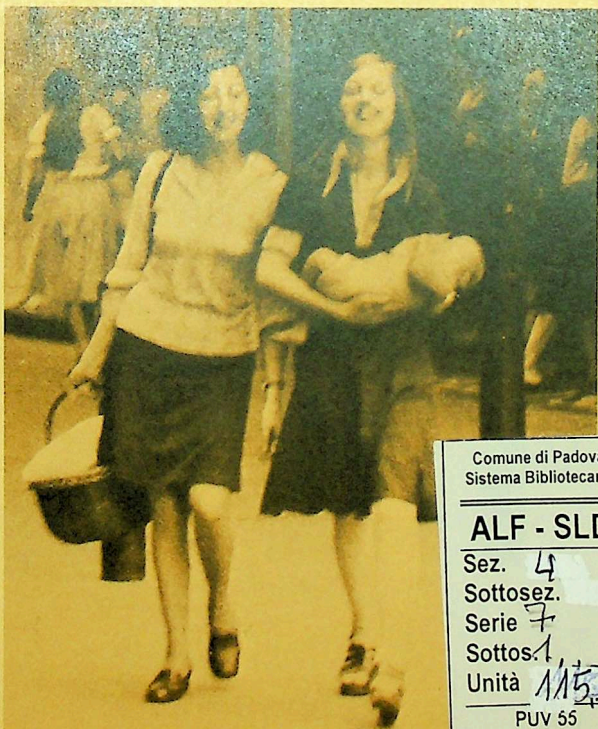


ALL WORK AND NO PAY

Women, Housework,
and the Wages Due



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ALL WORK AND NO PAY

Women, Housework,
and the Wages Due

edited by

Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming

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If Women were Paid for All They Do

*If women were paid for all they do
There'd be a lot of wages due*

—from a 1940s china money box in the form of a rolling-pin

When a baby woman is born, everyone knows what will be expected of her. Traditionally dressed in pink, she is bought dolls as well as a teddy bear, and later a cookery set rather than a building kit. She is trained from the first to be good-tempered and not too adventurous, to learn to please rather than to fight, to learn to help around the house rather than stay out with her friends. To learn to put the needs of the household, the family, before her own needs.

Some people say women don't get enough job training, but in reality we have the longest and most meticulous training of all. We are being trained to work 'for love'.

As women, we are forced to accept that if we have a relationship with a man, it will involve a lot of work: looking after him, putting his needs before ours. Even if both man and woman are earning a wage, the man's wage will be higher than the woman's and so his

job more important than the woman's. His well-being and needs will come first. If we want children, then our wage will stop when the children are young and we are home full-time. We will have to depend on the father for money or else scrape by on Social Security [Welfare]. And we are forced to accept that along with the pleasure of having a child, we will have to accept a lot of work. Ours will be the job of looking after that child, caring for the child physically and emotionally. We will be responsible for that child's health and happiness.

The wife and mother who goes out of the home to earn a wage, to escape being totally dependent on a man, being isolated in the home, and the penny-pinching that trying to make one wage feed the family involves, takes a *second* job. She doesn't give up her first job, but has to squeeze it in first thing in the morning, in the evenings, at weekends.

The single 'career girl' too must do housework at evenings and weekends. If she goes out with a man she will usually be doing some of his housework. And even if we don't marry or live with a man, the fact that most women do means that every man will see a housewife when he sees us. Men expect us to be at their disposal sexually and emotionally. To be sympathetic to their problems, bolster their egos, have a ready smile, make the tea.

No woman can escape this work. We have some room to manoeuvre over how much housework we will do, but none of us can avoid it altogether.

ALL WOMEN ARE HOUSEWIVES. Single or married, young or old, with or without children, lesbian or straight, that housework is our first job. But that job of work is so identified with being female, so tied to what's expected of us from birth, that it's hard to see where work ends and we begin. If we had a wage for that work, we would begin to know what is us and what is our work. Even to ask for a wage is already to say that *we are not that work*.

While housework isn't paid for with a wage, we can work 100 hours a week in the home, as women with young children do, and at the end of the week there's nothing to show for it. We have no money and we seem to have produced nothing. No wonder men say, "What have you been doing all day?" We sometimes wonder ourselves where our time has gone, but we know from our mental,

emotional and physical exhaustion that we've been working flat out.

The product that our housework produces is people, people who are to work as we have worked, as housewives and as wage earners. We produce and reproduce in other people and ourselves the ability to work and go on working, we produce labour power. All other production would grind to a halt tomorrow if women weren't producing these workers.

Wherever else we are, in schools, hospitals, factories, fields or offices, we carry with us our housework. We do housework in the mornings, evenings and weekends as well as going out to work. And in our waged jobs we often find ourselves cooking, cleaning, sewing, caring, doing the work that services people all over again.

Everyone knows that women's wages are lower than men's. This is not an accident. We are forced to be grateful for *any* wage because we are trained to work for no wage. And employers can keep our wages low because they know that there are countless women without any wages who are queuing up for the job if we don't want it.

Our housework goes on behind the scenes, unnoticed, uncounted, uncharted as long as it is unpaid. But if we demand to be paid for it, if we demand Wages for Housework from the State, we are saying first of all that housework is work. We are saying that we don't accept that being born female should condemn us to looking after people for a lifetime, that we want to be able to go slow, strike, refuse our work the same as other workers. We don't have to change nappies because we are female, we don't have to look after everyone because we are female, we don't have to be the servants of the world because we are born with a womb.

We are saying that we women need money of our own—if we weren't forced to depend on men for money, we wouldn't have to put their needs before ours, to service them sexually, physically, emotionally. We could begin to find out what *our* needs are.

But we are also saying that government and employers—the State—owe us a living, the State which benefits from the work that men, women and children do must pay us women for keeping everyone functioning for that work. Men and women work all day and at the end of the week those in waged work get a wage packet

which doesn't buy much more than the necessities of life. Those who have worked at home get nothing. The wealth that we have created goes to the employers and the State.

In the twentieth century, when they can send men to the moon, we have some idea of the technology that exists (and which we have paid for with our work); we have some idea of the technology that could free us from our work. That there's no need for anyone to work all day, to work every week in order to live. When we see in the shops, on TV, everywhere around us, the wealth that our work has created, we have some idea of the gap between what our work has produced and what we get in return for that work. We know that the money we are demanding is our money, that we are only getting back what is owed to us, the wages due.

The idea of Wages for Housework is not new. Women in the late nineteenth century were already discussing—

Who works without wages?

... The worker's wife darns and mends things that are not worth the trouble she takes; she calculates and drudges without end; she looks for the cheapest food, which also takes time; she never counts the hours of labour—her work is never done.

... If all housewives were to die at once, and the men were forced to buy everything ready for use, wages would have to rise immediately. It is by her unpaid labour that the housewife makes it possible for her husband's wages to be kept so low.

Who profits from low wages?

The employer, of course, so all the toiling of the woman is in truth not profitable to her family, but to the employer. Housewives keep their families in the cheapest way; they nurse the children under the worst circumstances, and all the toiling of thousands of housewives enables the possessing classes to increase their riches, and to get the labour-power of men and children in the most profitable way.*

*Mrs. Wibaut, 'Working Women and the Suffrage', publ.1890s. Republished in *Women in Rebellion, 1900*, Independent Labour Party, Leeds 1973.

But in the last few years women have not only been discussing the idea but acting on it.

The explosion of the Welfare Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement in the late 1960s was a dramatic expression of the struggles that women had been making for years, and in turn gave a voice to and strengthened that rebellion. Welfare mothers in the U.S.* and 'unsupported mothers' in Britain directly attacked the State and demanded payment for the work they had been doing in the home. They refused to have husbands just because they had children, they refused to be sterilised just because that was cheaper for the State, they refused to accept Welfare as a charity. They demanded wages from the State because they were working.

Their struggle cannot be separated from the rest of the tumultuous '60s, which was a period of rebellion all over the world. The student movement, the youth movement and the struggle of young blacks in the ghettos—the struggle of those outside the factory, the wageless—exploded onto the streets. In the factories, workers, especially young workers, found new forms of struggle. As well as sabotage and strikes, they used the higher wages negotiated in return for boredom, speed-up and danger, to pay for Mondays or Fridays off. They were refusing work and its routines by any means possible.

Each area of the world had its own variations on these themes. But in the 'general' rebellion and refusal, the specific interests of women were overlaid and therefore denied. The welfare mothers, drawing strength from these struggles, not only spoke to the needs of all women but were in fact a public crescendo to the massive *rebellion of women* that had been going on behind closed doors, appearing publicly only in divorce and abortion statistics.

Women had been walking out of marriages, refusing the work that went along with a relationship with a man. Those women who stayed in marriages fought to get the men to do the housework, refused to have large families because having children brought more work, fought to get access to a wage packet of their own, even though that meant a second job, and then fought for pay rises. And now welfare women were demanding a wage *without* a second job, and refusing to take a second job.

* In the U.S., the Welfare Movement has been led by black women, even though white women have been a majority of welfare mothers.

The Women's Liberation Movement, composed at first of young 'middle class' women, was part of the same rebellion. Bra-burning (the refusal to be a sex object), refusal of marriage, struggles for child care (the refusal to accept all the work of looking after children), struggles for free abortion and contraception—the right to decide not to have children, not to be defined only as wife and mother, not to have to do the work their mothers had done.

The demand for Wages for Housework is the product of these struggles. It is the demand which makes explicit the connection between all the apparently diverse struggles against housework, for more time for ourselves, and for money for the work we have been doing.

The first analysis of these struggles which explicitly identified housework as the major ground of struggle for us women was *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. * That book made sense of what we had experienced as women and what we knew of our mothers' lives as well as our own. At the same time, in describing women's work as producers of labour power, workers, the book had grasped the source of our power as women. The work we have in common is the work on which all other work rests. In demanding a wage for that work, we have a lever of power to refuse it.

In seeing our potential power we can see too the crisis that the rebellion of women has already created. The 'crisis' we hear about every day is the product of our struggle, of our refusal of 'our' work. When women rebel in the family, the family which rests on our submission begins to break down, and the factory, office, school and hospital feel the tremors.

Women who also have waged jobs have taken their rebellion into those jobs. Absenteeism, disengagement from work, disengagement from the trade unions and the age-old swindle of more money being tied always to more work—we have been notorious for all of these. Increasingly women have been going on strike for higher wages, refusing the blackmail of working 'for love' even in those jobs where we have been most blackmailed by what is expected of us as women. The devoted secretary has become the temp typist, refusing to make

tea and remember the boss's wedding anniversary, moving from job to job in search of higher wages. The teacher has walked out of the classroom. The devoted nurse has walked off the wards.

But the rebellion of women who are not themselves in waged jobs has reached into these jobs too, through the children they would not (and could not) discipline, through the men they have refused to depend on. The rebellion of young people, their refusal to work—truancy, the youth movement, the student movement, drop-outs, flower power—is attributed to the refusal of housework by their mothers and to their taking a second job. This is 'the breakdown of the family'. The mothers refused to control these children both because their rebellion made them uncontrollable, and also because the mothers were unwilling to take the part of police and social workers against them. And when the young people refuse to take the jobs that their parents were forced to accept (for instance, at a time of massive unemployment, London Transport cannot find enough workers) those already in waged employment are in a stronger position to press their demands. When women refuse to be dependent on a man's wage packet, and to impose the discipline on a man that our dependence on them had meant in terms of their *having* to have a regular job and bring in a regular wage, then we make it possible too for the men to press their demands. They lose a servant but gain the power to refuse their own servitude.

This is our part in the capitalist crisis. The struggle of different sectors of the working class internationally has been cutting into profits, undermining capital's ability to plan, their ability to get on with their business of accumulating profits. And the response of employers and their State is to try and get all workers to work harder, and particularly to put us women back in our place, working to keep everyone working.

Unemployment, wage restraints or wage cuts, inflation and price rises, Welfare cuts—in every case they want to cut our access to wealth, and in this way to increase our work, to *force* us to accept more work.

Price rises mean that women must either spend longer shopping for cheap food, longer cooking to make cheap food palatable, longer washing because we can't afford washing machines or launderettes; or else (if we haven't already) take on a second job because the man's wage packet won't keep the family. Often we have to do both.

*By Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James. Published by Falling Wall Press, third edition, Bristol 1975.

At the same time they are laying women off and laying men off. They are putting pressure on us all, women and men, to fight for the jobs that are available, to accept lower pay and worse conditions. They want to intensify the working day both outside the home in the factory and inside the home in the family. Welfare cuts hit women hardest—women on Social Security [Welfare] or dependent on men on Social Security have a longer working day to make the money stretch. Cuts in the health service mean that women take care of the ill at home. Cuts in nursery facilities mean that women take care of children at home. Women are expected to absorb the costs of the crisis by working harder.

Women continue to refuse this imposition. All over the world, in whatever ways are open to us, we are demanding and taking more time and money for ourselves. The needs of women everywhere are the same needs and the different struggles that women have been making have the same objectives: to take back our time, which happens to be our lives; to take back the wealth which we have created with generations of unpaid labour.

This book is part of the campaign for Wages for Housework. In showing what we women internationally have in common; in showing how, no matter where we find ourselves, every one of our struggles increases the power of every other; in describing the lives that women lead and the struggles that women have been making; we are demonstrating that an international movement of all women demanding wages for their work is not only possible but already a reality.

Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, July 1975

The International Perspective

The Housewife

In Italy on the weekend of International Women's Day 1974 there was a weekend-long rally—with a photographic exhibition, film show, singing, speeches and discussion—in Ferretto Square, Mestre. It was organised by the Triveneto Committee for Wages for Housework, and opened their campaign. This was the first public demonstration for Wages for Housework. The following is one of the speeches from that occasion.

I am a secretary and I speak for women like myself who have an outside job besides their housework. I want to say why I am in favour of this campaign for Wages for Housework and why, therefore, I'm taking part in this day of action.

I have found it impossible to struggle together with my workmates to improve the conditions of our job outside the home. This is because, on the one hand, women who take a job outside the home generally work for only a few years; they do it to put away money to get married, to save up for their dowry, to buy clothes, cosmetics—that is, all the equipment that enables them to find a

husband. For women work outside the home is transitory work. It has been impossible to build a stable organisation for struggle with these young girls who stay for a few years and then leave.

On the other hand, some older women have to go back to jobs because their husband's pay packet is no longer enough to keep the family going. Women of a certain age, married, with children, with a house to keep going as well as their second job, have never found the time to organise. And this is the weakness of women when, in addition to housework, they also have to work outside the home. This is our situation, women's situation.

But what has been suggested to us up to now?

They have put forward emancipation through a job outside the home. All of them—the reformists, the extra-parliamentary groups. *All of them. Without even noticing, without ever discussing the fact, without seeing (because they were men) that we already had a job—housework.* A heavy, unpaid job, which they never discussed, never even saw—I repeat—just because they were men.

They have told us, "Liberate yourselves through work outside the home", and we have found ourselves working 16-18 hours a day. They have the nerve to come and say this to us, simply because we are women. They never would have said it to men, and in fact they've never had the nerve to propose the 'emancipation of men' through 16 hours of work, eight for pay and eight for nothing! Only capital, in the early stages of industrialisation, has so far managed to impose such a long working day on us all—women, children and male workers.

They have told us also, "Let's struggle for social services, let's struggle for nurseries—so you can work outside the home." It was taken for granted that only women with jobs outside the home would be allowed to use the nurseries—never full-time housewives!

We've found ourselves struggling for nurseries in very small numbers and with no power, so we got very few nurseries and these are terrible. They gave us the OMNI nurseries,* concentration camps for our children. While we were at work these nurseries gave our children tranquillisers, tied them to the beds, and we couldn't even find the strength to reject these ghettos, these 'social services'.

*State nurseries, which are notoriously badly run and badly equipped.

And as far as working outside the home is concerned, let's not mince words: *it's not the work we need, it's the money!* It is to get money that women take on this second job—to have some money for themselves, to give some to the family when their husband's pay isn't enough, or just because they are tired of asking others for money. I've never heard a woman who wasn't 'political' say she was going out to work in order to liberate herself. I've always heard women say, "The work is never-ending", that when they get home, they have to "go right back and start working again".

The 'hidden work'

I've only begun to see this question of work clearly since I've been in the women's movement. From the very beginning the movement has unanimously denounced housework as work we all do that has never been paid for. Then I realised that in the struggle over wages in jobs outside the home there were too few of us, too few, and so we have been losing that struggle.

The problem then was to see on what ground we women, all of us together, could struggle and demand money.

Even those of us who go out to work have to do housework. When we come home we find the washing-up to do, the beds to make, the children who no longer recognise us, who don't know who we are.

Then I discovered, we discovered, that the strength of women is enormous. That it could be enormous, on precisely this ground of common struggle—housework, the work we all do that nobody has ever seen. On this basis we would be able to find the strength to move forward, to begin to organise, to carry on this campaign . . .

I also realised that through this campaign for Wages for Housework we can find the strength to determine the conditions of our jobs outside the home, and I've seen that this is so.

I came out of my home to look for a job in a condition of indescribable weakness. I had to take a job at 70,000 lire [$\pounds 42/\$105$] a month. And this was because behind me there were millions of housewives without even a penny, ready to take the same job, ready to compete with me (because they have so divided us), ready to work for 60,000 lire [$\pounds 36/\$90$] a month because 60,000 lire is better than nothing.

The *type* of job we are forced to accept also demonstrates the weakness of our position. I'm a secretary, which means being a mother, wife and mistress, having to remember all the appointments; if the boss is hungry you have to phone the sandwich bar, go out for his coffee and buns. And the list could go on and on . . .

This is my job, the work I do outside the home! The work that is supposed to liberate me!

But what power have I got to determine the conditions of that work, what power have I got to get more money, what power have I got to reduce that work, if millions and millions of women at home go on being mothers, wives and maids for nothing? What power have I got to demand social services if millions of women at home go on providing these same services for nothing? What power have I got to demand nurseries while millions of women go on raising children for nothing?

A common struggle

I finally realised that that was not the right way to fight, that the job outside the home was not the place to begin, that we had to choose an objective that was common to all women, to struggle for.

We could gain the power to determine the conditions of social services and the conditions of the second job only through the struggle for Wages for Housework. If we can make the work every woman does in her own home count, if we can get it paid for, we'll no longer be forced to do embroidery at home for 200 lire [12p/30c] a day as we do in Sicily! Because that's the work they offer us. That's the money they give us. And they have the nerve to do it just because we are women! I won't say any more about the many horrible low-paid jobs which we women are forced to do.

I also realised this. That even if there was some chance of talking with other women at my job and trying at least to see how to organise against the conditions of work outside the home, we still weren't managing to organise ourselves—to organise with all other women—against housework. Housework always remains a nightmare for all women, married or unmarried, with or without children, young or old.

In the feminist movement I found the possibility of organising with all other women, and it became clear to me that Wages for

Housework would be the only guarantee that we would be able to determine the conditions of housework as well as those of work outside the home.

We're still dusting furniture with a rag in 1974! We're still doing housework in the most primitive ways! We still sweep our houses with brooms the way women swept caves millions of years ago! This work, housework, must change!

We must find the power to destroy it, to change it, to reduce the hours of this work, we must find that strategy of struggle through which we can break the chain of our exploitation from home to factory to office to maternity ward.

In *Wages for Housework* we have found this basic strategy for the liberation of all women.

We've worked hard for the campaign because we believe in these ideas. We've distributed many leaflets. I've distributed them myself. There wasn't one woman passing on the street who didn't agree. All women think housework must be recognised, must be paid.

We are slaves

We must have our own health insurance, it is the right of all women. Young women, students, suffer the economic blackmail of their own parents, they have no way of expressing their sexuality; they can't travel, they have to learn to become housewives, the future women in the home, utterly dependent on the family. This is to be a slave.

After marriage women work all day. If there isn't enough money or if they don't want to ask their husbands for it, they go out to work. At 40 we women are deformed. You needn't look hard to see in our faces, in women's faces, the life we lead. At 40 our bodies are deformed. This body bears the marks of hundreds of miseries, of thousands of hours of work which we donate free to the bosses, which we donate to the State, that State which is based on the family, which is the place of our exploitation, the place of our work. That is why we demand money from the State—it is from that violent, fascist State that we want money, money like all other workers!

To the comrades who come to tell us, "You should carry on the class struggle," as if our struggles were not class struggles, we say, "Comrades, read what we've written!"

Half the world's working population is unpaid—this is the biggest class contradiction of all! And this is our struggle, the struggle for Wages for Housework. It is *the* strategic demand, at this moment it is the most revolutionary demand for the whole working class. If we win, the class wins; if we lose, the class loses.

That's for the comrades who don't understand, who don't want to read, who laugh at what their mothers do—our leaders of the extra-parliamentary left! Our leaders of the extra-parliamentary left, who tell us that we deal in ideology, that we are sociological. Sisters, we say to these leaders, "Go home and look at your mother with new eyes. Look at her not heartlessly, like a robot, like a man, but as one human being to another!"

I want to say something also about the situation of older women, because nobody ever talks about them. Women of 50, women of 60, old women, never retire. This is because our work is unrecognised and unpaid. A man, when he finishes working, retires, which means he no longer works. Women are not only subjected to the mockery of the State pension, that pittance, but they go on working at home, they go on doing housework until they die.

This is our destiny. As long as we women, mothers, sisters, go on bringing up children at home for nothing, when we get old we find ourselves landed with the role of 'granny', which means we have to bring up our grandchildren for nothing as well—so they manage to make us go on being mothers as long as we live.

Women go through the menopause. The menopause can be treated. But no, women must suffer 10 years of hot flushes, 10 years of pain, 10 years of suffering. It is 10 years of our life they take away. An older woman has no right to love, or to fall in love. She is discriminated against sexually, she has no right to a sexual life; she must be only a 'granny'!

We have to pay a very high price for motherhood, at every age and in every situation.

Let's look and see what life is like for the girls who increasingly are trying to refuse marriage even if they have children and are unmarried mothers. These women, these mothers are put in disgusting institutions. Their children suffer discrimination at all levels, like rotten apples. The OMNI doesn't want them, it doesn't want these

children without marriage, these children without a daddy. These children have to go into orphanages. These are the services they have given us, for which we are supposed to struggle!

If we have handicapped children, what help do we get? None. Derision, that is all. We have to hide them in the house, and when we can't manage them any more we have to put them in horrible institutions where they suffer further discrimination. And these too are our children, it is for them that we struggle. We are struggling against this exclusion and this exploitation. Because our struggle for Wages for Housework opens a political perspective for all those strata of the class whose powerlessness has up to now been absorbed within the family: old people, children, the handicapped, etc.

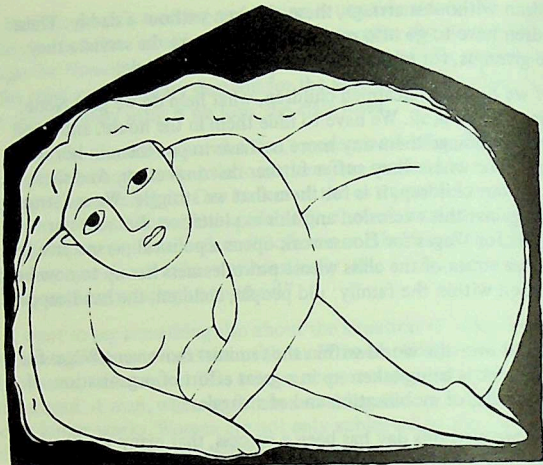
So all over the world within the feminist movement Wages for Housework is being taken up in a great effort of organisation, of propaganda, of mobilisation and of struggle.

We are glad this day has been a success, that many women have come; that means that many women are coming together, many women are beginning to struggle for Wages for Housework and this we put forward as the order of the day for all!

State and bosses, start calculating
We want our wages, and we're not waiting!

Polda Fortunati, Mestre (Italy), March 1974





8 MARZO 1973

**contro il lavoro domestico
che sostiene il mondo
ma soffoca e limita
la donna**



LOTTA FEMMINISTA

Against housework which sustains the world but suffocates and imprisons the woman.

LOTTA FEMMINISTA [FEMINIST STRUGGLE]

Lesbian and Straight

The perspective that results in the demand for Wages for Housework recognises that housework is not women's biological destiny. We have all been raised to think that we will 'naturally' do the cooking, cleaning, raising children, looking after men, because we are all women. Wages for Housework says that we do this work because we are trained to do this work, because the State needs us to do this work.

Heterosexuality is part of the definition of our housework. It is a role that has been imposed on us by and for the benefit of capital. Heterosexuality is the morality that says that all women 'naturally' serve men sexually (and in other ways—emotionally, physically etc.). We know that many women are lesbians, many women are 'frigid', many women are celibate, so we know that heterosexuality is not in our genes, but in our training for the work that we must do. We create and service the workers of the world (including ourselves). The existence of lesbianism points out to us that this work is not the result of our biological nature. Lesbianism exposes sexual servicing as WORK.

Wagelessness guarantees our servitude

The institution of our work—our factory—is the family. In the family we do the work of producing and training a new generation of workers. In the family we do the work of maintaining the man, so that he is able to work another day. In the family we act as a discipline on the man, because we must force him to work so that we and our children don't starve. Our needs become the needs of the family, and the needs of the family are capital's needs. It is our wagelessness that guarantees that we do not place our own needs or the needs of our children above those of the family and capital. Without money we have no way to meet our own needs—we even have problems defining them for ourselves.

The existence of lesbianism helps define the sexual needs of women. It is the expression of all women's need to control our own sexuality, just as demanding community controlled daycare is an expression of our need to be free from the responsibility of training new workers. It is not in itself a solution to our sexual needs. It is

not in itself a victory. But it is a struggle against capital's institutionalisation of our sexuality nevertheless.

One of the services that women perform for men and the State is sleeping with men. Our job as sex objects is separate from loving or having children. Bearing children is a separate job that only happens to require sex with a man as a prerequisite. Loving is something we try to do in spite of capitalism, not because of it. Loving serves the State insofar as it is necessary for the sexual service of the man or the maintenance and training of our children etc. The State tries to convince women that having sex is a 'labour of love' in the same way that it tries to convince us that cooking breakfast and raising children is a labour of love. We may enjoy frying eggs. We certainly may love our children. We may even like having sex. But these facts don't change the fact that all these things are work and are not performed only for ourselves and our families. In fact, it is because these things are work for someone else that it is often so hard for us to love at all.

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

Lesbianism is workers' control

Because lesbianism is a refusal to sexually service men it is a fight against that work. One of the crucial working conditions of heterosexuality is isolation of women from each other. Lesbianism is a refusal of some of this isolation. In lesbian relationships we still take care of ourselves and other women (other workers) so it is not an escape from our work. But because we are doing this work with other women, it is a form of workers' control. When we go to bed with a man, he thinks that he is escaping from work. Women know that sex is work. Men do not. For the man, sex seems an escape from work—he is the boss. It shows. We can feel it. That is why it is

so hard for us to love the man who beds us. When we sleep with a woman, we are still serving the State—she too must be kept just happy enough to keep working. But at least when we spend our time and sexual energy on women we are also maintaining her for her struggle against our work. That's workers' control.

As lesbians, we do not think that we are any stronger than, any better than, any different from other women. All women are fighting against our work in different ways, and lesbianism is just one of those ways. Lesbianism is a struggle, and because we have all as women built our own power, we as lesbians are able to be open about what we are, how we are fighting, what we need. All of us are houseworkers—we are no different in the eyes of the State. We are no different in the work that we do. We are no different in that we fight against that work. We were all raised to believe that heterosexuality was part of our 'nature'. And we, too, have believed it. That is why it is often painful to be a lesbian. We feel like freaks. It is only when we remember that NO WOMAN LIKES HOUSEWORK, and therefore in the eyes of the State we are like freaks, that we can feel stronger.

All women are straight; all women are lesbian

It is the struggle of ALL women that has given us the strength to come out as lesbians. Our existence and our struggle as lesbians therefore gives strength to ALL women. All women, women who are called lesbians and women who are called straight, are existing under capitalism for the same purpose—to serve capital through serving the family and men. This is what we mean when we say that all women are straight. Lesbians are part of women's struggle against capital. NO WOMAN WANTS HER SEXUALITY TO BE SUBJUGATED TO THE NEEDS OF THE STATE—TO THE NEEDS OF CAPITAL. This is what we mean when we say that all women are lesbians. Until we have completed this fight against our subjugation, no woman is free of it. Lesbianism is part of that fight. It is not an absolute victory, but it is always a victory that we can struggle at all. And every struggle gives us the power to fight harder.

As lesbians become visible, we are able to see, as women, that we are fighting against the institutionalisation of our sexuality—against our role as sex objects for men. Each of our different situations—straight, celibate, lesbian—is the point from which we are fighting.

Lesbianism is used as a threat to keep all women down, to keep us in line. We must take this threat and turn it around against the State, to refuse capital's power to discipline us. We must take the words lesbian, dyke, queer, that they lay on us and define them for ourselves. This is why it is important for lesbians to be visible within Wages for Housework.

We are not saying that all women should be lesbians, but we are saying that as lesbians we are struggling in the interests of all women. Instead of being paralysed by the threat of lesbianism, we can use that threat by never denying the possibility of our own lesbianism. Even in individual relationships with individual men, when we need a lever to fight back we can always leave open the possibility of lesbianism.

People think, sometimes, that lesbians don't do any housework. When a lesbian stands up and explains why she needs Wages for Housework it becomes clear that ALL women are doing housework. The amount is irrelevant, because being a woman means that our lives are defined by the fact that universally women are housewives.

This paper is an attempt to start some dialogue on lesbianism in the Wages for Housework movement.

Postscript

This paper has been written so many times that we have lost count. The rough drafts, rewrites, meeting notes etc., which we have saved for our own interest probably weigh several pounds. We hope that as a beginning statement on lesbianism from a Wages for Housework perspective it helps clear up some of the problems we all had. It was written by the Wages Due Collective in Toronto, Canada. Originally we were all women who had been through the women's movement, the lesbian separatist movement, and had eventually been convinced of the Wages for Housework perspective. We had a lot of help and criticism from straight sisters in Wages for Housework, as well as from lesbian women who are still afraid of the definition of themselves as housewives (afraid of straight women—through long histories of being excluded by 'straight women's movements'). We still have a lot of questions. The damage that has been done to lesbian women by capitalism is something that we didn't get into much in this paper—but should be discussed. In many ways it is the same damage as has been done to all women. In some ways it is

unique. It is easy to resent straight women when you are a lesbian—it is hard to overcome this. None of us has been comfortable with this resentment—we all know in our hearts that something is not right when this happens—that we are fulfilling someone else's plans. Now we have the tools to deal with it. Now we have a perspective that explains it—and that we are part of without having to keep quiet about our lesbianism. The strength that we have gained, as lesbians, through Wages for Housework, is something that we want to share with all women. It is one thing to know that you are fighting. It is something quite different to know that you are not alone.

The Wages Due Collective, Toronto (Canada), May 1975

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Ellen Woodsworth Francie Wyland

Wageless of the World

The following article, beginning with the feminist perspective that all women have their wageless housework in common, explores the implications of this for the Third World, and the relationship between the struggles of women in the Third World and those of women in the metropolis. It is a complicated piece, since it breaks new ground. We are publishing it here because the relationship between the situation of women in the Third World and women in the metropolis is such a crucial question. It is taken from the Preface to the Latin American edition of the book The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community (see p. 10 above for the significance of this book).

The working class is divided by the power of those whose work is waged (men) over those whose work is unwaged (women). But the hierarchy within the working class is by no means confined to the power of men, identified with the wage, over women, identified by wageless and therefore invisible work. There is also the power of the waged worker in the metropolis over the unwaged worker in

the Third World. Both are fundamental to the capitalist division of labour nationally and internationally. In other writing, developing a paragraph of Marx, we approached the hierarchy within the working class this way:

A hierarchy of labour powers and a scale of wages to correspond. Racism and sexism training us to acquire and develop certain capabilities at the expense of all others. Then these acquired capabilities are taken to be our nature and fix our functions for life, and fix also the quality of our mutual relations. So planting cane or tea is not a job for white people and changing nappies is not a job for men and beating children is not violence. Race, sex, age, nation, each an indispensable element of the international division of labour. *Our feminism bases itself on a hitherto invisible stratum of the hierarchy of labour powers—the housewife—to which there corresponds no wage at all.**

So that beginning with the wageless work of the housewife, we found ourselves redefining the class struggle in international terms, and most particularly redefining the relation between the working class in the metropolis and the working class in areas of technological underdevelopment. Wageless workers on the land, low waged workers in the industrial interstices, even lower waged workers in the kitchens of the salaried and the wealthy of the Third World, are divided by power—not by class—from the working class in the metropolis.

Let us demystify not only what divides us as women but what is the material basis of our unification.

Firstly, where there is a wage the domination of the wage of the man over the woman is international. The reproduction of workers for mines, mills or factories is the product of unwaged female labour everywhere. Each situation of course is unique. In some parts of Africa it is often in the extended tribal family where women perform this unwaged labour for capital. In Zambia, the copper mines are magnanimously and increasingly surrounded by company housing of two- and three-room bungalows. The same in

industrial Mexico City: the family is nuclearised and deculturised at one architectural stroke. How efficient to have workers used up daily and reproduced on the spot by other workers (of another sex)! And we are expected to be grateful that government and/or industry provides us with housing—*our* factories, for which we even pay rent. Again, in Caracas, where the technology to which the oil worker must submit is extremely high, oil production is absolutely dependent on female domestic labour. The following book attempts to show why there is this great discrepancy between the technology of extracting and refining oil and that of extracting and refining oil workers. It shows how the wife of the oil worker is as productive as he is because she daily “directly produces, trains, develops, maintains [and] reproduces labour power itself”.* These questions, while not the same, are similar to those about the discrepancy between Third World and metropolitan technology in general, and about *who on an international level is productive.*

Secondly, in most of the world, side by side with women’s reproduction of others’ labour power when it is daily destroyed on the land, is the use and destruction of women’s own labour power on the land. Often it is not through the wage of the man and the woman’s lack of it that her labour is commanded, but a *patriarchal structure which predates capitalist society.* That structure may not yet have undergone *the capitalist reorganisation of the patriarchy: the patriarchy of the power of the wage.* Nevertheless it is *the wage relation internationally* which is commanding the two forms of labour: the reproduction of labour power for the land and the reproduction of the material commodities which that land will produce. *In the same way as the proletarian character of the labourer in the home is hidden by the lack of a wage, so the proletarian character of the labourer on the land, ‘the peasant’, land-owning or landless, is hidden by the wagelessness of that labour.*

The majority of Latin American women are either Indian or of Indian extraction, existing on subsistence agriculture and doing a double load of unwaged labour: both as *jornaleras* (day workers), *minifundistas* (smallholders) or *ejiditarias* (collective farm workers)

* Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class*, published jointly by Falling Wall Press and Race Today Publications, Bristol, England, 1975, p.14.

*Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, Part One, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1969, p.172. “Productive labour would therefore be such labour as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labour power itself.”

and as housewives. The unit of production is the family. Women's work in the home, where they transform primary materials into the few consumer goods of food and clothing, is a fundamental aspect of the production of that family unit.

Even where there is payment in the form of a wage (to *los jornaleros*) or in the form of payment for sale of crops, it is the man who probably receives it. Women and children who work alongside him work for capital through his command. But at least the work of women and children is undisguised; it is recognised as work. Which is more than can be said for the urban housewife who is directly dominated by the wage; her housework, being unwaged, is not considered work at all.

So it is that capital has seized on every mode of production, and on the "train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions" which spring from these modes, to exploit all those temporarily trapped in them; and reinforces that exploitation by the prejudices and opinions they generate from which women suffer most and in a most specific manner. To obscure and thus ignore the specific nature of the exploitation of women (and children), and the specific and autonomous nature of the struggles this must produce, with the blackmail of universal poverty or universal repression,* is to resort to a moralism which in fact is a political attack on the least powerful—and therefore of course on the poorest and most repressed. And when the least powerful are attacked, all the forces of subversion are weakened.

It is impossible to speak of the relation of women to capital *anywhere* without at the same time confronting the question of development versus underdevelopment.† It is even more unavoidable when

*The left political parties of the Third World, which often sound like robust echoes of the left in the metropolis, point to the agonising poverty and/or repression in the Third World in order to undermine both the determination of Third World women to organise autonomously and the burgeoning reality of their autonomous struggles. The masculine management of the class struggle in a Third World country is as damaging to women and therefore to the struggle there as it is in the metropolis.

†Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Falling Wall Press, second edition, 1973, p.48. "Here again we must make a parallel, different as they are, between underdevelopment in the Third World and underdevelopment in the metropolis—

it is women of the Third World of whom we speak, since their situation cannot be wrested from the general context of predominant underdevelopment; rather they are a honed edge with which to approach the Gordian Knot that confronts *all* working class struggle in the Third World.

Working for capital

The tendency has been to subsume all those who are not city proletarians under the term 'peasant'. Once we assume that the basic division within the working class internationally is between the waged and wageless, and that *to be wageless is not necessarily to be outside of the capitalist wage relation*, every mode of labour which exists today must be re-examined to determine the social relation which it reproduces: whether there is surplus labour, if that surplus labour is stolen (appropriated by someone other than the labourer), and if so, by whom—in other words, whether and where capital has transformed pre-capitalist modes of labour into modes of its own self-expansion. Even the subsistence farming family of Mexico, for example, which produces no material surplus may be working usefully for capital; braceras and braceros provide a cheap and intimidated* reserve army of labour, particularly for the farms of California and Texas. Women with our unending work have produced that army of labour on that 'unproductive' farm.

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 because 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 . . . "

* The American State's intimidation of these workers (traditionally with the help of armed vigilantes, official and unofficial) is posed as a protection for native American workers. To its joy, a trade union with membership overwhelmingly of Americans of bracero descent has supported the recent clamp-down on immigration from Mexico. Which of course only means that the wages of the 'illegal' entrant can be even lower. See *New York Times*, Monday, 2 December, 1974, 'Ruling on Mexican Aliens Stirrs Chicanos' Job Fears'. Working class organisation which is confined to national borders and to the trade unionist struggle for jobs always results in our scabbing on each other.

Where our product, labour power, is 'overpopulating'—that is, where it is rebellious and refusing quietly to starve—the State in the unarmed form of Rockefeller Foundations or the armed form of native or foreign troops and 'expeditions' is seeking to 'regulate our productivity'. Women all over the world are repudiating these controls over our reproductive function, controls which range from mass sterilisation to mass genocide of those already born, by planned famines and other more scientific techniques.

Increasingly and in every situation internationally we are demanding the right to have children whose birth is not our agony physically, socially, financially; and the right not to have them if we so desire. Birth control campaigns vulgarly reflect the immediate and longterm brutal interests of the State. In its propaganda, by painting us as victims who don't ourselves know what is good for us, our interests become the excuse to perpetrate its interests against us. The starvation which it organises or at best allows is blamed on our fertility. We refuse any longer to be reproductive machines to be turned on or off as production plans alter. Having or not having children must be our choice and integral to our individual and social development.

But this is already to demand more than any political parties have ever assumed we in the Third World felt the need to have. We feel many needs because we have learnt many things even when they thought they were teaching us quite different lessons.

In a Mexican village one family may invest in a television. Other families around must pay to see it—must find the money to pay to see it, must find the job or grow the crop *or make the struggle for the wage without the work* which will yield the money to pay to see it. Or reappropriate another just like it or bigger—that is, make a struggle *for the wage without the work* in a way which bypasses the money form.

Once we have seen it, or heard the grating sounds of the inexpensive model of transistor radio in the village or in the field, that person, that family, that community, has stepped beyond any definition of itself as 'peasant'. When the woman from an area of underdevelopment in the heart of Europe, such as a village in Spain, sees a Hollywood film, the plot is secondary to the technology of the North American kitchen (which, nevertheless, is still the North

American woman's place). So we are ready to demand in Mexico, Tanzania, India and Spain all of the wealth that exists but of which we have been deprived. For on the media they tell us about or even show us all the products of technology which Third World peoples are denied. They have sent the media to give one message, but we have absorbed quite another. For we have come to the media with a mind crammed with the refusal of the bitterness of our experience. That media presents a picture, however distorted, of a whole world which peasants of Lenin's day or of Zapata's never knew existed. It pictures a range of goods and therefore a range of possibilities which *nobody* of Lenin's day or of Zapata's knew since they didn't exist *anywhere*. Our experiences as exploited women, urban or rural, Third World or metropolitan, are unique in each case. *Our needs and our desires are international and universal*: to be free, to be free of the labour that has worn us down over centuries, to be free of domination and dependence on men. We repudiate the assumption that we who are not socialised, collectivised, unionised, are the 'backward ones'. The backward technology with which they have burdened us is no measure of our own aspirations. And that is our dilemma.

Many well-meaning North Americans who returned from Cuba, having cut their six weeks of cane in the Venceremos brigades, may glorify cane-cutting as once Communist Party visitors to Russia glorified forced collectivisation. But who wants to cut cane all their lives? Who wants to do the cooking, washing, child care, when they get home from a day in the fields? Not those who returned after six weeks. What we need instead of the labour is wages, beginning with wages for the work we women have always done without a wage, whether we cook by charcoal or by gas, whether we wash clothes by the river bank, in tubs or in machines. It is our time, our energy, our lives. It is time to put paid to this work.

Refusing their development

In the metropolis when we demand a wage from the State, we are told that we can get a wage in the offices or factories which are waiting to suck up what little of our lives the washing machine has left free. Millions of us are driven there daily by an inflation which is transforming bringing home a wage—and therefore doing a double

shift—into another household duty, another chore, another obligation of the wife. In Mexico, with a 40% rate of unemployment or underemployment, to propose that women who want a wage take a second job in factories, offices, etc. (if they don't already have one on the land), is even more laughable. None of us wants that second job, neither those who have it and the pittance of a wage that may go with it, nor those who desperately need a wage despite the 16-hour day of the full-time housewife. More work will never sweeten our bitterness. Yet Third World women (in fact *all* women are told there is no other solution but to accept this 'development', to accept, that is, more rationalised exploitation, if they are lucky enough to get it in that sea of wagelessness. There is only one development today in the world, and that is capitalist development even greater exploitation than we have suffered up to now. That is the price we have traditionally paid for the wage. We will still bear train and care for the new generation while we are 'benefitting' from the assembly line of their development. Also, because so many of us are wageless, they will get the very few they hire cut-rate. Passively to accept that development is to accept a development of slavery, the opposite of its abolition.

For us in the metropolis to demand a wage from the State for the work we are doing in the home is our only real choice, so that we can massively refuse that job and the second, waged, job we do. As capital's crisis deepens it is not clear what place metropolitan women will have in its plans. One thing, however, is already clear. Though we are surrounded by development, they have begun to plead poverty and austerity and are expecting women to be the prime shock absorbers. When we demand Wages for Housework in whatever form—child care which we control, free birth control and abortion which do not sicken, kill or sterilise us, the socialisation of our work on our terms to liberate time for ourselves, and most important, money we can call our own—they now say here what they have always said in the Third World to every demand by women: "The till is empty".

Our great advantage in the metropolis is that the wealth stolen from all of us is where we are, on the spot, to demand back. For those in the Third World, it is infinitely more difficult to demand the return of the wealth that our combined labour has created. For most of us the dilemma is that this wealth is not where we are. They

poses enormous problems of organisation and mobilisation of power. Yet we have no choice. The State of every Third World country which has tried to impose development in the form of 'aid' and/or investment has ultimately had to defend that development with arms against the working class. When it is proposed that the road to the new society passes through our increased productivity, the Chilean firing squads are there to block the exits to our own road. *

Since in the past we have lost when we didn't ask enough, we cannot do worse by demanding everything. And though the wealth is not on the spot in the Third World, the agents of its continued expropriation are always close at hand. The State is only partially made up of the government and Rockefeller Foundations; these are the executors outside the factory of the multi-national corporations. Together they manage our exploitation, and plan its quality and intensity, as part of an international plan which encompasses every country, females and males, children and adults, the working class employed and unemployed, the waged and wageless of that class, the urbanised and the ruralised of that class. It is against them, and the (usually U.S.) arms which enforce their plan and their will, that such demands for wages will ultimately have to be made by all of us women. For though the dilemma of the Third World is that the wealth of our combined labour is in the metropolis, the Third World can draw on the wealth of our combined struggle to get it back.

To raise our voices internationally to demand our wage and an end to the work we do, which has brought no wage in the home and very little wage (if any) out of it, to demand that we develop and that technology be the servant of *our* development, the opposite of our being at the service of a developing technology the benefits of which we are then denied, is to completely revolutionise the terms of struggle. It is to articulate the internationalisation of our struggle and to raise our power at every moment of the international-

*The Chilean housewife was of course part of the working class resistance to productivity. Yet that has been drowned by the din of a carefully constructed mythology of the reactionary Chilean housewife which has served the right and the left internationally, not only to obscure the revolutionary struggle of Chilean women but to undercut the struggle of women everywhere. It was in particular the left's occasion to give vent to their rage at our audacity in organising without them and against their leadership.

al capitalist circuit. The unwaged men must follow our lead; although we will have to fight them for the right to fight capital, that in itself will be a high stage in the revolutionary process.

So, as women in Latin America read of our experience and our analysis, perhaps they will often see themselves; perhaps they will see a future which has been proposed to them finally unromanticised by those who live it; perhaps they will take confidence from our struggle as we do from theirs, and know how aware we are of our mutual interdependence.

In 1971 we said:

Women of the Third World have not yet spoken of the effects of colonial rule and industrialisation on them and on the traditional family. When they do, the horrors we now associate with capitalism and imperialism will gain new dimensions. We need a woman's history of imperialism, and of the division of labour between the industrial and agricultural worlds . . .⁴

That history has begun to emerge, as a weapon in the developing struggle.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class internationally.

Selma James, London, January 1975

NOTE: I am grateful to Jenny Rathbone's help when this essay was written. Her first-hand knowledge of the lives of women in Mexico confirmed yet again that we understand the wage and all the labour it commands only when we begin with the unique—but by no means exotic—experience of each section of the wageless. It is curious that 'the Marxists' are so blinded by the factory that they cannot see that Marx (a) states plainly that capital's birth and development began on the backs of the wageless, and (b) that the wage itself is determined as much outside of the factory as in it; that "Taking them as a whole, the general movements of wages are exclusively regulated by the expansion and contraction of the industrial reserve army . . ." (*Capital*, Vol.1, p.637)—that is, by workers without access to wages. Marx was not a feminist but, unlike 'the Marxists', he understood the wage and the lack of it. S.J.

⁴From *Feminism to Liberation*, ed. Edith Hoshino Altbach, Schenkman Publishing Co. Inc., Cambridge, Mass., 1971. Selma James, 'The American Family: Decay and Rebirth', p.197.

All in a Day's Work

Living through the Crisis

These three articles are transcriptions of speeches. They were given at a public meeting held by the Power of Women Collective in February 1974, during the miners' strike. The theme of the meeting was 'Living through the crisis: Women in Northern Ireland and Britain'.

For myself, up until '69 I didn't even know a thing about politics, but then I seen so much trouble and so much bias in '69 with the police and Special Branch and B Specials that all of a sudden I wasn't just learning; it threw into my face what politics were and the different political organisations.

I had to help out in the district. My husband was across the water and I had three children; the youngest was a year and a half. A neighbour looked after those children while I helped in whatever way I could, by being a first-aider and also by going out whenever the police and the army moved in, any time there was rioting between both factions, Catholic and Protestant, as the government likes to put it. (Actually it was the government behind it all the time.) And I learned to be part of the district.

Before that I was just a housewife, a doormat, a yes-woman, and now I am able to think for myself a good bit better than I did then. I'm younger in my mind now through having to help people and through having to help everyone else. I realised I was needed very much, not only by my children but by the community. And it makes me feel good to think that I can turn round, if someone is injured or if someone goes into hysterics, that they can turn to me and I can go and help them.

A few times the British army have shot after me, whenever they've known I've went. In one case it was a woman who was waiting for an ambulance. She was expecting twins. And the army wouldn't let the ambulance into the district to take her out. And four men took the risk, a very big risk, in getting a loan of a mini-bus and taking this woman to hospital. We were in the hospital 20 minutes whenever the woman had the twins. Thank God they were all right. But the army stopped us on the way down and they knew this woman was ill. And they insisted on the woman getting out of the mini-bus and searching the mini-bus until in the end we just told them, right, youse take her in. If you don't let us go now, youse'll just have to take her. So they let us go on down the Crumlin Road to the maternity. And as I said, that woman had twins and they were all right. That was only one incident.

The harassment by the British army went on worse and worse, and the men have come to depend on the women more and more than they ever done. The women are now more active in every angle of life there. There's an awful lot of them now, they just more or less keep their house tidy but as for new furniture, new wallpaper, that's all something to be done later on whenever we've got ourselves straightened out. But at the moment we're needed very, very much.

And in this way I have great sympathy with the miners and their wives because the miners get their strike money, their dole money, but it's less than what they were earning in the mines. It's their wives who get the cut, their wives who still have the same number of mouths to feed, the wives who still have the same problems at home. Miners can still go into the pub for their drink; and if his meal isn't there whenever he goes in, the poor woman's going to get it again. And now the government's going to turn round and Heath says that if he gets voted again they're going to stop the

strike money for the women. Well let the women do what quite a lot of the women have done in Belfast. I don't know if it has been in the papers here. Whenever the National Assistance, or Social Security as youse call it here, was stopped, the women brought the children down and told the government: you look after the children, we can't.

They did. And they left them sitting in the Social Security offices. It hurt the wives to do this but they had to do it. Sometimes the women's husbands were wanted by the police for questioning, other times their husbands were in Long Kesh, and the government wanted them to take out separation orders from their husbands so that if they got released then the government could sue them for deserting their families. And they refused to do it. This has happened. And on top of that it cost the government £8.15 a week to look after each child if it is in a home, so you picture one family out of every street in a mining village, every week, bringing their whole family down and leaving it there.* How much is it going to cost the government after about four or five weeks? You'll break the government quicker this way. They'll have to give in to you, so they will.

And another thing for women, well this is something I have thought about. We want wages, we want wages for our work. I can't even get the brew—brew is, by the way, unemployment money—because I have refused a job in a Protestant area, the Shankhill Road. I worked there before '69, I came over here in '71 with a friend to a protest, and our photo was in the *Sunday News*, which is a Protestant-run paper. And the people went to an aunt of mine, she'd a shop on the Shankhill Road; they recognised me and they told her that if I was seen on the Shankhill again I wouldn't come off it alive. So I can't go down the Shankhill. I explained this to the unemployment exchange, and they made me sign a form, on Tuesday there, that I refused to go into a district. I got a letter this morning to say that I have been turned down on unemployment benefit. Well, as it is, the doctor has put me on [health] insurance because I have bad nerves and I'm awaiting trial.

*Women in the mining areas have already done this. See *United Women* broadsheet, London 1972.

Do you realise exactly what is expected of a woman and the government gets all this for nothing? First of all, she's a wife, secondly, she's a mother, third, she's a nurse, fourth, she's a teacher, fifth, she's a cleaner, sixth, she's a cook, seventh, she's a mathematician, and eighth, she's a dressmaker, and ninth, she's a painter and decorator in the home. And not a ha'penny does she get from the government for it. And the government wants to keep her down. So I say no, definitely not.

Rose Craig from Belfast

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I don't know all the fancy words. I'm from the dock area. I'm a docker's wife and I feel the crisis that we're in now I've been going through since I can remember, four years old. I feel when we get these adverts on the television, "SOS", "Switch off the lights", "Switch off the fire", this is what I've been doing from when I was a kid. You know, we could never go in from one room to another without my dad saying, "Don't leave that light on, don't leave that because we haven't got a penny for the lights". And this is what I feel, there's no 'crisis', there's *always* been a crisis.

I live on the Isle of Dogs [East London]. There's police harassment; I've got a juvenile son of 14, and it's just a build-up of things I was put on the Isle of Dogs to live; it wasn't a choice, it was a place to live. There was absolutely nothing there, so with friends we decided to call UDI [unilateral declaration of independence]. We are completely isolated from anywhere, there's water on both sides, so we decided to block the bridge one day. But since 1967, my children have been persecuted by the police and anything that goes wrong, if there's a warehouse broken into, if the boy doesn't go to school, it's, you know, 32 Halyard, and that's it.

And I've experienced strikes, you know. I've sat in with three kids under four years old demanding money, and my husband's been on a 10-week strike. The one that stands out mostly in my mind, he was on strike for six weeks and every Thursday he used to go to a payout place where they paid the strike money from the Social Security; but it was kept in a separate place. On the last

week, he returned back to work. He went back one day and was taken seriously ill. So we never had no money to come. So he said, well we'll have to borrow it. And I said, I'm fed up with borrowing money, this is all we're doing, borrowing this, leaving the rent to pay that.

So I just got the three kids—they were what? four, seven, and eight then—I just got the three kids, picked them up from school, went down to the payout office where they'd been paying out, you know, in the past, and I sat in the room with about 500 men. Terrible looks I got sitting there with three kids. Then a guy come in and said, what are *you* doing here? You know, this is not for you to be here. So I said, well, my husband's ill and I've got no money. He said, but you shouldn't be here, your husband should be here. I said, but he can't; I'm here for some money. And this great big thing because I was a woman, in there with them men. So I said, well, I refuse to go until I go out with some money, and I'm intending to stay here or leave the kids here till I get some.

Anyway they just called out numbers, because they're paid off by numbers, like prisoners. And in the end I suppose they felt sorry for me, this poor woman sitting in the middle of about 500 men, she must feel embarrassed, but I never! I never felt embarrassed. Because I wanted the money and that's all I was there for. And in the end they called me out and said—it was £11, I remember—next week, you know, you'll have to go to the Social Security office, don't come back here no more, because you are an embarrassment to us. That wasn't the word, but that's what come across.

You know, there's all these things. These are all my crises. And like Wages for Housework, if I'd had my own income I would have said, sod the £11; I'll feed my kids on *my* money, what I'm working for in the home. I've been called an overprotective mother, lots of things I've been called. You know, if I was a bad mother, I'd be—that's a bad mother. But if I'm a good mother, then I'm overprotective. And these things are just really my crisis, you know, all the way through the police on the island and the kids, not only boys but girls as well. These are my problems. And that is my crisis.

Joyce Luck from London

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My crises are very much in the line of Joyce and Rose's. But added to that the fact of me being a black woman and an immigrant makes it even more kind of specific and more pinpointing. I can never forget the fact, wherever I go and whatever my crisis, it's magnified by me being as I am.

I wanted to say about my day-to-day experience as a mother of three children in the home. I feel frustrated, I feel a great sense of despair at the moment because I feel totally burdened by everything. Prices rising, everything going up, you know, not only food, but clothes. To get from point A to point B I have to check how many pennies in my pocket. I have to look around, I have to make do with clothes, accept clothes from friends, that's how I survive.

I feel a kind of war within my home, never mind the war that's being waged constantly—my husband is a factory worker. He works evening shift from two to 10. It means that my child who is at school never sees him for the week, because he comes home at 10 o'clock. I am left solely with the burden of them from 14 to 16 hours, because I just get about six hours sleep and I'm up again like a machine. And it's the fact that he's away from the home so much working for our bare subsistence, because that's about where it takes us. I mean you're worried about how you're going to spend the bloody money anyway, because you go to the shops and £8, £9 shopping, it just about runs out midweek, and you just have to make do.

Well I'm sick of making do. And there is a kind of fight that's created within my husband and I, because I feel that even if he's off on a Saturday and Sunday I still don't get any time off. I mean I don't even have time for a bath; sometimes I have to go without a meal. And although he contributes a hell of a lot by way of sharing with the burden of the housework and washing dishes, doing the launderette for me, I still feel very jealous when he is up and out for two hours or three hours. I mean it's not his fault. He has to get out, he feels a need to get out. Otherwise he'll go mad. And I am left. I mean there's no way to turn. And not me alone; most women I associate with, in my situation, they're in that position. Sunday to Sunday and year in and year out. And there is this kind of internal conflict. So there is no peace outside, no peace inside.

And I can see where capitalism has us divided on all fronts. As a wife you kind of have to get your husband in order, for him to go

out to work because if he doesn't go out no money comes in. My husband is off sick at the moment; the first thing, they send his pay less his working shift allowance, and it's the shift allowance that he works specially for to bring home in order that we have a little more. And that's the shift that's nearly killed him. So they kill you on one side and when you're half dead they take away what little they preach at work that the Social Security are going to give you when you're sick to keep you. So it's all a big farce.

Anyway I don't work in a factory, I've worked in a hospital, it's all the same thing. They work you to death and even if I felt that if I went out and brought more money in, it still wouldn't be enough at the rate of inflation. Every day you go to the shops a penny up, this up, that up. And everyone—I've been to the launderette today and there is an old woman saying, oh this towel cost 90p a few months ago; now it's one pound something. And the realities of merely subsisting are really hitting us now. I mean if you're single, you're married, you're a bachelor or what the hell you are. And the only way I am dealing with it at the moment is to confront whatever situation I'm in.

I went to get my gas heater repaired after the conversion. They never did it properly. The Gas Board send me a big bill of £6 and tell me I have to pay up before they come to repair it. So now they're trying different tactics. You pay your money and you have to wait six months before the service is carried out. You have to put in your bloody labour before you can bring a pound home in your pocket. So I stand up and I say, keep your gas service, I'm not going to pay for it.

There was another incident at the dentist. We pay our social contributions to a free medical care and free dental care—oh Britain has a wonderful free service! What's so free about it? When I go to the dentist the other day for general checkup, I said, aren't you going to do my front teeth? He said, my dear, I won't touch those because the type of filling that they're putting, it will only fall out and it means that in another three, four weeks you come back and there is a bigger hole. You're better off not having it fixed; maybe it would last a bit longer. So I said, oh but what's all this contribution for? Oh, he said, you know, if you want a good job done, you'll have to pay £5 a filling. And really I am conscious—I mean the little time I have, I hardly ever look at my face, but I do feel that I want

some good teeth to eat a little bit of food that you can manage to get for your money.

This is how it hits me and I'm telling you how I feel and how I see it. And it's just a war I have to wage. Outside and then as I say inside my home with my husband who is doing his share. I mean I can't help it, I take it out on him, it's my situation, and it's a situation capital has us in at the moment.

Now since the miners' thing happened, there is this big crisis. No one has ever stopped to think what a crisis the poor ordinary people have been in; their whole life is a crisis. You hear the news media every night, "Switch off something". Or, "Don't heat two rooms". Most of us have only two rooms in which to live all our lives. So it's totally irrelevant, to me and to my section of people anyway. About the electricity, most of us have to just wallow in the paraffin in spite of the smell and the nastiness. You're born, you're bred and you just keep on going in it until your lungs—along with the cigarettes. I don't know why they don't give a government health warning about paraffin. And don't forget, it's going up in price.

Bernadette Maharaj from Trinidad and London

The Single Housewife

Scrub, scrub; cook, cook; wash, wash; shop, shop; dust, dust—that some of housework. All women do it whether they're caring for others or for themselves. "Enjoy yourselves while you're young and single," we're told. But all women are housewives, married or single.

When I was married, employed, and managed to think beyond the next shopping list I would have said, "No! The single woman has everything that I haven't got. How can we be the same?" When I thought even further beyond the next shopping list I found myself unmarried and joining those lucky women, the single ones. Now I could really begin.

Hating housework because I'd been doing it for years, I started

noticing that a lot of the work that I did at my job in a shop was housework. I dusted, swept and scrubbed the floors, cleaned the windows, made it all look nice, made the coffee, washed the tea towels—and was pleasant to the customers. I remembered other jobs I'd done and looked at other women's jobs: we were cleaners, caterers, waitresses, nurses, secretaries, teachers, clothing and food manufacturing workers. Those jobs were the ones we'd been brought up to do in our own homes. But here we were doing them outside our homes and getting paid for it!

Somehow I hadn't stopped being a housewife. I got myself a new job in an office where most of the other people doing the same work were men. What happened? No matter what their 'rank' the women in the office were expected to be the human face of the organisation. They were to be kind, attractive, and cool if the men made sexual advances. If someone was leaving, it was the women who organised the party. Hours of each day were spent listening to the men's personal problems and encouraging them when the boss or the work got them down. This was exhausting and depressing. If they wanted a woman at one of their business lunches, I was dragged along. Forget about the shopping. If they felt like easing the day's problems with a drink after work, of course I should go. These were the sorts of things they could demand of their wives and which helped them go on working. Here I was the company's wife. Like their wives, I wasn't being paid for that.

Talk done, off the men went to more support and comforting, to a warm house, cooked food, clean clothes. I was left to catch the corner shop before it closed, spending more on food than a housewife cares to or a woman's wage can afford. Then home to a cold flat, meal to be cooked, clothes to wash, house to clean. And no comforting. That's what happens to the spare time that single women are said to have. You do the things that are going to make it possible for you to turn up at work the next day and the next day. Washed, fed, looking good, ready. That's where most of the evenings and weekends go. Housework has its use to employers, then, whether it's done as a job and paid for or whether it's done for yourself or someone else at home.

There's not much time left over for seeing your friends, spending time with their kids, or forming close relationships. The single woman isn't the free and easy bird with lots of lovers she's made out

to be. There's only time for one close relationship—when you can get it. It's very hard to find a straightforward guy who isn't looking for extra-marital solace, a quick lay, or someone to care for him and iron his shirts. And if one does come along, then you find your relationship is affected by the fact of your job. Just so you can see each other you have to live together.

No wonder most men marry soon after they get a permanent job. They want caring companionship and someone on tap to make love to. They know they don't want to do the housework that keeps them able to go to work, on top of the job itself. That's too exhausting. They couldn't work the same hours in the job. Commonly even an unmarried man has a girlfriend who performs wifely functions at least part of the time—who makes a meal for him, say, at least two or three times a week. And besides, men earn more than women, so an unmarried man can pay for those things a wife usually does and is; for service washes, meals out, a cleaner, and a supportive woman.

But single women, all women working outside the home, are working those hours *and* doing housework. The time that all women spend working in the home means that our employers and/or the employers of the men we service get more out of us and out of the men. If we made our 'spare time' our own time, then they'd get less work time. And what do they do with those extra hours we give them through our housework every day? Time is money. We should be doing our shopping on the company's time. If we're not, then our unpaid housework is their profit. We should demand laundry and creche services at the workplace. If we don't, we're giving them time they're not paying for.

The single woman a housewife? A lot of her life is being that, most of her life-style is because of that. So much for ceasing to be a housewife. I'm still a housewife. That's where capital has got me. Married or single, our struggle's the same.

Wendy Edmond, Oxford (England), January 1975

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All women are housewives. That is the role they are brought up to fulfil. Whether they get married and have children and their life consists literally of 'housework' (i.e. keeping house for a man) or whether they stay single (with or without children) does not in any way alter this fact. Single women without children often have difficulty identifying with 'real' housewives. They feel they are different because they appear to be independent and free. In fact, in a more subtle way, they are probably performing exactly the same functions for the men in their lives at home and at work and for themselves as the 'real' housewife. This is a false differentiation between women which we must get rid of.

As a single woman the fact that we are all housewives was very vividly brought home to me in my last job which I did for two years. As an assistant film editor I worked in a very isolated and claustrophobic situation for one (married) man directly and for several indirectly. There were no other women either in our cutting room or nearby. Making tea and coffee all day was the least of it and a man in my job would have had to do the same. But I was also expected automatically to do other tasks specifically because I am a woman. I went out to buy special foods for anyone who felt ill or had no time, I bought cigarettes and personal provisions at the chemist if they forgot. I swept, hoovered, scrubbed the cutting room with scouring powder from top to bottom, I suspect more often and better than a male assistant. I chauffeured men across town in my car if they didn't know the way. I was expected to keep them company at lunch and dinner if we were working late and they were alone, or know when to stay behind if they were going to talk business or eat with a woman. I was at all times a shoulder to cry on. Work problems, financial problems, personal problems, depression, ill health and sundry grumbles came my way daily in varying doses. All this on top of performing a tiring job efficiently and well and looking good, to add to my boss's status. (Inasmuch as my boss and I were friends, I did of course sometimes confide in him, but more often I held back my own problems.) I often felt that we were as good as married. My boss asked me not to go out with the odd possible man that turned up; he on the other hand felt free to go out with my girlfriends.

But the crunch came for me every night when we eventually went home. All the men would ring up their wives to announce

their imminent arrival and ask what was for dinner. They would go home after a hard day's work to hot meals, clean houses, clean clothes for tomorrow and lots more understanding. I on the other hand would go home hoping to find a shop still open to grab some food, to a flat I hadn't had time to clean, to dirty clothes, to unanswered correspondence and no energy to deal with any of it till my day off. (I sometimes worked seven days a week and didn't have a day off.)

I suppose I should add that I was doing an apprenticeship and learning a trade which is why I stuck it out; but the point is it was an experience which shows very clearly that I was a housewife at work and at home, that I was reproducing (as well as his wife) my boss's labour power, and also my own, and that all this work was invisible. This is true of millions of women who go out to work.

Esther Ronay, London, June 1973

Lesbian Women: Love and Power

Wages for Housework recognises that doing cleaning, raising children, taking care of men, is not women's biological destiny. Lesbianism recognises that heterosexual love and marriage is not women's biological destiny. Both are definitions of women's roles by the State and for the advantage of the State. Wages for Housework says that to fight against our roles is to fight against our work, is to fight against the State.*

This is the beginning of a document by the Wages Due Collective, a lesbian group that is organising for Wages for Housework in Toronto, Canada. The women in this group had been Separatists. They decid-

* This quotation, together with the one in our fourth paragraph, is from an earlier version (current at the time of writing) of the article that appears on pp.21-25 above.

ed to fight for Wages for Housework because it was what they needed as lesbians.

Lesbianism, inside and outside of the Women's Liberation Movement, has been a source of power for all women. They know that lesbian—and celibate—women have been able to refuse the labour that is part and parcel of relating sexually to men: cleaning, cooking, sewing, sexual services, emotional support, being 'feminine', and wrestling with the male ego when you want anything for yourself. They know that some women are able to express their solidarity towards each other with no holds barred.

Lesbianism is an expression of self-love and confidence in women. The existence of a set of women, lesbian and celibate, who don't always have a man in the back of their minds, who do not care what men are going to think of them, has given all of us—especially lesbians—a chance to break away from what is expected, and begin to decide what we want and how we want to get it.

While it gives us all power to fight, lesbianism cannot clear up the mess that capital makes of our lives. "Women who are called lesbians and women who are called straight are all existing for the same purpose in the eyes of the State—to serve capital through serving men. This is what we mean when we say all women are straight. *Being a lesbian does not free us from our roles as houseworkers.*" (Wages Due) It does not free us from cleaning, cooking, shopping. It does not free us from having to earn a wage or hassle with the Social Security [Welfare] or for child support. It does not free us from being poor. It does not free us from the jibes of men in the street. It does not free us from the male shadow others see when they look at us. It does not free us from our own dwarfed, hungry personalities and the personalities of those around us. It does not free us from having to discipline our children to accept that they can't have what they want, that they must do as they are told, that they must grow up to live, like us, according to the needs of the State.

In some ways lesbians' lives are more devastated by the imperatives of capital than the lives of other women. Firstly, we have no access to any man's wage. If we have children we often have to find the money to feed them ourselves, on 'women's wages' (in jobs even harder for us to find) or on the Social Security pittance. The housework is on top of that, and when money is short, there is more of

it. Secondly, we are ghettoised, isolated from other women. Either we live a humiliating lie or we are cut off and regarded as a separate species, as animals. We are used by men and the State as bogey-men, the exotic accident that could happen to any woman. Being poor and cut off from the struggles all women are making, we can be used to keep other women in line—"Don't get out of hand, girl, or . . . (I'll take you for/you'll turn into a lesbian)." We've made the break and discovered we're still not free.

Lesbianism has sometimes been put forward in the Women's Liberation Movement as a solution to all our problems. It is not. It is a powerful starting point for struggle. Separatism has been put forward as a political perspective for all women. It is not. In its failure to recognise that other women are struggling too, and that these struggles are crucial even to Separatists' power, Separatism is anti-feminist. Feminism is the recognition that our own individual needs are those of the great majority of women, and that our own individual power depends on the social power of women generally. We can't base our perspective on the hope that all women will choose lesbian joys and trials over their own. We have to base it on the fact that *none* of the choices that are offered us—not legal marriage, not 'living with a man', not sleeping around, not celibacy, not lesbianism, not separation from men—*none* of these 'choices' offers us a life that we are willing to accept.

We are fighting for Wages for Housework because this will give women the time, the money and the power we need in order to refuse our work, refuse all the forms of prostitution we submit to for money, and begin to structure our lives and relationships as we want them. We are fighting for Wages for Housework because this struggle will enable us to join all other women who are struggling against their work and against the way that they have been identified with that work. We are fighting for Wages for Housework because this struggle will enable millions of other women to join us—to identify our struggles and our lives with their own, and, in many cases, to become lesbian. Thousands of lesbian women are shut behind doors with their children, only waiting for a bit of power to be able to come out. More, already relating sexually to women, remain with their husbands for lack of money. We refuse to be poor. We refuse to be ghettoised. We will be a power.

Lesbian women, Power of Women Collective, London, March 1975

No End to the Working Day

It was actually by accident that I started at the poultry slaughterhouse 11 years ago. I was 34 then. My oldest daughter was at the folk high school, and when she came home from that, she had to find a job, and she would be here for a month. That's when it started with this poultry slaughterhouse.

More and more people worked up there, including some from my family. They earned pretty well, and you can always use an extra penny. So I thought that if Lise was going to be home anyway, I could just as well try working there for a month. Of course, there was something or other we wanted to buy for the kids. Well, Lise didn't get any job, and she stayed home until January, so I kept on going to work. It was fun to have all that money in your pocket; you're not used to it. Then she got a job, so my husband took care of the kids.

But I had a bad conscience about leaving the kids. The smallest one was only two years old and the next one about four to five years old—and of course there were the other ones, even if they were big. I didn't feel right about leaving them, but, well, you'd buy something or other to take home to them to quiet your conscience a little. Yes, that was the worst, to leave the kids. I have six children. The eldest was 15 or 16 years old when I started working, and the little one was two years old.

This area has a high rate of unemployment, and that's also why my husband could stay home and mind the kids. He's never been really unemployed during the summer, but it's especially bad in the winter. He's gotten unemployment insurance, though.

The working day

In the beginning, I was healthy and had more courage to handle it all. When I came home, there were lots of things that had to be done, and you couldn't let yourself be tired. This had to be done and that had to be done. It inevitably became a treadmill at last. There was work and more work and still more work. You could never say now that you were free and could relax and sit down. You also had to have time to chat with the kids. It was no good if they had to race around behind me just to be able to talk to me.

It went well enough in the beginning. But there's year after year, and you say to yourself when you come home, "Well, now you have to do that and that, and now it's Saturday, Sunday, and you have to get that done." You set yourself too many tasks and only get half of them accomplished, and then you have a bad conscience about everything that you don't accomplish.

But that wouldn't get it done, so you wait for another time. In that way, there's an awful lot that you're sorry about not doing.

In the beginning, my health was fine. But in the last five years, it got worse and worse. I've got an occupational disease because I stood in the same position all the time. Maybe I got a little exercise because I had to take a new box every five or six minutes and that helped, but my doctor said that I have an occupational disease in my neck and back. There's something wrong with the muscles. That's probably because you use the same muscles all the time.

There were also others who had the same problem. We should have gone to gymnastics; that would have been the best. But when we'd come home, there'd be plenty to do so none of us really had the strength to go to gymnastics. We talked about it between ourselves, but the management . . . Apparently they think that they're up there and we're down here. That's the way I felt, in any case, and I know that most of the others did, too.

I had to go 10 kilometres to work and that also made the time away from home longer. I had to get up at five o'clock in the morning, set breakfast out for the kids, make lunches for the ones who were going to school, make my own lunch, get washed, eat, and stoke the furnace. There were lots of things that had to be done. I biked to work the first three years, winters too. But once in a while, in the very worst weather, when it froze so that your ears were numb, and it was really ugly weather, then a few of us hired a taxi. It would drive around and collect us. But we didn't do that very often. We were used to being outside so we didn't freeze so much. And when we went out for that ride twice a day, we got hardened to it.

In the morning, that bike ride could be lovely when the weather was fairly good, because then you'd be mostly rested up. In the evening, I always shopped on the way home, and that wasn't much fun. You don't go to work in your nicest clothes, and I had to go

into stores. But what could you do? It was worse when I rode the scooter. Later, I got a scooter instead of a bike. When it was cold, I had both glasses and helmet on, so I really looked like a spaceman. I had to go shopping in that get-up.

I never knew when I'd be home that evening. There weren't any fixed working hours. It depended on how many chickens there were. We had to finish all the ones we had, so we could easily risk getting an hour or two overtime. You expected that. We were told on the same day, so that they sat at home and thought maybe, "She's coming home at such-and-such a time," and then I didn't show up. After a while, we learned to check how many chickens there were for the next day, so we could figure approximately how long it might take. But sometimes there might be more or there might be a machine breakdown, so we had to sit and wait until it was fixed. It was especially bad the last period.

So there they wait at home, thinking, "That's strange. Mom isn't home yet," and then you come home at six o'clock and must make dinner and the whole rigmarole with getting the kids washed and doing the dishes and all. The kids could put up the potatoes and the like; they've always been good at that. And also at washing up and straightening up. When you came home, it was nice to see that it wasn't all scattered about, as when you'd left. And before you went to bed at night, you also had to make sure things were straightened up, because the kids also had to get up and out of the house. It should also be clean enough for people to come in without having to wade through it all.

You worry about the children

I've been at the factory for 11 years. I began in October '59, then I stopped during the summer because my husband had a job and the kids couldn't stay alone. But then he was unemployed again when his factory closed and he was on the sick list for a year and a half. He stayed home then and took care of the kids and after a while they got so big that they could be at home alone. The little one hadn't started school, that first year when my husband started to work again, but our neighbours on both sides were kind enough to take care of him. They had said that he was welcome to come over there, but there was no fixed agreement that they would take care of him. Then he got a dog to take care of him, and he was so happy for that. Especially in the beginning, I thought about how he was,

what he was doing. You stand there worrying, and it's not very relaxing. So you hurry home as fast as you can when you're through.

Some of the others also had the same problems. Several of them in town put their kids in a kindergarten. They'd be walked over and walked back, and they could stay there the whole day. But they had the same problem as we did when we had to work overtime. They couldn't get home to their kids either.

Even if I would have wanted to have the little one in a kindergarten, I probably couldn't have gotten him in. We don't have any kindergartens in this county. There wasn't a chance here at all. That was before the counties were merged, so there was neither kindergarten nor private care. Now there are kindergartens in town, but they're overcrowded.

The first winter, my two little ones were at home alone, because my husband had to sign on every day [register for work]. That took time, and the two little ones had to stay at home alone and play for those three hours. So many times, you looked at the clock and thought, "I wonder what they're doing," because kids are kids, and they had to sit and play nicely until Dad came home again, and even if you'd removed one thing and another that you thought might be dangerous for them, you were worried anyway.

One day we had an odd experience. My husband came home and both of them came rushing over. They'd sat there and played with some coins and the big one had swallowed a 10-øre coin. It would have been worse if he'd swallowed the five-øre coins, for they're bigger. You can't prevent things like that. Afterwards, you think how terrible it would have been if it had stuck in the boy's throat and there they were alone, the two little boys . . . Of course, it wasn't far to the neighbours', but what would children like that do? The smallest one wasn't very big. What would he do if the other one started to get blue in the face? You think about that afterwards. If anything had happened, you could never forgive yourself. Honestly, I don't understand today how I could do it.

I would never have taken that job

The result was that I got bad nerves. Now, it was enough with one thing and another. In the last four or five years, I've taken nerve pills once in a while; in some periods, all the time. I've been on the sick list sometimes. The first time was because of this business

with my muscles. I had some massages and that helped for a while. But it got worse and worse anyway, because when you start to work again, it's the same thing, and you don't have time to do anything about it, to relax and do some gymnastics.

Then there were other periods when I really didn't think I could keep on working. I just *couldn't*. I got pain-killers and nerve pills. Then it happened that one of my daughters came home with her little daughter. At first, she had day care, but then I stopped working because I couldn't stand it any more. Now I stay home and take care of the baby and my daughter works there where I worked.

I stayed there for as long as I could, but then I got that chance to quit, and we've also discussed that if I had the choice today . . . If I knew as much when I started to work as I know now, I would never have taken that job in the poultry slaughterhouse. The day that my grandchild isn't here any more, I'll try to find some part-time work and then I'll take whatever I can get. Maybe I could work part-time at a hotel or every other day. In any case, nothing more than that. I'll try it as soon as the baby isn't here at home any more, because I'll miss her so much that I'll have to plunge into something.

My daughter will probably move when she starts her education, when she gets in where she wants to, and then she'll certainly have the child along, she certainly will. And the girl is hers, after all. If she wants her along, then she'll take her along. Now I've had the opportunity to take it easy, and I see that I've got to take it easy. There are some things I've got to do very carefully.

I've tried pain-killers and I've tried just to grit my teeth and bear it. Sometimes you think it's slavery because you always have to go around with that box in your pocket because you have to keep taking those pain-killers. Now it hurts here and now it hurts there. Maybe you could learn to live with the pain, I don't know. Not all the time, but maybe you could say: it hurts all right but now you've got to get this done, so later you can sit down and rest. But I've taken a lot of pain-killers in the past years. I was also put in the hospital for my back, and they said there, "Do gymnastics. Take long walks. Swing your arms." But that takes time. You have to have time for that.

The children are bigger now, but of course there's still work with them. No kids leave school any more after seventh grade. That is, the two big ones left. But that's also why I work, so that the kids can get an education. They've managed pretty well anyway, but nowadays if you don't have eighth or ninth grade or a high school diploma, chances are small that you can become an apprentice or do what you want to do. I've tried to judge what I thought would be best for them: if they should continue their schooling or if I should stay home with them. If I could choose today, I'm not sure that I would have worked at that poultry slaughterhouse. Maybe I could have gotten a less time-consuming job and then done a bit more here at home. Because when you're always working, if you buy something, it has to be fast and easy, and you can also let yourself buy. But if I'd have stayed at home, I could have raised a pig and butchered it and gotten a lot more out of the vegetable garden with herbs and vegetables, and other things so that I wouldn't have to buy so much. And then with taxes, it all adds up. It costs more when mother isn't home daily.

The question is if it couldn't have gone just as well if you'd done things another way, so you could have been home more with the kids. Not that they've complained. I know that there are thousands of children whose mothers work all day; but if each of us could choose, then some of us would probably get a job and earn more money and have the children taken care of in another way; and some would stay at home if they had the chance. It would be sensible having that choice. Not least of all for the sake of the children. They deserve all the benefits you can give them.

Ellen Jensen, Jutland (Denmark), 1971

Interview with a Shoplifter

When was the first time you took anything from a shop?

As kids we were always stealing from Woolworth's—it was a game we enjoyed. It was useful experience because later in life I remembered that and then I knew it was possible. I don't know anybody who didn't nick things from Woollies as a kid.

Do you still regard it as a game?

No. I didn't think of taking anything again until I had a baby and I was living on Social Security [Welfare]. I was always having to struggle but at first I didn't take anything because I lived in total fear of the authorities. Being completely alone I didn't even discuss it with anybody else. There was never any worry about it being wrong or anything like that, just the terrible fear of getting caught. I was so convinced that the State was all-powerful that I half expected the sky to fall in if I as much as looked at things I couldn't afford. I believed the snoopers saw all.

That was before the days of the Claimants' Union.* The shop assistants in the department store always looked at me as if I had no right entering their beautiful and splendid shop. One day, though, a friend of mine came over to see me and after we had been to the launderette we went around the shops with our kids and she began to talk about nicking stuff. It was all a bit veiled and indirect but her words gave me a tremendous feeling of confidence. She had just said that it was terrible to see all this stuff sitting there in the shop and us with nothing.

After that I began to lose some of the fear. Now I find that you can chat freely with friends about what you've got and how, and it's accepted. Some people go on afternoon sprees and get clothes and everything.

Is there any item you can get easier than others?

Well I suppose books remain the easiest of all but I've known people get meat from under the butcher's nose! It's funny—some people can get just anything while others can only get things they

* A union of people on Social Security/Welfare.

are not desperate for. I remember a time when we were really desperate and could not even afford any food. I was cohabiting,* the S.S. knew, and my bloke hadn't got a penny. I was very depressed and each day he went into a particular shop and got some mince or fish fingers and a few basics to eat. I only seemed able to get stuff we didn't really need.

Do you get great satisfaction out of it?

Well, yes and no. Yes inasmuch as you get stuff you haven't paid for, but on the whole no because I know that the stuff is mine anyway, that those people who own Tescos and all those shops can so easily afford to lose the odd two or three things which it takes all my ingenuity to take. When you get home at the end of a little spree you flop down in the chair and think to yourself, "Well, what have I got after all that work?" and you look in the bag and you know it's peanuts and for it you have probably risked prison. It just demonstrates to me how desperate we women are to get something of our own.

E.W., Glasgow, February 1974

Women and the Unions

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 individual 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 . . .

* Living with a man and therefore not entitled to any money from Social Security (S.S.), because the man is supposed to support the woman.

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 union had to fight two governors by busting the windows of the union offices.

At Ford Dagenham 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 of) 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 whole class into grades and corresponding wage rates so that groups of workers see their interests as different from other groups—for example, *men in relation to women*.

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 Transport and General Workers Union publicly in order to get

*In February 1970, following the acceptance by the union of a low wage rise discriminating against women, 20,000 Leeds clothing workers came out on strike. Thousands of women from at least 45 factories marched from factory to factory calling other workers out, and marched through the streets of Leeds to press their grievance.

'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 is 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 organisation, 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 full-time 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 organisations 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* unions workers) and have organised them to deal with their waged work situation. A housewife's work situation is the home, and every woman who does waged work (except the rich) also does unwaged 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

* Women who clean offices at night could not even get officials from the Transport and General Workers' Union to meet them because union offices closed at 5 p.m.

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 supermarket. 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 following organisational-ly the way capital is organised: a fragmented class divided 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 production of material commodities, 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 factories. And blacks, like women, see the function of the union within the class writ large in its relation to them. For racism and sexism are not aberrations of an otherwise powerful working class weapon. They are its nature.

* Film about a strike in the mining community in New Mexico which was won because the women put forward their own needs, took action in spite of the opposition of the men and won them over to their strategy.

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*.

Selma James, London, April 1972



This is Nursing

Introduction to a Struggle

In the spring and summer of 1974, nurses in Britain took industrial action for the first time. The action began in April when student nurses pressed the Royal College of Nursing* to confront Barbara Castle† and “demand that the gross injustices to which we have been subject are rightfully realised and rectified immediately.” Then when the nurses’ negotiating body met with Barbara Castle, a demonstration of 1,500 nurses waving banners and chanting “strike”, “strike”, marched outside. The Minister, less anxious for a confrontation, slipped out of the building to avoid meeting the marchers’ delegation. The pressure was on.

Strike action was being considered by nurses, stoppages with emergency cover were arranged while nurses attended protest meetings, and the RCN threatened mass resignations from the National Health Service unless an ‘independent’ inquiry was set up by 4 June. Nurses’ action committees were formed in hospitals, representing nurses of all grades and overriding differences in union

* A professional body to which many nurses belong.

† Minister for Health and Social Security.

and professional organisation. Nurses began to work out demands, grievances and a strategy for struggle. A mass national demonstration was planned for 6 June. By this time the government had promised an 'independent' inquiry to be headed by Lord Halsbury. The RCN retreated from its militant pose and called for a moratorium on action. The marches went ahead. Thousands of women marched in different towns.

Suspicious of the promise of a report by the inquiry "by the end of the summer", and unwilling to be restrained by the doctrine of 'professionalism', which in effect said that to demand what is rightfully yours is 'unprofessional', many groups of nurses decided to continue their action. Walkouts and disruptions were carried out in many hospitals. And although the RCN had retreated, the other hospital unions were still giving their backing to these activities.

A National Co-ordinating Committee, drawn from the numerous nurses' action committees, planned a national day of action for 8 July. Less than a week before that date, the leadership of one union, which had been the most militant sounding, accepted a promise by Barbara Castle of an (unspecified) interim pay award if the Halsbury Commission did not report by 16 September. This union, CoHSE (Confederation of Health Service Employees), called for a halt to all action.

Many local groups of nurses, who had begun to mobilise support from factory workers, miners, government employees, and other hospital workers, for joint action on 8 July, were left in the lurch. The marches for that date were called off. The initiative which had been enthusiastically seized by the nurses when they began agitation in April was unceremoniously taken back by the union. Still, 300 staff at Highcroft Mental Hospital in Birmingham, members of CoHSE and NUPE (National Union of Public Employees), staged the first-ever 24 hour strike of nurses *after* the compromise was reached, and many other nurses continued with other kinds of protest action—approaching other workers for support, refusing to nurse private patients, etc.

Against this background the proposals in the Halsbury Report when it appeared were anti-climactic. They included a 29.0% to 30.8% increase for a nursing officer, a management position,

which amounts to £600-£700 [\$1,500-\$1,750], and only 14% to 17.9% (£147-£231 [\$367-\$577]) for a nursing auxiliary. An 'improvement' of pay differentials had clearly been accomplished—and as usual those already at the bottom got the least money.

Student nurses, who (like nursing auxiliaries) provide what is politely referred to as "a pair of hands", ended up with an actual salary of between £93.75 [\$234] and £110.25 [\$275] monthly before tax. That this represented a 41.3% increase for some is merely a reflection of how bad the old rates were, and not how generous are the new. None of the student nurses got more than £8.50 [\$21] a week rise (and most got much less—some as little as £1.25 [\$3], compared to £20 [\$50] a week for higher management personnel).

But more important than the Halsbury Report itself was the message which widespread action of nurses during their struggle announced: that nurses had found their voice; that they would no longer be kept in their place by the illusions of professionalism, which would prevent their challenging their low pay and the lousy conditions under which they work; that they would no longer submit to the blackmail, always used against service workers and especially women, which says that to fight in your own interest is to endanger someone else's. Lord Halsbury assures those who might be dissatisfied: "This is not the last word on the subject." On that at least we must agree.

The articles which follow were written during the summer of 1974. The first two articles describe what it is to be a nurse, how nursing has become 'a job like any other', and the rebellion of nurses against that work. The final article, 'The Home in the Hospital', is an analysis of nurses' work, the struggle that nurses have been making, and the relationship between their work and struggle and those of women in the home.

Editors

NOTE: This introduction is based on an article by Lizzie Stuart, 'Halsbury Report: crumbs for the "birds"', in *Power of Women Journal*, No.3.

A Job like Any Other

I came to this country in 1962 when I was 17. I went to look for a job and the Youth Employment Officers suggested that I go for a job in the factory. I didn't want to work in a factory—but I didn't know what I wanted to do—I didn't really want to do nursing as such. I went to a London teaching hospital to train as a nurse. They said I would have to work as an auxiliary first because of my age. I now know this isn't true; they could have taken me on as a cadet. So I worked as an auxiliary doing bed pans, washing babies' woolies, cleaning lockers, etc.

When I first started it was so depressing, I was one of the only black girls there. Then more and more black girls came into London and it wasn't so bad. I remember one incident. I was living at the nurses' home and at that time I was wearing clothes I had brought with me from home. As I was going out while living at the nursing home the matron said to me, "Where are you going dressed like a tart?" They used to do things like going through your clothes and then ask you how you could afford certain things. I remember that the first pay I got was £9 [\$22.50] a week. In 1963 I started training for an SRN [State Registered Nurse], and I felt so isolated, there would be times when I would sit in the canteen all by myself with no one to talk to. I was unhappy but I didn't want to work in a factory and my family and friends all felt nursing was better than that, so I stayed. It was during that period of my life that I saw I was being victimised. To me it has always just been a job. I trained because I couldn't see what else there was; now it is a way of earning a living. When I finished training and was on the wards the doctors especially wouldn't recognise black nurses then. Many is the time I was asked to fetch a nurse. But this has changed; they can't do without black nurses at all now.

In 1964 I qualified and left the Health Service immediately, and went to work for an agency. I will never work for the Health Service because of what I went through during my training. The patients are not being looked after properly—and the nurses have no say in the way the patients are looked after and the money is disgusting. Everyone on the ward is divided by what status they are. In the NHS you have to put up with things that as an agency nurse you don't have to. Matron doesn't rule you any more.

When I first started agency work there were not many agencies around and in those days it was mostly private nursing that they catered for. Many times I have gone to a job and the person has said that they didn't want me to nurse them. If they were desperate they would say, oh, you could look after me today but I would like someone else tomorrow. I don't particularly like working for an agency either but you get more money and more freedom. If my daughter is sick I just ring up and say I am not going in. Whereas in the Health Service they would try and persuade you to come in saying how short-staffed they were, and if you didn't you would lose a night's pay. But I do feel that they are making a big business out of us. You get different rates from different agencies and some take up to 12½% commission. I work nights all the time because I have a child. I chop and change agencies to get more money. I work four nights a week from 8.30 p.m. to 7.30 a.m. at a London hospital where the majority of nurses are from overseas. I find that whenever people talk about agency nurses they mean black nurses, but there are nurses from all over the world working for agencies. I feel very sorry for the girls, say, from the Philippines and Malaysia who don't speak English very well and who are being exploited. They remind me of when I first started training.

Patricia Matthews, London, August 1974

Breaking the Chain of Command

When I first started nursing I was relatively naive about the workings of the hierarchical system; how it attempts and often succeeds in implicating even its lowest members in the process of control.

While still in Preliminary Training School—the eight weeks school instruction which a student nurse received before being thrown onto the wards to work—I remember being astounded one afternoon hearing a student nurse, three months my 'senior', talking about relations with the ancillary staff, the women who clean

the wards, wash the dishes, scrub the toilets, etc. With great viciousness she repeated the dictum issued to her by the ward sister: "You do not take orders from them. They must take orders from you—don't forget that." In fact the hierarchies of control of nursing and of non-nursing staff are separate, but in day-to-day activity conflict and hostility often emerge—softened by some feelings of friendship and mutual consideration. This is the double-edged knife which the hierarchy wields and from which it seeks to derive its strength: you may be low, but there is always someone with even less status, less experience, less power than you.

A large portion of the nursing workforce is made up of training nurses. A student nurse is a student in name only, except for approximately 24 weeks of a three years' training. The rest of the time she is a working nurse, getting her training on the job, doing a 40 hour week, working evening shifts several times a week, and night duty—often an 11 or 12 hour shift. She is often left in charge of a ward of about 30 patients. She works weekends and bank holidays and gets three weeks' holiday plus one week to make up for bank holidays. She does not get student holidays, she does not get extra time in which to keep up with her studies. She receives a shockingly low wage called a 'training allowance' and gets less the younger she is. She pays full income tax. A first year student nurse, living in the nurses' home, may take home after deductions as little as £11 [\$27.50] a week. Life and health are cheap at that price.

The buildings that we work in and live in are usually inadequate. Our wards are long, with 12 or 15 beds lined up against each side. It takes fewer nurses to look after one room full of 28 patients, so with chronic staff shortages it is impossible to create smaller wards. The wards are too small to fit a decent sized table in—so the patients eat on or next to their beds, remaining isolated amidst a crowd even during the most social of activities. There may be two baths and three sinks for 30 patients; there are only three toilets and they may all be at one end of the ward and thus all but inaccessible to an elderly woman who needs assistance walking and whose bed is at the other end. The beds are too close together and may need to be pushed to the side to accommodate a dressing trolley. This is the room in which we do our work of caring for the patients; where we bump our shins and tear our tights when we try to squeeze between chair and bed to reach a thermometer; where

we have to move a chair and a heavy patient from one spot to the other to make space if we need it.

Nurses' homes are a reflection of the ward. Here nurses may share their toilets and baths with 15 or so others. Kitchen facilities are small and inadequate, shared by far too many people and we too must eat in our rooms near our beds because there is no place for a table. Our rooms are ridiculously small and cramped with standard furniture of bed, desk/dresser, and chair. The building is old more often than not, with long, cold, dark, high-ceilinged corridors—door after door and behind each door a cubicle which is supposed to be our home. Theft is a tremendous problem in our homes. Like all poor people who find themselves in overcrowded, inadequate living conditions, we end up taking it out on each other.

The home is 'supervised' by a warden, often a nursing sister herself—so we may be under the sway of the same authority at 'home' that we thought we left behind when our working day was finished. She enters our rooms without invitation, checking for an illegal male guest or to make sure when we're off sick that we really are, or maybe just to remind us that she's there. Many of us move out of the home if we possibly can to escape the presence of authority for at least part of our time.

What makes the exercise of authority at work particularly effective is that it hides under the cover of greater experience and greater knowledge. For those in charge, it is but a short step from instructing a learner to do something which is an important part of her nursing duties to harassing her because of the length of her uniform or because of the way she informs the nurse in charge that she's going off duty. The unwritten rule is that when the 'knocking-off' time arrives, even if you are doing absolutely nothing, you wait for the nurse in charge to 'invite' you to leave. The numerous rules of protocol and petty demands and requests that may be made of you as a 'junior' nurse are the oil with which the chain of command is lubricated. It is a common experience for a 'junior' nurse to be asked to do the most absurd, time-wasting task, just to teach her 'her place'.

But in nursing like in other industries, a discontented workforce is an inefficient workforce. And more particularly in nursing, it is an inadequate workforce, because those who are not 'happy' leave,

either getting out altogether or by joining agencies, where as relatively freer agents they are less subject to restrictions and demands than as permanent members of a hospital staff. There is pressure for a modernisation of management which rather than cowing the workforce with petty tyranny, will create the illusion of greater participation in management by the managed themselves.

These factors are the background against which the present struggle of the nurses is taking place. As recently as a year ago a nurse complaining about low wages and lousy conditions would be thought immoral for the mere mention of such worldly concerns. A stock response was: "If the pay were higher, the wrong kind of people would be attracted"! Given the chronic shortage of nursing staff, the world must be filled with the "wrong sort of people" ... people like the patients for whom you're caring who say, while you're making them clean and comfortable: "I wouldn't do your job for a million pounds." What they really mean is that they wouldn't do it for £11 a week and you must be a real angel of mercy or stupid or crazy to be doing all that shit work for so little. Actually we are none of those things—what we are is women.

Nursing is women's work. And women are low-paid workers. In the past, when nursing was almost exclusively a vocation for the daughters of the middle class, the low pay was not as great an issue in their lives. But now nurses are nothing more nor less than working women doing a job. Working class women, especially Irish, West Indian, and other immigrants, have by their presence within the profession transformed our needs and expectations. Young women now entering, even those from the middle class, also bring with them completely new attitudes about their relationship to authority and their rights. Subversive notions of equality have penetrated the hospital and training nurses tend to distinguish between the right of a person to teach them and the right of that person to order them around. Older nurses may still express surprise that a first year and a third year student, for example, relate to each other without regard for distinction in their rank! We've come a long way and we're still moving.

Lizzie Stuart, London, July 1974

The Home in the Hospital

Who Cares

The hospital worker is a waged houseworker. She takes care of the very young, the very old and the sick of all ages. But her various functions are fragmented among many different people. Some cook, some clean, some see after the creature comforts of the patients. Nurses also administer medication and treatment, which is what housewives have traditionally done. Hospital work is socialised, industrialised housework, on a factory-like basis, where different functions are taken over by different people in different uniforms, functions to which there correspond specific wage scales.

The divisions within the health service industry correspond to the usual hierarchy of labour powers, in which sex, age, and race help to determine the work and relative position of each worker. But the hierarchical division of labour of the hospital factory is reinforced by the myth of professionalism. Until recently few nurses thought of themselves as hospital workers. They had been told they were professionals, like doctors. They were not manual workers, but 'educated', with specialised 'scientific' knowledge. It was not a job but a vocation, a calling, like religion. (In other parts of the world, this work is done by nuns.) Of course, no one pointed out that professionals with the most specialised 'scientific' knowledge—doctors—were paid very much better for their dedication. In fact, the real basis of professionalism is the capacity both to exclude others from having access to specialised knowledge, scientific or unscientific, *and* to 'specialise' common knowledge—to convince others that they can't possess that knowledge and must be dependent on the professional. A member of a profession can charge more for his skills because he is organised to prevent competition.*

*The women's movement has rediscovered much about our bodies, what makes them go wrong and how to cure them. Some 'professional' functions, pregnancy testing, certain kinds of abortion, etc., don't require long training or great expense. State control over our bodies is exercised through the control of professionals over abortion, childbirth, birth control, sterilisation. Knowing what medical professionalism is about, we can see more clearly that professionalism in any sphere is not a social service but a social control.

Though nurses are workers who are skilled, they are a long way from being professionals. Nurses do heavy physical labour. They cannot control the numbers who are trained. And the training they receive goes only to the point where they can't challenge the doctor's authority and arrogance, even though the nurse often has more experience and real knowledge of the individual patient. So the first built-in aspect of the hierarchy is the inferiority of the nurse and the superiority and authority of the doctor which is then cloaked by calling them both professionals.

The way the wheels of this hierarchy are greased is different from most other waged work: every first-year student nurse has a chance to be second-year, and every second-year the chance to be third-year, and every third-year the chance to be staff nurse, and every staff nurse the chance to be ward sister, and some ward sisters become matrons and a few matrons become administrators (never doctors).

There are two types of training from the beginning. A two-year course leads to the qualification of SEN (State Enrolled Nurse) which *cannot* lead to promotion. A large number of West Indian, Asian and Irish women are deliberately directed to SEN training. One way of pushing women from overseas into SEN training is by demanding educational standards which overseas applicants are less likely to have. This is an attempt to guarantee a trained, low-paid workforce on the ward floor.

The SRN (State Registered Nurse) goes through a three-year training and it is she who is told she has a chance to move up. This system is closer to the old apprenticeship system than to modern factory production, but it is uniquely useful to modern factory production in a hospital. It is a method of social control reinforcing the hierarchy and widening divisions among workers. At the same time it is the specific method of organising work in the hospital factory. Those who have higher qualifications are the same people as those who discipline labour. The chain of command goes from matron down to the hospital ancillary worker. The nearest thing to this chain of command and regimentation is the army.

Below the trained or trainee nurses are the auxiliary* nurses, nursing assistants who have no training, but who do many of the nurs-

* Literally, 'helpful', 'assistant'—*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*.

ing duties on the ward. Below the auxiliary nurses are the hospital ancillary* workers, cleaning, cooking, doing the heavier domestic and other hospital work. Hospital ancillary workers are very largely immigrant, from Ireland, the West Indies, Asia, Africa and Southern Europe. These are the workers who first brought the strike weapon into the hospital. But when they went on strike in 1972/73, the division between nursing and non-nursing status combined with racism and nationalism, and nurses scabbed on the striking ancillary workers. Even now, because of this history, nurses tend to go for support to male factory workers before going to women and men in the hospital service itself. This is also because they have not yet fully appreciated how much power service workers can have. If all hospital workers came out together, they would not be so dependent on workers in any other industry. This awareness will grow as the struggle develops and it is the only guarantee that the hospital hierarchy, complicated by national and racial divisions, will be undermined.

The nursing industry has been changing from a *vocation* for women of the middle class to a *job* for women of the working class, and particularly for Irish and other immigrant women.† The working class woman becomes a nurse because she needs the money, because she will always have a training to fall back on as she goes in and out of waged employment all her life, and because the work is presented as being more human than that in a factory or typing pool. Some immigrant women didn't even have that slim element of choice; it was their only way to get to Britain, that is, to get waged employment.

On the other side, university graduate women who "are desperately anxious to escape from the triple trap of teaching, nursing, or shorthand typing" are being invited on a new basis into the hospital service, to be "skilled middle management". This creation of a more top-heavy management elite is an attempt also to 'reprofessionalise' nursing. The hospitals will use some of them as "grateful outsiders"‡

* Literally, 'subservient', 'subordinate'—*Shorter Oxford Dictionary*.

† See 'A Job like Any Other', pp.64-65 above.

‡ These quotations are from the *Financial Times*, 9 March, 1971, as quoted in *Women, the Unions and Work* by Selma James, publ. Notting Hill Women's Liberation Workshop Group, London, 1972. (This pamphlet is to be republished with a new Postscript by Falling Wall Press, autumn 1975.)

to manage other women. This method of control and breaking down the cohesion of a struggle, by lifting a few women to higher grades and even fewer to managerial positions, is certainly not confined to hospitals (or to women). The chosen few feel they must continually prove themselves. They live in constant anxiety that they'll be sent down to the ranks again, and again be replaced by men. They are the most brutal supervisors and at the same time make the white male power structure look more 'democratic' and less male (and eventually less white). 'Equal opportunity' always leaves the great majority of women not only at the bottom but even more efficiently managed.

The recent nurses' struggle

The struggle in the spring and summer of 1974 erupted—

1. because of the new balance of power between capital and the working class as expressed most dramatically by the two miners' strikes (1972 and 1974) and the war in Northern Ireland.
2. because of the increasing number of working class and particularly immigrant staff in nursing and other hospital work.
3. because inflation has driven many women out of nursing since it is so low paid. On the one hand, the working day is more intense, and the nurses' working class position is more exposed. On the other hand, they can't be so easily replaced, so they have more leverage to struggle with.
4. because the increasing pressure on them has made it even more difficult for nurses to care for the patients. It is painful to turn a blind eye to the needs of someone who is suffering; yet hospital conditions force nurses to do this, and undermine the mythology of nursing being a 'caring profession'.
5. because the young nurse, as part of her generation, has less respect for discipline and authority on which the whole organisation of hospital work is based. The counterpart to lack of respect is lack of 'ambition': the fact that a woman is promised that she can rise in nursing is in itself a discipline, but only if she cares about rising.
6. because there is an international women's movement which has registered and increased the power and the boldness of all women.

Therefore nurses today are less vulnerable to the blackmail to which they, even more than other service workers, are traditionally subject. They are undermining the conditioning that we have received as women and which has been reinforced by their conditioning as nurses. Women are always made to feel completely responsible for whatever happens to those in our charge, and guilty for considering our own needs. This is a direct result of our wageless work in the home where we are always justifying our existence because we appear to be living off other people's (men's) labour. When women's needs and others' needs appear to clash, women are made to feel selfish, ungrateful and uncaring if they consider themselves.

The nightmare reality of this society is: to have the job of caring for others is to neglect ourselves. Breaking the blackmail, hospital workers have exposed the actual social relations between service workers and those dependent on their work. Caring and compassion are degraded, they become chores and an area of exploitation when they become capitalist work. When a nurse sells her labour power, part of what she is selling is her emotions. Part of her training is about how to turn her feelings into the 'right' responses. Neither those who 'care' nor those who are 'cared for' set the terms of the relationship; it is a capitalist relationship which the nurses' struggle is attacking. It is only in attacking this relationship that the nurses can care for the patients *and* themselves. Their struggle in the interest both of higher wages and better conditions for themselves will mean more staff and improvements in the care of patients which are *not* at the nurses' expense.

Whose health service?

This does not mean, however, that the impetus for the nurses' demands has been a desire to 'save' the National Health Service, as the trade unions and leftists have claimed.* Quite the contrary. The impetus has been nurses asserting *their own needs*, which run counter to the needs and function of the NHS, their employer.

Those who assume that the needs of the nurses and the needs of their employer are not opposites have failed to understand what the NHS is, what the needs of the workers in the NHS are and also

* See for instance the report of the nurses' march in Bristol, which the organisers planned as a procession of silent lament for the passing of the NHS, in *Power of Women Journal*, No.2.

what the needs of the 'consumer' of the service, the patient, are.

In this they have totally ignored what the feminist movement has said and done to wrest control of our bodies from doctors, from drug companies, in a word, from capitalist medicine. This feminist struggle of women as 'consumers' of the NHS, and the struggle of women as workers for the NHS, are crucially linked. Some women are being exploited in work aimed at keeping the minds and bodies of other women (and of every other section of the working class) adjusted for capitalist work. Implicit in the nurses' struggle is a refusal of that work, and therefore a lever for us all against that control. Nurses and other hospital workers, more than anyone, are in a position to know how the conditions and functions of their work make it impossible for them to provide the care that we need, and that they often went into nursing to give.

We must make clear again what this health service has meant to us as women, from birth control that doesn't work or kills and poisons, to prenatal care, abortion and childbirth on the assembly line,* to imposed sterilisation, to the catheterising (using a tube to draw urine from the bladder) of women in the geriatric wards because it's faster than walking them to the toilet regularly. The health service, private or nationalised or a combination of both, is and can only be the control by the State of our bodies.

In Britain the fact that the health service is nationalised and paid for by National Insurance contributions† rather than over the counter mystifies its function. It seems not to be an industry and not a control over our bodies, not a repair shop for labour power damaged mentally and physically by doing capitalist work, living capitalist lives and breathing capitalist air; but a public service which we must protect and preserve and even extend.

The industrial nature of the medical 'profession' is not so mystified in, for example, the US. As in Britain, profits from the

* Many hospitals in Britain are now inducing birth artificially at the cost of pain to the mother and risk to the child, for 'convenience' reasons, i.e. so that hospitals can get through more births in daytime hours and without expanding the maternity wards.

† National Insurance contributions are weekly payments made by the worker and her/his employer. Those who do not have a wage and do not pay these contributions still have access to the NHS, but not to the sick pay to which a full contributor is entitled.

labour of nurses, nurses' aids and ancillary staff go into the coffers of the State and private industry in the form of providing healthier or at least functional and more tranquillised workers. As in Britain, the hospital worker and the patient see a lot of money going into the pockets of the senior doctors, surgeons and consultants. But in a country where medicine is private, payment goes directly to doctors and hospital management, rather than through the State. It is clearer there that medicine is an industry rather than a 'public service'.

In Britain, the trade unions and the organisations of the left have blamed 'public apathy' for low wages in the NHS,* and have appealed to us to support the nurses in order to 'save the health service', which they treat like an enclave of socialism and humanitarian values in a capitalist world (rather like the 'education' system). They attack the agency nurses for refusing to devote their lives to this 'service'. The NHS is not a service that the ruling class has granted to us, but a service which hospital workers provide for the ruling class in providing mentally and physically 'fit' workers. It is a service based on the exploitation of some workers, the hospital workers, and the manipulation of others, the patients. The fact that it is nationalised means only that every sector of the working class is kept functional through it, and that the payment from our wage for this service to the ruling class is rationalised in the form of National Insurance payments. The fact that it is obviously in *our* interest to be seen by a doctor or go into hospital, whether or not we have a wage and whether our wage is higher or lower, doesn't alter the fact that fundamentally the service is not for our benefit.

In fact *all* of our consumption of goods and services is—

... the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the labourer [her]/himself. The individual consumption of the labourer, whether it proceed within the workshop or outside it, whether it be part of the process of production or not, forms therefore a factor of production and reproduction of capital just as

* "This is your NHS and you must be prepared to pay for it," organisers of the nurses' march in London shouted to the public. See the report of this march in *Power of Women Journal*, No.2.

cleaning machinery does, whether it be done while the machinery is working or while it is standing. *The fact that the labourer consumes his means of subsistence for his own purposes, and not to please the capitalist, has no bearing on the matter.* The consumption of food by a beast of burden is none the less a necessary factor in the process of production because the beast enjoys what he eats. The maintenance and reproduction of the working class is, and must ever be, a necessary condition to the reproduction of capital. (K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1, Moscow, 1958, p.572. Our italics.)

This is the most complete demystification of service work we know, and also the clearest indication of the potential power of the service worker, whose job is the reproduction of the working class. The maintenance of the working class is not marginal but crucial for capital to function. The refusal of the job of maintenance, therefore, gives the service worker tremendous power.

The struggle of the NHS and agency nurses against their employer, the State, is a political struggle against the State's use and organisation of their labour. The rest of us are involved in the same struggle when we fight with the NHS for control of our bodies. The National Health Service is a State institution that we must destroy in order to gain that control.

Nurses organise

Nurses organised independently before the unions came into the recent campaign. The fact that there were many unions in the hospital has been a strength for the nurses. That no one union represented them made it easier to organise across and outside union boundaries, and to continue their independent activity. In most places the individuals who were most active were or became union members, and some were or became shop stewards. But the local action committees that they set up to organise the struggle were not part of the union structure, and operated very differently from union bodies. This was their first attempt at organisation as nurses, yet they were able, despite problems, to use unions and trades councils while doing their own organising, formulating their own demands, and even keeping their own funds.

Almost all the most active women had a healthy cynicism of any trade unions, and discussed their unions and professional

bodies without any particular loyalty to any one of them. Even when the unions most seemed to be leading the struggle, it was of course the nurses' activity which was the power driving it forward. Once the nurses started to organise, the unions took an interest in them. If there was going to be a struggle in the hospital, the unions wanted to make sure they were in control.

The nurses have not been pinned down to any one way of doing things, but have been quite open-minded about how to proceed in terms of organisation. This is often true of women, who have been traditionally outside the union structure or any other part of the power structure. Nurses' organisations, which sprang up overnight everywhere, were informal, unstructured. Many people learned new skills, writing leaflets, making posters, duplicating, attending meetings, chairing meetings, doing public speaking. Many nurses are still in the professional bag where even *joining* a trade union is making a class commitment that they are as yet frightened to make. They feel they will lose status (power) by identifying with 'workers'. Yet we have seen in one area of London, in Brent (and London has not been the most militant section of the country), that when nurses do join a union it is often just one part of their activity. They have had informal meetings in their hospitals and made contact with nurses in other hospitals, helping the others to organise out of their own independent funds. This was already building a network outside the union structure which may fade out of sight at low points, only to surface again when activity is heightened.

These were the demands put forward by the London Nurses Action Committee:

1. £30 basic for nursing ancillaries at 18. The same cash increase for all other grades, i.e. approximately £12.
2. Forty hour week, inclusive of meal breaks and 30 minutes' changing time per shift. Time and a half Saturdays, double time Sundays, double time night duty, triple time bank holidays.
3. Canteen prices to be returned to pre-April '74 levels.
4. Same rent for all grades of staff living in, set at £1 per room. No compulsory living in. Accommodation to be run by elected committee of residents and should be freely available to all who want it.

5. Present staffing levels, laid down but not acted upon, must be acted upon. No staff cutbacks through closures of wards or hospitals. Unqualified staff are not meant to take charge of wards, this must be acted upon.

6. No agency nurses in the NHS.

7. No private practice in the NHS.

8. Increase in London weighting allowance to £500.

9. A sliding scale of wages, that is, a 1% increase in wages whenever there is a 1% increase in the price index.

The attack on the agency nurse

The agency nurse suddenly came to public notice during this recent struggle, when she was made the object of attack, and blamed for the state of the NHS and the situation of the NHS nurse. Who is the agency nurse, and why was she chosen for this scapegoat role?

An agency nurse is a woman who uses her skill to escape from the worst features of the hospital hierarchy. In London, she is often a black nurse. Although figures show that her pay, averaged out and subjected to the usual deductions, is not necessarily more than that of NHS nurses,* she has a reputation for earning big money. Those who work both at NHS and agency jobs, 'moonlighting' in their 'spare time', may have large incomes compared to other nurses. They have paid for them in lack of leisure time and lack of sleep. Hopefully, some have found a tax fiddle that permits them to keep more of the money they earn on agency jobs. The big criticism of them seems to be that they are women who want to earn more money.†

The agency nurse is often a woman who has children and therefore a triple burden. She must do her waged work, but make complex arrangements so that she can look after her children and do her housework as well. She will often work night shifts so that, like the night cleaner, she can be at home with her children during

* The Halsbury Report quoted agency nurses' pay as being on average some 6% lower than NHS pay, once the loss of holidays and other fringe benefits are taken into account. (For example, staff nurses: NHS pay, £1,841 [\$4,602] p.a.; average agency pay, £1,734 [\$4,335] p.a.)

† See 'Backlash' from Red Rag Collective and the reply of the Black Women's Group in *Race Today*, November 1974.

their waking hours. She takes agency work in order to find a shift that fits her overburdened schedule, that permits her to take a day off when some crisis occurs in the family without her being penalised (except by loss of pay), without losing her job.

Agency nurses give up certain benefits for the ready cash they need. They give up seniority, holiday pay, sickness benefits and whatever security comes from being on the staff. And for many agency nurses there is no choice whether to stay within the NHS or become agency nurses. Unless they can have more say about what shift and what days they will work, they can't take *any* waged work.

During the nurses' industrial action, the unions and the left have made agency nurses the focus of their attack. Everywhere they have pushed for a ban on agency nurses—for NHS nurses to refuse to work with them.

Throughout the struggle the unions and the left have been concerned to defend the NHS. They have been more worried about whether the NHS has enough money than about whether the nurses have, and have attacked agency nurses both for 'going private', using the 'gift' of their NHS training to get work elsewhere, and for taking too much cash from the NHS.

The accusation that agency nurses—or any nurses—owe anything to the NHS for their training is a lie. Nurses more than pay for their own training by the work they do when they are supposed to be 'students'. The NHS would cease altogether without the virtual slave labour of student nurses (studying for SRN) and pupil nurses (studying for SEN).

The unions' and the left's attack on the agency nurses was a convenient way of diverting pressure from the NHS. It was taken up to some degree by nurses, as the demands of many of the nurses' action committees show (e.g. the London Action Committee demands above). Refusing to work with the agency nurse was an action nurses could take without going so far as to strike. It was a way to put pressure on the management by depriving it of *someone else's labour*. In preventing the NHS from using 'outside' labour, the nurses hoped the NHS would be forced to give NHS nurses the advantages that agency nurses had taken for themselves. The agency nurse had some of what the NHS nurse did not have

and wanted, in terms of immediate cash and more flexibility. The two were divided from each other by differences in contract and often by race.

The trade union line on agency nurses has been very typically trade unionist and anti-working class, sharpening divisions between workers. The division of labour, and the divisions between us that flow from it, are such that *any* two sets of workers working side by side are set in opposition to each other. (The whole purpose of the division of labour is twofold: one to divide the labour, and the other to divide the labourers. Both result in higher productivity.) The agency nurse and the NHS nurse could have tremendous power together, if they took up demands and methods of struggle that embraced the needs of both. In making scapegoats of the agency nurses, the unions' pressure has been to drive them further apart, and in this way to divide and weaken the nurses' struggle.

Women's demands

In spite of the attack on them, agency nurses have not scabbed during any of the short strikes we have seen;* they have not worked where the NHS nurse has refused to work. Quite the opposite. By gaining some flexibility for herself in hours and pay, by being officially outside the NHS, the agency nurse has been responsible for an instability and disengagement from loyalty to the NHS which has been of great use to the struggle of the official NHS worker. She, more than anyone, has been responsible for destroying the myth of professionalism and Florence Nightingale devotion to the job.

Demands that embrace the needs of *all* nurses as women, who are all houseworkers and may be mothers—demands for child care facilities, days off with pay for emergencies, flexible work schedules—have only begun to be raised by nurses, agency and NHS (who may be the same person: one by day and the other by night). Such demands could enable agency and NHS nurses, and other hospital workers, to unite in their common material interest and begin to tackle the divisions that have set the boundaries of their fight. This would mean a big increase in power.

* There were a number of short walk-outs, stoppages and works to rule. Agency nurses refused to take over any of the tasks that NHS nurses were leaving undone.

But child care presents the dilemma that, when we demand it from a specific employer, we become tied to the job by the child care which we would lose if we were sacked or left the job. The same is true about flexible working hours, which is a weapon employers are using in other industries to drain the woman of her energies in a few hours and make it easier for her to carry on doing the two jobs of home and factory or office for one wage. With such demands there is always the danger that capital will co-opt our struggle—use what we win against us.

These are the problems that always arise when we are limited in our views about what can be won because we have a limited view of our power. It is always to this crisis of how to prevent capital from co-opting our struggle that we must address ourselves.

The Power of the Service Worker

What we ask for, what we can win and the degree to which we can resist co-option are always determined by our power. That power in turn is determined by how many are on our side, and what weapons we all wield against those who are exploiting us. The nurses' struggle has already begun to demonstrate the source and the scope of their power as service workers. In doing this it has uncovered who shares this particular power: who undergoes the same kind of exploitation, and therefore who can and must be with them in destroying it.

The nurses' job is to repair and reproduce, in the hospital, labour power that has been damaged. All service workers, in one way or another, do the same work: they produce not things but people, the labour power on which capital depends. The most crucial place where this work goes on, the foundation which all other service jobs are built around and assume, is the home. Labour power is first and foremost reproduced there*—conceived, nursed, taught its first words; and it comes home to be reproduced there

* 'Production' and 'reproduction' have often been confused, the first to describe making things, the second to describe making people. In reality, where capitalism is concerned, making things and making people are one process, done on one assembly line that moves from the waged workplace to the home and back again. All production of things, because it is continually repeated, is reproduction. All production of people is reproduction for the same reason and for the same boss.

every night of its life. Teachers, caterers, nurses and other hospital workers are mainly women who have gone out to do this work of reproduction for a wage. Their work is socialised, and *directly* supervised and controlled by capital, but it is essentially the same work in each case—a specialisation of an aspect of the work of the housewife.

The decisive question which the struggle of the nurses and other service workers is answering is: whether workers who do not produce things, but produce people, have potential social power by refusing to produce these people. Can they withdraw their labour and, if they do, can they make it hurt enough to win?

Halting service work may or may not directly interrupt the production of things, but in every case it makes it more difficult for workers to continue this production and ultimately forces this production to slow down, or at least prevents it from reaching new levels. When labour power has to fight to be reproduced, it is even less inclined to work: when we have to struggle to get to our waged job, to be renewed or to renew ourselves after a day's work there, to be looked after when we are ill, we are even less inclined to get to that job. We are often even glad of the excuse—to ourselves and/or to the boss—that, in the absence of services essential to our reproduction as workers, we too must be absent.

We have been encouraged to look to the community as an area where tensions are released, where we 'relax' and take our 'leisure', where we are cared for and are cared about. It has seemed disconnected from the drudgery and impersonality of the factory, of 'work'. But in fact the 'community' is where we recuperate from that other work, where we work to recover from work so that we can go back to work. Or where, as children, we work to be trained for work so we can go on to more work as adults. This preparation and recuperation is an essential part of the reproduction of labour power, and it is based at every point on our service work as women, in the home and out of it. As long as capital and its work destroys labour power every day in factories, fields, offices, mines and schools, we will be destroyed by the work of patching it up and replacing it; and destroyed too by seeing it continually destroyed again.

Creating the appearance of social peace and order, absorbing and

masking conflict, is one essential part of reproducing labour power. Halting service work undermines this appearance of social peace and order. The routines of capitalist life have always given capitalism the appearance of naturalness (as if life couldn't be any other way) and the appearance of viability (as if nothing else could work as well). Children growing up see a relatively smooth-running system, and their mothers and teachers discipline them to behave in such a way as to fit into that system and find their appointed place. Marx says, "The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, training, habit, looks on the conditions of that mode of production as self-evident laws of nature."* *The advance of the class struggle in the service area has the opposite effect.*

When the service worker struggles, the community ceases to provide even the appearance of a release of tension, of a haven of caring in a harsh world, and is seen for what it is—a factory of another kind, where others work on us and we work on others ourselves. When the service worker puts forward her own demands, capital no longer appears to provide security, order, peace, stability. When she refuses to do the work that turns all of us into objects to be serviced, everyone sees and feels the instability of the society. Children find no established routine to fit into, and their mothers refuse the service work of teaching them their place. By causing wards to close and admissions to hospitals (except emergencies) to stop, by refusing to work for private patients, nurses and other hospital workers have done their share in demystifying what the community is all about, by subverting it, by shaking the 'natural order of things'.

Industrial action becomes more problematic the more directly workers are involved in the 'woman's work' of caring for dependent human beings. Transport workers and dustmen [garbage men] do service work, are part of the community's reproduction of labour power. But their work does not involve establishing a relationship with other people. In this respect the work of nursing and teaching is closest to the woman's situation in the home: the work of teachers because they are held responsible for the child's personality and future; the work of nurses because they are held responsible for

* *Capital*, Vol.1, p.737.

people's physical well-being. The housewife and mother is held responsible for both. Nurses have demonstrated that, despite the blackmail of being tied as individuals to other, dependent, individuals, they can organise and assert their *social* power. In this they have shown what is possible too for the housewife.

But other service workers have two great advantages over the full-time service worker in the home. First, they already have a wage. The full-time houseworker doesn't, and it is much more difficult to go from nothing to something than to go from a little to more. Second, other workers are not isolated in their work as full-time housewives are.

Full-time housewives have always found ways of organising. Those housewives from mining areas and elsewhere who (on more occasions than the media ever let us know about) have left their children at the Social Security offices or at the Housing Department offices until they got what they were demanding have undermined the discipline of wageless service work, the blackmail of service work, by demonstrating their right and their power to refuse this work. But it has rarely been possible for them to break the confines of geographic areas and particular issues. We cannot ignore the weaknesses of the full-time housewife's situation. For one thing every housewife *knows* this about her situation. But we must not assume that these are insurmountable weaknesses, that the housewife cannot organise her power on a wider scale. When other workers strike, the isolated, unwaged housewife begins to think in terms of refusing her role and her work, of organising to refuse it. But she gains confidence in particular from women's struggle against service work, like the nurses' struggle, and in this way these struggles help the housewife to wage her own struggle and to cut through the blackmail from which all women suffer.

It's not news that one section of the working class learns from another and gains strength and power from what it learns. But no one has ever assumed that *housewives* are part of that learning (and teaching).

Wageless houseworkers and waged service workers

What is possible for housewives is crucial to what struggles like the nurses' struggle can achieve. Nurses, like all women, are housewives. The hours and conditions of the housework they do at home, and

particularly the fact that this work is done without any wage, determine every aspect of their lives, including the hours, pay and conditions under which they do housework in the hospital.

First, it is housework that forces on the agency and NHS nurses the dilemmas about flexible hours in the job outside the home and about childcare so she can do that job. It is housework and its wagelessness that forces nurses and other women to fight and settle for 'solutions' that tie them to that second job outside the home, that only make it more possible to do the two jobs for one wage, that benefit the employers and the State more than they benefit us.

Secondly, our wagelessness at home means that we come to waged work from a position of powerlessness in other ways as well. We are forced to take on a second job under almost any conditions and at almost any wage. And we are powerless in relation to men, who often undermine the struggles we make and fight only for pay rises for themselves, preferring to keep us 'dependants' who will be forced to do *housework* for them in return for a share of 'their' wage.

Thirdly, the fact that women look after people for free at home undermines the wages that hospital workers, and other waged service workers, can get for doing the same work in socialised conditions. On the one hand, the State knows that if hospital workers strike, or impose too high a price for their work, at least some of it can be sent back into the arms of the 'community', the arms—and hands—of mothers, daughters, wives, sisters, where it will be done at no cost to the State. Thus patients are sent home early to convalesce, and operations are delayed for months while a woman sustains the ailing member of the family. On the other hand, the nurses are not *expected* to receive a high wage for work which, since it has been done by generations of women without wages, has come to be seen as part of our nature. Caring for the ill is supposed to 'fulfil' us; we're supposed to carry on, regardless of pay or lack of it, out of dedication.

When the nurses shouted on their demonstrations, "We can't put dedication in the bank," they spoke for every woman. When they refused to accept the conditions in which they work to reproduce labour power, when they said that this work must be rewarded in

money, they opened the way for an entirely new level of power for themselves and all women—the power we can have when we are all demanding money and refusing to work for love.

Organising our struggle

The power partially waged women workers and wageless houseworkers can draw from each other derives first of all from the fact that *they are the same people*. There are fewer and fewer women who go through their entire lives without doing waged work before, during, after or without marriage. And all women with a wage, whatever else they are doing, or have been doing, are also doing housework. This is potentially a great unifying force. The full-time housewife needs the power of the woman who is partially waged and in a socialised position. The reverse is also true. Unless the woman in waged work attacks her own unwaged work, she is scabbing on herself, and unable to win more than sporadic and temporary victories. For every woman to fight for Wages for Housework is to refuse to scab on ourselves.

But to demand Wages for Housework wherever we are working requires a whole new level of organisation and a new *kind* of organising: connecting a network of struggles through *a public, a massive and an international campaign*.

Every worker, woman and man, knows that the more widespread your struggle, the more likely you are to win. But houseworkers understand best the weakness inherent in their isolated labour. We need, even more than other workers, to see that women in other situations, in this country and elsewhere, are demanding what we are demanding. Otherwise it is much more difficult to conceive of winning (and no section of the working class is interested in making a struggle unless it can win. Especially women: we work too hard to waste our time and energy).

When women shoplift or withhold rent, it is to gain money for themselves which belongs to them. When women individually fight with men over doing housework, it is to gain time for themselves away from that work. When women demand more of the 'man's' wage, it is already from the conviction that they work for that money too. From these struggles we can see that the full-time housewife is already struggling for wages and against housework. Exactly the same is true of partially waged women. When nurses not only

fight for a wage rise, but make demands such as payment for meal breaks, free child care facilities, we can begin to see in what way *every* struggle by partially waged women introduces the struggle against housework; enlarging the struggle to include a wage for all this slavery.

The first step to lift these struggles from their isolation and to begin to gather our power is to put a name to the objective of the thousands of particular struggles, and to demand directly what they are demanding implicitly: Wages for Housework. This in itself increases women's power. By saying loud and clear all that we are entitled to, it opens a way for a struggle on a much broader, more socialised scale *whether women are working in a socialised situation or not*. To organise a campaign for that demand, to organise a campaign based on the work that *all* women have in common, is to organise the channel for connecting one struggle with another, one stratum of women with another; is to help build a network of struggles which, though particular, can draw not only on the forces at their immediate disposal in any one place, but on other women in struggle.

A campaign of this kind *builds a mass movement*. If we are to break through the divisions that have limited all our struggles, we must build such a mass movement.

The demand for Wages for Housework in cash for every woman makes clear once and for all that housework is work for the State, work from which the State benefits. Makes clear once and for all that we are not prepared to do it just for love, as part of our 'female role'. Makes clear this is a job like any other, that must be paid like any other, and that *we can refuse like any other*. With a mass campaign for a wage for all our work under way, we can more easily win particular struggles, for higher wages in the second job, for nurseries without having to take a second job or be dependent on any particular second job—to win these struggles with no productivity strings attached.

The nurses' struggle, and the boundaries it has reached this time, have shown again the need for a new level of power, based on a movement of all women. At the same time it has demonstrated the *possibility* of such a movement, the basis of its power in the refusal of service work.

The struggle of nurses forced us to see again the blackmail which has kept the service worker with one hand tied behind her back. The State, over and over, has put the responsibility for the well-being of other workers in our hands—for the young, the ill, the old, the man. As mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, we have put ourselves last and worked to join together what capital and its work tears asunder every day in factories, fields, offices, mines and schools. This has not been seen as work when there is no wage. It has been seen as dedicated work when there is a low wage. It is always work, for capital and its State, and they have always blackmailed us into doing it. It is up to us to turn the blackmail of service work on its head. Since our work is essential to the State, we can blackmail *them* into paying for it. So far we have done it for love, not money. But the cost of loving is going up.

Power of Women Collective, England, September 1974



General Strike

Family Allowance: the Woman's Money

This speech was given to a huge women's march on International Women's Day 1973 at the height of the Family Allowance Campaign. During that campaign, petitioning was used to contact thousands of women, there were demonstrations in several cities, a sit-in at the main London post office, and in Lancaster in a post office and a baby clothes shop. Women from factories marched and sat in with full-time housewives, unsupported mothers and married women came together, a mass movement of women demanding money from the State.

I have been asked to speak today on behalf of the Women's Family Allowance Campaign, a campaign which is being organised by Women's Liberation groups all over the country. This is a campaign to defend and increase the Family Allowance, the only money many of us have of our own.

The Family Allowance is paid each week to every mother with two or more children, 90p [\$2.25] for the second child, £1 [\$2.50]

for the third. It's not much, and we need more. But for women who work full-time in the home, it's the only money that's paid direct to us. The only money we don't have to ask anyone for. The only money we can call our own.

It is paid on a Tuesday. The men bring home their wages and give us our housekeeping at the end of the week. By Tuesday we are broke, but we can go to the post office and cash some money to see us through to the end of the week. We have a Family Allowance book. We know how much money we're entitled to and where we can get it. We have the money for this week and for future weeks. This is our right.

If we want to save a bit, we can delay cashing orders so we can save up for more expensive essentials. Or we can cash it every week. It's up to us. One thing we know for sure is that we can get that money. It's not tied to a man's wage. It's paid at all times—through sickness, unemployment, strikes or breakdown of marriage. This is the only money we can rely on.

But now the government is trying to take this money away. The government have said they want to abolish the Family Allowance. Instead they want to pay what they call child tax-credits. They say they want to pay these in the men's pay packets, through the employer. They say people in work or registered for work and getting sickness or unemployment benefits would get these credits, paid through the man.

But what about people on Social Security [Welfare]? Those on strike? Those who are self-employed? Wives of students? All these people would be left out completely. And even in those families getting the tax-credit, the women would have to ask the men for the money. We're not having that. We refuse to give up what little money we have of our own.

Already the government has seen that we won't give up our right to some money of our own, and that women have been protesting all over the country. In the Budget speech the government had to back down a bit. They said they would pay some of the child tax-credits to the mother.

But tax-credits are not the same as Family Allowance. They would not be paid automatically. They would not be paid to all

women with children. Many women would be left out. We don't want tax-credits for *some* mothers. We want Family Allowance for *all* mothers.

We want to keep the Family Allowance as paid at present, paid automatically—never mind whether the men are working or not working, on strike or supplementary benefits.

We want the Family Allowance paid for the first child as well. We want the Family Allowance to be made tax-free. The men must no longer be taxed on what we get. We want women on Social Security to get the Family Allowance as well as Social Security. *And we want more.*

The government has stopped school milk. They stopped cheap school meals. They put charges on prescriptions. They put the rents and the rates and the prices up, and froze wages. We need more money, not less. We want that money from the State, not from the men. The men haven't got enough either.

We have seen what power we have. One and a quarter million women signed a petition demanding that V.A.T.* be removed from children's clothing and the government gave way. They are going to have to give way over the tax-credits as well. They are going to have to keep and increase the Family Allowance.

The Women's Family Allowance Campaign has been collecting signatures for a petition. We have been to schools, factories, markets, post offices, and women have been queuing up to sign, taking away petitions to get their friends to sign. Women have been organizing meetings and working out a strategy for further action. On March 27th we shall be petitioning and demonstrating at post offices all over the country. Wherever you are, get some petition forms and go to your local post office.

We are going to show this government the time for taking things away from us is over. Workers all over the country are striking. We are workers too. We are going to make them give us what we want.

*Value Added Tax—tax added to the price of certain articles to conform with the tax system in the Common Market.

We say

HANDS OFF OUR FAMILY ALLOWANCE.

MORE MONEY FOR WOMEN.

IN THE FACTORY, IN THE OFFICE, IN THE HOSPITAL,
IN THE HOME, POWER TO OUR SISTERS!

Suzie Fleming, London, 10th March 1973

The government was forced to back down on their proposals. The idea of selective payment of child tax-credits was dropped, and when the new scheme comes in, 'universal child credits' will be paid to every mother, through the post office. The scheme will be exactly the same as the present Family Allowance scheme. The government was also forced to raise the Family Allowance, and to set a date for its introduction for the first child. The Family Allowance is now £1.50 [\$3.75] a week for the second and subsequent children. From April 1976 it will be paid for the first child in single parent families, and for the first child in all families from 1977. We didn't get all we demanded. The money will still be taxed, and still deducted from Social Security payments. And it's still a pittance even after the 50% rise. But the response of women to the question of 'money of our own' showed that this is the question on which women want to fight. No issue in Britain has had such a response from women as this.

Editors

Married to the State

In Britain 'unsupported mothers', women with children who have no husbands, have been organising against the Social Security [Welfare]. Some of them organised themselves in Claimants' Unions, unions of women and men dependent on Social Security, an 'allowance' from the State. Women had to fight in the Claimants' Unions to press for their own demands. This article draws out the

implications of the general demands of the Claimants' Unions, which in themselves don't specifically mention women.

The demands of the Claimants' Unions are:

1. The right to an adequate income without means-test for ALL people.
2. A free Welfare State for all with its services controlled by the people who use it.
3. No secrets and the right to full information.
4. No distinguishing between so-called deserving and undeserving.

Part of the first demand is a guaranteed adequate income for every woman, whether she is married or not, and this is why the Claimants' Unions nationally decided to have a campaign against the cohabitation ruling from 21 to 25 August [1972].

This ruling is, along with the 'four-week ruling' (the 'right' to cut off a single man from his benefit after four weeks) and the 'wage-stop' (designed to keep poor families poor), the most vicious of the Social Security practices.

The cohabitation ruling is used to terrorise unsupported mothers, who are given a measly allowance—as if it were a charity—for themselves and their children to survive on (and survive is the word, too). Not only are they given very little money, but what little they are given is taken away from them at the first opportunity if the Social Security can prove that there is a boyfriend or lover about. The way they do this is by using 'special investigators' who hang around your front door early in the morning to see if a man leaves, or listen to neighbours' gossip, etc. And although just having a lover is not cohabitation according to the Act, because cohabitation is defined as sharing board and lodging as well as bed, many women are terrorised into believing that they are cohabiting if they have a boyfriend. Many women have their allowance books taken away from them, many end up in court, and some even in prison—all because the Social Security will NOT recognise a woman's right to an independent income.

There are in England today something between 200,000 and 300,000 'unsupported mothers', i.e. women who have either chosen to have children and remain on their own, or who are

widowed, separated or deserted women with families. These women do a full day's work, doing housework and looking after children, and they should be entitled to a wage irrespective of whether they are living with men or not. If children are taken into care the State has to pay a lot more for them than it is in fact now paying for their mothers to look after them.

Why are 'unsupported mothers' treated like this?

It is because they are not seen as working for an employer, and in capitalist society you are worth nothing if you are not doing so. Unsupported mothers are told they are not 'productive members' of society—they can't go out to work. That they are a drag on the economy because they haven't got the money to consume. That they are no good as the 'pillar' of the family unit because they are not servicing a man out at work.

But we say TO BRING UP CHILDREN IS WORK and we want a WAGE for all the work we do—whether cleaning offices OR homes, producing electrical parts OR babies.

What is really at stake when one attacks the cohabitation ruling is the status and economic dependence of the MARRIED woman, since the aim of the ruling is to make it impossible for the unsupported mother to be more independent and economically better off than the married woman. A married woman in England who cannot 'work' because of non-existent child-care facilities (the nursery situation is worse in England than almost anywhere else in Europe), and bad pay if she does go out to work, becomes totally dependent on the man's income. To be economically dependent on somebody is NOT the best basis for a relationship with that person; NO other worker is required to make love with and bear children by their employer, or have him around after the end of the week-day. (This, of course, in addition to the fact that great numbers of working-class families suffer because the man's wage isn't enough to live on in any case.)

When women 'work' they are always channelled into the boring, dull, monotonous, badly paid service jobs; and the employers are confident that women who are resigned already to slavery in the home won't protest at slavery and exploitation in the factory. Since women are NOT paid for the work they do in the home, and for their children, they will also accept being paid less and being

given shitty jobs when they work for an employer.

It is this situation in our society of women's economic dependence—always getting paid less for a job OR having to get the money from the man—that is reflected in the way that women are treated when they are living on the S.S.

When a man becomes unemployed and goes to claim, he can claim for wife and children; but a woman who becomes unemployed—even if she has been the ONLY breadwinner and paid her full stamps, etc.—cannot claim for husband and children.

The Social Security ALWAYS treats the woman as a dependent and forces her into that situation. The Social Security Act says that, when a man and a wife claim the benefit, it is always assessed as the husband's and paid out to him. Although the only reason he can claim the benefit according to their own rules is because of his family (since a single man would get cut off after four weeks), there is NO guarantee that the wife and children will ever see that money. A woman has no right to her husband's income—many women don't even know what their husbands earn—and has to rely on his kindness and sense of responsibility. The Social Security makes sure that her situation remains equally insecure when her man is out of work. The wife cannot claim on her own account, or for her children.

On the other hand, a father on his own with children is almost forced out to work, since according to the S.S. a man is *always* a worker and breadwinner and is *not* meant to be at home with children.

It should say something about the degrading situation of many 'housewives' that, if they become 'unsupported mothers' and go on Social Security, that might be the first time for many years that they actually have money of their own that is regularly coming in and that they know IS theirs without directly having to arse-lick anybody. So women on Social Security allowance are often very reluctant to get again into the situation of having to depend on a man for money, and will fight hard against the cohabitation ruling which tries to do precisely this.

Many married women at home with children have been building up a resentment towards 'unsupported mothers' getting an allow-

ance from the State, because they look at their own situation and say, "Why should they be able to get money for bringing up kids when I have to ask my old man for every penny?"

WHAT WE SAY IS LET US FIGHT TOGETHER FOR *EVERY* WOMAN'S RIGHT TO AN INDEPENDENT INCOME, WHETHER SHE IS MARRIED OR NOT.

One of the ideas put forward for the week of action against the cohabitation ruling was that married women should go and sign on as 'unemployed', and claim either unemployment benefit OR an allowance for doing housework and looking after children and, if refused, dump their children in the offices.

Behind the cohabitation ruling is the preposterous assumption that, because a woman and a man sleep together, the man should also keep any number of children the woman might have by other men—i.e. he is supposed to pay her for sexual services. Social Security force women into a form of prostitution like this. I have a friend who was told by an S.S. officer visiting her that it was okay if she slept with a different man every night as long as she didn't have any steady relationship with any one in particular, because in that case her money could be cut off and the man be liable to pay also for her two children.

The result of this harassment is that many unsupported mothers fear to start even friendly relationships with men, and not only do they have the strain of bringing up small children on very little money on their own, but they are now allowed to have any sexual life with a man either. Many men will also think twice before starting to go out with a woman when in a short while he may be forced to keep her and her family. It is no wonder that many women break down or live on tranquillisers.

Apparently the Social Security now have a special directive that says that, if a woman is cut off for cohabiting, she can get money for her children for four weeks pending appeal if they are not the children of the cohabitee. Also, if she loses the appeal, the man is NOT OBLIGED to support the children if they are not his children: they try to persuade him to do so, but he doesn't have to. If he refuses, the Social Security have to give her money for the children. Most people do not know this, though, and are too intimidated and afraid even to find out.

There are now groups of unsupported mothers who are trying to work out new ways of living together, looking after the children communally, sharing the work; groups of women squatting, demanding decent housing and a decent life for themselves and their children.

UNSUPPORTED MOTHERS ARE ORGANISING THEMSELVES IN CLAIMANTS' UNIONS, FIGHTING FOR THEIR RIGHTS TO AN INDEPENDENT INCOME WHETHER THEY LIVE WITH A MAN OR NOT.

Monica Sjoo, Bristol, July 1972

Mother-Led Union

The Mother-Led Union was formed with three initial demands. The first is parity with foster parents. This would give women on benefits more money than they now get. Although the government claims it pays foster parents only enough to look after the foster kids, it's pretty obvious they pay them as much as they do (up to three times as much per child as a woman on welfare) because *it's work* to look after kids, and nobody would look after somebody else's kids if she didn't get paid well. So, figuring it's just as much work to look after one's own kids, women on government assistance want to get paid well for it too.

The second demand is for a higher earning capacity than the government presently allows, if women want to take on a second job outside the home. The positive aspect of this demand is that a lot of women on welfare *do* get part-time jobs—so the MLU is saying they should get paid very well for that *extra* labour. But this is also a demand we have to be very careful of. The government might well decide that it could save a bundle if it allowed women on welfare to earn more in a job outside the home. But if the MLU won parity with foster parents, women wouldn't be forced out to work

in crummy jobs. Then if they wanted extra cash they could get that *in addition* to a living wage from welfare.

The third demand is for free, community-controlled daycare for all women. It's not that the women necessarily want to put their kids in daycare so they can get a second job, but they *would* like daycare for their children as much or as little as they want. In other words, so they can have some *choices*—to take on a second job or not, to have an afternoon free of their kids or not, to get out of their high-rise apartments and go shopping by themselves or not.

March 7 [1975], the Friday before International Women's Day the Mother-Led Union held its first demonstration and public presentation of its demands to the Ontario government. One hundred and fifty Union members and their children, women from the Toronto Wages for Housework Collective and the Wages Due Collective, from the Day Care Coalition and others gathered in a huge blizzard (the first of the entire winter) in front of the legislative buildings and then marched noisily and excitedly over to one of the government offices. Almost every one carried a placard—"If women were paid for all they do, there'd be a lot of wages due" . . . "Welfare women, single women, married women—same struggle—wages for housework" . . . "Davis [the Premier] eats too well [and underneath, a picture of a pig]"—and a lot of them showing the clenched fist.

The two Wages for Housework collectives handed out a leaflet saying why we thought the struggle of the Mother-Led Union was important for all women. Lots of women took extra copies for their friends, and many started wearing the Wages for Housework buttons we had brought.

When we marched into the assembly room, the government officials assigned to meet us went positively pale. They had expected 50 quiet, timid women, and instead found three times that many militant, angry women and screaming kids. Three of the Union members read their briefs to the government. And these women were demanding nothing less than Wages for Housework.

To quote Jean Lance, "But do we not work in the home? Yes we do, cooking, sewing, refereeing, mothering, fathering, washing and so on . . . I could go on for an hour. It works out to about 16 hours a day without pay. We would like to know how we are ex-

pected to do our jobs—the most important we believe . . . mothering—without the proper monies."

And as Joan Clark said, "If 'work' was the way to get off welfare, there certainly wouldn't be any mothers on welfare!" And then, "When women take a second job outside the home they 'graduate' from 'just a homemaker' to the 'working poor' . . . So when we discuss a Guaranteed Annual Income, we are discussing how much of the pie we are going to give the women of this country. It would be very wise of women at this point to be sure that they are not being divided against each other. Whether she decides to work in her home or takes a second job outside the home, she is being handed the same amount of peanuts. The number of peanuts she receives does not depend on the amount of work she does; if it did, mothers with two jobs (the working poor) would be receiving two wages, and the 3.5 million mothers and their children (almost half of Canada's population) would not be the largest and most neglected segment of Canada's poor."

Then the fun really began, when the government officials had their turn. Because the government had so underestimated our strength, these two guys had been told to just 'accept' the briefs and then leave without comment. Well, the women wouldn't hear of it. They started hooting and hollering and demanding an immediate response to our demands. One woman stood up and asked why the government always sent incompetents to deal with women . . . another demanded to know why as soon as her son turned 16 he was no longer considered a dependent but a 'boarder'. By the time one teen-aged boy stood up and angrily asked why a foster child was entitled to \$2 [80p] a week allowance and *his* mother couldn't afford to give him any, the government officials threw up their hands in despair and said they had another appointment. They were overheard saying as they were leaving, "Boy, after what we've been through today, we should ask for Monday off!"

There was no mistaking the sense of power that we all felt after that demonstration. And there is no way that, once we've made a struggle for Wages for Housework and have won, we're going to go back to the isolation of our homes.

Frances Gregory, Toronto, April 1975

Asian Women Strike

On May Day this year 39 Asian workers — 27 women and 12 men — walked out of section 61 of Imperial Typewriters in Leicester. Within a few days 500 workers from other sections had joined them, and at the end of a fortnight production was down to 50%. Their demands were fundamentally for backdated bonus money that the company owed them and for an end to racial discrimination, perpetuated by both management and the union, on the factory floor.

First, management had signed an agreement dated January 1972 which clearly stated that the basic wage was calculated on a production target of 168 machines a day; any worker who produced more than this was to be paid an additional bonus. Both management and the union had withheld this information from the workers and had told them instead that the target was 200 machines a day. It was only by accident that some workers from section 61 saw the 1972 agreement on the desk of Reg Weaver, the factory convenor [chief shop steward]. They immediately demanded the money they have been conned out of over the last two years. At a quick calculation the amount involved is over £400 [\$1,000] per worker.

Secondly, the strikers pointed to the racism on the factory floor. The workers of section 61 felt that the quotas of production allocated to white workers and to themselves were imbalanced. They pointed out that of a total work force of 1,600 workers, of whom 1,100 are Asian, there is only one Asian shop steward. The rest are all white. A demand for the democratic election of shop stewards had been put to the Transport & General Workers Union through the convenor. The union had not responded and the workers had become increasingly bitter about the whole set-up. The discovery of the 1972 agreement added fuel to fire. The union and its representatives at the factory had not only ignored the workers' demands regarding the election of shop stewards, they had collaborated with management to deprive them of money they had earned.

At the end of their tether, the workers decided to walk out and demand a total change. The union, true to its tradition in relation to black workers, promptly declared the strike unofficial and since

then have encouraged management to use any possible method to smash it.

The strike at Imperial Typewriters is unique for several reasons. Without the support of their union and without any significant support from the left, the strikers have set their sights on winning. Over the weeks they have evolved new and creative forms of organisation. For instance, they have come up with the 'grievance meeting'—a mass meeting of the entire strike force where men and women describe their experiences at the factory. They say what is wrong and what needs to be done. These sessions are taped and the strike committee then translate the tapes into a coherent series of demands. It is at these meetings that the women have voiced their demand for equal pay. And since they represent roughly half the strike force they have had the power to ensure that their demand is made a priority. The men know that without the women they cannot win. The wholehearted support that comes from them in relation to this particular demand is more than a gesture of solidarity. It is a recognition of power and therefore the basis for a real and meaningful unity.

We attended one of the grievance meetings and listened to several men and women describing life at Imperial. It was the women who laid a particular emphasis on all the other restrictions that made their day-to-day lives different from those of white workers—washing time, waiting time, tea breaks, lunch breaks, toilet breaks, etc. They were saying that their *total* experience is what makes life at Imperial intolerable. The fight for a higher wage is one aspect of their struggle. The other is a struggle against productivity deals and the speed at which they have to work in order to keep up with ever increasing targets. Not only do they want more money, they want more time. This is one of the women who spoke at the grievance meeting. She's a widow and the mother of three children. She joined Imperial's three years ago at a basic wage of £13.50 [\$33.75] a week:

I assemble motors in the store department. When I first started work here I had to make 14 motors per hour. But then they raised the target to 16 and then to 18 and so on. Now it's 22. To work at that speed we can't even drink a cup of tea. We have no official tea break but sometimes one of us goes out and gets tea for the others. But then if the foreman

sees us he starts complaining about us in front of all the other workers, and even the supervisor, saying we always waste time and talk too much. Anyway, we didn't complain about that. We complained to them about the target—we all said 22 is too high. However hard we work we can never make more than that—and unless we make more we don't get any bonus.

But on top of that if we make less than 22—say 20 or 21—they cut some money from our basic pay . . . We are mostly all Asian in our section but our shop steward is a white woman. She doesn't care and the union doesn't care. I pay 11p a week to be a member of the union but I really think it's a waste of hard-earned money. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against unions—but our union is no different from management. And our shop steward, she hardly ever talks to us. One day she told me she was going to a meeting with some other stewards but I know she went to the hairdresser's. I'm sure the supervisor also knew but he never said anything to her. She comes and goes as she likes. We can't see any difference between her and the supervisor. Yet she is with the union and he is with management. She didn't come out on strike with us—she didn't even want to hear about it. There's another one just like her in my friend's department . . . I'm not saying that all Asians will make good shop stewards. Some of our people are also like the white people; they take their side—management's side—against us. But this way, we are not represented at all . . .

I've been in Imperial's for three years now. I know what I'm talking about. I have three children and I'm alone. My basic pay is £18 [\$45] but the men get £25 [\$62.50]. There's a lot of difference between £18 and £25, isn't there? It shouldn't be like that—we do the same work after all. Why shouldn't we get the same money? And as I was telling you, in our section sometimes we get even less than the basic rate if we don't reach the target. I feel very strongly about this—how can I bring up three children on that salary? I had never worked before when I joined Imperial's and at that time I was very relieved to get the job. I didn't really know what to expect. But now everyone says Imperial's pays lower wages than other factories. If we don't get more money and if we don't

get equal pay, I'm not going back into that factory. I'll look for another job. I know it won't be easy but I'll look.

Another woman we spoke to later described her working day from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. As a woman in a Southall factory says: "Equal pay? We do twice as much work, we should get double pay."

I have to be at work at nine and before that—at ten to nine—I take my son to school. I have to wake up at six o'clock every morning. I get all my children dressed and give them breakfast. Then I make my husband some tea. By then it's nearly eight o'clock. Then my husband goes to work. He has to be there at eight. After that sometimes I have to help my children with their homework—reading, spelling, things like that. Then at about 8.30 my eight-year-old son and nine-year-old daughter leave together for school. They go on their own. Then I have to put my two other children—one is five and a half and the other is four—in the nursery. After that I rush straight to work.

I work till three and my husband works till five. At three I go straight from the factory to get my two children from the nursery. And soon after I get home my other two children also come back from school. That's about four o'clock. I give them some milk and a wash and then start cooking because my husband eats every day at six. So by six I must have the food ready. I like to put my children to bed early. So after cooking I give them something to eat. I like them to go to bed by 6.30 but sometimes it gets a little later. After that there are always clothes to wash and also the dishes. I like to finish all the work just before I sit down. We usually listen to the news at nine o'clock on the radio before going to sleep.

It takes action to destroy myths. The strike at Imperial Typewriters has put paid to several. Asian women are not passive and docile, despite their confinement within a more traditionalistic family structure. The criteria normally used in assessing the quality of black man/woman relationships are derived from the white experience (and middle class to boot), and therefore the real substance of the power relation between black men and women is never identified. Consequently the revolutionary implications of the struggles of black women, especially Asian women, are ignored. As a result

they have either been written off or showered with liberal sympathy. Both attitudes negate the reality of their struggle and on the whole their experience remains a mystery to most white women. On the other hand, West Indian women in Britain are not so easily dismissed. But then Black Power gave them a voice and focussed attention on that voice. They are now being seen as a source of power for the movement as a whole. Their struggle has surfaced and been recognised, if not understood.

It is true that in the past Asian women have come out largely in support of the demands of their men. They had no choice. The alternative was scabbing. The women at Imperial Typewriters represent a new and revolutionary tendency among black women. Virtually a second generation of Asian workers, the cheapest of cheap labour and in factory production for the first time, they have shown that they are aware of the score and less willing to take the horrors. Their militancy on the picket lines, their forcefulness at the grievance meetings and their determination to fight till the end are all proof of this.

Mala Dhondy, Race Today Collective, London, June 1974

Postscript

The strike at Imperial Typewriters lasted 14 weeks, from May to July 1974. Throughout, the T&GWU were opposed to the strike and openly collaborated with management in an attempt to break it. After the return to work the women remained the most rebellious section of workers on the shop floor. They were aware of their power and ready to use it: "Some people used to finish working at three o'clock [the factory closes at five] and spend the rest of the time doing whatever they wanted."

"Three or four of the women were feeling cold in the factory one day and they stopped work. They stopped the whole line . . . it was only when the temperature was raised that the women started working. These things are beginning to happen all the time."

The example of the Imperial women in their initial walkout, in their activity in the strike and the demands they raised, and in their day-to-day struggle in the factory after the strike, had far-reaching

effects. A few weeks later, Asian women at Kenilworth Components walked out around similar demands. The following months saw a series of strikes by Asian workers all over the city; at Barrington Products, Delta Mouldings and Dunlop, to name a few.

The strike at Imperial was highly effective in slowing down production. The strike settlement brought promotions, new rates of pay, the retiming of jobs in the workers' favour, and increased militancy on the shop floor. The factory in Leicester could not continue as it had. After the settlement Litton International (the American multi-national which had bought Imperial in 1966) immediately began planning to move out. In February 1975 it was announced that the two Imperial factories in the U.K. (in Leicester and Hull) were to be closed. Litton said they were making a loss and were moving to Germany (where there were 150,000 unemployed immigrant workers).

At the meeting in Leicester, the first response to this announcement was applause and, particularly from the women and the younger men, cries of "So what? Close the place down."

The closure meant that people had to look for other jobs at a time of growing unemployment in Leicester. But this was very far from being the only result of the strike. This strike followed a long history of strikes by Asian workers who, relying on the traditional methods of trade unions and arbitration boards, both of which took position against them, had small success in making their struggle known or their power felt. The strike at Imperial's was a breakthrough.

Through their independent organisation, and their mobilisation of the Asian community in Leicester and further afield, the women and the male strikers broke out of the strait-jacket which had contained previous struggles and set a new level of power for Asian workers, and Asian women in particular.

Editors

This postscript is based on a longer article in Race Today, March 1975

Organising on the Second Job

Place

Maimonides Community Mental Health Center in Brooklyn, New York, is part of a voluntary hospital. The Center was established by special monies from Federal, State, and City governments.

Those who work at the Center are considered hospital workers, not government workers.

Since we are hospital workers many of us (excluding psychiatrists, nurses, some administrators and executive secretaries) are in District 1199, which is a nationwide hospital employees' union.

Even though we are in the same union as workers in Maimonides Hospital, we are separated from hospital workers because we work in our own building or in neighbourhood storefronts,* we hold our own union meetings, we have our own administration which is different from the administration of the general hospital, and our budget is separate.

The Center is 'progressive', considering other institutions. It is run by old leftists and liberals. It considers itself to be innovative, many young people work here and experience a relative freedom not afforded at many other workplaces.

Compared to other institutions of its kind, Maimonides Mental Health Center pays extremely high wages in each job category.

Given this backdrop it sometimes seems hard to find out who the enemy is or even who the boss is (we're almost all on first name basis). The blackmail is more insidious at a place like ours, where we are manipulated into believing 'we have it good'.

The Center operates much like a family. The men are at the head of the family directing the mothers and the children. Currently all the administration are male in a field (helping professions)

*A storefront is a store (shopfront) or small building that has been converted to give mental health services rather than sell goods.

which is traditionally female; and they treat the women either as children or as mothers, depending upon where in the hierarchy one stands (social worker—secretary—food service worker—patient).

Setting

In the summer of '74 there was a major reorganisation of all services. This reorganisation opened up 12 new administrative or middle management jobs which were to be filled from within; since 'we' had no extra money in the budget to hire new people.

Some of these 12 positions had already been in existence by the mere fact that someone was carrying these responsibilities, but now a formal titled position was created with a wage increase in some cases.

Both men and women applied for these jobs.

The selection committee, which consisted of men only, hired 12 men to fill these jobs despite the fact that a number of women who applied were more qualified and had seniority.

In addition some women who had been doing the jobs before the reorganisation could not apply once the jobs were posted because of the unnecessary professional credentials now required of the people applying.

Women began to meet to discuss sexism at the Center with regard to these 12 new positions.

It was clear to us that the Director was in violation of a number of Federal laws when he did not hire any women to these positions. The funds could be withdrawn and the Center could be shut down if we took this issue to the courts. Also the personal image of the Director as a 'progressive leader' in the mental health field was at stake.

The union grievance machinery was put into motion over the question of the irregular manner of these job postings and the question of sex discrimination, since many of these positions if held by a union member would be positions that the union held negotiating rights over. This practice of allowing former union members, who have moved into administrative positions, to remain in the union is highly irregular, but nonetheless goes on at the Center where many practices are different given the 'progressive' nature

ure of the place; typically one would not find administrators in the union along with the line workers. At Maimonides if you've been in the union and take a middle management job you can stay in the union—the union can negotiate for you.

In the fall a small group of women decided to ask the Director if we could have one of his staff meetings to take up the issue of sexism in the Mental Health Center, and we would chair this meeting. This was granted us.

This meeting began a series of periodic staff meetings to which both men and women came. For the first time these staff meetings began to include not only the professional staff but also mental health workers, clinical, housekeeping and food service workers. We also had organisational meetings at lunchtime where very few men were present because most of the men were opposed or unable to identify with our issues and/or were threatened by our power.

We called ourselves the Sex Discrimination Committee. This committee is made up of people with various political ideas. Throughout the struggle women were pushing for their different interests. The spectrum is wide. At each point during the struggle we debated tactics and strategies depending on the various political beliefs.

Wages for Housework is one of the political tendencies represented in the Sex Discrimination Committee. The women who hold this perspective range from a student, through three social workers and a mental health worker to a psychologist. All of us can personally see our role as women in the work we do both when it's waged and when it's unwaged.

'Wages for Housework' in action

Initially there were four of us committed to a Wages for Housework perspective at the Center. Through this struggle, two more women joined our Wages for Housework group. When the issue of the 12 jobs was brought to our attention we wanted to see how a Wages for Housework perspective would give form to this particular struggle. At first glance we knew that a demand which would simply put women in those 12 positions would not speak to the majority of us. We began to make an analogy between the family where women's work is not recognised, where it is unwaged and connected to our femininity (thereby being our blackmail) and the simi-

lar position held by women as wage earners in the family at the Center. We realised that much of the work we do at the Center is unwaged, connected to our feminine role, and that we are treated as housewives on the job. The Mental Health Center profits from this extended family situation by extracting more surplus labour from us women by not paying us for this work. This analysis was presented to the staff during various meetings.

We raised demands that would talk to all women and not just to those few who might apply for those 12 positions. The women staff (with the support of a few men) demanded from administration a full day off with pay to hold a conference on sexism in the Center. This day would be for all staff and would replace our normal day of work. The Center would be on minimal coverage for emergencies. The staff had the choice of working their regular job or attending the conference. A day with pay to organise for ourselves; a day with pay not to produce for capital, but to produce struggle.

We won this day. (As far as the Director was concerned this was an easy way to buy us off and keep us down.) On Thursday, December 5, 1974, 140 staff members, the bulk of whom were women, participated in a conference. There were four workshops which embodied much of the discussion of six weeks prior to the conference: Upgrading, Patient Care, Day Care and Legal Rights. We came to the decision to have these workshops after weeks of discussion and analysis concerning the role of women at the waged workplace, our relationship to our women patients, the need for day care and certain immediate legal actions we might take.

Seventy-five people in the Upgrading workshop raised the following demands: an end to unwaged work, wages for students who are working at the Center 'training'; a fight for inversely proportional raises (whereby the wage differentials which benefit men who get the highest wages would be reversed—instead, women who make up the bulk of low paid workers would begin to get a higher percentage of the wage increment); a possible job action where we would refuse to do work that we now do for nothing (this to include everything not written in our job descriptions, such as making the boss's coffee, serving him, acting as public relations person when that isn't your job, etc.); a women's watchdog committee to deal with grievances that women and men have because of the treatment we and also men get when doing work associated with a

woman's role (this committee to have a majority of women and some men on it); equal vacation with pay for all employees (four weeks) and time and a half for overtime for all workers.

It was pointed out how upgrading for individual women is an illusion for it serves to keep women pitted against each other. Only a small proportion of workers can enter these upgrading programmes and thereby move up. Those women who do move up the ladder are used to regulate and control other women with whom they work. Upgrading programmes also give the illusion that you can make it in a 'fair' system.

It is important to note that there was a heated debate in this workshop and at prior staff meetings on the role of the union. It became clear much to the dislike of some union delegates, that the union was seen as an organisation to which we would turn to get what we needed when we needed it; but that if it tried to stop us, we would not let that happen. Women spoke out saying that in the past they raised certain issues (i.e. the need for a pay increase, more vacation leave) with the union but they got nowhere. Women who were not in the union were concerned because the union doesn't consider you a worker if you are not a member of the union. Debate regarding the role of the union has come up over and over in this struggle and it is evident that this is a struggle which is going on autonomously of the union. We will give direction to the union if we need them, but we will not allow them to direct us. Our meetings are kept separate from union meetings, and at union meetings we invite non-union workers in by vote from all of us. The union grievance machinery has added seven women to the union committee by decree of the workers in order to keep the delegates and union machinery working for us.

The women in the Day Care workshop made recommendations demanding 24 hour day care for women employees of the hospital and the Mental Health Center. This would be paid for by the hospital and operate all day and night since there are night workers as well as day workers who could benefit from this. An addition was made to this proposal, to include the children of volunteers and students who are unwaged workers in this institution; and if there is space, community women who are at home with their children could make use of this service.

The Legal Rights workshop set up a mechanism for pursuing the legal channels open to us to fight the discriminatory practices of the Center. This included hiring a woman lawyer, raising the funds, first from the Center staff, and filing briefs.

Out of the Patient Care workshop came the beginning of a discussion about how to work differently with women and children, the need for a separate women's service, and a most important proposal which acknowledged that many women (such as secretaries) function as therapeutic agents and they should no longer do this without getting recognition and pay. Out of the Wages for Housework analysis it became apparent that our women patients hold the lowest position in the hierarchy of this 'family' . . . the Center. These women in effect are rebelling against their exploited position and their work. They come to us as patients and we offer them therapy and a speedy return to the position against which they rebelled . . . unwaged work at home, or 'upgrading' by joining the low waged work force. This helped us to see the connection between our exploitation at the Center and the exploitation of many of our patients. One of the therapists brought her women patients to the morning session of this conference.

At the end of the day all the workshops joined together for a meeting to vote on all the proposals which had been formulated in each workshop and to set up action committees to work on these proposals. An additional proposal was passed to demand from administration two hours off with pay each week for any staff member who wishes to work on any committee. It will take a lot of work to implement and fight for these proposals and we refuse to do it on 'our time' because 'our time' is 'their time' and we are going to make them pay for it. This proposal was passed. [See addendum.] In addition we will have a newsletter which will keep us informed of each committee's progress.

We also voted on and passed a motion to inform the workers in the hospital of what is going on at the Center. We will set up an information table at lunch time and distribute our newsletter to workers in the general hospital with the hope of spreading the struggle.

At the end of the day, a group of men were excited enough about the outcome of the conference to start a men's group. Prior to this day they had been very sceptical, but now saw their own

self-interest as not being opposed to ours.

As this struggle at Maimonides unfolds, for we are only beginning, we have come to value more and more the Wages for Housework perspective. This is a perspective that makes links where none seemed possible. For example, if we had taken the route of only fighting for a reopening of those 12 positions so that women could take those jobs, we would have involved very few women. Most women cannot, and will not, ever be able to apply for those positions. However, when we begin to talk about our work, and how much we do that is unwaged, and how our femininity is connected to that, we can begin to make alliances. Secretaries could talk about their problems and so could professional social workers and psychologists. There was the beginning of a sense of unity where before there was mistrust, jealousy and silence. We talked about the different privileges afforded us by the institution which divides us—e.g. ‘professionals’ get four weeks vacation and ‘non-professionals’ two to three weeks. We listened to all these differences and together made demands that would benefit all women. We shared vignettes with each other about how we are treated like housewives at the Center no matter where we are in the hierarchy.

Taking our time

Much energy and excitement has been created. Women are taking it upon themselves to do little works of sabotage. One secretary is refusing work which she considers not to be work that she should do even though she has been doing it for years. She refuses to get patients’ charts for therapists and then search out a psychiatrist to fill out a prescription for these patients. She is not a therapist and will no longer be the handmaiden for the therapist. In my storefront the women are refusing to do the typing for the men, make the coffee and clean. An executive secretary walked off the job the other day to have an interview for school and insists on getting paid for this time away from her desk. Certain staff members are filling out their time cards so as to include lunch as a paid hour, since we realize that most of the time we eat at our desk and produce for them during our lunch hour. One woman has told an administrator that she will no longer do his secretarial work because her other boss pays her for one job and gives her work for two and a half people; therefore she refuses to take on his work as well.

Women have come to lunch-hour meetings many times in direct defiance of their bosses who tell them to take their lunch break after our meetings because they don’t want them to attend. These are individual acts and they go on every day now. There is a spirit of power that has come out of this full day conference. When women begin to come together there is a strength, and it has just begun to show itself here at Maimonides. We have just begun and there is no telling where we will go.

Jane Hirschmann, New York, January 1975

With support from Maimonides’ Sisters: Barbara Reiter Silverman, Hedda Matza, Emily Schneider, Ceci Sisane, Beth Rosenthal

ADDENDUM

At the time of this writing we have won a major victory. Two hours off work with pay for all staff members to work on any staff committee except the Legal and Fund-raising Committees. The Director of the Center will not pay us to raise funds to take legal action against him. He figures the other committees probably are safer for him. He doesn’t recognize the power we insist on building, which will not be through legal channels. Therefore, the Sex Discrimination Committee now meets once a week at lunch time. The other committees operate as sub-committees of the Sex Discrimination Committee, and meet for two hours a week on Center time.

Another development has been the reopening of 11 of the 12 jobs, so that the charge of sex discrimination can no longer be brought against the Center. When the Director reopened the 11 jobs his intention was to involve us in the writing of the new job descriptions so that we could make sure they were ‘fair to women’ and so that we couldn’t complain later on. He also wanted to involve us in the hiring process.

At first members of the Sex Discrimination Committee felt that we should get involved to ‘right the wrong’ done to us. Women felt it was important to make sure that the new job postings allowed women to apply for the jobs and didn’t exclude them because of unnecessary professional credentials. The focus became the question of what to do about the repostings and hiring.

Some women felt we should get involved in this process. Others of us felt that by getting involved in this we would lose much of the momentum already generated by the larger issues raised in this struggle. Moreover, the many issues raised at the full day conference on sexism spoke to the majority of women at the workplace, whereas the question of those 11 jobs would only be of interest to a few.

If we were to get involved in the hiring process we would then be responsible for who got hired, and when complaints came they would be deflected away from the boss and on to us. We pointed out that this workers' self-management or workers' control is very dangerous. We also raised the issue of unpaid work and the fact that none of us was hired or being paid to do administrative work, so why should we do more of the Director's job for him? He has the pay and status, so let him do his own work. The Sex Discrimination Committee finally, after a few weeks' discussion, voted not to get involved in the rewriting of these job descriptions or with the actual hiring process. We informed the Director by memo that it was his job to go to each unit of service and find out the qualifications it deems necessary for the particular job. Then at a formal staff meeting he should inform us of the new job postings and we would then decide if we had any comments to make. As of this writing, March '75, the jobs have not been re-posted. In other words he hasn't done his work.

The Upgrading Committee decided that we wanted to find out who did what kind of unpaid work. In order to do this in an orderly fashion we decided to hold meetings with separate units of service—i.e. social workers, mental health workers, secretaries, nurses, and so on. The clerical workers (a category which includes secretaries, medical records, cashier and registrar) were the first to organize a mass meeting. They used the two hours allotted them as part of their work on the Upgrading Committee. This meeting was so successful that it necessitated more meetings. They had many grievances. The one they are most hot about are three job postings which, like the other 11, are discriminatory, are written for certain people, reflect a speed-up because there is enough work in the job for two people, and ask for work to be done that will not be reflected in the wage you get. One of the job postings was four pages long and enraged the clerical staff. It listed all the work that a secretary does

including "running errands and making lunch". Clearly a job that has four pages of functions and responsibilities should be paid at a much higher rate than secretaries ever see. Also, once this description was put into writing, it was blatantly obvious that these functions were connected to the secretaries' female role and that a man's job description would never include these servicing functions.

The clerical workers got the support of the entire Sex Discrimination Committee to stop these job postings. This is the first time that they have met on their own without the head of the clerical unit (a woman) or the men they work for. They have run their own meetings and consequently have made demands to administration. There is a feeling of great power and unity developing.

Since the clerical staff have asked that the head of secretaries not be present either at clerical meetings or at the Sex Discrimination Committee meetings when they want to raise their issues (so that they can speak freely), the issue of female administration has come up and is now being debated. Some women have noted that if they take any of the 11 administration jobs now open the possibility exists that they, too, will be asked to leave certain Sex Discrimination Committee meetings. Male or female, if someone is your boss, responsible for keeping you in line, you don't want them there when you're exploring your grievances and deciding on action against management.

Mental health workers are now planning to meet to discuss their particular grievances, much in the same way as the clerical staff are doing. The struggles of each group brings power to us all to move forward.

J. H., March 1975

Northern Ireland: the Power of the Ghetto

Before we went to Northern Ireland we were cautioned by more than one person not to talk about Women's Liberation: "It's irrelevant, there's a war going on. Women may have time for that later." We were there only a few days and spent most of the time with Catholic working class housewives. Every woman we met asked us about the women's movement.

Our first encounter with British occupation was this side of the Irish Sea. At Heysham as we boarded the ship our car was searched and our names and dates of birth made their way, we assume, back to the army computer.

We arrived in Belfast at dawn. At that time of day the town looked particularly depressing. It was clear that well before 'the troubles' started it was a city devastated by poverty. Now houses and shops are boarded up or bombed flat. Barbed wire and corrugated iron were everywhere, ramps every so often in the road, presumably to slow traffic and so stop quick getaways, barricades of oil drums or concrete to stop cars being left (with bombs). How much of this is for 'protection' and how much is just to make life more difficult is hard for 'outsiders' to say.

More mobile objects to make life difficult were armed patrols, 'pigs'—saracens, jeeps and other army vehicles—and soldiers pointing rifles at you. We were frequently stopped (day or night) at road blocks. The car was searched and identity taken once again. Side streets in the centre of the city were blocked to traffic. It is here where there are shops and offices, and not on housing estates, that protection is concentrated.

The ghetto

The housing estates themselves were ghettos more literally than we had expected. Each was a self-contained community where it was impossible to live for any length of time without knowing everybody. Lifeless statistics on high unemployment and low wages could be grasped visually. It was as if somebody had crammed as many people as possible into the smallest possible area. Plans like

this can only be directed at people who can't afford to get away from them.

But there's another side to the ghettos. They are a natural organisation. The fact that the women and children all know each other and are always there makes them the backbone of any resistance. The armed struggle protects the community, but the community protects the armed struggle. We were told that even a woman who is not sympathetic to armed resistance is prepared to open her door to protect a member of the IRA: "Any woman on this estate will."

The women are withholding rent and rates en masse, and refusing to pay for electricity, water or gas. There's very little the State has been able to do; when they cut off supplies people know how to turn them on again. And people in Northern Ireland have lost the fear of 'breaking the law'. We heard about the special Act to deduct bills outstanding from Social Security [Welfare], Unemployment and Sickness Insurance, and Family Allowances. This could be very effective if the State were prepared to enforce it; they have to decide if it's worth even further antagonising the Catholic community.

Already every second of the day is shaped by the presence of the foreign army. Armed foot soldiers patrol the estates and carry out periodic searches of the houses, usually before dawn. The children are frequently stopped. A seven-year-old: "They give us sweets and ask if our mums and dads are in the IRA." The women—mothers, sisters, daughters and girlfriends—who have family imprisoned or interned spend a lot of their week preparing food parcels and making long journeys for visits, spending two or three hours in the waiting rooms at Long Kesh and Crumlin Road or Armagh jails. One woman we met made two visits a week to her two sons interned in Long Kesh, and one visit to a third son in Crumlin Road. Of about £25 [\$62.50] a week that she, her husband and four other children had to live on, £15 [\$37.50] went on parcels: cigarettes, food and clothes for the three inside.

Women's activity, despite this burden, is extending. Until recently only men were 'lifted'; now there are over 60 women political prisoners in Armagh jail. But it's still safer for women to be publicly involved in politics. Protest marches are made up predominantly

of women, girls and boys. This shift to open dependence on women has meant above all that women no longer have time for their traditional work in the home, and they are increasingly proud of it. "I haven't baked since the troubles started." "Neither have I." And they all laughed. A number of women made clear that they are not going back to the kitchen when 'the troubles' are over.

This of course implies that women will refuse to have families of 10 or 12 children. Young women discuss this. These, remember, are Catholic women, many of them religious, many of them regular churchgoers. But they demonstrate growing opposition to the Catholic Church as women and as *Irish* Catholics. Like Catholic women elsewhere, many use birth control. The Church's position on this, together with its refusal to support the struggle and sometimes its unconcealed opposition to it, is beginning to provoke open attacks on the Church. We were surprised to find no hostility to Protestant people; on the contrary, Catholic and Protestant women were linked as women living through 'the troubles'. Women practising birth control and opposing the Church's domination in other ways are some of the most hopeful moves towards removing barriers to working class unity in Northern Ireland.

Everything is changing

The women in Belfast are largely in the home (though, as we've tried to show, this has an entirely different meaning there). But young girls who don't emigrate take jobs in shops and factories at wage rates as low as those in London five or even ten years ago (this is also true of the men). Because of discrimination and intimidation even fewer women are going out to work. We asked if women were organising in factories as they were in the community, and a woman told us: "We tell them not to work. We tell everybody to come out of the factories and go on Social Security so they can take a full part in the struggle."

It was not surprising then that the women jumped on Wages for Housework as a very practical perspective. "What's that button—Wages for Housework? I support that. I hardly do any."

So what are our tentative conclusions? First, we must make widely known what is happening to women in Northern Ireland and what they are making happen. But to do that we have to place their struggle as women in an entirely new context. It's not 'irrelevant'

to the war, as we were told before we went, and it's not just 'relevant' to the war either. It's crucial. On the one hand, women are bolder in their actions, and are depended on to be more openly involved. On the other, the conflict between their feminist needs and the power of the Church is breaking new ground in the history of Irish working class struggle. Women are increasingly aware of the power their crucial role gives them.

At the same time young people and children (who went on school strike while we were there) have carved out their own importance. How important can be judged by the fact that the 'Brits' were forced to intern 12 schoolchildren, not the kind of action that does any good for their image. Men and women, adults and children, old and young, see each other more and more as political comrades. In this way the family is transformed into a political unit where the traditional power relations are undermined.

The struggle in Northern Ireland is an offensive based in the community, not in the factory. In the past, unemployment—lack of wages—has been its weakness. It was always assumed if you're not in the factories you can't have power. But the people of Northern Ireland have shown the power the *community* can have through armed struggle. Women too can find a power base in the community, where we are wageless but never unemployed (we're always working in the home and not getting money for it). Women in Northern Ireland have found that base. They are at a higher stage of struggle than we are, and this has resulted in their rejecting the work in the home. But they don't consider the factory as the alternative. No one we met, man or woman, thought she was making a struggle for jobs *outside* the home. They have taken arms, or are backing up others who have, and are challenging State power. They have gone on rent strikes or left their jobs and are claiming the wealth that has been stolen from them many times over. They are not 'unemployed'; they are busy and active *on their own behalf*.

It's not so surprising then that, despite the suffering, the grief for the dead and the constant tension, we found people, and most especially women, really together. It's clear to them that, whatever happens now, there's been a break with the past, they are developing and changing, and nothing will ever be the same.

Some women from the Power of Women Collective
London, November 1973

Deciding for Our Selves

In every country over the last few years women have massively demonstrated that we will no longer allow governments, the church and all other agencies of repression to dictate whether or not we will bear children on their terms. Below are three leaflets distributed on demonstrations following the recent State offensive against abortion in Italy.

Women must decide our fate Not the Church, not the State

On January 12th, police invaded an abortion clinic in Florence, Italy, and arrested the gynaecologist, Dr. Conciani, and four women assistants. Seven women were awaiting abortions, already under anaesthetic.

Who benefits from these actions and laws? Worldwide, the State, the Church and big business are trying to regulate women's reproduction, to make us have children or prevent us from having the children we want, when, where and in conditions that *they* dictate.

- * They say they're against murder—but they force us into backstreet abortions that murder *us*, and plan or turn a blind eye to the genocide of famine.
- * They make us work, wageless at home and for pennies outside, and then expect us to pay hundreds for the control of our bodies.
- * When we want to have children, we don't have the money to keep them, the housing to shelter them, the time to enjoy them.
- * When they want us to have children it is for their own ends—to expand the workforce, to expand production, to increase profits, and they want us to bring them up for free, for 'love'.
- * When too many people are their problem, abortions and sterilisation are condoned. In Pakistan recently even the Catholic Church has advocated *forced* abortion and sterilisation. "It need not be a repressive sort of thing," said a missionary. "But it must be compulsory."

- * They try to make us think that getting an abortion in Britain is easy. Anyone who's met unsympathetic doctors, hospital bureaucracies, ruinous private clinics, knows it isn't. And now a powerful lobby of MPs, churchmen, leading industrialists, are pouring money into a campaign to make abortions even more difficult to obtain.

THEY NEVER LET *US* DECIDE. EVERYONE'S LIFE IS SACRED BUT *OURS*.

Nowhere in the world will we accept their plans for our bodies. Not where they pay us to have children as in France and especially Eastern Europe. Not where they pay us *not* to have children as in India—with transistor radios. Either way, we refuse their productivity deals. IF WE HAD OUR OWN MONEY, *WE COULD DECIDE. AND THAT IS WHAT WE WANT.*

We demand the release of those arrested in Florence, of those 263 women on trial in Trento, Italy. WE DEMAND THE RELEASE OF ALL WOMEN'S BODIES FROM THE CONTROL OF ALL STATES.

Power of Women Collective, London, January 1975

Statement of the Feminist Movement

The Feminist Movement accuses the State, the bosses and their servants of trying to organise a strategy of terrorism against women, by persecuting some women as an example to the rest of us, e.g. the arrests and prosecutions for abortion in Florence, the indictment of 263 women at Trento for abortion.

This strategy is an attempt to crush the mass struggle of women who all over the world are demanding not only the right to decide whether, how and when they will become mothers, but the right to lay down the conditions of the work that being a mother entails. The refusal to be a mother, by any means necessary, even abortion, is the response we women make to the State and the bosses who command us to submit to:

- 1) THE UNPAID HOUSEWORK THAT WE HAVE TO PUT UP WITH WHEN WE BRING UP CHILDREN.

- 2) SOCIAL ISOLATION.
- 3) THE CONDITIONING OF OUR SEXUALITY.
- 4) DISCRIMINATION IN THE WAGED JOBS TO WHICH WE ARE CONDEMNED.

The demonstration of Sunday 12 January at 3 p.m. in the Piazza S. Croce is called, organised and managed exclusively by the Feminist Movement.

The Feminist Movement, Florence (Italy), January 1975

. . . Padua Trento Milan Florence*

Women continue to die having abortions. Abortion is not a question which has burst out recently, but has always been the reality for women.

Women have always had abortions illegally (three million abortions a year) and paid with their lives, with imprisonment, with pain, with terror.

THE RIGHT TO ABORTION is a right that we women have always taken for ourselves to try to control the number of children we have, in a situation where the husband's wages are always low and we ourselves have no wage.

All of us women know that each child represents a hidden mountain of that housework which all the political powers are ruthlessly determined not to pay us for.

We accuse the State, the Church and all the political powers which, with their NO to abortion, and with their conditions and absurd moralising, are equal accomplices in a strategy of terror and exploitation aimed at all women.

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK
TO REALLY BE ABLE TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO
HAVE CHILDREN
FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND

Committee for Wages for Housework, Padua (Italy), February 1975

* Each of these cities has witnessed recent prosecutions for abortion.

Sisters Why March?

The following leaflet was given out in Spanish and English in Los Angeles.

On May 3rd [1975], we are joining the May Day march to show women's support for the immigrant workers. We aren't marching out of 'sympathy'. We march because we too know what it means to be powerless; because we know that we need each other to win.

Our lives are not our own. Capital organises our existence according to what is most profitable for them internationally. They decide how much and what kind of labour they need—where, when and what colour. They starve us in Ethiopia and encourage us to have children in Eastern Europe. They import us *from* Mexico and deport us *to* Mexico. They refuse us abortions in Boston and sterilise us in Los Angeles.

When 'cheap labour' is needed in California, undocumented Mexican workers are brought in. The immigrants face the risks and the miserable conditions because they need the money. Once here, they can be thrown out at the will of the government or need of the companies, the change of a season or the bringing in of a harvest. When they dare to fight back, they face deportation. The witch-hunt for 'illegals' not only eliminates 'surplus' labour, it is used to intimidate all Spanish-speaking people, with or without documents, born here or across the border.

We women face similar problems. At home, we work for nothing. When business needs us in the factories, we are pulled into that work *as well*. Like the immigrants, we face the hardships because we need the money. In the factories, hospitals, fields and offices, we work for *next* to nothing. We do it because we are accustomed to being unwaged or underpaid; we are too busy taking care of kids after work to organise; we know that there are millions of women, working at home for no money of their own, who would be desperate enough to accept the low wages. When business no longer needs us in the factories, they push us back 'across the border', back into full-time housework. Whether we work the one job (in the home) or two (in the home and outside), we never have enough time or money. If we are immigrants *and* women we get it all ways.

Especially now that capital is in crisis, we—immigrants and women—are blamed for all the country's ills. Immigrants are taking jobs away from 'Americans'; women are stealing jobs from men.

In fact, we don't *want* the jobs; we want the money. When we fight for jobs, we fight for the right to be exploited, we fight for the right to do more work. But we have worked enough—picked billions of tomatoes, made countless buttonholes in millions of sweatshops, typed trillions of letters, washed infinite numbers of dishes and raised *all* the world's children.

We, men, women, immigrants, all workers need more money and less work. We need power. The immigrant workers are saying they will not come or go, live or die, have or not have children according to what is most profitable to capital. That is our fight as well. Their power is our power. To support them is to support ourselves. That's why we are marching.

But we also see that we must organise as women for our own needs. We are beginning an international campaign for Wages for Housework for all women. We too need more time and more money. We too need power. Women who are interested in learning more about the campaign should contact us. Call Sidney during the day (661-0095) or Beth in the evenings (484-1167). WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK COMMITTEE.

**Sisters. March with us on May 3rd.
Support the immigrant workers.
Support ourselves.**

Wages for Housework Committee, Los Angeles, April 1975

A General Strike

This is the concluding part of a speech given on 10 March, 1974, during the weekend of action organised by the Triveneto Committee for Wages for Housework, to commemorate International Women's Day and to launch the campaign for Wages for Housework in Italy. (See pp.13-19 above for another speech given on this occasion.)

Today the feminist movement in Italy is opening the campaign for Wages for Housework. As you have heard from the songs, as you have seen from the photograph exhibition, as you have read on the placards, the questions we are raising today are many: the barbarous conditions in which we have to face abortion, the sadism we are subjected to in obstetric and gynaecological clinics, our working conditions—in jobs outside the home our conditions are always worse than men's, and at home we work without wages—the fact that social services either don't exist or are so bad that we are afraid to let our children use them, and so on.

Now at this point some people might ask, what is the connection between the campaign we are opening today, the campaign for Wages for Housework, and all these things that we have raised today, that we have exposed and are fighting against? All these things that we have spoken about, that we have made songs about, that we have shown in our exhibition and in films?

We believe that the weakness of all women—that weakness that's behind our having been crossed out of history, that's behind the fact that when we leave the home we must face the most revolting, underpaid and insecure jobs—this weakness is based on the fact that all of us women, whatever we do, are wearied and exhausted at the very outset by 13 hours of housework that no-one has ever recognised, that no-one has ever paid for.

And this is the basic condition that forces women to be satisfied with nurseries like the 'Pagliuca', 'Celestini', 'OMNI'.* This weakness forces us to pay half a million lire [£300/\$750] for an abortion and this, let's spell it out clearly, happens in every city and every country—and on top of that we risk death and imprisonment.

*'Pagliuca' and 'Celestini'—both notoriously brutal nurseries. 'OMNI'—the State nurseries which are poorly equipped and badly run.

We all do housework; it is the only thing all women have in common, it is the only base on which we can gather our power, the power of millions of women.

It is no accident that reformists of every stripe have always carefully avoided the idea of our organising on the basis of housework. They have always refused to recognise housework as work, precisely because it is the only work that we all have in common. It is one thing to confront two or three hundred women workers in a shoe factory, and quite another to confront millions of housewives. And since all women factory workers are housewives, it is still another matter to confront these two or three hundred factory workers united with millions of housewives.

But this is what we are putting on the agenda today in this square. This is the first moment of organisation. We have decided to organise ourselves around that work we all do, in order to have the power of millions of women.

For us, therefore, *the demand for Wages for Housework is a direct demand for power, because housework is what millions of women have in common.*

If we can organise ourselves in our millions on this demand—and already today there are quite a lot of us here in this square—we can get so much power that we need no longer be in a position of weakness when we go out of the home. We can bring about new working conditions in housework itself—if I have money of my own in my pocket I can even buy a dishwasher without feeling guilty and without having to beg my husband for it for months on end while he, who doesn't do the washing-up, considers a dishwasher unnecessary.

So if I have money of my own, paid into my own hands, I can change the conditions of housework itself. And moreover I will be able to choose when I want to go out to work. If I have 120,000 lire for housework I'll never again sell myself for 60,000 lire in a textile factory, or as someone's secretary, or as a cashier or usherette at the cinema. In the same way, if I already have a certain amount of money in my own hands, if I already have with me the power of millions of women, I will be able to dictate a completely new quality of services, nurseries, canteens and all those facilities that are indispensable in reducing working hours and in enabling us to have a social life.

We want to say something else. For a long time—particularly strongly in the last 10 years, but let's say always—male workers have come out to struggle against their hours of work and for more money, and have gathered in this square.

In the factories at Porto Marghera there have been many strikes, many struggles. We well remember the marches of male workers who started in Porto Marghera, crossed the Mestre bridge and arrived here in this square.

But let's make this clear. *No strike has ever been a general strike.* When half the working population is at home in the kitchens, while the others are on strike, *it's not a general strike.*

We've never seen a general strike. We've only seen men, generally from the big factories, come out on the streets; while their wives, daughters, sisters, mothers, went on cooking in the kitchens.

Today in this square, with the opening of our mobilisation for Wages for Housework, we put on the agenda *our working hours, our holidays, our strikes and our money.*

When we win a level of power that enables us to reduce our 13 or more working hours a day to eight hours or even less than eight, when at the same time we can put on the agenda our holidays—because it's no secret to anyone that on Sundays and during vacation time women never have a holiday—then, perhaps, we'll be able to talk for the first time of a 'general' strike of the working class.

Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Mestre (Italy), March 1974



Wages for Housework Publications

The Power of Women & the Subversion of the Community
by Mariarosa Dalla Costa & Selma James

Major development of Marxist analysis of capitalist production, beginning with women's wageless work in the home. The refusal of the myth of liberation through work is the source of women's power and therefore of working class power.

Publ. Falling Wall Press, 80pp.

Sex, Race & Class by Selma James

Describes sexism and racism as expressions of the international division of labour—the way jobs, wages and lack of wages are parcelled out according to sex, race, age and nation.

Publ. Falling Wall Press & Race Today Publications, 34pp.

Wages against Housework by Silvia Federici

All women *are* their work, are housewives. To demand a wage for that work challenges the work, the way it has shaped them and their relations with men.

Publ. Power of Women Collective & Falling Wall Press, 8pp.

Power of Women

Journal of the Power of Women Collective. Published by the Collective three times a year. International reports and analysis of women's struggles.

Other Wages for Housework publications are also available, both in English and in other languages. For further information about these publications, and about the international campaign for Wages for Housework in the following and other countries, write to:—

- Britain** Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Rd., Bristol BS6 5EP
Power of Women Collective, 20 Staverton Rd., London NW2
- US** New York Wages for Housework Committee, c/o Federici,
491 Pacific St., Brooklyn, New York 11217
- Canada** Toronto Wages for Housework Committee, P.O. Box 38,
Station E, Toronto, Ontario

Please enclose a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon with all requests for information.

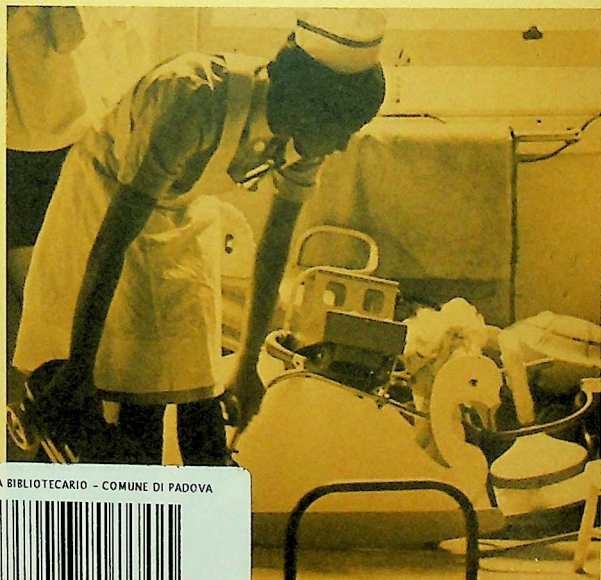
SLO

ALL WORK AND NO PAY

Women, Housework, and the Wages Due

This book describes women's lives and struggles through the speeches and writings of different women from many countries. It shows how all women—young or old, single or married, with or without children, 'straight' or lesbian—whatever else they do, are housewives. It makes clear how universal is women's need for a wage for housework, and that an international movement of women demanding the 'wages due' is not only possible but already a reality.

Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming are members of the Power of Women Collective, which is active in the international campaign for Wages for Housework from the State. Suzie Fleming also works at Falling Wall Press.



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