

WOMEN AND WELFARE

We start from a perspective which sees the condition of the housewife as the basic condition to which women have been confined in the capitalist division of labor, both in the metropolis and in the countryside. As housewives women must produce and reproduce labor power for the factory and the office, thus performing a function which is indispensable for the reproduction of capitalist relations and which is none the less social for the fact that it is performed in isolation and in a seemingly privatized fashion. Even when she does not enter the factory for a second job the life of the housewife is totally governed by the factory, intended not only in its strictest sense as a building with bricks and gates, but in its largest sense as the capitalist organization of work. That is, not only her life is commanded by the same alarm clock that sends her husband to clock in and her children to school, but, more fundamentally, her uterus, her sexuality, her whole body are placed at the service of production, which is necessarily production of workers as well as production of commodities and profit.

From this perspective we can see that if under capitalism the housewife is Everywoman, the welfare mother is Everyhousewife, which is why we take the struggles of the welfare mothers in the sixties as the spearhead of the Feminist Movement. Through their

struggles the welfare mothers have challenged the role women must perform in capitalist society, because in refusing their motherhood as a natural given to be paid for with their lives they have refused the alternatives capital forces upon women: i.e. marriage or the factory, unpaid work or extrawork.

The struggles of the welfare mothers are crucial for us because in her relation to society and the State reappear magnified and therefore clarified all the essential relations in which the housewife finds herself in capitalism. This allows us to demystify not only the capitalist relations which bind women in the family and society, but also the programs which sections of the Women's Movement and the entire Left tradition have devised to "liberate" women. We identify the welfare mother with every housewife in that both are excluded from a wage relation, though both perform an economic and social function which is essential to capital in all its social articulations (factory, office, school, hospitals etc) and are commanded in every minute of their lives by that social wage which capital destines to the more powerful sections of the working class. To say that the work of the welfare mother and the housewife is commanded by the wage relation --though they themselves are unwaged-- means to say that the needs of productivity and profit, i.e. the needs of the factory and the labor market directly determine the quantity and quality of their work, that is the quality and quantity of the labor power they must

produce. All over the world, women's sexuality, e.g. is immediately a moment of production, a moment of the wage relation. The labor market decides how many children they must--or must not--produce (which is always in inverse proportion to the number of immigrant workers that a particular country can let in). Whether what has to be produced is an unskilled or a skilled worker, whether more white than black workers have to be born, and in general how many of both are needed is immediately reflected in the life of the housewife and welfare mother. If Family Planning barely hides this immediate control over the productivity of women's body, the sterilisation constantly practiced against the welfare mother, particularly when she is black, makes this control brutally evident. Their uterus --our uterus-- is the wheel that keeps capital moving. Therefore our sexuality has to be strictly controlled so that we do not create crises of overproduction, which are the only ecological crises--the only pollution capital worries about.

The first and most essential form of this control is the exclusion of both the housewife and the welfare mother from the wage, which deprives them of the possibility of deciding whether to have or not to have children and therefore exercise a real control over their own bodies. Moreover, being excluded from a wage both the housewife and the welfare mother have to depend on an alimony, a charity, be this administered by the husband or by the

State. As such all society agrees in throwing both at the bottom of the social ladder as individuals who are parasitic on the wealth that either the individual worker, or the working class as a whole produces through their work. The anger which from time to time capital and the State is capable of organising at the community level against the welfare mother is an expression of this common agreement concerning her supposed parasitism. It is the same anger which the husband feels the "right" to express against ~~her~~ the housewife management or "mismanagement" of his income. In this context, one thing must be clarified. The wage relation for the wageless housewife determines that she must reproduce labor power not only in the form of a child, but also in the form of a man, who is the immediate beneficiary and supervisor of her work. Here lies the main difference between the housewife and the welfare mother, which a difference in power. In the very moment in which she is deprived of the security provided by a husband's pay-check, the welfare mother gains a relative independence since a) she no longer depends on a man but directly on the State; consequently her struggle is no longer privatised and subject to emotional blackmail, but it is ~~directly~~ more open, more clear in its aim and waged directly against the State; b) she refuses that portion of the housewife's labor which is destined to reproduce the man as labor power, thereby breaking the social contract which is implicit in the marriage relation. Refusal

which, as the representative of collective capital, is the ultimate and real beneficiary of their work.

of marriage is, in fact, a breach in a clause of a labor contract, from which the housewife has yet been unable to escape. This is why the housewife is angry with the welfare mother: this anger is the immediate expression of her envy at the fact that she--the housewife-- has not been able to refuse that portion of her work and dispose of some money of her own.

But both in the case of the housewife and the welfare mother the refusal to socially recognise their work as work carries with it a strict control over the money they spend. They have no right to whatever money is in their hands because in the eyes of society they do not work. (As the left puts it, the problem with the housewife is her "consumerism", which actually means that she has no right to consume since she is not productive, or not productive enough). In this respect both the husband and the social worker perform the same function for capital. Both make it sure that the money the woman spends is not spent in vain --i.e. on herself--since she has not earned it. In the family the husband is the mystified form that capital's command takes over the housewife, it is the mediated form in which the State enters the family; while the social worker openly embodies the rule of the State. (Today social workers --as well as doctors ~~xxxx~~, psychologists and teachers are the arms of the State, as necessary and powerful as the army and

the police). This contradiction within the family, which is expressed by the wageless and therefore dependent position of the housewife represents in a microcosmos the contradiction capital has created at every level within the working class through the wage relation. Through the wage capital recognises certain sections of the class as working class and others as non-working proletariat, which are then stigmatised as parasitic both on that wage and that work. welfarism is an essential aspect of racism and sexism and a reinforcement to both, since most welfare mothers are black and all--welfare mothers and housewives are females. This is why, the welfare mother has become the expression of all the contradictions within the proletariat, which are based on a hierarchy and delegation of power institutionalised by capital through the wage--or lack of it-- to keep the class divided and at ~~max~~ war against itself.

Through their unwaged condition capital forces both the housewife and the welfare mother to perform a second function. Not only they have to provide unwaged work, but since their work is not considered work, they can be forced to do extrawork at a very cheap price--be this the ^{direct} material imposition by the State, as in the case of the welfare mother (from welfare to workfare) or the indirect ^{induced by} coercion of higher prices as in the case of the hou-

sewife .(Through the organisation of inflation capital not only attacks the wage level achieved by the struggles in the factories, but forces women to accept low paid shit work, since to dispose of a double wage is increasingly necessary for the survival of the family).

Ironically, what in reality is the highest enslavement of women, is and has been presented by the organisations of the left--and now by sections of the women's movement--as their program for "women's liberation". This is because the left--male and female-- always begins with itself in the sense that it looks for those sections of the working class that can be more easily organised since capital has already organised them. But if Feminism has any validity, that validity is based on our beginning with class needs, which must lead to the destruction of the capitalist organisation of the class. we start from what women need and not from what it might be easier to get.

The struggles of the welfare mothers in the sixties have marked a radical break with a whole socialist tradition which centers ~~and centers~~ on the ideology of work and productivity as a condition both of struggle and life(socialism as the "fair wage",

i.e. the "fair profit"). This is why, the left --old and new-- has either bypassed the struggles of the welfare mothers, or has conceived them as the struggles of the lumpen to which it has proposed the path of development, as it proposed it to the housewife, under the form of industrialisation i.e. a second job. In the perspective of the left, the housewife and the welfare mothers --the third world in the metropolis-- are those not from capitalist relations but from the absence of them, and therefore have to be brought into capitalism (have to be further exploited) in order to wage a significant struggle.