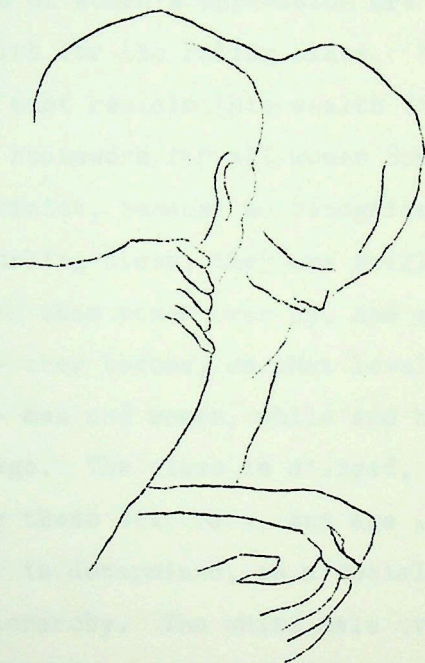


WHY LESBIANS WANT  
WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK



WAGES DUE COLLECTIVE  
TORONTO 1975

# "Why Lesbians Want Wages for Housework"

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Wages for Housework is a complete political perspective. This means that it is not another issue or idea that can be just tacked on to something else. That wouldn't work. It is a way to look at oppression, understand its causes and identify a way to fight it all at the same time.

It is Marxist, because it recognizes that events are changed by the struggles between the working class and the ruling class. (It is NOT Leninist - i.e. we don't believe in parties, vanguards, dictatorship of the proletariat, etc.) Wages for Housework says that the roots of women's oppression are founded in the fact that we create wealth for the ruling class. We say that to end our oppression we must reclaim this wealth (that's where the demand for wages for housework for all women comes in).

It is feminist, because we recognize that while men are part of the working class, they are still our oppressors. The state has given them power over us, and so they become agents of the state - they become, on that level, the enemy. Capital rules us all - men and women, white and black, young and old, through the wage. The class is divided, exactly as our work is divided, along these sex, race, and age lines. Our level of relative power is determined, on a social scale, by our position on the wage hierarchy. The white male over 30 in the metropolis is more powerful than a black, a woman, a child or an old person because he has more money. The housewife is wageless, and therefore on the lowest rung of the wage hierarchy, but very much inside this wage relation. The man commands her labour, she is subservient to the man, because she is dependent on his wage. He is compelled to work because he knows his wife and children will not eat if he stops. Capital rules by dividing us into waged and wageless workers. We believe that the only way we can struggle against this is autonomously, as women. We believe that there is no question of socialism without women's liberation - because the two are synonymous. No one is free until we are all free.

Women produce the most important commodity in capitalism. The only commodity without which capitalism cannot survive. the

insofar as it is necessary for the sexual service of the man or the maintenance  
 training of our children etc. The state tries to convince women that fucking is  
 "labour of love" in the same way that it tries to convince us that cooking bread  
 and raising children is a labour of love. We may enjoy frying eggs. We certainly  
 love our children. We may even like fucking. But these facts don't change the fact  
 that all these things are work and are not performed only for ourselves and our  
 families. In fact, it is because these things are work for someone else that it is  
 often so hard for us to love at all.

The existence of prostitutes also makes visible that fucking is work. When a  
 woman is most desperate because of her wagelessness, she can always take a wage for  
 fucking. This serves the state by ensuring that even men who cannot be sexually re-  
 lieved in the usual way of marrying a woman (buying a slave), can still be sexually  
 serviced so that he can work the next day. Prostitution certainly does not serve  
 women, and it is doubtful whether it serves the man's interests (except as defined  
 by capital). So it obviously serves capital. Prostitution is not a fight against  
 work, but it does serve to define to all of us the nature of our work.

Because lesbianism is a refusal to sexually service men it is a fight against  
 that work. One of the crucial working conditions of heterosexuality is isolation  
 of women from each other. Lesbianism is a refusal of some of this isolation.  
 In lesbian relationships we still take care of ourselves and other women (other  
 workers) so it is not an escape from our work. But because we are doing this work  
 with other women, it is a form of workers' control. When we fuck with a man, he  
 thinks that he is escaping from work. Women know that fucking is work. Men do not.  
 For the man, fucking seems an escape from work - he is the boss. It shows. We can  
 feel it. That is why it is so hard for us to love the man who fucks us. When we  
 sleep with a woman, we are still serving the state - she too must be kept just hap-  
 pily enough to keep working. But at least when we spend our time and sexual energy on  
 women we are also maintaining her for her struggle against our work. That's  
 workers' control.

As lesbians, we do not think that we are any stronger than, any better than  
 any different from other women. All women are fighting against our work in different  
 ways, and lesbianism is just one of these ways. Lesbianism is a struggle, and  
 we have all, as women, built our own power, we, as lesbians, are able to be open  
 about what we are, how we are fighting, what we need. All of us are however  
 we are no different in the eyes of the state. We are no different in the eyes of

learned, from seeing the men, that we will let no union negotiate a productivity deal. We want ALL the wealth that we have created. We will take everything that we can get, because every little bit helps us fight harder. And in the end, we will destroy women's work. We will destroy all work. We will destroy the ruling class entirely. This is the perspective called wages for housework. It contains an explanation of our exploitation and it points out the course of our struggle. It is not an invention that somebody pulled out of a text book. It is the result of the struggles of women everywhere - for more money, more time, so that we can struggle harder. It developed directly from the struggles of women - it is merely a condensation of a lot of things that we have all known a long time. It is not a single issue alongside daycare or abortion - it contains within it the strategy for fighting all these battles, and it puts them into a perspective, so that we are fighting for what WE need, not in reaction to capital's plans for us

People sometimes say that single women don't do housework. (especially lesbians). ALL women do housework. That's our role. That is what we are all expected to do. It is our role as housewives that is responsible for our powerlessness as women. Often we don't like to identify ourselves as housewives. This is understandable, because we see how powerless the housewife is, and we want to have some power. The mistake is thinking that we can escape our work as long as capitalism exists. A black liberation leader, a while ago, was addressing a group of black people. He said that they were all descended from slaves. That they were all bound up in the slavery that is their role. Many of them got very upset. They said, "Not me". Women, too, are all slaves. Often we want to say "Not me", but as soon as we recognize this common condition, then it becomes a source of power, then we are in a position to fight it together. Many of us manage to free ourselves from SOME of our housework. In fact, if we didn't we wouldn't have the freedom to be involved in the women's movement at all. But we can never free ourselves of being housewives, unless of course, we can be the daughter of Aristotle Onassis.

When we go out to work in a second job, we are paid less than men. This is because they can get away with it, because we are trained to be wageless workers (housewives), when we work outside the home we are grateful for anything. But there is more to it ~~xxx~~ than that. Because we have no power, because we are housewives, we don't have the power to demand a decent wage on the job market. There is always a housewife out there needing our job. They can always send us back into the home if we get too expensive. And as long as we are doing housework for nothing, we have no lever to demand more money. And we all do housework for nothing. We just don't recognize it as work, because it isn't paid.

When we work outside the home, much of the work we do is unpaid housework. We have all been taught the skills of licking ass, making coffee, being feminine, keeping quiet, etc.. But this work is not included in our job description. This training is not recognized in our pay packet. It is not paid for. That's why we make less money for the same amount (or more) work.

And when we have finished our job, we don't go home to a wife. We have to cook our own supper, do our own laundry, clean up, pay the bills, etc. We maintain ourselves as workers, and this too is unpaid work. As is our occasionally being raped; whether we are lesbian or straight we are assumed to be heterosexual, even though we have tried to refuse the work of fucking. Wages for housework is for all women.

Being a housewife is not an attitude. It is a fact. We cannot change it by changing our heads. We can only change the brand of our housework. Instead of TV dinners, we chop almonds interminably. Instead of going to bingo to keep ourselves sane for more work, we smoke dope and listen to records. Instead of maintaining a man and family, we maintain ourselves and our friends. Instead of cleaning a suburban bungalow, we clean our lesbian communes. Instead of putting on make-up and doing our hair, we put on vests and leather jackets, and cut our hair. Once we recognize this, we can stop guilting each other, and other women, and ourselves for being what we all are, and start doing something about it.

All women fight against our work all the time. Lesbianism is a fight against the work of fucking. But so, for many women, is frigidity, or illness, being 'too tired', etc.. Lesbians have been able to take leave of fucking, by means of the power built by all women's struggles. Women who fight against fucking by having a headache as often as they can, contribute to the power we drew on to be able to come out. And by coming out we contribute to the power they need to continue their fight. Lesbianism is the organized form women's struggle against fucking-as-work has taken.

We fight to do less work. Some women do this by demanding a maid. Some women do this by demanding unemployment. Some do this by demanding daycare. Some women do this by not having children. It's all the same fight.

All women want control over our work, so that we can have some control over our lives. Some women do this by taking on a second job. Some women do it by being a terror in the kitchen and ruling their families with an iron hand. Some women do this by getting government grants to do our own work. None of these are a complete solution, because none of them destroy the work itself. But they are all attempts by women to control our lives. Wages for housework offers the possibility of seeing each other's struggles as the same.

We all survive as best we can. Some of us have slightly more power than others of us. Some slightly less. But as soon as we have any power at all, we do less work. There is nothing 'good' or 'bad' about being housewives. We just are.

Some people <sup>say we should</sup> socialize housework, rather than demand money. But with capitalism, socialization is a loss of power, and therefore can never be part of a fight against capitalism. For example, the education system is socialized housework. And we all know that it is merely a more efficient way to propagandize our children. Prostitution is socialized housework. It is a way to get every man the fucks he is taught to expect. State-run daycare is socialized housework. It is a way to train our children earlier to be docile and disciplined.

We want an entirely different education system, we want universal access to free, community controlled daycare. But education and daycare will be inflicted on us, on the state's terms, unless we build the power we need to be able to command socialization of housework on our terms. Without wages for housework, the net effect of socialization of housework, as a strategy, would be to take out of our hands the possibility of controlling our work, of destroying our work. There are many states that do just this. We don't want it - we want the power to fight capital to the end. And that means, not pay for housewives, as many governments have already tried to give us, but wages for housework, for all women, for all the work. So that we can come out of our isolation and fight.

Many people say that wages for housework would lock women in their homes. Women are now locked in their homes, by their powerlessness. If the wage we commanded were a productivity deal it might not change this situation. But we are already living with productivity deals. You have so many kids, live in such and such a house, marry a certain kind of man, and in return you will get social approval, you will not starve (if you're lucky). So one more productivity deal on top of this wouldn't make much difference. That's why we say that wages for housework is not a single demand - it is a perspective. We need the perspective to know that we aren't being bought off/ We want wages for ALL women, no conditions attached. Of course, we will take what we can get, and they will first give us money in an attempt to make us work harder. They already do that, by 'letting' us take on a second job outside the home. As long as we know that we are fighting for wages for housework, for ALL women, then we won't stop at less than that. It is an insult to ourselves to say that if we got wages for housework we would stay in our homes. We already know that we have moved because we had some power. And wages for housework would give so many women so much more power, that much more time, that in any form it would swell the movement. That's unavoidable.

A lot of people say that money isn't power. That is isn't 'nice' to demand money. It sounds like playing into the hands of capitalism.

But the fact of the matter is, that this IS capitalism. We create money. That's our job, and like it or not we can't stop doing it. There is nothing mercenary about demanding money; money is how power is measured within capitalism. Our wagelessness, then, is both a measure and the cause of our ~~wagelessness~~ powerlessness. Like it or not, this is war. Life under capitalism is war. We cannot opt out of it, we can only choose sides. Saying that money is not 'nice', is the pacifism of this war. It is like putting flowers in the barrel of the gun. It is like sitting cross-legged while the machine guns mow us down. Pacifism has never put an end to war. Passive resistance is no resistance at all. We didn't choose this war. We are merely accepting the fact that a war is being waged against us every day, and we are fighting back. Passive resistance is what the state expects from women - it is part of our role as housewives. It is not a moral issue, because there is no 'right' or 'wrong' in this war. There is only them and us, and we want US to win.

Briefly, there is a point to be made, that should by now be clear. The 'working class' is not male, white and over 30. It is all of us. Housewives are not 'middle class'. We are workers. We are the backbone of the working class. We, like many other workers, are unwaged (as are old people, students, insane people, sick people, prisoners, and the 'unemployed'). We do not believe that the working class is 'backward'; and needs to be taught anything. We believe that we are unorganized and that we need to organize ourselves. We already know what we want - we've been demanding it for years - more money and less work. (Not 'equal pay for equal work' - that's the state's idea. Not 'the right to work' - that's the state's idea.) We don't want to be led. We don't need representatives to negotiate our cause. We have a very simple plan - which doesn't mean that it won't work, because it is the only plan that will. We want everything that we can get, and still more, and we will fight anyone who gets in our way.; We don't need to have debates and write books about who is the enemy, who will eventually be on our side. We will figure that out as we go along, by looking at who is on our side, and as we build our power,



more and more people will join us. We aren't going to worry if they give us wages first out of the taxpayers' pocket (read white male working class). They can fight for their own interests. We will say we want it directly from the state, so that the taxpayers know we don't want their money. Looking after the men is part of our housework, and we want to refuse it. We are willing to fight alongside of the men - on our terms. From now on, they'll have to defend their own interests, and if that means that they lose the part of their power that is built on the backs of women, of children, of blacks, and Indians, and whole rest of the wageless working class, that is the price they will be forced to pay for their own liberation.

But what about sexism, and the women's movement? Sexism is the ideology of the state. Whether or not it predates capitalism (it does) is irrelevant, because history doesn't march backwards, because sexism has not predated our exploitation, although the form of our exploitation has changed, and because right now we are exploited as housewives, and that's what we must fight. Sexism is the means by which the state exploits us. It is not in itself the cause of our exploitation. We fight sexism all the time, because we must. But if we fight sexism only, without attacking the source of our powerlessness, then we lose. Because all the state has to do is appear to give in, and then just change the brand name of its sexism. This has already happened. Witness the 'liberated woman' - originally we fought (and are still fighting) for the right to control our sexuality, and the state has used our fight to get even more free fucks out of women. Witness the 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' campaign. Originally we fought (and are still fighting) against the fact that we have no money, and now the state has turned it into a campaign to get us to work harder. We are even begging them for jobs. They are thrilled to have us fight to work, and so put up token resistance, to make us think we've won something. Without a perspective, all our struggles are in danger of going the same way. There are now state 'feminists' just like there were Uncle Toms in the black movement.

We need to have a complete perspective, which means that it must be international. Because capital is international, and plans internationally for women. They want to be able to decide which of us shall do waged work, and which of us shall do only unwaged work, which of us shall have children, and which shall not, all toward increasing our 'productivity', toward 'rationalizing' our lives. When we put forward a demand like free abortion, which speaks to only part of our need and doesn't speak to our need for time and money to have the children we may want, we open the way for the state to incorporate our struggle into their plans for us. Not only in the third world do they want control over our wombs. Here, too, they try to insure against the 'wrong' women having children, by making sure that when we reproduce we do so on their terms; we are tied to a man or to the state itself via welfare, and poorer, and less autonomous than we are when we are childless. If we put forward a demand for time and money, they cannot incorporate our struggle into their plans, or use it against third world women. If we build our power third world women are stronger. And vice versa. And so instead of just free abortion, we must fight for free abortion and wages for women so that we can afford to have the children we want, when we want them, and can afford to bring them up HOW we want. In other words, through demanding wages for housework, we are demanding all the other things that we need. And every struggle we make for services or time is a wages for housework struggle. We are demanding the control we need over our lives - to really be able to set up community daycare and schools, to really be able to have good birth control, to really have the money and time to set up our own centres, to really have the choice to travel around the world to connect with other women, etc. And we are demanding these choices in a way then, that cannot be co-opted, because they cannot accommodate our demand for power. The more we have, the less they have over us.

Besides the state feminists, the women's movement also contains another trend. A very important trend, because it is led by lesbians, and the struggle of lesbians is crucial to the women's movement as a whole. It is the Amazon Nation perspec-

tive. And its ideology is sisterhood. The idea is that we build, in the belly of the beast, counter-organizations, always growing until we link up and become powerful enough to fight the state. In a lot of ways, this is useful. It is certainly a better form of organizing than the Leninist parties. But it also has several major flaws. One is that if we fail to recognize the basis of our exploitation as women, then we fail to have the understanding that will eventually unite all women. So, instead, we get more and more isolated, more and more ghettoized. That's how the state deals with this sort of organization. That's already happening to us. Sisterhood cannot be a strategy. It is a strength only when it is a recognition of the common condition for all women. Without this recognition it becomes selective. It becomes conditional. It fails to recognize the real divisions among us. We do not deal with divisions by ignoring them - that's the ~~same~~ same strategy as the Leninist parties: Black and White Unite and Fight, United Front politics, etc.. Its effect is that the interests of the less powerful sectors of the working class become sublimated to the interests of the more powerful. That's happened to women already. That's why we organize ourselves autonomously. Withing Wages for Housework, lesbians must, and are, organizing also autonomously. That's why we have our own collective. That's why we are holding an exclusively lesbian meeting. We want to deal with the division between lesbian and straight not by ignoring it, or hiding it. Not by isolating ourselves from other women. But by fighting it out, on the basis of a perspective that serves our interests as well as the interests of straight women.

The effect of trying to build from an isolated position is that we become more isolated. We have created, in Toronto as well as a lot of other places, a ghetto. This ghetto is not our choice, it is the result of our exploitation in the first place. It developed out of an originally clear struggle - that as lesbians we were exploited. But we are not 'special cases' in the sense that we cannot unite with other women, or rather that they cannot unite with us on the basis of our common inter-

est. While mouthing the ideology of sisterhood, we have created a structure that cannot build sisterhood. And the fact of this structure is that it is more work and therefore there is less time for us to really fight. Our housework has intensified in the ghetto with a decrease in our power, it is a cause for our power ebbing away. And it isn't accidental that this is the point that the state is sending in the 'shock troops'. Unconsciously, these women, like the state feminists, are working against our struggle. They are the humanists, the women who put our struggle on a purely personal level. And out of sisterhood we are afraid to fight them, as if to do so would hurt them or us. In fact it could only help all of us, because here is the return of everything we set out to fight in the first place: pacifism, isolation, 'human liberation' (meaning women and children last), guilt, guilt, and more guilt. As if women haven't had enough guilt already, now we have to fight the oppressor 'within'. And the solutions are solutions that have always kept us down. Religion, the arch-enemy of our struggle as women. Pacifism, the role we have been stuck in for centuries. Even our identity as lesbians is being defused - now we must be 'androgynous'. We become 'nice' lesbians, meaning non-threatening. Because we are afraid of threatening our sisters, we have ceased to threaten the state. We have created a giant closet, full of housework. Now we must work at growing plants, making our own yoghurt, being thrifty - meaning we must shop harder (and shopping is not consumerism, it is WORK), we must build lesbian communes that are utopias with no compromises - certainly this is even more work than the nuclear family. We must take care of each other, and as our power decreases, our nervous breakdowns increase - more work. We must chant, and spend hours getting in touch with our bodies. We must buy stereos, and dope, and paint our houses white, while we dream dreams of the millennium.

Our ghetto has become a prison. It has strict rules of behavior. It has strict rules of dress. It has strict rules of entry and departure. It utilizes struggle only as a means of personal interaction, and ignores it as a means of building

a movement. We become trapped in GUILT. We are wrong if we are monogamous. We are wrong if we are promiscuous. We are wrong if we are bisexual. We are scared if we are celibate, and being scared is wrong. We are wrong if we work. We are wrong if we don't work. We force each other to work harder - make more rules, create more jobs. We organize ourselves endless meetings to fill in any spare time between working. And at these meetings we debate the menu for next Tuesday's supper. We are wrong if we scare straight women off by being dykey. We are wrong if we are in the closet by being femmey. We are wrong if we talk about politics. We are wrong if we don't.

In the end we are paralysed. We have created a giant closet. We are afraid to move because we don't know where to move, and our isolation has made us so suspicious we can't even see our own movement. We are tied into self-righteousness and morality, as if war has ever been a moral issue. As if we've ever had any choices in our lives

We have been forced into our ghetto by the weight of capital on our backs, by our powerlessness to move on the strength we built with other women in the movement. We did not have a perspective which would show us clearly the internal connection between our struggles and those of every other woman. We built the ghetto, which has been our fortress and our barricades, so as not to lose what power we had built. To escalate our struggle, to win, we must destroy the ghetto.

We are presenting this paper, in an attempt to share something that has given us the strength to begin to move ahead. In an attempt to share a perspective of our struggle that is free of all the contradictions and pitfalls that our movement has fallen into. We want to affirm the strength of lesbian struggle, and we want it to survive. Wages for Housework is a guarantee of that survival.

Wages for housework, as we have already said, did not spring from thin air. In 1972 women from several different countries met in Italy and began to pull together their understandings of women's struggles worldwide and the source of women's exploitation and powerlessness. They began to understand the power of women who were moving internationally, among them lesbian feminists who refused to be compromised in relation to men, and welfare women who were demanding more money from the state. They formed a group called the International Feminist Collective and began to make contacts all over the world with other women who had been thinking along the same lines. They also reaffirmed the necessity for the autonomy of the women's movement.

There is an international network of wages for housework groups, as the fight for wages is an international struggle against capitalism. There have been several international conferences, and there will be more as we continue to develop our strategy. In Montreal in 1973, a feminist symposium of 800 women made a resolution calling for wages for housework from the state for all women. Our strategy now is to build an international movement, to show the commonality of our situation and our struggles as women and to begin to mobilize women so that we will eventually be strong enough to force capital to give us what we want, and ultimately to destroy capital altogether.

We must break down the divisions that capital has created among us, but we cannot do this by ignoring them or by thinking we can change them by changing our heads. They are real. It is crucial that we all understand how the state has used lesbianism to keep us divided from and fighting each other, and from seeing how we are exploited in the same way. As lesbians, we know that often straight women, because they have more power, will not stand up and fight in our interests. We are organizing autonomously as lesbians for this reason. But though we see we have some interests that we must identify and vocalize ourselves that are different from straight women's, we are still primarily identified as

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housewives. That is our role. And that is considered to be our nature, too. That is why we feel that it is absolutely imperative that we organize with other women, both lesbian and straight. And demand an end to our exploitation as women, beginning by demanding wages for the work we do.

In Toronto, we are organized into the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee. In this group, we develop further our understanding of this perspective and strategy. We speak to groups of women, at conferences, prepare literature, and do all the other work that goes into building a movement. Within this committee, there is an autonomous lesbian collective called Wages Due. We meet regularly and discuss wages for housework from a lesbian perspective, and lesbianism from a wages for housework perspective. However, we have not always been organized this way.

We have spent a lot of time and energy, and will continue doing so, figuring out our relationship to the rest of the committee and theirs to us, and to other lesbians and other straight women. While we must speak up and demand that our interests be recognized and dealt with by all other women (no more closets, thank you), it is no longer only up to us to see that this happens. The straight women also have a political responsibility to us and to themselves to speak about our struggles when they speak about those of other groups of women. Wages for housework as a perspective has enabled straight women to recognize how they need the power of lesbianism themselves. All of us in the WFH movement, lesbian and straight, are beginning to see the importance of lesbian struggles to all women, and how we are a lesbian movement in the sense that we are all struggling to throw off the yoke of our sexuality and our lives being defined by the state and not by our own needs.

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