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Introduction

Over the past few years it has become clear that there are at least two different women's movements in the United States. One of them, a liberal feminist movement, an organic continuation of the late nineteenth century women's rights movement, is very much alive. It goes farther than the earlier movement in some respects, pushing for equalities far more substantial than mere legal rights — for equal work, equal pay, equal social status, even — do we dare suggest it — for respect.

There is also the women's liberation movement. In using that word, "liberation", the women's liberation movement went far beyond equality. It raised the slogan and an image of the total liberation of half of humanity from all forms of exploitation. And few activists in the movement doubted that the liberation of women would require the liberation of all, which in turn would require the abolition of class

society. If the movement did not usually describe itself as socialist, its reasons were not mainly timidity, but commitment to building a mass struggle. In that commitment women felt they were both opposed to and a part of the New Left. From ex-girlfriends of student politicians to women never before involved in radical politics, women shared bad experiences and critical feelings towards the New Left. From the very beginning of women's liberation, women were anxious to avoid some of the New Left's errors. Many thought of themselves as socialists before recognizing in political terms their own exploitation as women. This new realization did not merely add to, it completely transformed their vision of a socialist society and a socialist movement. They hoped other women who shared their new understanding of the exploitation of women would also come to share with them the realization that a socialist society was necessary to end that exploitation.

There is a sharp discontinuity then, between the women's liberation movement, and the liberal feminism of NOW and Ms. magazine. The great resources that the liberal feminist leaders have at their disposal have helped them bring the issue of women to the consciousness of the masses, but it has not been raised in a socialist context.

This should not surprise us. On the other hand, the women's liberation cause is still here, admittedly sectarian and disorganised, but still alive. All over the country there are socialist feminists working on specific projects — a health clinic here, a school there, day care organizing, organizing women employees. And there are even more consciousness-raising and discussion groups of radical women. In a few places there are even thriving organizations. The apparent demise of women's liberation is an image projected a lot by the disappearance of many radical newspapers, male and female; by the decreased attention given to the movement in the mass media; and to some extent by the decline of women's liberation organizations. But that decline in most cases came from internal contradictions and immaturities that were present from the beginning of the movement.

Despite this some have felt that the women's liberation movement was smothered by the liberal women's movement. That fear of cooptation has led some to the suspicion that some of the issues of feminism themselves lead inevitably to seeking solutions within a capitalist framework, that women and women's issues are somehow singularly cooptable. These judgements will not stand up to careful scrutiny, however. First, while the bourgeoisie may make some reforms ameliorating women's oppression, it cannot make the fundamental changes which the women's liberation movement has demanded without abolishing itself as a class. Second, the cooptive effect of liberal feminism seems to us an inevitable consequence of any reform movement. There is no evidence that women and feminist issues are more subject to it than workers and union issues, or than blacks and issues of black liberation.

Third, historically reform movements have often helped awaken expectations and consciousness and thus pushed people to the Left. We must beware of letting fear of cooptation drive us to positions of isolation, or to a doctrine of "the worse the better." Fourth, and most basic, the cooptation of women by liberal feminism is nothing compared to the cooptation of men by sexism itself. Sexism does far more than provide a reserve cheap labor force. It drugs men with privilege, and weakens the entire working class with divisions and false values. It may even turn out that some degree of equality for women will be a precondition for socialism in advanced capitalist countries, rather than an inevitable product of the socialist revolution. Certainly many of the problems of the existing socialist countries and socialist movements — authoritarianism, rigidity, lack of reliance on the masses — are influenced by the social and psychological patterns of male supremacy.

We do not mean to suggest that liberal feminism should not be attacked. On the contrary, liberal feminists should be constantly pushed from the Left — with concrete demands and programs more radical than the liberal feminist elite can accept. Meanwhile the Left can also learn from them, for some of their successes have been earned by work, not just bought with money. For example, we would

guess that a much higher percentage of working-class women identify with NOW and local liberal women's groups than with the radical women's liberation groups. In their reforming, issue-oriented, problem-solving consciousness, liberal feminist groups have developed concrete demands and projects that are understandable and sensible to many middle- and working-class women. They have launched campaigns that can be won, and that can make it possible for women in their organizations to feel more powerful than they have ever felt before.

The basic limitations of the women's liberation movement, on the contrary, were precisely in these areas. Its inability to develop concrete programs (this does not mean long-range ideals but things that can be won) and ambivalence about establishing strong organizations had to do, no doubt, with its class basis. The middle-class college graduates who predominated in the movement could in fact find "personal solutions" to some of their problems — professional jobs, husbands with leisure to share the housework, money and the emotional security about money that enable them to live without holding a steady job. Strong and militant organizations are almost always created by people for whom collective action is the only means of improving their lives, and for whom there are no individual solutions. But the seeming inwardness, the much-talk-no-action style of large segments of the women's movement was also a necessary phase of an important cultural transformation. The rebirth of feminism in our generation of women has required a transformation of consciousness as profound, if not more so, than that which created the New Left. This is because the women's movement went beyond an abstract commitment to justice to fighting for our own liberation. Stunned by our new understandings about sexism — understandings that were not objectively new but had been suppressed extremely effectively in our culture and history — many in women's liberation had to go through periods of deep personal change at the cost of tremendous amounts of energy. In "consciousness-raising" it was necessary to invent new processes as well as elaborate a new content for our political work, because a feminist analysis

had revealed how unsocialist much of the process of political work in the New and Old Left had been. This consciousness-raising took a long time because so many women were coming into the movement who had no experience at all of political participation, who had to build their confidence and struggle against passivity; and also because many women, made cynical by arrogant and irresponsible leadership in the male-dominated Left, felt ambivalent about all leadership. The result of all this was often reducing the political activity level of groups to the lowest common denominator.

Still, today we are far ahead of where we were four years ago. Large segments of the Left have been educated, at least on an elementary level, about sexism; thousands of women have begun to think politically about their own situations for the first time; we have thrown a new and potentially militant force into the general unrest in the society. If the middle-class base of the movement weakened it politically, it also gave us the tendency to underestimate our own achievements. It is good that women are increasingly concerned about the failure of the women's liberation movement to organize more working class women. But unfortunately many of the current discussions of that problem take an abstract form, going to extremes of self-condemnation and class baiting. This leads some middle class women to forget that even a middle class women's movement, if materialist and militant, could make a great contribution.

However there cannot be a revolutionary women's movement unless it is built around working-class women. The failure to reach more working-class women came only partly from youth and class arrogance and more from the fact that it was hardly even tried! The in-groupiness of women's liberation was legendary (although not more so than that of the whole New Left). With the exception of the increasing number of open lesbians, venturing out into hangouts like lesbian bars where there are always many working-class women, most women in the movement continued to make their livings and do their socializing and political "work" among college and professional people.

On the other hand, where there are healthy women's organizing projects in this country, we hear too little about them, partly because they often cling to their isolation as a protection against being smothered by other "movement" women.

Meanwhile the decline of the organized New Left has taught us another painful lesson: that the women's liberation movement was much more dependent than it had thought on being surrounded, so to speak, by a general, albeit male-dominated, socialist movement. We need a socialist feminist organization that is part of a general socialist movement. But in a period in which we have neither, it is important to work on both. We think it is important to squelch any remnants of the fantasy that a women's movement can make a revolution itself. It is equally important to squelch the apparent rebirth of the nineteenth century male socialist wish (it hardly deserves being called a theory) that the woman question can be dealt with satisfactorily by male leadership. At this period it seems absolutely crucial that the role of sexism be continually analyzed and fought both in women's organizations and in mixed ones. It is especially important however that the women's politics that continue now be mass work.

It is this conviction that leads us to publish the collection of materials from the British women's liberation movement in this issue. Although some of these pieces are a year or so old, they have not had enough attention here in the US. Britain is a more class-conscious country than the US — its women's movement defines itself as socialist and has sought to reach working-class women as its main priority. The projects described here are not triumphant, but we must learn from our failures. We would like in the future to publish in Radical America many descriptions of such organizing projects from within the US. It would be even better if we could get not mere descriptions but actually analyses of successes and failures and the lessons learned.

We are also convinced that a lot of theoretical work needs to be done about this situation of women. We should not allow our concern for political practice to lead to a rebirth of the anti-intellectual attitudes that have tradition-

ally afflicted the American Left, and particularly the women's movement. The development of a socialist feminist analysis of society is just beginning. Even a basic class analysis of our country is incomplete, particularly for women.

Socialists have generalized about the working class in America with very little knowledge of it. Very few of us have gone beyond what we read in bourgeois newspapers and textbooks in investigating the actual composition of the working class in America and the nature of its work and home experience. The women's movement in particular has brought increasing theoretical acceptance of the fact that the experience of the working class as a class takes place not just in the shop but also at home, in bed, in ballparks and movie theaters; but the information that should go into this new framework is only just beginning to be collected. The proportion of people in service and white-collar sectors of the economy is large and growing, but little has been written of the nature of their work experience.

For women this lack of understanding has an even more basic consequence: that we don't even have good definitions of what class is for women. We know that for too long women have been assumed to carry the class position of their fathers and then husbands. We are beginning to know that class is a complex, not a simple, category; that class describes one's relation to the means of production, as well as shared cultural experiences throughout life, from childhood to old age. What class are secretaries in? Since work is not socialized for many of them, this might appear to make them not proletarian. What does it mean, then, if we accept a definition of the proletariat that will include, at best, around 6% of American women? (Only 12% of American women working for pay work in production.) What class do housewives belong to? What does it mean if the wife of a factory worker and the wife of a school teacher do exactly the same kind of work on exactly the same budget — are they in the same class? We are not quarreling about the definitions; we are objecting to the substance of a politics that would underestimate the importance of women workers, both paid and unpaid, to a revolutionary socialist movement.

Thus much of the theoretical work we need must begin with the most basic questions. One of these, reflected in many places in this issue, is about housewifery as a job. The theoretical question of whether housewifery is productive labor — that is, do housewives produce exchange value and are they therefore united as a class by the common theft of the surplus value they produce — is important because it has implications for practice. The debate must also be amplified by people who have had experience in organizing housewives. We need analyses of the actual work involved in housewifery: the skilled and unskilled parts; the consciousness created by cleaning and the ideology of cleanliness, by taking care of others and the ideology of service, etc.

We do not think of any of the pieces in this issue as definitive. Nor do we see ourselves, now or ever, as defining the proper area of women's political work. But we think it would be damaging for the Left to conclude from the experience of the last four years that the women's liberation movement is finished. If it is finished, so is the cause of socialism. If we are entering a period with less political ebullience among students and ex-students — those groups that were, after all, the main basis of the women's liberation movement — there seem to be other sectors of the society more silent in the 1960's that are beginning to speak up now. Precisely if there are possibilities for increased working-class militancy in the next decade, it is crucial now that a socialist feminist analysis be developed, argued for publicly, and put into practice.

Linda Gordon
For the Radical America editors

The Earthly Family

Lise Vogel

...once the earthly family is discovered to be the secret of the holy family, the former must then itself be criticized in theory and revolutionized in practice.

— Marx, Theses on Feuerbach

I INTRODUCTION

Women involved in the women's liberation movement have in the last year or so undertaken a serious program of re-evaluation, as part of the painful process of moving from a new left to a revolutionary movement. One of the most urgent tasks for women's liberation is the elaboration of adequate theory. (1)

Theory has not played a large role in the development of the women's liberation movement. Indeed, the very ability to exist and grow without firm theoretical or organiza-

tional bearings can be seen as an index of the strength of women's liberation as a real social force. Now, having reached the limits of such spontaneous development, women in the movement are beginning to examine and reevaluate its theory as well as its practice.

Not surprisingly, the first theoretical expressions of modern feminism antedated the appearance of the women's liberation movement. The contradictions that were later to explode into social movement could already be seen developing, and individual women were already moving with them. Thus in 1963, bourgeois feminism found its first modern expression in Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. And in 1966, a Marxist feminism was voiced in Juliet Mitchell's "Women: The Longest Revolution," published in the British journal *New Left Review*.

As the women's liberation movement developed in the late 1960s and early seventies, many women began to tackle — theoretically and in practice — the problem of developing an analysis and strategy that would be both feminist and Marxist. A number of important articles appeared in this period. Meanwhile, in 1971 Juliet Mitchell published *Woman's Estate*, a book based on her earlier article. Mitchell's book thus became the first lengthy, easily available exposition of a Marxist-feminist analysis to come out of the contemporary women's liberation movement. As such, it deserves, and indeed requires, a critical examination. In what follows I shall begin by looking closely at Mitchell's book, and then go on to a general discussion of what I believe to be the major questions involved in developing an approach adequate to deal with the current situation of women. Finally, I will consider the implications I see for strategy and for the development of a working class movement in the United States.

II MITCHELL'S WOMAN'S ESTATE

Serious Marxist approaches to modern feminism have up to now circulated only in various "movement" publications. For this reason alone we should welcome the expansion of what was essentially a movement article into a trade book. Moreover, because Mitchell writes from a socialist per-

spective, she is able to offer important insights on a number of urgent issues. These observations constitute one of the most valuable aspects of her book. *Woman's Estate* is not, however, an easy book to read. It is frequently hard to understand what, exactly, Mitchell is trying to say. The uninformative chapter titles and many subheadings confuse, rather than help, the reader. The incorporation of the 1966 article, essentially unchanged, into three different chapters of the book is awkward, and results in a kind of intellectual discontinuity. Finally, the structure of Mitchell's argument can only be grasped with difficulty. For all these reasons, it is necessary to ground a critique of the book in a careful survey of what, it seems, Mitchell has actually said. (2)

The book is divided into two parts. In the first Mitchell reviews the background and development of the women's liberation movement. The opening chapter, "The Background of the Sixties," locates the movement in its immediate historical context. In Chapter Two, Mitchell moves on to a brief sketch of the development of the movement in Europe and North America, and of its "Campaigns, Organization, and Concepts." Chapters Three and Four rapidly survey what Mitchell calls "The Politics of Women's Liberation." Under this heading Mitchell discusses tendencies she considers to be dangerous (anarchism, terrorism, spontaneism, sectarianism), the problem of reformism, the history of socialist theory on women (Bebel, Fourier, Engels, Beauvoir), and the recent development of "radical feminism" (Millett, Firestone). The eighty pages of Part One thus range over a vast terrain of problems. The discussion is necessarily spotty, the arguments incomplete. What makes this section valuable is the sharpness of Mitchell's critiques.

Most immediately useful is a series of brief reviews in Chapter Four in which Mitchell pierces to the core of the inadequacy of both traditional and modern feminist theory. She discusses the essentially schematic approaches of Engels and Bebel and clearly locates them in the absence of a strategic context. She criticizes (perhaps not severely enough) Beauvoir's amalgam of ahistorical idealism and crudely economist socialism in *The Second Sex*. She notes that Millett's *Sexual Politics* surveys the various mecha-

nisms by which sexism is established and maintained but leaves us "with a sense of the random and chaotic and equal contribution of each and all [of the various sexist mechanisms] to the maintenance of patriarchy." The lack of structure or causality in Millett's analysis is "inherent in the notion of patriarchy as a political system in itself," and Mitchell goes on to thoroughly criticize this notion. Finally, Mitchell turns to Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*. For those of us who were both stimulated and annoyed by the book, Mitchell's devastation of its simplistic materialism — "no more historical than it is dialectical" — is most satisfying.

Mitchell's critique of Firestone is part of an extensive discussion of a trend she calls "radical feminism" in opposition to "liberationism:" "Briefly, liberationists see the oppression of women as one (though a major one) of the many oppressions experienced by different people in pre-socialist societies; radical feminists contend it is the major and primary one in all societies" (p. 51). Mitchell argues that the confrontation is premature: "Perhaps in the future, the biggest single theoretical battle will have to be that between liberationists with a socialist analysis, and feminists with a 'radical feminist' analysis. But that future has come too soon. The conflict is premature because neither group has yet developed a 'theory.' The 'practice' which is that theory's condition of production has only just begun" (p. 91). Throughout *Woman's Estate*, Mitchell intelligently confronts the many manifestations of "radical feminism." Perhaps her strongest argument is that "radical feminists construct too rigid a theory from feminist instinct. The notion of undifferentiated male domination from the earliest to the latest times simply gives a theoretical form to the way oppression is usually experienced. It is also somewhat equivalent to a worker seeing the employer himself as the only enemy, simply because he seems directly responsible for the individual exploitation. This is an aspect of the oppression, or exploitation and should not be ignored, but nor should it be made to stand for the total situation.... If we simply develop feminist consciousness (as radical feminists suggest) we will get, not political con-

sciousness, but the equivalent of national chauvinism among Third World nations or economism among working-class organizations; simply a self-directed gaze, that sees only the internal workings of one segment; only this segment's self-interest. Political consciousness responds to all forms of oppression" (pp. 93-94).

Structurally, Part One of *Woman's Estate* builds the necessary background for Mitchell to ask, "Where are we going?" (pp. 91-96). She suggests "that we have to develop our feminist consciousness to the full, and at the same time transform it by beginning a scientific socialist analysis of our oppression. The two processes must go on simultaneously — feminist consciousness will not 'naturally' develop into socialism, nor should it: the two are coextensive and must be worked on together" (p. 93). Mitchell's stress here and throughout the book on the need for theory is an important contribution, and one that belongs clearly to the movement of the seventies. Again and again she points out that a "specific theory of women's oppression" must be developed. At the same time she argues that radical feminist consciousness must develop simultaneously with socialist analysis of the oppression of women. In short, "we should ask the feminist questions, but try to come up with some Marxist answers" (p. 99). And theory is of course related to strategy: "Profound contradictions in the position of women caused the rise of the movement; it is these that have to be studied if a political strategy is to be evolved" (p. 179).

In Part Two of *Woman's Estate* Mitchell presents her own analysis of "The Oppression of Women." She reprints the main arguments of the 1966 essay, with additions that suggest a subsequent development of her thinking. It is here that the book suffers most from the juxtaposition of new insights to the unchanged earlier argument. The various sections with titles like "Comments and Conclusions" do not smooth over this disjunction between what was possible in 1966, before the rise of a visible women's movement, and what Mitchell could now do based on the experience of the last five years. One wishes that she had taken her own argument for the simultaneous development of feminist con-

sciousness and socialist analysis more seriously, and written the entire book from the perspective of the seventies.

Mitchell begins Part Two with a chapter in which she lays out her basic analysis. "Past socialist theory has failed to differentiate woman's condition into its separate structures, which together form a complex — not a simple — unity." She names four "key structures of woman's situation:" Production, Reproduction, Sexuality, and the Socialization of Children. It is "the concrete combination of these [that produces] the 'complex unity' of her position" (pp. 100-101).

Under "Production," Mitchell discusses woman's work in pre-capitalist societies; the problem of physical weakness, coercion, and the original sex division of labor; and the prospects for equality of women in industrial work. The category "Production" seems on the whole to mean work external to what we might call the "domestic" or "family" sphere, and especially participation in wage labor under capitalism. Mitchell's other three categories concern woman's existence outside of "Production" — as wife and mother. Under "Reproduction of Children" she includes the idea of the family, changes in the "mode of reproduction" (mainly contraception), and the child as a kind of surrogate product for women in capitalist society. The discussion of "Sexuality" surveys repressive forms of the family, the transition to effective monogamy, and the dialectical movement towards genuine sexual liberation. Under "Socialization of Children" Mitchell examines woman's "cultural vocation" as socializer of her own children, and the changes in family patterns with the development of advanced capitalism.

Two things stand out in this analysis. First, Mitchell views "Production" as an aspect of experience essentially external to women, even in the domestic sphere (the problem of the production of use-values within the home is nowhere discussed). Second, Mitchell mentions the family at every point, but the category "Family" as such has no explicit place in her analysis.

Mitchell ends this chapter with a discussion of the way strategy grows out of analysis: "A revolutionary movement must base its analysis on the uneven development of each

structure, and attack the weakest link in the combination. This may then become the point of departure for a general transformation. What is the situation of the different structures today? What is the concrete situation of the women in each of the positions in which they are inserted?" (p. 122). In her next chapter, Mitchell surveys the "four structures" of the situation of women in England, as "amplification and illustration" of her analysis.

Mitchell then returns to the "General Conclusions" of the 1966 article for an answer to the questions of strategy. The current situation of each of the four structures is quickly and rather superficially examined. Mitchell concludes that "production, reproduction, and socialization are all more or less stationary in the West today," and Sexuality is "the particular structure that is the site of the most contradictions" (p. 147). Sexuality is thus identified by Mitchell as the "weak link." At this point, Mitchell turns to a consideration of strategy, which must "include both immediate and fundamental demands, in a single critique of the whole of women's situation, that does not fetishize any dimension of it" (p. 148). In this way, Mitchell feels able on the one hand to insist on the liberation of the three domestic functions (Reproduction, Sexuality, and Socialization) from their "oppressive monolithic fusion," and on the other to call rather traditionally for the entry of women into the sphere of Production on a basis of true equality. In this chapter, Mitchell's analytical approach reveals both its strength and its weakness; I shall come back to these below.

The remaining three chapters of *Woman's Estate* suggest the very fruitful directions in which Mitchell's analysis has developed since the publication of the 1966 article. Chapter Eight on "The Ideology of the Family" recognizes the family as "a crucial ideological and economic unit" with historical dimensions; it briefly surveys the contradictions between the family and the societies in which it has been embedded. In Chapter Nine, "Psychoanalysis and the Family," Mitchell launches an examination of the oppression of women, men and children inside the modern nuclear family, with particular emphasis on Freud. The final chapter, "Out From Under . . .," is a fine summary of the contradictions facing

women in the sixties, their response in the form of a women's liberation movement, the dangers confronting that movement today, and the special conflicts involved where women are both wage laborers and "maintained persons within the family." These last three chapters indicate a tension between the theoretical apparatus taken over from Mitchell's 1966 article and a newly intensified focus on the family, a tension that remains unresolved.

Scattered throughout *Woman's Estate* are a number of sensitive strategic observations. Mitchell argues convincingly that "it is only in the highly developed societies of the West that an authentic liberation of women can be envisaged today" (p. 121). She stresses correctly that "the most elementary demand is not the right to work or receive equal pay for work — the two traditional demands — but the right to equal work itself" (p. 149). She sees clearly that the present contradictions within the family and between the family and the social organizations surrounding it are explosive, and indicate "the eventual dissolution of the 'family,' a future already visible within the conditions of capitalism" (p. 158). Most important, Mitchell attacks the simplistic formulae of orthodox socialism, observing that "the strategic concern is the liberation of women and the equality of the sexes, not the abolition of the family. The consequences of this demand are no less radical, but they are concrete and positive, and can be integrated into the real course of history. The family, as it exists at present is, in fact, incompatible with either women's liberation or the equality of the sexes. But equality will not come from its administrative abolition, but from the historical differentiation of its functions. The revolutionary demand should be for the liberation of these functions from an oppressive monolithic fusion" (p. 150). Gone forever are the abstract and schematic slogans of nineteenth century socialism.

Mitchell's 1966 article, widely circulated as a pamphlet, has been one of the most influential contributions to women's liberation theory. Its differentiation of the content of our lives into four constituent categories helped the developing women's liberation movement to articulate experience and begin to act on it. Its Marxist perspective, firmly

grounded in intelligent critiques of the Marxist "classics," gave us strength to confront both dogmatic Marxism and the emerging tendencies towards radical feminism. Although many of us began, implicitly or explicitly, to develop questions about the article, it didn't seem necessary at that point in the history of the movement to spell them out. Today, conditions have changed and the received literature of women's liberation is being subjected to rigorous re-examination, as part of the process of building an adequate analysis for women. The awkward juxtaposition in *Woman's Estate* of Mitchell's 1966 arguments to thinking based on her more recent experience is in itself a kind of mute confrontation, a prelude to a critique that seeks explicit expression.

Questions about Mitchell's structural analysis of woman's situation arise in four main areas. First, the discussion of the specific state of the separate "structures" is weak, a failure that has (or should have) consequences in the realm of strategy. To maintain in 1971 that "production, reproduction, and socialization are all more or less stationary in the West today in that they have not changed for three or more decades" is clearly incorrect. As Mitchell herself sometimes recognizes, the contradictions arising out of rapid changes in all four of her "structures" form the very context for the development of the women's liberation movement. Her failure to identify contemporary changes in the "structures" is accompanied by a generally inadequate historical vision. The problem is sufficiently acute to call the entire analysis into question.

Second, the view of "Production" presented in *Woman's Estate* is open to severe criticism. Mitchell sees oppression as the essential situation of women; hence her perceptive comments on the effects of oppression and her amalgamation of women to "oppressed peoples" like blacks and peasants. But Mitchell exaggerates the isolation of women from production: "The contemporary family can be seen as a triptych of sexual, reproductive and socializatory functions (the woman's world) embraced by production (the man's world)." Indeed, she speaks of "the exclusion of women from production — social human activity" (p. 148).

These are meant to be statements about women today, but this view of women's essential (and historical) exclusion from social production dominates the book. Examples of women's involvement in social production appear uneasily as exceptions or special cases: field labor in pre-capitalist societies (pp. 102-104); the peasant family (pp. 152-155); the women wage workers who are "excluded from the possibility of autonomous development of class-consciousness [because their] participation as a huge sector of the working-class work force remains merely a painful and arduous formality" (p. 181). Mitchell's persistent devaluation of women's productive activity must be challenged.

A third problem in Mitchell's analysis is her treatment of the family. Again and again the family is discussed as a crucial structure. Women are seen as imprisoned in their "confinement to a monolithic condensation of functions [reproduction, socialization, sexuality] within a unity—the family" (p. 148), but that unity has itself no articulated analytical existence.

Finally, Mitchell's use of a structuralist approach in making a Marxist analysis of women's situation has been a source of difficulty. Not knowing what to make of it, and lacking any guidance from Mitchell as to what exactly is meant by a "structure," most readers have been forced to take the structuralism in an essentially metaphorical way. To continue to do this is unfair to the seriousness of Mitchell's contribution, for she means what she says: "Woman's condition... must be seen as a specific structure, which is a unity of different elements. The variations of woman's condition throughout history will be the result of different combinations of these elements — we will thus have not a linear narrative of economic development (De Beauvoir) for the elements will be combined in different ways at different times. In a complex totality each independent sector has its own autonomous reality though each is ultimately, but only ultimately, determined by the economic factor. This complex totality means that no contradiction in society is ever simple. As each sector can move at a different pace, the synthesis of the different time-scales in the total structure means that sometimes contra-

dictions cancel each other out, and sometimes they reinforce one another. Because the unity of woman's condition at any time is in this way the product of several structures, moving at different paces, it is always 'over-determined' The concrete combination of [the four key structures of woman's situation] produce the 'complex unity' of her position; but each separate structure may have reached a different 'moment' at any given historical time. Each then must be examined separately in order to see what the present unity is, and how it might be changed" (pp. 100-101). The adequacy of Mitchell's discussion of the individual "structures" has already been questioned. The method that sets up this system of structures must also be evaluated.

These, then, are the four main aspects of Mitchell's analysis of women's situation that must be challenged: the concrete analysis of the "structures;" the view of "Production;" the treatment of the family; and the use of the structuralist method. The inadequacies in these four areas are of course related; and any complete critique of Mitchell should attempt to deal with all of them. (3) In what follows I shall instead sketch the outlines of an alternate approach.

III FOCUS: 'WOMAN' VERSUS 'FAMILY'

The choice of appropriate categories is basic to any analysis. A mistake here can skew the whole procedure. Marx's thought is particularly useful because of his deep awareness of this problem. He dealt with it most clearly in his Introduction to the 'Critique of Political Economy.' A few of his observations can be cited here, although the full force of his approach to these questions cannot be conveyed. Marx considers that "in the study of economic categories, as in the case of every historical and social science, it must be borne in mind that as in reality so in our mind the subject, in this case modern bourgeois society, is given, and that the categories are therefore but forms of expression, manifestations of existence, and frequently but one-sided aspects of this subject, this definite society." In other words, the categories of bourgeois society "serve as the expression of its conditions and the comprehension of its

own organization." A category "can have no other existence except as an abstract one-sided relation of an already given concrete and living aggregate." (4)

What I would like to argue is that to build a theory of women's liberation around the category "women" (as when Mitchell calls repeatedly for a "specific theory of women's oppression") is a mistake. We have focused too intensely on one aspect of our subject and thus arrived at a category — women — that expresses it too narrowly. The source of the mistake is easy to identify: as women involved in a social movement towards our own liberation we quite naturally took ourselves as the subject and the category "women" as its appropriate expression. But our subject is broader than ourselves, and the category through which we should build our analysis is the family.

To suggest that we look at the family has an unpleasantly familiar ring, and I do not in any way wish to abandon contemporary feminist insights into the schematic abstraction of "classical" socialist theory nor, for example, Mitchell's proper insistence that "the strategic concern is the liberation of women and the equality of the sexes, not the abolition of the family." I disagree, however, with the common assumption that the problem of women's oppression is devalued when attempts are made to analyze the family; precisely what we lack is an adequate analysis of the family. Only with such an analysis will we be able to get out of the impasse into which our attempts at a "theory of women's oppression" have led us.

The locus of the problem of the liberation of women and the equality of the sexes is in fact the family. An investigation of the family — its economic, social, psychological, and ideological functioning — will enable us to understand and act on the contradictions in the lives of women. The focus must go beyond women to the family. What we must analyze is the situation of all the family members — women, children, and men.

A switch in focus from women to the family will also help us to make better sense of our own history. Our exclusive concern with women has in fact made our actual history as women opaque to us. We argue about the prehistoric divi-

sion of labor between the sexes, but we do not yet have a good grasp on the recent history of the family as a producing economic unit in which women's labor was socially recognized. The extent of women's degradation under capitalism only becomes fully clear when we recognize what happened to the family with the advent of capitalism. A description from a British "Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor" is eloquent, if perhaps exaggerated: "The wife is no longer able to contribute her share towards the weekly expenses.... In a kind of dependency she sits down, unable to contribute anything to the general fund of the family, and conscious of rendering no other service to her husband, except that of the mere care of his family." (5) Women and children were expected to be capable of providing for themselves by entering into the productive life of the pre-capitalist community. The "mere care of his family" could still seem a grim vocation indeed around 1800. Capitalism has denied women participation in the socially recognized productive processes of society; women and children have been thrust, as never before, outside the very functioning of the dominant system of production, that is, from social existence.

Capitalism has, of course, also revealed, for the first time, the possibility of a true equality of the sexes in productive activity and in society as a whole. Here again, the family is a major arena in which this possibility is developing, as the contradictions between the contemporary family and the social nature of production deepen. The delineation of the precise character, the present situation, and the potential development of these contradictions is the implicit subject of many of the writings from the women's liberation movement; they can be seen as contributions towards a comprehensive critique of the family. Juliet Mitchell suggests, for example, that under capitalism "the social nature of production [tends to restore] the family to its social form — a social group of individuals" (p. 158). In other words, the future is prepared in the present. The emergence of women's liberation as a social force in fact bears witness to Marx's comment that humanity "always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter

more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation." (6)

This approach to an analysis of the family as the major category in which to situate the condition of women has been used, and in certain aspects developed more extensively, by Peggy Morton and Mariarosa Dalla Costa. What I have tried to do here is to locate it theoretically as the most fruitful way for our analysis to proceed.

IV WOMEN'S WORK IN THE FAMILY

A key problem is to analyze, precisely, the work women do in the family. A number of efforts have been made to consider this question within a Marxist perspective. Margaret Benston argues that under capitalism women work to produce use-values that are consumed within the family. Women work, but "it is just not wage labor and so is not counted.... Their work is not worth money, is therefore valueless, is therefore not even real work." Peggy Morton discusses the family perceptively "as a unit whose function is the maintenance and reproduction of labor power," where most of the work is done by women. Hodee Edwards maintains that women are "bodily-owned slaves" who produce the commodity labor-power; the slave-owners are said to be working class men who sell their labor power to the capitalists. For Edwards, an authentic slave mode of production has somehow survived into capitalism in the form of female slavery; at the same time she speaks of women as being exploited because they produce a capitalist commodity, labor-power. Mariarosa Dalla Costa asserts that "domestic work not only produces use values but is an essential function in the production of surplus value [i.e. through the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power]." In this way she confuses being necessary to the system with being "productive" in the strict sense; she speaks generally of domestic labor as productive and of women as exploited. (7) These analyses, unlike Juliet Mitchell's, all approach the work of women in the family from the point of view of

production. They confront, to varying degrees, the obvious issues that arise: What do women produce? What is the social meaning of their labor? How is this labor to be understood as a part of the capitalist mode of production? Their answers, embedded in more general discussions of the women's liberation movement and of strategy, are on the whole inadequate. The problem of developing a Marxist analysis of women's domestic work must be examined more directly.

Marx discussed the work women do within the family only occasionally, and even then rather obliquely. For example, in his analysis of feudalism he identified the family as the most elementary unit of production: the family is the "individual" direct producer. Thus Marx referred again and again to the direct producer's "agricultural activity and the rural home industries connected with it," and to the "indispensable combination of agriculture and domestic industry." A self-managing peasant produces "his own means of subsistence independently, as an isolated laborer with his family." Marx examined the situation within the family when he remarked that the "patriarchal industries of a peasant family" exhibit "a spontaneously developed system of division of labor. The distribution of work within the family, and the regulation of the labor-time of the several members, depend as well upon differences of age and sex as upon natural conditions varying with the seasons. The labor-power of each individual, by its very nature, operates in this case merely as a definite portion of the whole labor-power of the family." But Marx was less interested in the individuals than in the family as a producing unit that may itself dispose of some surplus labor. He examined, for example, the case of rent in kind: "The surplus-product, which forms the rent, is the product of this combined agricultural and industrial family labor...[and] it is by no means necessary for rent in kind, which represents the surplus-labor, to fully exhaust the entire surplus-labor of the rural family." Marx studied the family as a whole, as a productive unit, because it is here that he saw a possible mechanism for change in the feudal system. (8)

Marx thus had good reason to focus on "the whole labor-power of the family" under feudalism; his point of view, however, made him neglect not only women's labor but all individual labor in the feudal family. In addition, Marx, like his contemporaries, was imprisoned within a male perspective that ultimately distorted his understanding of the family and of women's productive activity in general. Aware though he was of the problem of the equality of the sexes, Marx invariably approached it from the standpoint of a man. Thus, for example, it is always "the relation of man to woman" that is the "direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person." (9) In considering the feudal family, Marx tended to devalue the social meaning of women's labor, despite his observation that production was organized according to an essentially natural and spontaneous division of labor. For example, he pointed out that "the product and surplus-product of the large estates consists by no means purely of products of agricultural labor. It encompasses equally well the products of industrial labor," although "domestic handicrafts and manufacturing labor [are] secondary occupations of agriculture, which forms the basis," but he assumed agriculture to be the exclusive domain of men. (10) When it came to capitalism, Marx forgot — strangely — the historic contribution of women and children to the pre-capitalist "indispensable combination of agriculture and domestic industry," that he had described so well. Instead, he took the bourgeois nuclear family, with its devaluation of women's and children's work, as an implicit norm, and raged against what he saw as its violation and impending doom at the hands of the emerging capitalists. For example, he characterized machinery (i.e. the passage from manufacture to industry) as "enrolling, under the direct sway of capital, every member of the workman's family, without distinction of age or sex. Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of free labor at home within moderate limits for the support of the family." Marx is suggesting here that in pre-industrial society the husband's work was supposed to cover the costs of maintaining the whole family: "The value of labor-power was determined, not only by the labor-

time necessary to maintain the individual adult laborer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family." In contrast, "machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labor-market, spreads the value of the man's labor-power over his whole family." (11) Marx was in fact wrong. In these passages he was projecting a bourgeois model of the nuclear family onto the past, as if it were the social structure of pre-industrial workers.

Marx analyzed capitalism from the point of view of capital. He never looked at the problem of the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power from the standpoint of the working class. In his writings, woman's domestic labor became as invisible, as ambiguously devoid of social existence, as it has become in reality. It is necessary, therefore, to reconstruct the family within a Marxist analysis of capitalism, beginning with an examination of the meaning of woman's work in it. We must consider the problem of domestic labor from the point of view of those whose task it is.

Margaret Benston first pointed out that in the family under capitalism, the domestic labor of women produces use-values for direct consumption within the family. Her observation was quickly accepted. Another way to look at this is to say that woman's labor in the family is essentially "useful labor, i.e., productive activity of a definite kind and exercised with a definite aim." (12) It is labor that has an essentially qualitative character. To say that women's labor is useful labor, is qualitative in character, is entirely equivalent to saying that it produces use-values for direct consumption. The reformulation avoids a fetishistic parallel to the production of commodities, and it enables us to see the situation more clearly. Women, insofar as they do work within the family, perform purely useful labor; that is, they produce use-values for immediate consumption. Men, insofar as they are wage laborers employed by the capitalists, labor to produce commodities; that is, their labor has a dual character, for it creates both use-values and exchange-values. Most men do some purely useful labor at some times (usually within the family); virtually all women are committed to a life of such labor, al-

though they may in addition be wage workers. Women and men thus move in essentially different productive worlds; the wonder (and the problem) is that these worlds are in fact totally interlocked.

Useful labor is one of the few universals Marx acknowledged: "So far...as labor is a creator of use-value, is useful labor, it is a necessary condition, independent of all forms of society, for the existence of the human race; it is an eternal nature-imposed necessity, without which there can be no material exchanges between man [sic] and Nature, and therefore no life." (13) It is only under the domination of capital that labor creates exchange-value as well as use-value. The labor of the individuals in the pre-capitalist family, for example, is above all useful. Moreover, it is relatively unalienated: "No matter, then, what we may think of the parts played by the different classes of people themselves in this society, the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labor, appear at all events as their own mutual personal relations, and are not disguised under the shape of social relations between the products of labor." (14) Productive activity under capitalism becomes subject to extreme forms of alienation. To the extent that people participate in strictly useful labor, they have one access into the possibility of unalienated labor. For example, the domestic work of women is done in an isolated situation, apparently outside of capitalist production, and it has traditionally been considered to be unproductive of consciousness. Nevertheless, because it is primarily useful labor, it has the power, under the right conditions, to suggest a future society in which all labor would be primarily useful. This is one of the sources of the consciousness and strength that drives women into the forefront of revolutionary movement.

Women have a very clear understanding — implicit or explicit — that their domestic labor essentially involves the production of use-values, that it is useful labor. Within the women's liberation movement this has resulted in a kind of two-pronged analogy between feudalism and the family under capitalism. In the first place, the man's wages are said to provide for a quasi-feudal system of maintenance

and reproduction of labor-power within the family. For example, Benston maintains that "each family, each household, constitutes an individual production unit, a pre-industrial entity, in the same way that peasant farmers or cottage weavers constitute pre-industrial production units." (15) This delineation of the family as essentially a remnant of an earlier mode of production underscores its reactionary character from the point of view of capitalist production. The analogy has, however, definite limitations. The family was the basic unit of production under feudalism, and women's productive activity within it was as socially meaningful as that of men; women's domestic labor under capitalism bears a quite different relationship to the dominant mode of production. In addition, it is hard to press the analogy to a pre-industrial production unit when the bourgeois nuclear family is so firmly anchored in modern capitalism. I think we have leaned on, and learned from, this analogy because we still lack a theory.

The parallel to feudalism is drawn in a second way when women's situation within the family is likened to that of the serf. Within the family, the woman is said to take on the role of serf, and the husband plays the lord. The relationships of dominion and servitude, enforced by coercion, that exist between husband and wife do indeed bear a resemblance to feudal relationships. Nevertheless, this analogy, like that of women to blacks, has an almost wholly metaphorical character. Women and men (unlike serfs and nobles) cannot in any meaningful sense constitute classes. And feudal relations of production cannot really survive into advanced capitalism in the West.

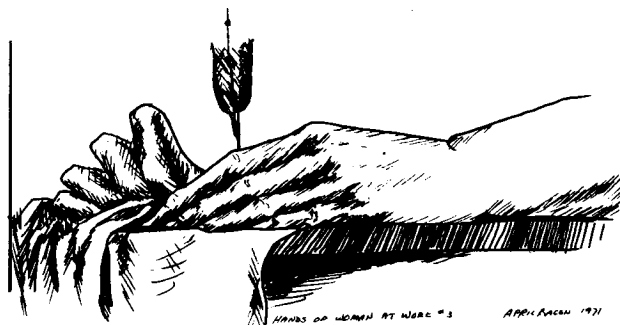
Anyone who tries to make a Marxist analysis of women's work in the family eventually confronts the question of whether domestic labor is "productive" in the Marxist sense. Some recent articles suggest, for example, that it is, and that women can therefore be said to be "exploited" — robbed of the surplus-value they create — in the same way as factory workers. To women involved in the women's liberation movement this conclusion is at first glance attractive, for it confirms and validates our understanding of the importance of our work within the family, despite its

social invisibility. The idea that domestic labor is "productive" turns out, however, to be a very superficial approximation, and if we are to make an accurate analysis it is necessary to examine the situation more carefully. The meaning of "productive labor" is very clearly restricted: "Productive labor, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage-labor which, exchanged against the variable part of capital (the part of the capital that is spent on wages), reproduces not only this part of the capital (or the value of its own labor-power), but in addition produces surplus-value for the capitalist. . . . Only that wage-labor is productive which produces capital." (16) Obviously, women's unpaid domestic labor in the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power can in no way fall under this definition. Women's labor in the family under capitalism is not, in the strict sense, productive. This does not mean, however, that it is unproductive labor, for unproductive labor is "labor which is not exchanged with capital, but directly with revenue, that is, with wages or profit" (for example, the labor of a hired butler or gardener). (17) In short, women's domestic labor under capitalism is neither productive nor unproductive — and we must remember that we are dealing here not with moral judgments (although bourgeois ideology would like us to think otherwise), but with economic categories. In other words, women's productive activity in the family "does not fall under the capitalist mode of production," strictly defined. (18) As Dalla Costa puts it, "their labor appears to be a personal service outside of capital;" the stress should be on "appears to be," however, and the insufficiency of Dalla Costa's formulation clearly recognized. (19) Indeed, domestic labor may itself be an economic category — the indispensable complement of wage labor. Thus, although women are not, in the classical sense, exploited, neither are they an excluded oppressed minority. Women's labor is performed in the very heart of the conditions of capitalism.

V SEX DIVISIONS OF LABOR

I have argued that we must focus on the family as the category through which to understand the situation of wom-

en, and that we must revise and deepen our analysis of the work women do within the family. This is, of course, only a part of the theoretical task, for the family must be understood within the context of the dominant mode of production at a given time. In particular, sex divisions of labor must be examined in detail, and, at the same time, from a fully historical point of view. On the one hand, the sex division of labor in some areas of productive activity remains substantially unchanged (above all, in child-bearing). On the other hand, the distribution of work and the social meaning of virtually all labor has changed through history and continues to change today.



For example, it was noted above that Marx was interested in the feudal family as a producing unit, that for him, therefore, "the labor-power of each individual, by its very nature, operates in this case merely as a definite portion of the whole labor-power of the family." By contrast, we should explore the division of labor within that whole. It may be, for instance, that a wife provides food, a grandmother makes clothing, a child does chores, and a husband maintains shelter, for an entire feudal family. In this way, each member does a certain amount of what might be called individual surplus labor which is then distributed within the family. These individual labors, taken together, make up the

labor necessary to maintain and reproduce the individual producers who comprise the peasant family. A similar division of labor obtains when "the whole labor-power of the family" is mobilized to do surplus labor for the lord. Although women were certainly oppressed in the feudal family, their labor had a recognized place and function within the terms of feudalism. A division of labor according to sex was built into the feudal relations of production, and woman's labor within the family was socially meaningful.

Angela Davis has discussed the quite different sex division of labor under the American slave system. (20) There the line between labor for the plantation owner and labor to maintain and reproduce the individual slave was drawn sharply and involved two conflicting sex divisions of labor. "The black woman was...wholly integrated into the productive force" that worked the fields of the slave plantation. In the work she performed for the slaveholder, therefore, "the black woman was forced into equality with the black man.... She shared in the deformed equality of equal oppression." In the work of maintaining and reproducing the slaves, on the other hand, African patriarchal forms of sex division of labor survived: black women did most of the domestic labor in the slave quarters. Davis explores the dialectically explosive consequences of this situation. Although "traditionally... domestic work is supposed to complement and confirm [women's] inferiority," in the American slave system, the black woman "was performing the only labor of the slave community which could not be directly and immediately claimed by the oppressor." The combination of equality in production for the plantation owner and control over the only area of productive activity not appropriated by the master made the slave woman specially open to rebellion. "Even as she performed her housework, the black woman's role in the slave community could not be identical to the historically evolved female role. Stripped of the palliative female veneer which might have encouraged a passive performance of domestic tasks, she was now uniquely capable of weaving into the warp and woof of domestic life a profound consciousness of resistance." The black woman created "a fresh content for this deformed

equality [in work for the master] by inspiring and participating in acts of resistance of every form and color. She could turn the weapon of equality in struggle against the avaricious slave system which had engendered the mere caricature of equality in oppression." Davis' analysis suggests that the contradictions in the sex division of labor under the American slave system became one source of the insurrectionary consciousness of slave women. (21)

Sex divisions of labor have been in many ways complicated and exacerbated under capitalism. For example, the experience of the job is more and more divorced from the world of the home, as company dormitories and towns are replaced by suburbs, consumerism expands, and family life and "leisure" are mystified and fetishized. In other words, the conditions in which surplus labor is appropriated by capital are increasingly separated from the conditions in which the maintenance and reproduction of the individual's labor-power takes place. The trends in the sex division of labor in each of these two situations must be examined, and their interrelationships evaluated.

Marx analyzed the activity of maintenance and reproduction of labor-power as "individual consumption" — a process wherein "the laborer turns the money paid to him for his labor-power into means of subsistence." He described individual consumption as an essentially isolated process. It is something "the capitalist may safely leave...to the laborer's instincts of self-preservation and of propagation." Indeed, in individual consumption, the laborer "belongs to himself, and performs his necessary vital functions outside the process of production." In other words, the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power takes place outside the relations of capitalist commodity production, that is, outside the world in which surplus-value is produced. For various reasons, Marx rarely acknowledged that individual consumption is a social process operating through a relatively stable social form, the family. Although it is true that under capitalism the family has been stripped of its former full participation in social production and can to some extent be said to live "outside the process of production," it is also clear that "individual consumption" is

a social process involving labor and intense interaction with the world of capitalist commodities. (22)

It is in the area of "individual consumption" that the most severe sex divisions of labor in modern capitalist society are to be found. The family under capitalism is primarily an arena for the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power. Women have been assigned virtually the whole burden of this necessary work. The husband's contribution is in theory reduced to the provision of enough money, from his work for the capitalist, to buy the raw materials for the wife's useful labor within the family. Thus, with respect to the labor required for the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power under capitalism, the division of labor between wife and husband is extreme. As already observed above, women and men seem from this point of view to move in different productive spheres. The key to understanding how these two spheres are interlocked is to situate them in the capitalist system.

The wage is the locus of the intersection between the capitalist mode of production and the process of individual consumption. Concerning the "wage-form," Marx remarked that it "extinguishes every trace of the division of the working-day into necessary labor and surplus-labor, into paid and unpaid labor. All labor appears as paid labor." He saw in "this phenomenal [wage-] form, which makes the actual relation invisible," the basis for "all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production." (23) Thus the payment of wages conceals the distinction between the labor necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power and the surplus labor that creates the surplus-value appropriated by the capitalist. All labor appears as necessary labor to the worker, since the wage paid covers the costs of the maintenance and reproduction of his labor-power. Moreover, the payment of wages for the expenditure of labor-power by the husband disguises the fact of the extreme sex division of this labor under capitalism. The actual work of reproducing and maintaining labor-power is performed virtually outside capitalist commodity production — that is, within the family with most of the work done by the wife. The linkage between the capitalist mode of com-

modity production and the process of the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power (individual consumption) assumes two aspects. To the husband it appears as the wage. To the wife it appears as the world of goods and services, the raw materials for the necessary labor largely performed by her. The sex division of labor in the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power under capitalism thus involves a fundamental mystification. The husband's necessary labor on the job appears to lose all its useful character for him; he sees it only in terms of exchange-value embodied in the "wage-form" that buys the "means of subsistence." The wife, conversely, confronts the world of capitalism as if it were composed of pure use-values (including the husband's wage) waiting to be consumed in the useful labor necessary to maintain and reproduce the family. Locked in an increasingly brutal division of labor, the two sexes tend to experience the relationship between the family and the capitalist mode of production from vastly differing points of view. Here is the root of the system of contradictions inherent in the family under capitalism. (24)

The picture I have sketched is intentionally abstract. It clarifies the condition of women under capitalism by showing a crystallized form, a pure consequence of the sex division of labor within the family. This abstract portrayal of woman as homemaker must now be modified, for throughout the history of capitalism women have also participated in wage labor. In other words, women have always been intensely involved in the two spheres of productive activity under capitalism — wage labor, and the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power. Moreover, the actual situation of women, men, children, and the family is of course an historical product, and is constantly changing. These changes must also be fully examined and strategically evaluated.

The participation of women in wage labor is amply documented. (25) Two long-term trends are especially significant. In 1890, only 18% of women over 16 years old were in what U.S. Government statistics call the labor force; by 1969, 43% were. Similarly, in 1890 fewer than one out of five workers was a woman, while in 1969 nearly two out of

five workers were. In other words, we are moving towards a situation in which women will be represented in the labor force in proportion to their actual numbers in the population. The second important trend is in the area of qualitative change. The women who work today tend to be older: in 1900 the median age of women workers was 26, and in 1968 it had risen to 40. More and more women workers are married: by 1967, almost three out of five women workers were married (living with their husbands). Increasing numbers of women with children work: in 1940, 9% of mothers with children under 18 worked; in 1967, the proportion had risen to 38%. This figure can be further broken down according to the age of the children: in 1967, 49% of mothers with school-age children (6 to 17 years) worked, and 29% of women with children under 6 worked. In short, the women who work are increasingly a representative cross-section of all women. Although various fluctuations have been extensively publicized — for example, the mobilization of women into industry during World War II, and their subsequent forced return to “homemaking” accompanied by the laying on of “the feminine mystique” — the enduring tendency is for more and more ordinary women to be both “workers” and “homemakers,” that is, to participate in both wage labor and the process of the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power.

Sex divisions of labor on the job are almost as severe as within the family. The entire occupational structure has been stratified along sex lines, making it easy to perpetrate inequalities in pay. Men’s jobs may sometimes shift towards becoming “women’s work” (and conversely), but integration of the sexes on the job is rare; equal pay is even rarer. At the same time, there is a persistent history of women fighting for men’s jobs and for equal pay. Indeed, it is in the sphere of wage labor that the first successful assaults on sex divisions of labor were launched, as early as the nineteenth century. The increasing participation of ordinary women in wage labor, and the contradictions they experienced there in addition to those inherent in their domestic work, contributed to the rise in the 1960’s of women’s liberation as a powerful social force. This force has expressed

itself in the domain of wage labor as an accelerated attack on all aspects of the inequality between women and men workers. The legislation of the sixties (1963 Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Equal Rights Amendment), only now beginning to be partially implemented, is a mere reflection of a generally quickening thrust towards equality in all productive activity.

Well over a century ago, Marx and Engels noted that a drive towards equality of the sexes was appearing most insistently in the sphere of wage labor. They suggested that in capitalist society, "the various interests and conditions of life within the ranks of the proletariat are more and more equalized," and in particular, "differences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class. All are instruments of labor, more or less expensive to use, according to their age and sex." (26) This progressive destruction of differences of age and sex, as all persons enter the sphere of capitalist production, was to open up the possibility for true equality, realizable only through a revolution to overthrow capitalism.

Marx and Engels correctly analyzed the dialectics of the situation. What they underestimated were on the one hand the value of women's productive activity in domestic labor, and on the other the potential for the family to act, along with the state, as a "cohesive force of civilized society . . . [which] remains essentially a machine for keeping down the oppressed, exploited class." (27) Thus, although Marx and Engels identified the tendency under capitalism towards the equality of the sexes and the dissolution of the family, they vastly misjudged the concrete conditions. What they saw as a bleak but dialectically promising picture soon seemed to be a wrong prediction. In the course of the nineteenth century the family was reestablished as an efficient means to maintain, reproduce, repress, stabilize, and if necessary divide the working class. Only now, in the second half of the twentieth century, have the potentially explosive contradictions inherent within the family under capitalism once again appeared. (28)

Important changes in women's work within the family have made possible women's increasing participation in

wage labor. Until the end of the nineteenth century, women's productive activity within the family was still enormous. Depending on the family's situation it could include: processing and cooking food (including all baking, preserving, pickling, canning, jelly making, etc.); caring for a kitchen garden, and for poultry, pigs, and cows; keeping house (including making soap, candles, lye, brooms, mattresses, etc.); making and repairing clothing and linens; bearing and raising children; nursing (i.e. doctoring) the young, the sick, and the dying. Thus, although women's domestic labor had already lost most of its social meaning, few married women in the nineteenth century entered the world of capitalist relations of production directly. As capitalism matured, virtually all of women's work within the family was at least partly capitalized or socialized. Women still cook, dress their families, and keep house, but the "raw materials" are now highly processed goods and services purchased over the counters of supermarkets, department stores, and service centers. Other functions formerly performed within the family, with great expenditure of time and energy, increasingly take place outside it. Women still bear children, but they deliver them in hospitals rather than at home. The socialization of children is more and more the province of large educational and cultural institutions; public day care for pre-school children is the most recent innovation in this area. Nursing and doctoring have been largely professionalized and removed to offices and hospitals, although some nursing still remains to be done within the family. At the same time, the development of better contraception and improved health care has meant fewer children, less danger of death or permanent injury, and an early end to child-bearing.

The literature of the women's liberation movement has extensively documented the inefficient and vestigial aspects of the family as a productive unit for the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power. It has dissected the unhappy situation of the wife and mother, who is simultaneously indispensable (above all for the family's ideological functions of stabilization and repression) and purposeless (especially insofar as the family is a productive unit). What should also

be stressed are the positive aspects of the process : a steady movement towards the socialization of the functions of the family, and towards the liberation of women from the family as we know it. Because this movement is occurring under capitalism, it appears on the one hand as a tendency towards capitalization of domestic labor, and on the other as an invitation to women to become wage workers for capital. As Marx saw, "new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself." (29) The material conditions for the liberation of women and the equality of the sexes have at last developed, and all around us the new relations of production struggle to establish themselves.

The evidence for the embryonic forms of these new relations of production is endless, whether one looks for it in the literature of women's liberation, or absorbs it through the bourgeois media. Rather than an organized movement, there is a clear motion towards equality, a motion involving not just a narrow "new left" sector but the whole working class. For example, far from needing to be smashed, the family is quietly undergoing a steady process of dissolution. The divorce rate continues to soar, and increasing numbers of women and men are remaining single. Greater access to contraception and abortion has provided the most important material basis for these developments. The push for day care is making them even more possible. Within the family, gender-defined roles are being challenged. In the area of wage labor, segregation and job categorization according to sex are being attacked, with some success. Part-time jobs for men are being seriously discussed as a way to move towards equality of the sexes. And, of course, the women's and gay liberation movements continue to be crucial in giving expression, shape, and impetus to these tendencies.

The convergence of this general movement towards sex equality with the split between life on and off the job has resulted in a peculiarly significant trend. Marx noted that the alienation of capitalist relations of production leads inevitably to the growth of a "personal life" increasingly sep-

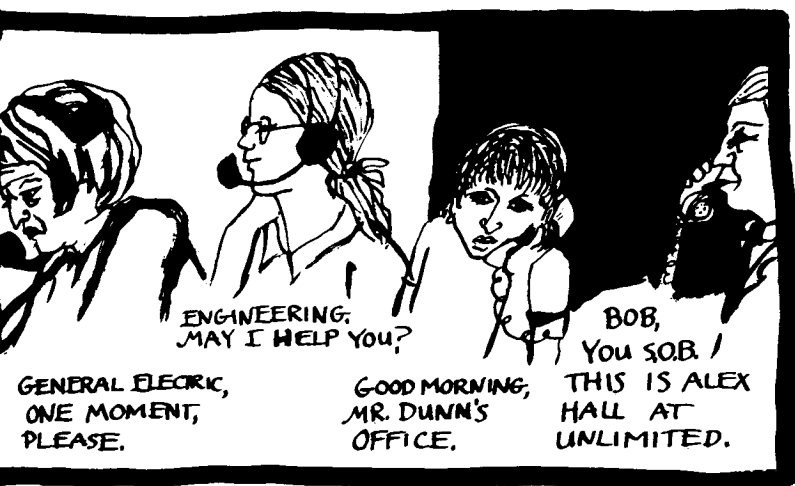
arate from productive activity in wage labor, for "the worker... only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself." (30) The major arena for human feeling has for some time been the family, and in fact alienation has been in part expressed through the separation between the family (site of the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power) and the job (where surplus-value is extracted from the laborer). The extreme character of this separation under advanced capitalism has now — dialectically — provided a roundabout but genuine approach towards the consciousness that it is necessary to overthrow capitalism: the experience of purely useful labor. It was observed above that within the family women perform useful labor and therefore can, under the right conditions, have access to a vision of a life of unalienated productive activity. The recent attempts to break down sex divisions of labor within the family are providing similar glimpses to men. Many of the fads and utopian projects of the sixties and seventies can also be interpreted as attempts to explore or extend this experience: camping, crafts, health foods, organic farming, food cooperatives, cooperative child care, communal living of various types, and so on. These are only utopian insofar as their partial nature remains unrecognized.



VI IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGY

The motion towards the dissolution of the family, the liberation of women, and the equality of the sexes can be summed up as a movement towards "free and equal" singlehood. Each contributing trend tends to appear in multiple guises. In addition, each usually assumes a number of contradictory faces. One trend may suggest, in perhaps utopian fashion, the new society. Another may explore the possibility for accommodation and containment within capitalism. For example, the split between bourgeois and radical feminism is already clear; that between radical and socialist feminism less so. The dissolution of the family can point towards either liberation or disaster (and perhaps both) for women. Contraception, access to abortion, and day care can be the basis for relationships grounded in equality, or for sexual exploitation in the Playboy tradition, or for a new kind of genocide. Attacks on sex inequality in wage labor can cut many ways, as the recent discussion within the movement over the Equal Rights Amendment has shown. Here, in full awareness of the contradictions involved in confronting these issues, is where strategy must be forged.

On some questions, the consequences of these contradictions for strategy have been quite clearly drawn. The fight



Mary Alice Farm, in *Off Our Backs*, April 15, 1971.

for day care, for example, has contrasted the radical potential of "community controlled" centers to the capitalist cooptation of industrialized day care. Obviously, the push for federally financed day care, perhaps to be achieved through contracting to private day care chains, has forced radicals to analyze the situation and make strategic choices. Similarly, the neo-genocidal use of contraception and abortion against black and third world peoples forced them to examine the strategic alternatives carefully. An initial response was to call for black women to have more black babies. The limited character of this strategy soon revealed itself. What is necessary is to transcend the contradictions between women and men (especially for a group victimized by the myth of black matriarchy), not to exacerbate them through reinforcing the most reactionary aspects of sex divisions of labor under capitalism.

Other problems have not been confronted with the necessary clarity. For example, the issues involved in the struggle around the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment were avoided by much of the movement. The situation was not interpreted as complex and involving difficult strategic decisions; rather, a simplistic choice was presented between opposition to the ERA in order to protect women wage workers, and support for it in what was said to be the long-term interest of sex equality. Most radicals simply accepted, passively or actively, the ERA as a positive step. Other alternatives that were proposed—for example, a mass movement to reformulate the Amendment in order to extend equal protection to women and men—never obtained sufficient exposure, much less support. Perhaps the working class movement for socialism (rather than for short-term defense against capitalism) has not yet developed sufficiently to back such a mass struggle, but the movement must be severely criticized for its general failure to face this issue.

Another area where strategy is not yet clear is the question of payment for domestic labor. The demand is increasingly being raised that women should be paid for the work they do within the family. Because women's unpaid labor in the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power appears

to be socially invisible and tends to imprison them in a situation of dependence on male wage workers, this strategy seems attractive. On the other hand, payment of a wage to women for this work would plainly perpetuate traditional sex divisions of labor. Moreover, it is usually not clear when the demand is put forth by whom such a wage should be paid. The obvious candidates are the husband, the husband's boss, or the state; a bill recently introduced in the Maryland legislature, for example, names the husband, but debate within the women's liberation movement has usually been vague on this question. To suggest that the husband, his boss, or the state pay the wife a wage for her domestic labor involves, in each case, certain theoretical and strategic assumptions about the nature of woman's labor under capitalism and the identity of her enemy. These and other assumptions about payment for domestic labor would have to be clarified in order to develop a strategy that raises the real issue, which is equality of the sexes in all productive activity. (31)

Since strategy must be based on an analysis of the concrete historical situation, it is crucial that we correctly understand the capitalist response to the rise of women's liberation as a major social force. After an initial period of shock and resistance, and despite some hesitation and backsliding, a large segment of the ruling class power structure is welcoming it. The welcome is being expressed in a variety of ways, of which the evidence is everywhere: passage of the ERA, judicial decisions against sex discrimination of all types, reform of abortion laws, representation at political conventions and in campaigns, reforms in the income tax system, proposals for child care on a mass scale, increased hiring of women for "men's jobs," and so on. Much of this is tokenism, but much of it is not. In virtually all areas of life, U.S. capitalism is beginning to move towards making a place for women on a basis of equality with men — always, of course, preserving the existing class divisions. Although each individual advance is a step towards sex equality, and might therefore be applauded, the general atmosphere suggests concessions from above rather than victories achieved through struggle. In

fact, the increasing willingness of capital to meet certain of the demands for equality is surprising. One might compare the very different results of the black liberation movement over the past fifteen years: despite greater urgency and a higher level of militance spread over a wider base, the black liberation movement has been able to achieve relatively minimal advances, and these at very high cost. It is necessary, therefore, to evaluate the openness of capitalism to women's liberation with appropriate suspicion. Only if we learn what this welcome means can we develop strategy accordingly.

What we are witnessing, I would argue, is a rapidly accelerating movement towards a situation that Marx and Engels saw in embryonic form in the nineteenth century: the dissolution of the family and the entrance of women into wage labor on the basis of equality. From the point of view of capitalism in crisis, steps taken in this direction can be a very real way to buy time. For example, Bebel suggested that in the late nineteenth century, small producers threatened by monopoly capitalism tried to save themselves by employing the cheap labor of women. (32) Today, capitalism finds itself facing a prolonged crisis and looks again to women for a way to cut its costs. The welcome it offers to women's liberation suggests that the entry of women into the wage-labor work force will be facilitated and accelerated as a way to lower the costs to the capitalists of the labor-power of the working class as a whole. The model of the bourgeois nuclear family supported by the wages of the husband will tend to be replaced by a new standard of a more egalitarian family in which both husband and wife work. Even without an erosion of living standards, this will enable capitalism to cheapen the cost of labor-power, for now two workers may earn as much as one did before. A more significant development may be the increasing number of people who will remain single, possibly living in loose collective situations, once the material basis of the bourgeois nuclear family is eroded and rigid divisions of labor in the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power come to be challenged.

From the point of view of women, these developments cut two ways. The tendency towards more egalitarian relations within the family and the emergence of a new standard of relative equality on and off the job are clearly positive steps towards the integration of women into society on the basis of equality. At the same time, the entry of women into wage labor represents a further degradation of our lives by capitalism. Once again women are being mobilized into industry because capital needs us. To the extent that we are unable to resist this mobilization, women today face a future resembling the "deformed equality of equal oppression" experienced by American slave women. And as with the slave women, these developments could move us towards a stronger position from which to fight. Moreover, precisely because it is advanced capitalism rather than a slave system that wishes to impose this "deformed equality," the results will be different. Whether the general standard of living will fall, whether the increase in numbers of single persons will be a more important trend than that of working wives, whether a new norm of free and relatively equal singlehood will evolve, and how all these changes will affect a revolutionary process — these are questions that will be answered in the future according to the nature and intensity of the crisis and the level of struggle.

Political organizing has up to now generally accepted the peculiarly alienated social relations that arise with capitalism. The separations imposed by the organization of capitalist society — of job from home, wage labor from domestic labor, men from women — all have been seen as essentially unchangeable until after the making of a revolution. What this means in terms of organizing and political work is that an individual's "personal life" has traditionally been regarded as essentially separate from political action. And the consequences have been, quite predictably, a warping of both personal and political experience. In particular, women have been on the whole forced to remain invisible, staying outside the processes of change or at most taking a special place alongside it.

I have argued above that the contradictions within advanced capitalism are moving us towards an erosion of sex

divisions in both wage labor and domestic labor. This situation has important implications for political work. No previous revolution has had available to it the kind of material basis for equality of the sexes provided by advanced capitalism. This suggests, I think, that the fight for socialism in the United States will be different. The new left of the past decade has already developed various forms that respond to this situation, mainly through its stress on organization outside the workplace. The revolutionary movement of the future is in the process of creating itself. There has been a quite necessary revival of emphasis on workplace organizing and class questions, but the issue of the separation of domestic from on-the-job experience has in general not been dealt with adequately. For example, the problem of the relationships between women and men, the question of why women on and off the job begin to move and organize themselves, and the issue of in what forms this can best take place—all these remain to be worked out. But the process has only just begun. It is only in the course of the struggle itself that a revolutionary working class movement will be able to begin to reject—to transcend—the divisions that weaken it. And it is through this struggle, then, that the real liberation of women will be shaped, developed, and eventually won.

NOTES

1. I have benefited greatly from numerous collective discussions of many of the issues treated in this paper. I would especially like to thank those with whom I worked in the Feminist Studies Program of the Cambridge-Goddard Graduate School and also the participants in a number of study groups and conferences over the past year and a half. My friends Ira Gerstein and Lillian Robinson read several versions of this paper; I am grateful to them for patient and careful criticism and many useful suggestions. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my own earthly family—my mother and father, my aunt Anna, my uncle Lester, and my cousins Mimi and Irv—for helping me to survive the experience of growing up in the fifties.

The paper was first drafted in August of 1972, and revised in the following months. The present version was completed in May 1973. Much time has passed since the original writing of the paper; I have tried in the footnotes to indicate some recent developments.

Ira Gerstein's paper, "Domestic Work and Capitalism" (printed below) was originally conceived as a sort of appendix to this paper. I see the two articles as complementary, part of what I hope will be an on-going effort to understand and act on the issues raised.

2. Juliet Mitchell, *Woman's Estate* (New York: Pantheon, 1971); page references in the text refer to this book. Mitchell's article, "Women: The Longest Revolution," was originally published in *New Left Review*, 40 (November-December 1966), 11-37. It has been widely reprinted, for example as a pamphlet by the New England Free Press (60 Union Square, Somerville, Mass. 02143).

Margaret Benston has recorded the difficulties in following Mitchell's argument in her review of *Woman's Estate*; see *The Pedestal* (Vancouver), April, 1972, p. 11, or *The Guardian* (New York), March 29, 1972, p. 14. The extent to which my summary of Mitchell differs from Benston's is one index of the difficulty.

3. Benston, for example, concentrates on the problem of Mitchell's view of production, and thus underestimates the subtlety of her approach (review cited in n. 2 above). This is not the place to discuss the question of the structuralist method. Many of the criticisms made of this method apply to Mitchell's *Woman's Estate*: the "structures" often have an oddly autonomous character, as if emptied of live people; the reunification of the structures is abstract, and hard to differentiate from vulgar pluralism; the view of consciousness and ideology is unpleasantly close to mechanical nineteenth century models. An extensive critique of the analytical approach used by Mitchell, written from a radical perspective, is presented in Norman Geras, "Althusser's Marxism: An Account and Assessment," *New Left Review*, 71 (January-February 1972), 57-86.

4. Karl Marx, Introduction to the 'Critique of Political Economy,' in *Marx and Modern Economics*, ed. David Hor-

owitz (New York-London, 1968), pp. 46, 44, 40. One begins to glimpse what these difficult passages mean in terms of method only through extensive reading and rereading of Marx. I have also found the exposition in Bertell Ollman, *Alienation* (Cambridge, 1971) generally useful; Ollman discusses the particular question of categories on pp. 12-26.

In this and the following sections, I am forced to assume a certain acquaintance with the literature and issues of women's liberation, and with basic categories of Marxist analysis, in order to present my arguments in as brief a form as possible.

5. Quoted in Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution 1750-1850* (London, 1930), p. 59. Pinchbeck, together with Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1919), supply enough information to sketch the history of the changes in the family and in the lives of women with the advent of capitalism. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood. A Social History of Family Life* (London, 1962), also covers the subject. In all three cases one must recognize the biases of the authors in favor of the "modern family." Although most modern feminist writings have tended to be relatively ahistorical, some have tried not to be. See, for example: Peggy Morton, "A Woman's Work is Never Done," in *From Feminism to Liberation*, ed. E. H. Altbach (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971), pp. 211-227, and in *Women Unite!* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Education Press, 1972), pp. 46-68; or Mari Jo Buhle, Ann G. Gordon, and Nancy Schrom, "Women in American Society: An Historical Contribution," *Radical America*, vol. 5, no. 4 (July-August 1971), pp. 3-66 (also available as a *Radical America* pamphlet).

6. Karl Marx, Preface to 'A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,' in *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Selected Works In One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 183.

7. Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review*, vol. 21, no. 4 (September 1969), pp. 13-27; Morton, "A Woman's Work," cited above in n. 5; Hodee Edwards, "Housework and Exploitation: A Marxist Analysis," *No More Fun and Games. A Journal*

of Female Liberation, 5 (July 1971), 92-100; Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community," *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 1 (January-February 1972), pp. 67-102, also printed (in a corrected and revised version) as part of a pamphlet titled *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, England: The Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol; February 1973), pp. 19-54.

8. Karl Marx, *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), III, 790-791, 796, 807; I, 78; III, 795. Similar formulations occur in Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), and *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations* (New York: International Publishers, 1965), and in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1947). For the mechanism of change in feudalism, see Marx, *Capital*, III, 794; see also *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, ed. Maurice Dobb (New York: Science and Society, 1967), esp. the article by H. K. Takahashi.

9. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 134. There is of course a context, if not a justification, for Marx's formulation: Marx was acutely aware of the historic subordination of women and children to men.

10. Marx, *Capital*, III, 786-787.

11. *Ibid.*, I, 394-395.

12. *Ibid.*, I, 42; Marx discusses the two-fold character of labor on pp. 41-46.

13. *Ibid.*, I, 42-43.

14. *Ibid.*, I, 77.

15. Benston, "Political Economy" (n. 7 above), p. 18.

16. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, I (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963), 152; cf. also pp. 396, 401, and *Capital*, I, 508-509.

17. Marx, *Theories of Surplus-Value*, I, 157; cf. also pp. 159, 164-165, 186.

18. *Ibid.*, 407. Marx is talking here about the survival of independent craftsmen and peasants, but he makes the general point that the distinction between productive and unproductive labor is purely economic.

19. Dalla Costa (n. 7 above), p. 74 (Falling Wall Press pamphlet, p. 26; see also note³ on p. 52 of the pamphlet for an explicit statement that "housework is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value").

20. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December 1971), pp. 2-15; reprinted in *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 13, nos. 1-2 (Winter-Spring 1972), pp. 81-100.

21. Davis never explicitly draws this conclusion, perhaps because she tends to limit the concepts of productive activity and production to work done by the slaves for the plantation owner.

22. Marx, *Capital*, I, 571-573; Marx remarks, somewhat enigmatically, that individual consumption "is productive to the capitalist and to the State, since it is the production of the power that creates their wealth," but it seems clear from the context that he is speaking sarcastically. On individual consumption see also *Theories of Surplus-Value*, I, 166, 297.

23. Marx, *Capital*, I, 539, 540.

24. The best treatment to date of these contradictions and of the family as producer and reproducer of labor-power is Peggy Morton's "A Woman's Work" (n. 5 above); see also the article by Dalla Costa (n. 7 above). Morton's article (first published in abridged form in *Leviathan*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 1970, pp. 32-37), which in early 1970 already touched on many strategic and theoretical insights subsequently developed in the literature of the women's liberation movement, has still not been recognized as a major document, nor its ideas assimilated.

25. For trends in women's participation in the U.S. labor force see, for example, Mary Bach Kievit, *Review and Synthesis of Research on Women in the World of Work* (Columbus, Ohio: ERIC, 1972); Robert W. Smuts, *Women and Work in America* (New York, 1959); Albert Szymanski, "Trends in the American Working Class," *Socialist Revolution*, vol. 2, no. 4 (July-August 1972), pp. 101-122; Lise Vogel, *Women Workers. Some Basic Statistics* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1971); and the 1969 *Handbook on Women Work-*

ers, U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Bulletin 294.

26. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, in Selected Works in One Volume, pp. 43, 42.

27. Frederick Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, in Selected Works in One Volume, p. 591 (Engels is describing the state).

28. Marx and Engels of course drew their conclusions from the particularly brutal, and therefore revealing, British experience. The general trend turned out to be somewhat different, more like the American situation, on which is based the following analysis.

29. Marx, Preface, p. 183.

30. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts, p. 110.

31. Since August of 1972, when I completed the first version of this paper, I have become aware that the question of a wage for housework may be, along with the ERA and protective legislation, one of the major issues confronting women (and the movement). In the United States, bourgeois social scientists are discussing housework in ways suggesting that a variety of plans to supposedly "validate" it through a wage may soon be tried. For example, a number of attempts are currently being made to quantify the value of housework; see: Juanita Kreps, Sex in the Marketplace. American Women at Work (Baltimore, 1971), ch. 4; Kathryn E. Walker and William H. Gauger, "The Dollar Value of Household Work," pre-publication mimeo (Ithaca, New York: New York State College of Human Ecology, Cornell University; March 1973); and most recently, Paul Samuelson's attempt to revise the GNP to include the value of housework. It is an easy step from these quantifications to concrete proposals that the wage actually be paid.

In Great Britain and Italy, the proposal of a wage for housework is being pushed by some groups on the left. Information on this campaign is of course somewhat hard to come by. My sources have been: pp. 52-53 of the Falling Wall Press pamphlet cited above in n. 7; Giuliana Pompei, "Wages for Housework," mimeo (translation and circulation by Cambridge [England] Women's Liberation; April,

1972); Selma James, *Women, the Unions, and Work*, pamphlet (London: Crest Press, April, 1972); and a talk given by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James in Boston in May of 1973. My impression is that the proposal of a wage for housework has a quite different character in Britain and Italy from what it might have if proposed in the United States. This is largely because of the sharply different history and conditions in the three countries. First, there is a tradition of state-paid "family allowances" in Britain and Italy, and in England the family allowance is paid directly to the wife. Second, women's participation in the wage-labor force has not changed appreciably in Great Britain, and has actually declined in Italy; by contrast, in the United States there has been a significant and sustained increase in the proportion of women in the labor force. And third, sex divisions of domestic labor appear to be more severe and unchangeable in Britain and in Italy than in the U.S.

In any case, the issue of a wage for housework has not yet been sufficiently clarified. The problem of for what work the wage is paid must be understood. The family allowance is in essence a payment for the bearing and raising of children. Is it then reasonable to invoke it as a precedent and basis for the demand to pay wages for housework? What would be the effect of paying wages for housework on the possibilities for a breaking down of the sex divisions in domestic labor? What is the relationship between the payment of a wage for housework and the welfare system? And what about the relationship between these issues and the question of who pays — husband, state, or husband's boss? All these problems must be dealt with carefully and from a class perspective.

32. August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism* (New York, 1904), p. 173: "The great increase in female labor, especially in small industries, tells the tale that only by dint of a strong application of female labor, with its correspondingly low wages, can small production keep itself afloat, for a while."

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Women, the Unions and Work, Or ...

What Is Not To Be Done

Selma James

This pamphlet has been published by the Notting Hill (a working-class district in West London — ed.) Womens Liberation Workshop group. It was written by one of our members and presented as a paper at the National Conference of Women at Manchester March 25-26, 1972. While many of us have minor or major disagreements with the paper, we feel that the discussion which it generated at the conference was of such importance to the future of the movement that it should be widely read and the discussion continue.

The demands at the end of the paper aroused most interest at the conference, and were discussed, added to and modified there. But there may have been some misunderstanding about their purpose. They are not a statement of what we want, finally, to have. They are not a plan for an ideal society, and a society based on them would not cease to be

oppressive. Ultimately the only demand which is not co-optable is the armed population demanding the end of capitalism. But we feel that at this moment these demands can be a force against what capital wants and for what we want. They are intended to mobilize women both "inside" and "outside" the women's liberation movement. They could provide a perspective which would affect decisions about local and national struggles. After discussion and modification they could become integrated and far-reaching goals which the women's movement could come to stand for. A vote taken on the final day at Manchester decided that the demands would be raised on the first day of the next conference. Many groups are planning local discussions before that time.

April 8, 1972.

This is perhaps written as an open letter to women attending this Manchester conference. It is impossible any longer to sit in the protection of a group and see the potential of the movement squandered. This was hastily written, though it represents many years' consideration. It is not meant to be the final word, not even of its author.

There are more ways than one in which the women's movement can be co-opted and be cut off from the possibilities of becoming an autonomous and revolutionary political movement. One is that we will assist capitalism to introduce and integrate women into new facets of its exploitative relations. The FINANCIAL TIMES of March 9, 1971, has made clear to those backward capitalists who have not realised it yet, how useful we can be.

...The thousands of trained girls who come out of the universities every year are desperately anxious to escape from the triple trap of teaching, nursing, or shorthand-typing...

Many of these girls are clearly of high ability, and they constitute a pool from which skilled middle management could be drawn. They would be as hard working and conscientious as only a grateful outsider could be, and it is conceivable that, in spite of the equal pay legislation, they might not cost as much as male equivalents, at least in the first instance. We will use such women, in increasing numbers, when we realise that they exist and feel able to recognise their qualities. Until then, a good deal of talent that is costing a lot of money to train in our universities will continue to be wasted, and British industry will have failed to see a source of renewed energy and vitality that is before its very eyes.

This use of rebellion, to co-opt the most articulate minority for the purpose of developing capital, with "renewed energy and vitality", is not new and not confined to women. It is the overriding principle of capitalist development. The ex-colonial world whom the British "educated" to self-government, for example, is ruled by "grateful outsiders". We need to examine how we are to be "used" closely and carefully if we are to prevent ourselves from organising only to assist capitalism to be less backward and in the process further enslaving ourselves, rather than organising to destroy it which is the only possible process of liberation.

Another, but connected, way of co-option has in some measure already taken place, and its agent has been left organisations. They have effectively convinced many of us that if we wish to move to working class women it must be either through them or, more pervasively, through their definitions of the class, their orientations and their kind of actions. It is as though they have stood blocking an open door. They challenge the validity of an autonomous women's movement either directly or (by treating women, a specially exploited section of the class, as marginal) indirectly. For them the "real" working class is white, male and over thirty. Here racism, male supremacy and age supremacy have a common lineage. They effectively want

to make us auxiliary to the "general" struggle — as if they represented the generalisation of the struggle; as if there could be a generalised struggle without women, without men joining with women for women's demands.

A major issue on which we have swallowed their orientation and been co-opted to defeat our own movement has been on the question of unionising women.

We are told that we must bring women to what is called a "trade union consciousness". This phrase is Lenin's and it comes from a pamphlet called "What is to be done." In many ways it is a brilliant pamphlet, but it was written in the early days of the Russian movement, in 1902. Lenin learnt from the workers and peasants of Russia in 1905 and 1917 and repudiated a good deal of what he wrote before these two revolutions. Left people do not speak of Lenin's labor conclusions, and in my view much of what passes for left theory (and practice) today is pre-1902. In 1972 this is a serious charge, and I think it can be proved. They can read Lenin and quote him. But unlike Lenin, they are not able to learn from the actions that workers take.

The most obvious recent action is undoubtedly the miners' strike. I believe many women in the movement have been awoken by this great working class event. Class action shakes all sections of the population in days or weeks when nothing else has moved them for years. We have all had a leap in consciousness as a result of the action of the class. Therefore what we consider possible is expanded. This is the immediate reason for our restlessness. We are not satisfied any more to stand aside and let the world go by. After three years of our movement, Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe and then this strike. We want to do something, but not just anything. We want to build a movement which is at once political and new, one which speaks specifically to the needs of women.

But what has been the basis of this tremendous demonstration of power of the class? After all, this is not the first big strike in the recent period in Britain. The postmen, the dustmen, the electricity workers and many others have demonstrated in action their will to fight. What distinguished the miners is that they didn't depend on their

unions but on their own self-organisation and methods of struggle. More than once during the strike, the union tried to dictate the terms of struggle. For example, when the union asked workers to man safety crews, or tried to discourage them from violent defence of picket lines, or stood in the way of the women organising independently. But the mining community went its own autonomous way. As a result, it won, among other reasons because in this way it won other workers to its cause.

This is not the first attempt at autonomous class action, but it is the first major success. Almost every recent national strike has been lost or at least drawn because workers allowed or could not prevent their union from "leading" it. Pilkington is the most striking case. And we must remember that 90% of all strikes are unofficial, either in spite of or against the unions.

Now at this point, where workers are beginning to wrest from unions control over their own struggle, we are invited to bring woman into the unions where they will acquire "trade union consciousness".

What has been the role of trade unions specifically in relation to women?

1. They have helped to maintain unequal rates of pay despite the brave attempts by women (and some men) trade unionists to give this issue priority. As a matter of fact, once unions ask for a percentage wage rise, and not the same rise for all, they not only confirm inequality of wages but further widen the gap between men and women — and of course between men and men too. Ten percent of £10 = £11. Ten percent of £20 = £22. To them that hath a bit more shall be given a bit more . . .

They have never organised a struggle for equal pay. In the two great equal pay strikes we know about — and there are plenty we don't know about — the women acted independently of the unions. During the Leeds seamstresses' strike the union wrote to the company and told them not to give in to the women. The women had to fight two governors by busting the windows of the union offices.

At Daganham (auto plants — ed.) when the seat cover sewers went out, of course there was no attempt by the

union to generalise (that is, bring the men out in support) a strike which took place because the union had turned their backs on the women. The shop stewards, at the crucial meeting with the Minister of Employment and Productivity, renounced upgrading — which was the demand of the women — and settled for a wage rise which was 8% below the average male pay.

2. Grading is the basis for unequal pay where men and women work together. The unions take for granted job categories which have kept women lower paid and will continue to under the equal pay act. Even more, they worry that equal pay for women might “disturb” the wage differentials among different grades of men. The GUARDIAN of 6 September 1971 quotes Jack Peel, general secretary of the National Union of Dyers, Bleachers and Textile Workers, talking to an employer, one Eric Booth. Eric says, “If we’re not careful this could be very expensive for us.” But Jack is more far-seeing. He says, “We could easily upset the men; upset their differentials. The way to avoid this is to go gently along.” The question of equal pay is not only about the double exploitation of women and young people. It is about the way capital has carved up the class into grades and corresponding wage rates so that groups of workers see their interests as different from other groups — for example, man in relation to woman.

3. They have not tried very hard to get us into unions. The Night Cleaners were in the degrading position of having to embarrass the T & G (Transport and General Workers Union — ed.) publicly in order to get “taken in”. We’re not straightforward like men, you see. We have all these problems of kids and husbands and extreme exploitation. They don’t really want us in the unions, although the dues are useful and we don’t compete for their union jobs.

Yet note: if there are a rash of strikes or sit-ins for equal pay or for anything else, the unions will be falling over backwards to bring women in. What else does capital have to control workers when they move? How else can they get us to participate in our own exploitation? Who else would we trust but an organization, a movement, formed by us to unite with other workers? And if we are

not depending on unions, who else would we depend on but ourselves and other workers? That would be dangerous — for unions and government. It would not be surprising if they were at this moment planning campaigns to recruit women in areas where they have been effectively militant, and planning also to come to our movement for help. Who can do their recruiting among women better than other women!

4. But for those of us who are deprived of wages for our work, who are housewives and do not have jobs outside the home, unions don't know we exist. When capital pays husbands they get two workers, not one. The unions are organizations which are supposed to protect (some) workers in (some) work institutions. Waged workers have organised unions (not the other way round, by the way — workers organise unions, not union workers) and have organised them to deal with their paid work situation. A housewife's work situation is the home, and every woman who does paid work (except the rich) also does unpaid work, is also a housewife. Yet when husband and father and brother are taking strike decisions which we have to support, we have no part in deciding the kind of action or the issues on which we fight. We get very little for ourselves — if we win, not even some of the credit. Has anybody pointed out how much every strike of men is dependent on the support of women? The unions ensure that the struggle is segregated and women can participate only as auxiliaries. Remember "Salt of the Earth"? In order for the women to be brought actively into the strike and win it, they had to adjourn the union meeting and have a meeting of the whole community instead. That's where it's at, on a national and international level.

5. Until recently the capitalist class with the help of unions had convinced men that if they got a rise in pay they got a rise in standard of living. That's not true, and women always knew it. They give men a pay packet on Friday and take it back from us on Saturday at the shops. We have to organise the struggle for the other side of wages — against inflation — and that can only be done outside the unions, first because they only deal with the money we get and not

with what we have immediately to give back; and second because they limit their fight — such as it is — only to that workplace where you get wages for being there, and not where your work involves giving the money back.

It is not simply that they don't organise the shoppers; it is that the union prevents such organisation, by fragmenting the class into those who have wages and those who don't. The unemployed, the old, the ill, children and housewives are wageless. So the unions ignore us and thereby separate us from each other and from the waged. That is, they structurally make a generalised struggle impossible. This is not because they are bureaucratised; this is why. Their functions are to mediate the struggle in industry and keep it separate from struggles elsewhere. Because the most concentrated potential power of the class is at the point of direct production, the unions have convinced the wageless that only at that point can a struggle be waged at all. This is not so, and the most striking example has been the organisation of the Black community. Blacks, like women, cannot limit themselves to a struggle in direct production. And Blacks, like women, see the function of unions within the class writ large in their attitudes to them. For racism and sexism are not aberrations of an otherwise powerful working class weapon.

You will see by now that I believe in order to have our own politics we must make our own analysis of women and therefore our own analysis of the whole working class struggle. We have been taking so much for granted that happens to be around, and restricting, segregating ourselves to speaking and writing about women, that it looks like we are only supposed to analyse and understand women after others (men) have analysed the class "in general" — excluding us. This is to be male-dominated in the profoundest sense. Because there is no class "in general" which doesn't include us and all the wageless.

I think that some of us who have refused to relate women's struggle to the class struggle have done this in self-defense, in order to get away from the left analysis of class which left us out completely (and as I have tried to show,

was a barrier to men workers carrying out struggle independent of unions).

In turn some women have been forced to stay in or join left organisations and suffer continuous humiliation in them in order not to be disconnected from class politics.

Another result of the denial of an autonomous role for the women's movement has been the women who see themselves only as supportive, this time of women and not of men. If we support women's struggles that is a step forward, but if we make no independent contribution, we are either unwilling or unable to use and share what the movement has caused us to learn. Faced with the elitism of the left, this patronising has seemed to some women the only alternative.

For all these women the autonomous politics of women's liberation is the only meaningful alternative. Until we create that, we will continue to snipe at each other, and always as a reaction to what men are doing.

Now the first thing that will pop into the heads of some of us is the benefit to be derived from unions. There is no doubt that certain slave conditions are done away with when a factory is organised, and usually when workers in factories organise, they organise into unions (or against them). It seems the only alternative to slavery. The whole history of the class is bound up with this institution. But it is the way workers get unions formed, organising together and almost always going on strike, that abolishes the slave conditions, not the unions. It is their power that brings the union in and it is their power that abolishes slave conditions. The union has become a symbol of this power and has exploited this image and this tradition so as to channel, direct and, where possible, smother the struggle, but the power is the workers'.

Secondly, if you go into a union or a non-union factory or office where both men and women are working, you'll almost always see that the men are not as pressed as the women. Their working speed is slower than women's; they take more time in the cloakroom, to smoke, to breathe. That also has to do, not with unions, but with power: women come into industry less powerful than men, for the obvious

reason of their manifold oppression through the patriarchy. But aside from their internalisation of the myth of female incapacity through which this patriarchy is maintained, there is another factor. They have an actual minority status in industry and they are very uncertain not only of their own capacities but of the support they will receive from men and the unions which are now identified primarily with men.

The very structure of the unions puts women off. All those rules and regulations and having to talk at meetings and having meetings at night when we are putting our children to bed and washing up, often confirm to us that we are just not up to scratch. We know these feelings well. We formed a movement because of them.

Certainly very few women in jobs or out of them feel the union can represent them as women who have not an eight-hour but at least a 16-hour day.

But if the power of the unions is the power of the class, and if unions have in essential respects been working against our interests as women and therefore against the working class, then we must organise that power, not those unions. We are in a similar dilemma with the family of the working class. I would like to quote from a forthcoming document which does not analyse women from the point of view of Marxism, but Marxism from the point of view of women (and therefore I believe of men). It comes from the Italian women's movement!*

The working class family is the more difficult point to break because it is the support of the worker, but as worker, and for that reason the support of capital. On this family depends the support of the class, the survival of the class — but at the woman's expense against the class itself. The woman is the slave of a wage slave, and

* WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY by Mariarosa Dalla Costa. "Radical America", Boston, Jan.-Feb. 1972.

her slavery ensures the slavery of her man. Like the trade union, the family protects the worker, but also ensures that he and she will never be anything but workers. And that is why the struggle of women of the working class against the family is decisive.

The struggle of the woman in the working class against the unions is so decisive because, like the family, it protects the class at her expense (and not only hers) and at the expense of offensive action. Like the family, we have nothing to put in its place but the class acting for itself and women as integral, in fact pivotal to that class.

6. Finally there is the question of women and "unemployment". First of all, we know that only rich women are unemployed — that is, do no work. Whether or not we're in jobs, most of us work like hell. The only thing is that we are wageless if we don't formally hire ourselves out to a particular capitalist and just work in our kitchens creating and servicing workers for the capitalist class in general. It is characteristic that the unions and the labour exchanges (i.e. wage slave markets) in Scotland have made a deal not to give jobs to married women. In the explosive situation in Scotland of which the UCS (Upper Clyde Shipyard — ed.) work-in was merely an indication, they — the unions and the government — figure we can be depended upon not to "give trouble". That is how we have been used all the time, and we have to prove them wrong or fold up. This damn capitalist class and their damn unions must not be able to count on our quiescence any more over anything. They have made this deal over our heads. They will make or have made others. We are expendable.

And when in Scotland we are kept out of the wage-slave market, it is to keep men from being unemployed just at the moment and in the place where the methods of struggle of Northern Ireland may catch on. This move against women by unions and government is probably as a direct result of the attempt men workers made to take over the employment exchange at the same time as the UCS work-in was going on. That is, some workers thought that an unwork-in

was a better idea than a work-in. No need to say where the unions stand on this when they are desperately trying to shove "We want jobs" placards into workers' hands. You would think it is immoral to be disengaged from exploitation. The only thing "wrong" with unemployment is that you don't get paid.

And this is the heart of the issue. The government, acting in the interests of the capitalist class in general, has created unemployment in the hope that, instead of fighting for more pay and less work, we will be glad for the crumbs that the master lets fall from his table. So that the "country" can "progress" over our dead and dying minds and bodies. The unions tell us to worry about productivity and exports while the capitalists are busy exporting their capital all over the world, for example to South Africa (and hope, by the way, to export white unemployed workers behind it). The unions are trying to lead exactly the kind of struggle that would make Ted Heath (except for the mining community, the Northern Irish Catholic community and the Zimbabwe community) a happy man: they are demanding jobs. It is the threat of closure of the mines that the government thought would keep the mining community quiet. Instead the people from the mine areas made clear from their strike that they didn't consider spending your life in a mine or scrubbing filthy clothes and nursing people with silicosis was an ideal existence. Their strike meant that they were saying: Take your mines and shove them. They refused to beg for the right to be exploited.

But what about these women who have been deprived of the social experience of socialised work and the relative independence of their own pay packet? It is certainly not as simple in their case. I quote again from the Italian document.

...The role of housewife, beyond whose isolation is hidden social labour, must be destroyed. But our alternatives are strictly defined. Up to now, the myth of female incapacity, rooted in this isolated woman dependent on someone else's wage and therefore shaped by someone else's conscious-

ness, has been broken only by one action: the woman getting her own wage, breaking the back of personal economic dependence, making her own independent experience with the world outside the home, performing social labour in a socialised structure, whether the factory or the office, and initiating there her own forms of social rebellion along with the traditional forms of the class. The advent of the women's movement is a rejection of this alternative.

Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created a movement — the rejection by millions of women of woman's traditional place — to recompose the work force with increasing numbers of women. The movement can only develop in opposition to this. It poses by its very existence and must pose with increasing articulation in action that women refuse the myth of liberation through work.

For we have worked enough. We have chopped billions of tons of cotton, washed billions of dishes, scrubbed billions of floors, typed billions of words, wired billions of radio sets, washed billions of nappies (diapers — ed.), by hand and in machines. Every time they have "let us in" to some traditionally male enclave, it was to find for us a new level of exploitation.

Here again we must make a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis — to be more precise, in the kitchens of the metropolis. Capitalist planning proposes to the Third World that it "develop"; that in addition to its present agonies, it too suffer the agony of an industrial counter-revolution. Women in the metropolis have been offered the same "aid". But those of us who have gone out of our homes to work be-

cause we had to or for extras or for economic independence have warned the rest: inflation has riveted us to this bloody typing pool or to this assembly line, and in that there is no salvation.

We must refuse the development they are offering us. But the struggle of the working woman is not to return to the isolation of the home, appealing as this sometimes may be on Monday morning; any more than the housewife's struggle is to exchange being imprisoned in a house for being clinched to desks or machines, appealing as this sometimes may be compared to the loneliness of the 12th storey apartment...

The challenge to the women's movement is to find modes of struggle which, while they liberate women from the home, at the same time avoid on the one hand a double slavery and on the other prevent another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation. This ultimately is the dividing line between reformism and revolutionary politics within the women's movement.

This is the most dangerous co-option because it is massive, and it was planned some time ago. A confidential report on the employment of women and young persons under 18 years (revealed in SOCIALIST WORKER, December 21, 1968) was prepared by the National Joint Advisory Committee, with representatives from the Confederation of British Industries, the nationalised industries, the Ministry of Labour and—guess who?—the TUC (Trades Union Congress—ed.) The report stated:

with the constant introduction of expensive new equipment, shift working will no doubt continue to increase so as to maximise the economic return from capital investment involved and indeed before committing capital to the purchase of such machinery employers want to be assured that shift

working will be possible, so as to ensure an adequate return.

Can we now understand the equal pay act which gives what they call equal pay on the terms that we work shifts?

The report discussed Section 68 of the Factory Act requiring that all women and young persons in a factory have their breaks at the same time. Section 68, it says, "denies to employers the flexibility in arranging the hours of their women and young persons...so essential in present day conditions." So much for capital's planlessness, and our peripheral "use" in industry.

Here is where the movement can be made or broken. We can be the modern suffragettes, only more dangerous, since where they invited women to vote and be free, we will be inviting them to achieve freedom through work.

No doubt there are times when we would be failing in our duty if we did not support and even encourage women to demand jobs, especially where they are isolated from women's industries, so that sweat shops are the only places within miles where a woman can earn enough money to cover the inflation and to avoid having to degrade herself by asking her husband for money for tights. But if we limit ourselves to this, if this is our programme and not just a tactic to help mobilize women in particular situations, all we are doing is organising women to be more efficiently and mercilessly exploited.

The question is: what in outline are the alternatives, in organisation and in demands?

First, the level of organisation of women is low. This is the most important reason why women in the movement are impelled to bring women into unions. Here is an institution already functioning and "experienced" — as we are not — which does not have to be built from the ground up. To think in terms of building organisations without traditions (except the traditions of the struggle itself) is to break from other traditions which, among other things, prevented a revolutionary women's movement for centuries. Independent organisation — independent of every section of the establish-

ment, is difficult to consider, let alone create, when thousands of women are not in motion.

But the picture is not as gloomy as it appears. There have been dozens if not hundreds of equal pay strikes. The Claimants Union (an organisation similar to the welfare rights organizations in the U.S. — ed.) is gaining in strength and has at its core unsupported mothers. And most recently, the women of the mine areas made the first attempt to organise independently. In addition, if we are not blinded by a "trade union consciousness" ourselves, we can see women even in the worst jobs and the most unorganised factories waging their struggle in completely new ways. Here is the DAILY SKETCH, January 18, 1971.

Thousands of girls quit humdrum factory jobs because they get fed up being treated like "robots".

They complain of monotonous and impersonal bosses.

The girls become frustrated because the jobs they do make little demand on their abilities and leave no room for personal satisfaction.

These were the main points of a survey by Bradford University into why 65 per cent of women quit their jobs in the electronics industry within a few months.

(You see who the universities are working for.)

We are not only victims; we are rebels too. The absenteeism of women is notorious. Instead of workers control of production, their action is more like workers control of the struggle, to hell with their production.

So that the first barrier to independent organisation, the supposed apathy of women, is not what has been assumed. If we begin to look with women's eyes, respecting what women do and not measuring them as men do, we will see a wealth of rebellion against and refusal of women's work and the relationships and roles they generate.

This is not always organised rebellion and refusal. Well then, let's organise it. The unions don't; they sit on its head.

There appear to be two levels of demands, the issues which arise on a local level, and the general demands which the movement comes to stand for. In reality our movement has suffered from an unnatural separation between the two. The Four Demands we marched for last year have been on the whole unconnected with individual group activity (in part at least because of the barrenness of those demands).

Our concern must be demands with which the movement articulates in few words the breadth of its rejection of the oppression and exploitation of women. The tension between a local struggle and the stated principles of the movement does not vanish but within each local demand, which mobilizes women wherever they are, the struggle loses its sporadic, provincial and disconnected character. The demands must raise possibilities of new kinds and areas of action in each local situation from the beginning, and always keep the fundamental issues before our eyes. There is much more to be said about this, but better to move to the proposed demands.

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 offices and put our children in their father's 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 can't afford? We are forced to demand abortion and sterilization 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 abortions 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 and 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 in a rent strike. But our inter-

vention can help guarantee that the women will also lead it, instead of being confined to making the tea in the back of the hall while the 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.

How do we organise a struggle around these demands? As I say, the Claimants Union has already begun. But the low level of organisation of women generally means that there is plenty hard work to be done.

We begin by uniting what capital has divided. If men have not yet learnt to support the equal pay fight which we have made, it is because their privileges over us — based on the dubious "privilege" of the wage itself — have blinded them to their class interests. They have always paid dearly for not uniting with us, by being thrown out of jobs to be replaced by "cheaper" female labour. We may still have to confront not only employers, unions and government but men too when we want equal pay. Equal pay for all may win them over to demanding equal pay also among themselves as well as with us. The battle for parity in auto is the class finding its way to just such a struggle.

We can organize women where they work for wages, where they shop, where they live and work. Women from

many industrial estates have shopping areas very near where they shop in their dinner hour. They often live close by. We can begin by leafletting in all three places, aiming to organise for their most pressing problems which are hours of work, wages, inflation, child care and slavery. Housewives can go to the SS (Social Security — ed.) offices and demand money, as the women and children from the mine areas did — we need not wait for the men to strike, we can ask them to strike to support what we are doing.

It is possible that women will feel too weak (or we will) to act independently of unions (though our job is to emphasise their potential strength), and there may be pressure on them from many sources — especially employers — for them to go into unions once they take action. At this point it is far from decisive. If we help get them moving on their demands, even what they can get from the unions will be greater. They gain confidence and experience; we all do, together. We can have strikes against inflation, rent rises, shift work for women and for men. We can offer a social existence to housewives other than another job — we can offer them the struggle itself.

Of course this is much easier said than done, though the situation in this country is changing so rapidly that every day more becomes possible. This is meant to begin a discussion of these possibilities, but on our terms. Nor is this anything like a complete picture of what is taking place in Britain today (or anywhere else), either among workers, or in board rooms, government offices or TUC headquarters. But it is clear to me and to others too I think that the time to make the leap from all that we have learnt in the small group discussions to political activity has come. We must not allow what we know is the female experience to be translated into the secondhand politics of “trade union consciousness”, which has been presented to us as the only viable alternative. Goodbye to all that. When 20% of the women of a mainly women’s factory don’t turn up for work on Monday, they are many years beyond the trade union struggle, in fact its mortal enemy. They are struggling not only for better conditions in which to be exploited but against exploitation, against work itself. We in the women’s

movement should be the last people to believe or act upon the absurd notion that women are incapable of leaping beyond the oppressive institutions which have trapped men. Because we have been ignored and excluded by these institutions it is precisely us who are in the position to move beyond them.

One final point. There is a debate that goes on about most of us being middle class. And we are. As the Notting Hill SHREW put it, to have sisterhood we have to get over the myths that only working class women are oppressed or that only middle class women can know they're oppressed. Some of us, let's face it, are only in the movement because capitalism is very backward and leaves women out of government and good paying professions. They will eventually discover that capital and the FINANCIAL TIMES have plans for them. But they must not hold the rest of us back.

A hell of a lot of us are fighting capital not because it is backward but because it exists. We are increasingly aware that the oppression of all women has its roots in the indispensable work, in home, in office, in hospital and in factory, that working class women perform for capital, sometimes with low wages, most often without wages. We must get over this guilt about having wall-to-wall carpeting and a "good" education — as if they ever taught us anything except to think like them and act for them. Guilt doesn't build a political movement; it inhibits and exhausts it. For guilt becomes sacrifice and sacrifice becomes either martyrdom or bitterness — or both.

The first step in the process of our liberation at this stage is to make our own independent evaluation of the political situation in this country (and later in the world — with the help of women in other countries) on the basis of what our guts and people like those in the mining areas have told us, and then act on it. Then the fact that we are middle class will not stand in the way of waging the class struggle, but as we women define it and as only we can wage it — for the first time in a generalised way. It will take some time, but then Rome wasn't destroyed in a day.

In Praise Of Ironing

Poetry is pure white :
it emerges from the water covered with drops,
all wrinkled, all in a heap.
It has to be spread out, the skin of this planet,
has to be ironed, the sea in its whiteness;
and the hands keep on moving,
smoothing the holy surfaces.
So are things accomplished.
Each day, hands re-create the world,
fire is married to steel,
and the canvas, the linens and the cottons return
from the skirmishing of the laundries;
and out of light is born a dove.
Out of the froth once more comes chastity.

Pablo Neruda
1962

The Carrot, The Stick, And the Movement

Sheila Rowbotham

This is not a detailed review of all the points in Selma James' pamphlet 'Women the Unions and Work'. Instead I want to take up some of the more general questions she raises.

CO-OPTION

Selma is pre-occupied with several forms of co-option, unions are presented as continually nobbling workers and capitalists co-opt both workers and Women's Liberation, while left groups lie in wait for women's liberators.

I'm not going to deal with the last kind of nobbling as I think it's better discussed out loud with very specific examples. Vague accusations only create an atmosphere of political paranoia and a reds-under-the-bed mentality which I am sure is very far from what Selma intends and only benefits the ruling class.

As for the co-optation of unions, the working class and possibly Women's Liberation too, it would be absurd to deny that these have not gone on and are not going on, or might not go on. The point is, how can we most effectively stop this process?

Selma keeps coming up with a series of scapegoats to explain failures and partial successes. This is all very well if we want to work off some rhetorical rage. But it doesn't help us to see how capitalism works and understand how to change it. The scapegoats serve as decoys. As long as we chase them we miss the social reality which brought them into being.

UNIONS

She says the unions fragment the working class, 'into those who have wages and those who don't'. In fact such a decision was created by capitalism. The factory system finally removed production from the home and brought the working class under the wage system. The growth of modern unions has come from this concentration of the labour force in the factory.

The work discipline of the factory which kept the machines running regularly was, and still is, bitterly resented by workers. It takes hours, days, years out of their lives. The employer takes a large part of what workers produce in the form of profits.

In resistance to the exploitation of their labour in this way workers have combined to raise the sum they can get out of the surplus they produce. Capitalism has thus made it possible for workers to create organizations to defend themselves on a scale that was impossible before.

Now although this kind of organising is limited to the wage bargain, it still constitutes a threat to the absolute control the employing class has over what the workers produce and the time they spend at work. It also makes possible the class pride and confidence workers gain through solidarity in strike action. The union organisation is necessary in order to prevent isolation of particular groups of workers.

Ever since the unions have been made legal the employers have tried alternatively to use the carrot and the stick. The carrot has been the co-option Selma notes. The stick has been the use of the state and the laws in the interests of private capital. The only effective weapon against this has been the continual creation of rank and file pressure and organisation. The shop steward movement is the obvious example; the movement for workers' control, another.

But this does not make the union structure unnecessary. If we only say women should organise where they work how do women on strike get support from other workers? How do they get strike pay?

If we are really serious about challenging male domination in the unions we should start by organising Women's Liberation groups at work and in union branches. Not as alternatives to unions but as a way of making industrial organisation both more effective against capitalism and more democratic, to go beyond the economic basis of the wage bargain. Women's Liberation groups are places where women can develop trust for each other as women. But working class women need class solidarity with men too.

WHERE WE COME FROM

Both feminism and the Women's Liberation movement have come, like the unions, out of particular historical situations in capitalist society. The early feminist movement's origin was the economic, social and political helplessness of middle class women who were excluded from production.

The main theme of this kind of feminism was for equal rights of jobs, before the law and for the vote. But Selma does them a disservice by saying they invited women to vote and be free. Many socialist feminists in the early 20th Century saw the vote as a necessary reform but by no means the answer to the oppression of women.

It is very important that we try to understand what kind of changes in capitalism have produced our own movement. Selma picks out one important factor, the potential use of educated female labour in middle management at lower rates of pay than men. She sees this as a way in which the

women's movement could be co-opted. But the way she presents this very real danger is confusing in the same way as is her analysis of the role of the unions in capitalism.

It was not the women's movement which produced the girls coming out of university as she implies. Higher education for women is a result of the need for a more educated labour force and of feminist agitation. It is of course still restricted mainly to middle class girls and is also not equal to men. Nonetheless the concentration of girls in universities which resulted from post war expansion, meant that middle class girls were shuffled into one of the most developed points of capitalism only to confront more clearly the underprivilege of their sexual future.

We come up with a terrible bump against the block between educational premise and practical reality.

REPRODUCTION OF THE LABOUR FORCE

We were not the only ones to be affected by changes in modern capitalism. The growth of welfare and the direct intervention of the state in the reproduction of the labour force has not only come about as a result of working class pressure. It also serves the long-term needs of capitalism for a relatively healthy and intelligent subservient labour force.

Fortunately this combination has proved dodgy again for capitalism and has created new ways of bargaining with the state, like the Claimants Union.

It has also made the nature of our up-bringing in the family, our education, our sexual relations, our feelings towards our parents and children, and the work women do in the family in reproducing the labour force, vital political questions. It is very important that we organise against capitalism at all the points where it reproduces itself.

AND ORGANISATION AT THE POINT OF PRODUCTION

However this does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bath water (to use a bad image). We should not

dismiss effective organisation at the point of production.

Selma's analysis disregards the significance of what has been an interrupted, but long-term trend in this century, the absorption of married women into the labour force. Capitalism has landed itself in the awkward position of depending on women's work in two places at once, at home and in industry.

It has tried of course to have it both ways, and force women to do two jobs. This process pre-dated the emergence of women's liberation. It was not a result of it as the Italian article Selma quotes implies.

'Capital itself is seizing upon the same impetus which created a movement — the rejection by millions of women of women's traditional place — to recompose the workforce with increasing numbers of women.'

In fact, this recomposition was well under way in the U.S. and in parts of Europe in the 50s when the propaganda about women being in the home was strongest and when Women's Liberation was being thought about only by tiny groups of women, among them, Selma in America and Simone de Beauvoir in France.

I am not saying that movements are the automatic response to crude economic facts or that consciousness does not change society, but that in reacting against this distortion in marxism, Selma lands us in another one.

Because she does not see movements and ideas as coming out of a social reality as well as transforming it, she misses the contradictory forces which bring us to conscious resistance. This has a serious strategic consequence because it means she emphasises organisation at home, around the reproduction of the labour force at the expense of organisation at the point of production.

Simply because some boneheaded marxist men have been dozy enough to stress only economic organising doesn't mean that we have to rush off in the opposite direction.

The importance of Women's Liberation is precisely that it makes it possible to cut through the separation between home and work, production and consumption, wage earner and dependant, man and woman, which has always helped to make capitalism stable. That is why working class

women are such an important group — their class and sex situation makes the connection necessary.

It's no good making a demand like paying people to do housework. This does not socialise housework. It merely confirms the isolation of the houseworker, in her, or less likely in his, nuclear home. It does not connect those who are responsible for the reproduction of the work force to wage workers in commodity production.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Implicit in Selma's pamphlet is an analogy between women and the underdeveloped economies. The Italian article she quotes touches on this and the danger of struggling against women's specific oppression only to reach 'another degree of capitalistic control and regimentation.' This is a very real danger and I think it's a pity she hasn't tried really to disentangle what this underdevelopment of ours involves and how this relates to the dominant form of production in capitalism and to the dominance of men in our culture.

This confusion means she falls into the opposite trap. Instead of simply getting capitalism to rationalize itself, she tends to idealize the symptoms of our weakness in capitalism. Absenteeism may be a gesture of revolt, but I don't see how we can stop the Tories cheating us out of equal pay if we never turn up for work.

We must be careful in asserting an alternative to male domination that we stress our possible strengths not our existing vulnerability.

Many of Selma's demands are based on the desire most of us feel to find a short cut out of capitalism. Of course we are opposed to price rises but it is a problem when we try to take long-term effective action against them. Of course we would like to work less. But this demand would get many employers laughing up their sleeve at the moment.

This is why the men and women who are demanding the right to work have a more realistic idea of making a demand which can be organised round in a decaying capitalist economy. To say we want to work less confuses the present

situation with a future socialist society and misses out the struggle in between.

There is no short cut out of capitalism, no amount of wishing and willing and demanding in the air will make the grotesque old monster pack his bags and go quietly off to some remote desert island for a quiet retirement.

PATRIARCHY

The disentangling of the non- or sub- capitalist elements in our predicament is one of the most crucial theoretical and practical tasks ahead of us. The danger of exposing women more completely to capitalism mentioned in the Italian article quoted by Selma is very real.

Capital itself has whittled away at patriarchal authority, which is based on the ownership of women's persons by men and rooted in the family as an economic unit of production.

Patriarchy, however, has survived though in a distorted form into capitalism. Like other 'backward' i.e. non-capitalist forms of ownership and production it owes its survival to the manner in which it serves capital. Capitalism is thus continually eating away at the subcapitalist remnants which feed it.

It is not clear whether capitalism could continue without patriarchy and the special oppression of women. It is certainly very difficult to imagine capitalism without male domination. But it would be rash of us to imagine that the struggle against male domination alone is sufficient to end capitalism. Our success will depend on the strength of other movements, against imperialism, racism and class exploitation and our ability to unite with them.

Our task is to make a strategy which will guard our autonomy but to make alliances with other movements of the oppressed, which will devise means of continuously breaking down the divisions capitalism has forced between us, and which neither idealises underdevelopment or exposes us to more systematic exploitation. The difficulties are tremendous. But it is our only chance of victory.

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Women's Labor, Women's Discontent

Angela Weir &
Elisabeth Wilson

Since Selma James produced her pamphlet, *WOMEN, THE UNIONS AND WORK, OR WHAT IS NOT TO BE DONE* many women will have discussed it. Given the centrality of the question of women and trades unionism it is perhaps worth re-examining the arguments again. We believe these involve three levels of analysis: 1) an analysis of the social formations which produce the conditions of capitalism; 2) an analysis of the operations of capitalism at a particular time, i.e. now (this must involve history) and the particular contradictions of capitalism; 3) from the above two, a strategy for women now.

Taking the first point the analysis of the extra-parliamentary left in England — this means really the Trotskyist left — is that the crucial and determinant social formation in capitalism is the formation of the means of production and that this is located in the factory. Therefore revolu-

tionary activity must begin by organising at the level of the means of production. Further to this there is the quasi-psychological assumption that the grouping together of large numbers of men in large units of production will provide the subjective conditions for the realisation of class consciousness and revolutionary organisation.

On the second level it is thought that the particular organisation workers have evolved to defend themselves are the trades unions, and that therefore it is crucial to work within these "natural" organisations of the proletariat and by a series of carefully framed demands and political education pave the way for the highest form of revolutionary struggle, namely dual power, which is created through the formation of factory committees which link to form some united confederation of workers in which quick and generalised uprisings will be the instruments for taking power. Their strategy proceeds from this analysis.

We reject this analysis and agree with much of Selma James' criticism.

However, we feel that because her analysis is based on a primarily descriptive/empirical account of women's relationship with the trades unions and of the nature of women's work, her paper has an insufficient theoretical basis and so in the end insufficient strategical and hence organisational directives. We wish to advance some possible lines for analysis.

Firstly at the most theoretical level we feel it is crucial to analyse not only the means of production but also the reproduction of the means of production, especially in terms of the reproduction of labour power, and the reproduction of the relations of production. It is perhaps in capital's ongoing struggle not only to produce but also to reproduce the conditions of production — to keep its own system going — that some of its basic contradictions may be revealed.

We feel that this is the theoretical viewpoint towards which Selma, and also Mariarosa Dalla Costa in the Italian pamphlet ("Women and the Subversion of the Community" in *Radical America*, Jan.-Feb., 1972 — ed.), are both reaching, yet their analyses of women's labour still seems to be

determined by the concept of "means of production" rather than "reproduction of the relations of production", and thus their analysis is too primarily "economic".

In the case of Selma's pamphlet the demands reflect a more or less ad hoc mixture of "material" (economic) demands, e.g. equal pay for all; and what are usually seen as more "ideological" demands, e.g. the right to control our own bodies.

In the case of Dalla Costa, whose pamphlet is more explicitly theoretical, the problem is originally posed in terms of the haunting premise of cultural lag. (We do not especially criticise her for this, because this is the way the "traditional" left has often interpreted the problem and she is trying to argue against it). She says capitalism creates wage labour, and that from this women and children (and one might add the old) are excluded. Being excluded from labour these groups lose their power, and "...thus with the advent of the capitalist mode of production... women were relegated to a condition of isolation, enclosed within the family cell, dependent in every aspect upon men... she remained in a pre-capitalist stage of personal dependence."

What seems ambiguous about Dalla Costa's pamphlet is that she appears partially to accept this vision of women excluded and thus locked in the cell of cultural and material dependency, whilst also asserting — and this is the main argument of the pamphlet — that women do produce surplus value. "We have to make clear that within the wage domestic work not only produces use value but is an essential function in the production of surplus value." We describe this as her main argument because she devotes 11 pages to her analysis of the "productivity" of domestic labour and because she also discusses women's sexual sublimation and passivity in terms of "productivity". In section C she does talk about women being responsible for the reproduction of labour power, but devotes only a paragraph to it. Also, rather strangely, she finds that the cause of women's role in reproducing labour power (interpreted as disciplining husband and children) is the psychological stunting of her personality. Then this function is linked back to sexual

passivity which in turn is a prerequisite or result — the causal sequence isn't quite clear — of women's exclusion from labour. To sum up, Dalla Costa is saying that in these three ways — 1) producing domestic labour, 2) being sexually passive and 3) being disciplinarians to children and husbands — women are being productive, though it is unclear whether or not she is saying that the second and third functions produce surplus value. So having "proved" that women produce labour qua their role of women, women then have their own ticket to create the socialist revolution. Her final section is headed "The Struggle against Labour" and her concluding thought seems to be that to liberate themselves from their exploitation housewives (is this synonymous with all women?) must "recognise themselves also as a section of the class, the most degraded because they are not paid a wage."

But who then are women struggling against, to whom then are they going to make their demands — the bosses? the government? their husbands? to all of these groups in a free-wheeling female holocaust? What is the basis of women's power if they destroy the family? Although Dalla Costa gives a Marxist analysis of women's position, and although she makes a number of acute empirical observations, all that really emerges is the demand for women to make demands in an unsystematic way — to go down to the local T. U. (Trade Union — ed.) meetings and make the men demand an end to shift work so we can make love at nights, go down to the medical students and demand that they give us the knowledge and means to have or not to have birth control, abortions etc., and so on. To be frivolous one might say that women are being told "if you're going to nag, nag about the right things." To be less frivolous one might say that although one agrees with many of these demands in themselves, they add up to no more than a mindless activism which tends to be debilitating and frustrating in the long run, and which doesn't amount to the class struggle or the possibilities of class victory.

We shall return to points about strategy and the alternatives to random demands later, but here we would just like to argue that Dalla Costa takes the wrong concept as

an instrument for analysis and that it would be more satisfactory to analyse the position of women from an analysis of the reproduction of the conditions of production.

In talking about the reproduction of the conditions of production we are discussing two things: 1) the reproduction of labour power, and 2) the reproduction of the relations of production. We believe these two functions are crucial to an ongoing capitalist society and that women's position in capitalism is fundamentally defined by their relationship to these two processes. In saying this we agree with Dalla Costa that capitalism does and has excluded women from production, but we are asserting that capitalism also creates new forms of institutions and roles for women and that these can be explained by the necessity for any society to create means by which it will reproduce itself. To get to the point at last, capitalism consists not only of a new type of infra-structure, but also of a new superstructure and a new state. Rather than women's productive labour being hidden because they aren't paid a wage, what is continually hidden is women's ideological role in a number of state apparatuses, particularly the family, and the reasons why this role is crucial to capitalism.

Starting from 1) then, women are crucial in the reproduction of labour power because:-

1) They are given the total responsibility for the reproduction of children, whilst lacking the means to control in any way that process. These means are controlled by state institutions — in the case of the U.K. directly, since these are publicly owned.

2) Women have the responsibility for using the husband's wage for the purpose it is intended, i.e. the material reproduction of labour power. There are two parts to this function: firstly there is that of buying food, clothing, housing etc., and secondly the labour of processing and maintaining them. Again, as in the case of having children, women are responsible for the wage but have no control over the means by which it is distributed.

In speaking of the wage one should also note that in the conditions of monopoly capitalism the wage is usually insufficient to cover the successful material reproduction of

the wage labourer, and that two other mechanisms are often created to assist this process — 1) surplus value is often channelled away from the firm to the state and paid out again in the form of housing subsidies, health service subsidies etc., though this in no way amounts to an equal redistribution of income. Also one might note that much of the government's money comes from taxation on the wage itself and thus the state has control over the supply of many of the minimum material necessities; and 2) women go out to work to supplement the male wage.

So women have responsibility for the material reproduction of the worker but lack control in a double sense in that they lack control over the state institutions. Women are crucial in the reproduction of the relations of production in the following ways :-

1) The care and socialisation of children. It is crucial for capitalism not only to reproduce labour materially but also to ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or consent to its practice. That this be the major responsibility of women particularly during the formative learning years of a child's early life is, we suggest, a feature specific to capitalism. However, here again the state controls the educational system and while women have more autonomous responsibility in the care of children than in other functions, the state through the educational system still controls much of the ideological socialisation which again is the women's responsibility. Arguably this is particularly the case at nursery and primary school level.

2) The disciplining of the husband — ensuring his continued ideological subjection by explicitly emphasising her own and the children's dependence on his continuing wage.

In making these remarks we emphasise that they are likely to be more true the further down the social scale one goes — for instance sexual roles are most rigidly defined in the lower working class — and that perhaps they are most true of some black families and of immigrant workers in Europe. There the man as wage labourer is often banished from the scene altogether and women are thrown in a direct relationship with the state.

We have tried to suggest that the crucial social formations of capitalism in which women play a role are the reproduction of labour power and the relations of production and that an analysis of women primarily in terms of their "productivity" masks the centrality of their role in reproducing the conditions of production. We want in this section to look at the present concrete operation of this role, but shall merely suggest some further possibilities for investigation since we have not done enough research to go more deeply.

It seems that the most significant factors in the present situation are high unemployment, inflation, the decreasing taxation of the very rich, the cutting of state welfare subsidies and the full introduction of means-tested social services.

British capitalism, faced with severe international competition and indeed the wage demands of the working class itself has been forced to respond in a number of ways.

1) Automation — productivity bargaining. Capital is being concentrated in high-output, labour saving machinery. As an example of rationalisation we quote from a report in the Guardian (21.8.72) on the Covent Garden move to Nine Elms, drawing attention to the fact that it hints at a theme of a number of recent labour struggles, namely a connection between the job and life outside or around the job. "Faced with the loss of the human elements which have made work in Covent Garden worthwhile... market workers are ready to demand compensation in traditional style; by hard wage bargaining... The new market will be more like a factory than a garden... (and)... the inevitability of the move, the well-publicised activities of property developers in shaping the new Covent Garden, and the imminent break-up of old-established employer-employee relationships have all contributed to a new mood of political awareness in the Garden."

New investment will mean less jobs, not more. The object of productivity deals are wage rises in return for less shop floor control, speed-up, measured day work, higher productivity per worker and cuts in the labour force. The result is a smaller workforce, more output (product) per

worker and more total product, labour cost decreasing proportionately to increased output, and increased surplus value.

2) The "lame duck" rationalisation policy in private and nationalised industry. This has meant profitable parts of nationalised industry being sold to "Heath's friends", while the social parts from which we all benefit are cut back — for example the postal service — with consequent redundancies. It has meant factories and sections not immediately profitable being wiped out, because other factories and sections are producing more, usually within the same firm.

3) Wage freezes — the 2 norm.

4) Increasing the cost of the Welfare State — free milk in schools is abolished, prescription charges are re-established, and at the present time rent increases are especially important. In *British Capitalism, Workers and the Profits Squeeze* (Penguin, 1972) Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe point out that, among many other weapons used with the purpose of increasing investment in the present economic situation, the Tory Government has already increased welfare charges at the same time as decreasing taxation of the very rich in an attempt to redistribute income to capital. "The working class is also hit by reductions in social services, agricultural price guarantees and housing subsidies, which will involve a saving of something like 1.25 billion dollars in 1974/5 on Labour programmes. These reductions include almost 125 million dollars in reduced food subsidies (and therefore higher food prices) and 250-500 million dollars from higher council rents. Those people below the official poverty line will escape some of the higher charges provided they submit to more means tests, and those who are very badly paid will, if they come forward, benefit a bit from the F.I.S. (Family Income Supplement — ed.) which still leaves them below the poverty line. But for the working class as a whole these changes in public expenditure involve clear reductions in living standards, proportionately much greater than those suffered by higher income groups."

These attacks on the working class are being backed up by legislation designed to lock the working class more

firmly in their cycle of dependence upon and subservience to the ruling class. The two most important pieces of legislation are the I.R.B. (Industrial Relations Board — ed.) and the introduction of means tested social services. Both say that same thing — if you are not officially recognised by the ruling class you have no right to challenge the existing distribution of income, nor even to possess the minimum necessary to live, a house, food, clothing. It has always been true that the ruling class decides who shall live and who shall starve; the new Tory legislation merely spells it out more crudely.

How do these processes affect women?

Welfare cuts are especially meaningful to women, who bear the brunt of them. They have a bearing too on working politically and organising in the community. Women are in fact caught and crushed between two opposing economic forces, the reality of price rises and welfare cuts and the ideology of consumption and the commodity, in which they play a key role. The point about consumerism is not that the use of well made and useful household objects or the desire for a more comfortable life are in themselves bad — and the Women's Movement must guard against the strain of puritanism that tends to imply such enjoyment is suspect — but that in this society, in the pursuit of higher and higher profits and more and more consumption therefore, women (as the main purchasers) are offered an ever increasing assortment of useless and unnecessary articles whilst real necessities — decent housing, strong furniture, safe toys — are unobtainable. It is part of the ideology of consumerism that women are encouraged to compete against one another. And there is no need to labour the point about the blatant untruthfulness of advertising.

In fact, as Selma points out, the vast majority of women can't afford the basic necessities of life for their families and themselves unless they work. Selma attempts to show how women's position is crucial in the economic situation, and she talks a lot about work, and the protest against the Protestant Work Ethic. It has been suggested that there has been a confusion here between "work" and "labour" or "wage labour". This doesn't make the theme less impor-

tant, though it indicates the degree of confusion surrounding it.

On the one hand the pamphlet expresses a deep rejection of the Work Ethic of our society as it is currently expressed in our daily lives. This is exemplified in mystifying demands by militants for "the right to work" and also in the total refusal to work among sections of the youth culture ("work's too oppressive").

Most of us have been brought up with a dual attitude to work. It is portrayed to us when young as an evil necessity about which adults complain ("your schooldays are the happiest days of your life"), albeit with martyred self-satisfaction, yet children do notice how their fathers often seem lost when on holiday and become increasingly irritable and bored without their work, so that all are relieved when the holiday ends and they can return to it. On reaching adult status we are urged to find "work you can enjoy", and it is implied that there is something wrong with anyone who can't "buckle down to a useful job of work" ("His trouble is he doesn't like work"). Middle class and working class, alike yet in different ways, are deeply ambivalent about work, and one should not underestimate the importance of this psychology of work.

We differ however from Selma over her conclusions. She states her aim as follows:-

"Our concern must be demands with which the Movement articulates in few words the breadth of its rejection of the oppression and exploitation of women. The tension between a local struggle and the stated principles of the Movement does not vanish, but within each local demand which mobilises women wherever they are, the struggle loses its sporadic, provincial and disconnected character."

Can demands do this, though? What are demands? Demands restrict thought by tying it down to something too immediate and specific. Demands are easily misunderstood and distorted. They are already an over-simplification, and can be no substitute for an analysis or for the manifesto — a more coherent statement of aims — which could come out of that analysis. Selma does not show that her demands connect.

What then do we do? Before discussing positive alternatives it is again necessary to explain where and why we disagree with Selma.

The issue of work seems to be connected with what we term Life Style Politics. We believe this is an important theme in the Women's Movement, but a partly submerged and unarticulated one. It represents a rebellion against the work ethic, and has also tried to offer an alternative based on co-operation (food co-operatives, communal living, non-monogamous relationships etc.), on certain kinds of organisation such as the C.U.s [Claimants Unions, similar to the National Welfare Rights Organization in the U.S. — ed.] and generally on values other than the bourgeois values of acquisitiveness (consumerism), with an emphasis on the de-scaling rather than the proliferation of needs (in the area of fashion the abandonment of make-up, "hairstyles" etc. etc., and of exaggerated cleanliness and routinisation in the sphere of housework). If we need fewer possessions we need work less because we need less money and we can make what we have go further by sharing it, is one belief underlying this life style.

It is in a sense an exemplary way of life, to be differentiated on that count from the drop-out, inturned "counter-culture" of hippies, though it has points of contact with it. Exemplary politics have been a feature of the left for a long time. Gramsci for instance defined this tendency as follows; "...there is one traditional party too with an essentially 'indirect' character — which in other words presents itself explicitly as purely 'educative', moral, cultural. This is the anarchist movement. Even so-called direct (terrorist) action is conceived of as 'propaganda' by example. This only confirms the judgment that the anarchist movement is not autonomous, but exists on the margin of the other parties, 'to educate them'."

Now we believe that in the present situation such exemplary politics cannot be the correct ones for us as women to pursue, because what we have to do is not to educate the left, but to create it, create at least our own left-wing movement and create its relationship to the wider struggle,

or perhaps it would be better to say situate ourselves simultaneously as the wider struggle and in it.

Exemplary life-style politics also emphasise the gulf between one consciousness and another. Are those who live in this new way political activists? To themselves they are; to many working class women they are incomprehensible, bizarre and therefore sinister. This is a familiar problem. But it does not need to be restated that it really is not good enough to reject working class women who are scared by talk of ripping off from supermarkets and don't wish to take part in even collective demonstrative public action of this kind because it is "stealing" and they don't believe in "breaking the law". False consciousness maybe, but also a realistic understanding on the part of say, a working mother of just what she would risk should she get done — her life smashed up, her kids in care, at the best interference from welfare workers or a probation officer.

Ripping off is, as a matter of fact, a demonstration akin to the absenteeism of which Selma speaks. She calls this women's refusal. Their revolt. True. Yet it achieves nothing. In the first place the management of a factory can get replacements for the girls on an assembly line and usually costs for a quick turnover and high absenteeism so they don't suffer too much (just as supermarkets cost for shoplifting). Nor does the individual woman benefit ultimately since disaffection from work is part of a vicious circle, it is one reason why she gets married young and "settles down" to have a family — only to have to return eventually to a similar hateful job, from which this time, because of her family responsibilities, she usually can't escape, unless indeed the second time around she takes refuge in mental breakdown, as frequently happens.

The apotheosis of unfreedom is the temporary typist, of whom Germaine Greer wrote as though the Temp. were the unfettered, roaming gipsy of our society, the truly free and ultimately liberated woman with no hang-ups about bourgeois security — when again in the long term to do temp. work is merely a recognition that a job for women is just a way of filling in time until you find a husband. To work

in that way is to extend prostitution from the sphere of sexuality to the sphere of intellectual functioning.

But in any case female absenteeism can be virtually abolished by a simple rearrangement of shifts to fit in with the "family responsibilities" of women (i.e. the fact that women have two jobs). The Peak Frean factory in Bermondsey discovered this some years ago. By introducing a nursery for babies and enabling women to fit their shifts around the family timetable, instead of vice versa, they reduced absenteeism and high turnover to zero without making costly concessions.

Absenteeism, like ripping off from supermarkets, is the private, negative politics of rebellion and refusal. It is a way of saying "no", of taking a secret revenge against the monolithic Them of the state. Life style politics goes a step further in that it is a public demonstration and a way of saying "Things are not the way we want them — this is how they should be," and at least they are collective and not isolated. But there is more difference than a transposition of letters between reactive and creative politics. These reactive life style politics are the politics of weakness because they proceed on the assumption that an actual revolution or transformation is impossible, and that therefore all one can do is create one's own revolutionary ghetto.

Of course we all hate work — wage labour — as it is in this society. We hate being assembly line fodder, we hate being house-cleaning and baby-rearing fodder, we hate being pen-pushing or managerial fodder.

Yet the demand to work less is confusing because it actually could only come about in an "affluent" society — the day surely will come when we work a 20 hour week — and could not be achieved, and in any case would be an irrelevant demand, in a transformed society in which this country had relinquished its exploitative relationship with the Third World.

We should like to see a society in which the bourgeois distinction between work and "leisure" — "spare time" as it is so significantly called — was destroyed and transcended. What we rebel against is the separation of work from enjoyment, and of home from work. Nor do we want

individual men taking over some of "our" jobs in the home while we take over some of "his" in the office or factory. We want greater flexibility between work and home — to have our kids with us at our place of work, or to work at home; we want greater flexibility in our concepts of what is mental and what is manual labour, and also of the nature of skills. The rebellion of women against being cast all and always in the same mould of home-maker extends to every sphere. Is it necessary for any individual to spend 50 years on a production line or as a teacher? So-called experience and expertise are valuable but in our present society are fetishised and often merely an excuse for privilege.

The political struggle does transcend the false categories of work and play and Selma is right to say that ultimately that is at least a part of what the Movement has to offer all women — the struggle for a better society and the belief that this is possible.

So we return at last — and too briefly — to strategy and organisation. The struggle must go on at different levels. Our priorities would be :-

1) A general ideological struggle arising out of a development of some of the ideas we have sketched above. Instead of piecemeal struggles — for contraception and abortion on demand, free schools etc. — and the perpetual confrontation with sexism, which often amounts to no more than lip service being paid to a situation which runs very deep, a coherent consciousness of our position as women as essential to the maintenance of the ideology of the capitalist state would suggest a more co-ordinated and consistent attack. This attack would not then be seen as an alternative or as in conflict with political work at the point of production or in the community, whereas at present what should be work connected to our position as bolsterers up of the predominant ideology too easily degenerates into merely the search for personal liberation (my man isn't oppressive etc.).

2) The struggle against the state in the community. This could be co-ordinated with the struggle in factories on an area basis. We might ask in passing what the "community" is or can be in our society. Community feeling and com-

munity loyalty can often be initially aroused only around negative issues of felt need as slum clearance systematically destroys the old working-class communities and our society becomes even more fragmented. In suburbs or housing estates the men go away to work leaving a purdah of young women and small children, and neither there nor at work is there a place for the adolescents, who become the werewolves of our society, nor is there a place for the old, who become its ghosts.

Yet the struggle in the community has already begun; it has to be co-ordinated and collectively directed against the state and made into a visible part of the same struggle as the struggle at the point of production.

3) We as women need our own organisation. If we do not have this we too will fall back into piecemeal and isolated groups and the Women's Movement will die. We have not had time in preparing this pamphlet to make concrete proposals as to what form this organisation should take, so we simply suggest that it should be a priority for discussion in the Movement.

A final word. This, which started as a reply to Selma but which, we hope, now exists in its own right as the beginnings of our own analysis — however sketchy at present — is heavy and perhaps will be criticised for being too theoretical. Our aim however is to contribute towards the ending of a false division between theory and practice. That is why we believe in a theoretical analysis as an indispensable part of action, for from the theory actions, such as we suggest, should spring.

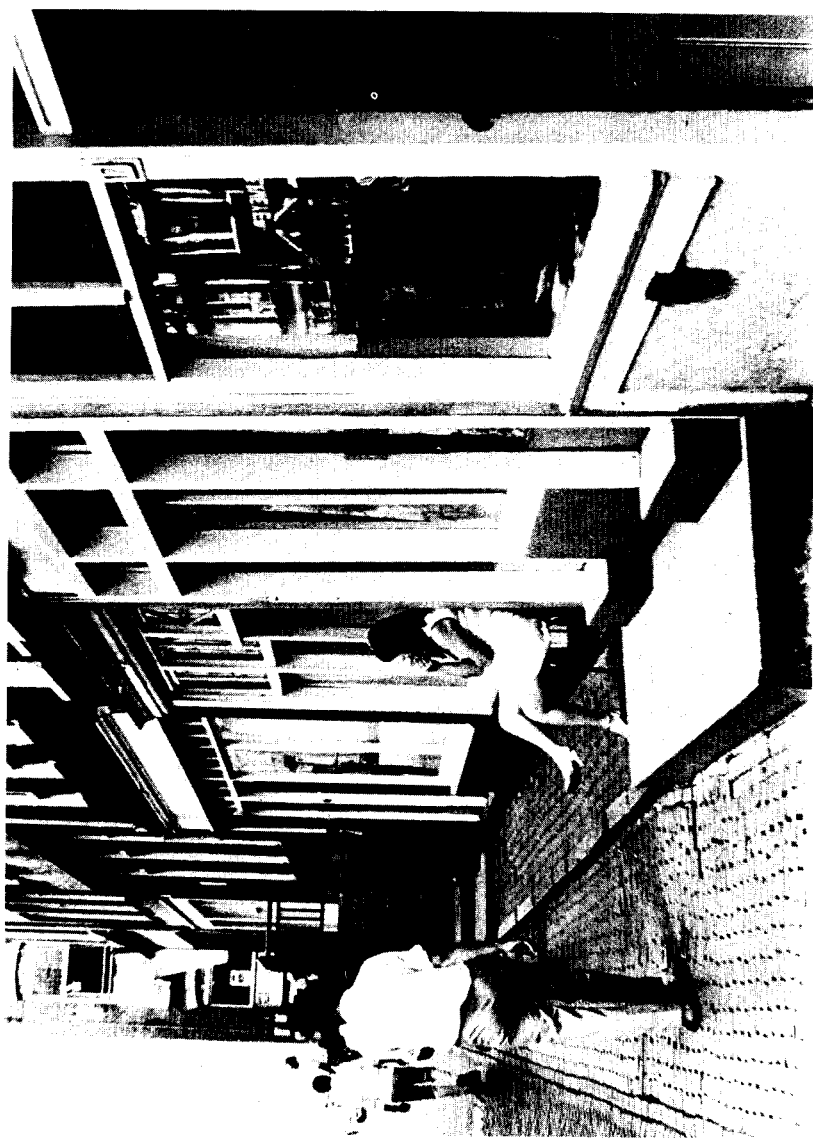
August-October, 1972.

WOMEN WORKING

Jerry Berndt & Ann Popkin



Berndt, Grosse Point, Michigan, 1972.



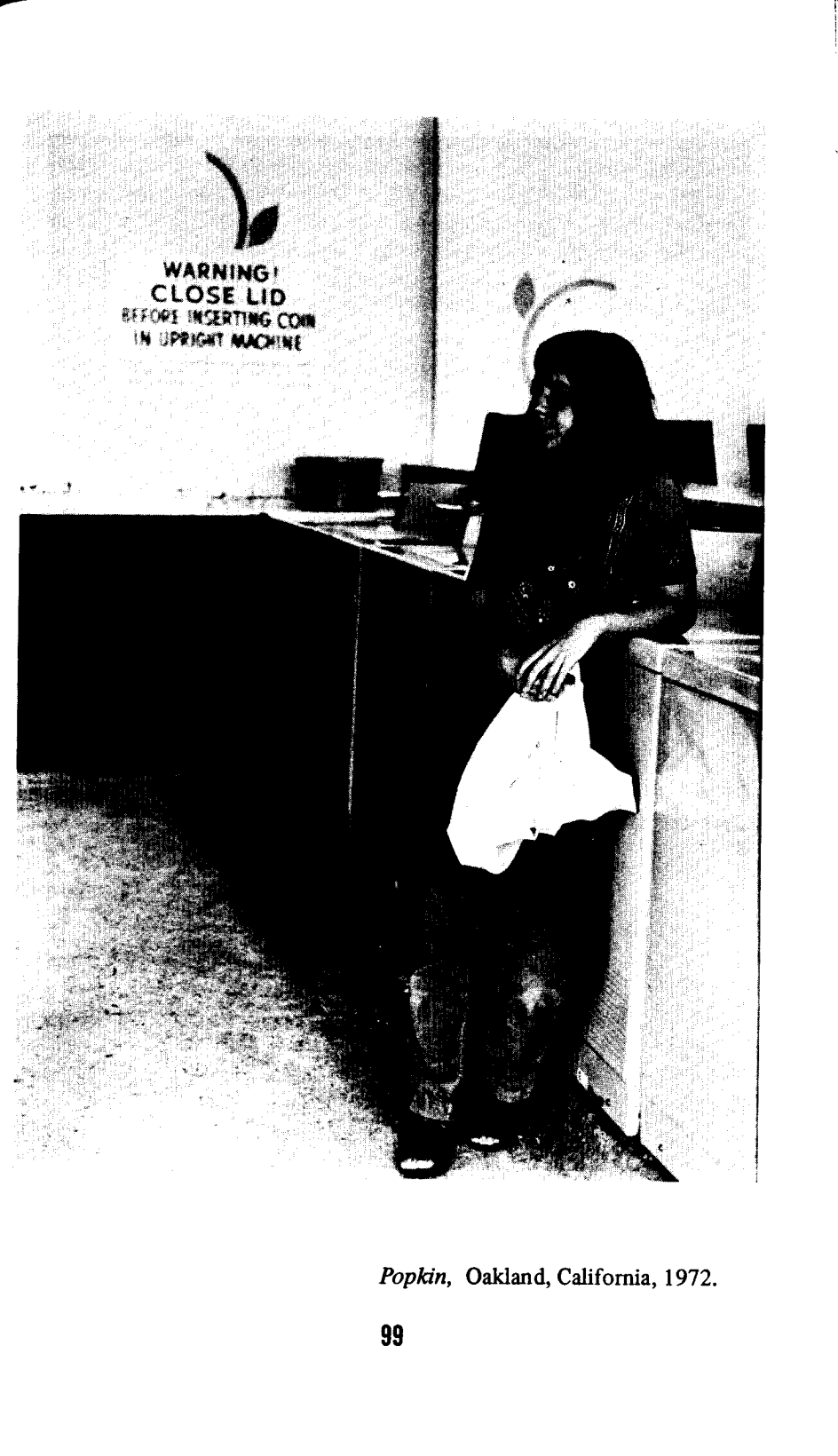
Popkin, Amsterdam, 1968.



Berndt, Detroit, 1972.



Popkin, Cambridge, Mass., 1970.



WARNING!
CLOSE LID
BEFORE INSERTING COIN
IN UPRIGHT MACHINE

Popkin, Oakland, California, 1972.



Berndt, Detroit, Del Ray, Michigan, 1972.

Domestic Work And Capitalism

Ira Gerstein

I. PRODUCTION RELATIONS AND THE PRODUCTION OF LABOR-POWER

The precise nature of domestic work, that is the work done mainly by women within the family, has been the subject of much discussion and analysis over the past several years. This paper is a contribution to that discussion. Its purpose is to develop a Marxist understanding of the nature of production within the family. (1)

Such a Marxist analysis is not simply a matter of "applying" a ready-made theory to a new problem. Although there are hints and fragmentary formulations in Marx's work that seem to be relevant to an understanding of domestic work, they are not sufficient to constitute a theory. Rather than rely on these fragments, we must extend Marx's basic categories in such a way that a systematic understanding

of domestic work will flow from them, just as an understanding of the function and nature of wage-labor flows from Marx's categories as we presently have them. Thus a discussion of domestic work depends on, and at the same time constitutes, a development of Marxism itself.

Marxist analysis begins with the notion of the commodity, a category that represents the most abstract and general characterization of the capitalist mode of production. Goods in this society are produced in the form of commodities, that is, as articles produced by private producers for the purpose of exchange. Marx's theory is, essentially, a theory of the social relationships of production between people in such a system, the forms they take, and the direction and consequences of their development. Because, in this most abstract picture of capitalism, the producers of commodities have no relationships with each other except when they meet in the market, where they exchange the things they have produced, all of the social relations of production necessarily take the form of properties of things. Value is the most fundamental and basic Marxist category. It is a social relationship that appears in the form of a property of commodities; it expresses the production relationship that exists between commodity producers — that each has produced and owns a commodity for which he or she has no use and which she or he wants to exchange. (2)

Capitalism is characterized by more than the general fact that all goods are produced as commodities. Under capitalism labor-power itself, the capacity of human beings to transform material from one form into other, more desirable, forms, becomes a commodity. Thus it acquires a value in the above sense. This fact provides the key for an analysis of domestic work. Although it is universally true, in all forms of society, that the work done by and within the family (or other grouping) to care for and maintain its members is also the maintenance of their ability to labor and do work, under capitalism this work becomes a type of commodity production — the production of the commodity labor-power. Domestic work is the aspect of this general, multi-faceted household labor that is specifically the production and maintenance of labor-power. That is to say,

domestic work is a production relationship centered upon the production of labor-power.

Taken in this sense, the conception of domestic work is an abstraction (for example, raising children involves other things than the production of future labor-power); it is only by making abstractions of this type that we can specify the aspects of household labor that can be analyzed in Marxist terms, and so related to the overall mode of capitalist production. But this abstraction is not simply an arbitrary theoretical distinction. It is forced on us by capitalism itself, because of the overwhelmingly important part played by the fact that labor-power is a commodity. It is this reality that leads us to consider those aspects of household labor that are specifically the production of labor-power under the category domestic work. Of course, in the actuality of daily life this separation is rarely or never made; the connections between what I will analyze as domestic work and concrete experience must be grasped more fully than I am able to do here.

The production, reproduction and maintenance of labor-power are scarcely considered by Marx. The words are there, of course, but as categories they are curiously static and passive. This failure to perceive the production of labor-power as really being commodity production leads to the consequent failure to perceive domestic work as an independent category, on an equal footing with, albeit different from, wage-labor. In order to correct this lack we have to view capitalism itself from a slightly different angle from the one that Marx emphasized, an angle that will stress the production of labor-power, and so enable us to "see" the independent existence of domestic work. In this way the analysis of domestic work will be organically located within the capitalist reality of which it is a part. For this purpose the essential feature of capitalism is the division of society into two classes, the working class and the capitalist class. Different ways of characterizing the basis of this division display different aspects of the system. We can understand why domestic work is not a prominent feature of traditional Marxist approaches by examining just what aspects of the class relationships they emphasize.

The standard way of describing the relationship between the working class and the capitalist class is to observe that the capitalist class owns the means of production, while the working class owns only its own labor-power. Because the worker cannot produce anything without using appropriate means of production, he or she must sell his or her labor-power to the capitalist, who then sets it to work for himself. This approach describes capitalism as a property relation — as ownership and non-ownership. The capitalist owns the means of production and, after buying it on the market, comes to own the worker's labor-power. This sale literally turns labor-power into a form of capital. When he produces commodities, the capitalist consumes his own capital, including the labor-power he has purchased. In other words, the capitalist production of commodities is simultaneously the consumption of labor-power. In short, the point of view taken in this description of capitalism is really that of capital. The consumption of labor-power, rather than its production, appears in an immediate and direct way. In this view, labor-power simply appears and reappears for sale as a commodity; the domestic work that maintains and reproduces it is of no particular interest. The working class is defined negatively — it doesn't own the means of production — rather than by the fact that it produces and exchanges what is, after all, the most characteristic and basic commodity of capitalism, namely, labor-power.

The essence of this description is that, seeing things from the point of view of capital, it emphasizes the purchase and use of labor-power by the capitalists, and so its sale and alienation by the laborer. If, instead, we look at things from the viewpoint of the working class, we get a somewhat different picture. The great majority of people, the working class, are producers too. They produce, bring to market, and sell the only commodity they can — their own labor-power. The class they meet in the market, the class that buys and consumes labor-power, rather than produces and sells it, is the capitalist class. Here we are stressing not questions of ownership and non-ownership, but rather what is produced. The production of labor-power by the working class is as real as the production of all

other commodities by the capitalists. The point is that commodity production does take place outside of the capitalist factory as well as inside of it. The production of labor-power is the indispensable complement of capitalist production. Domestic labor in the home maintains and reproduces this labor-power, and so is itself real productive activity. In this view the working class is defined positively, labor-power is seen from the point of view of its production, and so domestic work becomes visible as an important category in the capitalist mode of production.

A view that sees the working class as the producers of the commodity labor-power might seem to be subordinate to the one that sees them as non-owners of the means of production. (3) After all, it might be argued, no one would have to sell labor-power if they owned their own means of production. If labor-power didn't have to be sold it wouldn't be a commodity, and it weren't a commodity its production wouldn't be commodity production. In fact, in a historical sense, this argument is true. Labor-power became a commodity only when people were forcibly and unwillingly separated from their means of production. Peasants were forced off the land and were transformed into wage-laborers. Small producers and craftsmen, unable to become large-scale producers because of the costs involved, were forced into debt and ultimate ruin. They too had no other choice than to hire themselves out to others — to sell their labor-power.

Nevertheless, I would argue that these two aspects, labor-power as a commodity and the separation of the worker from his or her own means of production, attain a real degree of autonomy and differentiation with the development of capitalism and should no longer be rigidly identified, one with the other. One indication of this is the immense development, over the past 200 years, in the size, power and capacity of the means of production themselves. This development was made possible precisely because they were separated from the direct producers and transformed into capital, which revolutionizes them to an extent found in no other mode of production. During an earlier stage in the evolution of capitalism than we are now in, it was perhaps

not a completely unrealistic hope for a worker to think of regaining her or his individual means of production and in that way freeing himself or herself from wage slavery. The dream of owning some kind of small business has animated the U.S. working class up until the present day, but now even that dream must fade as the successful small business becomes increasingly rare. It is these developments that have led to the autonomy of the production of labor-power from questions of ownership of the means of production within capitalism; there is simply no way in which worker ownership of the means of production could be implemented on an individual basis. Looking toward the future we can envision that the condition for a communist society, in which labor-power will no longer be a commodity, should not be thought of so much as the reuniting of the producer with the means of production, but rather, that goods in general will no longer be produced as commodities.

At any rate, our situation today is one in which the production of labor-power as a commodity has become an autonomous rather than subordinate characteristic of capitalism. It has acquired a dynamic of its own, and indeed, this aspect of capitalist society is increasingly visible as it functions less and less smoothly. The growing instability in the family and the educational system, two of the primary locations for the production of labor-power, are examples of this. Characterizing capitalism in a way that puts an immediate focus on the production of labor-power makes thinking about these questions easier and more fruitful.

It is worthwhile to keep the historical dimension clearly in mind. Categories such as domestic work do not simply spring into existence at the beginning of capitalist production and remain unchanged as it develops. Categories reflect the underlying social reality, they change as it changes, develop as it develops. The analysis I have made suggests that domestic work is a developing category that is only now coming into full reality, reflecting the fact that the production of labor-power is becoming an increasingly independent sphere of capitalism. Looking at capitalism from the point of view of the working class, seeing the production of labor-power as a commodity as a primary feature of

capitalism, is important and possible for us because of real historical changes that have taken place in the course of the evolution of capitalism.

It would be as mistaken to insist on the total independence of the production and consumption of labor-power as to insist on the subordination of one to the other. The relationship between production and consumption is extraordinarily complex and subtle. Marx analyzed this relationship in great detail in the Introduction To A Contribution To The Critique Of Political Economy. Production and consumption are dependent but separate notions, neither could exist without the other, and each is an aspect of the other. They are bound together in a unity in which production plays the more fundamental role. When we are considering labor-power the question becomes extremely complicated. In the first place there is the historical factor discussed above. Even more, the consumption of labor-power (by the capitalist) is, at the same time, the production of commodities. Similarly, the production of labor-power involves material consumption. So the same process is a process of production looked at from one angle and a process of consumption looked at from another.

In this paper I have taken a point of view that emphasizes the production of labor-power because my purpose is to understand domestic work. Despite the fact that capitalist society is the unity of the production of labor-power and the production of commodities by wage-labor, we can and must treat them separately. They can be distinguished theoretically because there is a rupture between them in reality. The sex division of labor assigns women a primary role in the production of labor-power, that is, domestic work, and men a primary role in all other commodity production. The already complex social gap between production and consumption has been further structured by being organized around a natural difference between men and women. Neither men nor women can attain a complete awareness and consciousness of reality when each is shut off from half of it, and without a full comprehension of the totality of social existence our efforts to change it will always have different results than those we intended. The

development of a viable revolutionary movement in the United States depends crucially on the integration of these two realms.

II. THE MEANING OF PRODUCTIVE AND UNPRODUCTIVE LABOR

We know much more about the production and reproduction of capital than we do about the production and reproduction of labor-power. Marx's plan for the work that became *Capital* was to develop a comprehensive view of capitalist society. In the first sentence of the preface to *A Contribution To The Critique Of Political Economy* he wrote, "I examine the system of bourgeois economics in the following order: capital, landed property, wage-labour; state, foreign trade, world market." In fact he really got no further than the first of his categories, "capital". The three volumes of *Capital* as well as those of the *Theories Of Surplus Value* are devoted mainly to investigating and developing all of the ramifications of capital. Of course, it is impossible to discuss the consumption of labor-power in detail without bringing in its production as well. However, because the focus of *Capital* is on the relations flowing from the capitalist way of consuming labor-power, its production, when visible at all, is seen as a subordinate aspect of its consumption.

On the whole the Marxist tradition has not transcended this approach. It has focused on studying capital, which, from the point of view taken here, means looking at the consumption of labor-power while ignoring its production. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, not the least of which is that we do live in a capitalist society. In reality, capitalism dominates the unities of which it is a part. It is only recently, as capitalism has decayed and stagnated, that conditions have allowed us to see the production of labor-power as a real phenomenon.

We have no categories immediately at hand with which to analyze the production of labor-power, so a natural first step is to take the categories that Marx used for the study of capitalist production and try to use them. This is the

path that most of the analyses of domestic work that have been attempted so far have chosen. This method is not wrong but it can be very misleading if it is not done carefully and critically. As pointed out in Section I, Marx's categories are really the expressions of social relationships as they are manifested in things. Thus the transferability of any particular category from one domain to another will depend on the similarities between the social relationships in the two domains — in this case, the production of labor-power and the production of all other commodities.

Labor-power is a commodity, so those categories that refer generally to commodity production can be used when analyzing its production. On the other hand, the production of labor-power differs in many important ways from capitalist commodity production, so categories that have been developed for the latter must be treated with caution. Some examples of the general categories that can be used are value, exchange-value and use-value; surplus-value, on the other hand, is a specifically capitalist conception. (4) An analysis of the crucial ways in which these categories behave differently when they are used in the analysis of domestic work will be made in Section III, below.

One category in particular always seems to arise in analyses of domestic work — that of “productive (and unproductive) labor”. The question is asked whether domestic work is productive or unproductive. (5) Because of the way this question seems, at times, to dominate the discussion of domestic work, and because I believe it is a false question, based on an incorrect understanding of the meaning of productive labor, the remainder of this section will be a precise discussion of exactly what this concept does mean in a Marxist analysis. This clarification is necessary for us to get beyond the sterile debate which is the upshot of trying to relate domestic work to productive and unproductive labor.

Productive labor has a generally accepted definition. (6) It is wage-labor that produces wealth in its specifically bourgeois form, that is as surplus-value. (7) Productive labor refers to the social form of labor rather than to its material content. The determination of whether a given type

of labor is productive cannot be made merely by looking at the product that is the result of the labor process; nor can it be made by looking at the material circumstances in which the particular labor takes place. The appropriate question to ask is whether the laborer has been hired by a capitalist to produce a profit. A teacher in a private, profit-making school is a productive laborer; the same teacher in a public school is not. In either case the teacher is a wage laborer, but the private school teacher produces a profit for the owner of the school, while the services of the public school teacher are paid for out of revenue rather than capital, that is, out of the wages of wage-earners collected and distributed via the tax system. (8) Labor of this latter type, that is, wage-labor paid for from revenue, is called "unproductive labor".

Examples of this sort can be multiplied at will. Any particular type of service can be organized capitalistically, in which case it is productive labor. If, on the other hand, the same service is paid for directly out of wage-earners' salaries or represents private consumption by capitalists then it is unproductive. The service is the same in either case, as is the wage received by the service worker. The teacher sells his or her labor-power at its value, whether the sale is made in exchange for capital or for revenue.

The term "productive labor" appears to have a certain ethical and moral connotation. After all, who would want to be branded as an unproductive laborer, a term which seems to imply laziness, inefficiency and downright parasitism? The definitions of productive and unproductive labor have, in fact, no such normative suggestions. Indeed, the most useless and frivolous work can be productive labor while, on the other hand, work that is necessary and useful can be unproductive. Productive labor is simply labor that is productive for the capitalist. Since the essence of capitalism is the production of surplus-value, that is, production for profit rather than for use, productive labor is the labor that produces this surplus-value. The definition contains no reference at all to the production of use-values. In fact, confusing or identifying productive labor with labor that is useful is, at bottom, the same as confusing the two aspects

of all commodities, exchange-value and use-value. The technical meaning of the term productive labor is based on the fact that the production of commodities is also a production of value, while the normative use of the term productive labor is related to the use-value aspect of commodities.

Capital presents its own interests as the interests of society so it naturally wishes to establish that what is useful (production of surplus-value) to it is also useful (production of use-value) to society. Concepts such as productive labor are mystified. Productive labor is confused and intertwined with quite independent notions such as useful (to people), necessary (to people) and is disguised so as to appear as other than what it really is: the relationship between the working class and the capitalist class that enables the capitalist to extract and appropriate surplus-value.

Productive labor is more than merely necessary to capitalism, it is a basic element of capitalist society. Compare productive labor to, say, the army or the police. Both are, in fact, necessary for capitalism to function and so are useful to it. However, if there were no police we would simply have capitalism without the police. This would not be a very happy prospect for the bourgeoisie, because their system wouldn't last long under these circumstances. But while it did it would be what it was before — capitalism. That is, the necessity and usefulness of the police or the army to capitalist society is based on the objectively antagonistic social relationships of class society. It is otherwise with productive labor. It is not so much a necessity of capitalism as it is capitalism itself, in a different aspect, under a different name. Without productive labor there simply would be no capitalism. For this reason the concept of productive labor is a very important social category; it helps to make distinctions such as these clear. However it should not be confused with any notions of good or useful beyond the precise way in which it is both of these to the capitalist class.

Applying this to the question of domestic work means that we must consider the social form of domestic work from the point of view of the value and exchange-value it

creates, rather than by looking at its usefulness, that is, the use-values it produces. Of course domestic work is useful, as is most of the work done by most of the people in capitalist society. But a Marxist analysis distinguishes between the usefulness of an activity, which is a universal feature of human life, and the social form in which this activity is organized. Only in this way can we talk about specific social effects and their evolution rather than about "the human condition". It is precisely this distinction between activity and its social form that is lost in the way that, for example, analyses such as that of Dalla Costa try to apply the notion of productive labor to domestic work. (9)

III. THE CONTRIBUTION OF DOMESTIC WORK TO THE VALUE OF LABOR-POWER

Labor-power, like any other commodity, is a unity of value and use-value. The value of labor-power is the socially necessary labor-time needed to produce it — it appears in the form of the wage. The use-value of labor-power is the work that the laborer does. The use-value of labor-power is not the primary interest of the worker who is concerned with this aspect only to the extent that it does have a use-value for some buyer. That is, the worker wants to be sure that he or she will be hired by some capitalist or other and so will receive a wage, but whether the worker makes cars or tin cans is a matter of indifference to him or her. The worker is concerned mainly with the exchange-value of labor-power, that is, the wages he or she can get. The use-value of labor-power is, of course, of direct interest to the capitalist, who buys it by paying the worker a wage and consumes it by setting the worker to work at a specific task. Looking at capitalism from the point of view of wage-labor rather than that of capital, or what is the same thing, studying the production rather than the consumption of labor-power, therefore means studying the production of its value rather than its use-value.

The first question that must be asked is whether the process of producing the value of labor-power is also a process of producing surplus-value. That is, is the produc-

tion of labor-power capitalist production, and can domestic work be said to be productive labor? I have assumed, throughout this paper, that the answer to these questions is no. It is worthwhile looking at the arguments that lead to this conclusion.

There is an enormous difference between the motives of the simple commodity producer and those of the capitalist. The simple commodity producer is a small producer, such as an artisan, who owns his or her own means of production, and whose aim is to exchange his or her own commodity, which has no use-value to him or her, for a commodity that does have such a use-value. Human needs and their fulfillment are the ultimate motivation for production, even though these needs are satisfied by the roundabout method of producing for others and exchanging goods in a market. Production is limited, because the quantity produced is bounded by the finite human capacity, necessity and desire to consume. On the other hand, the aim of the capitalist is to continually increase his surplus-value. This has nothing to do with his personal consumption. The more surplus-value the capitalist has, the more he can and must try to get. He produces only to produce this surplus-value and so produces without any human limit or bound. The production of labor-power falls into the first of these categories — it is simple commodity production. Labor-power is produced and exchanged with an eye to the goods and services that the wage-earner can purchase. Money is not the motivation, but the things it can buy. The wage here is merely an intermediate step in the conversion of one commodity, labor-power, into other more useful commodities, consumption goods and services. Labor-power does not increase without limit as an independent way of piling up wealth. (10)

It must be remembered here that we are looking at a very restricted, though socially fundamental, aspect of household labor. Domestic work as I am using the term refers only to those features of household activity that are concerned with producing and maintaining labor-power as a commodity. The motivation referred to above is to be thought of only within this context. As I pointed out in Sec-

tion I, I am abstracting from all of the reasons that (for example) people have and raise children other than the fact that they represent future labor-power. I am dealing only with the characteristics of household work that are included in the notion of the production relations of the production of labor-power.

The argument that the production of labor-power is not capitalist production can be pushed further, going beyond the motivations that inform the process of production. If surplus-value were created in the process of the production of labor-power then it would belong to the working class, the producer and original owner of labor-power, just as the surplus-value created in the capitalist production of commodities belongs to the capitalist. But this surplus-value could then be saved and capitalized, enabling the working class to become part of the capitalist class simply by producing the one commodity for which it has the means of production. Although this fantasy is very congenial to apologists for capitalism who, indeed, profess to see no difference between capital and labor, both of them being "factors of production", the situation is, in fact, exactly the reverse of this rosy picture which cannot explain the fact that the size of the working class is growing and the size of the capitalist class is shrinking relative to it.

These arguments confirm the fact that the production of labor-power is merely the production of value and is not the production of surplus-value. Labor-power is the single and unique commodity in capitalist society whose general production does not take place in a capitalist manner.

The composition of the value of labor-power can be analyzed by examining the different elements that enter into its production: material commodities; the services of both productive laborers (for example, nurses and doctors in private hospitals) and unproductive laborers (for example, public school teachers, firemen); and unpaid domestic work within the family, most of which is done by the wife. Domestic work is a separate category here — recognizing this is essential to understanding its role. The analysis of Section II has shown, in particular, that the categories of productive and unproductive labor are simply not applicable to

domestic work. These categories refer to wage-labor that either does or does not produce surplus-value for a capitalist. But domestic work is not wage-labor at all. Even if it were correct to argue that the housewife is really paid a roundabout wage through her husband's paycheck (I shall argue against this interpretation below), the situation would still be sufficiently different from that of ordinary wage-labor as to make it very unhelpful to try to apply the productive-unproductive labor categories. Domestic work simply falls outside of these notions — it is an economic category in itself.

The way in which material commodities contribute to the value of labor-power is straightforward. Take bread for example. The value of a loaf of bread is the value of the raw materials used in making it (including the used up means of production) together with the labor-time of the workers who bake it. This value is simply transferred into the value of the worker's labor-power as he or she eats the loaf of bread. Looked at from the point of view of the worker's wage, the value of the bread can be thought of as a component of the value (or exchange-value) of labor-power. If it is assumed that the production of labor-power takes place under normal, standard conditions, that is, the commodities the worker consumes are all socially necessary for the production of labor-power, then the value of all of the commodities that the worker consumes is simply transferred to, and so becomes a component of, the value of the worker's labor-power. (Consumption is being used very broadly here. The worker's house or apartment, car and similar large items are also consumed over a long period of time — their value is transferred piece by piece.)

The various productive and unproductive laborers who contribute directly to the creation and maintenance of the worker's ability to work at a certain level of skill contribute to the value of labor-power according to the time they spend. For example, a bus driver who drives workers to a job adds an amount to the value of their labor-power that is equal to the time he spends driving. Of course this value is spread equally over all the people jammed into the bus. It is worth emphasizing that there is a significant differ-

ence between the way material commodities, on the one hand, and service-providing laborers, on the other hand, contribute to the value of labor-power. Material commodities simply transfer their own value on to the value of labor-power, while wage-laborers who service labor-power create a certain amount of new value according to the time they spend laboring. This value has no immediate relationship to the value of their own labor-power which is expressed in their own wage.

The situation here is similar to capitalist commodity production where the distinction is made between the contribution of constant capital (transfer of value from raw material and means of production) and variable capital (new value created by the wage-laborer) to the value of the finished product. However, in capitalist commodity production the difference between the value of the worker's labor-power (the wage) and the new value created belongs to the capitalist and is the capitalist's surplus-value, while the difference between the bus driver's wage and the value he or she creates does not belong to either the worker being transported or the bus driver. This value is appropriated by a third party if the bus company is privately owned. The situation of state-owned transportation systems is more complex. I will not analyze them here except to point out that it remains true that neither the worker nor the driver (another worker) appropriates surplus-value from the process. In any event, the contribution of such laborers to the value of labor-power is undoubtedly a small fraction of the total value of labor-power.

Now the question arises of whether the time spent by the wife in domestic labor necessary for the production of her husband's (and family's) labor-power contributes to the value of this labor-power as is the case, for example, with the wage-laborers examined above. It is difficult to get at the answer to this question, because value does not appear directly but only as exchange-value. That is, all we can see is the worker's wage and we have to reason backward to the components of this wage. How much value would be created by domestic work if it were value-creating labor? The crucial observation here is the well-known fact that

the time spent by the wife on necessary activities such as cleaning, cooking, caring for children and other household tasks is even longer than the average wage worker's working day. In addition, more work of this type is done by the husband and the children. Even if he doesn't help his wife at all the husband must still spend a certain minimum amount of time on the production of his own labor-power — eating, washing, driving to work, etc. Were all of this domestic labor to contribute to the value of labor-power in the same way that the labor of productive and unproductive laborers does, then the value of labor-power would be the sum of the time spent on domestic work, the time spent by wage-laborers who service labor-power, and the value of all of the material commodities consumed. But the time spent on domestic labor alone is already greater than the time spent by the wage-worker in his working day, so the value of labor-power would be greater than the value produced by the wage-worker in his working day. We know this is wrong. The value of labor-power, in fact, is less than the value the worker creates when this labor-power is consumed for an entire working day — the difference is precisely the surplus-value appropriated by the capitalist. The conclusion is that domestic labor does not contribute to the value of labor-power in the same way as productive and unproductive labor.

Before analyzing exactly how domestic labor does enter into the value of labor-power we have to examine the family's labor-power more closely. The labor time spent by the wife in the family is divided between maintaining her husband's labor-power and preparing her children's labor-power for the future, when they will be workers. In the discussion above, however, I have treated the wife's domestic labor time as contributing to her husband's labor-power alone. The question is one of accounting. Do we have to know the fraction of the time that the wife works maintaining her husband's labor-power and then show that this alone would make the value of labor-power greater than we know it is? The answer is no. Whatever time the wife spends on her children was also spent, by her husband's mother, on him. Since, at this point, I am treating domestic labor as if

it were value creating it really doesn't matter whether we think of the contribution of this type of labor to the husband's labor-power as being partly that of his mother and partly that of his wife, or whether, alternatively, we regard the work of the wife in each family as going wholly toward the husband. The total labor time spent on the production or maintenance of the husband's labor-power, which is the quantity we are concerned with, is effectively the same. (11)

There are several ways to proceed from the observation that domestic labor, essentially the work the wife does in the family, does not contribute to the value of the husband's labor-power in the same way as does the labor of productive and unproductive laborers. Firstly, it could be assumed that domestic work is of inherently "lower quality" than the work that wage-workers do for capitalists. This could be, for example, because it is less intense or requires less skill. The wife's working day would then always count as a fraction of the husband's, the amount she would add to the value of his labor-power would be less than the actual time she spends working and so his production of surplus-value for the capitalist would present no problem. A variant of this argument, in which the sexist politics behind it are more explicit, is that the wife "wastes" time, that much of the work she does is unnecessary. These arguments are contradicted by the known facts about domestic work. In its quality as the expenditure of human energy and effort, domestic work is physically exhausting; it is no less intense and skilled and possibly more so than ordinary wage-labor. Attempts to deny this fly in the face of reality and are really no more than ideological justifications for the supposed greater importance of the husband in the family.

Secondly, it might be that the time the wife spends on maintaining her husband's labor-power is value creating while the time spent caring for her children, who represent, in a sense, future labor-power, does not create value. To the extent that it makes sense to divide domestic labor this way at all this could resolve the problem if caring for children sufficiently outweighs the part of domestic work spent on cooking, cleaning, laundry and all of the other tasks that are devoted to maintaining the husband's labor-power.

Even so, in a family in which the children as well as the husband work the difficulty reasserts itself even more strongly, since now there would be no way to avoid the conclusion that the total labor-power of the family is worth more than the total value it creates in capitalist labor. On the whole, the type of indirect argument used here cannot conclusively reject this alternative. Some of its consequences will be discussed below when I consider the question of a wage for the wife. My feeling is that it is unnecessarily complex, leads to a questionable description of the wife's role as being analogous to an artisan or petty producer, and is an incorrect explanation of the value aspect of domestic labor.

The most reasonable and convincing alternative is simply that the wife's labor does not contribute to the value of labor-power. Or, put more accurately, domestic labor within the family, whose function is the production, maintenance and reproduction of labor-power, contributes to the use-value of labor-power but does not contribute to its value. Thus, domestic work should not be thought of as being the analogue within the family of wage-labor outside of it. Domestic work and wage-labor are each independent economic categories, obeying their own laws and founded on different social relationships. The total irrelevance of using the categories of productive and unproductive labor to describe domestic work is obvious now that we have seen that domestic work does not create value — these categories are appropriately used only in the domain of wage-labor. It should be emphasized that my conclusion that domestic work does not create value is not air-tight. These are not logical but social phenomena. What I have tried to do is to describe the possibilities and indicate where the most likely solution lies.

One of the many mystifications of our society comes from the identification of domestic work that maintains labor-power, which is an economic category, with women's work, which is an aspect of the sex division of labor. Domestic work fails to create value because of its nature as domestic work, not because women do it. Because this work does not create value, it is invisible when it is looked for

in value relationships. In capitalist society, where value and its production is the rationale for everything, this value invisibility is expressed as actual social invisibility. In other modes of production women's work in the home does not have this peculiar quality. It is the combination of capitalism with the sex division of labor that assigns women the responsibility for domestic labor, and thus creates the special kind of social nonexistence characterizing domestic work done by women today.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF THE WAGE

Because domestic labor does not create value, the value of labor-power is composed simply of the value of the commodities the worker consumes, together with the new value added by laborers such as nurses and doctors, whose direct services are necessary for the maintenance of labor-power. The worker's wage will be high enough to buy these commodities and services, because it is equal to the value of his or her labor-power. Here, however, there is a problem. The husband's wage is, in fact, much higher than this. It pays, not only for the commodities he consumes but for those of his wife and family as well. How can this situation arise and what is its meaning in terms of the value relationships already developed?

It is a commonplace that the answer to this question lies in the "historical and moral element" that enters into the determination of the value of labor-power. (12) What is meant by this is that the necessities for the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power, that is, the determinants of the value of labor-power, are not merely the physical minimum that the worker needs to survive but have a level determined by history and culture. In the United States this level, expressed historically in the concept of the American standard of living, has included the norm of the nuclear family with a non-working wife.

This argument does not at all imply that the husband is paid a wage that is above the value of his labor-power. Quite the contrary. The historical element does not lead to wages that are out of line with value but operates on this

value itself. Nor, by the same token, does the argument imply that the domestic work done by the wife is unnecessary work simply because it is a product of historical forces and evolution. The concept of necessity is always a social one. Only the bare biological survival minimum can be said to be necessary in an ahistorical and asocial sense. The work done by the wife at home is, at the same time, socially necessary and historically determined. For this reason it is possible to argue as I have, that women do not waste time in domestic work, that this work is arduous and involves long hours, while at the same time referring to this work as expressing a norm.

This analysis suggests that the historical dimension of the value of labor-power is composed of two distinct facets. On the one hand, there is the component that is the expression of the demand for a certain quantity and variety of goods and services for individual consumption, whether of the husband or the wife. On the other hand, there is the component that is the expression of the norm of a non-working wife. The distinction between these two is that they contribute to the final value of the husband's labor-power in very different ways. In the first, it is the level of consumption that is determined historically. The value of labor-power is then determined in the ordinary way from the level of commodities that satisfies this demand. The second component, expressing the role of the non-working wife, operates outside of the usual means of value determination. Here, there is a direct increase in the value of the husband's labor-power itself that is determined historically, an increase that goes beyond the value of the commodities and wage services that maintain it.

This analysis of the historical level of the value of labor-power is, at the same time, an analysis of the articulation of the family. The family is seen to be a structured part of the social system, rather than a closed unit. One of the consequences of the failure to see the structure in the value of labor-power is a corresponding failure to comprehend the structure of the family adequately. For example, if the way in which the norm of the non-working wife raises the value of the husband's labor-power is not distinguished

from the way in which the husband's consumption contributes to it, then the wife becomes almost literally an appendage of her husband. Her consumption becomes his consumption since it seems as if, when she eats bread, the value of the bread becomes a part of the value of his labor-power exactly as if he had eaten it. Likewise, the entire family becomes an extension of the husband since its consumption appears to contribute to the value of his labor-power in exactly the same way his own consumption does. This fetishization is one source of the extreme oppressiveness of the nuclear family.

The question of a wage for the wife's domestic work can also be formulated within this framework. It is sometimes argued that the part of the husband's wage that pays for the consumption of the wife is, in effect, a wage for the wife paid to the husband. The entire thrust of my analysis argues against this idea; it can be no more than an analogy and is a very poor one. The only way in which the husband's wage could contain a part that really corresponded to a wage for the wife would be if her work in maintaining his labor-power created value, since only value-creating work is wage-labor under capitalism. (13) I have argued above that domestic labor can be value creating only if it is split into two categories: (1) the care of children which is not value-creating, and (2) labor that maintains the husband's labor-power which does create value. Even were this the case however, that is, that domestic work created value, there are still problems with considering the husband's wage to contain a part equal to a wage for the wife. The value of her labor-power bears no necessary relationship to the value she would create in domestic labor, so if her "wage" (thought of as being paid to her husband) were to be equal to the value of her labor-power, which would be the case if she were in the situation of a wage-laborer, it wouldn't correspond at all to the "extra" value of his labor-power that she had created. Alternatively, if her "wage" was equal to the value that she had created then she would be in more or less the same situation as a petty producer or artisan who, unlike the wage-laborer, does not sell her own labor-power, but rather the commodity she makes by activating

this labor-power, and in this way receives the full value she creates. However, there is a significant difference between the wife and a petty producer: unlike the artisan, her product, the labor-power of her husband, cannot by its very nature belong to her. Thus this description can be no more than a metaphor.

Since analogies of this type, comparing the wife to a serf, a slave, or a "hidden" wage worker have been used very frequently in analyses of the family and women it is worthwhile to examine them more closely. On the positive side, the thrust of these statements is to try to capture the variety of the oppression and exploitation that is experienced within the family. They fail to do this exactly, but do at least make us aware of the complexity of the situation. However, they cannot be taken seriously as political economic analysis because they are all based on the fundamental error of confusing the concrete labor that creates use-values with its social form. For example, the idea that the wife is really paid a wage through the husband's paycheck follows from reasoning that in families with no wife, the husband would hire another woman to perform much the same tasks as the wife did. The correct conclusion to be drawn from this observation is not that the wife is really a wage-laborer, but that in our society there are two social forms for organizing the same concrete work — wage-labor on the one hand and domestic work on the other. To argue otherwise leads to the morass of being unable to distinguish, for example, between a peasant, a serf, a slave and an agricultural wage-laborer because, after all, they all plant corn.

Thus, the possibility that domestic work does create value can only be sustained by making somewhat labyrinthine distinctions between the care of children and other domestic work; it leads to rather far-fetched analogies that do not sufficiently capture the real situation of domestic work. This analysis of the possibility of a wage for domestic work strengthens the conclusion that domestic work simply does not create value. The part of the husband's wage that reflects the norm of the non-working wife should not be thought of as a wage for the wife's work; to do so only hides the real structure of the family.

The present situation, in which a non-working wife is a norm for the determination of wages, is double-edged both for the working class and the capitalist class. For the working class there is a potential space for a "human" family life in the sense of preserving an arena free from capitalist on-the-job oppression. On the other hand, other kinds of oppression arise; the working class is split along sex lines, the family becomes a source of mystification and a mechanism for the stabilization of capitalism. In addition, women provide a special kind of industrial reserve army that can be retired into the home, and so doesn't appear to be unemployed, when it is not needed. However, the situation also has its cost for the individual capitalist who has his own interests, rather than the interests of his class as a whole, to look after. He is paying for the maintenance of an extra (because unused to create surplus-value) labor-power—that of the wife. It can only be during periods of strong economic expansion that capitalism has sufficient flexibility to pay for the man's labor-power at, effectively, twice its commodity value. Especially during periods of fundamental and structural capitalist crisis the cost of this to the individual capitalist may not be worth the advantages of stability that accrue to the capitalist class as a whole.

This gives a new perspective on the increasing participation of women in wage-labor. When the factory system began, women and children were a major part of the workforce, especially in the classic capitalist sphere of textile manufacture. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which must have been the resistance of male craftsmen to entering the factory. Later on, as capitalism developed, working class resistance to the factory was broken and the family was constituted or reconstituted as a bulwark of the social system. However, capitalism must continually expand to survive, an expansion that is ever increasingly difficult for it to maintain. In capitalism's unceasing search for increased surplus-value it always seeks to depress the value of labor-power, and in the light of the structure that this value has, it can be asserted that eventually the capitalist class must try to set the potential labor-power of women to work producing commodities and surplus-value.

Women are, indeed, entering the labor force because their wages are needed to maintain family income. The choice being offered to the working class family is either to maintain its money income through the participation of the wife in wage-labor, a situation that is satisfactory to the capitalist who looks forward to getting twice as much work and so twice as much surplus-value from the same expenditure of wage payments per family, or to see its money income decline for the sake of preserving the non-working wife. The first choice weakens the repressive structure within the family and, eventually, the family itself. The final result will be determined by a complex struggle: (1) within the capitalist class because individual capitalists put their own interests ahead of those of their class as a whole; (2) within the working class, between women and men and between the progressive and reactionary trends in the family; (3) between the working class and the capitalist class, the fundamental struggle under capitalism. The future of the family, the future shape of capitalism, and the development of the struggle for socialism hang in the balance.

NOTES

1. Lise Vogel's paper, "The Earthly Family", printed above, includes a discussion of some of the women's liberation movement literature that analyzes the nature of domestic work.

I am grateful to Lise Vogel who encouraged me to develop the ideas contained in this paper, and whose many criticisms and suggestions have contributed materially to its final form. "The Earthly Family" and this paper are somewhat less than a collaboration — that the evident possibility for such a collaboration remains only potential for the present bears witness to the ravages of living in a capitalist and sexist society.

I would also like to thank Lillian Robinson for her helpful advice and substantive comments. My understanding of Marx has been deepened through my participation in the "Marx and the U.S. Economy" seminar of the Cambridge-Goddard Graduate School (1972-1973).

2. The ideas outlined in this paragraph are developed in great detail in I.I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972). Although Rubin presents a limited and static description of Marx's theory, I strongly recommend his book, especially Section I, for anyone who is trying to attain a deep understanding of Marx.

3. "Means of production" refers to the means of production of all commodities except labor-power. The means of production of labor-power are, in fact, in the possession of the working class.

4. The content of categories such as value, surplus-value, exchange-value, use-value, etc. are developed with great subtlety and thoroughness in Parts I and II of *Capital*, Volume I. Part I, "Commodities and Money", deals with concepts that are applicable to commodity production in general while Part II, "The Transformation Of Money Into Capital", introduces categories specific to capitalism. There really is no good alternate way to grasp the meanings of these concepts other than through studying *Capital*. The following definitions are not a substitute for this but are meant as an aid to the reader who is unfamiliar with these notions:

(1) Value is the property commodities have which enables them to be exchanged with each other. Its substance is the socially necessary labor time needed to produce the commodity.

(2) Exchange-value is the proportion in which commodities exchange with each other. This proportion is the ratio of the socially necessary labor time contained in the two objects and is the way value manifests itself.

(3) Price is the exchange-value of a commodity with the special money commodity, usually gold.

(4) Use-value is the property every commodity must have of fulfilling some social need.

(5) Surplus-value is the extra value which the capitalist acquires because he buys labor-power at its value, that is, the socially necessary labor time needed to produce it, and sets it to work for a time that is longer than this. Surplus-value appears in the forms of profit, interest and rent.

5. Much of the discussion over whether domestic work is productive or unproductive labor has been either verbal or in unpublished papers. A published article that tries to use these categories is Mariarosa Dalla Costa, "Women and the Subversion of the Community", *Radical America*, vol. 6, no. 1, (January-February 1972), pp. 67-102, especially p. 79. A revised and corrected version of this article appears in a pamphlet titled, "The Power Of Women And The Subversion Of The Community" (Bristol, 1972), available from The Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5EP, England. Here Dalla Costa states quite explicitly her contention that "housework as work is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, is producing surplus value" (p. 52 n. 12).

6. The history of the concept of productive labor can be traced in Karl Marx, *Theories Of Surplus-Value, I* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1963). The relevant section is Chapter IV, pp. 152-305 as well as pp. 387-413. Because of the historical nature of this book, it is difficult to understand what Marx is getting at without reading these sections in their entirety. Frequently he makes statements that seem to be his own position but in which he is really acting as a mouthpiece for a position he disagrees with. In these cases he is drawing conclusions, from faulty premises, in a more consistent way than the original author. This structure is especially troublesome in Secs. 3 and 4 of Chapter IV devoted to Adam Smith. Here Marx has isolated two separate definitions of productive labor found in Smith, one of which he agrees with, Sec. 3, and one of which he doesn't, Sec. 4. Thus, most of the positive conclusions in Sec. 4 (pp. 160-174) are wrong, although Marx doesn't continually remind the reader of this, since they are based on Smith's faulty definition.

7. For definitions of productive labor see *Theories Of Surplus Value, I*, pp. 152, 396 and 401. Unproductive labor is defined on p. 157. See also, *Capital, I*, p. 509. Marx's definitions of productive and unproductive labor are also discussed (although not with reference to domestic work) by I.I. Rubin, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-275, and Ian Gough, "Marx and Productive Labor", *New Left Review*, 76 (November-December 1972), pp. 47-72.

8. The wages of the teacher in a private school also come, originally, from wage-earners' salaries and capitalists' uncanceled surplus-value. The distinction is that this money is first paid to a capitalist who thus turns it into capital before hiring the teacher. The important issue is not the original source of the payment (which can never be established since we can go even further back and ask where the wage-earner's wage comes from) but its immediate source. In private schools the teacher is paid by a capitalist, this is not the case in public schools.

Revenue is the money spent on private consumption; money spent on productive consumption is capital. Thus, revenue is made up, essentially, of the wages of the working class and the personal consumption of capitalists.

9. See note 5 above.

10. A similar argument leading to these conclusions is made in a somewhat different context by Paul M. Sweezy, *The Theory Of Capitalist Development* (New York : Monthly Review Press, 1968) pp. 139-140.

11. I have carried out this argument at a very abstract level, ignoring the effects of changing family life from generation to generation as well as the question of the number of children in the family. If these were taken into account, I doubt they would change the basic conclusion.

12. "On the other hand, the number and extent of his so-called necessary wants, as also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country, more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently on the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed. In contradistinction therefore to the case of other commodities, there enters into the determination of the value of labor-power an historical and moral element." Karl Marx, *Capital*, I (New York : International Publishers, 1967), p. 171.

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Political Economy

Lillian Robinson

The linkage between the capitalist mode of commodity production and the process of the maintenance and reproduction of labor-power (individual consumption) assumes two aspects. To the husband, it appears as the wage. To the wife, it appears as the world of goods and services, the raw materials for the necessary labor largely performed by her.

—Lise Vogel, "The Earthly Family"

*He says, I'm making a living
She says, I'm making life
He works six
machines
Nine hours a day.
How many machine-
hours?
Six machines work
him
Nine hours a day.
How many man-
hours?
How many machine-
men?
(You forgot to record
your down-
time,
the assistant fore-
man tells him
thumbing Tuesday's work-
sheet)
He gets paid by the hour.
I'm making a living.
Graveyard shift
was better
(with the differential
for nights)
but he never saw
the kids
and they had to eat supper*

at lunch
and there was never any
time,
So he went back
to days.
Nine hours—time
and a half
for the last
hour--
every day.
27 minutes
for lunch.
I'm making a living.
You don't get paid
for lunch.
Today is Thursday
he brings home
a check for the last
week
Monday through Friday
nine hours
(don't forget to record
your down-
time)
He peels the check
out of his oil-stained
pocket
and gives it
to his wife:
one hundred fifty-

six dollars
and forty-three cents.
I'm making a living. He says,
I'm making a living.

In the morning
she gets up
to make his lunch:
two sandwiches
(baloney and cheese)
an apple, a piece
of cake.
I'm making life.
She makes coffee
wakes him up
gives him breakfast
sees him off,
gets washed and dressed
and wakes the children.
While they are in
the bathroom
she makes their breakfast
rushes them through it
and out
(What are you:
still asleep?)
After they leave
she makes the beds
washes the breakfast dishes
and then
because it's Friday
she combs her hair and goes
to the A & P.
She fills her cart
with chopped meat
toilet paper
milk and eggs
chicken
spaghetti potatoes
margarine
cereal coffee
frozen vegetables
oranges Jello.
Hands his check
that he gave her
up to the clerk
behind the glass
cashes it pays for
the groceries
and goes home.
The change goes back
to him.
She makes some
tuna-fish

and while she eats it
watches *Love*
of Life
puts the groceries away
and clears the kitchen
I'm making life
scrubs the bathroom
vacuums their bedroom
and the children's
room
washes his work-
clothes, the kids'
play-clothes
(When they come home
she always makes them
change
before they go out
on the street)
She puts the things
into the drier
and starts supper.
Her son comes back in
and does his home-
work.
THE EXPANSION OF
AMERICA he reads
his geography book
in the fading room.
(Turn on the light—
Do you want to ruin
your eyes?)
She fixes meat-
loaf: hamburger
bread-crumbs
onions tomato sauce,
also mashed
potatoes
frozen peas
and carrots
chocolate pudding.
He comes home
the kids are watching
TV. He takes a shower
she calls them
to the table.
Wash your hands
she tells the kids
and don't forget
to put out the light
in there
(What do you think:
we got stocks
in Edison?)
Life. I'm making life.

British Women's Liberation and The Working Class: Three Case Histories

INTRODUCTION

The British women's movement is very different from the women's movement in the United States. It is more oriented towards working class women, it is seen in the country as a whole as a socialist movement, and while its experiences cannot be seen out of the context of the political situation of Britain as a whole, there is much that the women's movement here can learn from studying it.

The British working class is poor. The night-cleaners discussed in one of the articles earned only about \$30 a week for a full time job. Old age pensioners get about \$15 a week from the government, and in general, workers get only about half or less the wage earned by people in comparable jobs in the United States. Yet the prices of food and housing are about the same as those of comparable quality here. This means, of course, that people buy goods of lower quality.

A family with a weekly income of \$65-75, the type of wage a blue-collar male worker earns, spends only about \$4.50 a week on meat and poultry. Housing is in bad condition—a substantial percentage of families live without inside toilets, and have no running hot water. In addition, the consumer items which so many people in the United States take for granted, such as refrigerators, and telephones, let alone washing machines, are considered a luxury. The work that women have to do in the home is therefore much harder, and much more time-consuming. Only one-third of British women work outside the home, compared to half in the United States. Housing struggles have an immediacy under these circumstances which it is hard for people here to grasp—the image of Britain in this country is of a country filled with delightful cottages and stately homes. and it is difficult to remember that many of the “cottages” are damp and have no running water. Similarly the British people are pictured as eccentric umbrella-swinging, bowler-hatted, London gentlemen, and theatre-going ladies who are fond of tea and biscuits.

These kind of people exist it is true, and, less obviously to Americans, they are identified, by working class and capitalists alike, as bourgeois the minute they open their mouths. Similarly, when someone from the working class talks, it is the easiest thing in the world for anyone to place them in the class spectrum. These differences in accent are maintained through a rigidly structured educational system in which approximately the richest 5% of families send their children to the so-called “public schools”, where they learn the speech and style which will type them as the elite for the rest of their lives. The next strata (the next 10-15%) are sent to grammar schools, which send some of their pupils on to the universities. The remainder are dumped in the “secondary moderns” where they learn little, and where the chance of going on to university is almost non-existent. (The new comprehensive schools which cater for all children not going to public schools are still relatively unimportant, and do not alter the basic pattern.)

The result of this system is that not only are income disparities well known, but class differences are also out

in the open, and, at least in one generation, cannot be altered by the mere fact of making or losing money. It is practically impossible for anyone to alter an accent without being spotted as a fraud (whether one is trying to develop an upper-class or a working-class accent). When working class people talk about capitalists, they mean, roughly, those who went to public school. When the bourgeoisie refer to the working class, it means people with working class, regional accents.

Britain is thus a class conscious society, although the recognition of this does not always mean that the working class opposes capitalism. It does, however, understand such terms as socialism, capitalism, and workers' control. The Labour Party draws on this in its propaganda, portraying itself as the party of the working class. The unions, the strength behind the Labour Party, are similarly long on socialist rhetoric, while in practice their aim is more to get the Labour Party into power, than to challenge the basic institutions of capitalism. Yet the Labour Party cannot be compared to the Democratic party, and the labour movement as a whole is a lot healthier than in the States. It is important to understand this because it poses certain problems for the women's movement.

Some local governments, which are controlled by Labour, are susceptible to pressure from the left, and are the focus for much of the activity around such issues as birth control, housing, and education. In one, admittedly exceptional case, women approached a local government about the need for a women's center, and were given not only a house, but also free gas, electricity, and telephone. This same group then debated whether too much effort had gone into getting these things, and too little into organising women. The Family Allowance Campaign gave evidence to a government committee as part of its activities, and afterwards there was self-criticism that too much attention was given to "whether the Government was listening to us" and too little into mobilising women (despite the fact that the Campaign had collected over 300,000 signatures in its petition campaign). In general, there is debate over how much one should struggle with the local or national government and

how much one should focus organizationally on building up the strength to avoid being co-opted when one does make such demands. In this country, the women's movement has been forced to rely on "self-help" so much that it has not seriously dealt with this crucial question.

The issue of how to deal with the unions is also more pressing in a country with a strong, albeit non-revolutionary, labour movement. The women's movement worked with unions in its attempt to unionise night cleaners, while being critical of the unions, and more particularly, the structure of the labour movement. Yet those who advocate working independently of the unions, are in a minority in the women's movement. The issue is a live one — some of the stir which was created by Selma James's article (printed here) came from people who opposed what she had to say about unions in general.

The question of autonomy arises again in relation to the male-dominated left. A much larger percentage of the socialists in the women's movement in Britain are working in mixed groups than are here. Again the problem is more immediate because the left has a much stronger base within the working class than here. It is sometimes hard to define "autonomy", for example in housing struggles. At the Fifth National Women's Conference in July of this year, one workshop was set up to discuss autonomy, and tried unsuccessfully to define a middle ground between those who think the women's movement should recruit women into existing revolutionary organisations and those who think it should be the organisation fighting against women's oppression. The discussion turned into one about specific struggles the women's movement is involved in, and while this seemed a good way of getting at the problem, the issue was far from settled. The differences between Socialist Woman, a group made up predominantly of members of the International Marxist Group (the British section of the Fourth International), and the Radical Feminists are not the sort that can be resolved by compromise.

The ways in which the British women's movement differs from the movement in the United States can be seen by contrasting the origins of the two movements. In Britain dis-

cussion of women's oppression within the left was the result of organisation among working class women. The Equal Rights Group in Hull was formed in 1968 around the activities of fishermen's wives who were protesting the lack of safety on trawlers, and a strike by women workers at Ford's on the issues of job segregation and unequal pay led to a period of industrial militancy among women workers and the formation in 1969 of the National Joint Action Committee for Women's Equal Rights, a trade union organisation. As a result of this, women within IMG and elsewhere began to raise women's liberation issues within mixed groups, and to meet separately. Meanwhile a group of predominantly American women in London, many of whom had been active in the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign were beginning to meet together as an explicitly women's liberation group, and other women's groups began to form throughout the country. The first national women's liberation conference took place in early 1970.

The movement continues to be better organised than in the States. There have been five national conferences so far, and it is planned to have at least one every year. The first conference set up a National Co-ordinating Committee to circulate information and to plan future conferences, but there was not sufficient unity to keep it going and it was dissolved by the national conference which took place a year and a half later. Nevertheless, compared with the United States the movement is well co-ordinated. There are regional newsletters, and the national conference continues to provide a certain unity to the women's movement that is completely lacking here.

The main factor which facilitates this is that the politics of the women's movement in Britain is more coherent. It is a socialist movement, and, although there are liberal feminists in it, they are somewhat defensive about not being socialist. In fact, another way of describing the coherent politics of the movement is to say that there is no liberal feminist movement — no NOW, no Bella Abzug, no Ms., no token bows to women, no cultural acceptance of feminism in the press, little avoidance even within the left of blatantly sexist remarks, no market for books about women,

no proliferation of women's studies courses at universities (this last is also because the British universities don't usually have "courses" but instead single-discipline three-year programs of study). Instead, the movement is seen as socialist and does not have to define its politics when it is, for example, calling a national conference — conferences can be open without being swamped by liberal feminists.

The conferences are thus small by American standards — they are attended by 1000-2000 women. But if one compares the size of the activist, socialist women's liberation movements in Britain and the United States, the difference is not large. Britain has a population about one-quarter that of the States, and the women's liberation movement here would be very happy with a comparable national conference. In London, a city of the size of New York, there are about 60 women's groups of 10-15 people, and in Britain a "group" means an activist group, not simply a consciousness-raising group. The activities of these groups cover a wide range of issues, and it is difficult to generalize about them. However, the articles printed here do give a rough idea of the types of work and methods of organisation that the movement is engaged in.

Over the last year the Family Allowance Campaign has been the single biggest activity of the women's movement throughout the whole country. Groups set up stalls in market places, carried petitions around the streets, organised demonstrations, and successfully brought the struggle to the attention of the whole country. Within the Family Allowance Campaign, a group of women argued and campaigned for "wages for housework". Those who advocate wages for housework constitute a distinct political group, and form a minority within the women's movement, but the issues raised by the demand have led to heated debate. Selma James first enunciated the argument in her article "Women, The Unions and Work" which is printed here, and since then many people have written on both sides of the argument. We print here two of the pieces which have come out of this debate. The article by Sheila Rowbotham originally appeared in the magazine Red Rag, which is put out by a collective of 21 women who define themselves as

Marxist Feminists, and who have an influence in the movement out of proportion to the size of their collective.

The attempt of office cleaners to unionise has also drawn on the energies of women in the movement as is documented in the article "The Night-Cleaners' Campaign". Other unionising work is going on but this campaign illustrates very well the difficulties which the movement in Britain is prepared to confront in its effort to build a socialist women's movement.

Not all people in the movement, as outlined earlier, believe that this is the correct form of struggle. The libertarian left, for example, believes in working independently of the unions, and within the libertarian left, women have stressed the importance of organising outside the workplace altogether (a stress which most women in the movement agree with). Housing struggles are an example of the work being done in communities, and the material printed here gives an indication of the perspective of women in these struggles.

There is much else going on in the women's movement in Britain, including the gay movement, child-care work, organising around proposed legislation on discrimination against women, and combatting sexism in children's books. The articles printed here have been chosen to reflect the type of political work with which people in the United States are less familiar, and to stress the differences between the movement there and here.

One further difference should be noted, and that is the absence in Britain of consciousness-raising groups in the sense in which they are understood here. The women in the British movement tend to regard them as too "inner-directed", and they have never been as widespread as they have been here. This might be explained partly by the over-all lack of concern with what are seen as psychological problems — very few people in Britain visit psychiatrists — but also reflects the more directly economic approach of the left in Britain.

The approach to women's liberation implied in the development of consciousness-raising groups is very different from the approach which the articles printed here

indicate. What is needed is not a compromise between these two approaches, but the development of a movement which embodies struggle at the different levels and which permits the development of an integrated theory of Marxist feminism. The British women's movement acknowledges, perhaps exaggerates, the influence of the United States movement. We must begin to learn from from the British movement.

Paddy Quick

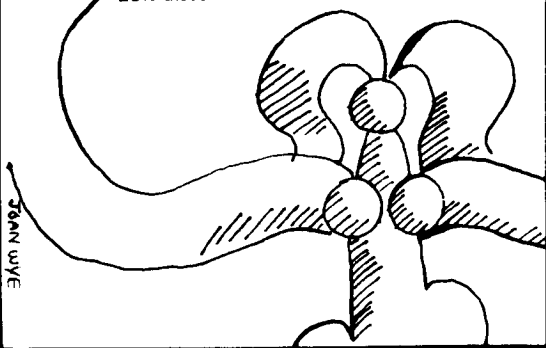
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Love on the dole

MARY HOPE

**MOVES INTO TOWN...
WHAT WILL LOVE HAVE IN STORE FOR HER?**

NOT MUCH - NO JOBS & ONLY 26 UNEMPLOYMENT MONEY.

HOW MUCH MORE CAN I TAKE OF A PHONE THAT NEVER RINGS... A HEART THAT NEVER THRILLS?

AND SO, JUST AS I'D DONE SO MANY TIMES BEFORE, I LEFT THE HOUSE AND WENT FOR A WALK. I WALKED SLOWLY, CAUTIOUSLY, HOPING AGAINST HOPE.....

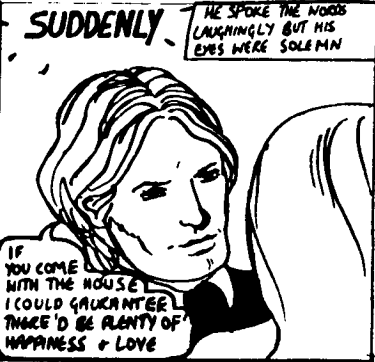
WHEN WILL MR. RIGHT APPEAR?



SUDDENLY

HE SPOKE THE WORDS LAUGHINGLY BUT HIS EYES WERE SOLEMN

IF YOU COME WITH THE HOUSE I COULD GUARANTEE THERE'D BE PLENTY OF HAPPINESS & LOVE



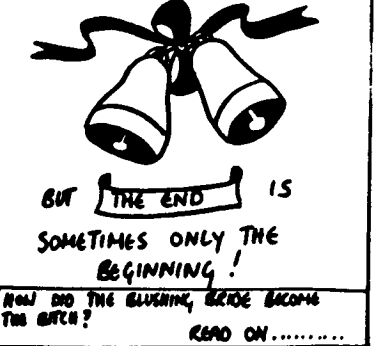
I CLUNG TO HIM AS IF I MIGHT FALL OFF THE EARTH!

THE END



BUT THE END IS SOMETIMES ONLY THE BEGINNING!

HOW DID THE BLUERING BRIDE BECOME THE GATE? READ ON.....



YOU'RE NOT MUCH FUN THESE DAYS MARY

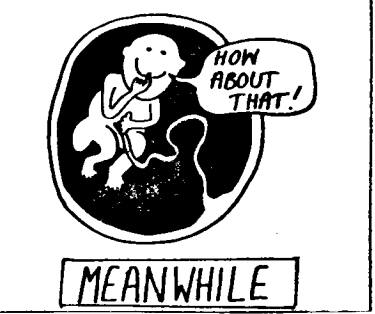
I-I'M SORRY (GULP) I'M PREGNANT BILL

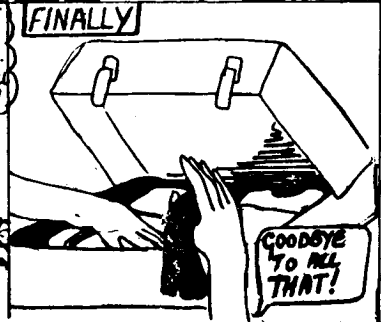
9 MONTHS LATER



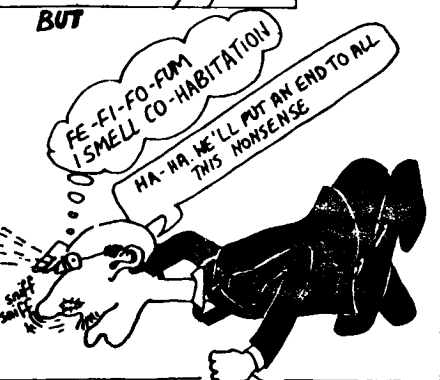
HOW ABOUT THAT!

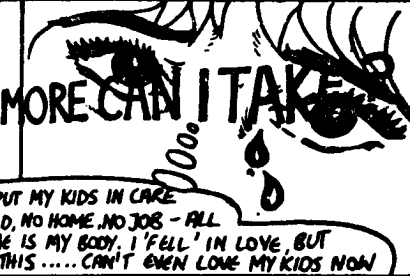
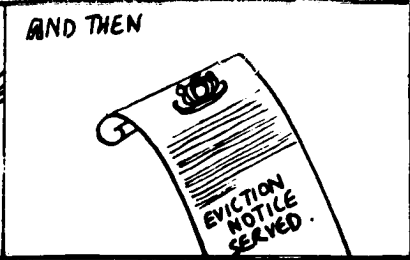
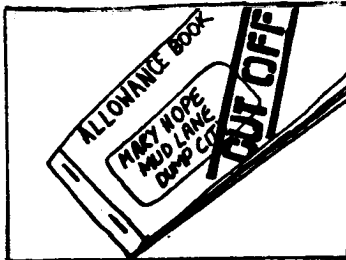
MEANWHILE





FIND ANOTHER MAN WHO'LL GET ME OUT OF THIS AWFUL LIFE - GIVE ME ALL THE THINGS I'VE ALWAYS WANTED - TREAT ME LIKE A WOMAN - NOT A SLAVE OR MACHINE.





THEY'VE PUT MY KIDS IN CARE
I'VE GOT NO FOOD, NO HOME, NO JOB - ALL
MEN WANT FROM ME IS MY BODY, I 'FELL' IN LOVE, BUT
LOVE CAN'T GET ME OUT OF THIS CAN'T EVEN LOVE MY KIDS NOW



GAZING OUT OF THE WINDOW, SOBBING OUR HEARTS OUT
IN THE BEDROOM, WAITING FOR THE NEXT MAN TO COME
ALONG AND LIFT US OUT OF OUR MISERY... THAT'S
HOW THEY WANT US - ON OUR BACKS AND AFRAID
TO FIGHT BACK



WHILE WE FACED OUR PROBLEMS ON OUR OWN, WE
ENDED UP ON PILLS, IN THE LOONY BIN, IN HOSPITAL, IN
PRISON. - BUT THERE'S MORE THAN 200,000 OF US -
SINGLE MOTHERS ON SOCIAL SECURITY - WE'RE IN EVERY
STREET, ON EVERY BUS, IN EVERY LAUNDRETTE, SHOP, PARK.



AND WE'RE GETTING MORE + MORE ANGRY - WITH
BUREAUCRATS WHO WON'T HEAR, DOCTORS WHO CAN'T
CURE, "LEADERS" WHO DON'T CARE.
WE'VE HAD ENOUGH
WE KNOW WHAT WE WANT



WE WANT:
A GAURANTEED INCOME - SO THAT WE AND OUR KIDS CAN LIVE WELL
AN END OF DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN "WORKERS" + "NON-WORKERS"
GOOD HOUSING. COMMUNITY CHILD CARE - SO OUR KIDS
CAN ENJOY LIFE INSTEAD OF FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL.
WE WANT THESE THINGS - AND WE'RE FIGHTING FOR THEM.

THE FIGHT FOR FAMILY ALLOWANCES

By means of a budget bill, the government hopes to dismantle the Welfare State. Its attempt is outlined in the recent Green Paper entitled "Proposal for a Tax-Credit System." In many ways this proposal can be regarded as an attack on women. For 90% of old-age pensioners are women; women are in the lowest paid jobs that require supplementary benefits. The unsupported mothers are women, and the recipients of Family Allowance are women.

In a larger sense the new budget is an attack on the whole working class. It comes in a period marked by great inflation (a rip-off on wages) and when there are great numbers of unemployed (always a threat to the employed). At a time when the whole country is characterised as "affluent," despite increasing "pockets of poverty." When landlords can reap benefits from city councils in order to provide high-priced housing, when they can put mink covers on the toilets in their own houses and rent buildings to the poor at the rate of one or two families in each room. At a time when so many full-time workers earn less than the NAB (National Assistance Board — ed.) minimum standard, that the government worries that people might give up working to live better on "assistance." At a time when work has become utterly dissatisfying. And finally, at a time when Britain is about to enter the Common Market and to take advantage of cheap labour from countries which provide no

social security to their populations (Italy, Turkey, Algeria, Portugal and Spain). The attack is motivated by a desire for greater productivity from the class, which means a greater disciplining of the class. Its immediate targets are the most vulnerable sections of the class.

Behind the new budget, there is a new attitude toward the poor (the aged, mothers, children, the unemployed), the attitude that they will have to sink or swim. In another sense, this attitude is old, not far from the days of the Poor Laws when sums were doled out to the "deserving" by "Guardians of the Poor" of local municipal governments. For centuries Poor Laws of one sort or another have managed poverty in Britain and their shadow still hovers over us along with their work-houses, punishments, means tests and brutal insensitivity to people's needs. The Welfare State is very young in comparison — if a date can be given for its birth that date would be July 5, 1948. Its date of death is now at issue.

But even the Welfare State, of so recent origin, is no ideal. In order to know what we must fight for and against, and how we must fight to protect women, we must have no illusions about any system that has been devised to manage us. What follows is a sketch of the history of the Welfare State, with particular emphasis on the origins and concepts of Family Allowance, a statutory benefit the plan for which is one of the cornerstones of the Welfare State, the benefit which affects the greatest number of women in Britain, and the one which will be wiped out by the budget bill if it passes in its present form.

The Family Allowance Act is different from all the other basic acts of the Welfare State in that it establishes statutory benefits that are not dependent on insurance payments. In a sense the difference is only one of nomenclature because all the benefits from all the Acts of the forties are paid for by taxes, by money taken from wages, whatever the wage deduction may be called.

The Family Allowance Act however has a different history from the social insurance acts, even though it came into being at about the same time as the others. It was discussed in Britain during the twenties and thirties, when it

was being instituted in many other countries of the Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, New Zealand) and of the Continent (France, Belgium, Germany). It was seen in all frankly as a benefit to the capitalist system, as a form of social control. A Canadian, J. Henry Richardson, says for example, "By ensuring better standards of nutrition, clothing and other needs of children in large families who otherwise would suffer privation because of unduly low wages, the system provides a firmer basis for the efficiency of the next generation of workers." He adds, "It can make a substantial contribution to economic productivity and to a progressive raising of the national income. A beneficial by-product of Family Allowances which has been experienced in Canada is improved school attendance as the allowances are withdrawn if attendance at school is not satisfactory." (Economic and Financial Aspects of Social Security, p. 154.) And the respected British sociologist T. H. Marshall calls the family allowance a means "to check and if possible to reverse the fall in the birthrate... and to sustain the family, as the vital nucleus of the social order." (Social Policy, p. 67.) Richardson finds an additional side benefit in family allowances in their helping to "stabilize the economy by sustaining the demand for goods and services."

While many countries were instituting family allowances and while they were being debated in Britain, they were not introduced here then, as Richardson says, "largely because the trade union movement was not convinced that the workers as a whole would benefit and in the Trades Union Congress a majority was not in favour" (p. 144). They did not trust a system in which "the remuneration of labour was based on any other principle than that wages were paid for work done and were based on the grade, skill and efficiency of workers without regard to their family obligations..." The question came up again a few months after World War II began, and again in a way to contrast family allowances with other benefits of a welfare system. The capitalist system then had hardly emerged from a long depression; the productive apparatus was not yet in gear even for war production. All kinds of goods were still scarce, but de-

mand was growing and signs of inflation were evident. J. M. Keynes, the foremost economist of his day, wrote a long essay entitled "How to Pay for the War" (Collected Works, IX) in which he offered a plan to make the working class pay for the war by deferring payment of part of their wages, by taxes and by putting their earnings in insurance funds. But he made one exception to these extractions from the class wages, and that exception was family allowances, money actually to be paid out to them. So obvious was the need even to him, even at that time.

Though Keynes' ideas were not adopted then, after the war (fought, paid for, and won by the working class), there was a new climate of opinion entirely. A Labour government came in to mediate the new demands of the working class, and Keynes' notions about social insurance came into their own. The ruling class welcomed them as their only means of holding onto their power. It was a Liberal, Beveridge, who designed the basic plan, but Labour and Tory were enthusiastic. Speaking of Beveridge's plan, Churchill said social insurance was "bringing the magic of averages nearer to the rescue of the millions."

All were infatuated with the notion of insurance as if they had discovered a universal panacea — one that would quiet the working class and save them their profits at the same time. They called it insurance, but forgot that insurance companies only succeed to the extent that they limit their risks. It really was a belief in magic — or the pretense of a belief. Given all the experience which had accumulated during the depressions of the twenties and thirties, when one insurance plan after another had gone bankrupt because of unemployment alone, it was a stupid notion to think that salvation would come from insurance. But the government rushed in as if it had been born yesterday. Beveridge thought he could plan poverty out of existence. He would also plan away the necessity for "assistance" in the future. As more and more people joined the insurance plans early in life and earned full benefits from them, the need to supplement wages or pensions with assistance would disappear, he thought. So in 1946 and 1948 Parliament made the plan law: National Insurance Act (pensions) and National In-

insurance Act (industrial injuries), 1946; National Health Service Act, National Assistance Act, Children Act, 1948. The Family Allowance Act was part of the total plan to be initiated on an "appointed day" (July 5, 1948), but payments actually began earlier, after the Act was passed in 1945.

At that time, inflation was dampened by price controls and rationing. Unemployment was still low. (And as Rodgers says, even a Poor Law "becomes unimportant in time of war" because of high employment (p. 2). The social insurance system, though under austerity, seemed to be working. Beveridge was a strict "egalitarian." He believed in flat rates of payment for everybody. Of course this "egalitarian" notion was being applied to a society where class lines were rigid and where differences of income were great. In effect all the insurance plans amounted to were very regressive taxes. (A regressive tax is one that hits low incomes harder than high incomes — like a sales tax which is the same for everyone but which is a larger proportion of a small wage than of a large wage.)

The Beveridge Plan and all the social insurance of the Acts of the Welfare State were merely regressive taxes. This is what Beveridge's egalitarian ideas came to. And he could not, despite all the "magic", plan away poverty. Quite the reverse has happened of course. It would have happened without the inflation that was let loose to cut wages further, but inflation made the situation more obvious by revealing ever greater "pockets of poverty."

The National Assistance Board set a minimum income for subsistence early in its career. The minimum was admittedly very low. But wages and pensions were often lower, so that supplementary benefits had to make up the difference. In the fifties inflation and unemployment increased, so that the demands on assistance became progressively greater. Studies have shown, for instance, that in 1953, 600,000 persons in workers' families were living below the NAB scale and that an additional four million were living at less than 40% above the low subsistence. And in 1960 two million were below and 7 1/2 million were less than 40% above. More startling to the government planners was the revelation that 63,000 full-time workers

with 229,000 children, were earning less than they would have been entitled to under National Assistance. Every time the level of assistance was raised to keep up with inflation, another sector of poverty-stricken people was discovered. This is the contradiction of the whole welfare system. It points up the fact that not only is it impossible to destroy poverty by social insurance, but that the system must break down. If it were not for the language disguises used, the inevitable defeat would have been obvious from the beginning. The more the class is taxed, the closer it moves to the brink of poverty. And social insurance is a tax.

One of the arguments for "insurance" as opposed to "assistance" was psychological. It was said that people felt insurance benefits were a right, something they had paid for and were entitled to, whereas "assistance" was not. There was shame attached to accepting "assistance," haunted by means testing and the old memory of Poor Laws. And indeed British people did seem to react this way. Hundreds of thousands did not apply for benefits or assistance that they were entitled to by law. In 1966 NAB changed its name to Supplementary Benefits Commission and became responsible to the Ministry of National Insurance, in order, they said, to overcome this reluctance and to get rid of the difference between insurance benefits and "assistance."

Family Allowance, however, did not have an aura of shame. Though not an insurance benefit, they were universal in application and there was no means-testing involved with them. For its own reasons, the State offered a subsidy to every family with more than one child under the age of 15. Besides controlling population, the Family Allowance was to attack what all the social planners call one of the two "stubborn" pockets of poverty, the aged and the large family. In other words, those most prone to poverty are people who have finished their working careers and those who have not yet begun them. For one there is no wage and for the other the parent's wage is inadequate. For a wage, according to one planner, is "usually defined by law or practice as an amount necessary for a man with a wife and two or three dependent children" (Richardson, p. 145). Family Allowance has been a help like assistance

to families near the poverty line. A small help, it is true — the scales were not raised, despite inflation, for 25 years — but one that has often made the difference between subsistence and total privation for many families. Another peculiarity of family allowances is that they have been taxable like wages, in a mechanism known as “clawback.” And in this perhaps is a recognition by the State that the Family Allowance is a wage, a wage for the raising of children who will be the future workers, the “human capital,” as Richardson calls them. It is a low wage, but then women’s wages are notoriously low.

Now the State proposes that this wage will be eliminated, first by removing the woman’s statutory right to it and putting it into her husband’s pay packet, where she will not see it or get it and where eventually neither will he. By tying all benefits to productivity (of the sort that they are willing to pay for), to the wage as they conceive and control it, the ruling class has opened its attack on the working class in order to discipline it to work, to produce harder and faster than it has ever done. This drive for productivity has support from all parliamentary parties, Tory, Liberal, and Labour. The opening gun is directed at women.

The State is in effect saying to women that their product has become redundant, that their machine, the uterus, must stop producing. Labour power more cheaply produced by women who are still more exploited and oppressed is available to the system. The bald threat aimed at women is not only that if they insist on producing children they will face dire consequences, that the profits and tax monies that the labour the class has already poured into industry’s and the State’s coffers will be held back from it — even the dribble that it has extracted in the past. The threat is harsher than that: in short the message to women is “we will starve you now to cut back on your future production.”

Cassandra Southwick
8 December 1972

IMPLICATIONS FOR WOMEN OF THE GOVERNMENT'S
"PROPOSALS FOR A TAX CREDIT SYSTEM" October,
1972

The government is proposing to do away with Family Allowance. It says it is replacing Family Allowance with what it calls "tax credits."

1. Tax credit is to combine Family Allowance and child tax relief, and replace both by a tax credit. But this tax credit is tied to a wage. Whether this tax credit will be paid to the mother or the father, the document leaves open. This issue, of tax credit paid to the mother or to the father is a red herring.

Although the government is not particular whether these credits are paid to the man or to the woman, we know from experience that it is most likely to be given to the man. They want us to fight it out among ourselves. If it is paid to us, the man will take a cut in pay. If it is paid to the man, we will take a cut in pay.

Once Family Allowance is not a statutory right, is included in tax relief instead, and therefore tied to a wage, women who do not have men to support them and do not themselves have a wage are excluded. All women with children should get a Family Allowance.

Once Family Allowance is not a statutory right, it can be eaten away at any time. In a year, let's say, they can change the rate of taxation and wipe it out altogether.

2. The implications for removing Family Allowance from women are very broad. We wish to stress that once they remove it as a statutory benefit and draw it into the tax system, as they are proposing to do, they can alter or even abolish it without special legislation, by a clause in a Budget. The implications of this are:

a. To take away Family Allowance from a woman who works at home doing housework and childcare is to take away the only money she can call her own. It's a woman's right to have her own independent money and not at the expense of lowering the man's pay packet.

b. To take away Family Allowance is to discourage a woman's right to choose the size of her family. She has

no guarantee that her housekeeping money will go up when she has more children.

c. To take away Family Allowance is to help remove a woman's right to choose what job she wants to do. If women have no money of their own, they are forced to take jobs at any pay under any conditions, any hours, in order to meet the bills and have any independence.

d. To take away Family Allowance will undermine women's struggle for equal pay. To the degree that women must find even part-time jobs for extra money or at any rate for themselves, they threaten the jobs of women who are already getting wages. (They don't threaten directly men's jobs on the whole — yet. Car workers get \$75 - \$100 a week. In the catering, light manufacturing and hospital industries, the pay is half that, and that is mainly — but not by any means exclusively — “women's” work.) This threat means it is more difficult for women to make a struggle inside the factory, office, hospital or shop, because there are too many women outside waiting for their place.

Whether or not there are jobs for women, the government wants women to be demanding jobs, which will make it that much more difficult for the equal pay struggle to be successful.

e. To take away Family Allowance is to deprive some women from the beginning even of so-called tax credits. Since credit can only be related to earnings or insurance benefits, those without earnings or insurance are left out. Increasingly, credits are tied to work, not to need.

- * The wife of the student is left out completely.

- * The student mother is left out completely.

- * The family where the man is on strike or where the woman as main wage earner is on strike are left out completely. This means that strikers and their families will be even more vulnerable.

- * The wife of an unemployed man while he is not eligible for unemployment benefit is left out for that period.

- * The woman who is sacked for being militant must wait for some period before she gets any benefit and during this period when she needs it most, she is left out completely.

* The self-employed woman is also left out completely, since tax credits are figured weekly and self-employed people have tax computed semi-annually.

TO TAKE FAMILY ALLOWANCE AWAY IS TO TAKE AWAY THE ONLY RELIABLE FORM OF INCOME OF THE FAMILY. STRIKE, UNEMPLOYMENT, INJURY, DEATH, THE WOMAN GETS THE MONEY NOW. UNDER THE NEW PLAN SHE MAY GET NOTHING, AND THE MAN WILL NOT GET IT EITHER.

f. To take away Family Allowance is to discourage women from ending intolerable marriages. Just that little bit coming in regularly, weekly, could be enough for her to make a start with the help of relatives and friends. Without it, she is at the mercy of events and the nuclear family.

g. To take Family Allowance away now, before British capitalism joins the Common Market, is to ensure that non-British workers coming here will not be entitled to this statutory benefit. The government says this question requires "further study." For one thing, many of the Common Market countries have much higher Family Allowances than Britain. This is what we must study.

h. Once the statutory right of Family Allowance becomes tax credit, a whole system of red tape ties it up. We know from dealing with the State that we can never find out exactly how they figure out what we are entitled to. We will never get the money they claim tax credit will give us. For example, once all statutory and insurance benefits become part of the tax system, it is very possible that rent rebates may cancel out any supposed tax credit, and the government document already hints at this.

3. The unsupported mothers at present can at least demand an income from the state. The married woman whose husband has a low wage or whose husband does not share the wage with her, or whose husband is particularly domineering, is even worse off if she has no money, BECAUSE THE STATE HAS NO RESPONSIBILITY TO HER, NOT EVEN ON PAPER — EXCEPT FAMILY ALLOWANCE.

4. The whole approach to taxing women's pay is on the basis, they say, of "First, incentive: the needs of the econ-

omy require the continued employment of large numbers of married women and the system must be such that they feel it is worth their while going to work." After waffling about for two pages, they do not change the tax position of the woman who has a pay packet.

As things stand now, the divorced/separated woman who is working outside the home is in trouble with tax. If a maintenance order is made for her children, she cannot claim them on her tax even if the man gives no money. The man gets tax relief on the maintenance money and also gets child allowance (tax relief for dependent children).

If he does pay maintenance, not only does she not get tax relief or child allowance, but she is taxed on the maintenance he pays.

Of course if you get a solicitor, and if you can take time off from work to fight it, and if you know your rights, you may be able to do something about it. But in practice most women are not told their rights, can't take time off from work, and in any case can't afford a solicitor. This position is not affected by the new proposals.

At the same time they threaten to leave the housewife who lives with her husband totally financially dependent on him, which is the greatest single "incentive" for her to get a job outside the home.

5. Because pensions have dropped in value, Social Security is increasingly needed by pensioners and fought for through Claimants Unions. This tax plan is to fix the sum you receive as a pensioner so that you are no longer entitled to Supplementary Benefit which is an elastic sum — it can go up if your rent goes up, for example. Two-thirds of retirement pensioners are women, over half a million women receive widows' benefits, 90% of old persons' pensions are received by women.

As for the Unsupported Mother, the Supplementary Benefit which she has increasingly organized to fight for in Claimants Unions will also begin to disappear. The point is not only to make her less eligible for Supplementary Benefit, but to take away her organizing to go to the SS to make a fight, thus giving old people the courage to fight with her support. This is clearly a move to prevent Claimants of all

kinds from fighting for a living wage directly against the State.

6. Tax credits are sometimes just another name for tax relief, when, for example, instead of women getting Family Allowance, there is less tax taken from men. Or tax credits replace allowances and benefits we are already entitled to. But now these allowances and benefits will be taxed. Everything is now going to be taxed, all insurance payments such as:

Maternity allowance
Unemployment benefit
Sickness and injury benefit
Invalids' pension

They will all be taxed. There will be no more tax rebates at the end of the year if you or your husband have been out sick or been unemployed for months. This is a tax squeeze, not a tax credit. After having paid for benefits, we will be taxed when we receive them.

Tax credit means tax relief and taking away what we already have won in the form of statutory right. It is to tax benefits for which we have already paid insurance. It is to make strikers, the unemployed, the sick, the invalid and the industrially injured, the pensioner, and especially the housewife, the waged woman and the Unsupported Mother more vulnerable to the State. It is to destroy the Welfare State and tie every statutory benefit to money already coming in either as wages or as insurance. It is to remove our right to get back our own insurance money which we have paid for through tax and stamps.

Tax credit is a phrase like "patrial" in the new Aliens Act. It hides the true meaning. Where "patrial" means white, "tax credit" means not only tax relief but taking away what we have already won. WE MUST NOT LET THIS HAPPEN.

7. Family Allowance must be given to every woman as a statutory right, whatever her marital or job status, beginning with the first child. (At present it begins with the second child.)

8. Family Allowance must be tax-free.

9. Family Allowance must be increased so that the woman and her children can have independence with or without a man. The nuclear family, based on the dependence of the woman, is thereby undermined.

10. Maternity Allowance must remain statutory and tax-free.

11. The woman who has waged work must receive equal tax relief with her husband, not instead of her husband. The Green Paper itself says: "where both husband and wife work additional expense is often incurred, e.g. on domestic duties otherwise undertaken by the wife, and it is fair to regard their taxable capacity as being less than that of the couple with the same total income which is earned entirely by the husband." The woman has child care expenses, fares, dinner money, having to shop in convenient places where prices are dearer, etc., etc. We don't want tax relief instead of the man; tax relief must be given to the woman as well. Otherwise, whatever her wage on paper, by the time they take back extra expenses, stamps and extra tax, she is working for a pittance.

12. The government has calculated that families with two children or single-parent families with two children need at least \$57.50 a week to live on. We think it essential that on the basis of this calculation it is essential to demand at least \$62.50 a week as a minimum living wage for all women in jobs or working at home.

The London Family Allowance Campaign

WOMEN AND HOUSING STRUGGLES

REASONS FOR THE PRESENT HOUSING CRISIS

- 1) The decline of Britain as an Imperialist power. This means the capitalist class is no longer prepared to subsidize working class housing, food, etc.
- 2) Entry into Europe and the Common Market means that the British working class must now pay the full costs of housing and food, like the European working classes. Subsidized housing amounts to lower wage levels, giving Britain a competitive advantage over higher European wage levels.
- 3) A crisis in the competitiveness of British industry means that financiers have been transferring money from long term investment in the productive sectors of capital, into short term, speculative sectors of capital i.e. land property, arts, currency. This has caused rapid inflation in land and property values.
- 4) The rise in costs of certain building materials, particularly timber and copper that are imported from Third World countries, which are now in a position to demand higher prices.

5) Increase in labour costs. The shortage of building workers and the organization of those workers, has forced employers to meet higher wage demands, especially from lump labour who employers used to do a job on the cheap.

6) Inability of house building to compete in profitability with commercial developments such as hotels, offices, etc. This mainly applies to towns, especially in London, which is becoming a centre of International Capital.

7) Middle classes taking over previously working class areas, thus turning high density areas into low density areas. This includes the take over for offices.

8) London attracts people from areas of high unemployment looking for work, this is partly due to the amount of casual and unskilled work around. Also many young people getting away from home come first to London.

9) Councils have been forced to borrow at high interest rates (65% of rents interest). Thus they have accumulated such debts that they have had to cut back on council housing. They have been unable to compete with private contractors for labour. Also they have not been able to build within the set yardstick.

10) The government's strategy to solve the housing crisis comes in the form of the Housing Finance Act. This in effect will actually increase the crisis for the working class. The building of working class housing is being turned over to private profit and investment, and subsidized council housing is being withdrawn. Thus all working class people are being forced to pay a higher proportion of their wages in rent.

THE HOUSING FINANCE ACT AND OTHER GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO SOLVE THE HOUSING CRISIS

Up until now, Local Authorities have been responsible for council house building and policy, although they could

never be much more than a buffer between the working class and the interests of private capital. According to their political alignment they operated council house policy more in favour or less in favour of the working class.

The Housing Finance Act has reduced local authorities to mere administrators of housing, while Central Government now controls actual policy. By the same token the State has increased its direct control over the working class.

By withdrawing all subsidies from council housing, thereby releasing all council houses to find their rent levels on the open market, at the "going rate", the State intends to extract more money out of the incomes of the working class as a whole.

By raising rents to the rough equivalent of mortgage repayment rates, the State hopes to induce the higher paid section of the working class into owner occupation, thereby ensuring they have a stake in the system.

By the means tested rebate system the State will have increased control over the incomes of many working class people, and will entrench the poverty trap. For lower income families rent rebates will be reduced according to any increase in income, i.e. through a wage rise.

By breaking up areas of lower rented accommodation, the movement of private capital investment within urban areas will become less restricted and at the same time the mobility of labour will become less restricted.

Housing Associations, in part, are taking over the task of providing rented accommodation for the working class; they are housing people from the council waiting lists. The profits that Housing Associations make are made more at the point of reconversion and remodernization of flats, for which they receive Government subsidies, and by employing their own contractors and surveyors they can milk off the money.

The Government has also introduced another bill that will give Local Authorities the powers to compulsory purchase housing kept empty by private speculators. This will be operable in areas that the Government will declare

'Housing Action Areas' but it only applies if the houses have been empty for seven years.

In an attempt to contain the housing crisis within the middle classes and to push higher paid workers into owner occupation, the Government is trying to control the interest rates paid on mortgages. Already they have dished out subsidies to the Building Societies in an effort to get them to peg their rates.

HOUSING AS A FORM OF SOCIAL CONTROL AND THE EFFECTS OF THE HOUSING CRISIS ON WOMEN

The property owning classes have always subjected the working class to exploitation through their basic need to be housed. In the past, housing the working class was used almost entirely as a way of making profit, although some early industrialists and bourgeois philanthropists used the provision of housing for the working class as a form of social control as well.

The provision of council housing (one-third of all heads of households are council tenants) has had the tendency to equalize material conditions between the working class and the middle class. But hand in hand with improved material conditions came more explicit forms of social control, by the authorities, pressuring working class tenants to conform to bourgeois standards.

Allocation of housing works in favour of what the authorities define as the model tenant. Good behaviour is the passport to better conditions. Tenants in arrears are threatened with eviction, refused rehousing to their choice, and descended upon by social workers. Politically active tenants are transferred, often to another borough altogether. Single women with kids, people on Social Security or on low incomes, are ghettoized into dump estates. Many petty regulations, no pets, where to hang your washing, where kids can and can't play, etc., are used to dictate tenants' behavior and standards.

Long waiting lists and planning policies force young couples out of urban centres, force large working class communities to the edges of cities and towns, while slum clear-

ance is used to break up other working class enclaves.

The bourgeois split between public and private life, so far as the working class internalize it, is expressed on the one hand with the recognition that time and energy is bought from them in the workplace, but on the other hand there is the expectation that time and energy is controlled by the individual in the home and the neighbourhood. With the more intense exploitation and control through housing, these expectations are increasingly undermined.

Under capitalism, women's social production has been defined as reproducing and servicing labour, for the capitalist class. But the split between public and private life has disguised her labour as being purely a personal service to those she loves, so it is she who experiences the contradiction of this split most intensely. As homemaker, the woman is supposed to make the home a place where the family is secure from the pressures of the 'outside world,' to keep up appearances that she can, and to enjoy doing just that.

As rents go up, and up, women have the task of making the household budget s-t-r-e-t-c-h.

As conditions deteriorate, through repairs not being done, women have to spend more time and energy doing the housework.

As overcrowding and homelessness intensifies, women become the battlefield of tension as the family is torn apart.

As multi-story flats replace other forms of housing, women become prisoners in their flats, particularly with the birth of a child. For the child the mother becomes its warden.

As many more women are unable to make the household budget stretch they are forced out into low paid work, or forced to take in 'outwork' as many more employers dish it out to cut their overhead costs.

It is women who are hit by the full force of the housing crisis, and through this, the woman herself is in crisis. It becomes increasingly clear that coping isn't just a question of personal, bourgeois capabilities that the woman has or hasn't, but that all these pressures are outside the control of the individual and must be fought on a class basis.

INTRODUCTION TO HOUSING STRUGGLES

Trade Unionists and many so-called Revolutionary, left groups, have consistently acted on the assumption that the only meaningful area of working class struggle is based in the factory. And not even all factories but only the ones where the highest levels of surplus value are extracted from the labour force. Workers in service industries, e.g. health workers, are not seen as being able to win any victory because they do not produce profit and must demand that other sections of the class that do fight on their behalf.

What these political assumptions have masked is that in order for capitalism to be able to extract high levels of profit from some sections of the working class, i.e. those organized into the higher paid, skilled, capital intensive areas of production, it must at the same time, organize other sections of the working class into lower paid or non-paid, unskilled labour intensive areas of production. One is NOT possible without the other, e.g. under the present stage of capitalist development the exploitation of the man in the factory is possible so long as the woman takes care of the home and kids.

Consequently the wealth the working class produces for the capitalist is NOT the product of one section of the class alone, it is the product of the WHOLE class.

Trade Unionists and left groups, by matching key areas of working class struggle to what capitalism has hived off as key areas of production of profit, on the back of numerous divisions of labour, merely serve to reinforce capitalism's own hierarchy and entrench the sectional interests within the working class.

Woman have known all along that it's pretty useless to organize and fight for higher wages if you don't at the same time organize around how that wage is spent.

The State's incomes policy is based on Freezing — wage demands, but then clawing back out of wages every penny it can get, through rising rents, taxation, prices, health charges, etc.

Housing struggles have been and can be struggles that unite all sections of the working class, men, women, kids,

in common struggle. People are confronted more directly with the need to challenge the way their interests are set against each other, through the divisions of labour that the system creates.

SQUATTING STRUGGLES

One of the results of the housing crisis has been a squatting boom. In many working class areas, side by side with rising rents, deteriorating conditions, overcrowding and homelessness, there also exist large numbers of empty houses, either kept empty by speculators or decaying in the face of wholesale redevelopment plans. 300,000 houses are now empty in the London area.

Within this contradiction many people have seized on squatting as a way of housing or rehousing themselves. The recent squatting movement developed out of the campaign in 1968, in East London. Unlike the squatting movement after the war, which inspired it, this was not a mass movement of working class people, but a campaign initiated by 'political activists,' to attack local authority and Central Government policy that left houses empty for years. Throughout the campaign, emphasis was placed on only taking actions which were legal; the activists said this was 'to make it possible for working class families to take part.' Families from homeless hostels were squatted in several London boroughs, and after much publicity gained, when a council hired thugs to try and carry out evictions, the 'political activists' entered into negotiations with the councils, often behind the squatters backs, and the Family Squatters Association was formed. The councils agreed to allocate houses to the Association, which would be returned at the councils' request. The families housed paid rent, and although at first some attempts were made to include them in the organization, the Association soon became little more than an extension of Council Welfare Services.

In its own terms the campaign was a success, but obviously it never confronted the power structures which control working class housing and create homelessness in the first place. By negotiating deals with the council the F.S.A.

reinforced the council's role, as a body that can take initiatives over housing, in favour of the working class, and provided them with a 'safety valve,' to cope with homeless people. At the same time it has acted to keep large numbers of squatters isolated, dependent on the Local Authorities, rather than developing links with other tenants' organizations.

Since 1968, many more people have squatted, independently of the F.S.A. and often as a very individual action. Out of this, groups have organized to prevent evictions, both in the streets and the courts, and to squat other people. In other situations squatting has been used as a means of attacking speculators, scaring away buyers who would force up prices, to get the council to C.P.O. empty property, and to set up playhouses and workshops.

Of the many people who are squatting, young people, immigrants, the low paid and unemployed, the downwardly mobile middle classer, many more women are squatting as their only present alternative. If a working class woman leaves her husband, she faces the homeless hostels or bed and breakfast hotels. If she leaves from a council flat, the council will put pressure on her to return by refusing to rehouse her. If the husband leaves his wife, and they have been living in council housing, the council will refuse to transfer the rent book to the woman's name and evict her. If she is rehoused, it will be onto the dump estates or into houses with only a short term life. Women on their own with children are left at the bottom of every housing list, while private landlords will rarely rent to them. Being dependent on Social Security means that paying rent and bills, on top of basic necessities like food and clothing, is now virtually impossible. They are labelled 'bad rent prospects.'

So, many more women are becoming active and confident in squatting struggles. For example, in Hackney, women and children who have been made homeless are finding empty houses, ones in good condition, breaking into them, sharing the houses and the looking after kids and being prepared to confront police and bailiffs, when threatened with eviction.

Recently, in some areas where houses are being emptied for redevelopment, tenants still living there have organized to stop squatters from taking over the empty houses. The break up of long term social relationships, the humiliation of seeing the area left to fall apart, the vulnerability of people left in the area to break-ins as houses nearby fall empty, uncertainty over coming rehousing... squatters become easy targets onto whom the existing tenants can direct blame and hostility.

In addition, the recent Lord Denning ruling enables landlords to evict squatters without a court order.

It becomes even more crucial for squatters to confront the divisions between themselves and other tenants, to develop an understanding of the class nature of the housing crisis, and to establish the common interests in fighting together.

One example of where this is beginning to happen is in Herne Hill, where seven families were asked by members of the Tenants Association to squat in maisonettes, on an estate owned by Grandiose Ltd. The company wants to sell the estate for a profit and has been refusing rent from the tenants and then booting them out for arrears. The tenants had to fight the property company, and the squatters wanted homes. By joining forces they have strengthened each other's fight.

PLAYGROUPS, NURSERIES...

THE STRUGGLE FOR COLLECTIVE CHILD CARE

The family and friendship structures which women depended on to share out the task of looking after their kids are being broken up. This is due to increased, forced mobility and redevelopment. More women become isolated with their children in flats and tower blocks or are stuck in overcrowded conditions. As traffic goes on increasing it becomes more and more dangerous for kids to play out on the streets.

At the same time women are expressing the need for greater forms of independence for themselves, and more space for their kids to play with other kids of the same

age. Consequently, on one level many working women have organized themselves to take over wasteground or private park squares, and to barricade streets to make playspace. But so often it doesn't go any further than this. It does not go beyond meeting the immediate needs of the women and kids and does not really challenge the housing and planning policies.

The Womens Liberation Movement's demand for 24-hour nurseries has had the effect of bringing these needs, of women and kids, to national attention but outside of any concept of class struggle. In practice the nurseries have been set up in isolation from any ongoing forms of class struggle. Many of the nurseries set up in cooperation with councils and on council terms, tended to be won on the individual merits of the women concerned. Thus the campaign has remained on the level of liberal reformism.

Women's Liberation has made no criticism of Thatcher's plan to pour millions of pounds into State controlled nurseries. The plan issued by Hackney Borough Council called 'the Right to Care' makes quite clear their reasons for setting up nurseries:

1. Too many children are being put into care by their mothers.
2. Children need to be 'caught' and socialized at an earlier age to counter the increasing vandalism in schools.
3. Women need to be encouraged to 'participate' in 'community organisation.' This is because the State recognizes the dangers of stresses operating on women and kids and is quickly moving to recuperate any class organization that could arise out of this.

We had a long argument about whether people setting up nurseries and playgroups should demand money and premises out of the council or not. Some of us thought it was important to challenge the control the council has over the money, the allocation, and the running of nurseries. Also that it is important to demand wages for all the people running these nurseries as a part of the struggle for recognition that looking after children is socially productive work Others thought that women organizing to build situations in which collective childcare becomes possible would

isolate themselves by directing their struggle towards the council. More important is that women's initiatives around collectivizing the care of children should be directed towards other working class tenants living nearby. This should be a way of beginning to involve the whole class, women, men and kids, and becomes part of a wider struggle to transform social relationships. It is important that people do not get dependent on money and resources from 'official organizations' until they are strong enough to make the demands on their own terms without being recuperated. This is especially true in the face of many attempts from councils, social workers, Fabians and other liberal bodies to co-opt forms of struggle in the community into co-operation with the authorities.

We agreed that in practice, whatever intentions we have in running the playgroups without letting the council have any control, it always comes down to the fact that the council can withdraw the money. This happened, for example, in Notting Hill Gate; they withdrew the money from a nursery where the women that took part in it had joined with people to lock the councilors in while they were having a meeting. The council always succeeds in picking out a few women to 'negotiate' with, thus establishing experts and 'leadership.' The council will also refuse to give money unless 'experts' are appointed to run the nursery.

We discussed ways of setting up nurseries without council control — taking over houses — which has already been done. Holding jumble sales, dances, kids days to raise money and to get local people involved. Asking for equipment — paint, line, toys, etc. from local factory workers, builders. Asking local people to help decorate and build equipment. In this way, we think we can start to encourage men to get involved in running nurseries — but from experience we know we have to challenge divisions like men doing the building and decorating, and the women doing the looking after the kids.

RENT STRIKES

Rent strikes have been the most important weapon of and form of working class struggle around housing. In recent years the two most important rent strikes in London have been the St. Pancras strike of 1960 and the G.L.C. strike of 1968. In both situations the rent strikes developed as a response to attempts made by Tory councils to remove the rate fund contribution to the housing account, force rents up to 'fair rents' or market rents, with an attached rebate scheme. Both schemes were forerunners of the Housing Finance Act.

In both strikes the struggle was fought predominantly around the economic question of rent rises: tenants withheld just the increase, expecting that the authorities would change their policy in response to tenants demands. This was particularly true of the G.L.C. strike involving 30,000 tenants; the majority of tenants merely withheld the increase, went on a few big demos but beyond that stayed at home and did not take part in any organizing.

In both strikes the defensive nature of the struggle was reinforced by the Labour Party and trade unionists. On the one hand the Labour Party attempted to limit the struggle into parliamentary channels and argue against all forms of militant confrontation with the authorities. For example in the St. Pancras strike, Labour Party tenants went to the rent offices where they publicly paid over the increases in the first three weeks of the strike.

Many of the leaders of the rent strike were trade unionists who imposed a trade union consciousness on the strikes. In the same way as trade unionists accept the principle of wage labour and just negotiate for a better deal, so they accept the principle of rent and fight only for reductions. Also they encouraged the same hierarchical roles to develop within the rent strike organization that exists within trade union organization. That is that women, claimants and immigrants are seen as having little power and are pushed into taking the back seat. The particular pressures that operate on women, the unemployed and immigrants through housing remain suppressed.

In the G.L.C. rent strike particularly tenants did not see that organizing to prevent evictions is a fundamental part of a successful rent strike and thought they could achieve their aims by negotiating, demonstrating and harrassing the G.L.C. Nor were they prepared to confront the police and when confrontation came on the demonstration to the house of the minister of housing the response after it was to ask women and children not to go on any more demonstrations. In the St. Pancras rent strike however tenants realized right from the beginning that the police would be used against them and fought many battles with them.

Throughout the G.L.C. strike only token support was called for from the trade unionists although at one point industrial action was threatened there was little organization to support it. During the St. Pancras rent strike local factories and porters from Billingsgate market left work to fight evictions. Railwaymen from Camden came out on a two-hour strike on the day of the evictions; council workers came out for two days and joined the pickets while firemen refused to have anything to do with the evictions.

However during the G.L.C. rent strike there were estates particularly in East London where organization went beyond the organization of withholding rents. At the beginning of the rent strike many new associations and action groups had been set up, superceding the old tenants associations and these were far more democratically controlled by the tenants. In the east end such action groups organized flying pickets to prevent evictions and forced the G.L.C. to do many repairs on the estates. Whereas before the old tenants associations had just organized social events and outings as a way of ameliorating the conditions the new tenants organizations, particularly in the east end, organized social activities in a way that began to transform life on the estate. For example kids on Suffolk estate closed the street for a play street and subsequently became 'the leaders' of the next big demonstration held by tenants. Women on the Isle of Dogs set up playgrounds and tenants on the estate got an old barge on the river and handed it over to the kids. They organized loads of parties which provided funds for bulletins, leaflets and posters.

TOWER HILL RENT STRIKE

In October there was a demonstration in Liverpool against the Housing Finance Act. Twenty-two men from the Birds Eye factory in Kirkby who were on this demo were suspended by the Birds Eye management for taking part in the march, and two men were sacked for the same. At the weekly Tower Hill rents action group meeting the women agreed to organize pickets to go to Birds Eye in the morning and support the 24 men who were picketing the factory in protest. The next morning the women went round the estate with megaphones and knocking on the doors getting other women to go with them. At 10:30 a.m. an army of women with children and babies in prams joined the 24 men who had been laid off. Birds Eye came to a standstill because the pickets had completely blocked off the main gate and turned back all wagons and lorries, explaining to the drivers why they were picketing the factory. The shop-stewards inside the factory were telling the rest of the workers that no one had been laid off and not to listen to the rabble outside as they were only trouble makers.

As a result of all this the 24 men were re-instated and the chairman of the Birds Eye group flew up from London and told the workers that he didn't want politics brought into the factory and threatened to close the factory down.

On Saturday, November 11, eight tenants on the estate received eviction notices. Seven of these were told they had up to the 20th of November to pay up their arrears or get thrown out, but the other one was only given till the 13th to pay up. At 4:30 on the 13th hundreds of people sealed off all roads leading to Tower Hill, causing traffic jams for a radius of seven miles. During the road block and for some weeks after there were also people in the threatened tenants house in case the bailiffs tried to get in. On the next day the Action Group received pledges of industrial support in the event of eviction from various industries on Merseyside.

Probably as a result of this show of force Kirkby Council decided not to evict any tenant for non-payment of arrears incurred by rent strike.

On Monday, March 12th Kirkby Councils Health and Housing Committee held a meeting in the Council buildings — the public was not allowed in. The Tower Hill rent strike was on the agenda for discussion and hundreds of tenants were outside the building to protest against any action that might be decided upon at that meeting. Police were on duty outside the building to prevent any of the tenants getting in. When one of the councillors turned up late everyone took the opportunity of pushing their way in with him. About a dozen people got in but were brutally thrown out by the police.

After the decision by the council not to evict they sent out court orders which are the first part of an attempt to recoup the arrears by attachment of earnings. The first of these which were received on March 26 were sent back to court with ON RENT STRIKE written across them — this decision was taken after a long discussion at an action group meeting. In May, 1970, tenants received letters asking them to attend court on the 24th of May and have a meeting with the registrar, probably to discuss the court orders that had been returned. The tenants decided to ignore the letters.

On the 25th of May some tenants received letters from the court informing them that starting from 22nd of June and on the 22nd of every month they have to pay the court \$67.50, which the court will then pay to the council. All these letters were gathered in and sent back with WE WON'T PAY written across them..

On the 22nd of June nobody paid the money and since then nothing has happened. The women in women's group have been talking about writing and distributing a leaflet about 'attachment of earnings' to give out at factories and also about revitalizing area committees so that everyone doesn't get scared and demoralized as they wait to see what the council will do next. (See article on Tower Hill Women's Group.)

TOWER HILL WOMEN'S GROUP

The Tower Hill women's group started round about December, 1972. At the moment it's made up of both women

from the estate and women from the Big Flame women's group. At that time some of us wanted to become involved as a long-term commitment in political activity with women. We wanted to be part of building a base in a community, to organize with other women on the bases of women's needs within a community struggle. The group's gone through a lot of ups and downs which we'll try to describe here because of the lessons we can all learn from that experience.

The women who initiated the group on the estate, and who first asked B.F. women to come, were among the most active members of the Rents Action Group (the co-ordinating body of the rent strike) and had become friends through that struggle.

For most women on Tower Hill the rent strike was their first experience of political struggle. And at least for the women who started the women's group, that struggle was an eye-opener:

PO: I didn't think I was capable of doing it. But I'm not surprised now because women are going from strength to strength now. They've made a stand on one thing and they're going to go on fighting.

MS: When this strike's over — you say we're going to win and get what we want — if something like this comes up again over a different issue would you jump in the deep end again or would you go back to being a housewife like you were?

PO: I'd do the same again because I just couldn't go back to the way I was. Personally I don't like the way I was. When I look back and think what I was — stuck in the house and just letting things happen — I wouldn't like to be like that again. I'd rather be the way I am.

MS: Do you think it's a question of you wouldn't like to be like that again or you just can't be?

PO: It's both. Now that I'm involved and I've seen what

we can do, especially the women, I wouldn't like to go back even if I could but I can't. I don't think I've done anything. I've just been like the others. But I'm surprised that I could take a stand and not be scared, because it's a big issue this, it's your house, the roof over your head and you've been brought up to look after that. You're glad to get your house and you're settled with your kids.

MS: Has your husband's attitude towards you changed?

PO: Yes. I think he's surprised at the change in me. He didn't like it at first but now he's used to it and I think he'd rather have me like this.

MS: He can accept you on level pegging with himself?

PO: Yes. He tells people that now who ask him. He wouldn't have done a few months ago. He goes to work and when he comes home I know he needs to relax. Well now he knows I do too, that I need things and other interests and to go out for a drink or something just like he does, and have a break from the kids and the house — and he helps me.

Because they knew the difficulties of being a woman with young kids involved in political activity they knew more women could become involved, who were still too frightened, tied down with kids and who still hadn't discovered their potential for being politically active. That was one reason why the women's group was formed — as a way of encouraging more women to come together to organize from their own situation and so participate in the struggle of the whole community.

R: The majority of women here have lived in Kirkby and then they've put their names down and got a house up here, and they go to their mothers or their sisters, and that's the extent of it. I was saying to Kathy, she can't get out the house, but I said, "what you did do last Wednesday, at the Birds Eye, shows that you'll

never ever ever be able to open a paper without reading between the lines. You'll never be able to watch television and say, 'well, everything's fine and the garden's green' because now you will have got a taste, and you'll never see the environment or anything in the light that you've seen it before." And I think that's all it takes, even if you're going to get their backs up. I think once you get that through to them, they'll never look back, they'll only look forward then, they'll start seeing things they've never seen before. That was the first time she'd been ever involved in anything like this. There was a lot of them like that. We had to shame Kathy because her man didn't want her to get involved. And we had to have a go at her, and she's quite militant now. So what she says is: 'When I listen to you I can go to him and I'll say this and I'll say that and I'll say the next thing....'

R: You see Theresa said to me, well you're young. I said when I'm 40 I might be dead with the fight but I'll keep fighting. So she said, 'everyone's not like you.' But I've been fighting myself for ten years, trying to find out where I was going. And its not been easy because I've been frightened. You know I've been listening to my parents, different people, older people and I've great respect for people, old, young or what. And as I've said to you before — violence I've never been able to take or participate in. But I feel now that I know where I'm going and I'll just keep going harder and harder but it's not an easy thing. It's a hard thing. Whereas people who are unaware sometimes are very lucky because they don't look at things and go sick at everything.

R: And you'll get women who'll talk to you and are interested but as soon as their men come in from work at night she'll think she might be able to say something interesting, something political say and as soon as she opens her mouth that guy says to her: 'now look here you don't know what you're talking about, shut up' and

then the woman gets deflated and thinks what's the point. I think that's why a lot of women don't get interested. It's no use kidding and saying it's easy for a woman to tell her man. I've seen it every day. It's not fucking easy when she's got to face that man and he's always been the so-called boss and that woman depends on him for livelihood. And when I hear women talk in Women's Liberation I want them to come right out into a typical family home and listen to a woman trying to do it. Some would say well I'd just get out. But it's not easy when you've got to live there day in and day out and you've got to bring up kids.... Women get frustrated but they've been told since they were little that their frustration is only a natural thing, it's typical of women and it'll pass. And maybe her man comes in and he's nice to her that night and her frustration passes. And women have been told that getting involved is boring and they go through thinking that. Women are told they're only fit for talking about each other. She's been told all she's able to do is sit there, be a great mother and listen to her kids screaming all day — that's an outlet and that's not boring and women have got to accept that. She's lived all her life thinking that her ultimate is a few kids and a home. Anything else frightens her. As soon as she tries talking to her man or her sister or her mother when anything goes on they laugh at her — 'that's not your worry....'

NOTE TO READERS

RADICAL AMERICA welcomes unsolicited manuscripts. We particularly urge people working in women's, community and industrial organizing projects to send analyses of the work they are doing. We are also interested in articles of history or contemporary analysis dealing with any significant aspect of the lives of working people and social movements, particularly in North America and Europe.

NIGHTCLEANERS' CAMPAIGN

(This account of the London night-cleaners' campaign was written by members of the London Women's Liberation Night-Cleaners' Collective, with help from some of the night cleaners. The campaign started with leafletting at the end of October 1970. International Socialist Women leafletted until Christmas, then Women's Liberation Workshop groups started alongside them and were joined by Socialist Woman (a women's group consisting mostly of women from the International Marxist Group). Cleaners have also been organising in Birmingham, Norwich, Lancaster and Manchester. In Lancaster cleaners went on strike for free transport, which they got, and were supported by students.)

Cleaning contractors make a lot of money out of work the cleaners are forced to do

Instead of employing cleaners directly, many large offices in the last few years have found it more convenient to contract the work out to cleaning companies. This means that the cleaning company promises in the contract to provide a certain number of women to clean so many feet of office space.

The contract is between the owner of the office and the cleaning contractor. The women cleaning don't know what it says. So there's nothing to stop the cleaning contractor from

providing much fewer cleaners than he promised. This does in fact happen, and is rarely found out.

Night cleaning is invisible work. Who knows or cares what goes on? The owner of the office and all the office workers are tucked up in bed. So this and other fiddles pass unnoticed.

"Time spent on problems such as one's cleaning workforce, recruiting it, organising and equipping it, is time diverted from the things in which the manufacturer or businessman is a specialist. His specialist time, effort and knowledge is being dissipated... Well, what type of work can contract cleaners do? They clean anything and everything. Nothing is too complicated nor too dirty." (Contract cleaners' publication)

The industry has grown by leaps and bounds since the war. The really fast growth has been very recent, since 1965.

Company	Year	Turnover (\$ million)	Profits After Tax (\$ million)
Industrial Contract Cleaners and subsidiaries	1968	2.1	.14
	1969	4.6	.28
Pritchard Cleaners and subsidiaries	1968	16.8	.66
	1969	27.3	.93
Initial Services and subsidiaries	1968	54.7	3.86
	1969	57.5	4.00

The large firms make bigger profits than the smaller ones. They are able to extract more profit out of the work women do because they operate on a larger scale. The rate of exploitation in the big firms is thus higher. Very little capital goes into equipment. The main cost for the employer is wages. So it is in the interests of the employers to keep the wages as low as possible.

Male full-time cleaners earn \$49.95, double the women's wages. The average full-time wage for women cleaners

throughout the country is \$24.05 — London rates are higher. So it is in the interests of the employers to hire women. Male part-time workers get the same rates as women. This is why night-cleaners, who are full-time workers, are nearly all women.

On one particular building, The Music Corporation of America in Mayfair (an expensive district in London), Office Cleaning Services have a contract which costs MCA \$330 per week. The labour employed consists of two women who clean the whole building five nights a week, and whose combined wages amount to \$65.

The Civil Service Union on contract cleaning

Government cleaners who are still employed directly and who are in the Civil Service Union (CSU) get higher wages and have to clean less space (10,000 square feet per cleaner, compared with 15,000 in contract cleaning). Consequently, contract cleaning costs are 30% lower than direct cleaning, which means that government offices are gradually going over to contract cleaning. But the 30% saving is at the expense of the women cleaners.

The CSU told the Prices and Incomes Board: "The main reason for the difference in costs between direct cleaning and contract cleaning... is that contractors pay low wages and give poorer conditions than the government." John Vickers, General Secretary of the CSU, says: "In all my years in the trade union movement I've never come across conditions like those in the contract cleaning business. It's like something out of the nineteenth century".

The 1968 Trades Union Congress (TUC) Conference expressed strong disagreement with the government's proposal to transfer one third of office cleaning in the civil service to cleaning contractors. In June 1968 representatives of the TUC General Council met the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Although they said they thought productivity and efficiency in cleaning could be improved, they said this should be done within the direct cleaning system by improving materials, equipment, and training. They said more money would be saved in the long run this way. They ques-

tioned the government estimates and pointed out the low wages of contract cleaners, and they suggested a centralised cleaning force and incentive bonus scheme. In correspondence later, the General Council asked if the reduction of one-third could exclude offices in areas of high unemployment.

The 1968 CSU motion calling on the government to make sure that cleaning contractors in the civil service should be restricted to firms paying the same rates as direct cleaning, and the General Council suggestion that the government should amend the Fair Wages Resolution were rejected.

The Fair Wages Resolution was passed by parliament in 1946, one of the first acts of Atlee's Labour government. It lays down that contractors to the government, local authorities, and all public utility undertakings, shall recognise the right of their employees to belong to a trade union and also, in civil service jargon, says that the contractor shall pay wages not less than those paid by the best employer in the trade.

The government refused to amend the Fair Wages Resolution to cover contract cleaning in public buildings, but admitted (31st. March 1969) in principle that the wages paid in the civil service sector must be one of the factors taken into account. Although the CSU has taken cases to the Industrial Court, so far the courts have said that direct cleaning rates cannot be compared with contract cleaning rates. This means that the level of wages in contract cleaning can be held down — which of course suits the cleaning contractors.

However, it does mean that cleaners employed by contractors can get their rates raised slightly by going to an Industrial Court through the union. In this way they can get parity with other cleaners. In 1971, for example, a firm called General Cleaners was ordered by the Industrial Court in Manchester to increase the rate they paid their workers from 60¢ an hour to 69¢ to cover the actual hours worked on what they called a "job and finish" basis.

The trade unions involved (Transport and General Workers Union, General and Municipal Workers, National Union

of Public Employees, Civil Service Union) said there should be a joint council of unions and employers and that the government should use its influence as a major customer to raise the cleaners' rates. The Prices and Incomes Board rejected the employers' suggestion that a Wages Council should be set up. These have not in the past improved the pay of low-paid workers.

Why bother to try to unionise women?

Some people are very critical of unions. They say they are bureaucratic and only concerned to improve wages. Also, the structure of unions tends to exclude women from the executive so the particular interests of women are not considered. We recognise that unions have many limitations, and that these limitations are most obvious in the case of women workers. However, to join a union is still a necessary first step if women are going to get better conditions at work.

Cleaning is women's work

Many of the women are forced to work at night because there are no nursery facilities. This means cleaners often don't get much sleep. Over a long period this is bound to affect your health, because you are doing two jobs. Many cleaners have a lot of children, and usually quite a few young children, because this is when money is tightest in a family. All women have a very narrow choice in jobs, and women who go into cleaning for various reasons have even less choice. They are often unsupported. The Prices and Incomes Board (PIB) report published in Spring 1971 said that a quarter of the women in their survey were the sole providers of their families. About a fifth of them were from families with an income below \$35 a week. More than 3% were living on the poverty line.

They are often immigrant women, which means that many jobs are closed to them. West Indian, African, Indian, Spanish, Cypriot women go cleaning because they have little chance of getting other jobs. Even within cleaning they have

less chance of being promoted. Have you ever met a colored supervisor?

There are women of all ages cleaning at night, from very young girls to old women with white hair. The PIB report found that the women in their survey tended to be under 40 (when the children are young) or over 60 (supplementing their pension). We are not certain whether this is general.

Night cleaners are sometimes called casual workers. This is completely wrong. They are working a full working week. Some people think that the cleaners only work for pin money. This is rubbish. People who think like that should try cleaning offices for a bit. It is true that there are always women coming on for short periods, at Christmas, or during a long strike such as the Post Office strike, or when a man is off sick. But this is for the basic necessities. However there is a large group of women who work for years and years in cleaning. Indeed after 12 or 15 years it gets so that you can't work in the day even though your children have grown up. Your body has adjusted to night work.

Condition of work in night cleaning

Long hours: 10 pm to 6 am generally, with slight variation. Low pay: most people get more money for doing night work; not cleaners — they get less. Pay is around \$30 a week, sometimes more, sometimes less. Wages vary from building to building. The same cleaning company can pay women different rates. When tax, insurance and fares are subtracted, cleaners can be left with only about \$15. No security: cleaners can be sacked without notice. Often they don't get holiday pay.

Hard work: cleaning is physically tiring. It can be very heavy work. Sometimes it's also dirty. If someone is away you still have to clean the building. When you do someone else's work, you don't get full pay, you get "cover money". This means you do twice the work for about \$1.00 extra. So it is always in the interests of employers to keep the buildings understaffed.

No protection: the Factory Acts don't apply to cleaners. This means that very young girls can work all night, that cleaners who are pregnant continue to work all night. Also, if you have an accident at work it's very difficult to get compensation, as the cleaning contractors are likely to deny responsibility.

The Cleaners Action Group demands

\$48.88 per week wages. Sick pay. Two weeks pay instead of notice or two weeks' notice in writing. Holiday pay — one day for every month worked. Adequate staffing on all buildings. Adequate cover money. Recognition of union.

Night cleaners want more pay, but there are also other demands which relate to general conditions. Until we are stronger our best bet is through the Fair Wages Resolution.

Local demands: conditions vary from building to building. Direct bargaining, e.g. over ventilation, the length of breaks, could be effective, if there is support from other buildings cleaned by the same contractor. Transport: at present many of the women travel long distances to work in London. Many live in south, east, or north-east London and have to get to the City of the West End. In Lancaster the cleaners have won the right of free transport to work. Why not in London? Control: any increase in wages is nearly always accompanied by a reduction in the number of women employed on a building. So the women pay back the increase by doing more work. Cleaners should be able to see the contract, and the union should be able to keep a check on the numbers employed to make sure the employers are not fiddling numbers.

Protection and restriction: women can't afford to be against protective legislation in general because at present women are doing two jobs. We should try to get protective legislation extended to men so it can't be used as an excuse to pay women less. At present, the difference between male and female rates in cleaning is defended on the grounds that women are not required to stretch to do high-level work. Equipment: cleaning contractors should provide more equipment.

Leafletters' report

The Shell Centre : waiting for action

Four of us from the Pimlico group and two from the Chiswick group began to leaflet the Shell buildings last June. The campaign had been under way since the previous November. Membership of the Transport and General Workers Union was building up slowly but we were still 20 or so short of the 50 needed before the night cleaners could form their own branch of the union. Shell was chosen as the next target because altogether 80 cleaners work there — 65 on the "upstream" building and 15 on the "downstream".

At first we were slightly nervous. Most of us felt embarrassingly middle class. However we were very encouraged to discover that the majority of the women stopped to speak to us, and several joined within the first month. Two or three of the women who joined first have been mainly responsible for the others joining. We now have about 22 altogether in the union on the two buildings. Three dropped out after they joined. We have had two meetings with some of the cleaners in a cafe near the Shell buildings. We have also had a meeting in a pub with the TGWU official. He has promised to write to Shell, to ask them for a room on the premises to hold a meeting with his union members. This, he hoped, would reveal Shell's attitude to the union.

The two buildings have different contractors: Office Cleaning Services on the upstream building, and Pritchards on the downstream one. We were hoping that conditions on the two buildings would vary, so that this might provide the long awaited opportunity for union intervention. However the two buildings do receive the same wages, \$30, although conditions do vary a little.

If the union could achieve just one small victory then we would have "got our foot in the door", as the union official puts it, and a foot in the door with contractors is what the campaign urgently needs. At the moment, women are still joining the union at Shell, but the majority of them are very apprehensive and frightened that they will get the sack. The supervisor on the downstream building is fairly encouraging, but the one on the upstream seems to delight in pro-

voking the women she suspects. The attitude of the supervisor to the union can be very important; the two weeks that the Shell upstream supervisor was away was when we managed to hold the two meetings in a cafe.

At the moment we are waiting to hear the outcome of the union's letter to Shell. In the meantime we are going to show extracts from the night cleaners film at one of our houses on a Sunday afternoon.

Cooks and the Department of
Education and Science: lost faith

Lucy first went out leafletting with May Hobbs (one of the office cleaners most active in the campaign) and Fergus from International Socialism in November 1970. They went to Somerset House, Australia House, and the ITV Centre in Kingsway. The night caretakers were mostly friendly and told them when the cleaners came of duty.

She then went to Somerset House alone, and found this rather difficult as she could only talk to one or two of the women at once, and the others would hurry off into the building. However those she spoke to about joining the union were very keen, although some of the black women were afraid they might lose their jobs. After this she went with Liz, as they could talk to many more women if there were two of them. After many weeks of leafletting and talking, they tried to persuade the cleaners to choose somebody to be the collector of their weekly subscriptions, 12¢, but this failed, as nobody wanted to take on the responsibility. So they decided to collect the money themselves each week. Actually there was only one building where 8 women joined in one evening and one actually volunteered to collect the dues. They made their two buildings for permanent collection Cook's building in Mayfair and the Department of Education and Science, nearby.

The DES was a building they leafletted consistently from November to July. There were about 10 women there, 7 of them black. The supervisor was very suspicious and hostile and constantly criticised the union, telling the women they were wasting their money. Only the black women joined.

They made the mistake of giving the impression that the union would obtain wage rises and improved conditions quite soon: indeed, this was what they believed at the beginning. They had never worked with unions or been involved in any political action at all, and didn't realise the enormous amount of work and planning involved.

The women paid regularly for months; they were given the "Cleaners' Voice" newsletter and the TGWU newspaper. The film people came along several times to interview them, much to the supervisor's resentment. The union refused to negotiate because there wasn't enough support ("enough" being at least 50% unionisation in any building they would negotiate for wages).

They gradually realised how powerless they were to help, what with combatting union bureaucracy, hostility from supervisors and other white women, and the women's own ignorance of union affairs. They felt they had deceived the cleaners because they hadn't explained that the struggle of unionisation might extend over years. At the beginning they hadn't understood this themselves; owing to the disproportionate amount of publicity the campaign had received, they were under the impression that success was near. During the summer they went away; other people helped sporadically to collect the dues, but the women lost faith. They still see them from time to time, but they don't take their money now.

Somerset House : still paying

After the usual pattern of talking to cleaners as they went in every week, 8 women joined the union, after about two months. Two were more aware of their exploitation than others; they were not alarmed by their employers' knowing about their membership. The others were more wary, but they all talked to each other during tea-break. Some were friends anyway, and in the end all joined except four cleaners on the building. The company supervisor was very rude about the women and scornful of their right to better wages and conditions. You were really back in a

mid-19th century situation; joining a union, to her, was some sort of a crime.

In fact, only 2 came from Somerset House and 2 from Bush House. It seems general that night cleaners find it difficult to come to meetings; they lead busy and tiring lives. Five women at Somerset House have 5 or 6 children. Also, many people are shy of "a meeting"; the word doesn't necessarily mean anything to them. Of course they are aware of the companies' attitude to unions, and they don't want to lose their jobs or get victimised. Of those who came to May's meeting from Bush House, two were white, two were black. It came out later that the whites did not get on with the coloured women, and one white woman even said afterwards that she would not join if blacks were going to get higher wages. In the event, the white woman did not join, but three black women did.

So women at Somerset House and Bush House have paid union dues for six months, and they have until now been keen that the union might achieve something. But it is clear that if nothing happens in the next couple of months they will get fed up, and who can blame them ?

The "woman question" and cleaners
Why is it hard to unionise ?

The cleaning contractors are completely opposed on the whole. They not only warn and threaten women but sack them on various pretexts, e.g. inefficiency, or go over to evening cleaning. The night cleaners work in groups of 10 or even fewer (although on very big buildings you can get 30 to 40 women employed). This makes it much harder for cleaners to organise than workers who are all concentrated together.

On the small buildings it's not too hard for the contractor to get other people in if the women complain or strike. The only hope on small buildings is to have support from women on other buildings cleaned by the same company. Help from the workers who work on buildings during the day is an important extra help.

The isolation of cleaners is made worse by the fact that they have so little time. The only night they can come to a meeting is Friday or Saturday. This means that their husband or someone else has to babysit. We've tried meeting on Saturday afternoon with the children, in an area not too far from where people live. But cleaners are scattered in different parts of London, and there's no guarantee that the women working in a particular building can all go to a meeting in the same area. We've also tried a meeting in the centre of town, with transport provided, and meetings in pubs near the buildings before work. The main problem with these has been that the cleaners have a lot of things to do before they go to work.

As with all women at work, the attitude to the union is connected with the particular situation of women in society. Many cleaners are doubtful about the union because it doesn't have an immediate effect, and it can mean simply trouble and the loss of the bit of money they are getting at the moment. The distrust we all have as women towards other women, and the fact that the area managers are men and can be superior towards women in ways that they couldn't be towards male workers, combined with the brainwashing women all receive to take things from men in authority, puts some women off union.

Even at work too, cleaners are responsible for things at home and have to think about shopping and prices; some of the women are against unions because they hold them responsible for rising prices. Also, the women who have come on for a short time feel it's not worth joining a union. There is nothing automatic about joining a union in their lives, so the women who have kept on paying tend to get fed up when nothing happens, while a small minority really think about it a lot, and about the general position of women in society as a whole. But for us leafletters it is very hard sometimes to try to persuade women to keep on paying, because we know how much cleaners need every penny they ear. On the other hand, there is nothing the cleaners can do without the first step of joining a union. But first steps take such an exhaustingly long time.

It's hard to explain to people who have never been in a union before the limitations of a union. They say why bother to join at all? This is a difficulty which not only leafletters but also cleaners who have become convinced about it have faced. Cleaners are all nationalities, which splits things up more, although not as much as it could. We've found that it's more likely to be the supervisors who say things against black women. But because the work is in such small groups, black and white women are often quite close and friendly. No black supervisors, though. The supervisor works very close to the women; she is not a remote authority but a person who is either liked or disliked as a person. Supervisors vary in their attitude to the union. They can be either bitterly opposed or really very strongly in support because they know very well what the set-up is in cleaning.

EDITORS' NOTE :

This article was written in December 1971. In the summer of 1972 there were strikes by night-cleaners at the Department of Defence building in Fulham and the Old Admiralty building, Whitehall. The strikers demanded recognition of their union, the CSU, \$7.50 a week pay rise, and better working conditions. They were joined by cleaners at a Home Office building who were protesting the firing of a supervisor and demanding negotiations on wages and conditions. Other unions gave support and union members refused to cross picket lines to deliver supplies to the buildings. The strike at the Department of Defence and Old Admiralty buildings was won in August — the cleaners demands being fully met, but the victory was short-lived. The contract under which the cleaners had been hired expired, and the cleaners were not rehired. The Home Office cleaners obtained reinstatement of the supervisor, but the contract under which they were hired expired and the struggle continues under new contractors.

At present the cleaners are concentrating on two issues. The first is trying to get a separate cleaners' branch within the Transport and General Workers Union, as men-

tioned in the article. The T&G has promised that this would be done, that May Hobbs would be an official secretary of the branch, and that other cleaners would fill the other positions in the branch. The second is an attempt to pressure Parliament into improving conditions of cleaners working for the government, and, more ambitiously, into employing cleaners directly rather than through contractors.

The women's movement continues to provide crucial support for the cleaners.

This article is excerpted from "The Night Cleaners' Campaign" in *The Body Politic: Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain 1969-1972*, compiled by Micheline Wandor (published by stage 1, 21 Theobalds Road, London WC1X 8SL. Price \$1.50 excluding postage)

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WORTH READING: A VERY SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Pantheon. This is the best book on women's history since Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. It deals with the role of women in revolutionary situations, beginning with the English revolution of the 17th century and ending with the Chinese and Cuban revolution. It is both feminist and rigorously materialist in its analysis. Unfortunately it suffers greatly from under-exposure in this country, and has not been able to find a paperback publisher yet.

Joyce Ladner, *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*, Doubleday Anchor. On black female adolescents in northern ghettos. Remarkably sensitive and filled with useful insights.

Two works of the brilliant early twentieth century socialist feminist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, are now out in paperback: *Woman and Economics*, written 1898, by Harper Torchbooks; and *The Home*, written 1903, by University of Illinois Press. Perkins Gilman was a pre-Marxian socialist, possibly the best feminist theoretician of her period, and lack of knowledge of her work contributes to holding back to the development of socialist feminist theory today.

Kathy Kahn, *Hillbilly Women*, Doubleday. Not in paperback yet unfortunately. A fascinating and class-conscious discussion of the situation of Appalachian women, by a noted singer of Appalachian folk songs.

We are delighted to see the reappearance of *Up From Under*, a New York women's journal. We always thought *Up From Under* was the best publication the women's liberation movement had ever produced; more than any other journal it reflects the concerns of working class women. A new issue now, after a long break, with a powerful short story by Susan Glaspell. Subscriptions for \$5 a year from 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY, 10012.

A new socialist publishing enterprise in Britain, Pluto

Press, is putting out several things that look very useful although we haven't seen them yet: Another book by Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History*, on feminism and socialism in the women's movement in Britain over the last 300 years; a translation of Werner Thonnessen's *The Emancipation of Women*, on the women's movement in Germany from 1863-1933, important to us because it was primarily a socialist movement with a large working-class base. These books each sell in paperback for \$4.50. Pluto has also published two relevant pamphlets: Alexandra Kollontai's *Communism and the Family*, written in 1920 by an important left-wing Bolshevik; and *The Politics of Homosexuality*, a new work by Don Milligan. All can be ordered from Pluto Press, Unit 10 Spencer Court, 7 Chalcot Road, London NW1 8LH, Britain.

Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," in *The Black Scholar* (a very good, radical, and not overly academic magazine, despite its name), Dec. 1971. An analysis of the economic significance of slavewomen's labor which looks at the whole of women's work in the whole of the slave economy.

Eli Zaretsky, "Capitalism, the Family, and Personal Life," in *Socialist Revolution*, numbers, 13, 14 and 16, 1973. On the history of the family and the development of individualism under capitalism, it complements in some important ways Vogel's article in this issue.

Han Suyin, a three-volume autobiography: *Crippled Tree*, *Mortal Flower*, and *Birdless Summer*, Bantam paperback. Many people wrongly think of Suyin as the author of a sentimental movie, *Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing*. A Eurasian born and raised in Setzuan Province in China, she made a remarkable and brave political transformation late in her life, from a daughter of a Mandarin and miserable wife of a Kuomintang general to a Maoist and propagandist for People's China. Her autobiography is moving and fascinating — she is able to make world-historical events seem graspable by her deep sense of the unity of the per-

sonal and the political. It is especially rich in details about the lives women in old China.

An excellent slide show, *Women in Vietnam*, is available for rental or sale from the California Indochina Peace Campaign, 181 Pier Avenue, Santa Monica, Calif. 90405. It is really substantive, with a historical section that sheds light on the uniquely high traditional status of Vietnamese as compared to other Asian women.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English have written an excellent pamphlet, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, now being distributed by The Feminist Press unfortunately for the highprice of \$1.25. It's worth getting a copy, however, because it documents a really crucial part of women's history: how the medical craft was stolen from women and how the craft became, under male domination, increasingly anti-human, arrogantly profession and profit-oriented. Anyone involved in health organizing projects ought to be familiar with this. Order from Feminist Press, Box 334, Old Westbury, N.Y. 11568.

The Feminist Press has also performed a great service by reissuing two wonderful full-length books, long out of print due to the smothering of working-class revolutionary culture that is so typical of our publishing industry. One is Agnes Smedley's autobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth*. She was a working-class communist and feminist, lived in Germany and China during periods of important political struggle, tremendously observant and a wonderful writer. Her book is especially eloquent about her family, about life in the mining towns of Colorado during the Ludlow massacre, about the politics of sexuality and human relations. A second reissue is Elizabeth Harding Davis' *Life In the Iron Mills*, probably the first attempt in this country for any established writer to create a proletarian hero. Even better than the novelette, with it Feminist Press has published a biography of Harding Davis by Tillie Olsen. It is one of the most political biographies of women we have seen, setting out absolutely unequivocally the social pressures that finally destroyed her large literary talent.

To Our Readers

This issue of Radical America marks the departure of Paul Buhle, who has moved away from Boston and the editorial staff. He will continue to work on the magazine from New York. Still, Paul's moving does bring about at least a symbolic discontinuity with Radical America's past. It was founded by him in 1967 as an outgrowth of an SDS internal education program on American radical history. Throughout most of the magazine's years in Madison, Wisconsin — until the formation of an editorial board in the fall of 1970 — he was in effect the sole editor. Even after editorial responsibility became collectively shared, first in Madison and then in Boston, the force and depth of his ideas made him an extremely influential figure on the magazine. The rest of us who remain in the Boston editorial group have benefitted greatly from his influence, and we are grateful for it.

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