to sterilization and birth control. Internationally women want the right to choose whether or not to have children.



**WE ARE ALL TEACHERS, SECRETARIES, NURSES, SOCIAL WORKERS,
CLEANERS, PROSTITUTES, WAITRESSES, COOKS, CHILD CARE WORKERS**

Portrait of a Canadian Housewife

Name: B.W. **Nationality:** Canadian; **Descent:** French and Irish; **Occupation:** Housewife and mother; **Husband:** Chrysler worker.

Q: How many people do you keep house for?

A: I keep house for five; that includes my husband, my two children, myself and my brother. My children are five and three, two boys. No one else besides myself does any housework. Absolutely no one.

Q: Does your brother give you any money for living here?

A: My brother pays twenty dollars a week to live with us. I do all his laundry, clean his room every day, and change the bed two or three times a week? he is particular and super clean, and he has to have his bed changed often. His room has to be cleaned every day, and on top of that – his laundry – well! He changes quite a bit, and then, plus his working clothes (tar).

He is a roofer, and I have to scrub those out. Every time I wash those clothes I end up with tar pitted all over my washer and dryer. Plus I have to make his lunch. This alone runs me about six dollars a week. He takes a bath here, sometimes twice a day, most of the times once a day. And I supply his razor blades, his shampoo and he washes his hair every night, sometimes twice a night.

Now, you start thinking, I buy him his bubble bath, I buy him his creme rinse, he uses that too, so you figure out that runs me, I'd say, two, three, four, an additional five dollars a month for that, and that doesn't include the water that he uses for his bath each night.

Q: And he eats here too, doesn't he?

A: No, he doesn't eat meals here. He eats out at a restaurant, but I make his lunches. So, you figure between his lunches, and the staples that I buy – his shampoo and stuff like that – I really only make about ten dollars off of him a week. That's all I get for doing all his laundry and cleaning his room and all that – that's all I get.

Q: How much is your average food bill? For one week?

A: My average food bill for one week is about \$55 without any snacks. Last year at the same time I bought the same amount of food, only I used to buy a barrel of chips a week and a case of coke a week; the case of coke was \$2.29 and the chips were \$.99, which they are \$1.15 now and there is way less ounces in it than there was a year ago. And my grocery bill was \$35. Today it's costing me \$55 without any snacks. No nuts, no potato chips, no pop, no nothing.

This is an interview with a housewife from Windsor, Ontario. Copies of the questionnaire are available from the Wages for Housework Collective, 4316 Huron Line Road, Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

I make my kids do without. I used to buy them a lot more chocolate bars, and stuff like that, but they have to do without now, because we just can't afford it. I never have a meal of meat left over for the next night. Never. And I'd say a dollar of that a week goes for cat food. That is about all. Plus my washing soap, and stuff like that. But most of it is food, and it's damn expensive. I think it's horrible.

Q: What does your housework consist of?

A: What are all the things that I do in one week? OK. Every day I have to vacuum two rugs, I have to dust all the furniture and move all the knickknacks. Every day. I never, never can do a day without it, because the kids running in and out, and I've got people coming in and out, company, it has to be done. And I've got eight rooms and a bathroom to clean every day, and that's a lot of furniture to dust.

And I've got to do my fridge and stove every single day. Sometimes I cook four meals a day, and then you turn around and every day I have to wash my kitchen floor. Never a day do I go without washing my kitchen floor and washing the whole table set, chairs and everything. And I don't go one day, and I can honestly say this, without doing three to four loads of washing a day.

Then every third day I have to cut the grass and we've got a hundred by a hundred foot lot and that's a lot of grass to cut. It usually takes me two to three hours, plus all the flower beds that have to be done that day. Plus the garden – that's all the weeding. So that's usually a whole day shot just for the outside. And the pool – I have to do that every second day, and that takes two hours. So that's what – three times a week that I have to do the outside work, then I rush like hell to get the inside work done, and rush like hell to do the daily what I just said there. To do it inside of here.

Q: And where is your husband in all this?

A: He's at work. He works seven days a week so we can just live, just live! Because we're not buying any luxuries at all. We can't afford them at all. So I have to do the work that he normally does. In order so that he can live and make money so that we can live.

Q: What about ironing?

A: I do ironing, oh let me see, not very often, because with my dryer a lot of things are permanent press. But I do a lot of sewing, and that calls for a lot of the ironing. That takes a lot of time too. At least once a week, no joke, I have to do all my windows, inside and outside, because there is a lot of traffic on this road and the dust is just unbelievable. When you just turn the light on at night and you can see all the dust and the windows are spotted, it looks like hell, eh?

And then that doesn't include every three months all my drapes have to come down, all my ceilings have to be mopped down. I wash the drapes. I could clean them at a drapery cleaner, but to save money I wash them myself. I have to iron all of them.

Q: What about walls? Do you wash walls?

A: I wash my walls every three months regardless. And every month I strip my floor of the wax, and re wax it again and keep it going nice every day. But four times a year I have a big cleaning, and the big cleaning takes me two weeks to get it all done, and that includes all the cleaning out of cupboards, and drawers, and stuff like this.

And there is always painting to do, eh? Once a year all the outside has to be painted and I do that. Tom doesn't lift a paint brush, he doesn't have time to. And then there is always, once a year, all these ceilings have to be painted. I paint all these ceilings myself, all the trim work, all of it.

My bedroom furniture is all Goodwill stuff. It's just junk, and I can't afford anything better, so I paint it every year to make it look nice. Twice a year I have to shampoo all my carpets, because if I don't they look bad, and things get spilt on them. And twice a year you've got to shampoo all your upholstered furniture and I do all of it.

Let me see what else I do. And that doesn't include any trimming of the trees, and picking of the stuff that I do also. So I do all the planting, all the harvesting of everything. I do all the freezing and canning. I think freezing, actually, is more work than canning. Because you have to cook everything for so long, and prepare it just like you were going to feed your family that night with it before you can put it in the freezer. A lot of things, like the meat and the cabbage rolls, you can't put that all in raw, it won't freeze good. It means a hell of a lot of work at the time. And even later when you do take out some of this stuff, you still have to set your table, you still have your dishes to do.



I do dishes ten times a day, if I don't do them once. At least. All this doesn't include washing of the car and the truck. I don't do the truck — it's his baby. You've got to keep that car clean. I can't every day.

But I'd say the worst thing I have to do is keeping up with the bathroom. I can't take more than ten minutes for my own personal bath. I never have time to. I go from the time I get up in the morning to the time I go to bed, and sometimes I hold myself from going to the bathroom because I don't have time to go to the bathroom. And if that sounds ridiculous, I know it does, but it's the truth. Because if I'm doing something and I let it go or something. I find myself that sometimes I don't even answer the telephone. That is bad, you know.

And then when you've got someone coming over like company, well, then that's a real big hassle. You have to go through all your good dishes, wash them all, iron your table cloths, get it really looking superb, and it takes you all day long just for doing all of this, and you don't get any of your other housework done. You have double to do all the next day and then you don't get caught up for a whole week. And no one stays to clean up, after the visit. There is only you that does.

Q: Would you consider the care and raising of children as part of housework?

A: I would rate them a day's work just in themselves. Just the two of them alone. I pity anybody that's got more than two kids. I pity anybody that's got just one, because at least with two, they have somebody else to play with. But I think children themselves are a day's work in themselves, because they are always, always into something, or else they want something.

They come in and they're outside playing, they're out there for half an hour, they come in and they're filthy. You have to change them completely right through to the underwear and give them a bath. And they always want something to eat. Let's face it, they're growing you know, they have to have something to eat constantly. You're just sitting down, they come in and they want something, you have to get up again.

You're never allowed time to relax for yourself. And I've seen me many times where I've neglected them because I'm busy doing something else, and that's not good. Why should this other thing that I'm doing take away my time for my kids?

It does though, because it has to be done. If it's not done, somebody's going to come in here, and they're going to stick to the floor and what are they going to think? And not only that but it ruins your Goddamn floor! They walk in here, "Holy Christ, what the hell does she do all day?" They don't care if you can be looking like a queen. They don't look at that. You can be looking like a mess, but if your kids and your husband look well fed, and they're nice and clean with clean clothes on, and your house is nice and clean, well, who cares what she looks like?

Your kids, your husband, and your house are reflected on you. But you're the one who feels it. I've been trying to grow my nails, and it's been a real big hassle. Whenever my husband does any remodelling or repairing in the house, which is usually once a month, I work right along side of him, and get it done, and of course my hands just look like a disaster. Dishwashing doesn't wreck your hands half the time like some of these other things do.

My hands are all full of black from peeling vegetables and things all week. So how are you supposed to have nice hands; and how is your husband supposed to come home, so that you'll get him to like you? You'll be in the car with him riding down the street and you'll see this real sharp looking girl, of course she's single, and she looks like a million dollars. Boy, why can't you look like that? Why does she look like that and you don't? Well, I'll tell you — what does she do?

This is what it is — if I didn't have all of this work to do, I could spend all day long fixing my hair. Look at me today, I look like a piece of shit, it's true. You know, I could be curling my hair, I could put makeup on and have long beautiful nails, really work at myself. But how are you supposed to work at yourself when you have so many other things to do? At the end of the night all you can do is take a ten-minute bath and get the hell to bed. And then you're supposed to be in bed and you're supposed to work — all ready to make love. All you feel like doing is putting on a flannelette nightgown and going the hell to sleep. It's true, it really is, and I know so many women feel like this.

Q: Do you see housework as women's work?

A: Why do *women* have to do the housework, and why do half of the time these women have to go outside of the house and work also? They have to come home and do their housework too, and their husband's work. But she's working eight hours, but the husband comes home, and he does absolutely nothing. Just lays down, reads his paper, looks at the idiot box, that's about it.

She comes home, she has to start the washing — who's going to afford to have somebody come in and do this for them? You have somebody come in and do all the work that I would do in one normal day, I would say that I would have to pay her at least \$75 a week, to do all of my work, and I don't think it would be done exactly how I like it. I wouldn't do anybody else's housework for under \$75 a week, and I wouldn't take care of the kids along with it, no, I wouldn't. I think that men could do housework just as well as women could. Because pretty well anything that a man does, like physical work, with his hands and stuff, a lot of things I can do too.

I can change a tire, let's see, what else? I put up a fence with him. I dug for the swimming pool, I dug for the patio. Plus the sand for the patio had to be mixed with cement, I did all of that myself, and it was all in by the time he got home from work. So I think pretty well anything that a man does I could handle it. I'm not saying I could lift a refrigerator, but if he were on the other end of it I could lift

it just as well as another man could, because I have before, so I think that men could do housework just as well as women.

They just think it's fifi, you know. It isn't because if you really get right down into it, I've seen myself really sweat doing this place. To really keep it nice and clean and everything else, you've got to work at it, you've got to sweat — it's a lot of work. But what else are you going to do, who's going to do it for you? They've got to live, and you can't live like a pig. You have to clean it, and who's going to do it if you don't?

Well, I worked out two years ago, this is really something, listen to this. I went out to work, and worked just part-time, three to four days a week, from 4:30 in the afternoon until 10 o'clock at night. I worked at the snack bar at the South Windsor Arena down the street. Now I would get up about quarter to seven and I'd rush like hell to get everything done in this house. And by a quarter to four I was finished, and I would hurry up, and fluff my hair, wash my face and brush my teeth. I'd run like hell to get supper on this table for when my husband pulled in the driveway at 4:20. He had to be right on the nose, because I had to be there for 4:30, it was a five minute drive.

But that meant that I didn't get supper, I didn't get lunch, and I didn't get breakfast. So, I'd leave the table all ready with the food, and I'd leave my meal to rush like hell to go to work. When I'm at work, I'd never get a break, not even for five minutes does someone come in and relieve you. When I started I was getting \$1.75 an hour, I had to wait on sometimes 800 kids, in that short time, plus I had 20 minutes at the end of the night and I had to total up all the money, roll it, bring it into the office, and clean the whole bloody snack bar, wash the floor, all the machines, and everything before 10 o'clock. Then rush like hell to get out of that place because they closed at 10 o'clock; you'd get locked in, if you didn't hurry up out of there. For \$1.75 an hour!

“In order for a woman to go out and work, to hire somebody in her home to do the housework, and to make it profitable so that she wants to work, she'd have to make \$200 a week.”

I would bring home \$18 clear a week. For like four days work which was like a whole days work, believe me, after what I had done here (at home). And I'd get paid every two weeks. Then after a few months, it went up to \$2 an hour, well, that was a little better pay, but it brought my check up to \$22, \$23, and I got paid every two weeks, which made it about \$46. Well, it helped out at the time, but at the end of the year, at income tax time (we usually get about \$600 back income tax), my working screwed my

husband's income tax so that we only got \$23 back. So what did it pay me to work? I worked for absolutely nothing! I got free pop-corn out of the deal. It wasn't worth it.

So in order for a woman to go out and work, to hire somebody in her home to do the housework, and to make it profitable so that she wants to work, she'd have to make \$200 a week. Because — big deal! — hat am I going to do with \$23 for four days? Noboo, even babysit for me for four days for \$23. And sometimes I had to have my brother babysit. Well, he'd babysit for \$2 a night, and when my husband was on afternoons that was for four nights. So that was \$8 I had to give him. What did I end up with when I was making \$18? \$10! Then my gas to go there and back, it was senseless. Then my kids didn't see me, stuff like that. I didn't get to see my husband at all, not at all. He'd walk down to the Arena, sometimes with the kids in the buggy, so that he could spend a little while with me over there.

It's no wonder I got sick and it's no wonder they say women are nuts, fickle, and they don't know what they want. It's no wonder, Christ Almighty, they've got so much to do. And besides all that, I've got to manage the money too. And that is one hell of a headache, when you figure you have to take your husband's check and you've got \$150 in bills and he brings home a \$145 check, you've got to skimp on the groceries in order to make everything balance. I don't even get \$5 a week allowance. With my brother's money that I get from him, which equals out to about \$10 a week, that just about covers my cigarettes, and my time for working up there.

You know, I don't figure \$10 a week is very much money for what I do for him. But he compliments me on everything, that's one thing I can say for my brother, he always says, "I got clean clothes constantly, and my room's always clean." But he's getting away cheap. And it's all on my back.

Q: What is your attitude towards housework?

A: My attitude towards housework? Oh boy! Sometimes, when I get up in the morning and I see the house all messed and everything, I just go like hell and work all day to clean it. When I'm all done at the end of the day and see how spottless it looks, I feel good. Then when I wake up the next morning and I see it right back in the same way it was the day before, and I have to start all over, I hate it. God-damn it, I hate it.

I just feel that there's nothing to break the monotony. You've got to do this, and you've got to do that, and it's got to be done every day, and there's no breaking of it. I can't even take, sometimes an hour for a coffee with the girls. Oh, I can't, I've got to wash my floor, it's got to be done, my feet are sticking to it. You know, we spilt milk this morning or the kids spilt this, or my husband did this. If it only had to be done once a week, I wouldn't mind at all. But having to be done every day, I can honestly say there are more important things I would rather do.

Q: What about when you are sick?

A: Being sick, is what mainly bothers me about being a wife and being a mother. How many times a year do I spend up with my two kids when they're sick? One'll get sick and I'll spend up three days and three nights with absolutely no sleep whatsoever. And I have to go through the same routine every day anyway. I don't get any nap in the afternoon, or anything, only to have a second kid catch whatever the first kid had. Then I'm three days up with him. Then my husband comes home from work and he catches the flu. He's home for a day or two days. "Bring me tea, or bring me soup." He lies in bed, reads the paper, watches the boob tube.

And what do I do when I'm sick? "Are you getting up? Are you going to make supper? What's going on here, anyhow?" Jesus Christ, I don't get to stay in bed for even an hour, when I'm sick. I find that when I have the flu, sometimes I have it for two weeks. I can't get rid of it because you can't just lay in bed and drink soup and broth and juice and get rid of it. You have to keep on going. Oh God, I don't know. I think that's for the birds.

Q: What is your attitude towards raising children? How do you feel about them — are you young so you must have to keep a constant watch on them inside and out?

A: The kids don't go more than two houses over on this side and one over on the other side. I have to keep an eye on them at least every 20 minutes. This is a really busy highway and there are ditches and a pond in the back. They're really amazed by this junk, eh? There are frogs in the pond and they love this shit. But, I've seen cars go down this road and hit the shoulder? they just go right off. If one of the kids was ever there, they'd be a goner. So I've got to watch them really close because they're not that old. I couldn't trust them for very long, oh no!

"I want this, I want that, do that for me, do this for me." Not that I mind. If I had absolutely nothing, no housework to do, only my kids and my meals, I would be happy. If only I could spend all my time with my kids and really do for them what I want to do. They miss out on a lot and I miss out on a lot, because I don't get to play with them. I don't even get to play with them a half an hour some days; other days, I'll not do something in order to do something with them.

You can't always be telling them, "Get the hell out of here, I've got to do this or that." They're going to think, "Jeez, what does she like better, the house or me?" That's the way it is. Raising children is a job all in itself, it really is. They're a joy but they're a lot of problems sometimes. I know, just in the last couple of weeks my oldest has been sick two nights, my youngest was sick one night; I was sick two nights, up all night. So I've had hardly any sleep this week at all. That's no good.

You get up the next day and who feels like plunging into washing floors and this sort of thing. Even if you did let the washing of the floor go and the vacuuming, you have to

make your meals, you have to do your dishes and you have to make your beds. You're not going to let your beds go unmade and get into that dirty bed. And you've got to keep up the washing. If I didn't wash every day my kids wouldn't have clothes on their backs to put on the next day. They've only got two outfits to wear for play and one outfit to wear for good. Who can afford to buy their kids more than that? It costs a fortune.

But I'd say housework is a real bummer, it really is. I'd love to have a maid in here. I would like to go out and seek a career or something. I would like that. But most of the other times I'd like to be with my kids and I'd like to be with my husband too. We've been married six years and I haven't been with him hardly at all. We never had a honeymoon. We've never gone away for even a whole day. We've never slept over anywhere, for over night, not once. In five years that we've had the kids, we've never had the kids babysat overnight. We've had them every day. I've had them, my husband doesn't have them.

He comes home from work after working seven days a week and he doesn't feel like playing with the kids. It's been "get the hell out of here" you know. A father should have, especially with two boys like I have, a really good



Kathe Kollwitz

relationship with them. But after working seven days a week who feels like coming home and playing with their kids? They just want to sleep and relax. But they can't realize that women need to relax. Sometimes I never do. A lot of times I'll be reading a magazine or something, like a book or I'll look at the paper once in a while, and I'll see a hair style I like, or this or that I'd like to try. Shit, I ain't got an hour to spend with my hair. You cut it short and you let it hang straight as long as it's clean. That's all you care about.

You can't look like a million dollars all the time. You just can't. And that's why a lot of women are fat. From the boredom of housework, from the every day drudgery. I think that 80% of married women are fat, I think so, and I think that housework has a lot to do with it. The husband doesn't understand that the wife needs to relax. She needs some time for herself. Not that I'm saying that it is his fault; he has to work too. I think this has a lot to do with women being fat.

I know it has a lot to do with me being fat. I'm not that fat, but I am a lot fatter than I would like to be. I looked like a model when I was single. My hair was always done, my nails done, my makeup on, and always beautiful clothes. And now what have I got? I haven't got anything. I've got two kids and a cat. And a husband that's home half of the time, if that. With me it's that I don't have time to eat right. I don't have time to sit here and say, "Well, for lunch now I'm going to make myself a tuna salad and a slice of tomato, and fix your plate all nice and pretty, so that you can, you know — shit! So instead, I'll grab a chocolate bar. Or a bottle of coke and a bag of chips.

I've seen myself eat a bag of chips for my meals during the day while I'm passing the vacuum or something because I can do it while I'm working. Whereas, if you've got to sit there and cut something up in a plate to eat it then you can't be vacuuming or something else. Never ever have I seen a woman sit down at the supper table and absolutely sit through her meal. That's why I get up from the table and sometimes I've got indigestion so bad. By the time you get to eat, it's cold and who the hell wants to eat it?

So you end up at the end of the night (your husband's out working again or something because mine is. He goes back to work again) sitting there and all of a sudden I realize that I'm hungry, so while I'm doing the washing or something I grab another bag of chips. This is what I do. Perfectly honest. But I'm nervous all the time. I'm nervous because I can't find any time of the week or the day or even out of the month that is absolutely mine. Never. Once, when I was sick (I was very sick. I couldn't lift my head off the pillow) I had my husband stay home from work. He had to lie. What was he going to do? Call up and say, "My wife is sick and I have to stay home and take care of the kids"? So he said, "personal business."

He stayed home and took care of the kids and what did he do? Just sat in the TV room and watched TV and read the paper all day. I was laying in bed and here's the kids, "Mommy, Mommy, are you sleeping, Mommy? When are

you going to get up? What are we having for supper?" I didn't get to rest at all. I finally got up and I told him, I said, "Why don't you get the fuck to work." "You'd be better off at work."

Q: What about daycare? Do you think it would help our kids one day a week, so that we could have a day when we wanted to do something. I want to take a sewing course, because I'd like to sew for my family to save the money. Not that I want to sew that bad because it's a lot of work and it's a lot of tension, but to save the money you're going to make your family's clothes. I'd like to go to that course, but what am I supposed to do with the kids? It's not only the money to pay, but it's not easy to find somebody who will take care of them unless you pay them top dollar.

"If we could have somewhere where we could put our kids one day a week, so that we could have a day when we wanted to do something..."

So you take sewing lessons and it costs you \$5 every time that you go, plus the cost of the lessons and transportation. So a lot of women just figure they can't afford it, they have to stay home. And there is where they get in their rut. They can't afford it. They don't have anyone to take care of the kids. What am I going to do with the kids?

Q: Do you think women should be paid for housework? Is it valid work deserving of a wage?

A: I think that women should be paid for housework, definitely, because I think that housework is just as hard as any other goddamn job that there is going, if not harder. It's more time consuming. My God, I've seen me go, well, on a bad day, I'd say I go fifteen hours straight a day. I usually get about six or seven hours sleep a night. Maybe once a month I'll catch up and I'll get eight or nine hours. Yeah, that's about all I get. So I think that definitely it is worth it.

Q: In our society work is looked upon as valid or real only when you receive a wage for it. So with women in the home doing work that isn't waged, you get questions like, "What did you do all day?" assuming that no work is being done. Do you think the wage would help with struggles with husbands, etc?

A: I know a lot of women! I have a lot of friends around here; I have a lot of relatives, my aunts and stuff like this; and they all have homes and kids and husbands too, and I know a lot of them that are really a whizz in the house, that keep their house going nice and everything else. But they keep it going all the time. A lot of times I'll tell my husband, "What the hell am I doing? I'm doing this day after day, seven days a week. I never get a vacation. I never get a day off."

My husband will say, "It's my day off today, why do I have to cut the grass?" And I'll say, "When the hell do I get my day off?" I never get a day off. Very, very seldom. Once in a while he'll take me out to dinner. Three hours, big deal! I think women should be paid for what they do at home, which is very deserving of a pay. I think so. It's a lot of work. It takes up a lot of time.

I mean, I'm a human being. I'm a woman, and I feel that I should have some time to myself to be able to do some things that I like to do. And I'm not. I'm doing all the things for my kids and for my husband, and I'm not getting anything out of it, except seeing them look nice and seeing the house look nice. But what do I look like and what do I feel like?

Q: How much should we be paid? Is it possible?

A: Well, I don't know if it is possible for us to be paid, but if it isn't I think it should damn well be made possible. How much? Let me see. I would say I would have to — if someone offered me, or if I was to do this for somebody else, (what I am doing right now) it's hard to say what I think it would be worth. If I did exactly what I do in this house, the lawn and everything like that, they'd have to give me a good \$100 a week. \$75 to \$100 a week, and that doesn't include taking care of the kids. With the kids, I'd say I'd have to have \$100 a week. And I'd do it damn well.

Then you would have some money. I would have money to hire a woman maybe for a day to come in and take care of my kids and my house. And it would maybe take care of \$25 of that money. But I'd be able to take care of me for once. I mean what am I living for? Sure, I had a childhood, which wasn't that hot-shit, believe me. I was married at the age of 18, and not because I had to be married either. I got married because I thought, you know, like a lot of women think. They love the guy, their dreamboat, we're going to have a nice little house, just the two of us, yeah!

Bang, here comes the kids, and you start finding out what the old man's like when he comes home from work, and what you have to do all day long. So here I am at the age of 24 and I feel like I don't have anything. I've got kids, a husband, a house, that's all. But me? What am I here for? Just to cook and clean and take care of kids and that. Don't I ever get time to enjoy something that I want to do? That's how I feel.

Q: Does this affect your relationship with your kids?

A: A lot of time I take it out on the kids. No wonder there are a lot of kids who are beaten. But if a man would ever stay up like I did with my second-born kid! When he was born, he had his days mixed up with his nights. I'll never forget it. My two-year old would be up all day and sleep all night, and my baby would be sleeping all day and up all night. For two solid weeks I didn't sleep at all and all that baby did at night was cry.

Show me a man who would go and spend two weeks every night with a baby crying. He'd kill himself or kill the baby. That's why I think a lot of women end up beating their kids. I haven't. I've given them darn good spankings

and spankings where it counts, on the backside and on the hands and that. But I can honestly say that I've never beaten them. I have to catch myself though. A lot of times, when they cry for hours and hours, for no reason, I could really – they really bring out the animal in you.

You've got to really keep a hold of yourself, and keep telling yourself, "They're only little. They don't know any better." But I can see why a lot of women have beat their kids. Because women don't have time, they have fuck-all time for themselves. I feel like I'm on this earth and in this house to just work and work and work and I never get any pleasure to go out and buy myself an outfit.

You go into a goddamn store. You've only got about an hour and you've got to get yourself a new outfit because you need it. I don't buy clothes because I want clothes (which I do want them, but I can't afford them), but I do go out if I need a new outfit. I need a new pair of slacks. You go into these stores. But what am I doing here? I have dishes to do at home, I have this to do at home, therefore you rush like hell in that store, at least I do, to get the hell home. Then I end up home here with something I don't like.

And I've got the kids with me in the store and who the hell can shop for an outfit with two kids? They're all over the store. You've got to scream and yell, "Where are you? What are you doing? Get the hell over here! Come on, give me your hand!" You have to bring them in the dressing room with you and they're all eyes. "What's this? What's that?" You're a nervous wreck. I end up coming home with bugged all.

"I think that women should be paid for housework, definitely, because I think that housework is just as hard as any other goddamn job that there is going, if not harder."

If I was paid for what I was doing here, I feel that it would be more worth doing it. I'd be working for something. I'd be working for money. I mean, what is this world all about? Today, it's money. Money for this, money for that. Christ, it even costs you a dollar to buy a paper anymore, damn near. It's \$.90. You give the paper boy a dollar and he says, "Well, you don't want the dime back, do you?" It's only a dime, what the hell is a dime? You can't even buy a chocolate bar for a dime.

So I think \$100 a week, that's a steal! Not to count on the side, you're practically a prostitute too. You might as well say so, except you don't get paid for it. You've got to be good in bed and good all over. It's true! Boy, if you add it up (the sex that I give out every week), and I'd say I'm good for at least \$5 or \$10 a night, I'd be worth \$125 a week at least. And on a night that he really feels like fool-

ing around, boy I'm worth a lot more! And I firmly am telling the truth.

Q: What would you do with the wage?

A: I think that once a week I would go out. One day out of every week, or even one day out of every two weeks would be good enough for me, and I would take exactly the whole day off. The whole day! I would have a bubble bath; I'd do my nails; I'd curl my hair; I'd put on make-up; get all dolled up. I'd maybe go out shopping all day and have lunch out. I'd pay a babysitter, someone to take care of my house while I was gone for the day. I would do that to get a break; that I need.

And I'd get a lot of things that I need; there are a lot of things that I need. I've seen me go with holes in my underpants, even, because I can't afford to buy underpants. I would get a lot of clothes that I need. I'm not an extravagant buyer. If I had an unexpected bill come in, (we have so many of them and they end up unpaid), I'd help with that. I wouldn't take the money and blow it. I'd get the things that made me feel good, things that I needed. I run out of make-up and this and that. I go through slippers an awful lot, because I'm in the house all the time. What else are you supposed to wear? You don't want to wear shoes and scuff up your floors that you just did.

But I've seen me many times go without these things, and then I get mad. What the hell am I doing here every day and I can't even buy a pair of goddamn slippers or I can't buy a goddamn bra? I've seen me go without a lot of things. And I tell my husband, "What am I good for all day? What do I have to do? I've got to work like this all day just to get fed, have my food, have a roof over my head, because that's all that I'm getting, and that really is just existing. That's not living, and I don't think that God put us on this earth just to exist.

There wouldn't be all the luxuries today that there are, and there are a lot of them, and I haven't got any of them. I've even seen myself wanting to get a bicycle for exercise and go out for a bike ride. But where am I going to go? What am I supposed to do? Put the two kids on a bike? I can't do that when they're little like that. I'd love to go for a bike ride and I'm crazy about horses. I'd love to go for a horseback ride. What am I supposed to do with the kids? I've got to take the kids with me, and if I've got to take the kids with me, I might as well forget it. I'd rather stay home. It isn't a rest. They are worse somewhere else than they are at home and every kid is like that. But that's what I'd do with my money. I'd have fun with it. I'd use it for things that I need. Then I'd feel that I'm working for something.

Q: Do you have any money of your own? Do you receive the baby bonus?

A: I don't have any money of my own. The baby bonus? OK, big deal. Here's another thing, this is fucking stupid, this baby bonus. First off, when I first got it, I was getting six dollars a kid, twelve dollars in all. So until January 1st I was getting \$12. That didn't even buy a pair of pants and a shirt for one kid a month, and the kids go through a lot of

clothes, they grow so fast and also they wreck them fast.

Then, if you're going to buy them something good you've got to spend \$20 for a pair of pants and a shirt. Easy you can spend that! A lot of times you can't even get a pair of shoes for \$12. So what we did with the baby bonus (there's six dollars for each kid) was to take out a life insurance plan for each of the kids. The one life insurance plan for the oldest is six dollars and thirty cents, and for the youngest (because he was a few years later it went up) is seven dollars and some cents. So the baby bonus didn't even cover that. This is a life insurance policy that they can keep when they're older, right through until they're 65. They'll be insured if they want to keep it up. Or if they don't, at the age of 21 they can cash it in for one or two thousand. I think it will be \$2,500. So the baby bonus was fucked for me.

So now we're getting \$20 for each child, \$40 a month. Big deal. OK, so we're getting \$40 a month. What am I doing with it? I'm paying the life insurance with it. What do I have left over? \$26 a month. OK. It's going to cost you at the end of the year because you've got to pay income tax on the money, so you're going to have to pay almost all of it back to the goddamn government. So what is the baby bonus helping? It's not helping anything.

That baby bonus, so God help me, should be tax free! For \$20 a child, you figure, even \$26 a month, I could get them one outfit for one kid one month, or each a pair of shoes the next month. That would be great. But if I'm going to pay at the end of the year then all I should do is take the \$26 I have left over and save it to pay back to the government at the end of the year. So what good is it? Good for shit. So if we got a wage, it would definitely have to be not taxed. The government gets enough of our money. They really do. Well, that's how I feel about the thing.

Q: If the government was to incorporate this money into your husband's wage, how would you feel?

A: If it was on my husband's wage, it would be the same thing. I would have to put the money on the insurance policies and take the \$26 and put it in the bank and pay it back to them. That's what it would end up to be. I think that is really fucked.

Q: Do a lot of women that you know handle the money in the house?

A: Most of the women I know handle the money in the house and if not they both handle the money in the house. But most women I know do handle the money, their husband's wage, because he just doesn't want to be bothered. It's just another little chore for her to do. I know that my neighbour next door and my mother and dad do it the same way. They take the cheque and go over what they have to pay and they do it together. But my husband, he doesn't know when the phone bill comes in, or the gas bill, and he doesn't even know the date of the month it comes in. If he had to phone up for a repair on the telephone, he wouldn't know what telephone number to call, what to look under or anything. All he knows is that it's a gas company. If he had

to take out the bill to the Union Gas Company, he'd never know that he had to do that.

I deal with the landlord, the schools and everything. My husband doesn't. I do the shopping for our food and that's a big chore, especially with two kids. I went on Friday along with the two kids. Oh, my God! I'm walking out of the store with this great big basket full of groceries and I'm trying to watch the two kids so that they don't get hit by a car in the parking lot, I push this heavy basket which took both hands to push so I couldn't hang on to them. I was a nervous wreck by the time that I got home. Oh, I'm telling you. I'd never do it again.

So my husband has to come with me most of the time. He'll take one kid and I'll take the other kid and then I'll go



through and pick out all that I want. I like to budget my meals. I like to sit down on Thursday and go through what I want for each day. I'll have this one day and roast beef the next or something. Not too often we have roast beef though. We get the frozen jobbers. It's cheaper. Plan it all out and then I buy what I need. And that's a chore in itself.

Q: What do you think are the factors that determine wages?

A: I think the only reason why a man gets paid more than a woman does, is because he's been through all the years that have gone by, looked at as the breadwinner. I think that is the only reason. If women were viewed all this time as the breadwinner, I think they would get more money.

Q: Why don't housewives get paid considering that their work is essential to a well-functioning society?

A: Why don't housewives get paid? Goddamn if I know. How can a man pay his wife? You take my husband. By the time that the credit union takes out . . . we have a loan through the credit union for the first mortgage on this house. Now that is not what I call a luxury, like if we went out and bought a car or something. Today isn't even a luxury. You need that for transportation. What are you supposed to do? We don't even have a bus that comes out here. We have trouble getting a taxi cab to come out here.

I mean, he just barely makes, on a good week, six days, he brings home \$150. Now it takes me \$100 a week for groceries, gas for the car and the milkman, paper boy and miscellaneous (which is if you run out of toilet paper and you have to run to the store). And I keep a few dollars out. But it takes me a good \$100 a week to manage the house. So it leaves us with \$50. Big deal. With \$50 I've got to pay the electric bill, which is sky high. It's tripled since we've lived here and that's only been three years. We've got to pay the gas bill, the phone bill, all the life insurances that we have. We have one on my husband and we've got one on me and one on each of the kids, not counting that one that I told you about for the baby bonuses. We've got another one on them also.

Then what else do we have to pay with that money. The house payment, did I say that? And what is \$50 a week going to do for that? My husband and I figured it out one night. He was yelling at me, "Where does all my money go? I'm working six and seven days a week and where does it all go?" I'll tell him, all right, it goes here, it goes there. I figure it out and we're running over two dollars or under two dollars. Or maybe we can put away \$10 that month in the bank. And what happens when Christmas time comes, or a birthday or something? All those unexpected things that come up. So that's where good old Master Charge comes in. And then you get charged the interest on that, and I don't use mine because I want to, I use it because I have to, when I have no choice.

But I think that's why housewives don't get paid. The government thinks that the husband should pay her, but that husband can't pay her. If anybody should pay us, it should be the government. We do enough for them. If we weren't home all the time, then the men couldn't go to work. The government would be just shot. The whole society would go kaputs.

Q: Making love has often been described as the duty or responsibility of a wife to her husband. How do you feel about your own sexuality in this context?

A: I'd say that making love really is a duty. I know a lot of women, a lot of my neighbours, and friends, and we have talked about . . . you know . . . you get together and start talking kinda dirty. We start talking about sex. A lot of the women say that, "Oh, I don't feel like doing it." A lot of times I don't feel like doing it. No wonder so many things are wrong with women and they have a headache at

the end of the day. Who the hell wouldn't have a headache, at the end of the day, with all that you have to do? Never being able to relax and taking care of the kids, and hearing them scream all day. That's why you've got a headache and you don't feel like making love.

I think they do it just because they feel that it is their duty. I think so because that's what I do. It's very seldom that I enjoy it. I can never relax long enough to enjoy it. I just want to get the hell to sleep, so that I get a few hours' sleep before the next day comes. But I think a lot of women figure it's just a responsibility along with that little white marriage contract that we have.

Sometimes I'll enjoy it. But very seldom. I'll do it just so I can hang on to my man and he isn't going to go out somewhere else and get it. And I think that's what a lot of women do. Nothing I'd like better than to be looking like a doll and feeling like a real sexy Marilyn Monroe and turning my husband on. Boy, he'd really love it. I'd love to feel like that. By the end of the day after all I've done and the

"If anybody should pay us, it should be the government. We do enough for them. If we weren't home all the time, then the men couldn't go to work. The government would be just shot. The whole society would go kaputs."

tensions and everything, I can't feel like that.

It really feels like a responsibility. In fact, I've threatened sometimes of having to pay me to come across. He thinks that whenever he wants it he should get it, which is quite often. This morning, what am I supposed to do? He wants it this morning. Here's the kids watching television and I'm supposed to close the door and say mommy and Daddy are going to make love now, so you can't come in for half an hour. He expects me to say that. I can't say that to my kids. But what am I supposed to do? But he expects me to.

Well, we were talking about it today. With all the company, we haven't done it for a while. And he says, "What's going on here? You ain't coming across too often. What's the matter? I don't go for this too much, you know. I'd better get it tonight." And I'm supposed to say, "All right." And right away after he falls right to sleep, just like that, and I'm kept awake by it. That's why women don't want it as often because it's less rewarding.

If I've been working all day, I'm tired, I'm hot, I'm sweaty and I have a bath and I feel a little bit better. But I don't feel beautiful. If I had my hair curled and make-up on, I'd feel beautiful and maybe I'd feel more like being a sex-pot. When I know I look so yukky and all I am is clean.

I've had a bath, but I've found that a lot of times, I'd say, oh nine out of ten times we go out, if we get the chance to go out, which isn't very often – then, boy oh boy! Say that we've got a chance, and my mother will take care of the kids and we'll go out to a party or to a wedding or a banquet or something like that credit union thing that we went to. Well, you're relaxed, you've had a good time all night, you have been without the kids; you come home and the kids are sound asleep; and I'm all dolled up; then I can really do it and enjoy it.

But other than that I can't say that I enjoy it. I just do it because here I am, come on in, take it and get the hell out and let me go to sleep because I have to get up early the next day. That's how I feel and I know that's how a lot of women feel. My neighbour told me her husband's really horny and here she is in the middle of ironing. She's really an ironing freak. She likes her kids to go to school looking nice, and she says, "I'm right in the middle of ironing and he says he's got to have it. And he takes me to bed. It takes five or ten minutes and he takes it and I get nothing out of it. And I get right back up and iron after."

Now you call that love? I just call that sex fulfillment for the man. It's not for the woman at all. It really is a responsibility that's just expected of you because you're married to him and you don't get anything out of it. Oh, it's just a bummer. And more times than one they end up going out on you. I couldn't take that. Knowing that he's out with somebody else and here I am, busting my ass at home all day. He should really care for me after all that I've done around here for him. Because it's his house, it's his kids, too. It's not just mine. Yet he can go out and have a grand old time but don't let me pull that, shit! Holy Christ! If he ever caught me in bed with another man, he'd come in and he'd shoot us both.

Q: What about your husband and brother, etc? How do they see your work in the home?

A: My brother and my husband figure that I sit on my ass all day and watch TV. They figure the house should look like this all the time, it's natural; houses always look like that. What are they supposed to look like? If they ever, ever came in this house and saw it dirty . . . once I did that and I had such a terrific fight. He wanted to go away on a hunting trip with a buddy of his for a week, mind you, and leave me home alone. What am I supposed to do for a week? I can't go out and enjoy myself. I have to stay home and take care of all this. So we got into a fight.

So I told him, I'm getting tired of doing all this shit. So I said, "I ain't doing fuck all from now on. I'm on strike!" and I took off. He took off to work and I took off to my neighbours. There was dishes and the house was like it is every day before I clean it. And I left it all. And when he came home I wasn't home. That's another thing. If I'm not home when he comes home, then look out. We're in for a fight for a week. I wasn't home, I didn't come home for an hour and a half after he was home.

And when I walked in that door he was waiting for me with the eyes just ragged. "What the hell's this? Where have

you been? What's this. Nothing's done. What's going on here? What hit this place?" I said this is the way the house looks every day before I clean it. I told you I was going on strike. "Don't you ever do that again, girl." That's what I got.

Q: Could you see women getting together to go on strike together? for a wage?

A: No. There was so much it took me two days to catch up. It's more work on them, so they figure, why bother. This is what a lot of it is with the women. Just like for the groceries. I've suggested us all picketing the stores. You know, don't buy this and don't buy that. If it's too expensive, don't buy it, damn it. Leave it there. They'll put the price down if they can't sell it. But they'll say, "My husband can't do without it. He's got to have this and have that." Just like the housework, "I can't let it go for a day. The next day, it's going to take me all week to finish." They figure it's not worth it. Maybe with money being involved they might get together, to fight to get the money. I know I would. I'd let it all go. I'd have a hell of a mess to clean by the time I finished. Lord only knows how long it would take you in a fight to do that, if you had to go picketing and stuff. But I think this is what stops a lot of women. Because they've got so much to catch up on if they let it go. They've got too much to do the next day.

February, 1975

INTERVIEW WITH B. W. – POSTSCRIPT

Q: Since I first interviewed you, have things in your life changed?

A: Since the interview things in my life started to change, but the changes didn't come about until I joined the Wages for Housework group. I was aware of a great many things, but I lacked the courage to do anything about them. The group gave me the courage to do something about them.

Q: Why did you join the Wages for Housework group?

A: Because I needed support from other women who were in the same boat as I was and I wanted to do something about my situation and life. I liked the idea of getting out of the house once a week, and didn't feel that going to a show was going to better myself. I wanted to have another world besides the four walls in my house, plus the idea of a wage appealed to me.

Q: What difference has the group made in your life?

A: It has made me first of all not be afraid to speak up when I have something to say. Before I felt no one would be interested in what I had to say. Now I feel important. Also it has made me more of a person, an individual. I have bettered my relationship with my husband and my kids. It has taught me that struggles are important and that if I believe in the struggle I should fight for it.

I spend my time and efforts on other things now instead of just on housework. Mind you, I still do my housework, but if I want to do something else, I do it. The house is not my whole life anymore. I'm refusing to be a walking, talking robot!

Q: What do you hope to get out of the group?

A: The group has done wonders for me. I love being involved. I am hoping it will continue to help me in my every day living. Also I want it to put me in the position of being able to understand everything about Wages for Housework. Therefore, I could help other women. I want recognition from men, and I want a wage!

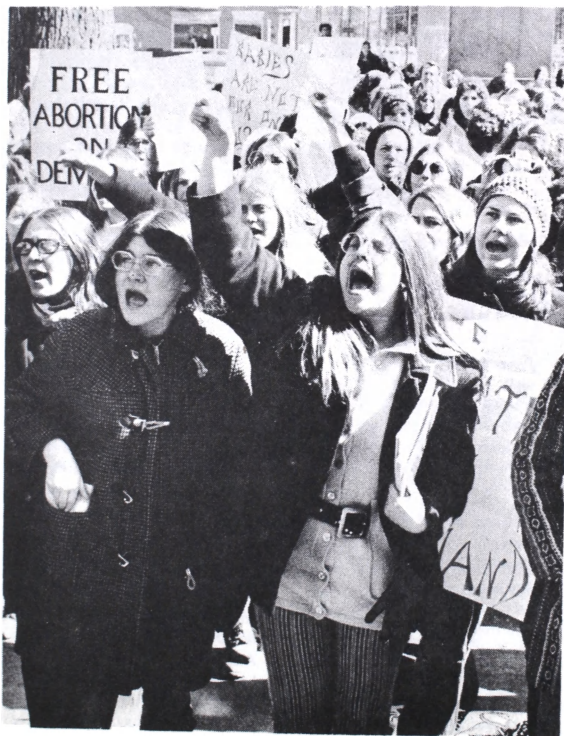
Q: With the development of the auto crisis, your husband was first forced to work a five-day week instead of a six or seven-day week, and then last January was put on indefinite lay-off. What has this meant for you and the kids?

A: First of all, it has meant a lot of pressures financially; it has meant learning to live all together 24 hours a day, having to fight for Welfare until Unemployment comes in, having to do without luxuries. It has meant more work for me because we can't afford convenience foods. We can't afford entertainment. Our whole life style has changed.

But because of the group, my attitude is different today. A year ago I would have looked at the situation much differently. Today I can cope with the auto struggle because of my own struggle. A year ago I would have pressured my husband to find a job. Today I say, stay home, fight, collect welfare, collect unemployment. Today struggles are important. We cannot be walked on anymore.

We have to quit working our asses off, because we are not the ones who are benefiting from the work that we do. Granted we're not getting ahead by him staying at home, but then we're not getting ahead by him working either. We are ahead, though, by the fact that we are together — he's home, he's not working seven days a week. I have more work but I struggled with him and he's helping me with it. We can't afford entertainment and we can't afford to eat anything but hamburger, but we are now looking at it as a chance to get to know each other. Our entertainment is now one another and the kids and the hamburger causes a good laugh at the dinner table.

The auto crisis has caused many changes in our lives, but because of my struggle, I am able to cope with those changes and am beginning to fight back.



Wages for Housework: Questions and Answers

Could you explain the perspective of wages for housework and how it is different from other feminist positions?

We start with the fact that in capitalist society there is a whole division of labor along sexual lines. Women have to do the social chunk of labor that involves reproducing the labor force. It is clearest in the case of the working class housewife but includes the rest of us too; she is the prototype that defines us all. Those of us in more "middle-class" situations (because of birth, family background, job classification, educational level, etc.) are still tied, in a fundamental way, to the sexual division of labor. For years now the feminist media has exposed the way women in all situations have to cater to other people; secretaries cater to bosses, nurses to sick people and the hospital hierarchy, wives to husbands, daughters to fathers and brothers, etc.

Our role as women consists of oiling the machinery of capitalist society to keep it running as smoothly as possible, to act as shock absorbers and to service the needs of others both physically and emotionally. And we don't just do it as unwaged workers in the home; we do it also in waged work (for no extra money, of course) and that puts us all, as women, in a proletarian situation. It is not so much saying that *all* women are working class but, rather, that the capitalist division of labor presses many more women into service than just the full-time housewife. Wages for Housework as a political perspective helps us to see that to be a woman means to perform unwaged work as part and parcel of the functioning of this society.

We see wages for housework as being in the interest of the mass of women. The few women who have been able to "make it" by working for the state rather than against it are the ones who have to make a choice between the power that capital offers them and the power which comes from joining with women who are making a struggle. Our perspective is for all women who identify with the mass of women and see their power in relation to the struggles that have been made by women everywhere and not for those who are busy trying to maximize their own power at the expense of the rest.

We agree that feminism does not deal in exceptions but in averages. That is very important because any power that any of us has comes from the struggles of the mass of women, not from the privileges capital has bestowed on a few.

This article is reprinted from *The Other Woman*, a Canadian woman's paper. It was written by the Toronto Wages for Housework Collective.

The women who are making it and cannot see how their position is the result of all our struggles are busy building their own power and trying to take the feminist movement in the direction of further integration into capitalist planning.

We want to go in precisely the opposite direction - towards a stronger attack on capital's plans to use us and "rationalize" us, because accepting their plans for us always means accepting an extension of their exploitative control over our lives.

Do you disagree with women getting jobs outside the home?

We say that women's work is so pervasive in this society that all women - except the very rich - are housewives and therefore workers. Our liberation begins with the recognition of that fact. It is the key to our (class) identity as women. We can see that in the civil service they now have male typists, but these men would never be asked to make coffee or be expected to do tension management in the office which female typists do all the time as a matter of course. No man is expected to add an attractive element in the corner or put up with sexual advances as a requirement for the job. We feel they can expect it of us because it is an extension of the unwaged work we do in the home. It shows the extent to which we are all housewives regardless of whether we are full-time mothers and wives. Which is why we disagree with those who say that women must get jobs outside the home in order to struggle for liberation. As if we could just stop doing the housework - in fact, we *end up doing two jobs instead of one*.

It is true that sometimes those of us who work outside the home have enough power to demand that the man we live with share the housework, etc., but these "liberated" relationships are often a kind of self-delusion. Doing dishes, laundry, shopping, etc., you might be able to divide that equally but there is no calculating the responsibility women always assume, the sexual and emotional support we are trained to give as a reflex, the many ways we are constantly forced to pick up the slack. There is never any end to our work because it encompasses our entire role as women - and that is not a quantifiable thing.

What is your alternative?

The first step is to *demand* wages for housework so that women's work is recognized as *work*. This is a fundamental prerequisite to any redistribution of housework and ultimately to abolishing the whole capitalist sexual division of labor. It is also the beginning of our struggle to refuse further exploitation outside the home in a second job. And when we demand wages for housework we are not saying we

want to spend all our time doing housework. Quite the reverse! We want money so we can have the power to refuse it!

If you don't have money in this society you are powerless, you can't make any choices. Which means you can't leave your husband, or you're forced to take another job. Some of us have un wanted children because abortions, if you can get one, cost money. Some of us are forced to have abortions because the children we want we have no money to feed. Wages for Housework would mean choices. It would mean the power to tell your husband to fuck off and do what *you* want for a change, the power to refuse work in a sweatshop or for office overload, the power to think of yourself instead of bowing to others all the time.

With the *demand* for wages for housework we already begin to build our power to refuse the entire female role that capital saddles us with. We think this demand is the logical culmination of all the propaganda the feminist movement has made about women. It is time to move beyond descriptions and denunciations of women's role and organize to end our first exploitation as unwaged workers in the home. This will begin to build our power to destroy the whole female role and the society to which it is so essential.

Why is the demand of wages for housework directed to the state?

We say that wages for housework must come from the state because the state is the ultimate beneficiary of our labor. It is the state that plans the size, quality, and distribution of the labor force and at all points depends on our unwaged work. And it is the function of the state to keep capitalist society running smoothly; and to the extent that it succeeds, it exploits women. Because women's work is so pervasive, it really makes no difference whether you're living with a man or not, or whether you have a family or not. For those of us who *are* with men, an important part of this demand is that it will give us independence. To ask for the money from the man would only be tying the knot tighter instead of beginning to loosen it. Also we all get robbed by capital, even men, so to ask them for the money instead of the state, would be to redistribute poverty rather than demanding more of the social wealth we have all created with our labor.

What would women do if they had wages for housework?

No woman has ever asked us what she is going to do with her free time when she receives wages for housework! Most of us would have no problem because we have never been able to do what we want so we have some catching up to do! Women with children say: all I have time to do now is discipline the kids and act like a cop. They have no time for themselves and they have no money of their own. Wages for housework begins with the struggle involved in *demanding* the money and many women are using their time to make that struggle rather than do housework.

The Mother Led Union is an example. Those women aren't going to win anything without coming out of their

homes and fighting together, and that's exactly what they're doing. The kind of relationships that develop in struggle and the excitement felt when you begin to see your power means that those women are not going to go back home afterwards for business as usual. It will break down their isolation as housewives and give them a point of contact to build on. The struggle for wages for housework will begin to link women everywhere so that we can win back the time that has been stolen from us, the money they never gave us, and the choices we were all denied.

What about the charge that wages for housework would be dividing the working class?

Wages for housework starts with the fact that the working class is already divided. The Left makes the accusation that to demand wages for housework and to make struggles autonomously as women is to divide the working class rather than unite it. We are totally fed up with the Left talking about the working class as if it were totally homogeneous. There are all kinds of contradictions within the working class, divisions along the lines of sex and race, which overwhelmingly mean divisions between those who have a wage

We are convinced that those of us with less power must organize our own struggles in our own name, and on our own terms, and that, as we gain more power, the rest of the working class will *join with us* rather than our having to join them from a position of weakness forever subordinating our own struggles.

and those who don't. We don't think these divisions will just disappear by invoking the "general interest".

We are convinced that those of us with less power must organize our own struggles in our own name, and on our own terms, and that, as we gain more power, the rest of the working class will *join with us* rather than our having to join them from a position of weakness, forever subordinating our own struggles.

As a group, our experience in the Left showed us how our struggles as women were always reduced to the "woman's question". We realized we were never going to make a revolution that way. You can't develop a working class perspective by excluding half the working class! The whole thrust of wages for housework as a political perspective is to end the divisions within the working class, between the waged and unwaged.

This is a fundamental attack on capitalist society and the state which keeps us all divided in order to better exploit us.

We see women as a central part of that attack. As women build their power, then other sectors of the working class will join with us because we have some strength to offer them. At some point men will see that it is in their interest to come out of the factories on strike to support our demands for community daycare because they too want to spend time with their children, and by joining together with the power of women we are building the power of the entire working class in order to fight together against the way capital organizes our lives and for the power to decide for ourselves.

Does Wages for Housework include women in the third world?

Wages for housework is an international perspective which looks at the exploitation of women not only in the advanced countries but also in the third world. You can't really see what is happening in one place without looking at the whole. Capital plans our exploitation in a concerted way on an international scale and that's how we must plan our struggles. In the past, the feminist movement has mistakenly raised demands which did not take into account *all* women and as a result played into the hands of the state which wants to use even our struggles to keep us divided.

The birth control and abortion issues are cases in point: women in the third world are having birth control forced on them because capital wants the number of workers who are going to make a struggle against "development" cut down. When the movement here said we want free birth control and abortion on demand, third world women were right to wonder why we were making demands that could be used against them.

Also the Black and third world population in the U.S. -- We demanded abortion when they are facing genocidal sterilization policies in their communities. The demands which any section of women raise, in any part of the world, *must* be within the framework of a broader political perspective which is based on the fact that capital exploits us all in different ways. If they say to some of us that we should have children then we demand abortion; if to others of us that we mustn't have them, then we refuse their birth control. The only way to further our interests on an international scale is to demand the *choices* they want to deny us. We all want the right to have children whenever and with whomever we wish, and the right to not have any at all.

The more power we have to decide for ourselves the less power capital has over us to subject our sexuality and our lives to its development. Building our power internationally is the only way we can subvert their plan to exploit each one of us differently and use the struggles that we make against one another.

How was the Wages for Housework perspective introduced in Canada?

A small group of women met in Italy in 1971 and formed the International Feminist Collective and from there have come most of the initiatives in spreading wages for housework internationally. Two of its members, Selma James, of England, and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, of Italy, made a tour in

Canada and the U.S. in 1973. The Montreal Feminist Symposium was the culmination point for the entire tour. 800 women heard the initial address which Selma gave on the opening night of the conference, and on the final day a resolution was passed unanimously demanding wages for housework from the state!

Since that time a number of us have spread the perspective through literature distribution, public speaking, circulation of video tapes, and involvement with women's struggles. Last October the first attempt was made to gather together women who were committed to developing this political perspective; we had a conference in N.Y.C. attended by 50



women from 6 countries and set up an informal network. We are now planning another conference for the end of February in Montreal when we hope to issue a political statement which defines our basis for working together. It is open to all women who share this political perspective. There has been a tremendous response in Canada so far and we think wages for housework will have a growing impact both in the feminist movement and outside it.

How was your collective formed?

Until about 6 months ago we were part of a mixed political group. We made a political split from the men and established a wages for housework collective. Before that, we

were sympathetic to this perspective but there was a lot of confusion in our minds about what that meant organizationally in terms of autonomy from the men and what it meant in terms of organizing with women. So we felt it was really essential to make a break from the men in order to get any political clarity for ourselves, and since then there has been no holding us back! Our present focus, as a collective, is to build the wages for housework perspective through contact with women's struggles, preparing and distributing materials and public speaking.

At the moment, we are working with 2 other groups in Montreal and NYC collecting and editing all the wages for housework materials in English and issuing a "Women in Struggle" series and a "Wages for Housework Notebook" series. Afterwards, we plan to translate things from Italian and, hopefully, from other parts of the world as the network becomes larger and more cohesive. We are also planning a public meeting here in Toronto on Jan. 31. We are not interested in sectarian debate with the Left or others who disagree; we want to meet women who are organizing themselves and who, by discussing wages for housework, will be better able to do so.

Have you done any organizing with women's issues and how do you see your role as a feminist collective?

Some of us have been working with the Mother Led Union which grew out of a welfare women's conference last June which demanded, in resolution form, "A guaranteed adequate annual income for individuals, whether working or not, married or not, on welfare or not..." Within this framework we are organizing in the MLU to mobilize women on bene-

fits to demand parity with foster parents, removal of all ceilings on earnings from a second job outside the home, and 24 hour community daycare for both women working outside the home and full-time housewives. These women are planning to go on strike to support their demands and are also organizing around neighborhood issues in various "locals".

We see these as wages for housework demands because they are saying that women, regardless of their specific condition, need more money, more time, and less work. Which is another way of saying more control over our lives. We are working with the MLU because we believe that when one group of women makes a struggle it means more power for the rest of us, so that there is a material link between the interests of women on benefits and our own. It is the framework of more money for women and the recognition of the vast amounts of unwaged labor that we all perform for the state that allows us to identify the interests of all women in struggle with those of the mothers on benefits, and as a result support the particular struggle they are making.

We feel, also, that the kind of coverage that "The Other Woman" has given the MLU is a concrete source of power for those women. The feminist movement, in fact, by its very existence, is a tremendous power to all women making a struggle, whatever their particular circumstances, nationality, etc. We see our role and that of the feminist media as supporting the struggles of women everywhere not only by spreading information and "reporting", but by putting them within a political framework that makes the material connections visible. We can't really build our power as women any other way.



Fucking is Work

Wages for Housework recognizes that doing cleaning, raising children, taking care of men, is not women's biological destiny. Lesbianism recognizes that heterosexual love and marriage is not women's biological destiny. Both are definitions of women's roles by the state and for the advantage of the state.

Wages for Housework says that to fight against our roles is to fight against our work is to fight against the state. This doesn't mean that if we merely readjust our roles, without recognizing the work contained within them that we are fighting the state. In fact that state often readjusts our roles for us. But it does mean that whenever women deviate from roles set out for us by the state, it creates the possibility within the class of women to see the roles and the work as they really are: serving the state.

We do not think that lesbians are special cases. We think that all women are special cases in the definitions of the state. This is what keeps us divided. We recognize that all women are houseworkers, and as lesbians we can clarify certain forms that this work takes, and therefore define certain struggles that we can take against our work, against the state. By uniting our struggle as lesbians with the struggle of all women, we can win.

Capitalism has institutionalized relationships between men and women in the form of heterosexuality. And the only legitimate expression of this form is marriage. In marriage the woman supports the man to work harder, to buy a bigger house, a car, etc., and to subjugate her needs to these needs, which are capital's. Marriage is also the institution for the socialization of children to be good workers for capitalism, and this too is the work of women. Further we are brought up to believe that our work in marriage is our biological nature and therefore unchangeable.

All women are socialized to be heterosexual and to get married. Women who are called lesbians and women who are called straight are all existing for the same purpose in the eyes of the state - to serve capital through serving men. This is what we mean when we say all women are straight. Being a lesbian does not free us from our roles as houseworkers.

One of the services that women perform for men and the state is fucking. Our jobs as cunts is separated from loving or having children. Having children is a separate job which only happens to require fucking as a prerequisite. Loving is something we do in spite of capitalism, not because of it. Loving only serves the state when and if it is a prerequisite

This paper was presented at the International Feminist Collective's Meeting in Montreal Canada. Since that time, the group has revised parts of it; the new statement will be available from the collective after 15 May. Mail all requests to Wages Due Collective, Box 38, Station E, Toronto, Canada.

for fucking men. Fucking gives men pleasure and a feeling of power that they need to continue working for capitalism. The state convinces us that fucking is a labor of love in the same way that it convinces us that making breakfast and raising the kids is a labor of love. We may enjoy cooking eggs and we may love our children, but those facts don't change the fact of our work as long as this work serves the needs of capital.

The state convinces us that fucking is a labor of love in the same way that it convinces us that making breakfast and raising the kids is a labor of love.

It is the existence of lesbianism that makes fucking visible as labor. Also a woman who refuses to fuck is refusing part of her work as a woman, and is therefore waging a fight against the state whether she recognizes it as such or not. A woman who demands money for fucking is also waging a battle against this work whether she recognizes it or not. Both lesbians and prostitutes challenge the state by their mere existence. We can see how threatening prostitution and lesbianism are by how much money the state saves in free fucks.

The state tries to co-opt this struggle against fucking by either making it illegal or institutionalizing it. Prostitution is either illegal or state-run. Lesbianism is illegal if we are under twenty-one, we cannot work as civil servants, we cannot legally cross borders, we cannot legally have our children, we cannot legally defend our right to work for wages or rent a place to live.

At this point in time the state uses heterosexuality to serve its own purposes. Unless we make our struggles against the institutions of heterosexual love and marriage in a clear class context then the state will be able to co-op them. Up until now the general struggle against marriage has taken the form of the free love movement and open marriage. Neither of these forms, because they are led by men, understand that fucking is work, and that liberation for women does not come through more and easier access to fucking. Hippies and the revolutionary youth movement have isolated themselves by thinking that they have created something which gives them more freedom. In fact they have created something that gives women more work.

Wages for Housework must take up this struggle, recognizing that lesbians, celibate and 'frigid' women and prostitutes are waging a battle against fucking and therefore against the state.

Lesbianism is women loving women. It is a form of social relationship between people of equal power. It strengthens the power of the class by being a gut expression of class solidarity. It is a form that we can use and work from in learning how to struggle with each other as women. In this way it serves all women. It is an expression of self-love and confidence in women. This is what we mean when we say all women are lesbians.

As lesbians we know that we can survive without the approval and recognition of a husband, because we have already survived illegally and underground for centuries. The danger for us lies in what we do with this knowledge. Lesbians can serve the state by saying that we want to be responsible citizens with just a few more civil liberties (like the gay liberation movement is doing). Or we can set out to prove that we can be truck drivers and executives (like the status of women groups do), as if we didn't already know that we can do anything we want. Or we can isolate ourselves in groovy lesbian ghettos and die slowly because of it (like lesbian separatists are doing). All these things do is give more power to the state by focussing lesbianism on individuals and trying to find individual solutions rather than taking our power and strengthening it and that of all women by using it to attack the state.

Lesbianism. . . is a form of social relationship between people of equal power. It strengthens the power of the class by being a gut expression of class solidarity.

Sexuality is used to divide women. Straight women think that by associating with lesbians they are losing power. They act this out by hating, fearing or ignoring lesbians. Lesbians think that by associating with straight women we are losing our identity. We act this out by refusing to struggle with straight women. But as long as any of us react to our powerlessness as women by refusing to unite with women we are losing our only potential power and serving the interests of capitalism.

Lesbians are used as a threat to all women to keep us in line. We must take this threat and turn it around against the state. We must take the definitions of lesbian, dyke, queer that they lay on us, and define them for ourselves. This is why it is important for women who are lesbians to be visible within the Wages for Housework movement.

As lesbians become visible we are able to point out to all women that there are alternatives even now, under capitalism, to our role as men's fucks. This gives us the possibility

of more choices, which gives us the strength to fight our work even at the level of relationships with individual men. Men are threatened by the possibility of 'their women' becoming a lesbian. We can use that threat by never denying the possibility. We are not saying that all women should come out. When the power of women's liberation made it possible for lots of lesbians to come out, it wasn't the coming out as lesbians that was the main point, it was the power that made it possible that made it important.

Another thing - We do not think that the definition of bisexual is useful to any of us. It is no threat to the state. In fact the state is encouraging it these days in an attempt to weaken the power of lesbians. Because of this, defining oneself as bisexual erodes the power of lesbianism. This system has divided men and women to such an extent that loving both equally (which also assumes equality between men and women, which isn't true), can only be an extremely unsettling and schizophrenic position for any woman to be in.

In conclusion then, we feel very strongly that as lesbians we have something to contribute to the building of our power as women. First, we can contribute the definition of fucking as work. Second, we contribute the power of loving women. In return, we gain from the increase in the general power of the class, and hopefully the support and understanding of our straight sisters, which we need to break down the isolation that the state imposes on us. This paper is an attempt to start some dialogue on this subject. We cannot afford to ignore it, because we are lesbians.

The Wages Due Collective, Toronto



All Women are Housewives

by Suzie Fleming

I thought I would start by outlining how the demand for Wages for Housework first arose in Britain. The first really massive movement for a wage for housework was the movement of unsupported mothers, the same movement which in the United States is called welfare mothers, or welfare women. These are women who are "unsupported", that is to say unsupported by a man. Most of them are women with young children, who get their money directly from the state as a welfare "benefit" for the work they're doing. These women in Britain began to organize themselves into what they called Claimants' Unions, which were unions of people who were on welfare. The Claimants' Unions were not only [composed] of women, but from the start they were dominated by women. It was women who were key in the struggles that broke out. These women organized mass demonstrations in the welfare offices, sit-in's, etc., both to defend the rights which they already had, such as they were, and to ask for improvements. And they quite clearly talked about themselves as women who worked in the home. They demanded that money not as a kind of hand-out, but as a payment for work. As well as organizing themselves, they began a campaign to ask women who were married, who were living with a man, to sign up for welfare also. Because they saw quite clearly that their situation and the situation of those other women was really the same. Now at that time the campaign didn't get off the ground, because the women who were supported, who had an income from a man, hadn't seen that alliance of interest, hadn't seen how all those women could make a struggle together. That became clearer in what was the next mass campaign in Britain, which was called the Family Allowance Campaign.

The Family Allowance is money that's paid by the state to women with children. Every woman who has two or more children, whether or not she has a man supporting her, is entitled to some money from the state. It's very, very little. It's around \$2.50 for the second child and for every child after that. Which seems like a totally insignificant amount of money. But when the government threatened to take this money away, threatened to pay it through the man's wage packet, there was really a massive outcry from women. And the women's movement began to organize a campaign to defend the Family Allowance and to fight the governments' proposals. We went out on the streets with petitions, we organized public meetings: first of all to inform women that this was what the state was planning, because it [the plan] had been published in a government document which most people did not have access to. The proposal had

very little coverage by the media. So that our first function as women in the women's movement was to spread this information. And what we found when we got out on the streets was really an eye-opener to us. Women were really passionate about that money. Although it was so little, women were quite freaked-out at the possibility that it would be paid to the man. Particularly women who were working full-time in the home and had no wage at all of their own. They really stressed the importance of that money. They talked about it as the only money they could call their own. It was the only money which they didn't have to go to a man to ask for. It was the only money that they could rely on in times of crisis, like if the man walked out. It is very little, but it would at least see them through being able to get together some food for the kids. It was often just enough money, if the situation was intolerable in the home, to get the train fare together to go stay with a friend, or to stay with their family, or to be able to move out. So that campaign really exploded the whole question of how women in the home are totally dependent on the man, particularly if there are young kids and the woman is unable to take a second job. This really put the question of Wages for Housework on the agenda. The state saw this very quickly. It was extremely frightened by the campaign and immediately backed down on its proposals. A lot of women had for the first time articulated [their situation] publicly, and it was really an important moment for us as women. It was also an important moment for the women's movement in Britain, because this was the first campaign that we had been involved in that had spoken to all the women that we met. I had been in the women's movement from the beginning, and no other demand that we had ever raised had had that kind of response.

So a number of us came together then to form a group that would begin to raise the demand for Wages for housework, and to see how we could organize. That group was the Power of Women Collective. A lot of its membership is from London, but there are people from other cities around the country also. When we originally formed the Collective, we had been thinking of Wages for Housework as a demand for women in the traditional housewife situation, that is, women with children, at home all day, totally wageless. But as soon as the Collective formed, single women, women without children, women who weren't living with a man, started to say, "Well, I do housework too, I want the money." This started to uncover the amount of housework all women do, whether or not they have children, whether or not they're living with a man. The single women started to discuss how when they came home from work, they'd have to start cleaning up the flat, they'd have to rush to the corner store and buy food and cook; and how

This is a speech given at Oberlin College in March 1975. Suzie Fleming is a member of the Power of Women Collective in Bristol, England.

this work which they were doing was not something they were doing for themselves, because all it enabled them to do was to be in shape to go to work the next day. Aside from that they began to discuss how much housework they were doing on the job outside of the home. Women who were secretaries began to talk about how when they arrive in the office in the morning, they have to look pleasant, they have to look good, they have to have their hair done, they have to wear certain clothes, they have to smile — all these things are expected of a secretary. They have to be supportive of the men in the office, they have to make tea, they have to make sure that the boss has remembered his wife's birthday—all that kind of supportive role, which has been seen as the female personality, was being uncovered as work; and work that we don't do for ourselves, but is part of the work that we do on our jobs, is part of the work that enables us to be workers, and work for the benefit of capital and the state.

... single women, women without children, women who weren't living with a man, started to say, "Well, I do housework too, I want the money."

A lot of these things were revealed even more clearly by another mass campaign which took place last year: the struggle of the nurses. This was the first time in Britain that nurses had raised a wage demand and had been ready to take action. Both they and other women saw this as a really crucial moment, because what the nurses were saying was: although we look after people, although other peoples' lives are dependent on us, we refuse to be blackmailed any longer. If necessary we will go on strike. They were quite openly challenging the blackmail that is put on women, the way we are immobilized in our struggles because of other peoples' dependence on us. Again, it was raising the whole question of housework on the job, of the whole female personality as work. What they also made clear is the kind of power that service workers, in other words women who are doing housework in a socialized situation, have. Because the state was very frightened of their demands. And their power was not to close down every industry — because if nurses go on strike, the factories still function. [Their power] was the threat to the role that women play, which is implicitly a threat to all our hidden work that's being done in the family. I think the state understood that very clearly.

Some women in the Collective are nurses and we were involved in doing propaganda around that struggle. Propaganda that was crucial not only for drawing out what was going on in the nurses' struggle, but also [for showing] the connection between their struggle and the struggle of other women. And other women began to see in the power that the nurses had exercised power for themselves also.

I thought I'd mention some of the implications of the demand for Wages for Housework. You begin to see how dependent the economy and the state is on our work. You can see this in a number of ways. Look at the wage a man gets. The wage is as low as it is because men depend on a lot of free work from women. If men had to pay all the time for eating out, if they had to pay someone to look after their children, if they had to pay prostitutes for sexual services — you can immediately see how their wages would be a lot higher. You can see it in the situation of women and *our wages*. Firstly because we reproduce ourselves so cheaply. Most women in women's work, in women's jobs, can survive on the pay they get only because they do a lot of work in servicing themselves. Women on the whole cannot afford to eat out; they have to run home and cook their own meals. We're in a situation of real weakness when we go out of the home onto the job market: because we come from a situation of total wagelessness, we're put in a position of having to be grateful for any money that we can get, even when it's very little. And our position in relation to organizing at that second workplace is very difficult because of the first job in the home. If you try to call a meeting "after work", everybody's running home to do their work at home. They haven't even got time to stay for the meeting which would enable them to organize at that job.

But the demand not only shows our weakness for organizing but also our strength. It began to show how crucial our work was to the functioning of every industry, and of the society in general. We service the men so that they can get to the factory the next day, to put it most



bluntly. To give a practical example: Some women were discussing Wages for Housework and one woman said, "Well, if we got all the women in the town together and we organized ourselves, and went on strike, and all walked out of our houses half an hour before the man had to get up — when the alarm bell went off, we wouldn't be there, and there would be nobody to make the breakfast and look after the kids. The man simply wouldn't be able to get to work and the factory wouldn't function." You can see immediately in that proposition how dependent all industries are on the work we're doing. So that we immediately begin to see practical ways in which women can organize; even women who work full-time in the home and have traditionally been thought of as totally powerless and totally isolated [can organize].

The demand has also been crucial in opening up a struggle against the power that men have over us, which is really the power of the wage over our wageless condition. Whenever women begin to discuss what is the key to our exploitation and our oppression, that discussion has always focused on the family. We've seen always that somehow, something begins there, and now we've begun to see much more clearly clearly what it is that's beginning there. The whole family, the whole structure of the family, is based on our wagelessness within it and the power of men as waged workers over us. And that situation is immediately reproduced if we go out and take a second job. The men at that job don't want to organize with us because they see us as housewives. They go for their own thing and they don't see any kind of benefit in organizing with us.

That situation of dependence on a man: that is our fate in life unless we can organize to get ourselves away.

The other sort of crucial break that we're making is that when we've discussed the question of economic independence before, amongst ourselves, it's always been posed: if you want a wage packet, you have to go outside of the house and earn a wage. Up until now, that is the only kind of alternative that the women's movement has been presenting. The women's movement, by not raising a demand [to be paid] for the work that we're already doing, has really been saying to women: if you want economic independence, take on a second job. And I think that a lot of women have quite rightly been extremely suspicious and hostile towards the women's movement, because women have enough bloody work to do; to propose that women take on more work is simply not a strategy for any kind of liberation. Work has never been a liberation.

At this point in time with the [economic] crisis — we have a crisis in Britain but it's quite clear that you have more of a crisis — you can see a way to organize which really breaks with the past. People are being laid off: our demand should not be for more jobs, but for more money — who needs the work? What is going on is that they're attempting to discipline us by laying people off, by causing unemployment. They want us to fight amongst ourselves for those jobs. And in that way they think they'll have a docile labor force, which they haven't had for some time now. Our only

strategy in that kind of situation can be to go for the wage without the work. In other words, the perspective that we're putting forward is a perspective that will be of use not only to women, although clearly that is my primary concern, but also to the entire working class. If men get a little bright, and took some direction from us . . . The struggle for work is a struggle which only helps capital, and only helps the employer to control us still further.

. . . to propose that women take on more work is simply not a strategy for any kind of liberation. Work has never been a liberation.

Since a lot of women here are students at this college, I thought that I should say a few words about what may be in store for you. First of all, they promise you top jobs when you get out of here. You should look around, and again you should look at what the crisis means, and what's happening to those top jobs. And what's going to happen when you're in a situation when you go to apply for a job, and there's a man who is supporting a family also applying for that job, and who's going to get it. And if you get it, and he doesn't, you should ask yourself a few questions about why. The *Financial Times* in Britain had a big article recently on the need to employ women in managerial jobs. The reason they spelled out quite clearly was that we come in as "grateful outsiders," that was the term they used. In other words, we're so grateful to have a job, that we're ready to work harder, we're ready to discipline the women who work under us. In employing us they're not doing us a favor. They're getting a really good deal out of it. They think that they can exploit us more efficiently than they exploit men. We really have to examine our situation in that light, and see what kind of a deal it is for us. You can see this [situation] all over: in the hospitals in Britain, they're putting women into higher management because they realize that those women will be much better able to discipline the women working under them. They'll know better how to do it because only we know how women function, and what kind of blackmail works best on women. We can be the super-controllers of other women.

The other thing you need to think about is: if you think you're going to escape the nuclear family and have a liberated life and all that, you ought to start considering what's going to happen when you have children. This question is really a crisis now for younger women. If you get your top professional job, there comes a point when if you want to have a child, you have to stop working for at least three months, unless you want to give birth in the office. Even if you're in the kind of job which would allow you to pay some other woman to do the child-care, you'd better start thinking about how far your wage is going to stretch. And whether when you're in that situation with a young child, you're really going to be able to manage without a man, without a man's wage to support you. Think about what

you're going to be paying out in terms of child-care, and how much it's going to cost you to support yourself and any young children.

I worked as a television researcher — top job, right? and there were women on the staff who were topper job than me. (One woman in particular was employed as a reporter.) It was the person in the office who was really most obnoxious to me. She didn't want to identify with me at all because I was a woman. She wanted to see herself as like the other men. Her struggle to keep up with those other men — she had to do twice as much work as they did, and it was really a fight all the time to prove that she was one of them. I met her again quite recently, and she told me that she had left because she'd been on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She had two young children, she'd been back to work two months after the birth of the second child because she couldn't afford to take more time off in case they filled her job. She was really in crisis; she never saw her children, the money that she was earning was only just enough to pay for the child-care, so that it still gave her no independence *vis a vis* the man, and she was completely separated from other women. That is hardly an ideal position in my view.

A woman I know was working at a publisher's and they began to raise the demand for a creche [nursery]. They called a meeting, and a lot of women who didn't have kids came. She was really surprised to see a lot of these young women come to these meetings, and she asked them why. These were women who were newly-wed, quite young, and they said that they could not afford to stop work to have a child. That was *their* crisis. Inflation has meant that people are so dependent on two wage packets, that in most situations the man's wage packet won't even cover the expenses. To have a creche at work was a crucial question for them, because they otherwise could not afford to have children. These were women in relatively top jobs.. This has also been another eye-opener for us.

Another thing that's worth discussing is that women who are students quite often don't see themselves as housewives, as women who do housework. I think that you'd better start to think about your working day. You cook for yourselves, you clean for yourselves, you shop for yourselves. In other words, you reproduce yourselves: you have to get yourselves in shape to do schoolwork, which is work.

There's also something of a myth about liberated relationships with men. Even if you don't cook for him, start figuring out what other work you do. How much time you spend supporting his ego, how much time you have to spend thinking about your appearance for men, how much time you spend thinking about and organizing contraception, how often you sleep with a guy because in this time of liberated sex you can't refuse. All of these things are done by women who are older than you, by women who are living with a man. The discussion of rape has always been a discussion of rape on the streets, but there's also a question about rape in marriage: if you're financially dependent on a man you really are not in a position to refuse him sexual service.

The women who get out of that [situation] are single women, which means either celibate women, or women who are becoming lesbians because they don't want to take on the work that's involved in being with a man. That kind of sexual servicing and emotional support is something which is women's work whether or not you are splitting the cooking and the shopping (and even that I would doubt if you're living with a man). What we're saying is that that whole female role — which is impossible for any woman to escape — is work that we're struggling against. We want to make a break with that female role, we want to define ourselves quite differently. And the only way we can do that is to begin to get a wage for that work.

As soon as you start looking at the work that you do as a student, you can immediately see the links with the work that other women working for the university are doing. When you think about how you are servicing a man, you start to see how the women who are working in the secretarial posts in the university spend a lot of time in the office supporting the men, etc. You see the women who are cooking as essentially socialized houseworkers who are doing



nothing that's basically different from what goes on in the privacy of the home. Also, I gather that a number of students here are on financial aid, which means that as well as doing their own housework, they're also working in the cafeterias; this is exactly the same position the other women who are working in the cafeterias are in.

What we're saying is that that whole female role . . . is work that we're struggling against.

If you look at Wages for Housework as a perspective, it has really begun to uncover all the unpaid work that's done for capital. It reveals child-care as not only for our children but also for the state: what we are doing is producing the future labor force. It reveals relationships with men as work, as something which we do not merely for them, but which actually enables them to function as workers and [therefore] benefits and state. It reveals things like studying, apparently for ourselves, as work, because it will fit us to be more highly skilled workers who work for the state.

Discussion with Suzie Fleming and Oberlin Women
April 3, 1965 (edited and revised)

Chair: The question is: where is the money [for the wage] going to come from? If it comes from the state, what effect will this have on taxes, and will this be virtually just taking the money out of men's wages through taxes?

Suzie: We've been working for hundreds of years and we haven't seen the money. Which means that somebody else has seen it, and that's capital. We demand the money from the state because that's where the money is.

If I could just read an excerpt from one of the books which we've produced, which is called *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* [by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Falling Wall Press, Bristol, 1972]: "We have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies [diapers] by hand and in machines." What we say is that we have worked enough. Let them find the money; this is our struggle, and we want all of that money back, and when we get that money back and if capital falls, that is absolutely great with us, because that is precisely our intention.

Questioner: What I was asking was, where would the tax base come from?

Suzie: When the unemployed struggle for wages, are you going to say, where is the money going to come from, or are you only asking that question because we're women. Did you ask that question when welfare women made a struggle

It reveals servicing ourselves as not for ourselves, not something we do so that we can enjoy our lives, but simply something we do so that we can function as workers the next day.

And if we look at the demand Wages for Housework as money, as cash which we quite seriously intend not only to demand but to win, we can begin to see what kind of a difference it would make in our lives, the kind of possibilities it would open to refuse that work. To refuse first of all the second job that many women are taking as well as the first job in the home. To begin to refuse the work in the home because we have the power to leave. The power that the wage will give us to leave a man, to set up a different kind of situation. Money is really time and social power. If you look at the question of abortion which has been raised so widely: abortion is the right not to have children. What about the right to have children? What about the money we need if we are going to be able to have children when we want to have them? So that the question of choices is fundamentally a question of time and money. It is only by having money that we can have more time, and we can have more power, to organize and make a struggle for all the things we want.

for wages? Did you ask that question during the welfare movement?

Questioner: I'm only asking that question because we know our governments are far in debt as it is.

Suzie: If the government can't pay up, it should just piss off. If they can't organize a society in which everybody gets the money that they need to live, the money so that we don't don't have to be dependent, the money for the work we're doing, then they just aren't organized properly. My concern is not where they find the money, that's not my problem. If I'm in a factory, and I make a wage demand, the least of my concerns is where management is going to find the money to pay me. My concern begins with my need, and it's from my need that I make a demand.

Chair: Implicit in your question is the idea that women aren't really doing work, and that if we are, we should get paid after other people. I don't think you'd raise the same question, for instance, when men in factories go out on strike.

Questioner: There are plenty of people running around with Cadillacs and Rolls Royces. There are lots of rich people. Why don't we tax them? How about taking the money from corporate profits. There's a lot of wealth around the country, the only thing is that we don't have it.

Suzie: But the other point is that capital produces waste. There is a whole set of effort, and work that we are doing, that is just producing shit. If we were organized properly, we might actually be producing for need instead.

Questioner: The only point I was trying to make is that if this money is coming from the state, and on the whole,

men are still going to be the ones working outside the home, then the wages that are paid for housework, and the women who do that housework, are still under a male-dominated system. All you've done is revamp the economic system *vis a vis* who gets the money from whom — you're just getting it from the government Papa instead of from your husband Papa.

Another Questioner: I think that what she's trying to say is that we'd be dependent on the government, which is true. But [the difference is that] we [will] get that money no matter what, unless the government falls, which is fine . . . But as long as that government stands, we get that money, no matter what.

Chair: Another question — won't Wages for Housework institutionalize housework? Aren't you assuming that women are always the ones who do housework now and will do housework in the future? Won't the wage only pay them for this and not redefine sex roles? And why can't we share housework with men?

Suzie: The fact of the matter is that overwhelmingly women *do* do housework. Even when you get the man to share, what you basically get him to do is to help you. You still have to organize the household, and it's work to get the man to help. I'm sure a number of other women can speak to that. It's work in itself. And this myth that somehow women have escaped: even if you've escaped housework in the home, you sure as hell haven't escaped it on the job. Because women are overwhelmingly doing that work, *every* woman's position is defined by housework. That's not to say that we like the work; that is absolutely not the case. But the only way to get the power to refuse that work, on a massive scale, is to get the power that the wage can bring.

Chair: The question is: are men eligible for the wage? And if not, you're really institutionalizing women forever as housewives, always being in the position of having to ask men to help them.

Suzie: If men want Wages for Housework they should go out and fight for it. I'm for that — why shouldn't they get wages? But I'm here to make the struggle for me, not for them. [They are] not my primary concern . . . Men are also beginning to raise demands to get paid for the work that they do for capital which is not, strictly speaking, the work that's going on in the factory. I certainly know that it's been raised in Britain, the demand to be paid for travelling time, that time when you travel to and from work, which is also your life. The demand for changing time — when they have to change into work clothes [has also been raised]. The miners, under great pressure from their wives, may I add, started to demand cleaning-up facilities at work. Both men and women have gone to companies and said: *You* do the laundry, you wash these filthy clothes. These demands are already being raised. If men want to make that struggle too, that's just great, but we aren't waiting for them.

Questioner: Speaking to the whole question of institutionalizing and recreating sex roles: Any alternative to the

wage is to leave women to struggle from a situation which they're already in now [doing housework], with no power, because they have no money, because they have no wages. If women are ever going to have the power to begin to create any alternative structures to the family and any alternative way of living besides doing housework, which they are in fact doing no matter how you as an individual might be struggling against it, it's going to have to be through gaining the wage.

Suzie: You can see that in a concrete way in the woman who is partially waged, who has a second job and at least has a little wage for some part of her working day. She is in a

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much better position to get the man to "share the housework" than a woman who is totally wageless, who has absolutely no power in that relationship, who can't force the man to do a thing. Just look around and see which households the men are at least doing something in. It is overwhelmingly in situations where the woman has at least a little something of her own.

Chair: The question is: How is dressing, etc., for a man "working"? Don't you have a choice in doing that? How is a man going home after work different from a woman going home after work (without children)? How does Wages for Housework relate to single women?

Suzie: One of the most immediate differences is that his wage packets are usually bigger. He's much more likely to be able to afford services like having his clothes cleaned, eating out, perhaps somebody to come in and clean the apartment during the day, that kind of thing. But also: if men want to start talking about what they have to do to reproduce themselves, and to struggle over that: that's more power to us, I'm not against that . . . I don't know how you envision your future, whether you envision a life of celibacy, or whether you think that you will be a lesbian, or whether you're going to have to find yourself a man.

Questioner: Well, I have a choice in who I want . . .

Chair: Are you saying that you're going to be able to choose a man who's going to share all these things [housework] with you?

Questioner: Well, there's choice there, but I got the feeling that you thought everyone was compelled to be put in this kind of situation.

Suzie: Do you envision you'll ever have children?

Questioner: I can't say, but it won't be something that I choose by myself, it will be a mutual decision, probably.

Suzie: You'd better not make it a mutual decision, because you're going to have the kids all your life, and if he walks out, he isn't. So you'd better make that decision on your own. That is the reality of life.

Another Questioner: On another level, how about contraception? It's not his hassle. He doesn't have to worry about an IUD that may kill him any minute. He doesn't have to worry about getting cancer from the pill. Even if he's conscious of our role as women, there are still things he's been taught . . .

Chair: The question is: What's going to come after the revolution?

Suzie: I don't have any blueprint for what would happen after the revolution. I don't think we can even begin to imagine the possibilities of who we may be, and what we may do, and how we want to organize ourselves after the revolution. Our business at the moment is to make demands that stem from our needs, and in my view our needs cannot be met without revolution. I think that in making a revolution we will begin to get some idea of our own potential, of our own power, and begin to find out what we can do as human beings. I don't think we have a notion of that at the moment.

Chair: We do want the wage, the actual money, but I think it's important to realize that we do not intend to get the wage and stop there, that then there will be a freeze on everything, women will remain the home doing housework, men will remain outside in the factories, and everything will be fine . . . If we're realistic, and if we just look around, we see that women are institutionalized in the home; and the wage not only won't institutionalize women in the home, but on the contrary, it will be real; revolutionary: to break through the myth that all the work which women are doing they're doing out of love and out of nature; to say that, in fact, it's work and we want to get paid for it. And only then can we in a sense begin to change that role and refuse that work, and go on to different kinds of work, and different kinds of struggle, or whatever . . . If my mother was waged for all the work that she's doing, her position would be a totally different one within the family and in her job outside the home; her relations to everyone would be different . . .



History of our Collective

Wages for Housework in Oberlin, Ohio

In September of this year, nine of us got together in a socialist women's group. We all felt the need to formulate politics that could speak to us as women. We met weekly as a study group, and Wages for Housework became our focus almost immediately. By February we were into the perspective enough so that we wanted to participate in the Wages for Housework conference in Montreal. We still had questions about the perspective, and our group was not all of one mind; writing our statement for the conference was a difficult process of collective clarification:

"Oberlin College Socialist Women's Group, Oberlin, Ohio:

The reasons we arrived at the Wages for Housework perspective are not different from those of many other women. Although we are students and not actually housewives, we realize that we, like all women, embody that role. However, from the point of view of practice we find ourselves in a contradictory position.

Because we are middle-class students, at first our group found it hard to understand how WFH related to us. We felt that as individuals we had rejected the role of housewife. (Even if we did marry, surely we'd split the duties in the house.) At an elitist, private college such as Oberlin, we are taught to strive to be doctors not nurses, professors not teachers, and that housewives are the dregs of human existence. But it is clear, the qualities identified with housework and even the role of housewife are part of us and will be forced upon us wherever we go. Further, although economically we may be able to reject the nuclear family, socially we cannot escape it.

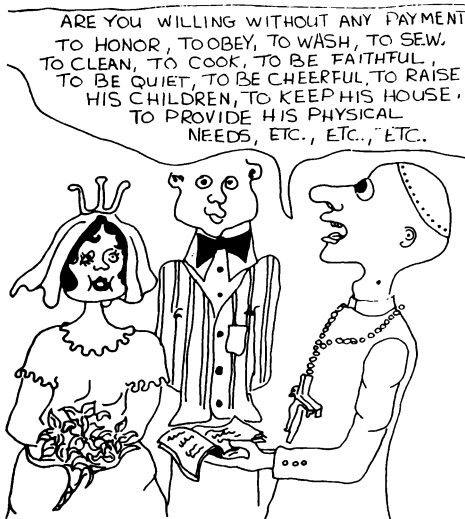
The WFH perspective has also clarified our wageless condition as students, and the objective position of the college and the university under capitalism. This was brought home by the college trustees who are forcing a million dollar budget cut down the throats of Oberlin students and employees. They have also effectively divided us among ourselves by making each group fight for its piece of the pie. We attempted to form a coalition to fight all budget cuts because we reject the notion that it is in our interest that the college remain a sound business financially. We hoped that "no budget cuts" could be a first step towards demanding the wage if the fight exposed our role as being trained to work in, if not run, the social factory. Unfortunately, for various reasons, our demand was misperceived and co-opted by those who are into "community governance". Despite our discouragement, this struggle has helped us clarify the extent to which the WFH perspective extends to every facet of our lives.

Our primary concern is not with our wagelessness as students, however, but with the wageless condition of women as housewives. Within the college this has meant our participation mainly in educational activities: a course on women and socialism in the experimental college, speakers, a presentation of the Oberlin Women's Collective, and a planned issue of the Activist on WFH!

We feel that it is important here to define our relation to the Oberlin town community. Because the college is isolated from the town and because we desire solidarity with women outside of our peculiar situation, many of us have felt a need to get involved in the struggles of community women. But college women's involvement with community women has historically fucked over town women. Because students are unwilling to remain in a small town like Oberlin, their level of commitment has been uneven. This has caused resentment in the past and therefore mistrust of students by the community. The Women's Service Center and Coming Out (a women's paper) are two examples of student-community efforts which have reflected this. Though the possibility exists that individual contacts could get things rolling, we feel strongly that the community must take the initiative in WFH struggles and as students we can only offer support.

We feel we must recognize our transitory position and yet not make it an excuse for inactivity. We are still getting ourselves together as a group and defining for ourselves the WFH perspective. Our group is divided because, for some of us, leaving Oberlin is immediate. Whereas some of us feel a need to become involved on the campus or in the town, others are looking towards political work outside of Oberlin. We cannot call ourselves a "collective". Our commitment to WFH is varied. But for all of us, WFH has fundamentally changed our understanding of women, the working class, and our place in the struggle."

Writing this statement and attending the Montreal conference were only the beginning of many experiences that



have made us increasingly aware of the difficulties involved in collective political practice. The conference itself was an important experience for us. We clarified our understanding of the perspective, especially when we talked about more concrete ideas for practice. We also learned that it is our commitment to WFH that gives us the impetus to work out the problems we encounter when we try to work together as a group.

We were the only completely student group at the conference. The apologetic tone of our statement to the conference illustrates the paranoia we were experiencing because we thought that as students we were somehow isolated from the "real world", separated from housewives and the movement. In the course of the discussions in Montreal we realized that we, too, were housewives, that our different situation as college students did not diminish this fact, and that especially as students we had unique experiences and ideas to offer the movement. We no longer had any excuses for inactivity!

When we returned to Oberlin we wrote an article that appeared in the International Women's Day issue of the school paper. Here we tried to clarify our understanding of how WFH related to Oberlin College women specifically:

"Woman's work is never seen as work but as her nature, the fulfillment of her role as loving and supportive of others. A woman is always a housewife. The secretary brings her boss a cup of coffee with a smile. Even at Oberlin, women are expected to constantly offer a sympathetic ear. And "caring" extends to sleeping with him if he "needs" you. How often are we "liberated" enough to say NO? And who's responsibility is it to take the pill or risk an IUD?

Oberlin women are taught to succeed, to be doctors not nurses, professors not teachers. . . . We are led to believe we are superwomen, that every choice is open to us, that we can successfully combine career and family, a high salary of our own and a "liberated" husband if we wish.

But Oberlin has also taught us that competing in a man's world means being aggressive, independent, unemotional. We lose either way. By learning to win in the classroom, we will lose in a relationship, we will lose in the bedroom. It is no accident that men dominate in discussions, for competing aggressively is a reversal of everything we have been taught to do and everything that is accepted of us.

Of course some women can make it. But the superwoman can only maximize her own power at the expense of other women. She has to fight other women for the privileged status that this society can only offer a few. Wages for Housework points out that the real choice for women is between the power that capital can give a small elite or the power we can win for ourselves by joining with the mass of women."

This article did not elicit a particularly sympathetic response! In fact, by the time this article was published, Wages for Housework had already exploded on campus in the form of violent arguments about the exclusion of men from a meeting with Suzie Fleming a few days before. This "discriminatory" action became the hottest topic to hit the Oberlin campus in a long time:

"Fussy Feminist Kicks Men Out"

Two male students left King 106 last night at the request of a speaker who would address only women.

Suzie Fleming, sponsored by the Radical Coalition and the Forum Board, was scheduled to speak on "Wages for Housework" at 7:30 p.m. Review news editor Dan Hotchkiss and WQBC reporter Mark Cackler were asked to leave at the door. They entered and sat, but left when Fleming refused to speak while they were there.

"I'm really surprised," Hotchkiss said. "I didn't expect this at all. It really raises some questions for me about the sincerity of some of these people."

Asked about the incident, the speaker said, "The men who usually come to these things do not understand yet our need to organize autonomously and are not sympathetic." Fleming is a representative of the Power of Women Collective in London.

The Oberlin Review, Tuesday, March 4, 1975

This ridiculous article was just a small part of the reaction. All the members of our group were bombarded at every possible place and moment with angry criticism. All of a sudden we had all the practice we could want at articulating the perspective. We certainly clarified our own



ideas on autonomous struggle; but arguing with men was the last thing we wanted to waste our time on. We became more convinced than ever that we wanted to exclude men from our meetings, that our autonomy was essential to our politics.

But we had also alienated most of the women on campus. We felt we had to deal with their hostility to us. We tried to speak to their criticisms by explaining our position on

autonomous women's struggle in letters to the *Oberlin Review*, a leaflet distributed to all the college dining halls, and a broadcast of Suzie Fleming's talk on the radio including questions and answers over the air.

"Fleming not 'fussy' "

To the Oberlin community:

Suzie Fleming is not a "fussy feminist." Her reasons — and ours (the Oberlin Wages for Housework Collective, which arranged for Suzie's visit) — for insisting that men be excluded from her "Wages for Housework" meeting on March 3 are not only "understandable," but absolutely valid. In fact, there was no other viable alternative.

"Wages for Housework" is an international working class women's perspective, formulated by and for women. The perspective does not posit that men are irrelevant in the struggle against capital, that men are our enemies, or that the revolution will be accomplished only by women. What WFH insists upon, however, is the necessity for an autonomous women's movement. Capital has divided us by sex, as well as by race, class, and age. We abolish those divisions not by ignoring their reality and joining together as "one big happy family", but by organizing around our specific exploitation, gaining strength from and with each other; in so doing, we lend strength to the class as a whole. Just as we struggle as a class to abolish classes, so we struggle as a sex to abolish sexism. Eventually (and even during certain moments of the present struggle), we expect that the various autonomous movements will join together in a common fight; this can only be effective, however, when each movement has gained a clear understanding of its condition and, more importantly, has gained the power with which to change that condition.

The dynamic of an all-women group is quite different from that of a co-ed one. Women can be more honest and less inhibited in the absence of men, especially when discussing an issue such as our own oppression. At the beginning of the meeting, we in the Women's Group knew that many of the women in the room were ambivalent and disturbed about the ouster of the men. After the meeting, however, many women — including several from the town — told us that ultimately they were very pleased that men had been excluded. They were convinced, they said, that the stimulating, constructive interplay and the rapport which had developed during the meeting could not have occurred had men been present.

Susie Linfield '76

The Oberlin Review, Friday, March 7, 1975

In the leaflet we tried to explain the meaning of autonomous struggle again by focusing on points that could relate to college women. We perceived that these women were reacting so strongly against our perspective and our exclusion of men because our statements and actions threatened their view of themselves as already "liberated" women.

... "Because of our socialization as females in this society, we have learned to always direct ourselves, our appearance, our ideas, our words, to men. For women there is always an invisible male audience, if not actual men in the room. But to begin to learn to address ourselves to each other as women, to disregard that male audience, we choose to close our meetings to men. Most of the women who remained for the discussion Monday night agreed that the exclusion of men did create an atmosphere that brought us together as women. . . ."

... Formal equality — the Equal Rights Amendment, non-discriminatory laws, affirmative action — cannot give women equality with men, although these can be worthwhile efforts. Equality is a matter of power. In capitalist society, a matter of money. Wages for Housework speaks to women who realize that power is something we have to win for ourselves because only we know what our needs are. This is why the perspective is being developed only by women; why, at this point, we close our meetings to men. . . .

We were strongly supported by community women who attended the Suzie Fleming meeting:

"Male Intruders Justly Ousted by Feminist"

To the Editor:

On the evening of March 3, I attended the "Wages for Housework" discussion led by Suzie Fleming from the Power of Women Collective in London. Flyers announcing the discussion had invited all women from the College and the community to attend.

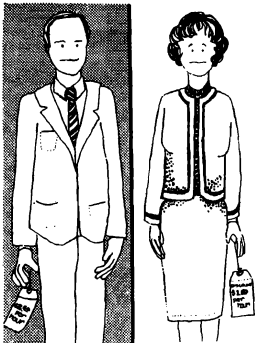
I witnessed the attempts of the two men identified in the Review as Dan Hotchkiss and Mark Cackler to attend. Although women at the door clearly explained the reasons for limiting the discussion to women, the men insisted on coming into the room to confront the speaker, and verbally intimidate the audience into permitting them to remain.



Their presence and behavior was disruptive, divisive, and a familiar attempt to exert male power over a female group. They left when the women, as a group, including the speaker, refused to support them.

Other men who had also come for the discussion had accepted the women's wish to meet together as women and had left.

I had also attended another "Wages for Housework" presentation at Oberlin College last semester during a



radical economics conference; both the speech and the workshop following it were open to men AND women.

The men dominated, trivialized, and fragmented the discussion to such an extent that many women left feeling they had been prevented from hearing and exploring a perspective of vital importance and concern to them.

I support the women at Oberlin College who invited only women to Fleming's discussion and I commend the group's solidarity in preventing the men from participating.

I object to the Review's characterization of Fleming as a "fussy feminist," to Hotchkiss's remark concerning her (our) sincerity, and to the harrassment and threats to which individual women involved in arranging the discussion have been subjected.

Women on this campus and in this community will continue their attempts to define and control their own lives; ridicule and threats will not prevent them from doing so.

Ruth Sabiers

The Oberlin Review, Tuesday, March 18, 1975

This series of events had an important impact on the development of our group. We were initially surprised and a little discouraged that the first publicity WFH received at Oberlin was centered on this supposed "discrimination against men". We did not feel this was an honest representation of the issue. But however badly the publicity and certain men and women presented the question, we did realize that dealing with this question of women meeting autonomously was an important first step in our struggle at Oberlin.

This activity brought our group together. We learned to trust each other more to speak and act as individuals for the group. In the course of these events we also began to think of ourselves as a collective for the first time. But most im-

portant, our collective expanded to include community women as well as more students.

This expanded collective has now spent a few weeks discussing the perspective. The initial sensationalist publicity has died down a bit, and we are ready to provide our own publicity, a mass propaganda effort. We have written a pamphlet which we will distribute in the laundromats, doctors' offices, hairdressers', churches, schools, and anywhere else we think women may pick it up.

We have also met with the Women's Service Center in Oberlin in an attempt to better understand what women are doing in the community and to listen to their reactions to WFH. There are several other groups that we hope to meet with in the near future in order to prepare the groundwork for a town meeting in the fall.

Another aspect of this propaganda campaign is our participation in the Annual May Day Fair . . . We will have a literature table, present a WFH guerrilla theater piece, and hopefully will get some more discussion going.

We are now fifteen women who are very excited about the possibilities for expanding the movement in Oberlin, Ohio. We are getting together and moving!

Sylvia Gentile and Betsy Lewis



The Social Factory

Many of us in the independent left have reached a point of re-evaluation. We have found our political perspective and organizing inadequate and sometimes irrelevant to the needs and activities of the working class. And yet we have found ourselves unable to integrate our collective practice and maintain a national discussion from which could emerge new perspectives.

Our lack of political clarity and development on both a national and local level contributed greatly to the dissolution of Modern Times. For example, we in Modern Times came to doubt the viability of our primary organizing perspective: the "mass revolutionary organization at the workplace." To the extent that such organizations are possible, how are they essentially different from trade unions? In what way are they capable of going beyond the limitations of the factory? But although our own experience made us doubt our original organizing perspectives, we were not able to posit alternatives which might have helped us move forward.

Our inability to move forward left us in a political limbo. Four members of the former Modern Times collective retreated by retreating to what we consider traditional left politics based on class struggle trade unionism (for example, the politics of I.S.). The majority of us reject these politics.

Perhaps at a future time, it would be useful for us to present a direct critique of traditional left politics. We feel, however, that at this point, there are more urgent matters. We would like to present an alternative perspective on the class struggle, one which we hope will help us go beyond our former limitations. Although these ideas are still in embryonic form, we feel they point in new and important directions.

We begin with the question: what is the working class? The answer is generally posed by the left as follows: the working class is the industrial proletariat, i.e., the blue collar workers. Sometimes the working class is stretched to include non-industrial waged workers -- white collar workers, nurses, etc. Outside the working class, there are "the rest of the people" -- blacks, women, prisoners, gay people, students, the unemployed, welfare mothers, schizophrenics and cripples.

This is essentially capital's definition. There are productive workers on the one hand, and on the other, there are

"The Social Factory" was written by some members of an independent collective -- Modern Times -- from Cleveland, Ohio. Modern Times centered its political activity around workplace organizing and the publication of a monthly radical newspaper. After about three years of work the group fell apart in April 1974. "The Social Factory" was written that spring as an attempt to define new directions for organizers and was signed by ten of the fourteen members of the then defunct Modern Times.

the social problems who are a drain on the "society." The left picks up on this analysis and develops it further by designating the productive workers as exploited and the rest as oppressed. Productive workers are sometimes defined by their position in industrial production, and sometimes simply in terms of their being waged or not.

This view of the working class reflects a failure to understand that modern capitalist society is a factory -- a social factory -- the whole of which functions to reproduce capital in an ever-expanding form.

In the social factory the state more and more plans the utilization of our labor, always with the view toward the maximum profitability on the social level. When capital decides to cut inflation by creating more unemployment, the unemployed are functioning to expand capitalist profits. When capital needs women's labor power off the market, both their unwaged labor in the home and their "unemployment" are productive to capital. When it is more profitable to capital to keep the elderly off the labor market, they are thrown into the junk heap of social security.

The working class, then, cannot be defined in terms of its productivity on the individual factory level, nor can it be defined according to whether or not it is waged labor. The productivity of the working class exists on the level of the social factory and the role of some of us in that factory may be to be unemployed.

In an important sense, employed or not, we spend 24 hours a day working for capital in the social factory.

In an important sense, employed or not, we spend 24 hours a day working for capital in the social factory. Waged laborers spend their remaining hours "after work" reproducing themselves to return to work. Eating, sleeping, drinking, movies, fucking are all essential work which we do in order to be prepared for the next day's labor. These same functions are perhaps even more essential for the "unemployed" so they will not turn their violence against capital.

Women play an essential role in the social factory. Aside from providing a cheap labor force which can be returned to the home with relative ease, women bear the burden of bringing up the next generation of workers and feeding, clothing and comforting their men so they can return to another day's labor. They also have to manage the family budget in the face of inflation. All this is unwaged labor for capital.

One reason that it has been so difficult to see the working class in its broadest sense is that some labor is waged and some, unwaged. For example, the unemployed, welfare mothers and the elderly receive social welfare which disguises their role in the social factory. The amount of money the unwaged receive generally depends on two elements: the minimum required to reproduce labor power -- their own and their children's -- and the amount of power they have or can threaten to exercise.

There are many levels of power within the unwaged sector. Unemployed youth have more power and can demand more money than invalids – not only because their labor power is potentially more valuable to capital, but because black youth can threaten to burn down the cities.

As a whole, the unwaged have less power than the waged, their wageless state being both a cause and effect of their powerlessness. There is, however, an overlap. Domestic workers have been known to earn less than the unemployed.²

The division between the waged/unwaged is one of capital's strongest weapons against us. Perhaps the most obvious way this division is used is in the creation of the "reserve army of labor", which, by the way, is an international army. To the extent that there is a large group of unemployed competing for the same jobs, wage levels are depressed. Interestingly enough, this function of unemployment is being challenged by the working class. Many young workers have refused to accept low-paying or distasteful jobs and prefer welfare or hustling.

A second and related use of this division is the turning of the waged and unwaged against each other. Wage laborers are invited to join in an attack on welfare recipients who are supposedly causing higher taxes. Since a disproportionately high percentage of the unemployed are non-white, this encourages white racism.

A third use made of this division is to divide the working class in its loyalties. It is difficult for waged and unwaged workers to see an identity in their class interests. When welfare women fight for more money, auto workers don't easily see that as a wage struggle which should be supported like any other.

The division between waged and unwaged is used very effectively against women whose work in the home is only beginning to be recognized as work. Particularly because of the central role of women in reproducing the working class, both in terms of raising children and keeping their men going and ready to work, men could easily see a struggle of women for wages and a shorter workday as a threat to them and not as a legitimate workers' struggle.

In reality, the wageless and powerless condition of housewives and other sectors of the working class is both the strength and weakness of the more organized sectors of the class. Clearly the wageless position of the wife gives a certain power to the husband. Skilled workers and highly organized mass workers have maintained a position of power against capital and within the class because they can demand concessions from capital, the cost of which is borne by the less organized sectors. If auto workers strike for higher wages, the price of cars will go up and that higher price is borne by those sectors of the class that are not in a position of power to demand commensurate wages. That includes lower-paid workers as well as the unwaged.

On the other hand, the wageless condition of vast numbers of workers weakens the struggles of the more organized in the ways outlined earlier. The ability of industry to move south or out of the country in the face of high wage demands is an example of this. (This in no way implies, however, that as industry moves, the working class in the newly

developing areas won't increase its own struggle. On the contrary, capital's inability to control the working class is international.)

Waged women have keenly felt the effects of the wageless state of their sisters. Women have been compelled to accept low-paying jobs because their only alternatives are to be a wageless wife or a welfare recipient.

Another example of the way the wageless condition of some weakens all would be found by looking at an auto worker in his family situation where the wageless condition of his wife means that his wage is not only expected to reproduce himself but his entire family.

The same kind of dynamic clearly applies within the waged sector of the working class. Capital is more willing to give in to demands of the more organized sectors if the cost can be passed on to the less organized. But in the same way, the weakness of any sector of the class weakens the whole working class. Perhaps a classic example of this dynamic is the South African auto workers, where the white workers earn enormously higher wages than the blacks, yet their wages are far lower than auto workers in the U.S.

The trade unions both express and promote the division between the waged and unwaged sectors, as well as within the waged sector itself. Although one's relationship to the union in a particular workplace must be a tactical question,



the family

developing trade union struggles as the prime emphasis cannot be a revolutionary strategy since it neither relates to the activity of working class militants, nor does it challenge the divisions of labor and power within the class.

The explosions of the 60's, such as among blacks, women, welfare recipients, students, etc., can now be seen in a different light. These were not struggles by "oppressed minorities" against discrimination. They represent not only a struggle against capital but also a power struggle within the working class.

In an important way, the working class is continuously redefining itself through its own activity. When the black community demanded more money, it clearly raised the point that if blacks were unemployed, it was because capital wanted them unemployed. In our terms, we can see this as both the demand of wages for unemployment and the struggle for power. The recent unionization and wage struggles of hospital and clerical workers is another instance of a sector of the class demanding recognition as workers and developing power within the class. Prisoners have struck as well to demand union wages and recognition as workers.

These workers are making clear their relation to the productive process -- the social factory -- a relation which has been mystified for so long. And they are challenging the position of the more powerful layers of the male industrial working class, just as the mass industrial workers challenged the skilled workers in the 30's.

An understanding of this power struggle within the working class as well as against capital must be the departure point for revolutionary strategy, for it is only through this struggle that the working class can unite itself and increase its power as a class. This whole dynamic applies on the international level as well. Any increase in the strength of the international working class strengthens the position of the national working class.

Portugal is an interesting example, for it was the struggles in the colonies in conjunction with increasing strike activity in Portugal which forced the capitalist class to loosen the reins in the metropolis -- Portugal. But Portugal is a kind of third world to the more advanced capitalist countries. And it is the increasingly acute class struggle in Portugal which is preventing international capital from continuing to use Portugal as an escape from the class struggle in the rest of Europe and the United States; i.e., it is the strength of the Portuguese class struggle which will strengthen the working class in its metropolis.

To locate the vanguard of the working class in the already more powerful or more easily organized sectors of the class is to base one's strategy on the divisions within the class rather than on their destruction.

To locate the vanguard of the working class in the already more powerful or more easily organized sectors of the class is to base one's strategy on the divisions within the class rather than on their destruction. To base a revolutionary strategy on the trade unions is to base one's strategy on an even narrower layer within the working class -- that layer which is still willing to channel its energy through the unions -- mainly white males.

Our strategy is to disrupt the social factory, to develop the power of the class as a whole so that it can choose to act according to its own needs, and not those of capital; to withhold its labor, to refuse its functions in the social factory, to destroy capital's plans. To do this, a strategy must attack the divisions within the working class, divisions among waged workers, and between the waged and unwaged. The capitalist defined division between the workplace and the community also must become irrelevant. Our whole lives are integrated into the social factory and we do and must resist on that level.

This strategy does not envision all sectors of the working class subsuming their needs under a general program which would of necessity reflect the interests of the already more powerful layers within the class. It seeks to develop the power of all sectors of the class so that unity can be built on the basis of the respect each sector would have for the other's power. That is the meaning of autonomous organization of different sectors of the class. Women, for example, must organize autonomously, not only because men cannot express women's needs or develop women's politics, but because women must develop their power within the working class.

The struggles of the wageless are crucial. Money demands by the unwaged are a direct attack on the waged/unwaged division. They are also extremely subversive in that they allow *workers* to make the choice to refuse to work for capital. As long as we are unemployed for the benefit of capital's profits, we are working in the social factory. When we begin to find ways to disrupt capital's plan for how many and who are to be unemployed, we are subverting the social factory.

In this context, the importance of the struggle for wages for housework becomes clear. Women in the home, whether or not employed outside the home as well, are providing up to 24 hours a day unwaged labor. This is not only a source of weakness for women but for the whole working class. Women must struggle for power against capital and within the working class, for the recognition of their labor, a shortening of the workday, services provided by capital, and money.

Wages for housework would fundamentally disrupt the social factory. Capital could no longer expand on the backs of an unwaged female population. Housework would have to be revolutionized if it were paid hourly. And women would have the choice of refusing to be pushed into the second job, outside the home, whenever it suited capital.

If much of this appears to neglect those highly organized and powerful workers in, for instance, auto and steel, we wish to make it clear that this is not the case. These work-

ers' struggles are already beginning to go beyond the factory gates. We are beginning to decide when, and under what conditions, we are going to be on the labor market. Large-scale unemployment can be met in a similar fashion. We must make it clear that it's money we are interested in, not more jobs. Sub pay in auto and steel is already a realization of this demand.

These points hardly begin to indicate what kind of struggles could be developed with the perspective we are putting forth. This whole discussion has of necessity been very schematic. Many other elements could have been explored,

like the false dichotomy between economic and political struggles – a dichotomy which leads one into being a good trade union militant at work and a "revolutionary Marxist" in the party. But hopefully this will do for a start, to open up some needed discussion.

We do not pretend to have everything figured out. But confusion is something that we may have to live with until our practice and the activity of the working class will clarify many things. We can not allow our inability to answer all questions to cause us to return to more comfortable, traditional approaches.

NOTES

1. The functioning of the social factory is more and more under the direct management of a constantly expanding state. The institutions which comprise the modern capitalist state attempt to both absorb our struggles and organize our exploitation. Universities, social workers, town planners, and prisons, for example, plan and attempt to carry out the absorption of social revolt. Economists, trade unions, the army and the media either plan or function to facilitate the regulation of our labor and consumption.

Through taxation, the state accumulates large chunks of capital which are necessary for economic planning. The defense industry is expanded or shrunk. Injections are given to near bankrupt industries to prevent social dislocation (for example, the \$200 million given to Lockheed to prevent bankruptcy). The economy is inflated, deflated, and staglanted.

2. Just as there is a continuum of power within the unwaged sector and between the waged and unwaged, there are two continua of power within the waged sector. One is the continuum among industries: steelworkers in general have more power and earn higher wages than agricultural workers. Labor which is an extension of housework – hospital work, clerical and domestic labor, etc. – is low on the scale. Some power is based on skill and restricted union membership, as in the construction industry – a situation maintained by the trade unions. On the other hand, the power of mass industrial workers is based on organized struggle -- struggles which gave birth to industrial unionism.

The other continuum of power within the waged sector exists within each industry. Again this may be based on skill or degree of organization.

Certain sectors of the population are clearly over-represented in the bottom layers of these continua. Women, blacks, chicanos, immigrants . . . the list could go on of the more powerless sectors of the class which are either unwaged or concentrated in poorly paid dangerous jobs. Racism has been a tool to keep non-whites in this powerless position.



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Excerpts from
**WHEN WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK
BECOMES A PERSPECTIVE**

BY SILVIA FEDERICI

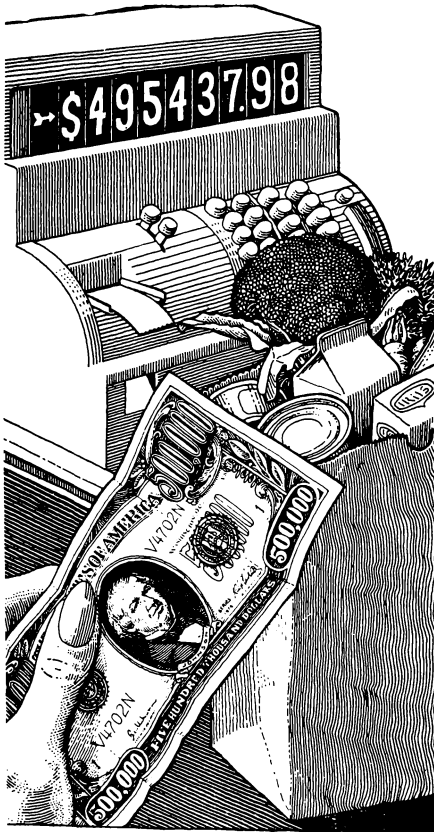
It is important to recognize that when we speak of housework we are not speaking of a job as other jobs, but we are speaking of the most pervasive manipulation, the most subtle and mystified violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class. True, under capitalism every worker is manipulated and exploited and his/her relation to capital is totally mystified

But in the case of housework the situation is qualitatively different. The difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women, but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character. Housework had to be transformed into a natural attribute rather than being recognized as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's schemes for women this work was destined to be unwaged . . . In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common assumption that *housework is not work*, thus preventing women from struggling against it, except in the privatized kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees to ridicule, thereby further reducing the protagonist of a struggle. We are seen as nagging bitches, not workers in struggle...

This fraud that goes under the name of love and marriage affects all of us, even if we are not married, because *once housework was totally naturalised and sexualised*, once it became a feminine attribute, all of us as females are characterized by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and even like doing them—even those women who, due to their social position, could escape some of that work or most of it (their husbands can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we are all in a servant relation with respect to the whole male world. This is why to be called a female is such a put-down, such a degrading thing ("Smile, honey, what's the matter with you?" is something every man feels entitled to ask you, whether he is your husband, or the man who takes your ticket, or your boss at work.)...

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. *It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore, to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.*

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