

WHEN WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK BECOMES A PERSPECTIVE

Many times the difficulty of this and other things can be expressed in discussing wages for housework when they say that wages for housework is reduced to a minimum...

...they say it is love..we say it is unpaid work..

they call it frigidity..we call it absenteeism..

if marriage is work single women should collect unemployment..

every miscarriage is a work accident..

homosexuality and heterosexuality are both working conditions..

but homosexuality is worker's control of production not the end of work..

more smile?..more money..nothing will be so powerful in destroying the healing virtues of a smile..

Neuroses, suicides, desexualisation..occupational diseases of the housewife..

other choices—professional work, enlightened husband, normal life, gay relations or a combination of these it would not make much of a difference. Supposedly there are other ways of achieving economic independence and the last thing we want is to get it by identifying ourselves as housewives, a fact that all agree — is, so to speak, worse than death.

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Many times the difficulties and ambiguities which women express in discussing wages for housework stem from the fact wages for housework is reduced to a thing, a lump of money, rather than being viewed as a political perspective. The difference between the two positions is enormous. To view wages for housework as a thing means to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society. Usually when we take this attitude we start asking ourselves "what difference could some more money make in our lives"?. We might even agree that for a lot of women who do not have any choice except for housework and marriage it would indeed make a lot of a difference. But it seems that for those of us who have other choices---professional work, enlightened husband, communal life, gay relations or a combination of these it would not make much of a difference. Supposedly there are other ways of achieving economic independence and the last thing we want is to get it by identifying ourselves as housewives, a fate ^{which} we all agree -- is, so to speak, worse than death.

The problem with this position is that in our imagination we usually add this money to the otherwise shitty lives we al-

ready have and then ask "so what?", on the false premise that we can ever get that money without at the same time revolutionising--in the process of struggling for it--all our family and social relations. But if we take wages for housework as a political perspective we can see that struggling for it is going to produce a revolution in our lives and our social power as women. And it assumes that if we do not "need" that money it is because we accept the particular form of prostitution of body and mind by which we get money to hide that need. As I will try to show, not only wages for housework is a revolutionary perspective, but it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class.

It is important to recognise that when we speak of housework we do not speak of a job as other jobs, but we speak of the most pervasive manipulation and subtle violence that capitalism has ever perpetuated 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. The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss are equal; while in reality the wage, rather than paying for the work you do hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit. But the wage at least recogni-

ses that you are working, and you can bargain and struggle around and against the terms and the quantity of that wage, the terms and the quantity of that work. To get a wage means to enter a social contract, exploitative though it might be, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning. You work not because you like it, or because it comes natural to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live. You are not that work. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a taxi-driver, all that matters is how much of that work you do and how much of that money you get.

But in the case of housework the situation is radically different : the qualitative difference lies in the fact that not only has housework been imposed on women , but it has been transformed into a natural attribute of their female physiques and personalities, 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 been recognised as a social contract because from the very beginning in capital's schemes for women this work was destined to be unwaged, and nobody in her right mind would accept hours and hours of unwaged work unless she believed that it is natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity. In its turn, the unwaged condition of housework has been the most powerful weapon in reinforcing the common social belief that this is not work, thus pre-

venting women from struggling against it, except in the privatised, kitchen-bedroom quarrel that all society agrees is ridiculous, and thereby further reduce the protagonist of a struggle.

Yet how natural all this is is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialisation -- i.e. conditioning, day-to-day training, usually performed by an unwaged mother, to prepare a woman for this role, to convince her that children and husband are the best she can expect from life. Even so, it hardly succeeds. No matter how well trained we are, few are the women who do not feel cheated when bride's day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink (many of us still have the illusion that they marry for love, a lot of us recognise that they marry for money and security, but it is time to make it clear that while the love or money involved is very little the work which waits for us is enormous). This is why older women always tell you "Enjoy your freedom until you can, as much as you can, buy whatever you want now..". But unfortunately, very little freedom can ever be enjoyed if from the earliest period in ~~your~~ life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent, and most important to sacrifice yourself and even get pleasure out of it.... "it is all done for love".., if you do not like it it is your problem, your failure, your guilt, your abnormality.

We must admit that capital has been very successful in hiding our work. It has created a true masterpiece at the expenses of women : exploitation far from being realised as such has been transformed into an act of love .By denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, capital has killed many birds with one stone. First of all it has got a hell of lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women far from struggling against it would seek for it as the best thing in life (.. the magic words.. "yes, darling, you are a real women"..). Moreover, it has disciplined also the male worker by making his woman dependent on his work and his wage, while at the same time has pacified him by giving him a servant after he himself has done so much serving at the factory or the office. In fact, our role as women is to be the unwaged ,but happy and most of all loving servants of the "working" class, i.e. those strata of the proletariat to which capital was forced to grant more social power. In the same way as God created Eve to give pleasure to Adam, so did capital created the housewife to service the male worker physically, emotionally and sexually--to raise his children, mend his socks, patch up his ego when it is crashed by the work and social relations (which often are relations of loneliness) that capital has reserved for him. (It is precisely this peculiar combination of physical, emotional and sexual services that are involved in the role women must perform for capital, that creates the specific character of that servant ~~xxxx~~ which is the house-

wife, that makes her work so burdensome and by its very nature hides it completely).. It is not an accident that most men as soon as they get their first job start thinking of getting married. This is not only because now they can afford it, but because having somebody at home who takes care of you is the only condition not to go crazy after a day spent in an office or at a machine. As bad as things might be for the male worker, there is a woman at home, waiting for him, to reassure him that everything is all right, that he is all right. ~~And when a man enters his house he can cuddle in his woman's arms and lick up his wounds. "Well, you are a great man. I'll be with you" (every housewife is somehow a frontier woman backing her man through his hardships).~~ Every woman knows that this is what she should be doing to be a true woman and have a "successful" marriage. And in this case too, the poorer the family the highest the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy with the middle class and the proletarian family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machisms in the working class family: the more blows the man gets work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at her expenses --beating your wife and venting your rage against her when you are frustrated or overtired by your work or when you are defeated in a struggle

(to go into a factory is itself a defeat). The more the man serves and is bossed around, the more he bosses around.. a man's home is his castle..and his wife jhas to learn to wait in silence when he is moody, to put him back together when he is broken down and swears at the world, to turn around in bed when he says "I'm too tired tonight", or when he goes so fast at lovemaking that, as a women put it, he might as well make it with a mayonneese jar.

But 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 were characterised by it. If it is natural to do certain things, then all women are expected to do them and like them, even those women who, due to their social position could escape some or most of it (their husbands ~~may~~ can afford maids and shrinks and other forms of relaxation and amusement). We might not serve one man, but we all are in a servant relationship with respect to the whole male world, which 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 carman who punches your ticket, or your boss at work).

If we start from this analysis we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand of 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, refuse precisely that female role that capital has invented for us.

To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has from us, since these expectations--the essence of our socialisation--are all functional to our wageless condition in the house. In this sense, it is absurd to compare the struggle of women for wages to the struggle of the male workers in the factory for more wages. The waged worker in struggling for more wages remains within an accepted social role, we struggle against our wageless role.

In the same way, there is a total qualitative difference between the struggles of the ~~sknwxforxwxwage~~ waged worker and the struggles of the slave for a wage against that slavery.

It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for wages we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we were never out of them. We struggle to break capital's plans for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labor and social power within the working class, whereby capital has been able to maintain its power. Wages for housework, then, is a revolutionary demand not because by itself it destroys capital, but because it has the power of attac-

king capital and forcing it to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us and consequently more favorable to the unity of the class. In fact, to ask for wages for housework does not mean to say: if you pay us we will do the housework, but precisely the opposite. Against any accusation of "economism" we should remember that money is capital, i.e. it is the power to command labor, therefore to reappropriate that money which is the fruit of our labor ~~and~~--of our mothers and grandmothers labor-- means at the same time to undermine capital's power to command more labor from us. To say that we want money for housework is the first step towards refusing to do it, because the demand for a wage makes our work visible, which is for us the most indispensable condition to be able to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and in its most insidious character as feminity.

And we should not distrust the power of the wage in demystifying our femaleness and making visible our work--our femaleness as work--since the lack of a wage has been so powerful in shaping this role and hiding our work. To demand wages for ~~housework~~ housework is to make it visible that our feminity is not a natural destiny' but forced labor and a social identity imposed on us by that labor--to make visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, and then, have been thrown back at us as a model

to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted as women in this society. To say we want money for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking etc. and, at the same time, that we have cooked, smiled and fucked through the years because we did not have any other choice, but not because it was ~~more~~ easier for us than for anybody else. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling, our feelings have gone lost from so much loving, our oversexualisation has left us completely desexualised. Wages for housework is only the beginning, but its message is clear: from now on they have to pay us because as females we do not guarantee anything any longer. We want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known. And from the viewpoint of that work we can ask not one wage but many wages, because we have been forced into many works at once. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses and shrinks: this is the essence of the "heroic" spouse who is celebrated on "mother's day". We say: stop celebrating our exploitation, our supposed heroism, from now on we want money for each moment of it, so that we can refuse some of it and eventually all of it. In this respect nothing can be more effective

years of female work outside the house still witnesses

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than to show that our female virtues have a calculable money value, until today only for capital, increased in the measure that we were defeated, from now on against capital, increased for us in the measure we organise our power.

This is the most radical perspective we can take because we can ask everything, daycares, equal pay, free laundromats, but we will never achieve any real change unless we attack our female role at its roots. Our struggle for social services, i.e. for better work-conditions, will be always frustrated ~~un-~~ ~~less~~ if first we do not establish that our work is work, that it unless we struggle against the totality of it ~~with~~ we will never achieve victories with respect to any of its moments. We will fail in the struggle for the free laundromats unless we first struggle against the fact that we cannot love if not at the price of endless work, ~~for which we constantly feel~~ ~~for~~ ~~against~~ ~~our~~ ~~husbands~~ ~~and~~ ~~children~~ ~~from~~ which day after day cripples our bodies, our sexuality, our possible social relations.
 Unless we first escape the blackmail whereby our need to give and receive affection is turned against us as a work-duty for which we constantly feel resentful against our ~~husbands~~ husbands, children and friends, and guilty for that resentment. Getting a second job does not change that role, as years and years of female work outside the house still witnesses.

This not only increases our exploitation, but simply reproduces our role in different forms. Wherever we turn we can see that the jobs women perform are mere extensions of the housewife condition in all its implications. That is, not only we become nurses, maids, teachers, secretaries..all functions for which we are well trained in the home, but we are in the same bind that hinders ~~the~~ our struggles in the home: isolation, the fact that other people's lives depend on us, or the impossibility to see where our work begins and ends (e.g. is bringing coffee to your boss and chatting with him about his marital problems secretarial work or is a personal favor ??) And the fact that ~~the~~ we have to worry about our look on the job is is a condition of work or is the result of female vanity ?? (Until a while ago hostesses in the USA were periodically weighed and had to be constantly on diet--a torture that all women know-- for fear of being laid off). As they all like to say--when the needs of the labor market require her presence vthere-- "a women can do any job without loosing her feminity", which simply means that no matter what you do you are still a cunt.

Concerning the proposals of socialisation and collectivisation of housework, a couple of examples will be sufficient to draw a line between these alternatives and our perspective. It is one thing to set up a daycare the way we want it, and then demand that the State pays for it, and it is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control

them, discipline them, teach them to honor the American flag not for five hours, but for fifteen, twenty four hours. It is one thing to organise communally ~~xxxxxxx~~ the way we want ~~them~~ to eat (by ourselves, in group etc), and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State ~~xxxxxxx~~ to organise our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extent the State control over us.

Some women say :how is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands towards us? Wont our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before ~~once~~ we are paid for it ? But they do not see that they can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, and they assume that it is "a woman's thing" which does not cost us much effort. The pleasure they take in our services stems from the belief that housework is easy for us, and we even like it because we do it for ~~xxx~~ their love. Actually they expect us to be grateful because by marrying us or living with us they have given us the opportunity to express ourselves as women, (i.e. to serve them) , "you are lucky you have found a man like me". Only when men will see our work as work--our love as work and ~~xxxx~~ most impprtant our determi-

nation to refuse both, will they change their attitude towards us. When hundreds and thousands of women will go to the streets and say that endless cleaning, being always emotionally available, fucking at command for fear of losing our job is hard, hard work for us which wastes our lives away.. they will be scared and feel undermined as men. But this is the best thing that can happen even from their own point of view, because ~~by exposing~~ ^{by exposing} the way capital has kept us divided (capital has disciplined them through us and us through them--each other, against each other) , we, their crutches, their slaves, their chains, open the process of their liberation. In this sense wages for housework will be much more educational than trying to prove that we can work as well as them, that we can do the same jobs. We leave this worthwhile effort to the "career woman", i.e. the woman who escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle, but through the power of the master i.e. the power to oppress ..usually other women. And we do not have to prove that we can "break the blue-collar barrier (New York Times, August 28, 73). A lot of us have broken that barrier long time ago and have discovered that the overalls did not give them more power than the apron; if possible even less, because now they had to wear both and had less time and energy to struggle against it. The one thing we have to prove is our unity in our struggle i.e. our capacity to expose what we are already doing and what they are doing

to us.

Unfortunately, many women--particularly single women--are afraid of the perspective of wages for housework because they are afraid ~~to~~ of identifying even for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society. But they do not realise that this is precisely their weakness, a weakness which is maintained and perpetuated through that lack of identification. We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes (and we all want to be gay) because until we recognise our slavery we cannot struggle against it, because until we think we are something better, something different than a housewife we accept the logic of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us

~~role of the master, which is a logic of division, and for us the~~
 logic of slavery. We are all housewives because no matter where we are they can always count on more work from us, more fear on our side, in putting forward our demands, on less pressure for money, since hopefully our minds are directed elsewhere, to that man in our present or our future who will take care of us.

And we also delude ourselves that we can escape that housework. But how many of us have..in spite of working outside the house? And also..can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man ..what if we loose our jobs..what about aging and loosing even the minimal amount of power that youth (productivity) and attractiveness(female productivity) afford us today ????

And what about children ?..will we ever regret ~~not~~ having chosen not to have them, not having been able to realistically ask that question...And can we afford ~~xxxxxxx~~ gay relations?? are we willing to pay the price of isolation ,exclusion..

And can we really afford relations with men ?