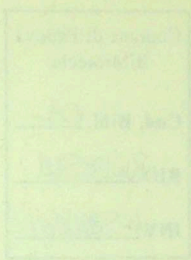


WAGES FOR
HOUSEWORK
NOTE BOOKS

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WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

NOTEBOOK NO. 1

WHAT IS WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK?

This pamphlet is edited by the Montreal Power of Women Collective. We are part of an international group of women working around the perspective of wages for housework.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the first of a series of pamphlets that we plan to present on the Wages for Housework perspective. The articles were written by women in Italy in 1972, England in 1973, and the United States in 1974. They represent the growing interest in this perspective around the world. All three centre on the total revolutionary potential of the wages for housework perspective, in contrast to the fragmented, disconnected approach of previous feminist analyses that could only deal with one side of women's exploitation.

For the first time, the various aspects of women's exploitation and oppression : economic dependence, lack of social/political power, deformed sexuality, passivity and lack of confidence - have been explained in terms of a central feature in the lives of all women; the unwaged labour that women universally perform in the home. Since the lack of a wage has been so powerful in shaping our femininity and in hiding our work, we understand then, the power of the wage demand in demystifying our femaleness and making visible our work.

All three articles discuss the wage demand as the beginning of our struggle - a struggle against the capitalist division of labour, to restructure social relations in a way more favourable to us and the unity of the working class. They present the wage demand as the essential first step without which there can be no struggle at all.

Firstly, demanding a wage for housework means that women refuse any longer to perform silently, and for free, all the social services necessary to the community that capital refuses to provide. Therefore women's invisible work is made visible and recognised as socially necessary. This work, once seen as work, is separated from our "female nature", It becomes possible to refuse this work and to demand that the State pay for it.

Secondly, wages for housework will eliminate women's economic dependence on the man's wage. Once women thus come into a direct relation to capital, they are then enabled to struggle directly against it, Once the men who stand between women and capital, no longer benefit from their exploitation, the power relationship between men and women will be transformed. This can destroy one of the principal barriers to class unity by eliminating divisions within the working class (between women and men) that have been created by capital. Capital is strong only as long as the working class is divided and weak, - class unity will mark a new stage of class struggle.

The Montreal Power Of Women Collective
January, 1975

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

by Giuliana Pompei

Work in the Home

When we began looking around ourselves, as women, one of the main things we discovered was the home, the family structure as a place of specific exploitation of our labour power. In our analysis we must give first place to this private sphere, these domestic walls outside which Marxist class analysis -- not to mention the practical activity of the left political organizations in and out of parliament -- stops. Inside the home we have discovered our invisible work, the enormous quantity of work that women are forced to perform every day in order to produce and reproduce the labour force, the invisible -- because unpaid--foundation upon which the whole pyramid of capitalist accumulation rests.

This work, which consists of having children and taking care of them, feeding a man, keeping him tidy and cheering him up after work, is never presented as such. It is presented as a mission whose fulfillment enriches the personality of the one who carries it out. A woman is a mother, a wife, a daughter; she is loved only if she is willing to work without grumbling in the service of others for hours and hours, Sundays, holidays, and nights. This labour relationship is seen always, and only, in personal terms: it is a personal affair between a woman and the man who has the right to appropriate her labour. It is continually explained to the woman that her world is the family and not society; within the family, therefore, she must express the contradictions involved in the division of labour between men and women, which society imposes on her. The housewife has always been excluded from working class organisations--all she can do is look for individual solutions.

As an individual, for instance, she has to confront continual price increases. When her man's wages are no longer enough for meat she substitutes potato souffle--which takes another hour of work, or she goes to markets and butcher shops far from home to save a few pence on the housekeeping. Inflation is a weapon used by the employers to cancel out wage increases won by the workers. Women, isolated in their homes, have had to bear the main brunt of inflation in terms of more work. Traditional labour movement organisations must share the blame for this fact, which has been a grave source of weakness for the workers' struggle itself.

The material bond that pins us to this work is our dependence on a man's wage. This wage not only pays for many hours of his direct labour, but it also commands other work -- that of the woman in the domestic factory -- which revolves around that wage. The wealth created is distributed to women through a man's wage, if at all. On this basis a stratification is created among women. This is wrongly interpreted as a real class distinction, whereby a woman's class position -- working class or capitalist class -- is always determined by the man on whom she depends, as if the definition of class as determined by one's position within specific relationships of production were not valid for women as well as men.

True, the woman who can exchange her services for a bigger slice of the income is greatly privileged: a nice house means less work. It means hot water; it means space to separate someone studying from someone else watching television and both from the one who does the washing; it means the children don't get ill from the damp, etc. If there is not enough money to pay a high rent (and they are all high) it is the woman who has to work like mad every day to put something resembling a full meal on the table, to dress her children so they don't look too different from the others when there are already so many other things that set them apart. Even so, we say that a housewife is in herself always a

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proletarian, though her social status varies according to the income of the man she depends on. No one has ever thought that a slave was not a slave if he had a rich master who could guarantee him a higher standard of living than other slaves.

The Second Job: Work Outside the Home

There are very many women who, to escape the curse of inadequate wages and the isolation of their condition, decide to work outside the home as well. But again their responsibility for the "invisible work" -- the continuance of a patriarchal type of production relation -- reveals the true face of the "emancipation of women through work." Only a part of this mass of housewives who "choose" double exploitation are taken into production, and then always at the lowest levels; the rest are usually not even counted among the unemployed. Many of those who work outside the home serve as nurses, secretaries, servants; like factory women, they get the worst and lowest-paid jobs. It costs capital nothing to train us for these jobs and assure our ideological loyalty, since the best school for servility is the family.

An outside job never takes away a woman's responsibilities as a housewife. All women working in production know that they do their heaviest work at home, as do they cannot defend themselves against this. For that matter, even against outside work they manage to organise only slowly and with enormous difficulty, because outside the factory or office there is another clock to punch: the child to be fetched, the shopping and the washing to be done. Here capital has stepped in to relieve us by inventing the system of part-time work. Through this system capital, without too much bother, secures a double advantage for itself: on the one hand, it makes women serve as an underpaid reserve labour force; on the other hand, it makes women serve as an unpaid domestic servant by leaving the institution of the family intact or even reinforced.

In no case can the woman escape the production relationships determined by the fact that she is a woman in a capitalist society. We are all brought up to be able, as soon as the lack of other women makes it necessary, to carry on producing workers at all costs and without protest. Some begin at the age of 12, some go on imagining a bit longer -- even till they finish their studies -- that they can escape this fate. Some think they can refuse their role at an individual level and some accept to fully at once, only trying not to make too big a mistake in choosing a "master:" a bad choice will cost you your life.

Capitalist Organisation of Domestic Labour

The fact that housework is done in a precapitalist or protocapitalist way in no way means that today it is not capitalist and perfectly functional for a phase of capitalist development in which average social productivity, more than factory productivity, is seen as central. Being able to count on this enormous quantity of unpaid labour -- just because it maintains the appearance of unproductive labour, to the point of not even being called work -- enormously lowers the cost for capital of producing that fundamental merchandise that is labour power. It also means capital can freely manipulate the labour market to suit its cyclic needs: in response to labour agitation it 1) creates a form of unemployment which goes uncontested because the woman expelled from socially organised production always has housework waiting for her and 2) castrates the workers' capacity for struggle by cutting off or reducing the second family wage.

This will go on as long as housewives continue to function simultaneously as a stratum of the most exploited class and as an element for the containment and control of tensions and conflicts. Prices rise and women face the first consequences: sick people are inadequately cared for and women work to make up for the shortage of medical facilities (before, during and after treatment); neighborhoods turn into unlivable ghettos and only women's work can make them bearable. Only women can absorb the lack of schools, shops, green spaces and

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services in general without rebelling. Only they can mediate between society and members of the family to see that the men don't dismantle the factories and burn up the neighborhoods, to see that the old just grumble and don't go mad, that children don't end up under care and that starvation wages go on feeding the family.

The only thing that can make women accept all this is constant blackmail imposed on them by all means: this is the only way of being a woman, those who rebel are going against their "natural role." If one of us feels that she can't manage she is at once made to understand that this is a personal problem which she must solve for herself.

Even the task of assuring the renewal of the labour force, quantitatively and qualitatively, is imposed on women within precise relationships of production. For capital to be able to regulate the flow of workers it is necessary to deprive women of control over their own bodies. This is done by material and ideological instruments whose basic conditions for operation are found within family structure. The capitalist system has always paid much attention to demographic policies as instruments of development, rewarding prolific mothers when "eight million bayonets" were required and sterilising Black women when the uncontrolled growth of the Black proletariat might have led to explosive situations in the ghettos. It is well known that the only development policy which capitalism has to offer the Third World is birth control.

Maternity is the most effective ideological instrument for controlling women; it is the key by which their total adhesion to the system is obtained. By exalting its ideological aspects and masking its social ones, the myth of maternity as a mission continues to hide from women the reality of their condition. The way women conceive and bear children is not at all natural if compared with developments in other sectors of science (space research, transplants, etc.). In 1975, painful childbirth and the dearth of effective contraceptives are signs of the backwardness to which women are relegated in capitalist development.

Women guarantee not only that labour power will be reproduced in the necessary quantity, but also that it will grow up with qualitative characteristics suited to the development of the capitalist system. Children must be educated, at the most malleable age, for the division of labour: they must at once get it clear in their heads that everyone must sell his or her labour power to survive, and that there is no escape from this curse. The reproduction of the labour force is necessary for the continued effectiveness of capital's blackmail in all its forms, from division by job grading, to the exclusion of those who are not productive. Women get the worst of this blackmail — they are always in the lowest job grade, that of a housewife; they are the first to be fired, they have to look after the rejects society encloses in ghettos.

Through the mother, the child at once learns to accept all this as natural; this is the first step in an apprenticeship which later continues at school, in the propaganda of the mass media, etc. It is meant to provide an adaptable labour force which will lend itself to the mechanisms of exploitation.

In the acceptance of this division of the labour force between factory and domestic production, in the acceptance of the separation of women from one another and from other exploited people, lies one of the basic reasons for the weakness of working class organisations.

The most important thing that women have been deprived of is the opportunity to organise against their work. And the left has been partly responsible for this isolation, this lack of opportunity to organise (which is the real source of women's "inferiority"). It has found theoretical justifications for relegating women's problems to the level of a "woman question," in its view such questions are

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superstructural and this will be solved by the transformation or revolution of social structures; besides, it says housework is not productive and thus the housewife as such is incapable of struggle, organisation, etc. In the course of the revolution, the left has given exactly the same tasks given them by capital: to feed, keep tidy, and cheer up the revolutionaries, to offer them sexual outlet without too many complications, to bring up the new generation to accent double exploitation as the only possible way to emancipation.

The Wage Demand

On the basis of this analysis, we must now define the scope and the objectives for women's struggles which can fully express the revolutionary potential which is maturing as women find their position more and more unbearable.

We have already outlined a preliminary answer (in general terms and still to be checked and refined): we've had enough of this work which every day suffocates us, deforms us and blocks all our relationships with outside reality, this work that locks us in a woman's role. We reject this work and we reject this role. We struggle for all objectives which will reduce our hours of work, which will give us a chance to meet, to organize and increase our strength, which will give us more freedom to start destroying our role in practice.

When we organize to achieve some objective, even a minimal one, we are already in practice rejecting housework: we must go out, we must join with other women, we must discover that our "personal" problems are everyone's problems and that only together can we find the strength to deal with them.

The cost -- which up to now we have borne entirely along -- of running this domestic labour power factory should all be unloaded onto the system.

We want the system to assume the costs of maternity, while we ourselves decide and plan it, because we are sick of having it imposed on us as a "law of nature" or as a "variable quantity" within capitalist planning.

We want the system to build and pay for nurseries, kindergartens, canteens and centralised cleaning and laundry services, etc.

We want free housing -- which means not only removing the rent item from our already meagre budgets. ~~Instead of all for us it means less work than we have to do today in order to make two small rooms into a home for a whole family.~~ We want greenery, gardens and parks in every part of the city -- which means not spending two or more hours a day taking the children out to breath and play. We want lower prices -- which means less work cooking, going to distant markets to save a few pennies, etc.

All this is a wage demand -- we want to capture a bigger slice of real wealth -- in terms of houses, green spaces, free services, etc. -- compared with that which we manage to pay ourselves today out of a man's wages. And this increased real wealth, this greater availability of goods and services which we demand as the minimum compensation for all the unpaid work we have on our shoulders, we intend to enjoy: what we want is not to become more productive, not to go off and be exploited better somewhere else, but to work less and to have more opportunity for social and political experience.

Precisely because the fight for free social services is already essentially a wage demand, we see no contradiction between this struggle and the struggle based on a demand for direct wages for housework the work we are doing now and will go on doing even if tomorrow we win our fight for a reduction in hours and workload.

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Social services are not the ultimate objective of our struggle: still less do they offer a real alternative to the exploited situation we are immersed in. Even if we get wages for shit work it is still shit work. However, such concessions will not be handed to us on a platter -- they can only be won by hard fighting at a high level of organisation. And they should be seen as a victory: the conquest of our battleground and better conditions in which to broaden and build our struggle. Can we begin to reject our role -- for example, by not getting married and not having children -- when for many of us the only guarantee of income is still a man's wage?

Can we start talking about educational standards, relations between adults and children in this society, if even the bricks and mortar of nurseries do not exist?

Can we have time for autonomous political growth if domestic work continues to eat up 12 hours or more a day and if we cannot get at least part of it done outside the home?

The Wage Demand and the Struggle for Social Services

Once we have pointed out that the wage struggle does not contradict but actually includes the fight for free social services, since these reduce our hours of work, we at once come up against some considerations suggested by the immediate reality of women's condition.

1. The right to be paid for the work one does is something which immediately affects all women, even those who don't figure in the statistics as housewives, even those who are not wives or mothers: the girl living at home who studies or works, but who is always expected to "give a hand" at home; the "independent" woman with her own income who sooner or later is lumbered with the care of the old, if nother else; the elderly woman who wears out the last years of her life looking after the children of a younger woman who is thus "freed" for factory work; the woman whose man is "understanding" and ready to help but always makes it clear that by rights she ought to be doing the work, and so on.
2. The demand for wages is a demand for independence. No matter how many services we manage to win, no matter how much more free time we gain in this way, until we win our own incomes and thus break the bond of economic dependence on a man -- whether husband or father -- how can we form the relationships we want, decide if we want to get married or not, to have children or not? How can we control our own lives? How many women are unable to leave their husbands today and get divorced tomorrow because, although they have worked all their lives, they cannot support themselves and their children?
3. The demand for wages has in itself a big ideological impact. We are looking at our work in a new way. We have been taught to see that our work is an expression of our femininity, in which, we are told, our finest quality -- generosity -- if fully expressed in giving others security and serenity. The fact that we now see that work as a socially necessary activity, which must be paid for just like the work our fathers, husbands, and sons do outside the home is already a big step towards achieving an attitude of detachment, towards destroying that "naturally" fixed role which society assigns us at birth.

The Power of Women

When we put forward the perspective of wages for women, we have in mind certain high points of the class struggle in and out of Italy. We see the phenomenon -- of vaster dimensions in the U.S. but present also in England --- of a massive demand for income by whole working class strata -- women, youth, Blacks -- who in the ups and downs of the economic cycle have been exploited at the lowest levels, and expelled and pushed aside from the productive process,

and who are now fighting this exclusion by a real assault on the agencies of public assistance.

There are 13 million Americans who ought to be getting social security subsistence payments. Since the explosion of public assistance rolls in 1958-1959 in the U.S., women without husbands and with children to support have been in the forefront of the fight for wages without a job outside the home. To the degree that these women struggled they ceased to perform their function of shock absorbers between the proletariat and the forces of repression. The sociologists noticed the new subversive role of women after the ghetto revolts: they finally discovered that the "authority" of the family over young people was "decreasing", which is a twisted way of saying that the family no longer stood between these young people and their own interests and struggles.

In Italy, in just this phase of capitalist attack on employment levels, we have seen a series of struggles in the factory for a guaranteed wage (for example: Zanussi, Candy, Oreal, Lagostina, and many others). The demand for a guaranteed wage is even advanced, though secondarily, in the platform of the engineering union. The wage demand has also emerged in some strata of the working class which have been hit by restructuring and made redundant. In the student movement the demand for wages, in the indirect form of refusal to pay costs of acquiring skills, has been one of the focal points for mobilisation.

The most interesting data for analysis of the composition of the overall female labour force in Italy are not so much the total numbers (at present only 19% of women "work"; there are probably about 10 million housewives), but rather the figures relating to mobility (according to ISTAT data for 1970 and 1971):

48% of women without jobs have left work for family reasons; one million women were fired or expelled from agriculture.

1,600,000 women have had a job in the last five years.

1,600,000 domestic of whom the overwhelming majority are women.
workers

What conclusions can be drawn from these summary data?

1. That the "housewife" has probably not always been exclusively a housewife. That a large percentage of the more than 10 million housewives not only have always done and continue to do their "invisible" work, but on top of that they have done and continue to do a second job outside the home. A woman goes into a factory and then leaves (either for "family reasons" or because the factory closes), she does seasonal work (eg. female employment in agriculture, the food industry, canning, etc.), she arranges in a thousand ways to fill out the family income. Even when she can no longer get out of the house she brings the factory home where she does piece-work, makes a contract with a middle man and the living death of home-work.

2. That in the "housewife" we can see a figure representing a whole class stratum, who on the whole have already felt the burden of the double job on her own back, and will probably be less and less willing to adapt herself to cyclic changes which today relegate her to the ghetto of the home and which tomorrow will again order her into the factories and offices with a double workload. The current tendency towards increasing expulsion of women workers does not seem likely to reverse itself in the near future. In view of this fact it seems likely that the social figure of the housewife who represents an ever-increasing slice of the female population -- can be mobilised much more readily by a demand for wages for the work she already does, a demand for income than by a generic request to support the Communist Party's full employment policy-- to ally herself with a struggle to defend and extend opportunities to work.

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struggles to respond in certain areas with inflation or with "stagnation" (drop in investments, reduction of employment), the only way we see of positively affirming the workers' interests is to make capital pay the highest possible cost for unemployment and expulsion: give us a guaranteed income and pay us wages for housework.

Of course, as a demand of marginal strata capital has already taken account of this, in Italy there is Piccolli's proposal for a guaranteed wage for workers made redundant by modernisation. These "concessions" are two-faced: on the one hand they open an arena for widening struggle (for example, see the pressure in the U.S. for public assistance funds well beyond the simple unemployment benefit), and on the other they are an attempt to create a welfare ghetto in which to segregate certain strata of workers and set them against those in employment.

This attempt can only be fought by linking the struggles of the unemployed, students, women, and employed workers. Yes, a demand for income, but connected with a drastic reduction in hours for all. When the struggle for a 20 hour week becomes general, even if it is called a struggle for employment, then we'll say okay, we don't see any contradiction between this and the rejection of work. Then we will say -- as women -- that we intend to bring into that struggle our specific interest in sharing with men all the work and the "joys" of maternity. Only on this material base can the destruction of feminine and masculine roles, and of the institution of the family, become a concrete prospect.

It is precisely within the process of class reintegration that we see the function of a militant feminist movement: because we see not only the division between laborers and technicians, workers and students, white and Black workers, but also the more profound and radical opposition of the sexes, as a formidable weapon in the hands of capital for the fragmentation and control of the working class.

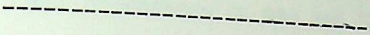
We assert that as long as men are set against women by their role as instruments and immediate recipients of women's servile labour, as long as women's unpaid labour works as a brake and a form of blackmail on the capacity for struggle of women and men, the system can be sure of a basic guarantee of equilibrium and a wide margin for manoeuvre to reabsorb the conquests of the working class.

Therefore a period of independent organisation of women, we can't tell for how long, it necessary: we need to win our identity, to define the forms and objectives of our struggle, to assure that these struggles will effectively strike at these mechanisms of stabilisation and equilibrium of the system which only we could discover as fundamentals because only we feel their full negative force in a material way: the family, feminine and masculine roles, procreation. To confirm what we have said we can observe the wholly ideological and transitory character which the anti-authoritarian theme (criticism of the family, roles, etc.) has assumed in the student movement and the new left. Ideological and transitory because materially men get a lot of privileges from these structures and their criticism on this plane cannot be radical; this analysis could be extended to the different theories of non-repressive education and also to so-called sexual freedom. These theories did not come from women and indeed have been finally turned against them, pinning them more effectively to their role; this reveals their essentially conservative character.

In the condition of women today, we have identified some of the most explosive areas of contradiction: we have begun to struggle for wages for housework, to demand an income. This demand is being put forward at a stage when capital is planning increasingly massive reductions in women's employment and thus ever-greater exploitation of women's work. In itself this demand represents a step

towards a reunifying of the working class; it means setting in motion women's struggles that will weigh massively on the power relationships between the working class and capital.

The those who go on asking us to join them as allies, or worse, as subordinate auxiliaries, of already existing organisations, we must reply that not only have they failed to understand the order of the day which we, as women, propose through the feminist movement, but they show that they have repressed the new forms of organisation and the opportunities which are emerging from the political level and the new content of workers' and students' struggles in recent years.



It should be noted that the increasing unemployment of women referred to in this article by Pompei is only one side of capital's plan for women. It in no way contradicts the efforts of capital in other areas of the world to re-compose the working class with increased numbers of women who are then paid lower wages than the men they replace. At different times and in different places, capital attempts to extend its power and weaken the working class in different ways -- in this case by setting men and women in competition with each other for jobs. Our task becomes finding ways of increasing our own power by uniting the entire working class. Pompei suggests demanding wages for housework and linking it to a demand for a drastic reduction in the hours of work for everyone. In this way, waged workers would have a common interest with demands of the wageless for a wageless .

-The Power of Women Collective, London, England

We in the Power of Women Collective, who are organising on wages for housework, base our perspective on the unwaged condition of the housewife. Her condition is the lowest common denominator for all women; through it we are all defined and imprisoned, Black and white, working class and middle class, "supported" and "unsupported", unwaged and partially waged. We begin with the housewife because her unwaged condition is our fundamental weakness. If this unwaged condition is our basic weakness, our perspective must deal with that. While the discussion in our small groups has always centred on the family and the woman's role within it, this fact has not been reflected in the politics or the organisational practice of our movement. The perspective of wages for housework does that for the first time. It aims at power for women to destroy their dependence on men and therefore to destroy their destiny as housewives.

We are not proposing, as others do, that the alternative to housework is factory work. These are two aspects of forced labour which we have to do because we need the money that capital gives us, either directly or through men, in order to live. This money we can get only by working in the home or out of it, but it is not payment for that work. It is just enough to subsist on so that we can continue to do that work. When we demand wages for housework what we are saying is that we need the money and we don't need the work. We are not proposing a productivity deal; we are not a trade union.

The question has come up that if we get paid for housework we will have to do it thoroughly and put up with time and motion study men (or women). The fact that so many people raise this question shows that they see the struggle against housework as different from the struggle against factory work. Or maybe it is because they can't imagine that women could make an anti-capitalist struggle as men. For example, when factory workers demand a wage increase, they know they'll be offered a productivity deal. Everybody says: go for more money and less work at the same time. That's what we as women propose to do.

The same principle applies to the question of where the money is to come from. We would never tell factory workers not to demand more money because capital will try to get it back from other workers. We say, as wage earners say, let it come from profits.

The struggle for liberation is the struggle for power. Does anyone believe that if we are strong enough to demand and win a wage for housework that when the time and motion study men (or women) knocks at the door, any of us will let him in? In a rent strike when the collector comes he gets the door slammed in his face.

But we are not sold on one way of demanding wages for housework. There are many ways that the demand can be expressed. If we organise a creche in our street and demand that the council pay for it, that is wages for housework.

In fact, there is no part of a woman's life which is not founded in women's wagelessness in the home and therefore no place where a struggle for money can't be made. The perspective of wages for housework uncovers the woman's complete work week, in the factory and in the kitchen. The fragmented life of a woman with its seemingly separate compartments is for the first time seen as a totality through the perspective of wages for housework. For example, we want control over our bodies. But this control is the power to demand birth control that works, that doesn't pollute our bodies, having children when we want them without deeming us to dependence on a man and to slavery in

the home, and being able to raise children without constant financial worry and housing crisis, without having to be confined to heterosexuality, without having our arms and legs trained to follow the rhythms of an assembly line. "What about the children we want and can't afford? We are forced to demand abortion and sterilisation as we have been forced to demand jobs. Give us money and give us time, and we'll be in a better position to control our bodies, our minds and our relationships." (-Women, the Unions and Work or What is Not to be Done, p. 18, by Selma James)

To demand money is to determine the grounds of the struggle. We agree with Marx that money is "universal social power" and this the ruling class knows as well as we do. In the context of demanding a wage, we're in a stronger position to get the work off our backs, and in a stronger position too to determine the terms on which this work is socialised. We don't want capitalism to socialise housework as it has socialised factory work and as it is socialising childcare. We're fighting to socialise housework on our terms, not in order to take another job outside the home. The free time we win belongs to us.

The struggle for a wage for housework is the struggle to work less in the factory as well as in the home. It is because so much of her work is unwaged that the woman is in such a weak position in the factory. Women get lower wages because for housework they get no wage: there are always women at home desperate for a wage, however low. Women get lower wages because housework saps their time and energy to fight for higher wages. Women get lower wages because the men they work with think of them as their husbands do, as dependent, incapable, ignorant -- "housewives."

Some people say that women's work in the home is not productive and therefore they should not get a wage. We believe that women's work in the home is productive in the Marxist sense. Some of us are doing research to show that this is the case. But our perspective of wages for housework, as we have tried to show, doesn't depend on whether or not women create surplus value. We repeat: we are not looking for a productivity deal -- as much wages for so much surplus value. Our struggle is based on our need for money, on our need for power, on our need to undermine the power of men over us, to undermine the power of capital over us, and over men and children.

by Silvia Federici

Many times the difficulties and ambiguities which women express in discussing wages for housework stem from the reduction of wages for housework to a thing, a lump of money, instead of viewing it as a political perspective. The difference between these two standpoints is enormous. To view wages for housework as a thing rather than a perspective is to detach the end result of our struggle from the struggle itself and to miss its significance in demystifying and subverting the role to which women have been confined in capitalist society.

When we view wages for housework in this reductive way we start asking ourselves: what difference could some more money make to 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 difference. But for those of us who seem to have other choices--professional work, enlightened husband, communal way of life, gay relations or a combination of these--it would not make much of a difference at all. For us there are supposedly 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 a bit of money to the shitty lives we have now and then ask: so what? on the false premise that we could 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 in our social power as women. It is also clear that if we think we do not need that money, it is because we have accepted the particular forms of prostitution of body and mind by which we get the money to hide that need. As I will try to show, not only is wages for housework a revolutionary perspective, but it is the only revolutionary perspective from a feminist viewpoint and ultimately for the entire working class.

"A Labour of Love"

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. 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 recognizes that you are a worker, 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 have a wage means to be part of a social contract, and there is no doubt concerning its meaning: you work, not because you like

it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live. But exploited as you might be, you are not that work. Today you are a postman, tomorrow a cabdriver. All that matters is how much of that work you have to do and how much of that money you can get.

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 be recognised as a social contract because from the beginning of capital's schemes for women this work was destined to be unwaged. Capital had to convince us that it is a natural, unavoidable and even fulfilling activity to make us accept our unwaged work. 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 privatised 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.

Yet just how natural it is to be a housewife is shown by the fact that it takes at least twenty years of socialisation--day to day training, 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 the wedding day is over and they find themselves in front of a dirty sink. Many of us still have the illusion that we marry for love. A lot of us recognise that we 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 awaits us is enormous. This is why older women always tell us "Enjoy your freedom while you can, buy whatever you want now..." But unfortunately it is almost impossible to enjoy any freedom if from the earliest days of life you are trained to be docile, subservient, dependent and most important to sacrifice yourself and even to get pleasure from it. If you don't 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 expense of women. 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 a lot of work almost for free, and it has made sure that women, far from struggling against it, would seek that work as the best thing in life (the magic words: "yes, darling, you are a real woman"). At the same time, it has disciplined the male worker also, by making his woman dependent on his work and his wage, and trapped him in this discipline 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 create 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 crushed by the work and the social relations (which 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 which is the housewife, that makes her work so burdensome and at the same time invisible. It is not an accident that most men start thinking of getting married as soon as they get their first job. 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 on an assembly line or at a desk. 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 higher the enslavement of the woman, and not simply because of the monetary situation. In fact capital has a dual policy, one for the middle class and one for the proletarian family. It is no accident that we find the most unsophisticated machismo in the working class family: the more blows the man gets at work the more his wife must be trained to absorb them, the more he is allowed to recover his ego at his expense--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--but 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 has 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 one woman put it, he might as well make it with a mayonnaise jar. (Women have always found ways of fighting back, or getting back at them, but always in an isolated and privatised way. The problem, then, becomes how to bring this struggle out of the kitchen and bedroom and into the streets.)

We Are All Housewives

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 characterised 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 putdown, 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.)

The Revolutionary Perspective

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.

To ask for wages for housework will by itself undermine the expectations society has of us, since these expectations--the essence of our socialization--are all functional to our wageless condition in the home. 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 challenges his social role but remains within it. When we struggle for wages we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role. In the same way there is a qualitative difference between the struggles of the waged worker and the struggles of the slave for a wage against that slavery. It should be clear, however, that when we struggle for a wage we do not struggle to enter capitalist relations, because we have never been out of them. We struggle to break capital's plan for women, which is an essential moment of that planned division of labour and social power within the working class, through which 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 attacks capital and forces it to restructure social relations in terms more favorable to us and consequently more favorable to the unity of the class. In fact, to demand wages for housework does not mean to say that if we are paid we will continue to do it. It means precisely the opposite. 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 the most indispensable condition to begin to struggle against it, both in its immediate aspect as housework and in its more insidious character as femininity. Against any accusation of "economism" we should remember that money is capital, i.e. it is the power to command labour. Therefore to reappropriate that money which is the fruit of our labour--of our mothers' and grandmothers' labour--means at the same time to undermine capital's power to command fore labour from us. 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 is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in 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 that we want wages 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. At the same time, it shows that we have cooked, smiled, fucked

throughout the years not because it was easier for us than for anybody else, but because we did not have any other choice. Our faces have become distorted from so much smiling, our feelings have got 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 work we can ask not one wage but many wages, because we have been forced into many jobs at once. We are housemaids, prostitutes, nurses, 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 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 for us in the measure we organise our power.

The Struggle for Social Services

This is the most radical perspective we can adopt because although we can ask for everything, day care, equal pay, free laundromats, 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 working conditions, will always be frustrated if we do not first establish that our work is work. Unless we struggle against the totality of it 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 except at the price of endless work, which day after day cripples our bodies, our sexuality, our 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, 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 witness. The second job 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 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, where our work ends and our desires begin. Is bringing coffee to your boss and chatting with him about his marital problems secretarial work or is it a personal favour? Is the fact that we have to worry about our looks on the job a condition of work or is it the result of female vanity? (Until recently hostesses in the United States were periodically weighed and had to be constantly on a diet -- a torture that all women know -- for fear of being laid off).

As is often said -- when the needs of the waged labour market require her presence there -- "A woman can do any job without losing her femininity", which simply means that no matter what you do you are still a cunt.

As for the proposal 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 day care the way we want it, and demand that the State pay for it. It is quite another thing to deliver our children to the State and ask the State to control them, discipline them, teach them to honour the American flag not for five hours, but for fifteen or twenty-four hours. It is one thing to organise communally the way we want to eat (by ourselves, in groups, etc.) and then ask the State to pay for it, and it is the opposite thing to ask the State to organise our meals. In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the State's control over us.

The Struggle Against Housework

Some women say: how is wages for housework going to change the attitudes of our husbands towards us? Won't our husbands still expect the same duties as before and even more than before once we are paid for them? But these women do not see that they can expect so much from us precisely because we are not paid for our work, because they assume that it is "a woman's thing" which does not cost us much effort. Men are able to accept our services and take pleasure in them because they presume that housework is easy for us, that we enjoy it because we do it for their love. They actually 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 see our work as work -- our love as work -- and most important our determination to refuse both, will they change their attitude towards us. When hundreds and thousands of women are in the streets saying that endless cleaning, being always emotionally available, fucking at command for fear of losing our jobs is hard, hated work which wastes our lives, then they will be scared and feel undermined as men. But this is the best thing that can happen from their own point of view, because 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", the woman who escapes from her oppression not through the power of unity and struggle, but through the power of the master, the power to oppress -- usually other women. And we don't have to prove that we can "break the blue collar barrier". A lot of us broke that barrier a long time ago and have discovered that the overalls did not give us more power than the apron; if possible even less, because now we had to wear both and had less time and energy to

struggle against them. The things we have to prove are our capacity to expose what we are already doing, what capital is doing to us and our power in the struggle against it.

Unfortunately, many women -- particularly single women -- are afraid of the perspective of wages for housework because they are afraid of identifying even for a second with the housewife. They know that this is the most powerless position in society and so they do not want to realise that they are housewives too. This is precisely their weakness, a weakness which is maintained and perpetuated through the lack of self-identification. We want and have to say that we are all housewives, we are all prostitutes and we are all gay, because until we recognise our slavery we cannot recognise our 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 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, to put forward our demands, and 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 housework. But how many of us, in spite of working outside the house, have escaped it? And can we really so easily disregard the idea of living with a man? What if we lose our jobs? What about aging and losing even the minimal amount of power that youth (productivity) and attractiveness (female productivity) afford us today? And what about children? Will we ever regret having chosen not to have them, not even having been able to realistically ask that question? And can we afford gay relations? Are we willing to pay the possible price of isolation and exclusion. Can we really afford relations with men?

PUBLICATIONS

Women in Struggle # 1

Women in Struggle # 2

(The Women in Struggle series are collections of documents about wages for housework struggles that are taking place on an international scale and affecting every aspect of women's lives. Included in the booklets are political statements, analyses, and leaflets coming out of these struggles).

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 1

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 2

(The Wages for Housework Notebooks are collections of the more theoretical documents about wages for housework. The first two notebooks bring together many of the theoretical articles which have not yet received widespread distribution).

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WAGES FOR

HOUSEWORK

NOTEBOOKS

#2

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK NOTEBOOK NO, 12

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INTRODUCTION

The series Wages for Housework Notebooks and Women in Struggle emerge from the growing international network of women's groups fighting for wages for housework. Circulating documents, learning from each other's struggles, is a vital part of our political growth. Above all these documents are an expression of our determination to organize a struggle as women to resist Capital's plan, both in the home and outside of the home.

The international dimension of this notebook comes not merely from the fact that groups from the U.S., Canada, Italy and England are involved in its practical production and content. Our strategy is international because Capital's planning is international.

This is precisely the topic of the first document, Speech at the International House, given by Selma James in New York City. James focuses on the relation between the condition of women working without a wage in the kitchens of the Metropolis and the condition of the wageless in the Third World. The connection is the refusal of a higher level of capitalist exploitation, the alternative is the struggle itself, the refusal to function for Capital wherever we are. This is what James calls the new International, the International of struggles, one influencing the other, in every part of the world and in every sector of the working class.

This International of struggles is illustrated by the circumstances at the origin of the second document, When the Mute Speaks - the Work of Creating a Movement. This is a transcript of a presentation by Selma James in Padova, Italy at a time when the Italian women's movement was beginning to develop. The power that women had started to organize in another country, in this case England, became immediately a point of reference, meant immediately more power for the women in Italy.

The third text, In Defense of Feminism - a London Conference Report, by Priscilla Allen and Sylvine Schmidt, analyzes the battle within the women's movement for a revolutionary direction.

Wages for housework is our direction. It is an international political perspective. The texts we present here explain our strategy and its implications. But our strategy is not only grounded in theoretical work. It is clear to us

that women have already struggled for the same objectives. In North America, for example, we have learned from the struggle of Welfare Mothers. They have exposed the true beneficiary of our forced labor in the home when they confronted directly the State and when they demanded money for the work they were already doing rather than jobs and a double exploitation.

It is up to us to organize further our power as women.

Nicole Cox
New York City, 1975
Wages for Housework Collective

Selma James, Priscilla Allen and Sylvine Schmidt are members of the Power of Women Collective in England.

SPEECH AT THE INTERNATIONAL HOUSE

I think that I will have to define Marxist-feminism not by one sentence, but by everything that I plan to say tonight. I want to speak about the new International, and I want to make clear that when I speak about an International, I speak not about an organization which calls itself an International, but about the link of struggles which are taking place all over the world. I think that one of the basic problems, if not the basic problem that we face today, is that these struggles which are continuously going on in every part of the world and increasingly with every section of the population which is exploited and oppressed by a ruling class, are not linked to each other - are not seen as linked to each other, are not seen therefore as affecting each other.

I think a classic example of what I am speaking about, before I begin to speak about women, is the relationship of the island of Guadeloupe with the labor market in Paris. In Guadeloupe - which is a West-Indian island which is owned by the French - there has been a struggle going on for some years among the sugar workers, among the plantation workers. In Paris, some of the West-Indians who come from the French islands are immigrant workers. If you see the garbage disposal trucks pass, you see the workers on them and they are black people, many of them: they are Senegalese, they are not West-Indian. Go to the post offices and the white collar jobs, and you see that West-Indians are there - and their position in the labor market in Paris is a direct result of the struggle in Guadeloupe. And the immigration into Paris of West-Indians is a way the French government has used to keep a lid on that struggle or to give that struggle a safety valve so that it cannot expand and increase. Yet when you are in Paris, you can be quite unaware of the struggles that are going on in Guadeloupe, and you can be quite unaware that that struggle in Guadeloupe is giving a power to the West-Indian worker in Paris which he and she would not ordinarily have. In my view THAT IS AN INTERNATIONAL. It is not an organization, it is not the first International or the second International, but it is THE International, THE International of the working class expressing itself and one struggle influencing another struggle in a place very far removed.

It is in that sense I will be speaking about an international. We have another kind of international, or rather another facet of that international - it's the international which is forming itself by the increasing growth and development of women's movements in most parts of the world. It is

not our fault, those of us who are Marxist-feminists, that **that** international has been spoken about by the ruling class in **its** newspapers and its media as a group of people who want to be let into the power structure. That is not our fault. We feel very much that we are an expression and part of that working class struggle and the contacts that we make and the links that we make in our struggles are also part of that working class international. And that's what I will be speaking about tonight.

Now I want to speak about where that feminist movement has come from, not in terms of the country it has come from, but what section of the working class is expressing itself when a women's movement is formed. As far as we are concerned, the basic position of women in this society - that is, in the metropolis (and I would like to make a distinction between the metropolis and what is called the underdeveloped world) - is the position of the housewife in the home, in the nuclear family. People have noted that it is a position of isolated labor, and that is certainly true. But what is most distinctive about it is that it is labor which at the end of the week, we do not get paid for in wages - which means that the person in the home who receives a wage has a power over the person who does not receive a wage. We know the situation where one section of an exploited population is utilized against another section of an exploited population. The word we use for that, ordinarily, is a colony. That is what a colony is: it is where power is delegated from one authority to be passed on to those who are the least powerful in the society; it means to be identified by someone outside of yourself; it means to do labor which is forced, which you have not determined the character of, nor the conditions of; it means that you are fighting always, you at the bottom, who are being determined and identified, always to identify yourself against those who have a power to identify you.

What I am saying, then, is that the nuclear family in the metropolis is a classic colonial situation. Now sometimes the reason that it doesn't appear to be that, is that it is not geographically removed from those who have absolute power. Certainly - (I live in England) - the ruling class in England which delegates the power to the man over me because he has a wage and I do not, is on the spot. If I were living in the West Indies - and when I lived in the West Indies - the power that was delegated to the man over me was not there but in London. But the character of the hierarchy of which I am a recipient at the bottom of the pile is exactly the same. And the fact that geographically we are separated in the one case, and we are not separated in the other, does not change the nature of the fundamental relationship. The British - I don't know very much about French imperialism - were absolute masters of the delegation of power, of authority to others, and they have not ceased to be masters; as a matter

of fact, they have taught the United States how to do it even more efficiently because they do it now under the guise of independence. The colonial relationship however, the delegation of power over others to others, remains.

Now there is another link between the position of...I want to make clear here...I know always that in the women's movement, there are parallels made between the black struggle in the United States and the women's struggle, and I don't want to denigrate those parallels, but I want to make clear that I am not speaking about parallels. I am speaking about a way of ruling and a way of governing which is characteristic not of the way whites govern blacks or the way men and the white power structure govern women, but of the way Capital rules.

To make it absolutely clear, what I am saying, and to remove it from the fact that I am using the black struggle as a parallel for the women's struggle is: within a factory, that kind of colonial relationship also operates whether the workers are all white, or all black, or all male or all female or a mixture of all. The fact, for example, that you have an assembly line - I don't know what the rates of pay are here but I will give you an English equivalent - that on the assembly line you get ten shillings an hour, and if you are a very skilled worker, you get twenty shillings an hour; and the fact that being skilled you are able to take breaks in between your work, and take some pride in the work that you do, is also an hierarchical structure. On top of that there is the foreman, and on top of that there is the supervisor, and on top of that there is the manager. Usually to the level of supervisor - I am speaking about a British factory - they will be working class people; they are not members of the ruling class, they are members of the working class which the employer - this particular employer or the capitalist class in general - has given some power to oversee the work of other working class people - so that the hierarchical structure, and the delegation of one power over the other, and the imposition of the will of one person on the will of another, is the characteristic feature of capitalist society.

Another classic example of that, just to make sure that there is no mistake in what I am saying, is the function, for example, that middle class people play in relation to working class people. They perform ruling functions: they are doctors to get you well so that you can go back to work very quickly - they are not concerned about why you are ill, they are concerned that you should not be; they are lawyers; they are professional people of all sorts. They themselves have no power except as it is vested in them by people who actually have power, so the relationship in the home is not a unique relationship, but a characteristic relationship of an oppressive and exploitive capitalist society. What is unique about it is that when the whole society is governed by a wage relation, there is

a woman in the home who, because she does not receive a wage, is assumed not to be working. Now that is a very unique situation because in the other colonies, where they receive wages, they know bloody well they are working and they are struggle against that work all the time. The woman is struggling against that work but at the moment she struggles against it, she is also feeling extremely guilty about struggling against it because it doesn't look to her as if it is forced labor because the people on whom she is working and for whom she is working are people whom she loves... And that puts her in a dilemma which exploited people ordinarily are not placed in.

Now, in a sense, the woman is not unique as a wageless person. There have been other wageless people and continued to be other wageless people in the capitalist society who are working (I am not speaking now about the unemployed - I will be talking about these later.) There is, first of all, the classic example of the slave, the slave who was not unpaid obviously: he and she would have starved to death if they were unpaid. The slave was paid a little bit, in kind, in food, and in shelter and some clothing. But the slave was not waged. But because (I am speaking now about new world slavery, obviously I am not speaking about ancient slavery) - but because that slave was operating in a society which was dominated by the wage relation, that a slave was producing what Marxists call surplus value. Now, it's not for me to go into tonight the whole question of what surplus value is. But surplus value is fundamentally, without giving a very detailed definition, surplus value is the robbing of your labor by capital so that capital can command more labor. It is the labor of the slave (which allowed...) that capital had robbed from him and from her, which allowed capital to extend its rule all over Europe and finally into other parts of the world. So that you work, they take a lot from you, they give you a little back, either in wages or in the case of the slave, in a little bit of clothing, a little bit of food and a little bit of shelter. And they accumulate what they have taken from you which gives them an additional power to go and enslave other people.

The other classic example of people who do not have wages but who, living in a capitalist society which is dominated by waged labor, are also producing and helping the capitalists to further accumulate wealth to dominate you with, is the peasant. And there are many economists today, I think quite a few people in the audience may know about them, who are continually speaking about the fact that neither the housewife nor the peasant is productive; that is, they do not produce that surplus value - that power, that capacity of capital to accumulate and to exploit other people. To me it is an impossible idea, and the conclusion of that apparently theoretical argument is that they do not see either the housewife or the peasant as members of the working class. Therefore, they divide the world between workers on the one

hand, who are usually white, able and over thirty, and peasants on the other, who I assume - I think they always assume - are male as they always speak about slaves being men: it is a strange idea. And then of course, if there is room in the paragraph they will mention the women. Until we formed a movement, there was no room in the paragraph - so that not only do they not see the way capital dominates the world but they do not see the forces which are fighting against that domination as having some relation to each other, and as having some common interest, and as having - what I said before - an influence, one on the other, in the struggles that take place.

Now, the wageless position of the women does relate to some degree to the position of these other wageless people; one of the things which ensures that the woman will do the kind of labor that she does in the home at a very low technological level, is that she doesn't have a wage. And let's first establish what this technological level is. It is perfectly clear that if you go into a film and you see in the film the most modern American kitchen, which it is assumed that every woman has (and of course she hasn't), that that has nothing whatever to do with the level of productivity in the society - that that is not a result of her high level of productivity, but is a result of somebody else's. If you look at a refrigerator, at a washing machine, at hot and cold running water, at how a house is set up, it is perfectly clear that it has nothing in common with a highly industrialized complex anywhere in the metropolis. It is an offshoot of that productivity, but it is itself not very productive. It is nineteenth-century technology. I think that we women have to begin to understand that we have been treated very badly and left out even of the marginal fruits of a developed capitalist society. And the reason they can buy us off with that is because they don't pay us by the hour. Because if they'd pay us by the hour they would be falling over themselves to see that we got our job done in a hurry. But because they don't pay us by the hour, except to the degree that they want to sell us A, B, C, and make a profit on the sale, they couldn't care less if we were washing on scrubbing boards.

Now something similar - not the same, but something similar - is true, for example, of the peasantry in the third world. If you are able to pay somebody at a very low wage, at bare subsistence, then also the impetus for you as a capitalist - to make that labor more productive - does not exist. Do you follow? A classic example is the sugar plantation in the West Indies. (My references on the third world will on the whole be the West Indies because I have lived there for a number of years and was involved in the struggle there. It doesn't mean I know nothing about other places but I would much prefer to speak from my own experience

than what I have read in a book; I hope you accept that. I don't say that the whole of the third world can be seen in the West Indies, that is not the implication of what I am saying, but I would rather speak from experience.) The sugar plantation in the West Indies, have been worked by men, women and children. I mean the children of the sugar workers have traditionally been illiterate, in the West Indies; I mean they go to school for some part of the year but as soon as the cane-cutting season begins, they have to work. Some of the things that they do is that they pick the canes when they fall from the wagons and then put them back on; they do something for some pay because it takes the whole family working in order for the family to survive. That went on for a long time, until the sugar workers began to demand bonuses, and they began to demand some pay between crop seasons - that is, for six months of the year they are living on credit. And as soon as the struggle began, there was an immediate invention - or maybe they had invented it long ago, but they didn't bother to use it - of cane cutting machine so that now when you go to Trinidad, you see ten people working the machine, and an hundred people standing outside watching them because they have no work. They are completely unemployed.

So when, in the case of women, they don't give you a wage at all, your productivity does not rise hardly at all, except to the degree that you have money to buy modern appliances. In the case of the peasant or in the case of the waged worker on the line in what is called the third world, when that wage is low there is also no need to make any investment in labor savings because the only reason that you make a labor-saving investment is that you save PAID LABOUR. It's not labor that you save. It's PAID labor that you save. So it was the struggle that brought in the machine and it is also the struggle that naturally brought in the unemployment and we will see later what these unemployed are thinking about and what kind of struggle they are waging now. So the relationship between this question of the wage and productivity is a very clear one. It is clear in the case of the woman with no wage, it is clear in the case of the peasant or waged worker on the line with a low wage, and we can make exactly the same parallel between the waged worker who has a higher wage (not a decent wage) because that, I am afraid, does not exist in a capitalist society and cannot exist because the "wage" implies that it is most indecent, that for every worker that wage is related to the level of productivity. And the woman in the home in a sense gets the worst of that bargain.

Now that, I want to make clear, divides us from those people who speak about the peasantry or the housewife working

in PRE-CAPITALIST relations. In THAT, Mr. Engels and all of them are talking nonsense. It is impossible once the wage relation is established internationally for anybody to be involved in pre-capitalist relations. The mode of production, the level of productivity, can be low but it cannot be pre-capitalist. Nothing can be pre-capitalist because what capital is, implies, states, and underlines is that we, we capitalists, make everything capitalist as soon as we possibly can. We want that absolutely clear. This business of somebody being pre-capitalist and this being post-capitalist, and this being advanced capitalism, and this being monopoly capitalism, I don't understand all these words. CAPITALISM IS CAPITALISM. SOME OF US GET NO WAGE, SOME OF US GET A LOW WAGE, SOME OF US GET A LITTLE HIGHER WAGE THAN THAT, AND SOME OF US DON'T GET ANY WAGE AT ALL, AND ALL OF US WANT MONEY. THAT'S CAPITALISM.

Now I don't want to imply - I want to make clear - that the development of capitalism in the third world has had some very serious consequences, not only for the men of the third world but for the women of the third world. And I want to speak about what that wage relation implies for the family. There is a lot of talk about the fact that in the third world you have overwhelmingly what is called by anthropologists generally the extended family where as in the metropolis, you tend always to have the nuclear family. You are all graduate students and I don't think I have to explain those terms. Why is it that you have an extended family in the third world and you have a nuclear family in the advanced world? I don't know too much about what the anthropologists and sociologists give as a reason, but Marxism has a reason, and this reason is waged labor. The basic relation which capital has with a man or a woman who is working for a wage is that that worker is completely and absolutely at the disposal of capital and without any kind of protection except the one that she and he makes in a struggle that they will eventually make, any kind of protection from family and from kinships.

And this is very interesting to note - and I hope some third world men as well as women will think about this - that one of the fundamental facts about the situation in Zimbabwe - I don't know if you know about the Zimbabwe, but you know about Ian Smith - I mean I don't know what is printed in the American press - I know they are rather selective - but you know that there was a struggle between the overwhelmingly African majority and the tiny white minority that was originally Rhodesia. One of the fundamental facts about the struggle in Zimbabwe, which has never been exposed, which I learned quite by accident because I am ignorant - I should have known it perhaps some other way - is that previous to white domination, the land

was worked by the women. And the men didn't do too much. Now that is not my business. That is their business and the women would have sorted that out in time. But the fact of the matter is that if the land was worked by the women, the women had a certain power in spite of the domination of men in other spheres of life. And when they took the land away from the people-and this happened to the highly white islands in Kenya as well as in other countries in Africa-when they took that land away, they took away with it the power of the female. They also, in the process, took away the power of the male in front of imperialism, in front of the invading capitalist system. Because there was nothing on which he then could depend, and he had then to turn into a waged laborer.

Now the situation...(pause)...I don't want to go into every situation in every single country; I mean, I can't - I don't even know it, and there is certainly no time if I did - but in general the situation is, that the responsibility of the male must then be to the new productive apparatus which they build for you. They don't only take the land away, they then recruit you to work on it, and they have a special job usually for the women: it is in the kitchen. Now, some women were in the kitchen previously, but most women were in the fields, and we are not talking about capitalist production when we speak about women being in the fields; I am not suggesting that it is a good way to live - I know there is a better way to live and that's not to work at all - but if you have to work, it is better at least that it is your land and you can to some degree dictate the terms of that labor, especially if you have a power by working it. But when that land is removed, the men are put on it to work and the women are taken to serve those people, to see after their children, and the responsibility for the other members of the society are cut.

Now this is very important: the question of the aging which is such a problem, in the metropolis is a question of wage labor because the aging are no longer able to earn a wage. It was not on the whole a problem in a traditional society, in a society of the extended family, because your level of productivity did not have to be high in order for you to be considered a serious member and a valuable member of society. There were functions you could perform.

Now I want to go into the question of another function which both third world men and women play, and that most particularly women in the metropolis play, and which has been pointed out among others by Margaret Benston, who has written an article called "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation." And that function is the function of an industrial reserve army. Now that's a Marxist term, and Marx used it to describe the fact that one of the important factors of capitalist rule was that you had a whole set of people who were not themselves working but who were at the disposal of capital to work at any time. And that meant that you could shift production from one area to another, but it also meant that there was a continuing pressure on those who were employed to accept the conditions and the wage which capital wished to impose. I mean the classic situation is that a fellow says, "I don't want to work for a dollar sixty an hour," which is the national minimum, "I want two dollars and fifty instead." And the employer says, "Listen kid, there are hundreds of people waiting outside for your job." And that was the situation of the working class in the United States, for example, in the thirties. That's the classic line, everybody knew that line, everybody talked about that line, because there were an hundred people waiting outside the gate.

But capital being international today, is not merely dependent on the hundreds of people waiting outside the gates in your particular city, or in your particular neighborhood; they know that there are millions of people waiting outside the gate in the whole of the third world. And the function of workers who are unemployed in the third world is precisely to be an industrial reserve army for the metropolis. And I have a number of cuttings with me here this evening, if anybody wants to check them later: it is perfectly clear that European capital since the war would not have been able to move without immigration from underdeveloped areas, not only in the third world, but also from Europe itself; Southern Italy is a classic example, Yugoslavia is another one, Spain and Portugal are other areas; North Africa - you can see North Africa in any factory in Paris; and the West Indies, Pakistan, and India are all over Britain; the whole of the textile industry or a lot of the textile industry is supported by Pakistani and Indian labor. West-Indians...they say that if West-Indians left London, the public transportation system would collapse and that is not an exaggeration. The same is true of the National Health Service and a whole set of other areas of the British production. Yeah, health is also producing, it's producing workers, it's an industry.

And women in the home are also part of that industrial reserve army. In 1940 and '41, when the war began in this

country and the United States was getting ready to involve itself in the war in Europe and in the East, a whole series of articles appeared. (I don't know why I found them; I think it was my sister who was reading the magazines, and they were around the house and I picked them up). They discovered that women had a marvelous capacity with their fingers, I mean they made some marvelous religious thing about it practically, that women had a capacity to do small things at work which was absolutely marvelous, because there was "something" in the fingers - a terrific propaganda which in 1945 disappeared completely. And in 1945, in 1946, 1947, "True Romances" and all the rest carried articles which I read avidly because I was a teenager and thought that was really how to learn about life, and nobody told me there was another way, and I did learn a great deal. Every story was about the fact that there was this conflict over this marvelous man and one woman was a career woman and the other woman only wanted a home and family, and you know who got the man - it was the woman who wore curlers and wore makeup and only wanted a home and family. And it was perfectly obvious that there was an onslaught on women, not only to get them the hell out of the factories - because that they get by sucking them, by firing them - but to make it look like it was a marvelous thing that they were doing. I mean it was really splendid - they were sending you back home where you were really going to find yourself. This marvelous capacity in your fingers had somehow evaporated.

Exactly the same thing was reversed when the Korean war began and the propaganda again came out about this marvelous capacity. And they were manipulating women as an industrial reserve army in this country. Now I am sure they were doing it in other places; I am just trying to give you some idea of the methods they utilize and the propaganda that they unloose on us when they have a plan for us which they want to carry out and which they want to convince us is the absolute best thing for us to do. I mean, part of the idea...is not merely that they impose something on you, but they make it look like it's: "Kid, we got you in mind!"

Now the question is, then, what does one industrial reserve army in the metropolis have to do with another industrial reserve army in the third world? It has to do with a struggle that we both are making. That is really the connection. In 1970 there was a rebellion in Trinidad. There were four forces that were really involved. There were the unemployed in the cities, who began the struggle; there were the employed in the oil industry, the highest-paid workers, who were looking to see if they should get involved; there were the sugar workers in the country who had gotten tired of living not only in underdevelopment in terms of wages, but in underdevelopment in terms of being separated from all that a city could offer; and

there was the army, which was the working class performing a particular function for capital there. And these forces came together, and there was a rebellion, which was not defeated; it did not succeed - I think and I hear on good advice it will burst out again soon, and we are only waiting for the event. But it was perfectly clear from that rebellion what had been clear from a number of rebellions that had taken place in Caracas, for example, and in other parts of the third world, where people from the country had come into the cities and they said, "Look, we are going to starve to death in the country, and in the city we can starve to death and see color television at the same time, and we'd rather be there." And in Caracas, you can see the hills with the towns and every once in a while they get very fed up with being up there, and not involving themselves with the wealth which Rockefeller's exploitation of the oil makes possible for some sections of the population in Caracas. And it is pretty clear that in Caracas, and in Trinidad, and in whole areas of the third world, the unemployed when they make a rebellion are not making a rebellion so that they could be employed. They are not interested in finding another and higher level of productivity for capitalism. As a matter of fact, they are not interested; they are refusing that productive role which they performed previously, which was to stand at the gate either immediately or five thousand miles away waiting for that fellow to get fed up with his job so that they can take his place at the machine.

And that is what is happening to women too; we have a particular experience in Britain - which in the discussion period perhaps you would like me to speak about - about trying to get some money for women who work in the home. We there are fighting a struggle, in one form, for wages for housework. And it is pretty clear that these women want the money because they wish to have the power to refuse the job which capital is offering them. That is, they do not want to have to go out and to work and take another job in addition to the one they are doing home in order to have some little independence, in order to have some little power, in order to be able to negotiate with the men who have used the power of the wage over them all this time. And when sections of the population no longer wish to play the function of an industrial reserve army for which they have been so to speak reserved, the first response of capital is that we better not have so many children.

Now I want to make clear that I am for marvelous birth control, and I am for the right of abortion without any strings attached and without any money attached - it must be free and on demand for any woman who wants it. But I

*shanty

am also for the right to have children which at the moment, and for some time, has been denied us. We cannot have the children we want because we don't have the money to put bread in their mouth and we don't have the money to maintain them when we want to do something else. In other words, for a woman to have a child is a disaster, in the sense that she is completely economically dependent either directly on the state, or on the state through a man. She must stop whatever she is doing and see after that child because nobody else is about to do it. I am for the right to have children as against what capital proposes, which is to eliminate certain sections of the population which they feel are either too expansive or unsafe. Now there is an article which I'd like to refer to (I haven't quoted to you tonight; I hope you understand how sympathetic I am to you, but this one is too beautiful to miss.) The Financial Times is the equivalent of the Wall Street Journal. They don't write it for us so they tell the truth. This one is called (it's March 27, 1973)...it's by a man called Joe Rogalli and it's called "When Family Planning Becomes Quality Control." They don't put articles like this in the Daily Mirror.

Now do you know who Dr. William Shockley is? Is he known here? He is a man who has a plan for...he has gradation of intelligence and it's somehow related to race, strangely enough! And Dr. William Shockley is a man whom liberals usually don't like; they just don't like him to say things that they assumed all the time. I mean the concept of intelligence is, by its nature, racist as far as I am concerned. That there is a higher and lower form of life in relation to whether or not you can pass a test, you can't get more racist than that, except to add color and sex. Anyway, Mr. J. Rogalli discusses the question; he doesn't say all that's involved, he doesn't say that this industrial reserve army is getting restless, but you can gather it and he has a plan.

"It is my belief," says Mr. Rogalli, "that in the not-very-distant future, men and women just like these /that is, prime ministers, etc./ will find themselves considering the really fundamental issue in population studies in industrialized countries, which is whether an acknowledged government-backed ethic should be made to reduce the number of pregnancies occurring in certain types of families. The person who has said this out loud, in the most provocative possible manner, is, of course, Dr. William Shockley. He is the American Nobel Prize winner who caused such a furor in Britain recently. I share the distaste of those who focus on the unpleasant racial implications of what he has written /he doesn't like it too much!/. I was also taken aback by his 'thinking exercise' proposed as follows: 'There would be a bonus for those willing to be

sterilized. Payers of income taxes would get nothing, bonuses for all others regardless of sex, race or welfare status would depend on best scientific estimate of hereditary factors in disadvantages such as diabetes, epilepsy, heroin addition /and now...dig that...he!/? arthritis, etc.' I suspect that if the proposal were to stop right there, the support for Dr. Shockley would be greater than many liberals would think. The next sentence is the worst /he doesn't like this at all!/: 'At a bonus rate of a thousand dollars for each point below 100 IQ, 30,000 dollars put in trust for a 70 IQ moron potentially capable of producing 20 children might return 250,000 dollars to tax payers in reduced cost of mental retardation care. Ten percent of the bonus in spot cash might put our national talent for entrepreneurship into action.' Liberals who find all this too horrible to contemplate should however pause to consider that partly as a result of one of their very own favorite campaigns, we already have a policy not unlike the one outlined in the first of the paragraphs quoted above. The distance from the second paragraph's philosophy is less than many people realize. This is because we have what is called 'a domiciliary family planning service' /he is talking about England/. In some cities it has been a matter of pride for many years. Sir Keith /that's Sir Keith Joseph, Minister of Social Services/ recalled yesterday how expenditure on this service was trebled two years ago. Provided that the women are willing the doctors and health workers who offer the service visit homes and offer advice and equipment. Those helped are either too ill or handicapped to go out. /And I might add, to make a struggle/...Or they are too poor, have large families and suffer from husbands who will not hear of such a thing. And they go out and one of the district nurses says, 'Mrs. Green had her fifth baby at twenty, living in welfare accommodation, her husband is unemployed most of the time, they have one child in care. She is now established on oral contraception.' "

In Jamaica they have ads that run every hour (I am not talking about Jamaica, New York, I am talking about the one that has Kingston as its capital and Montego Bay as the enslavement of the Jamaican population in the tourist industry). They have ads that run every hour and the ads go something like this: "I am going to marry William on such a date," and another woman says, "Oh yes? That is very nice." "And you know, William and I are really going to plan our future. We are not going to have children until we can afford them." Now in Jamaica and in Kingston and in the rest, that means never. That means the end of the Jamaican population any shade lower than brown. Now that, in plain parlors, is genocide. And that is what they plan to do with our children - THOSE WE WANT. Because we, the women's movement, (and the women's movement is an expression of this) are refusing to play the function of an

industrial reserve army and are refusing to play the function of an exploited labor on the assembly line, because we have children, so that we must take a lower pay outside the home because we have no wage in the home, so we must be satisfied with anything that they give us when we go out to work. That is their response. When they do not have machines with which to exploit you workers, they wish to see that you workers are not born. Now it seems to me, that it is perfectly clear to me that the women's movement is not nearly a parallel with the third world, but that the struggle that we are making for control of our uterus and for money to live in spite of the fact that we are not exploited at the highest level that capital has in mind for us, is directly and intimately linked with the struggle in the third world for exactly the same objectives. Whether that struggle is being carried out in the third world by men or by women is to some degree, but only to some degree, irrelevant.

The problems of the women in the third world, the type of exploitation of the women in the third world, I have not spoken about tonight except in passing. They will do that and they will do that much more satisfactorily than I, but I want to make it clear that the very existence of our movement gives power to the women in the third world which they would not have except that we existed. There is talk about the fact we are white and middle class. Many of us are. That is not, as far as I am concerned, an attack except as it is an attack on capital. If we, who are white and middle class have refused the little baubles that they have offered us so they could enslave us better, and have decided that we would link our fate to the revolutionary forces in the world, I do not see that as a cause for complaints from anybody. But in addition to that, whether we are white and middle class or black and working class or any combination of any of those factors, we are determined that the unwaged labor that we do in the home, which is an exploitation for the benefit of the ruling class, we will not do any longer. And in that sense whatever we may say in passing and whatever variety of views may arise from the women's movement, we are an action, and an action which is ultimately revolutionary. That that, it seems to me, is my idea of what Marxist-feminism is, and my idea of where this new International which will be built which will destroy capitalism, some of the places it will come from.

I want merely to add one thing. I have not spoken about the traditional meaning of the people who are traditionally called the working class, those who are white, male and over thirty. And I am not writing them off, not at all; we are extremely dependent on the struggle that they will make. But what I am saying is this: the idea that you will have a revolution or a revolutionary struggle

in one part of where capitalism is exploiting us all and that it can be a success is a nonsense and has proved to be wrong.

The revolution will take place when it is made by all those who are exploited by capitalism in whatever part of the world and in whatever state of capitalistic development. Because it is my view that whether you are exploited by a big machine or by a little one, it does not determine what kind of a struggle you can make. Once the big machine exists in the world and once that big machine is the conglomeration of the wealth which has been stolen from you, then the goal is to get that big machine back. And the ways that you can struggle for it, although determined to some degree by the situation in which you find yourselves, will always be related, very closely related, to the struggles that others are making elsewhere.

I think I'd like to leave it at that.

Selma James
New York City, April 17 1973
Columbia University International
House

WHEN THE MUTE SPEAKS: The Work of Creating a Movement

Introduction

In June 1971 the women's movement in Italy was just getting off the ground. . . Some individuals from various groups in and near Milan asked me, because I was from England, which had had almost two years of practice of a movement, to have a conversation with them. The conversation lasted two afternoons. The first afternoon was discontinued because everyone present wished to attend a demonstration in support of the sit-in at the Milan University Faculty of Architecture of a group of working class families who had been evicted from their homes. They, along with the students, had had to battle with the police to stay in the university. A child had been killed in the battle.

The second afternoon was recorded and later transcribed by the Milan women who wanted a final script for translation. It was edited by a number of hands, translated and circulated in Italy.

Almost two years passed. In that time certain points have been clarified and developed within the movement in Italy and elsewhere, as a result of theoretical work and day-to-day practice. For example, the limitations for action of the small group and the need for organization within the women's movement along the lines of specific political tendencies has made itself felt. This has been the response to the needs of activity and at the same time the need to combat the co-optive process not only from outside but from within the movement itself. What has not yet been elaborated is the section on the homosexuality of the division of labor.

The women's movement has had to emphasize how women are estranged from each other, pitted in rivalry against each other, expressing our contempt for ourselves in our contempt for each other. While accepting this as fact, I wanted to emphasize that the opposite is also true: women are driven together away from men, and the lesbian relation pervades the social if not the sexual relationships of women in capitalist society. For the homosexual relation is as pervasive as the division of labour itself, and is an enemy within against that division. I believe only through the incorporation of this reality into our view of the struggle can the Gay movement lose its exotic, moral and peripheral appearance, and be seen instead as a vital struggle of class.

Padova, 28 January 1973

I thought the best way to be of use to you is to give you some idea of the problems you are undoubtedly going to face in forming a movement and the relation of a revolutionary women's movement to organizations that call themselves revolutionary.

If we make the assumption, as we did yesterday, that fundamentally the position of women from the birth of capital has been based on the separation of the home - the family - from direct production which were united in previous societies; then our movement is for the purpose of destroying the separation between those who are directly productive (that is, in general, man) and those who are indirectly productive (that is, women); between production and education, that is, between the generations, between ourselves and those who are older than we are and those who are younger.

Then we begin to see that the nuclear family, which the anthropologists mystify as some strange and accidental phenomenon, is merely the unit that capital needs to produce workers and to service workers. That means that first of all labour power is the creation of the woman: that is the commodity she produces. The reason, then, that there are homes for the aged and hospitals for the sick is that the nuclear family has no place in it for anyone who is not being trained to work or actually working. So that the nuclear family is a mobile unit and can be shoved wherever the man is needed in production. Then we can see that it is impossible to have a women's movement which integrates into the society, which can conceive for itself of the liberation of women being found in this society, because we objectively are concerned with the destruction of every institution, not only the destruction of the institution of the family and the institution of the factory, which are mutually interdependent. Every institution in the society, school, hospital, orphan asylum, old age home, is directly related to our position in the family and the separation of the home, the community, from the directly productive centre.

Because we do not have any inheritance of revolutionary history that we know about, we have to begin from the ground up. And we have suffered because of this lack. I'm not saying, however, that we have no revolutionary history; I'm saying that because we have been deprived of knowing about it, it appears that we start from scratch. One way in which this lack was brought home to us in England was the relation between the Women's Liberation movement and the "political" women in the movement. (By "political" I mean the women whose first contact with politics was through the white male left and often whose first loyalty remains there.) Where revolutionary ideas were not present, that vacuum is filled by the ideas of the ruling class. Since there are not four

volumes of Capital devoted to an analysis of the subversive nature of women's labor, or their historical equivalent, it has been easier to impose upon us the secondhand and outmoded politics of the old left, this time via women. I want to list some of the things these women did (and do) because they give us a very hard time.

First of all they came into the women's movement primarily to recruit for their political organisations; they came to use us.

Second, they believed that the movement was for the purpose of raising the "political consciousness" of women to the level of men, and did not understand that the reason that the movement was historically necessary was that the political level of men was low, low enough to call into existence a women's movement.

The third thing was that they conceived of the working class as being white, male and over thirty and being only in the advanced world. They believed the struggle was only in direct production, which was the view that the traditional left had had of the whole of the third world. According to this view, only the people who worked in factories could make the revolution, and so they thought that housewives had no social power. Women, we say, come from a situation of underdevelopment; the house is in no way a representation of modern technology and of modern social relations - developed capitalist relations, and developed capitalist technology. So that their position in relation to women was directly connected with their position in relation to the third world: the area of development must dominate the area of underdevelopment. It was an imperialist view of the class struggle, a reflection in the mirror of struggle of capitalist relations.

The next point they put forward, sometimes hidden and sometimes open, was that the working class issue - bearing in mind their definition of the working class - was the "wider issue," the "general issue." I earlier made the point that all the institutions of society are dependent on the separation of the home from direct production; one can see from this that the female issue is the widest issue because that is every working class issue. That is particularly true in a country where women make up 30% or 40% of the waged labour force, where they are in direct production as well as in production in the home. One can see in a situation like that that women form the link between the various institutions of the society and therefore are a key to a generalised struggle leading to their destruction.

Finally, what characterises these women, and what makes it possible for them to have these anti-feminist

views and behaviour, is that they refuse to examine their own position as women in the political organisations of which they are members; or if they do, to connect these organisations' "chauvinist" practices with structural political weakness, with their imperialist approach to the class struggle. To be racist about women need not call into question, it seems to them, any other aspect of your politics.

The immediate result of these "political" women putting forward these ideas and behaving in this way was destructive to the formation of the movement because it denied the viability of the movement and the necessity for its autonomy in the class struggle. This resulted in a reaction by many middle class women in particular: refusing to have anything to do with class. It is the responsibility of those of us who are Marxist feminists to put forward our views in the movement to prevent it from becoming a movement which is fighting to make capital more advanced rather than to destroy it. The danger is always that middle class women will translate women's liberation into a liberation movement for some middle class women. "Political" women, in excluding middle class women (that is, except for themselves), from the struggle of class except as ballast, reinforce this tendency. We have evidence that in England capital wants to integrate a lot of middle class women: by lowering wages and by shortening the training period, a lot of jobs are made available to women (engineering for instance)*. We are not knocking ourselves out to build a movement so that a few women can get better jobs and capital can reorganise itself more efficiently through them at the expense of the rest of us.

While we fight for abortion, we must bear in mind what it means for different classes of people. For instance, we can measure the social wealth of the working class not by whether working class women can have abortions but by the freedom to have or not to have children. It is because we are deprived of being able to have children when we wish (for a complex of social, economic and political reasons), that we have to fight to have abortions.

We have some very specific tasks to perform in relation to laying the theoretical foundations for a movement, which

*The Minister for Education in Britain has recently built this reorganization of female labour power more firmly into the education system.

by the way, have not been laid anywhere - not in the U.S., not in England.** We have a lot of ideas and a lot of theoretical foundations are still to be laid.

The first thing to work on seriously in the countries we happen to live in is the economic functions that women have performed in relation to that economy. It varies somewhat from place to place. In my view, the fundamental labour of women for capitalist society is the production of labour power in the home. They are always saying that we don't produce commodities and therefore we cannot be revolutionary or at least anything but peripheral to the revolutionary process - we have a very big commodity on which the whole of capitalist society is based.

The second thing along with the economic work that has to be done is the historical work. No question that if we look for it, we'll find the struggle of the working class to prevent the fragmentation of the community, to prevent the State from taking over the functions previously performed in the home: education, nursing, etc. We have evidence that in 1860-70 the working class of the East End of London - which was a great centre of the working class in England - fought bitterly against compulsory education, to keep their children out of schools - against having to be taken to the hospital (apart from the fact that hospitals were so bad you died if you went there.) These were struggles to protect their own people, to refuse to have the family pared down to the nuclear family, totally vulnerable to what capital wanted. And we'll also find tremendous activity by women acting in groups, acting autonomously in every important rebellion and revolutionary situation.

Why did women get the vote in England? I believe it was to prevent a movement which was already there from growing and moving into well beyond suffrage, in a post-world war, post-Russian Revolution epoch. We have to find the evidence.

**Since this was written, with the publication of The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community by M. Dalla Costa and myself (Falling Wall Press, Bristol, England 1972), the bare bones of a theoretical framework were laid. Since then there is a growing body of literature which centres on the strategy summed up in the demand Wages for Housework, e.g., "Women, the Unions and Work or what is not to be done" by myself, and other papers and pamphlets by the Power of Women Collective, England, and Lotta Femminista, Italy. Papers and pamphlets are now in preparation in North America also which take this strategy as their starting point.

Dealing with women we have to throw out the definition that we have inherited of what a struggle is. In my experience I know of individual women in individual homes waging individual struggles which were in every sense a total social struggle, except that they waged it alone: in the U.S. the struggles of individual-women against their husbands, family, neighbours for the right to divorce. They fought alone but at a certain stage they made it socially acceptable. There is an example of social struggles which take an individual form.

I wanted to relate this last point of our history to the kind of specific problems that you all may have to face - in comparison with the kind of problems that we have to face in England. In England what we have to do is to destroy sociology, to destroy psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis, to destroy the progressive educators, because they are the theoreticians of the Welfare State, they are the theoreticians of policy to manipulate men, women and children. Of course the first of these are the economists, there is no question about this: we have absolutely to destroy them.

By welfare state I mean very specifically the health service and social workers, Social Security, etc., the doctors who, when you go to him to tell him that you are having a nervous breakdown because you can't stand any longer being in the house, gives you a tranquilizer. They are the people who study us very carefully to tell capital exactly how little they can give us in order to avoid a struggle, to distract us from our objectives, to use our energy in struggle to attain their objectives. This is really what their function is. That is the theory of the modern State. The U.S. is full of it, absolutely full of it, and has been for years. Lenin has said that the State is the bodies of armed men, you know, the police and the army; but in my view today, the State in the U.S. and increasingly everywhere, is also the bodies of unarmed men and women who plan you economically, socially, politically, educationally and sexually; who come to tell you - if you are refusing to accept the society or to "participate" in the exploitation of the society - their function is to say, "You are not normal and we will fix you up so that you will be normal, that is, you will conform, and accept all the exploitation that we wish to put upon you." Probably there is as much money given to that as there is to arms.

I don't know to what degree sociology, psychology, psychoanalysis - I am sure the economists - and other so-called social scientists, how pervasive they are in Italy. What is pervasive in Italy is the Catholic Church; that is perfectly obvious. That's your enemy and those are the people you have to destroy, and what I was saying about history I think can be useful in the destruction of the Catholic Church. (I don't mean physical destruction - that will come down when the rest comes down - but theoretically you have to

destroy their position and practically you have to challenge them.) It seems to me that if you begin to get in touch with working class Catholic women, you will undoubtedly uncover many areas of struggle that they are waging against the church at the same time that they go and light candles - I am not saying they are not religious - I assume and we must assume that they are rejecting the hold that the church has had over them and specifically the exploitation that the church has always put upon women - you know: the fundamental principle on which the churches operate is that the highest aspiration for a woman is to be able to endure suffering.

I am now making another point: what we have to be careful about is alienating women who are Catholic from coming into the movement, and the best way is to give them back their own struggle. I assume that this struggle is going on because of my experience in Spain; I lived for six months in 1958 among very religious peasant people, and the women told me that when the nuns came round to see them and told them: "You must not use contraceptives," the women kissed the cross and then kissed the sister's hand and then said, "Sister, when the church buys my children shoes, I will not use contraceptives. Until then I have to." Now if you tell women what they are doing and present their own activity on an individual or community level as "the social revolution," which it undoubtedly is, then you draw them out and you help clarify their own struggles with them, which is what you purpose always is in studying history.

Women are invisible; we must think of ourselves as having been invisible for many centuries, that these are all kinds of struggles which we have waged and are waging which nobody has recorded, which nobody has elevated to the level of politics or social revolution. Discovering what women are actually doing is the same thing that we are doing when we write history; we are giving to women, to ourselves, our own history. The old left's idea (at least in England and the U.S.) is that people have to understand that they are exploited; the radical groups said they had to tell workers that they are exploited! Now we don't have to tell women that we are exploited and oppressed - every woman knows that. The important thing is to tell her: "Listen, there is something we can do about it. The proof is that this is what we have done in the past, and this is what we are doing now, and this is what we can do." That means that you have to write history so that every woman can understand it - and this is much more difficult than doing the research; it presumes a link between what has happened, what is happening, and what we can make happen that intellectuals of either sex have rarely been able to make. A movement can perhaps succeed where individuals or even organisations failed.

This sums up very briefly what I feel we must all be doing -

and what I hope I'll be doing. That does not mean that **there** are not many, many other things to do, but I'm now talking about the theoretical framework which must be laid.

I want now to speak about our experience with the kind of organisation which is useful for the kind of work that we want to do. Now I'm not talking about the theoretical work but the practical work.

We have found, and I don't know if this would be true of you, that we function best in the small group - and we function best without men; that there are many things no woman will say in front of a man especially if she has a relationship with him; that these small groups must really be founded on the very particular experience that women have had - that is, the discovery of the fact that the uterus has been fundamental in our social and personal relations, our whole psychological makeup and the work that we do, our whole relation to this capitalist society. The people that we are has been determined by the fact that we were born with a uterus, the only instrument that can reproduce a worker.

When we talk in the small group - talking on the basis of the individual experiences, experiences of the members of the group - what we are really doing is discovering how the uterus has been the foundation of all our relations, I repeat, the work that we do, our total relation to society; we are discovering in other words the power structure that is related to the uterus.

The small group is the only place where this experience can emerge, and it is the only place therefore where a re-definition of politics can emerge - you know, you are doing the historical work and the economic work, but at the same time you must be finding out exactly what is the experience of women - what is it? - and you begin with yourselves. You are that experience, it is not something outside of yourself.

The other function that the small group performs is that it begins to discipline women like me to keep their mouths shut and let other women speak.

Now, since most of the people who are in the liberation movement in England are middle class, I believe that a fundamental position that we must begin to take is that we, middle-class women, refuse to be integrated into this society. The first flowering of the Black movement was a movement to integrate; then at a certain stage its revolutionary essence asserted itself; it said, "We don't want to integrate into this society, we want to destroy it." And this orientation is very important in our movement. I think that in refusing the kind of co-option that capital wants to make of our movement (especially because its composition tends to be middle class),

our orientation as "political" women must be: middle-class women refuse to integrate, refuse to become part of the capitalist power structure, the white male power structure. That means in practice that those women who are sociologists and economists and psychologists and lecturers and teachers must begin to destroy the institutional structures into which they have been incorporated from the inside. With working class women it is much more complicated than that, and we must see ourselves as a movement of women in two ways in relation to the working class women:

First of all, I believe that where housewives are concerned, we can make an appeal to them as a women's liberation movement to get community organisations formed - community organisations are struggles of women. You will know. I have heard what you did here, telling women whose families were on the point of eviction: "We women have done enough free labour in the house that we have no need to pay any rent." This I think is wonderful. As I said yesterday, our next question in England will be inflation, the other side of wages.*

The second point that we must bear in mind is that it is very unlikely - I may be wrong, this is what I think now, I may change my mind tomorrow - but my experience is that the working class woman, especially the black woman, although she will form autonomous organisations, is not likely to form organisations outside her class; that is, where there is a tenants' movement against eviction or against rent itself, what she is likely to do is to form a women's group within the tenants' movement, rather than leave the working class man to join with middle class women.**

But we must be very self-conscious about the work that we are doing. Because if we are doing our work on history, and we are doing our work of recording the actual rebellion of women and the work on the economic relations of women to society; and if we are disrupting and protesting against beauty

*Strictly speaking, it was not. It was a struggle to keep and increase the Family Allowance, the pittance which women get for bearing children and have gotten since 1945 when the British State replanned the quantity and quality of labour power to be reproduced. It was, however, in the climate of rising prices that made the Family Allowance issue so urgent to women. The question of independent money for women, especially for those who are fulltime housewives, is undoubtedly the key to every issue which women face. This is dealt with in literature already referred to on page 3, footnote 2.

**Recent experience in the campaign to keep and increase Family Allowance(see above)has somewhat altered this view. We could see possibilities of all housewives seeing their common interest as dependents of men to join to fight for a wage for housework. See espec. "Wages for Housework," by Giuliana Pompeii, Power of Women Collective, London.

contests and if we are rewriting fairytales - as some women in England are doing - and helping to organise community actions of women, then we are helping women who are not in the movement and who might even think that our movement has nothing to do with them. We are nonetheless influencing them to take an autonomous position within the working class movement. (The existence of the women's movement has already meant a new level of power for every woman. The last thing the ruling class will want to happen is for this new power not enough but something/ to be identified with the existence of a movement and the roots of that movement's existence be traced to mass action by women. So these are the connections we should be making, obviously.)

Finally I come to my last point. There is in the U.S. a movement of women - I don't think it is very large, but it is growing - of women who have been in the liberation movement for two or three years and who have discovered that every relation with a man is a compromise with capital. They have decided therefore that they are going to become "political lesbians", not necessarily because they find women more attractive than men, but because at least with women this compromise is not necessary. If we Marxist-feminists are functioning properly in the movement, we will be able to understand what a movement is as opposed to an organisation and we'll be able to understand therefore that these political lesbians are absolutely vital to a movement, because they have gone to the ultimate position in one vital area. I believe absolutely with them that in any relation between a man and a woman, a woman must compromise herself. However, there are millions of women like me who at the moment are willing to make the compromise. But in order for the movement to progress and drive forward, there have to be some women always pointing out to the rest of us that this society cannot liberate us. We will be able to form for instance a new kind of commune, we will have a cooperative, we will have nursery schools and we will incorporate men into the home to some degree, and achieve all kinds of desires that all women have in order not to drive the logic of the position to the end, to try to envisage a structure within the society that will itself be liberating. These women by their very existence say, "No such structure can be created." The power structure can only be destroyed; it is not a "problem" that can be solved. And this is in defence of those women because there are going to be many attacks upon them.

It is in defence of these women that we begin to build a movement because, on the one side we will have the political lesbians (I hope in England we will, because they are fundamental to a movement); on the other side we'll have the civil rights wing of middle class women who will struggle for abortion, birth control (and by the way, I'm not saying that only middle class women will struggle for these or only a

civil rights issue is involved), the kind of civil rights demands which lead to capital being less backward but which do not necessarily lead to its destruction - that is also part of the movement. And it is only from day to day and not by any political theory (which as I say we desperately need), but doing the work that has to be done that we'll be able to work out any particular point what our relationships are to other wings of the movement.

I also see the Gay Liberation Movement, the movement of homosexuals, as an absolutely vital part of the liberation of the whole of society, and closely linked with women's liberation. It is our job not only to defend gay sisters and brothers but to make the attack on capital that the life it makes us lead, while it elevates heterosexuality to a religion, at the same time in practice makes it impossible for men and women to be in touch with each other physically or emotionally - it undermines heterosexuality except as a sexual, economic and social discipline. We cannot have profoundly intimate relations with men - that is one of the things we are complaining about.

What I believe we should be saying is that you have a situation in this society where you have a division of labour between men and women. For instance, you have 1,000 women working in a factory, they spend eight or nine hours with the women who work next to them, they spend three or four hours with their husbands not counting when they are sleeping. They are more intimate with the women they work next to - they know when they have their period, how they are feeling and what their husbands do to them - more than the men they sleep with - and that is a lesbian relationship. This is what we have to face: capital undermines heterosexuality on any other than its own power-structured basis. The division of labour divides the history of exploitation of one sex from that of the other; it drives women to each other and away from men. We are torn by the contradiction between the idealisation and worship of heterosexuality and the master-servant nature of our relations with men. The Gay movement, oppressed by the heterosexual relation, undermines it, undermines the division of labour which lies at its core, opens the way for an individuality free of sexual identity.

So that the division between the women's movement and the Gay movement is more ideological than actual. We both aim to subvert the sexual division of labour. The only way in which most of us women are not lesbians is that we do not participate in the actual sexual act with other women. But if we compare the relationships among women on the one hand and between men on the other - the sexual act between women is a logical consummation of a social relationship based on the homosexual structure of exploitation. Capital undermines

heterosexuality even while it is fundamental to its structure. We turn to lesbianism revolted by how we are reduced in our relations with men. We are filled with guilt when we acknowledge sexually where our intimacy and political ties, determined by our history, must lie. Yet when we transcend in this way the conditioning that marks the boundary between our feelings and our bodies, between our social affinities and our sexual ones, we move beyond necessity and into new discovery of the human social and sexual potential.*

What I have been trying to say, then, is that we are confronted with a dilemma that we have to deal with continually: on the one hand women, not men but women, in the women's movement, who have political positions which divorce feminism from politics - for that also is a political position; on the other hand, these women, in the name of "politics," undermine feminism which is the basis of our political positions, and the only basis of an autonomous movement. Our major responsibility, it seems to me - I am open to disagreement because my mind is not made up absolutely on anything (except that we have to be free); we are only at the beginning - it seems to me our major loyalty must be to the women's movement and its autonomy, for one reason: because the whole of society has an hostile attitude to the movement, even those who claim to be anticapitalist. When the mute speaks for the first time, someone tries to put words into her mouth. Now this is what the women's movement is: this is the invisible and the mute who for the first time opens her mouth, speaks, acts, and becomes visible. Our major responsibility at the moment, which may be a responsibility that shifts and changes, is to see that this movement gets off the ground; that the women who have never spoken, even if we think that what is coming out of their mouths is nonsense (and by the way it will be much less nonsense than we may think because if we always give serious thought to the things women say, we'll be able to understand and make connections with that cannot be understood and connected in any other way), that when they speak nobody is to tell them what to say.

*Nothing said here implies that homosexual or bisexual people in any way prefigure community personality or relationships. Until we are free, that is, until 1)sexuality is disengaged from power - until women's sexuality is no longer part of our work; and until 2)our personalities are no longer fragmented in labour which divides our minds from our bodies and one sex from another, we will be circumscribed in our sexual expression. Only a capitalist society can reduce sexuality to a quantified physical function. Only a communist society can destroy that calculating ledger mentality of human functions and capacities, and assert the social nature of all that is human.

We will discuss among ourselves but nobody from outside and particularly no member, male or female, of an outside political group, can come and tell us: "You have a wrong political line." What we have to tell then is: "You never have had any political line on this subject, at least none that distinguished you from the ruling class, and this has distorted all of your politics up to now. We will work out our political line among ourselves. In short, fuck off."

Selma Janes
13 June 1971

IN DEFENCE OF FEMINISM

Preface

The report which follows was written and distributed in duplicated form early in 1973 after the National Women's Conference of November, 1972, in Acton (London). If it were only a report of what occurred there, its interest would be merely historical. But it is not that. It is a political report, a selection of significant events with an interpretation of them against a background of previous and related events. It records a major confrontation within the movement, whose reverberations are still ringing in our ears. In short, it makes a good introduction to the present stage of the women's movement.

This is not to say there haven't been changes in the women's movement since 1972. Some of the changes that have occurred will be noticed in footnotes to the original text. This preface will deal with developments of larger and more general significance.

A movement, because it is broadly based and spontaneous in character, cannot be confined in a permanent program or set of demands. Its vitality rests on its ability to give expression to a widespread revolt against a condition of life. A shared condition of life. The women's movement grew out of the shared constraints of women's lives and the continual revolt of women against them. It grew out of the shared sense of an historical opportunity to make a successful, united struggle against them. That opportunity was prepared not only by the struggles of women in home, factory, office, in whatever workplace, but also by the successes of the black movement.

Like any living organism, a movement grows and changes, has experiences and learns, makes mistakes and corrects them. It has periods of activity and of rest, of clarity and confusion, of ebb and flow. It can have aberrations and momentary fads and it can make astounding recoveries from these.

A movement is also by its nature a contradictory organism. The fact of its existence is a contradictory fact, as each of us in the movement is a contradiction. We are the creatures of the System, and we are fighting the System. The System made us and we made the movement

struggle and gave the Radical Feminists an ideological base for constructing separatist politics. The writers of the report held that no such split was feminist or revolutionary. As Marxists we saw the women's movement as an independent and autonomous expression of women in the class struggle. But the group we represented was small. The brunt of attacks on our position fell on one woman. From the volume of "replies to" and attacks on Selma James as an individual, one would not think it was the women's movement that opposed "star-making" or the identification of ideas with particular women.

That situation has changed. In March, 1973 a group of women gathered to discuss the revolutionary feminist politics presented in The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. We wanted to explore the perspective of wages for housework and the kinds of actions that would flow from it. Because the housewife, whether employed in a second, waged job or not, is the index to the condition of all women, because her dependency and exploitation are at the heart of women's low level of power to direct our own lives, we hold that our social role and social work, as housewife, are the key to our struggle as women. Whatever our personal triumphs or opportunities, in an important sense we are all housewives; those who hold power define us in that way.

We called our group the Power of Women Collective. In March, 1974 the first issue of our journal, Power of Women was published; other issues have followed. We have also published a document on the nurses' struggle, a pamphlet called "Living Through the Crisis", two pamphlets on wages for housework, as well as this report. Nor have our activities been confined to writing, publishing and distributing our materials (though other groups in various countries have taken them up, translated and published them).

We are also an action group. We have been involved in the struggles of women like the nurses, women in Ireland, and the Asian women of Imperial Typewriters; we have sponsored or spoken at many meetings of women; and we are preparing a market stall in London for dissemination of our ideas and organisation within a given community. All this has taken the time and energies of many devoted women, women whose ranks are always open to other women who want to join the struggle.

It should be said that since Acton, many of the ideas we struggled for have gained general currency. Now, every woman concerned with the issue of abortion also recognises the importance of the right to have children. No woman involved in trades unions credits them with a higher consciousness in struggle than women possess. And it is

now commonplace, from U.N. documents to left analyses, for women's work in the home to be considered a vital part of the working day. Women entering the movement today find it, in these respects, on a higher level politically than it had reached in 1972.

In an important sense, the Power of Women Collective also grew out of the London Conference of 1972. If we had been able to see then what has since developed for us, the confident optimism of the last three paragraphs of the report would have been sounded with trumpets.

Priscilla Allen
December, 1974

* by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Rd., Bristol 6. (35p + 4p postage)

(Also available in the U.S. and Canada in many bookstores and from 'aces for Housework' local groups (see back page.)

IN DEFENCE OF FEMINISM

A London Conference Report

"Within the women's movement, therefore, we reject both class struggle as subordinate to feminism and feminism as subordinate to class struggle. Class struggle and feminism are for us one and the same thing, feminism expressing the rebellion of that section of the class without whom the class struggle cannot be generalised, broadened and deepened."
from the Statement of the International Feminist Collective

Introduction

The draft of this report was shown to a few women for their comments, and one or two, though they agreed with much of it, were against its circulation. They felt that there was some bitterness at the conference which was better left alone than stirred to life. Also that to present so controversial a view of the conference might be seen as sectarian.

That there was bitterness at the conference the report attempts to account for politically. But we had other reasons for acting against the advice of our initial readers in circulating the report.

First, it has not been the habit of the women's movement to sweep feelings under the carpet.

Second, many women in the movement, we among them, have complained strongly from time to time that women who are neither liberals nor members of the male left have to shut their mouths for the sake of avoiding controversy, for the sake of "sisterhood" as it is not uncommonly defined. The price of our peace is being subjected to politics which we had hoped to escape by leaving the male left. We feel the conference liberated us from this restraint and that sisterhood, like charity, begins at home.

Third, we as a movement are in the habit of shying away from articulating political controversy, especially with those we love, women or men. But if we are unable even within the movement and among those closest to us to articulate firm political positions, then we are not prepared for the new situation in Britain. This situation demands more than articulation of political controversy in words.

Increasingly the State in Britain is more repressive, the class confrontations bolder and vaster. If we are unable to discover and invent a political practice which is both effective against the State and feminist, we can become politically irrelevant, even helpful to that State, and drive women back into the arms of the male left. This is what is happening to some degree in the United States where a massive movement could not find an autonomous mode of thought and action which was anti-capitalist and anti-sexist as one totality.

We wrote the report to help that process of discovery and invention, and for another closely connected reason. That reason is this: we, as a movement, do not take ourselves seriously enough. In London on November 3-5, 1972 two thousand people from Britain and a number of other countries, not only European, gathered to discuss the condition of women and, as women, what we could do about it that nobody else could, that nobody else had ever been able or wanted to. That is a major political event. The report tries to give a context to that event and to describe it as a moment in the process of our development as women and as a movement.

The point of view is one which sees women and their movement as objectively part of the class struggle, and which is trying subjectively to ensure that the line between women "in" the movement and "out" of it, from the most to the least powerful among us, is continuous and unbroken - a lifeline.

If it had been a report for the Guardian (a bourgeois liberal paper), it would be a different report. Soon after the conference the Red Mole (a Trotskyist newspaper) published a different kind of report too (even though the conference had decided that no report should appear except within the movement). It was written by two women from the male left and therefore suffered from the limitations of its source, limitations which this report will try to define and illustrate.

Which brings us to our final point. Perhaps the reader will be surprised that we have spent so much time discussing the left. We are working in a long tradition: that of disentangling our struggle as women from the meshes of the left. Remember Beverly Jones' response to the SDS in 1967, Marge Piercy's "Grand Coolie Dam" of 1969, and Robin Morgan's goodbye to the "counter-left, the counterfeit left" in 1970. Many of us have hoped that not too many more statements of that sort would have to be made. But for this conference the Radical Feminist wrote: "Absent physically (the left) remain directors with their female representatives" and "they have made the Women's Movement, to a large extent, a branch of the male left". The difference between the Radical Feminists and us is that we take that charge seriously enough to wrest the movement from the left's hands.

It must have struck others besides ourselves that at the conference the organisations of "the left" could not be distinguished one from the other. To conclude that they are all sexist merely is to state a truth which hides a bigger truth. Of course they are sexist. At present, every organisation in which both men and women work together cannot avoid being dominated by men. This is why we don't allow men in our movement, and we have never heard another reason given. But the question is: are they against what we are against? The Black left is. And the white left?

We are in a tradition in a profounder sense. As the revolution advances, the enemies of the class seem to be buried deeper and deeper within it. The co-optation of the Social Democracy, an organisation built step by step by class action, announced itself in 1914 when it supported the imperialist war. The sixty years since 1914 have seen many other organs and institutions created by the class co-opted, and other hands trace how even shop stewards now play, at best, an ambiguous role in the struggle.

To see the left today as being "on the other side" -however fine individuals among them, especially but not only working class women- to see it as being not only against us but not against what should be our common enemies, this too is part of a tradition. When we speak so much of women in left organisations it is because we are deeply concerned about the co-optation of our movement, about the mediation they can offer to our enemies.

One specific and obvious example is the Communist Party, whose international record on the "woman question" (as on every question) does not bear examining. The power of our movement gives CP women the courage fight the men in their organisation on this question. They will succeed in making the party adjust its line on women, the better to influence our movement and gain more women members. ("Grandma what big teeth you have!" "The better to eat you with, my dear".) (1)

So it is that a struggle for power between women and men brought about by our movement's autonomy becomes a means, ironically, of creating a greater threat to our autonomy. But there we see a clear example of a tradition of co-optation and attack on co-optation that describes the condition of our life, of our movement, of our struggle.

We hope that sisters will consider the report. We hope too that when they are involved in action, they will not put that action aside to discuss the report. (One reason why this report is so late is that we have been involved in actions.) We hope some people will be very angry. But we

hope others, angry or not, will find it useful in sorting out their own politics and taking them seriously enough to organise to fight like hell for them. The last sentence of this report is meant to point to a new beginning which, owing to historical circumstances to some degree peculiar to Britain, it has devolved on our movement to spearhead.

The Background

No single mass event provided a general background for the London National Conference of Women's Liberation in 1972, as had for the national conference in Manchester the previous spring. The Manchester conference had reflected the high level of struggle that the mining community had reached in its strike, when it succeeded in ignoring a threat by the State to remove its livelihood. The militant actions of this community opened the way for a freer and wider expression of revolt in all sections of the exploited population. It opened up possibilities of struggle. The mining strike was directly responsible for the pamphlet introduced at Manchester, Women, the Unions and Work, or what is not to be done, which, all agree, has changed the character of discussion and actions in the women's movement. The excitement it generated in Manchester was due to a new appreciation of the importance and power of women's struggles and of their centrality in the class struggle.

After the mining community, the dockers took on the State, and the long campaign waged by the Night Cleaners of London, mostly women, burst into a strike. The threat of violence posed by 10,000 workers converging on the Saltley coal depot to support the mining community became actual violence during the strike of the dockers. The reaction to this growing violence was repression on the part of the State; and on the part of the unions and, to a certain extent, the left it was disavowal. The unions discouraged, denied, and where they could not deny, condemned the violent acts of their members in defence of their struggle. The State had already rounded up eight people in the Stoke Newington area of London to use as scapegoats and warnings to working class militancy. The established left gave the Stoke Newington Eight virtually no support while it condemned in its press "violence and terrorism". The trial of the Eight, which included four women, was going on at the time of the London conference. All of these factors, within the context of high unemployment with inflation, confronted the continuing struggle of the class. All these were operating on our minds at the London conference whether we articulated them or not.

We did not leave the Fourth National Conference with the same unmixed enthusiasm we felt on the way back from

from Manchester, even if it was a demonstration of our growing forces (nearly 2000 women were present), even if the creche run by men and the social without men proved again to be great successes. This conference was more oriented towards action and mass organisation, which meant also it was more than any previous conference an arena for theoretical debate on the politics of the movement. After years of ideological drift, a recognition of the need for theoretical clarity in the movement bespeaks a new stage of its development. On the brink of new and different struggles, women wanted naturally a firmly based perspective.

There were two possibilities: to discuss a political perspective beginning with women's struggle and our movement in particular or beginning outside of the movement and incorporating ourselves into an already worked-out male-oriented perspective. To do the former is the most difficult task a movement of women can set itself; it is to posit its own power and its own revolutionary perspective against all the male-dominated groups with dozens if not hundreds of years of history behind them. In terms of this conference we failed. Which is to say that the conference became an arena dominated by the ideology of the organised left.

Since Manchester, the Women's Liberation Movement has seen its potential go beyond the specific struggles for free abortion and contraception. The six demands published in Women, the Unions and Work have been the impetus for the political heightening of the women's movement, but also, because the "general struggle" was under the hegemony of the organised left, which had already established its "revolutionary" strategy, the demands aroused violent reaction from them - CP, Maoist or Trotskyist.

Since the six demands presented at Manchester were so much discussed, they deserve full quotation here.

1. WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO WORK LESS. A shorter work week for all. Why should anybody work more than 20 hours a week? Housewives are hesitant to ask men after a week of at least 40 grinding hours to see after their own children and their own underwear. Yet women do just that, for themselves and for men. When women are threatened with redundancies, the struggle must be for a shorter work week. (Maybe men will take our lead for a change.)

2. WE DEMAND A GUARANTEED INCOME FOR WOMEN AND FOR MEN WORKING OR NOT WORKING, MARRIED OR NOT. If we raise kids, we have a right to a living wage. The ruling class has glorified motherhood only when there is a pay packet to support it. We work for the capitalist class. Let them pay us, or else we can go to the factories and put our

children in their fathers' laps. Let's see if they can make Ford cars and change nappies at the same time. WE DEMAND WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK. All housekeepers are entitled to wages (men too).

3. It is in this context that WE DEMAND CONTROL OF OUR BODIES. If even birth control were free, would that be control? And if we could have free abortions on demand, is that control? What about the children we want and cannot afford? We are forced to demand abortion and sterilisation as we have been forced to demand jobs. Give us money and give us time, and we'll be in a better position to control our bodies, our minds and our relationships. Free birth control, free abortion for whoever wants them (including our sisters from abroad who are denied this right - sisterhood is international). WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN.

But childbearing is not the only function of our bodies that capital controls. At work we make them do what they don't want to do : repeated jerks on an assembly line, constant sitting or standing, breathing fumes and dirt. Work is often painful and dangerous. It is always uncomfortable and tiring. After work your body is too numb for you to feel it as something you can enjoy. For this reason it cannot develop sexually. Our physical feeling is further destroyed by the limited kinds of sexuality and the shallow relationships this society promotes, and by the scarcity of times and places where we can make love. Our bodies become a tool for production and reproduction and nothing else.

4. WE DEMAND EQUAL PAY FOR ALL. There is a rate for girls and a rate for boys, and a rate for women and a rate for men, a rate for "skilled" and a rate for "unskilled" and a rate in the North and a rate in the South. Whoever works deserves a minimum wage, and that minimum must be the rate of the highest grade.

5. WE DEMAND AN END TO PRICE RISES, including tax, rent, food and clothing. There is a battle brewing on housing. As usual, with tenants' struggles, women are going to be at the heart; they are the ones who will refuse the rent collector when he knocks on the door in a rent strike. But our intervention can help guarantee that the women will lead it, instead of being confined to making the tea in the back of the hall while men make speeches in front.

6. WE DEMAND FREE COMMUNITY CONTROLLED NURSERIES AND CHILD CARE. We are entitled to a social existence without having to take another job out of our homes. Mothers too have a right to work less. Young children as well as women are imprisoned in their homes. But we don't want them to go to a State institution instead. Children, women and men must be able to

learn from each other and break the ghetto existence to which they are each confined. We will then begin to destroy the State's authority over our children and our possession of them.

In the same way as children are to be wrested from the State, so old people and the mentally and physically ill must come back to the community's care. We need time and we need money to destroy the prisons in which our children, our grandparents and our sick people are confined.

* * *

The earliest version of these demands was first discussed in one workshop at Manchester and revised there. When the discussion was reported in the full session, an even larger (300 women) second workshop on the demands resulted. In full session again the conference decided that the first day of the next conference should be devoted to the six demands. This spontaneous response came from women who on the whole had no experience in left organisations. Many of them were in the Claimants Union, whose demand for a guaranteed income and wages for housework had already organised women to confront the State. Or they were like the women of the "Tough and Tender Collective", whose response to the pamphlet is described in their booklet, A Plan for Action. (2)

"The group of us writing have read the pamphlets "Women, the Unions and Work, or what is not to be done" by Selma James and "Women and the Subversion of the Community" by Mariarosa Dalla Costa *. For us the pamphlets started huge discussions and meetings and sorted out a lot of ideas. It was a good opportunity for us to get together more. But still our ideas were too theoretical, too vague and woolly. The idea of this pamphlet is that we are trying to get an overall picture of the situation. Not only the condition of women in our society, but how this system controls all of us and what this means, and how we as women can fight it. . . . Our emphasis is on action and organisation. Having understood and agreed with Mariarosa's description of the housewife's fundamental role in capitalist society and taken Selma's point that we don't have to 'go to work' to be part of the working class and that Trade Unions are not and never can be the pivotal point of 'revolutionary consciousness', we now know what perhaps we have been leaning towards in the past two years; that we can and should be organised in the community we live in, around the things which oppress us most, financially, emotionally, psychologically."

Women of the political organisations (CP, IS, IMG) were left behind by a movement which had gone beyond their ideological

control. They had expected the women's movement to be subsidiary to the "general struggle", to be confined to "women's problems" such as contraception and abortion and in a purely ideological struggle against sexism. They were the first to ask for further discussion. Soon after Manchester they recovered from their surprise and prepared to do battle.

For the left the issue was singular. It was not any one demand which cut to the quick, but that we should be so presumptuous as to premise demands based on the movement's autonomy from them and from the unions. For if this were permitted, then they were out of a job: there was no need for them as vanguard parties, which represent the "generalisation of the struggle" and are the "political" counterpart of what the unions represented to the class "economically". This issue never clearly emerged at the conference. Yet by their presence in every discussion of the demands during the eight months between the conferences, by the literature they wrote for the London conference, by their attempt to isolate the demands from the movement by speaking of them as one individual's, they were able to control or at least sidetrack meetings before and during the conference and by attrition wear down the confident enthusiasm that Manchester had sparked. Such behaviour has always been characteristic of the "vanguard". At London they expected that a vote on the demands would be taken which would finally dispose of them. A large part of the literature of the conference must, we think, be read in this light.

Conference Literature

The movement has always refused the initiative of actions offered by the organised left. Where the left dominates, is in ideological debate, holding back action by insisting on theoretical discussion and thus preventing an autonomous move forward on a national and co-ordinated level. For that reason conferences like this one are not representative of local groups in Women's Liberation and their autonomous actions. The conference overflowed with publications full of theoretical debate. Access to publication is a power that women's sections of male-dominated groups derive from them. (The question of why women cling to men for power is larger and has been continually discussed in the movement.) The Maoist women, because they refused to accept the feminist basis of the movement, had been expelled at Skegness (the second national conference) where they had brought men and where they had come in control of the then-existing Women's National Co-ordination Committee. However, they were present at the London conference with a 50-page document ("A reply to the Reactionary Selma James") and an open letter which they circulated proclaiming that they were not taking part and that they would not take part until the movement acknowledged the correctness of their political line. They also presented a resolution in the last session of the conference, but in

speaking for it their spokeswoman gave her political identity away; the middle-class women there, she said, were concerned only with their "bloody orgasms". When its failure became obvious, they saved face by withdrawing the resolution.

The penetration of the left has not always been so blatant - or so inept. Other groups, though giving their first loyalty to male-dominated left organisations and participating in Women's Liberation on carefully defined and independent grounds, espouse the idea of an autonomous women's movement and at conferences or other large meetings act as part of it. Whatever differences they have, inherited from the political line of the male organisation, these groups (and we can include the Maoists here) have an essential similarity when it comes to the "woman question". Because their political line is essentially reformist, whatever the bombast of their rhetoric, the left women have found allies among liberal women, whose feminism finds expression in egalitarian sentiments or lobbying in Parliament Square, who have a distaste for revolutionary theory or struggle (but not for its rhetoric apparently), and some of whom consider themselves "apolitical". Although they are integral to Women's Liberation as women from the various male groups are not, together their liberalism forms a crust against the eruption of revolutionary ideas. In the literature of debate and in the workshop reports, you could hardly tell one from another in their basic approach. Whether they attacked the pamphlet for its "primary concern with sexism" or for its "primary concern with capitalism" (and they did both), their own views on women, on unions and on work were notably alike. Using the topics of their debate against the six demands, we can summarise their positions.

The Demands as Demands

Both the Leicester statement which asserted that demands "distort". and an unsigned Libertarian "Reply to Selma James" which rejected demands because they "restrict thought by tying it down to something too immediate and specific", chose to attack the six demands, which had been brought to the movement for discussion, without mention of the four demands that had been foisted on the movement earlier without any discussion and without any vote by the membership. (The four demands were: equal pay, equal education and job opportunities, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion on demand.) Or perhaps their sudden opposition to demands as such was a recognition of the newness of the six. In this they differed from the writers in Red Rag who saw the first, second and fifth demand as new, but identified the third, fourth and six with the old four demands (as they wondered why the demand for equal education and job opportunities had been left out of the six). Equating three of the

six with three of the four was quite wrong, of course, for the scope and content of the demands were different. For example, the demand for equal pay for women bears little resemblance to the demand for "equal pay for all". The latter attacks all disparate rates, for regions, skills and age as well as for sex, and in doing so attacks the objectification of human beings which is the heart of capitalist wage relations. (3) But paradoxically most of those critics or "repliers" were too busy explicating Lenin to notice a detail of this sort. In the process they demonstrated that they knew nothing of the nature and use of demands, little if anything of actual struggle, and still less about the real conditions of most women. They were joined by a chorus from the left, who had been responsible for the four demands, who called the six demands "divisive" of the women's movement. (one recalls that this was the charge levelled at the whole women's movement - by men - at its beginning.) They were against the six demands. What they were for emerged as they stated their own positions on unions, work and wages.

The Unions

On the subject of Trade Unions there was almost universal agreement among the repliers. Though not one denies the record of the unions in regard to women especially, they conclude nevertheless that women must join trade unions to "democratise" them and to rid them of sexism. Instead of seeing unions as a historical creation of the working class co-opted like the Labour Party, they see the unions as identical with workers - from which one can only infer their low opinion of the working class. For if trade unions are admittedly reformist and if they express the spontaneous aspirations of the class, then the class must be seen fundamentally reformist. (Cf. Marx's statement that the working class is revolutionary or it is nothing.) For a woman to join a trade union means, of course, that she must join the ranks of waged labor, and for most women, at the lowest, most sweated rank. Obviously their opinion of women is even lower than their opinion of the rest of the class. For low as they say the class is in its "consciousness" of its revolutionary tasks, women can only learn and participate in this low consciousness through the trade unions. Indeed they speak frankly of the "backwardness" of housewives. A telling verbal exchange illuminated this attitude in one of the workshops on the six demands. In answer to a left woman who had been describing the backward attitudes of "ordinary" housewives, a Black woman asked, "Who the hell is this ordinary woman? And what makes you so special?"

We must interject here that many women who opposed the pamphlet's analysis of unions, however, did so on an entirely different basis. Workers, male and female, continually take action against their unions, but only the ruling class seems

to articulate this when they say with increasing frequency: the unions have lost control over their workers. However those who traditionally attack unions attack from the right. To express the actions of the class by attacking in words what workers attack in action (and also in words if you are there to listen) is new in Britain, frightening - and vital.

Work

The only people in Britain who are as worried as the capitalist class about workers' rejection of work are those dominated by the ideology of the organised left. This concern is demonstrated by the writers in Red Rag. Speaking about the absenteeism of women, Sheila Rowbotham wrote, "I don't see how we can stop the Tories (sic!) cheating us out of equal pay if we never turn up for work!" Sue Cowley worries that work might be identified with capitalism (though she shows her opposition to the "work ethic" if not to work). Micheline Victor, in a condescending apology for the Unsupported Mothers for demanding wages for housework, relates their demand to the fact that they "don't have a job" and are forced to "choose between two forms of insecurity" (husband or State). Her assumption, a very privileged one, is that a job equals security (and also, by the way, that men in "private" employment are not also working for the State). Caroli Mullen says that "the minimal pre-requisite for any degree of equality must be economic independence; the fact that a woman's job is in itself not liberating or is even quite awful, does not invalidate that point." The ease with which these women consign other women to double slavery, to "quite awful" jobs, is notable, whatever its rationale. The pamphlet of the IMG women tells us: "THE PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION IS BASED ON ITS ECONOMIC POWER AS A RESULT OF ITS ROLE IN PRODUCTION" and "A LIVING WAGE TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT IN POSITION TO SELL THEIR LABOUR (sic!) WOULD CONTRADICT THE NATURE OF CAPITALISM." (With the last we completely agree, but then we thought contradicting the nature of capitalism was what the class struggle was all about.) Finally the Maoists conclude in their list of charges, "Not only is (Selma James) anti the unions, she is also anti-work." One can see that these planners of the future society would be hard taskmasters.

Wages

For those who approach the ongoing struggles of the working class in terms of some blueprint for the future socialist society and who define demands under the categories of "transitional" or "ultimate", depending upon how closely they fit into the ideal plan, the concept of wages for housework is anathema. Immediately they see visions of a State where housework is paid for, where time-study men follow a woman around her kitchen to calculate on the boiling of

an egg; the issue of Shrew from London's Arsenal group actually says this. They worry that housework wages would be unrealistically high, since the housewife works an 80-90 hour work week. To this visio they prefer the reality of unwaged housework, which is not, according to them, institutionalised. In defatigably planning, they think in terms of "fair wages" and also of differentials, though they want no disparities by sex. This is the epitome of trade union consciousness and what the demand "equal pay for all" was designed to undermine.

Finally and most important of all, they do not see housewives as productive, that is, they do not see housework as work, as part of capitalist production. Housework is "not at the point of production", and therefore, in the capitals of IMG, "A CALL FOR REWARDING THIS WASTEFUL USE OF HUMAN LABOUR IS POSSIBLE ONLY IN THE IDEOLOGY OF PETTY BOURGEOIS SOCIALISM!" Their more revolutionary demand (if they made it) would be for the abolition of housework and the institution of public canteens and nurseries. "Backward housewives" are not to be trusted with a wage (or even a demand for one), but capitalism can be trusted to create canteens where we can collectively eat shit and nurseries where Mrs Thatcher, the Minister of Education, can imprison babies at an earlier age.

The Workshops

The first day of the conference was organised in workshops. Sixteen workshops went on, some throughout the day, some beginning in the afternoon. Reports on them were given in plenary session at the end of the day, and it is from these reports that we have a general view of the workshops. Their division by subject is significant. Two workshops on old campaigns: anti-discrimination and abortion-contraception. Six which focussed on particular topics, interests and avtions: sexism in textbooks, a literary anthology, women in media, women's studies, self-help therapy, a "guide for brides". The other eight workshops drew their impetus, openly or implicitly, voluntarily or unintentionally, from Women, the Unions and Work and the six demands. A few were organised to answer the pamphlet, a few to find an alternative revolutionary line. One which tried to ignore it found the discussion "abstract" and had to turn to the concreteness of the pamphlet. No attempt will be made here to describe each workshop, but several will be remarked on for their approach to the basic questions of the conference.

A workshop called "plan for action" discussed women's role in the tenant and rent struggles. And they saw the need for national conferences on particular issues affecting women, and called one on housing for Dec. 9-10.

A workshop organised by the Northeastern Paper (another "Reply") group proposed to work at developing an analysis, to engage in socialist education either in Women's Liberation or "other left groups". Another similar workshop aimed especially at "uneducated women" called itself "women's voice". They wish to start a magazine written in simple language and to "work around rent struggles and factories".

"Women and the State" workshop was organised on a statement almost identical with the report that came from the workshop. It held as foremost in importance the taking of "social wealth" by squatting and shoplifting, without mediation by unions as in factory struggles, but in direct confrontation with the police and the State. Struggles for wages, this workshop felt, are reformist because to use the medium of money does not undermine the basis of capitalism.

The workshop on "Capitalism and Sexism" found a similar contradiction in the demand of wages for housework. The question was asked, "how can we demand a wage for something we want to get rid of?" Sexism was divorced from women's wagelessness "wages do not define a relation" (our italics). By this logic, of course, no wage labourer should take wages from capitalists unless it's her intention to remain a wage slave.

Two workshops (Plan for Action and Family Allowance) actually got to work on new campaigns, but the workshop on the six demands and actions flowing from them found itself hampered in following its subject by women from the left who insisted on theoretical discussion. An attempt to split the large workshop into two groups, each of which could follow its own bent, failed because those who wanted to discuss actions were joined by those who wanted theoretical debate.

The reports on the workshops often seemed a single-voiced statement, too neat to reflect development within a workshop. Indeed some reports were almost identical with the statements which had proposed the workshops.

Thus the plenary session became on the whole a platform where political lines could be pushed - and unprecedentedly dull. But it reached a high point of tension suddenly when the microphone was snatched from Selma, as she spoke in sympathy with a feminist who called the whole session a "male charade". She asked why we had not heard from the Claimants. After the mike was taken from her by one of the chairwomen of the day, there were shouts of "let her speak" and a group of women at the side of the hall offered her another microphone. As she spoke she was interrupted once more, this time by a CP woman who grabbed the mike at the front of the hall and delivered a personal attack on her. The explosion had been building for

the whole day, and it has historical echoes. No attempt (aside from Skogness) had ever been made before in the movement to prevent any woman from speaking, but the tactic of removing the microphone from a speaker is well known in left circles.

Radical Feminism

At Manchester it had been decided to devote the morning of the second day of the next conference to a discussion of Radical Feminism. Although these workshops were not reported on in plenary session, the general impression was that they were a relief. Many of us thought that these workshops "saved" the conference because here the emphasis was on our individual experiences as women. Some women in one workshop expressed their frustration after two years in the movement, saying, in effect, "we know only what we don't want; we don't want only consciousness-raising groups. We would like to organise on actions with other women, but not if that means, like yesterday, to depart from the reality of our female experience, from what we want in our bodies and minds". The insistence on a feminist view was like coming home.

The Radical Feminists have always rejected male politics explicitly and they have given an analysis of the relations between left women and the movement which, in our view, expresses their dilemma. In Thoughts on Feminism, a series of feminist essays presented at the conference, a woman writes:

"The fact that many women come to WL through the male left, that is, having been politicised first on issues of concern to men (i.e. class, homosexuality) and because they continue to identify with the left, has made the women's movement, to a large extent, a branch of the male left. While the men get on with the real revolution (concerning economics), the domestic side of the struggle (abortion, childcare) is left, traditionally, to the women. Progressive men have co-opted revolutionary potential.

"The left, of course, understand that their presence (male) is not feasible in WL. Absent physically, they remain directors with their female representatives in the movement reminding 'non-political' sisters of the bigger struggle outside, preventing women from concentrating too much on themselves".

Despite this strong statement characterising the functions of the left women, in practice the Radical Feminists accommodate themselves to the presence and politics of women whom they charge with being agents of men. There is a logic behind this accommodation. For it was the left women who first split the struggles against capitalism and against sexism. For them there was the class struggle, the "general struggle",

on one hand and on the other women's struggle-- not so serious or fundamental in nature as the class struggle. With their emphasis on "the general struggle" they demoted women's struggle to a subordinate role. It was the working class (white, male and over 30) who would make the "real revolution", and class was therefore the more central division of forces than sex. Capitalism was the "main enemy"; sexism was merely an ideology, a superstructure of the system. Many women rejected this political line; many rejected the "class analysis" on which it was based. Ignoring class and putting the emphasis on sex alone, the Radical Feminists have made an ideology based on anti-sexism. When they fail to defend the movement from the attack by left women (as at the plenary the day before - though it was a Radical Feminist who called the plenary a "male charade"), they are expressing a political logic: the split of capitalism and sexism has given them a foundation for their rejection of class politics. And accepting that split, they, like the left, end up characterising the working class as male. (3)

. "The Radical Feminists seem not to have a perspective of a mass movement - so far as their document allows us to generalise their attitude:

"If we really, sincerely want to change society and be rid of sexism, capitalism in all their subtle and not so subtle forms, we have got to change our living - which doesn't mean just spending hours talking about possessions of people/property, free love/sex, etc. - it means withdrawing from our male-oriented lives, living, trusting, working, playing, sexing, loving, hating WITH WOMEN - giving up all heterosexuality - really putting into practice what we have talked about for ages - SISTERHOOD."

. Though such a perspective envisages fundamental changes in individual lives, they are no substitute for a political perspective. Nor can they have impact on the development of the movement in its present attempt to relate to other women through action, organisation and through writing about women. Where they could be of help to women in individual struggles against men, in schools, in the kitchen, in the bedroom, the Radical Feminists' effect is limited. For their only answer to the problems of the mass of women in their daily struggles is separation. Their advice is to leave, get out of the oppressive situation. Ignoring the clear impossibility for most women of following such advice, failing to see how oppression is in fact the ideology of exploitation (attitudes that express and reinforce capitalist power relations), they leave the mass of women to the tender mercies of the left, the unions, "private" employers and their State, who propose doubling the exploitation of women more generally.

Whatever virtues of the Radical Feminists in their rejection of the left mode of politics and in their emphasis on women's autonomous struggle, they may well be on the way to making themselves irrelevant by their failure to see and act on the actualities of power relations. One has only to look at another document circulated at the conference to appreciate the contrast between their approach and the actualities of women's lives. This document, a narrative by a woman from the Notting Hill (London) group of her attempt to organise with factory women, entitled Scrooge and Stouge: Company and Union v the Workers of Chesebrough Ponds, gives a picture of real conditions. No single article or document on women's oppression and exploitation - young women or old, married and single, Black women and white, women with kids or without - has been written with the depth and richness of this document. It has the reality of life seen through a woman's sensibility and understanding of the relationships between life at home and in the factory, between men and women, of their attitudes towards work and the unions and the difficulties of the struggle. It is a very Radical document. It is a very Feminist document.

The Claimants Union

In contrast to other occasions and to the previous conference, in London the voice of the Claimants, particularly of the Unsupported Mothers, was not heard. Women from the CU, which also includes the unemployed, the sick and the aged - all those living on Social Security pittances - had been active participants at Manchester. They had behind them the strength of the organisation that they were instrumental in founding, an organisation directly confronting the State. A few weeks before the London conference, the CU had had a national conference in Birmingham, whose tone had been depressed. Part of this depression resulted no doubt from the fact that their sisters in Women's Liberation had given not even lip service support to their activities, and no support of substance, no links with the struggles of women dependent on the wage given directly by a capitalist or through a man. Indeed, quite the reverse, since the organised pre-conference discussions for the most part undercut the Unsupported Mothers. The battle about the six demands was particularly hot on the subject of wages for housework; next to the question of trade unions (with which it was linked), this demand infuriated the left-dominated women. But the demand had originated with the women in the Claimants union, in their handbook for Unsupported Mothers, not as ideology, the coinage of the left, but as political direction for struggle, in the most positive sense a political line. Not only had they demanded wages for themselves - for their work in producing and caring for the labour-fodder of the future - but they had called on women who have men supporting them to join them in the demand, since these women too are wageless for the

work they do for the State. The left women's antagonism to the demand reflected the policy of their organisations, one of which has been so careless as to let leak its intention to turn the CU into a union of the unemployed, leaving behind the sick, the old and the Unsupported Mothers. This intended manipulation of the Claimants' organisation was totally subversive of the Unsupported Mothers, and so it is no accident if their conference was depressed and that the Claimants did not find find their voice at the London conference.

It must be left to other articles and documents to place politicalt the potential and actual importance of an organisation, central to which are women, whose struggle against the State is not mediated by trade unions, by individual employers and by individual men. But here we must make it clear that for us there is not a feminist movement and by its side somehow related some Unsupported Mothers who are poor and to be pitied. The Unsupported Mother as she has organised herself and as she gives leadership to the rest of the class poses for us our future directions.

Claimants were in attendance at the conference. And a workshop on their activities was suggested. But what seems to have happened is that the Claimants dispersed to try to follow their interests in the various workshops debating the six demands. The workshop on Claimants was combined with the workshop on Family Allowance. Their particular and unified voice was thus lost. Ironically, in the heated and bored atmosphere of the plenaries, their presence was graphically represented in the huge feminist paintings by Monica Sjuo, a Bristol woman, who is active in the CU; the paintings lined both walls of the auditorium.

Abortion and Birth Control

One campaign which has been active, popular and effective of change concerns the rights to abortion and birth control - of all the campaigns first launched by women in the movement. Not only in Britain, but internationally this is true. At the three international meetings of this conference, women from France, Holland, South Africa, Canada, Spain, Ireland, all emphasised their work on these subjects. The only delegate announced as "official" from the United States was not from Women's Liberation but from WONAAC (Women's Organisation for National Action on Abortion and Contraception, a Trotskyist-led organisation), and she reported only on WONAAC's activities, especially on the international tribunal which is being organised in New York City. In Britain, the abortion and birth control campaign is the only one flowing from the four demands of 1971 which got off the ground.

Women's need for control over their bodies, over their sexual and reproductive functions, is immediately obvious to all. The demand for this right to individual control supplies an outstanding example of how the personal is political and the political personal, a basic premise of our movement. But this need and this demand also brought out some of the contradictions that our campaigns encounter.

At the first international meeting the woman from South Africa expressed her fears about the way abortion and sterilisation (the ultimate in birth control) are being used in the Black hospitals of South Africa. Later, during the international reports at the conference itself, Bobby Sykes denounced the active genocidal policy of the Australian State against the Aboriginal population, by means of abortion and sterilisation - in addition to malnutrition and starvation. So the conference reports immediately exposed the issue of population control, a capitalist device for planning the workforce. The danger of capital's plan to co-opt our campaigns for its own purposes was posed by a leaflet circulated by a group of women from Richmond, London (but unsigned), entitled, "Fertility Control - Control for Whom?" By its allusion to Paul Erlich, the leaflet made the connection between both the exploitation of fears of overpopulation and the repressive ecological notion that women are polluting the earth with children, both useful to capital at this historical moment. The reminder of the two sides of the choice, the RIGHT TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN, was timely, since some of the campaign literature, in concentrating on abortion and birth control only, has sometimes played into the hands of ecologists and others working for the State. (One piece from WONAAC in fact equated choosing with abortion.) By echoing the phrase as it appeared in the six demands, the Richmond women supplied the broader context of the issue necessary for it to be truly woman-liberating, truly revolutionary, and truly non-cooptable at this time.

The International Meetings

The international meetings had a life, a mode and a development almost independent from the conference. Since they were organised separately from the conference organisation (by women from Notting Hill), this was inevitable. But even if their integration had been planned, they would have been different because the international women necessarily reflected different conditions of women, different situations and organisations, and different possibilities of struggle. Another distinction was that, after the first, these meetings were not the arenas for battles between feminists and women of left organisations that other meetings of the conference were.

If there was a political division among the international

women, it was not like the British split. Some women, in flight from male political domination, were concentrating on "consciousness-raising" as opposed to "political action". This division took various forms. A group in Milan concentrates on a study of sexism and patriarchal institutions and relations. A larger group in France works to link politics and psychoanalysis. The Dutch male-led Dulle Minas were opposed by women who are forming an organisation which excludes men and which concentrates on exploring the female experience. Two French women, one a night cleaner of Algerian parentage, opposed the MLF; the situation in post 1968 France is illuminated perhaps by the fact that they now belong to no women's group. But none of the international women spoke for male organisations of the left. That the emphasis of some on "consciousness-raising" keeps them from the moment from active public struggle and cuts them off from the mass of women in their countries may be helpful to the left parties, but it is not their willing intention to help these groups. In the last analysis, this may be the only basis of autonomous female politics - as many of us now politically active can testify, though we must also testify that it is in itself no guarantee.

The large number of women from Italy (Padua, Milan, Ferrara, Venice, Naples and Florence) gave great life to the international meetings. (When even the Guardian recognises the imminent possibility of insurrection in that country, this fact is hardly surprising.) Most of them were from an autonomous women's organisation called Lotta Femminista, and they set a high level for discussion. The woman who reported from Padua began not with the internal affairs and ideas of her group, but with a detailed description of the objective conditions of women in Italy and of their struggles. Against this background full of hard data, she utilised the ideas and campaigns of her organisation.

Another woman from Fascist Spain, where a meeting of more than 20 persons must be registered with the police and where in spite of this a women's movement is beginning, used a like pattern for her report. In passing she remarked that the clandestine CP has had a harmful effect on the women's movement in Spain, by arousing guilt feelings in some women about the martyrs of the working class and making them doubt the legitimacy of their own movement. We were moved by the situation she described and at the same time we were deeply impressed with the calm and firm approach. Her feminism found its solid base, its index to the condition of all women, in the lives of working class and peasant women.

Despite brutal repression, despite being cut from international currents, the women of Spain begin their movement with class politics and feminism already integrated, because of the experience of that class, which has behind it the revolution of 1936. That experience was dramatised once more as

the meeting climaxed in the reading of a letter from Mujeres Libres, an organization of refugee Spanish Anarchist women which has lived for 36 years and maintained a newsletter in three languages for women refugees on three continents, keeping touch and taking care of each other. Their representative at our conference, reluctant to speak to us in English, gave us this letter:

"Dear Sisters in Struggle:

"I bring to your conference the most hearty greetings in the name of the Federacion 'Mujeres Libres' de Espana en Exilio - Spanish Federation of Women for Freedom in Exile.

"We hope that through your deliberations you find the right way to fulfil the aim of liberation not only for women, but for women, but for all human beings.

"In these crucial and critical moments, when humanity suffers the traumatism of political immorality and material ambitions, we must struggle to conquer a society based on human rights under the motto of the mutual respect and solidarity between equals.

"On these principles 'Mujeres Libres' initiated 36 years ago their struggle in Spain, struggle that to this day we maintain in Spain and in exile.

"The world looks to women in revolt!

"We must give the right answer.

From 'Mujeres Libres' "

The letter provided a high point and all the greater impetus for the next meeting, which was decided upon spontaneously.

The third and last international meeting occurred as the conference ended and it was held not at the hall in Acton, but at the South London Women's Center. There the international women who remained were even in number with local women, and this fact, along with the more intimate quarters which were not rented for the occasion but belonged to us, created a closeness that the other meetings had lacked. The discussion was fiery with enthusiastic debate over the questions and problems raised by the conference. Every woman spoke and not as "international" or representative of a group but as individual member of an international movement. Even the Anarchist woman found her English tongue and plunged into discussion. One of the subjects raised was the problem of the left-dominated women and their obstruction of feminist politics, beginning with Spain in the thirties where the Anarchist women had struggled against the stranglehold of the CP. This gave us a deeper insight into where the two

generations of Spanish women were coming from and explained further their political sophistication. Our conclusions open a new perspective for all of us. And they will be useful as a conclusion to this report.

Conclusions and Perspectives

The final session of the conference was devoted to the posing of resolutions. By their nature, resolutions are not generally subjects of debate. They express an opinion or feeling on a question that affects the general welfare of women that all can agree on. And they rarely entail a commitment to action. Most of the resolutions posed were of this nature. But posing resolutions can be used to push an extraneous political line, and there were a few such instances at the London conference, one of which we have alluded to above. But in general the conference passed all and only those resolutions that spoke to them as women on a general and basic level.

Among them was one of important and immediate concern: that denouncing the British State's plan to eliminate Family Allowance payments. The subject of this particular resolution, the subject of a workshop as well, will also be the subject of actions. Already women have mobilised to fight the cutting off of the only sum of money that goes directly into the housewife's purse, that affects her welfare as well as her children's, that changes the level of power between men and women in their households. We believe that Family Allowance is for a woman a wage, that is, a wage from the State that we all serve. Other women are against wages directly from the State but know it would be suicidal to oppose the government's taking this money away from women. It can be expected that many left women, particularly those of the CP, will join the campaign to keep the Family Allowance. It is possible that they may try to narrow or diminish it, try to turn it from a mobilisation of women into a charity lobby. (4) For the latent or instinctive feminists among them, to do this will not be intention, but the product of a political perspective infused with a notion of the incapacity of the class, and most especially of women, to fight and win. Only such a notion can explain the attempt to narrow and diminish the demands of the Unsupported Mothers of the Claimants Union and when the attempt failed, to ignore them.

This subject brings us to our conclusion and to the perspectives alluded to above. There is good reason to believe that the London conference will be the last of its kind. Although it was a large organisational success, it appears not to have accomplished much, hamstrung as it was by the organised left. Aside from the international meetings, it

showed little immediate development or growth from the coming together of nearly 2000 women - though that fact in itself was an inspiration to many women. And yet nothing has been quite the same since. Perhaps the conference, by demonstrating the organised power of the male organisations' influence and their animosity to feminist politics, made feminist politics more urgent and even more accessible.

Since there is no way to prevent the left women exercising their male influence in any movement gathering which is not in itself an action, what will probably happen within the movement is a crystallisation of forces on an issue-oriented and/or political perspective-oriented rather than a geographical basis. The frustrations over inaction and the desire for action will burst forth, no doubt, in the form of campaigns. One important one will be the ongoing campaign to keep and to extent Family Allowance. Its implications have not yet all been discovered and its relation to fundamental issues of our struggle as women and as class against capital have yet to be posed. As women on a mass scale these will emerge.

Only in contrast to the potentials of the situation, of the ingredients present in numbers and ideas, and to the enormity of the tasks ahead do we say the conference accomplished little. In another sense it accomplished a great deal politically, and even its shortcomings must be seen in proportion to the great tasks and issues posed. For what we discussed, directly at times, obliquely at others, were basic questions of our time: how to avoid slavery to capitalist work and yet make a living; how to get control over our bodies and our lives; how to get back the value of our work, past and present, from those who control it; how to make our social relations human instead of objectified; how and why to build a mass movement.

It is no accident that these basic questions underlay our discussions, for in women's lives they define themselves most clearly. It is women, married or unmarried, with jobs outside the home who bear a double burden of work; it is the housewife who by her unwaged labour must question the whole concept and nature of work and her dependence on men as a dependence on capital. Finally women in the persons of the Unsupported Mothers must daily confront the ultimate master, the State, without the mediation of a man, a trade union, or even a boss. For them the power relation is laid bare.

The questions were posed, positions taken, and no resolution arrived at. But it is to the credit of our movement that these questions, destined to be at the heart of every movement and struggle of the working class and of the building of a left in Britain integral to and expressing that class,

were posed at the London conference by women.

Sylvine Schmidt

Priscilla Allen

Footnotes to In Defence of Feminism

1. Recently a conference of bureaucrats of all the Communist Parties in western Europe met in Rome to set the line on women. Although the top brass of the different countries had trouble getting together on the subjects of abortion and divorce (what is expedient differs from one country to another), they could agree on one topic: they unanimously opposed wages for housework. Corriere della Sera, Milan, November 19, 1974, p.11. Behind the palimpsest of trivial decoration that Communist Parties the world over use to paint women's struggles or campaigns, the hard line of the counter-revolution stands out clear in this decision.

2. This collective of women no longer exists. Many of the women who were once part of it have joined a mixed group of the left.

3. The revolutionary potential of the demand for equal wages for all was hinted at in the wage discussions broadcast on national television and radio, sparked by the miners' pay claims in January, 1974. Workers were asked about differentials of pay in general, about who was a "special case", who was more "important", etc. Many newspapers carried features and editorials on the subject as well. It was manifestly explosive material.

4. The women's National Family Allowance Campaign had a victory that was in proportion to the forces it gathered. When the Select Committee on the Tax-Credit Scheme reported to Parliament in July, 1973, they had revised the plan in accordance with some of the campaign demands. But the Campaign did not kill the tax-credit scheme itself. That scheme is still high on the Tory agenda. The Labour Party has a similar scheme in view (by another name), but has not broached it formally. After an attempt to play mothers off against pensioners in the summer of 1974, the Labour government has recently promised to raise family allowance payments.

PUBLICATTONS

Women in Struggle # 1

Women in Struggle # 2

(The Women in Struggle series are collections of documents about wages for housework struggles that are taking place on an international scale and affecting every aspect of women's lives. Included in the booklets are political statements, analyses, and leaflets coming out of these struggles).

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 1

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 2

(The Wages for Housework Notebooks are collections of the more theoretical documents about wages for housework. The first two notebooks bring together many of the theoretical articles which have not yet received widespread distribution).

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