

20 Staverton Road
London N W 2
24 October 1973

My dear Antonella,

We here have been told that some of the women in Lotta Femminista believe that Rosa did not have the right or in any case should not have signed the book POWER OF WOMEN. I was saddened to hear that because it so misunderstands the relationship of the movement to individuals who do particular pieces of work. I'm writing to you about this because we know each other from before the formation of Lotta Femminista and would be friends if even we were not in addition comrades of the same movement and the same political tendency within that movement. So we are able more to understand each other.

There has never been a book written, not even Marx's CAPITAL (and most especially Marx's CAPITAL!) which did not owe its revolutionary ideas to the mass movement either in a public organised form or in that day-to-day massive worklike action by which the exploited subvert capitalist domination. The individual is fortunate indeed who can even for a moment in time be the sounding board of any of these vibrations. POWER OF WOMEN is a case in point. Without a women's movement, it could not have been written. The ideas represent the digestion of the body of literature and practice of the movement seen from a point of view already in skeletal form in A WOMAN'S PLACE but enriched by a study of Marx.

I was there the first evening in Padova when Rosa read her first draft of what became "Women and the Subversion of the Community". We were about 12 women. Of those, only Rosa, Pia and I are in the feminist movement. You were at the second meeting (and I remember seeing Carolina for the first time there too) where the document was distributed in duplicated form. From that meeting came Lotta Femminista.

That document represents a great many years of thought and the political experience of the working class in Italy, the United States, Britain and the West Indies. It was not written by Lotta Femminista. It was the specific act which laid the basis for Lotta Femminista to come into existence.

I feel that if the book were not a success, there would not be complaints about who signed it. But it is a success, internationally and that is one reason why this kind of discussion is even raised. Often behind disputes of this kind are hidden ideas and impulses which for a variety of reasons people don't want to or are yet unable to express. It's important always, ~~as~~ it seems to me, for these to emerge so they can be treated on their merit. In other words, a dispute of this kind is an effect, not a cause of ill-feeling.

You may remember in the second expanded Introduction to the edition in Britain, I wrote the following about A WOMAN'S PLACE. "Though it bears my name, I was merely a vehicle for expressing what women, housewives and factory workers, felt and knew..." But I felt and knew these things too, and I wrote them down, my neighbours did not. Should they complain that my name is on it? I don't think they'd mind. They didn't then, and that was because they were glad it was written. (Also it is so simple and so direct that people do not feel threatened by it.)

I am myself more worried about what I heard in North America, from good people who meant no harm. They believed the book came out of the extra-parliamentary left in Italy, not from women internationally and their movement. (I've heard the same in England.) They seem not to understand the provincialism, racism and sexism which permeates the extra-parliamentary left everywhere in Europe, and do not distinguish us from them. This to me is a much more serious question

than whose name appears on what book.

There is finally the question which Silvia told me is being discussed by some women in Lotta Femminista: the question of anyone signing any articles or books. It seems some people feel that this helps to obliterate power relations within a feminist ~~xxx~~ group. In my view, the question of power relations in any political group is such a deep ~~xxx~~ and ~~inxxx~~ insoluble one under capitalism that, aside from the many advantages of individuals signing articles and books and also of its necessity (after all, we don't all agree and will never all agree), to pose the question in this way reduces the ~~xxx~~ contradiction of power relations to a popularity context. In that way it prevents the real difficulties from being seriously tackled. There is now being widely read in the women's movement in the US and Britain a pamphlet called "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" by Jo Freeman. It begins the discussion of how refusing to ~~have~~ ^{have} ~~xxxxxx~~ leaders does not result in not having leaders. To pose it more succinctly: those of us who reject the Leninist Vanguard Party, what do we put in its place? Since I think this is one of the most difficult questions the feminist and all other working class movements ~~has~~ ^{has} to face, I don't think there are facile answers. It cannot be helpful to pose it as a facile question.

Power to the sisters,

Circa la questione delle firme dei materiali prodotti dalle compagne, abbiamo già divulgato un documento ciclo stilato durante il coordinamento di ottobre a Padova.

Sulla specifica questione del libro "Potere femminile e sovversione sociale" riportiamo una parte della lettera di Selma James ad una compagna di Ferrara in quanto il punto di vista espresso da Selma può dare un contributo alla chiarificazione di simili questioni.

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Qui ci è stato detto che alcune donne di L.F. credono che Rosa non abbia il diritto, o in ogni caso non avrebbe dovuto firmare il libro POTERE FEMMINILE. Sono rimasta sbalordita nel sentire questo, perchè ciò equivoca i rapporti del movimento con le persone che fanno specifici lavori.

Non c'è mai stato un libro scritto, neppure Il Capitale di Marx (e proprio soprattutto Il Capitale di Marx) che non sia debitore per le sue idee rivoluzionarie al movimento di massa, sia nella sua forma pubblica organizzata, sia in quell'azione sovversiva condotta giorno per giorno, con cui lo sfruttato sovverte il dominio capitalistico. E' davvero fortunato l'individuo che può, anche per un momento nel tempo, essere la punta di scandaglio di alcune di queste vibrazioni. Potere Femminile è il caso in questione. Senza il movimento delle donne, non avrebbe potuto essere scritto. L'idea rappresenta l'assimilazione nel corpo, della letteratura e pratica del movimento, considerato da un punto di vista già esistente in forma scheletrica ne "Il posto della donna", ma arricchito da uno studio di Marx

Ero lì la prima sera a Padova quando Rosa lesse la prima stesura di ciò che divenne "Potere Femminile". Eravamo circa dodici donne. Di queste solo Rosa, Pia ed io siamo nel movimento femminista. Tu c'eri alla seconda riunione (e ricordo di aver visto Carolina per la prima volta) quando il documento fu distribuito in forma ciclostilata. Da quella riunione prese vita Lotta Femminista.

Quel documento rappresenta un grosso lavoro di anni di pensiero e di esperienza politica della classe operaia in Italia, negli Stati Uniti, Gran Bretagna e Indie Occidentali. Non è stato scritto da Lotta Femminista. E' stato il documento specifico che ha posto le basi perchè L.F. venisse ad esistere.

Credo che se il libro non fosse stato un successo, non avrebbero dovuto esserci accuse per chi l'avesse firmato. Ma esso è un successo a livello internazionale, e proprio questa è la ragione n.1 del sorgere di questa discussione. Spesso dietro dispute di questa specie si nascondono idee e impulsi che, per le più varie ragioni, le persone non vogliono o non sanno ancora esprimere. Ma è importante sempre, mi sembra, che esse emergano in modo che si possa entrarne nel merito.

Una disputa di questo tipo è un effetto, non una causa.

Ricordarsi che nella seconda edizione ampliata l'edizione in inglese è scritto quanto segue su "Il posto della donna":
"...le donne, e le donne, sentivano e sapevano..."

In altre parole, una disputa di questo tipo è un effetto, non una causa della malattia.

Ricorderai che nella seconda Introduzione ampliata all'edizione in inglese ho scritto quanto segue su il "Il posto della donna":
 "...Sebbene porti il mio nome, io fui soltanto un veicolo per esprimere ciò che le donne, casalinghe e operaie, sentivano e sapevano..."
 Ma io pure sentivo e sapevo queste cose; io le ho scritte, le mie compagne no. Dovrebbero esse accusarmi: del fatto che lì sopra c'è il mio nome? Non credo ci pensino. E non lo fecero allora perchè furono contente che fosse stato scritto (e il documento è pure così semplice e diretto che le persone non se ne sentirono tradite).

Mi ritrovo io stessa più preoccupata per ciò che ho sentito in Nord America, da persone in buona fede che non intendevano arrecare danno alcuno. Esse credevano che il libro provenisse dalla sinistra extraparlamentare italiana, non da donne a livello internazionale e dal loro movimento (ho sentito lo stesso in Inghilterra).
 Non sembra che tali persone capiscano il provincialismo, il razzismo e il sessismo che permea la sinistra extraparlamentare in tutta Europa e non distinguono noi da loro.
 Questa per me è una questione molto più seria di quale sia il nome che appare su tale o tal'altro libro.

Selma James

(lettera tradotta da L.F. di PD sede n.2)

Padova, 30 luglio 1978

Caro Selma,

ho letto

~~la tua lettera~~ la tua lettera del 7 giugno
1978 da Londra ~~che mi ha fatto molto piacere~~

~~per la prima volta dopo anni di paziente silenzio, volto a spegnere che preoccupazioni politiche più serie spazzassero via meschinità come queste, desidero parlarti molto apertamente.~~
e per la prima volta dopo anni di paziente silenzio, volto a spegnere che preoccupazioni politiche più serie spazzassero via meschinità come queste, desidero parlarti molto apertamente.

Mi risulta strano che la rete internazionale e in particolare statunitense dipenda, per sapere qualcosa dell'Italia, esclusivamente dalla nostra ultima conversazione telefonica mancata, visto che abbiamo sempre regolarmente spedito a molte sedi degli US e del Canada tutti i materiali che testimoniavano i nostri percorsi di lotta e di organizzazione: dai numeri di giornale, ai vari bollettini locali, ai ciclostilati, ai libri. E' vero piuttosto che da anni è stata tagliata l'informazione sull'Italia non pubblicando nulla in merito o addirittura non facendo tradurre materiali o non utilizzando traduzioni già fatte (pare che Silvia Federici ne abbia fatte molte invano). E, più che strana, direi che è ridicola l'aria che - anche in questa lettera - viene fatta spirare attorno a noi, donne del salario in Italia, che saremmo "in attesa di giudizio" da parte di qualche altro ~~gruppo~~ gruppo straniero e fino a quando ^{delle} ~~queste~~ "cose" non "siano chiarite", non potremmo pubblicare questo o quell'altro materiale di lingua inglese.

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A tale proposito intendo allora chiarire subito che, per quanto riguarda l'uso da parte nostra di materiali prodotti negli USA, ~~intendo~~ continuerò a riferirmi a Silvia Federici, a questo specificamente deferita dai tempi della fondazione del Collettivo Internazionale Femminista, e secondo i criteri che abbiamo sempre seguito. Non mi risulta che il Collettivo Internazionale non esista più, anche perchè, facendone io parte assieme a Silvia, non vedo come si possa sciolle re anche al di là della nostra decisione.

Pare invece che ^{ti} non ricordi affatto i criteri a cui il Collettivo si è sempre informato circa le pubblicazioni. Voglio allora aprire un inciso per riassumerli brevemente:

per
autografi
pezzi

Al Collettivo, quanto ai materiali scritti, ha sempre funzionato, ~~automaticamente~~, nel senso semplicemente di organizzare le pratiche di traduzione e pubblicazione, garantendo politicamente della adeguatezza sia della prima che della seconda. Per quanto riguarda il decidere sulla disponibilità del materiale stesso, le compagne membra del Collettivo decidevano direttamente solo relativamente ai pezzi (articoli, o libri, o altro) relativamente ai quali il gruppo o autore singolo li aveva autorizzati a ciò. Invece Verrei precisare che la "automatica riproduzione" del materiale c'è sempre stato, perchè così era stato deciso, solo per i materiali di velocissima utilizzazione, per esempio per quanto andava riportato sul giornale. Per tutto il resto, composizione di raccolte di pezzi in libri, ecc., la compagna del Collettivo consultava comunque la "corrispondente estera" per sapere se tutto veniva accettato o se ci dovevano essere modifiche. E direi anche che era fatta

salva comunque sempre la possibilità per la compagna estera di decidere diversamente da come veniva suggerito. Cioè in ultime analisi potevamo pubblicare in altro luogo da quello da noi predisposto se non condividevamo i nostri suggerimenti. E continuiamo a pensare che questi criteri siano gli unici possibili. Non solo perchè attorno ad ogni pubblicazione ci possono essere problemi vari rispetto a cui solo all'autore può essere riservata l'ultima parola, ma perchè anche qui se le valutazioni politiche non coincidono, non sarà certo la coazione a risolverle.

~~Una difficoltà reale invece è che spesso non sono date risposte in tempo utile per cui si deve accantonare di inserire pezzi vostri poichè non si possono tenere in ballo editori all'infinito. Le compagne svizzere hanno atteso ~~per troppo tempo~~ le vostre risposte riguardo ai pezzi inglesi da inserire in "Le foyer de l'insurrection", ma mentre ricevevano le nostre risposte, consigli e correzioni riguardo ai nostri pezzi regolarmente, nulla ricevevano da parte vostra e si trovavano molto male nel condurre avanti il lavoro del libro. Invece un "no", ma in tempo, lo avrebbe lasciato lavorare meglio.~~

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Oppure si dà il caso che, dopo avervi mandato traduzioni provvisorie perchè le volete rivedere, non riceviamo mai indietro la correzione definitiva. Oppure ci

viene detto che alcuni documenti sono prov-
visori e non si possono nemmeno far circo-
lare come ciclostilati fra le compagne e
poi non sono mai seguiti da una redazione
definitiva e circolabile. Queste sono dif-
ficoltà che hanno conosciuto molto bene su
molte ~~le~~ compagne ~~collettive~~, che hanno atte-
so invano vostre risposte su questioni co-
me queste, e sono difficoltà che credo sia
un interesse più direttamente vostro che
nostro risolvere. Per noi il prezzo è so-
prattutto l'inutile perdita di tempo.

Concludendo: circa "Motherhood, Lesbianism
and Child Custody" e altri scrit-
ti inglesi, il discorso della lettera è
insensato se confrontato con la nostra pra-
tica di sempre. Non abbiamo mai pubblica-
to niente senza previa autorizzazione.

Resta invece il problema se volete o no
che le compagne lo possano leggere tradot-
to in italiano e ciclostilato e credo che
le compagne di Ferrara siano ansiose di
avere una risposta.

Nel caso desiderate però che i materia-
li che inviate non vengano nemmeno tradot-
ti e fatti circolare, non si capisce per-
chè ce li inviate. Credo faccia parte di
alcune contraddizioni che mantenete irri-

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solte da troppo lungo tempo e che dovrete risolvere.

Quanto alla continua e più o meno larvata mi naccia di scandalo politico che ricorre anche in questa lettera, aggiunge solo del grottesco alla scandalosa pratica di minacce e di accuse che senza ragione alcuna avete da tempo cominciato a profferire nei confronti di compagne del salario di altri paesi, e in particolare italiane, ² di cui quella del razzismo è solo la più facile e la più usata. Dico "facile" perchè ovviamente se scaglia ta da Donne Nere dovrebbe riuscire impossibile per donne bianche difendersi, così come per quelle di noi che sono "straight" dovrebbe riuscire problematico fronteggiare supposte perplessità di gruppi lesbici. Ma sappia mo sin troppo bene che la pratica nostra come di altre compagne italiane in USA non può realmente mai essersi estrinsecata in alcun modo "contro" donne Nere - donne Lesbiche. Queste riserve allora che da tempo si insinua che tali gruppi abbiano nei nostri confronti, o nei confronti del Comitato di New York, o di Silvia Federici, non possono che essere strumentali a una manovra intimida toria che non ha certo origine nei nostri reali rapporti con loro, bensì - a mio avviso - da una tua volontà di assicurarti un molto discutibile tipo di direzione politica a livello internazionale, stabilendo una gerarchizzazione dei paesi, delle razze ² delle preferenze sessuali, in modo del tutto impolitico. Cioè, se la questione è l'assumere la stratificazione di potere nella classe a livello internazionale, nessuno ha mai avuto dubbi in merito. Detto questo però, resta immutato il problema che di fatto ciascuna sezione può muoversi solo con una strumentazione propria. Anche qui allora la garanzia

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Ma le "strane" è che le compagne lesbiche al nostro interno, e sono molte, non hanno alcuna perplessità nei confronti di quelle di noi che non lo sono.

che il risultato delle pratiche politiche di ciascuna sezione sia a giovamento delle altre non può passare che per il confronto, non certo per la coazione che non ha mai fatto funzionare politicamente nessuno. Tanto meno può passare per la mutilazione, per cui l'attività di una sezione dovrebbe sempre passare attraverso permessi o indicazioni e ordini. Certo, la strada del confronto, nelle reciproche autonomie, è più complessa. Ma è l'unica vitale e possibile. ^Efortunatamente oggi il lavoro politico non cresce e non si confronta su livelli come questi. ^{Le} ~~La~~ ^{nostri} ~~di~~ ^{per} ~~per~~ ^{ovvero}.

Nemmeno il nostro paziente silenzio però - come già dicevo sopra - è valso a coprire questa pratica che si è già largamente rivelata nella sua insensatezza alle compagne delle varie sedi italiane che sono venute a Londra e che sono ritornate ~~disgustate~~ in Italia disguidate per l'atteggiamento da Tribunale Internazionale che avete preteso di assumere nei confronti nostri e di altre compagne come Silvia Federici. Altrettanto grotteschi sono stati i vostri tentativi di "dirigere direttamente da Londra" l'attività di alcune compagne del salario e di ~~XXXXX~~ ^{del salario} sedicenti compagne, in Italia, come se noi non esistessimo.

In particolare, riguardo a questi autodefinentisi "uomini per il salario", voglio anche chiarire che ci sono altri uomini in Italia che lavorano nella prospettiva del salario al S.I.D. ma non avendo assunto semplicemente che l'alternativa era di ricevere ordini da voi o da noi. Ma di cercare di pensare e di muoversi autonomamente cioè sulla base del loro sforzo, ^{a partire} ~~da~~ da quanto noi abbiamo rappresentato fino ad ora come lavoro organizzativo e tipo di dibattito. E penso che siamo sulla strada buona per rappresentare un effettivo allargamento di compagni ^{lavorano} che lavorano per il S.I.D., mantenendo noi tutta la nostra libertà di indirizzarli di volta in volta su cosa fare, o di non indirizzarli, e anche di prendere posizione contro se si daranno questi casi. Sembra anche che attorno al problema di ~~XXXXX~~ ^{che} ~~dever~~ ^{avere} ~~o~~ ^{avere} ~~avere~~ ^{posto} quest'anno nel mio Istituto, io sia ^{venuta} ~~stata~~ ^a ~~produrre~~ ^{produrre} fra i compagni che vi lavorano una ^{proposta} ~~proposta~~ ^{politica} ~~politica~~ ^{proprio} ~~proprio~~ ^{attorno} ~~attorno~~ ^{al} ~~al~~ ^{S.I.D.} ~~S.I.D.~~ non semplicemente come presa di posizione ideologica ma come pratica politica effettiva.

come presa di posizione ideologica ma come pratica politica effettiva.

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Pratica che da parte di alcuni è cominciata con uno sforzo preciso di messa a punto di lavori atti a produrre nel movimento maschile una riarticolazione del dibattito e un riorientamento della esperienza organizzativa.

Ancora: l'allusione nella lettera del 7 giugno al Triveneto prescindendo dall'intera rete del salario ricorda molto l'operazione tentata anche in USA di tagliare la testa di qualcuna, oltre che di eliminare un gruppo storicamente significativo, con la pretesa - folle - di sostituirla. Dico "tentata" perchè fortunatamente la capacità politica delle compagne in USA nei confronti delle quali avete tentato questa operazione, come quella delle compagne italiane, fa sì che nè loro nè il loro lavoro possano essere così disinvol-

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tamente distrutto e sostituito. Anzi, resiste e cresce parecchio, ma certamente no^m grazie al vostro aiuto.

Crediamo anche che finchè questa è l'ottica con cui vi rapportate alle compagne di altri paesi, non siate nemmeno in grado di intravedere i grossi problemi di dibattito e di organizzazione sui quali stiamo lavorando per ~~essere in grado di~~^{poter} affrontare una seconda fase di lotta. Seconda fase di lotta che tenga conto della nuova forma che sta assumendo a livello mondiale lo Stato capitalistico; tale ~~forma~~ rinnovamento passa, nel caso specifico dell'Italia, attraverso una ricomposizione, nuova e estremamente forte, di DC e PCI. Questo certamente è il risultato del livello di attacco che si è scatenato contro lo Stato e il capitale in questi anni.

Ma tutto questo sembra che voi non lo conosciate. E' vero allora che solo essendo parte diretta, come siamo state noi in questi anni, di questo attacco, se ne possono conoscere le concrete articolazioni e portata di diffusione, ma è altrettanto vero che voi tanto meno lo conoscerete quanto più vi intesterete come da tempo fate nella vostra pratica nei confronti dell'Italia, a ~~riformare~~ non tener presente che "l'informazione è frutto di organizzazione". Conseguentemente non conoscerete mai il cuore delle cose interrogando chi capita a Londra, uomo o donna che sia, ma lo potrete conoscere solo attraverso un rapporto di confronto politico che è l'unico che permette anche a chi trasmette l'informazione di decidere cosa trasmettere e di valutare che garanzia ne può avere.

Le conseguenze di questa riorganizzazione statale per

zione di decidere cosa trasmettere e di valutare che la
ranzia ne può avere.

Le conseguenze di questa riorganizzazione statale per
noi che siamo state sul fronte di lotta in questi anni,
sono che dobbiamo affrontare su terreni diversi il problema
della organizzazione femminista. Se una pratica poli-
tica basata fundamentalmente sull'uso dei media per la
diffusione del discorso da un lato non ci era permessa
già nella fase precedente per il livello di controllo
esercitato dallo Stato sui mezzi di comunicazione, ^e dal-
l'altro era comunque ~~una~~ inadeguata al livello dello
scontro entro cui già ballavamo, nella fase che si è
aperta ora non può nemmeno costituire un'indicazione.
A meno che non la ^{si}intenda come l'ovvia cosa di usare
dei media "quando si può". E chi non l'ha fatto?

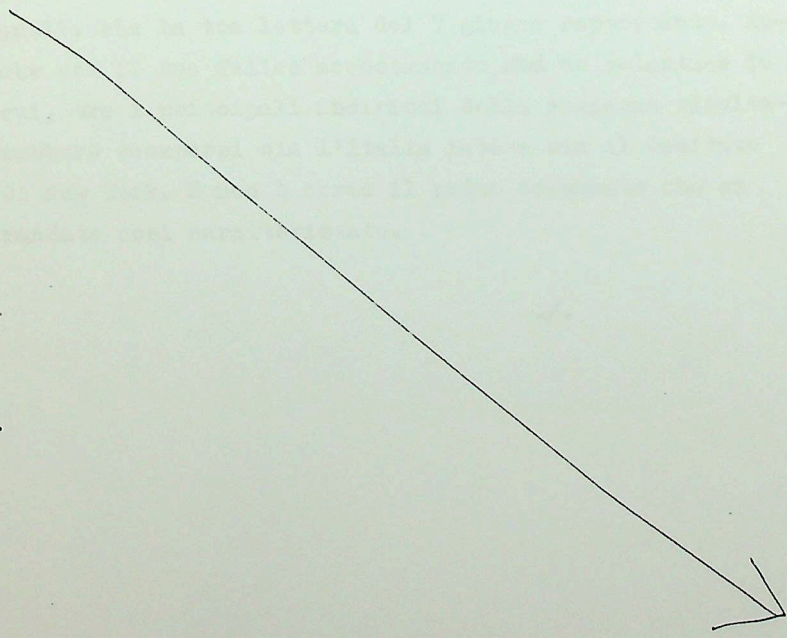
Ma la repressione che stiamo vivendo non si
sviluppa solo a livello economico, ~~ma si intreccia con~~
una repressione militare diretta ~~contro~~ la quale non ba
stano nè parole nè marce, e gli scioperi generali sul

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72

lavoro domestico non basta la nostra buona volontà a farli saltar fuori. E tutte le altre forme organizzative sperimentate e consolidate, assemblee di sole donne, comitati femministi, sui luoghi di lavoro esterno e nei quartieri, hanno attinto un livello che si presenta ormai ~~come~~ come un fronte di trincea.

Per quanto riguarda la fase precedente, gli anni passati, non crediamo che la vostra pratica si sia rivelata più efficace della nostra nè il vostro dibattito più ~~efficace~~ adeguato ai problemi che ci trovavamo ad affrontare. Cionondimeno, anche quando voi marciavate in 6 e noi in 3.000, abbiamo sempre avuto un atteggiamento di confronto politico diretto all'aiuto reciproco, e non certo a giudicare per punire, come del ~~part~~ tutto gratuitamente rispetto alla nostra pratica e ~~xx~~ follemente in assoluto avete assunto voi nei nostri confronti.



Posso dire che mi ha stancato molto più questo tipo di cretineria politica su cui da anni ho pazientato, che le mille marce e riunioni e azioni di attacco che abbiamo condotto. Ciò che continua a "tenermi su" non sono certo lettere come questa, ma la crescita continua delle mie compagne e di nuove donne attraverso il reciproco sforzo. Ripeto: credo che tu oggi non abbia la ^{capacità} ~~immaginazione~~ politica di immaginarlo. Mi resta un dubbio: l'ossessione sul problema della leadership, isolato e accanitamente privilegiato rispetto alla problematica da cui invece dovrebbe naturalmente discendere, non è un caso che porti facilmente al raffigurarsi come Tribunale Internazionale. Ma tale ossessione è frutto di ingenuità politica o di un'identificazione tout-court con il potere capitalistico?

Penso che le compagne del salario italiane si confronteranno a livello di dibattito e di organizzazione con le compagne di altri paesi quando lo riterranno politicamente opportuno e comunque non su livelli come quelli che la tua lettera del 7 giugno rappresenta. Anche con il suo felice accostamento ~~ad~~ un volantino in cui, tra i principali indirizzi della campagna risulterebbero scomparsi sia l'Italia intera sia il Comitato di New York. E non è certo il primo documento che ci mandate così caratterizzato.

Non desidero nel frattempo essere costretta a rapporti personali con te, nè direttamente nè per telefono. Non a caso il fatto che il personale è politico non vuole affatto dire che il livello politico debba stringere le persone in un intrico di rapporti personali che non lasciano respiro. L'unica sede in cui ci rivedremo è, per quanto mi riguarda, quello di un confronto politico assieme alle altre compagne, quando anche noi lo riterremo opportuno politicamente, cioè quando ci sarà la possibilità di discutere su problemi politicamente rilevanti.

WNR

P.S. Copia a Wilhelmine e Marjareth,
Julia Ramirez, Beth Myrber, Luzie Fleming,
& Gisela Bock

Selma :

I have read your letter from London of June.7, 1978 and for the first time after years of patient silence, in the hope that more serious political matters would dispose of petty things like these; I want to speak openly to you.

It seems very strange to me that the international network and particularly the network in the US should depend on the phone call we did not have to find out something about Italy. In fact, we have always sent regularly to many groups in Canada and the US materials that show the development of our struggle and our organisational work, from the different issues of the journal to the several local bulletins to books and fliers. What is true, however, is that for years now every information concerning Italy has been curtailed to the extent that nothing has been published or translated and even the already made translations were not utilised (it seems that Silvia Federici made many of them for nothing).

I also find ~~me~~ not so much strange but ridiculous the attitude that, also in this letter, is assumed towards us wfh women in Italy who, supposedly, are "going to be judged" by some other foreign group and are not allowed to publish any material in English until certain "questions" are not "clarified".

Concerning this, I want to make it immediately clear that as far as ~~we~~ our using US materials is involved I will keep referring to Silvia Federici who was specifically assigned to this since the foundation of the International Feminist Collective, and will follow the criteria we always followed. I am not aware that the International Feminist Collective has ceased to exist, also because Silvia and I are part of it and therefore I do not see how it could be dissolved without a decision on our side. It seems, however, that you have completely forgotten the criteria the International Feminist Collective has always followed concerning publications. I will make then a brief digression to summarise them.

Concerning written materials, the Collective always functioned in the sense of organising ~~xxx~~ their translation and publication as well as guaranteeing the political adequacy of both. For all decisions concerning the use of the materials, the sisters members of the Collective disposed directly only of those pieces (articles, books etc.) whose publication had been authorised either by a group or by their author. An "automatic reproduction of materials always occurred --for this is what the Collective decided--only in the case of materials that were to be quickly utilised, like e.g. what was to be reported on the journal. For all the rest--selections of pieces to be anthologised etc.--the sister of the Collective always consulted the "foreign correspondent" to check whether everything was agreed upon or any change had to be made. And the foreign sister could always ~~xxx~~ decide differently from what was being proposed. This means that ultimately she could publish in a different place from the one we had proposed if she did not agree with our suggestions. We continue to think that these criteria are the only possible ones. This not only because around every publication problems

may arise about which only the author can make the final decision, but because if there are different political judgments it is not through compulsion that agreement can be reached. A real problem, however, is that often we do not receive an answer soon enough so that we have to give up using your pieces because we cannot keep the publishers waiting forever. The Swiss sisters waited for too long an answer concerning the English pieces to be put in Le foyer de l'insurrection. While they regularly received answers from us as well as suggestions and corrections on our pieces, they received nothing from you which made it difficult for them to work on the book. At least a "no" but ~~xxxxxx~~ received in time would have made things easier. It also happens that often, after sending you a provisional translation to be checked, we never receive the final version. Other times we are told that certain documents are provisional and cannot be circulated even as mimeographs among the sisters, but then they are never followed by a definitive version to be circulated. These difficulties are well known to many sisters who have waited in vain for an answer from you on questions like these. They are difficulties it seems to me, that it is more in your interest to solve than ours. ~~xxxxxx~~ The price ~~xxxxxx~~ we pay is only a useless loss of time. In conclusion, concerning "Motherhood, Lesbianism and Child Custody" and the other English materials, what you say in your letter makes no sense whatsoever compared with our usual practice. We have never published anything without first receiving the authorisation to do so. The question remains whether or not you want the Italian sisters to be able to read it, and I think the sisters in Ferrara are anxiously looking forward to an answer. In case, however, you do not want us to translate and circulate the materials you send us, then I do not understand why you send them to begin with. This, I think, is part of some contradictions that you have kept open for a long time and that you should resolve.

As for the recurrent more or less open threat of political scandal which reappears also in this letter, it only adds a grotesque note to the scandalous practice of threats and accusations which, for no reason whatsoever, you have begun since a long time to wage against sisters in other countries and particularly Italian sisters. Among these accusations that of racism is only the most easy and most used. "Easy" for obviously when it is waged by Black Women it should be impossible for white women to defend themselves, in the same way as it should be problematic for those of us who are straight to answer to possible perplexities by a lesbian group. What is "strange" however is that the lesbian sisters among us, and they are many, have no perplexities concerning those of us who are not. But we know even too well that our practice, like that of other Italian sisters in the US, cannot really have moved "against" Black Women and Lesbian Women. The reservations, then that for some time it has been hinted these groups would have about us and the New York Committee, or Silvia Federici, can only be instrumental to an intimidatory manoeuvre which certainly has no roots in our real relations

with them, but originates from your will to ensure for yourself a very questionable political leadership at the international level by establishing a hierarchy of countries, races, and sexual preferences ~~in a~~ totally impolitically. ^{was} ~~assumed~~, ~~was~~ ~~that~~ ~~internationally~~ that there is a hierarchy of power within the class. ^{instead of us had doubts about that} Given that, the fact remains that ~~that~~ each section of the class can move only with its own instruments. Also in this case the guarantee that the political practices of each section really give power to all the others can be reached only through political comparison (confronto) and not through compulsions, a practice which has never allowed anybody to function politically. Much less can it be reached through curtailment, in the sense that the activity of any section should be conditioned to permissions or suggestions-commands, by others. True, the practice of comparison (confronto) within levels of reciprocal autonomy, is more complex. But it is the only vital and possible one, for political work does not grow and cannot be compared along the paths you are following.

that is: if the problem is to assume

As I said before, not even our patient silence has served to cover this practice which has already revealed its senselessness to the Italian wfh sisters who came to London and who have come back disgusted by the posture as International Tribunal you have assumed towards us and other sisters like Silvia Federici. Also grotesque is your ^{attempts} attempt to "direct from London" the activity of some wfh sisters and some ^{wfh} "wfh men" in Italy, as if we did not exist.

Practical II. This paper of "Wages for housework" I want to clarify that there are other wfh in Italy working on Wages P.M. but having feared that the alternative was not simply to receive orders from you or from us. But to try to think and to move autonomously, that is on the basis of their effort, starting from what we represented up to now as organizational work and kind of debate. In I think they are on the road to represent a real enlargement of people working for W.F.H., being us free to suggest to them what to do, or not to suggest, ~~xxxxxxx~~ what to do, being us free even to move against them if there will be the case. It seems also, that even starting from my having or not having a job this year in My Institute, I am free able to make among all the others people working there a ^{and a rearticulation of the political discussion on a} ~~political~~ ~~of it~~ ~~about~~ W.F.H., and ~~all~~ this not ~~xxxxxx~~ just ^{an} ideological assumption but as a real moving. And in effect some of them began an activity, different kinds of works, idoneous to produce in the male movement a rearticulation of the political discussion and a reorientation of the political practice.

Again : the ~~reference~~ reference in your letter of June 7 to the Triveneto Committee, as if it were separate from the Italian wfh network is reminiscent of the operation attempted also in the US of cutting the head of some sisters as well as eliminating a historically important group with the crazy pretense of substituting it. I say "attempted" because fortunately the political capacity of the sisters in USA against whom this operation has been tried is such that neither them nor their work can be so easily destroyed or substituted. On the contrary, it has ~~grown~~ remained and grown, but certainly not because of your help.

We also think that as long as this is the way you relate to sisters in other countries you won't see the big problems at the level of debate and organisation around which we are working, to prepare ourselves for ~~the~~ a new phase of struggle adequate to the new forms the State is assuming internationally. In the case of Italy the reorganisation of the State involves a new very strong recomposition between PC and PCI, which is certainly the result of the level of attack against capital and the State during these years.

It seems that you know nothing about this. True, only by being part --as we have been during these years-- of ~~this~~ this attack can one know its concrete articulations and ramifications. But it is also true that you will know ~~it~~ less and less the more you persist, as you have been doing for some ~~some~~ time, in your practice towards Italy, ~~and~~ not consider that "information is the result of organisation". Thus, you will never know the reality of the situation, interrogating those who happen to come to London, be they women or men. You will know it only through a political comparison (confronto) which is ~~the~~ the only way that allows those passing the information to decide what to communicate and how reliable it is.

The consequence of this reorganisation of the State ~~is that~~ for us who have been on the battle line during these years is that we have to deal with the problem of feminist organisation, on different grounds. If a political practice based essentially on the use of media for the circulation of our perspective was out of question in the previous phase, due to the level of control exerted by the State on the media, and in any case was not adequate to the level of political confrontation in which we had ~~already~~ ~~reached~~ to move, in the phase which has opened up it cannot even represent a possible course of action. Unless what is implied is the ~~fact~~ fact of using the media "when one can", and who has not done this ?

The repression we are living does not operate only at the economic level but implies a direct military/repression against which neither words nor marches are sufficient--as for general strikes for wfh, our good will is not enough to make them happen. Concerning all the organisational forms which have been experimented and consolidated--assemblies of women only, feminist ~~committees~~ committees, on the second job and in the community--they have reached a level that already appears as a trench.

Relatively to the past phase, these past years, we do not think that your practice has been more fruitful than ours or your debate more adequate to the problems we face. Nevertheless, even when you marched in six and we in 3000, we always had an attitude of political comparison (confronto) aiming at reciprocal help and not certainly at judging and punishing as in your attitude towards us--a practice which is gratuitous compared with our work and in general is crazy.

I must also say that this sort of political idiocy on which I have been patient for years has tired me ~~more~~ much more than the thousand marches, meetings and actions of attack that we have sustained. What still "~~cheers me up~~" is certainly not letters like this, but the continuous growth of my sisters and of new women through our reciprocal efforts. I repeat it, I do not think that at present you have the political capacity to imagine it. I have only one doubt: your obsession with the problem of leadership taken in isolation and privileged with respect to the problematics from which it should naturally follow, ~~and which~~ not accidentally ~~leads~~ leads to its representation as International Tribunal. But is this obsession the consequence of political naivete or the consequence of a tout court identification with capitalist power ?

What is certain is that the Italian wfh will compare (confrontarsi) at the level of debate and organisation with the sisters of other countries when they will consider it politically feasible, and in any case not at levels like those of your letter of June 7 with its happy accompaniment by a flier in which from the main addresses of the campaign have disappeared both Italy in its entirety and the New York Committee. And it is certainly not the first document of this sort that you have sent us.

In the meantime, I do not wish to be obliged to have personal contacts with you neither directly nor by phone. Not accidentally the fact that the personal is political does not mean that political work should close people in a network of suffocating personal relations. As far as I am concerned, the only place where we will see each other again is that of a political comparison (confronto) together with other sisters when we will consider it politically feasible, that is when there will be the possibility of discussing ~~politically~~ politically important matters.

Mariana

x P.S.: Copy to Wilmette^{from}, Margaret, Judy Raviner, Beth Myler, Lizzie Fleming and Gisela Rock.

- The English text is a translation that I revised. In any case, as the "original" the Italian texts.

MARIAROSA DALLA COSTA STATEMENT ON “WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY” AND HER COOPERATION WITH SELMA JAMES.

In her recently published volume, *Sex Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning* (PM Press, March 2012) Selma James makes a number of incorrect statements relative to her collaboration with me and the authorship of *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* that force me to respond, as they distort the history of our cooperation and the beginning of the Wages for Housework Campaign.

According to Selma James’ introductory notes to the *Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* and, in particular, her commentary concerning the essay “Women and the Subversion of the Community,” I have usurped her right to be considered the author or a co-author of this article. I reject this claim and I must point out first that what has been reprinted by PM Press is a heavily edited version of the original introduction that Selma James wrote in July 1972, from which my name has now been removed eleven times. In the original introduction to *The Power of Women* Selma James unambiguously presented “Women and the Subversion of the Community” not only as my work, but as the product of the new women’s movement in Italy.

Let me underline here that what is at stake is not a competition for the authorship of an essay. On the contrary, the question at stake is the historical and political origin of the campaign and struggle for wages for housework, which now appears in Selma James’ account as the product of the ‘inventiveness’ of an individual. This could not be further from the truth.

Neither Selma James nor myself ‘invented’ or discovered the perspective of “Wages for Housework” (WFH) as it is claimed in the book and in the promotional material for its launching in the United States. The demand for wages for housework had been promoted by feminists in Europe and in the United States since at least the beginning of the 20th century. I discovered their analysis and demands in the late 1970s when I was working on *Famglia welfare e stato tra Progressismo e New Deal* (1983) and mentioned them in that book. Socialist feminists like Crystal Eastman were asking for housework to be remunerated by the state and actively working on this program already in the first decade of the century. An article that appeared in 1912 in the socialist newspaper *Chicago Evening World* contained an analysis of housework that was very similar to that made by activists in our campaign, pointing out that employers buy two workers for one wage, and that the kind of work a man does determines the work and living conditions of his wife as well. Among male theorists, we can recall Wilhelm Reich who, in *The Sexual Revolution* written in the 1930s, said that marriage is an institution that exploits women, that unpaid domestic work enables employers to increase their profits, and that the employers can impose

low wages precisely because behind the workers there is the free work of their wives. Reich also underlined that even women who have a waged job continued to do the housework as a condition for their marriage to function. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, written in the 1950s, has pages on the "housework question" that anticipated the analysis we produced over a decade later. Most importantly, the housework question was the central issue in the new feminism that emerged in the early 1970s in Europe and in the US, which marked a break with emancipationism and the demand for "parity". There were different positions on this question, but the problematic arising from the unwaged character of this work, and the fact that housework reproduces labor-power was already acknowledged by various authors, from Betsy Warrior to Peggy Morton and others, prior to the publication of *The Power of Women*.

I further want to point out that the launching of the campaign for WFH was a collective process and project. Not accidentally the launching occurred with the formation of the International Feminist Collective in July 1972, which took place in Padova (Italy) at a meeting in which about twenty women, mostly from Italy but also from France, from the US and the UK, participated. The political perspective that shaped wages for housework theoretically and practically was a coalescing of different political currents including the Italian Workerist Movement, itself the product of one of the most important cycles of struggles Italy had seen in modern history. Indeed, my very first encounter with Selma James was a product of the relation both she and I had to this movement.

By the time I met Selma James I had been involved for years in the political activity of Potere Operaio, a network of militant groups issuing from the Workerist Movement, that later dissolved into what has become "Autonomia." The political categories I was using in my analysis were those developed by Workerism: the strategic character of the wage struggle, the refusal of work, and the social factory. Consequently it is not surprising that these categories are found in the article in question. The political use of the wage struggle by Potere Operaio was promoting struggles for a wage by other unwaged subjects, like students, who began demanding a "pre-wage" for the work of forming their labor-power. Potere Operaio also launched the objective of a guaranteed income that is still on the table today, as part of a program where it is interwoven with the question of a minimum wage. The demand for wages for housework was clearly influenced by this political framework.

The invitation to Selma James to participate in the Padova June 1971 meeting, the first in which I presented a document discussing the question of wages for housework with a group of women activists, one year prior to the launching of the Campaign, reflected my desire to connect Selma to the developing feminist movement in Italy, and it was in recognition of her merit both on the level of analysis and political practice. Selma knew very well what I would present in this meeting because, prior to it, I read to her the document I had written. From this first meeting I worked fulltime

to make the new movement grow and for a while the relationship with Selma was not problematic. When we decided to join our writings in the booklet that became *The Power of Women* (published in Italian in March '72 and in English in October of the same year), Selma James wrote an Introduction that underlined the significance of the fact that my essay "Women and the Subversion of the Community" came from Italy, a country with a particularly high percentage of housewives. It is exactly this reference, along with my name and the pages that followed, that have been erased in the new version of the '72 introduction that Selma James has published in her book. (I attach this introduction of July '72 as reproduced in the PM Press volume, highlighting what was removed: file SELMA'sIntro72original_and_as_modified).

However, this is not to deny that, in the spirit of cooperation that prevailed at least for a time in the feminist movement, we fully discussed everything we published with each other, and made significant contributions to each others' writings. I should add that another activist participated in our discussions about the article and contributed to it. But at the time nobody suggested that the article should have more than one signature. To be accused now of having taken advantage of this cooperation to place my name on an article predominantly written by Selma James is something I find totally unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of comradely cooperation necessary for building an international movement. I also reject vehemently and with true indignation the argument that I was 'allowed to sign' "Women and the Subversion of the Community" because I needed a weapon against sexism.

I never said anything when I realized that, starting from the third edition of the book in 1975, Selma James began to add her signature on the essay, or, more outrageously, in later years, started referring to the *Power of Women* as written by her "with" Mariarosa Dalla Costa. I also never said anything about the fact that, in spite of my having been a main exponent of the Padua WFH Committee, I have no record of our Committee gathering to discuss the Forward to the 3th English edition nor our Committee deciding to add its signature to that of the Power of Women Collective. It is always very demoralizing when old sisters part ways and I did my best over the last four decades to stay away from polemics about the authorship of this work. However, the comments made in the book that Selma James has now published force me to rectify the claims that she makes.

Last, I did not part ways with Selma James because of any split in the WFH network 'on the basis of race,' as her introductory notes claim. This is not the place for me to fully address this claim. I will only state that it masks what in reality were profound disagreements on political and organizational issues.

In conclusion, it saddens me to realize that Selma James decided, in presenting her work to a US movement public, to both erase and degrade my contribution (as well as the contribution of other sisters) to a campaign that represented an important movement in feminist history.

In recognition of the importance of this history, we are now assembling our archives and making them public. Thus, I hope that a more balanced view of the early history of this movement will be available to new generations of activists.

Padua, March 27th, 2012

Introduction

Women and the Subversion of the Community is a contribution to the question posed by the existence of a growing international movement of women: What is the relation of women to capital and what kind of struggle can we effectively wage to destroy it? We must hastily add that this is not the same as asking: What concessions can we wring from the enemy?—though this is related. To pose the first question is to assume we'll win; to pose the second is to calculate what we can salvage from the wreck of defeat. But in struggling to win, plenty can be gained along the way.

Up to now, the women's movement has had to define itself unaided by any serious heritage of Marxist critique of women's relation to the capitalist plan of development and underdevelopment. Quite the opposite. We inherited a distorted and reformist concept of capital itself as a series of *things* which we struggle to plan, control or manage, rather than as a *social relation* which we struggle to destroy.¹ Bypassing that heritage or lack of it, our movement explored the female experience, beginning with what we personally knew it to be. This is how we have been able for the first time on a mass scale to describe with profound insight and cutting precision the degradation of women and the shaping of our personality by forces which intended that we accept this degradation, accept to be quiet and powerless victims. On the basis of these discoveries, two distinct political tendencies have emerged, apparently opposite extremes of the political spectrum within the women's movement.

Among those who have insisted that *caste* and not class was fundamental, some women have asserted that what they call an "economic analysis" could not encompass, nor could a political struggle end, the physical and psychological oppression of women. They reject revolutionary political struggle. Capital is immoral, needs reforms and should be left behind, they say (thereby implying that the reforms are a moral obligation which are themselves a negotiated and above all non-violent transition to "socialism"), but it is not the only enemy. We must change men and/or ourselves first. So that not only political struggle is rejected; so is liberation for the mass of women who are too busy working and seeing after others to look for a personal solution.

The possible future directions of these politics vary, mainly because this point of view takes a number of forms depending on the stratum of women who hold it. An elite club of this type can remain introverted and isolated—harmless except as it discredits the movement generally. Or it can be a source of those managerial types in every field which the class in charge is looking for to perform for it ruling functions over rebellious women and, god bless equality, over rebellious men too.² Integral to this participation in the marginal aspects of ruling, by the way, is an ambition and rivalry up to now primarily identified with men.

But history, past and future, is not simple. We have to note that some of the most incisive discoveries of the movement and in fact its autonomy have come from women who began by basing themselves on a repudiation of class and class struggle. The task of the movement now is to develop a political strategy on the foundations of these discoveries and on the basis of this autonomy.

Most of those who have insisted from the beginning that *class* and not *caste* was fundamental have been less able to translate our psychological insights into autonomous and revolutionary political action. Beginning with a male definition of class, the liberation of women is reduced to

¹ "Wakefield discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, means of subsistence, machines and other means of production does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative—the wage worker the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free will. He discovered that *capital is not a thing but a social relation between persons established by the instrumentality of things*. Mr. Peel, he moans, took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 3,000 persons of the working class, men, women and children. Once arrived at his destination, 'Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.' Unhappy Mr. Peel who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!" Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (Moscow: 1958), 766. (Emphasis ours.)

² The *Financial Times* of March 9, 1971, suggests that many capitalists are missing the opportunity to "use" women in positions of middle management; being "grateful outsiders," women would not only lower the pay structure, "at least in the first instance," but be a "source of renewed energy and vitality" with which to manage the rest of us.

equal pay and a “fairer” and more efficient welfare State.³ For these women capital is the main enemy but because it is *backward*, not because it *exists*. They don’t aim to destroy the capitalist social relation but only to organize it more rationally. (The extra-parliamentary Left in Italy would call this a “socialist” as distinct from a revolutionary position.) What a rationalized capital—equal pay, more and better nurseries, more and better jobs, etc.—can’t fix, they call “oppression” which, like Topsy, the orphaned slave child who never knew her parents, “just growed.” Oppression disconnected from material relations is a problem of “consciousness”—in this case, psychology masquerading in political jargon. And so the “class analysis” has been used to limit the breadth of the movement’s attack and even undermine the movement’s autonomy.

The essentially similar liberal nature of these two tendencies, wanting to rationally manage “society” to eliminate “oppression,” is not usually apparent until we see the “political” women and these “non-political” women join together on concrete demands or, more often, against revolutionary actions. Most of us in the movement belong to neither of these tendencies and have had a hard time charting a course between them. Both ask us: “Are you a feminist or are you political?”

The “political” women who talk of class are easy to identify. They are the women’s liberationists whose first allegiance is not to the women’s movement but to organizations of the male-dominated Left. Once strategy and action originate from a source outside of women, women’s struggle is measured by how it is presumed to affect men, otherwise known as “the workers,” and women’s consciousness by whether the forms of struggle they adopt are the forms men have traditionally used.

The “political” women see the rest of us as non-political and this has tended to drive us together in self-protection, obscuring or playing down real political differences among us. These now are beginning to make themselves felt. Groups that call themselves Psychology Groups (I’m not talking here about consciousness raising groups) tend to express the politics of caste most coherently.⁴ But whichever quarter they come from, viewing women as a caste and only a caste is a distinct political line, which is increasingly finding political and organizational expression in every discussion of what to do. In the coming period of intense working class activity, as we are forced to create our own political framework, casting away second-hand theories of male-dominated socialist movements, the pre-eminence of caste will be posed as the alternative and will have to be confronted and rejected as well. On this basis alone can the new politics inherent in autonomy find its tongue and its muscle.

This process of development is not unique to the women’s movement. The Black movement in the U.S. (and elsewhere) also began by adopting what appeared to be only a caste position in opposition to the racism of white male-dominated groups. Intellectuals in Harlem and Malcolm X, that great revolutionary,

³ If this seems an extreme statement, look at the demands we in England marched for in 1971: equal pay, free twenty-four-hour childcare, equal educational opportunity and free birth control and abortion on demand. Incorporated into a wider struggle, some of these are vital. As they stand, they accept that we not have the children we can’t afford; that the State facilities keep the children we can afford for as long as twenty-four hours a day; and that these children have equal chance to be conditioned and trained to sell themselves competitively with each other on the labor market for equal pay. By themselves these are not just co-optable demands. They are capitalist planning. Most of us in the movement never felt these demands expressed where we wanted the movement to go, but in the absence of an independent feminist political framework, we lost by default. The prime architects of these demands were women with a “class analysis.”

⁴ Psychology itself by its nature is a prime weapon of manipulation, i.e. social control, of men, women and children. It does not acquire another nature when wielded by women in a movement for liberation. Quite the reverse. To the degree that we permit, it manipulates the movement and changes the nature of that to suit its needs. And not only psychology. “Women’s liberation needs: — to destroy sociology as the ideology of the social services which bases itself on the proposition that this society is “the norm”; if you are a person in rebellion, you are a deviant. — to destroy psychology and psychiatry which spend their time convincing us that our “problems” are personal hang-ups and that we must adjust to a lunatic world. These so-called “disciplines” and “sciences” will increasingly incorporate our demands in order more efficiently to redirect our forces into safe channels under their stewardship. Unless we deal with them, they will deal with us. — to discredit once and for all social workers, progressive educators, marriage guidance counselors, and the whole army of experts whose function is to keep men, women and children functioning within the social framework, each by their own special brand of social frontal lobotomy.” From “The American Family: Decay and Rebirth,” by Selma James, reprinted in *From Feminism to Liberation*, collected by Edith Hoshino Altback, Schenkman (Cambridge, MA: 1971), 197-8.

were both nationalists, both appeared to place color above class when the white Left were still chanting variations of "Black and white unite and fight," or "Negroes and Labor must join together." The Black working class was able through this nationalism to *redefine class*: overwhelmingly Black and Labor were synonymous (with no other group was Labor as synonymous—except perhaps with women), the demands of Black people and the forms of struggle created by Black people were the most comprehensive *working class* demands and the most advanced *working class* struggle. This struggle was able to attract to itself the best elements among the intellectuals who saw their own persecution as Black people—as a caste—grounded in the exploitation of Black workers. These intellectuals who got caught in the moment of nationalism after the class had moved beyond it saw race in increasingly individual terms and made up that pool from which the State Department could hook the fish of tokenism—appointing a Black as special presidential advisor on slum clearance, for example—and the personnel of a new, more integrated technocracy.

In the same way women for whom caste is the fundamental issue will make the transition to revolutionary feminism based on a redefinition of class or invite integration into the white male power structure.

But "'Marxist' women," as a woman from the movement in New Orleans says, "are just 'Marxist' men in drag." The struggle as they see it is not qualitatively different from the one the organized labor movement *under masculine management* has always commended to women, except that now, appended to the "general struggle," is something called "women's liberation" or "women's struggle" voiced by women themselves.

This "general struggle" I take to mean the class struggle. But there is nothing in capitalism that is not capitalistic, that is, not part of the class struggle. The questions are (a) Are women except when they are waged workers auxiliary to capitalism (as has been assumed) and therefore auxiliary to a more basic, more general struggle against capitalism; and (b) Can anything ever have been "general" which has excluded so many women for so long?

Rejecting on the one hand class subordinated to feminism and on the other feminism subordinated to class, we (original: Mariarosa Dalla Costa) confronted what (to our shame) has passed for Marxism with the female experience that we have been exploring and struggling to articulate. The result has been a translation of our psychological insights into a critique of the political economy of the exploitation of women, the theoretical basis for a revolutionary and autonomous women's struggle. Based on what we know of *how* we are degraded, we move into the question of *why*, in a depth as far as I know not reached before.

One great achievement of Marx was to show that the specific social relations between people in the production of the necessities of life, relations which spring up without their conscious planning, "behind the backs of *people*" (*Menschen*—previously translated as *men*), distinguish one society from another. That is, in class society, the form of the relation between people through which the ruling class robs the exploited of their labor is unique in each historic epoch, and all other social relations in the society, beginning with the family and including every other institution, reflect that form.

For Marx history was a process of struggle of the exploited, who continually provoke over long periods and in sudden revolutionary leaps changes in the basic social relations of production and in all the institutions which are an expression of these relations. The family, then, was the basic biological unit differing in form from one society to another, directly related to the way people produce. According to him, the family, even before class society, had the subordinated woman as its pivot; class society itself was an extension of the relations between men on the one hand and women and children on the other, an extension, that is, of the man's command over the labor of his woman and his children.

The women's movement has gone into greater detail about the capitalist family. After describing how women are conditioned to be subordinate to men, it has described the family as that institution where the young are repressed from birth to accept the discipline of capitalist relations—which in Marxist terms begins with the discipline of capitalist work. Other women have identified

the family as the centre of consumption, and yet others have shown that housewives make up a hidden reserve work force: “unemployed” women *work* behind closed doors at home, to be called out when capital needs them elsewhere.

Women and the Subversion of the Community (original: The Dalla Costa article) affirms all the above, but places them on another basis: the family under capitalism is a center of conditioning, of consumption and of reserve labor, but a centre essentially of *social production*. When previously so-called Marxists said that the capitalist family did not produce for capitalism, was not part of social production, it followed that they repudiated women’s potential *social power*.⁵ Or rather, presuming that women in the home could not have social power, they could not see that women in the home produced. If your production is vital for capitalism, refusing to produce, refusing to *work*, is a fundamental lever of social power.

Marx’s analysis of capitalist production was not a meditation on how the society “ticked.” It was a tool to find the way to overthrow it, to find the social forces which, exploited by capital, were subversive to it. Yet it was because he was looking for the forces that would inevitably overthrow capital that he could describe capital’s social relations, which are pregnant with working class subversion. It is because we (original: Mariarosa Dalla Costa) were looking for *women’s* lever of social power among those forces that we were able to uncover that even when women do not work out of their homes, they are vital producers.

The commodity they produce, unlike all other commodities, is unique to capitalism: the living human being—“the laborer himself.”

Capital’s special way of robbing labor is by paying the worker a wage that is enough to live on (more or less) and to reproduce other workers. But the worker must produce more in the way of commodities than what his wage is worth. The unpaid surplus labor is what the capitalist is in business to accumulate and what gives him increasing power over more and more workers: he pays for some labor to get the rest free so he can command more labor and get even more free, ad infinitum—until we stop him. He buys with wages the right to use the only “thing” the worker has to sell, his or her ability to work. The specific social relation, which is capital, then, is the wage relation. And this wage relation can exist only when the ability to work becomes a saleable commodity. Marx calls this commodity *labor power*.

This is a strange commodity for it is not a thing. The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floor swept, its lunchbox prepared, its sexuality not gratified but quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the night shift. This is how labor power is produced and reproduced when it is daily consumed in the factory or the office. *To describe its basic production and reproduction is to describe women’s work.*

The community therefore is not an area of freedom and leisure auxiliary to the factory, where by chance there happen to be women who are degraded as the personal servants of men. The community is the other half of capitalist organization, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, *the other, hidden, source of surplus labor*.⁶ It becomes increasingly regimented like a factory, what we

⁵ Marx himself does not seem to have said anywhere that it was. Why this is so requires more space than is available here and more reading of the man at the expense of his interpreters. Suffice it to say that, first, he is singular in seeing personal consumption as a phase of production: “It is the production and reproduction of that means of production so indispensable to the capitalist: the laborer himself.” (*Capital* 1: 572.) Second, he alone has given us the tools to make our own analysis. And finally, he never was guilty of the nonsense with which Engels, despite his many contributions, has saddled us and which, from the Bolsheviks to Castro, has given a “Marxist” authority to backward and often reactionary policies towards women of revolutionary governments

⁶ I said earlier that *Women and the Subversion of the Community* moves into the question of why women are degraded “in a depth as far as I know not reached before.” Three previous attempts stand out (and can all be found in *From Feminism to Liberation*.) “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation” by Margaret Benston attempts to answer the same question. It fails, in my view, because it bases itself not on Marx but on Ernest Mandel. Even the few paragraphs of Mandel, which Benston quotes are enough to expose the theoretical basis of modern Trotskyist liberalism. We must restrict ourselves here to what he says about women’s work in the home, which Benston accepts. “The second group of products in capitalist society which are not commodities but remain simple use-value

(original Mariarosa) call a social factory, where the costs and nature of transport, housing, medical care, education, police, are all points of struggle.⁷ And this social factory has as its pivot the woman in the home producing labor power as a commodity, *and her struggle not to*.

The demands of the women's movement, then, take on a new and more subversive significance. When we say, for example, that we want control of our own bodies, we are challenging the domination of capital which has transformed our reproductive organs as much as our arms and legs into instruments of accumulation of surplus labor; transformed our relations with men, with our children and our very creation of them, into *work productive to this accumulation*.

A Woman's Place, originally published as a pamphlet, was written in 1952 at the height of the Cold War, in Los Angeles, where the immigration of young working men and women had assumed Biblical dimensions.⁸ Though it bears my name, I was merely a vehicle for expressing what women, housewives and factory workers, felt and knew as immigrants to the Golden West from the South and East.

It was already clear even then that working outside the home did not make drudgery at home any more appealing, nor liberate us from the responsibility for housework even when it was "shared." It was equally clear that to think of spending our lives packing chocolates, or winding transformers, or wiring televisions was more than we could bear. We rejected both and fought against both. For example, in those days a man's friends would still laugh if they saw him wearing an apron and washing up. We changed that.

There is no doubt that the courage to fight for these changes sprang directly from that paycheck which we so hated to work for. But though we hated the work, for most of us it provided the first opportunity for an independent social experience outside the isolation of the home, and *seemed the only alternative to that isolation*. After the mass entry of women into industry during World War II, and our brutal expulsion between 1945 and 1947, from 1947 when they wanted us again we came back and, with the Korean War (1949), in increasing

consists of all things produced in the home. Despite the fact that considerable human labor goes into this type of household production, it still remains a production of use-values and not of commodities. Every time a soup is made or a button sewn on a garment it constitutes production, but it is not production for the market." This is quoted from *An Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory* (Merit, NY: 1967), 10-11. Even the title betrays the falsity of the content: there is no such thing as "Marxist economic theory" or "Marxist political economy" or for that matter "Marxist sociology." Marx negated political economy in theory and the working class negates it in practice. For economics fragments the qualitative relations between people into a compartmentalized and quantified relation between things. When, as under capitalism, our labor power becomes a commodity, we become factors in production, objects, sexual and in every way, which the economists, the sociologists and the rest of the vampires of capitalist science then examine, plan for and try to control). Juliet Mitchell ("Women—The Longest Revolution") also believes that although women "are fundamental to the human condition, yet in their economic, social and political roles they are marginal" (93). The error of her method, in my view, is that once again an interpreter of Marx, this time Althusser, is her guide. Here separation of economic, social and political roles is conscious policy. Labor power is a commodity produced by women in the home. It is this commodity that turns *wealth* into *capital*. The buying and selling of this commodity turns the market into a *capitalist* market. Women are not marginal in the home, in the factory, in the hospital, in the office. We are fundamental to the reproduction of capital and fundamental to its destruction.

Peggy Morton of Toronto in a splendid article, "A Woman's Work Is Never Done," points out that the family is the "unit whose function is the *maintenance of and reproduction of labor power* i.e. . . . the structure of the family is determined by the needs of the economic system, at any given time, for a certain *kind* of labor power" (214). Benston calls, after Engels, for the capitalist industrialization of household jobs as "preconditions" for "true equality in job opportunity and the industrialization of housework is unlikely unless women are leaving the home for jobs" (207). That is, if we get jobs capital will industrialize the areas where, according to her, we only produce use-values and not capital; this wins us the right to be exploited equally with men. With victories like that, we don't need defeats. On the other hand, Morton is not looking for what concessions we can wring from the enemy but how to destroy him. "All too often we forget why we are organizing women; the purpose of building a mass movement is not to build a mass movement, but to make revolution." Benston, she says, "does not provide any basis on which strategy for a women's movement can be based." The absence of this motive for analysis in the movement generally "encourages a real liberalism among us" (212). Right on.

⁷ For those who believe the struggle in the social factory is not political, let them note that here, more than in the factory, is the State directly the organizer of the life of the worker, especially if she is a woman, and so here the worker confronts the State more directly, without the intervention of individual capitalists and the mediation of trade unions.

⁸ Southern California had experienced a huge wave of immigration during the war. Between 1940-46, the population of San Diego (home of shipyards and naval base) had increased by 61 percent, that of L.A. by 29 percent (*Business Week*, December 20, 1947, 72).

numbers. For all the reasons outlined in the pamphlet, we wanted money and saw no alternative to demanding jobs.

That we were immigrants from industrial, farming or coal-mining areas made us more dependent on that paycheck, since we had only ourselves to fall back on. But it gave us an advantage too. In the new aircraft and electronics industries of L.A., in addition to the standard jobs for women, for example in food and clothing, we—more white women than Black, who were in those days largely denied jobs with higher (subsistence) pay—we managed to achieve new freedom of action. We were unrestrained by fathers and mothers who stayed “back East” or “down South.” Trade unions, formed in the East years before by bitter struggle, by the time they were imported West were negotiators for a 10-cents-a-year rise, and were part of the disciplinary apparatus which confronted us on the assembly line and which we paid for in high dues taken out before we ever saw our money. Other traditional forms of “political” organization were either non-existent or irrelevant and most of us ignored them. In short, we made a clean break with the past.

In the women’s movement of the late ‘60s, the energy of those who refused the old forms of “protection,” or who never knew them, finally found massive articulation. Yet twenty years before, in the baldness of our confrontation with capital (directly and via men) we were making our way through what has become increasingly an international experience. This experience taught us: the second job outside of the home is another boss superimposed on the first; a woman’s first job is to reproduce other people’s labor power, and her second is to reproduce *and sell* her own. So that her struggle in the family and in the factory, the joint organizers of her labor, of her husband’s labor and of the future labor of her children, is one whole. The very unity in one person of the two divided aspects of capitalist production presupposes not only a new scope of struggle but an entirely new evaluation of the weight and cruciality of women in that struggle.

These are the themes of *Women and the Subversion of the Community* (original: of the Dalla Costa article). What was posed by the struggle of so-called “reactionary” or “backward” or at best “non-political” housewives and factory wives in the United States twenty years ago is the starting point for a restatement of Marxist theory and a reorientation of struggle. This theoretical development parallels and expresses and is needed for an entirely new level of struggle which women internationally are in the process of waging.

We’ve come a long way, baby . . .

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class.

Selma James
Padova, July 27, 1972

The following pages from 10 to 13 of the original ’72 edition, where Dalla Costa was named other 6 times for important passages, have been cancelled. The pag. 10 was beginning with “ It is no accident that the Dalla Costa article has come from Italy.

64 Larch Rd.
London NW2
6 June 1975

Dear Sisters,

Some things may not have been clear from the letter the Power of Women Collective sent to subscribers explaining that there was "a serious error in the address list on page 2 of our Journal no. 3", (the error being that we included the via dei Tadi address in Padova as a place where people could contact our political perspective.)

One inadequacy of our letter is that we were referring to the Centro Femminista and should have said so. It was an oversight on our part to refer to their address without using their name, and we apologise for this. Another shortcoming is that we did not sufficiently bring out what is fundamental in our differences with this group. After further discussion we have understood better how we can differ from other groups who also say that they are "for wages for housework", and we are more confirmed in our original view.

The implications of Wages for Housework have been considerably developed since this perspective was first put forward. This is as a result of the experience of different groups in different countries and our continual exchange of information and ideas. We are clearer now about what our perspective means in organisational terms.

The basis of our politics is women's work in the home. Our organisational practice therefore can only flow from this fundamental relation to capital which all women share. We have seen that women have been isolated and separated from each other by their work and even by the rebellion against their work. We have seen that we have been forced to make limited and 'separated' demands, for child-care, for higher wages in waged jobs, for abortion, for money to live without a man, struggles which don't draw immediate strength from each other because they are waged in isolation by women in different situations. Thus we have seen the necessity of making a demand that speaks to the needs of us all, that can bring us together. We seek therefore to build a movement that can bring together all women as housewives, in all the different situations in which we find ourselves: married/single, heterosexual/lesbian, mother/non-mother, with/without a second job, young/old, through a campaign for the wage, for every woman, on an international level.

Negatively, we have experienced in our struggles as women how, unless we demand the wage per se, from the beginning and for all women, we stand in danger of being defeated either because there are not enough of us or because the State has been able to utilise particular demands for its own purpose of our more intense exploitation. (There are more "opportunities" for women to get waged work in the United States now than before, but the female wage in relation to the male wage has dropped)

Positively, we are confident of our ability to organise that campaign and win that wage because we know that housework is fundamental to all women's work, that the need for a wage for that work is fundamental to all women, and that the struggle for the wage is a lever of power common to us all. To raise the demand, to let all women know that we want a wage for housework and intend to win one, is already a power for all women, and precisely the basis of organisation. Our involvement in individual struggles does not contradict but is part of a campaign, integral to building an organisational network. But our campaign is itself the strategy for struggle. It is a new strategy for struggle flowing from a new political perspective, an entirely new evaluation of the class struggle. To reduce our political activity to involvement in individual struggles only, is to throw out the analysis of what is the specific form in which capital exploits women and the specific response with which we propose to confront it. It is to negate Wages for Housework as an analysis because we negate the organisational conclusions that flow from it.

The report of the Triveneto Committee (A Long Weekend of Struggle) has made clear the ways in which propaganda and mass activity are one. To demand wages for housework internationally, as we said, is already a power. To come out on the streets together in a demonstration for it is inseparable from the demand. Making our presence felt has already made it possible for women to raise demands and make struggles which were impossible before. After a demonstration of 100 comes a demonstration of 1,000, and of 10,000, the possibility of strike action across the lines which divide us, of activities that can hurt the State and be seen as a power to other wageless workers as well as to the waged. Our campaign is the organisational framework which will make all these actions more possible in a way that organising in one neighbourhood, in one city, or even in one country, can never do because we can never feel or convey our collective

strength to the wageless, isolated but rebellious housewife. In some parts of the world the struggle for the wage directly is quite advanced. The power this generates is a magnet which sucks us out of the provincialism, nationalism, isolation and timidity which has been our training as women.

In conceiving of a mass campaign, we are making an organisational break with the left and with politics as they have practiced them. First, they have always seen themselves as outside the working class. In whatever section they were addressing themselves, their politics in theory and practice was never based on a mutual experience. We do not "intervene" in other women's struggles with Wages for Housework. That is our struggle, and that is the struggle of all women because all struggles of women are struggles for the wage.

Second, the left ignored us not only because they were men (some of them were not), but because we were unorganisable in their terms. We have an entirely different conception of what is organisationally possible and necessary for us as women who are isolated from each other and who find, when we confront capital, another section of the exploited (men workers) standing in our way. Our network of organisation must overcome this isolation and the divisions among us.

Third, because of their failures, the male left have criticised the working class: the working class was backward - it could not grasp their perspective, was not ready for it.

In varying degrees these have been the positions taken up by some who identify themselves with wages for housework. They have felt that a mass campaign for the wage was premature, that women are "not ready" for such a campaign. This is not our position; this contradicts the premises of Wages for Housework. We have seen that internationally women are already struggling to refuse work and win money, and the demand for wages concretises and expresses what is already present in the struggles women are making. We are not imposing on "other" struggles a demand which will "supersede" them but making a demand which names explicitly our mutual goals and makes it possible for us to draw on each other for further power.

The Centro Femminista, via dei Tadi, Padova, has repudiated a campaign for some of the reasons above. It is not accidental then, that they were able to cooperate organisationally with women's commissions of male organisations. Unable to break with the organisational practice of the male left, they were unable to break with the male left organisationally.

The question of the campaign for the wage for every woman, then, has become the dividing line for us between on the one hand wages for housework as one demand among many, as a slogan which is eye-catching, as a demand which one day we will struggle for, and on the other hand Wages for Housework as an international and revolutionary feminist perspective which we activate now to build the power of women on a mass level now. This is what we meant when we said in our letter that the Centro Femminista was "not a Wages for Housework group". The enclosed document by Ruth Hall is an analysis of the second international conference of the Wages for Housework network where all the issues above are made more explicit. It makes as clear as possible that the issue of the campaign is the issue of whether we are for or against Wages for Housework, and is not peculiar to any country.

The Power of Women Collective has been asked to organise an international conference in July for those groups and individuals who have broad agreement on this crucial issue and who want to compare experiences and work out how to further the campaign. In countries where a campaign has already been initiated, we accept the judgement of those groups which have initiated and are working on the campaign there as to who from that country should be invited to the conference. In Italy that group is the Triveneto Committee.

While there are occasions such as this conference when those who share this political perspective feel the need to meet on our own, this doesn't mean or imply that we aren't at all other times open to dialogue, discussion, communication and common action with all tendencies in the feminist movement. We are confident that many feminists will be increasingly drawn to Wages for Housework as a political and organisational strategy on the basis of their own experience and as they see for themselves its implications for women's power. In Britain we will be organising a national conference this autumn open to all groups and individuals who are interested in the perspective.

While we jealously guard our organisational autonomy against capital and the male left, we just as zealously nurture our links and relations with other feminist groups. But to state our position clearly and to dissociate ourselves from what undermines our position is not sectarian or destructive. We need clarity in order to ^{continue to} break new ground.

In Sisterhood, Power of Women Collective