

POWER of WOMEN

Immigration and Population Control

Dear Race Today,

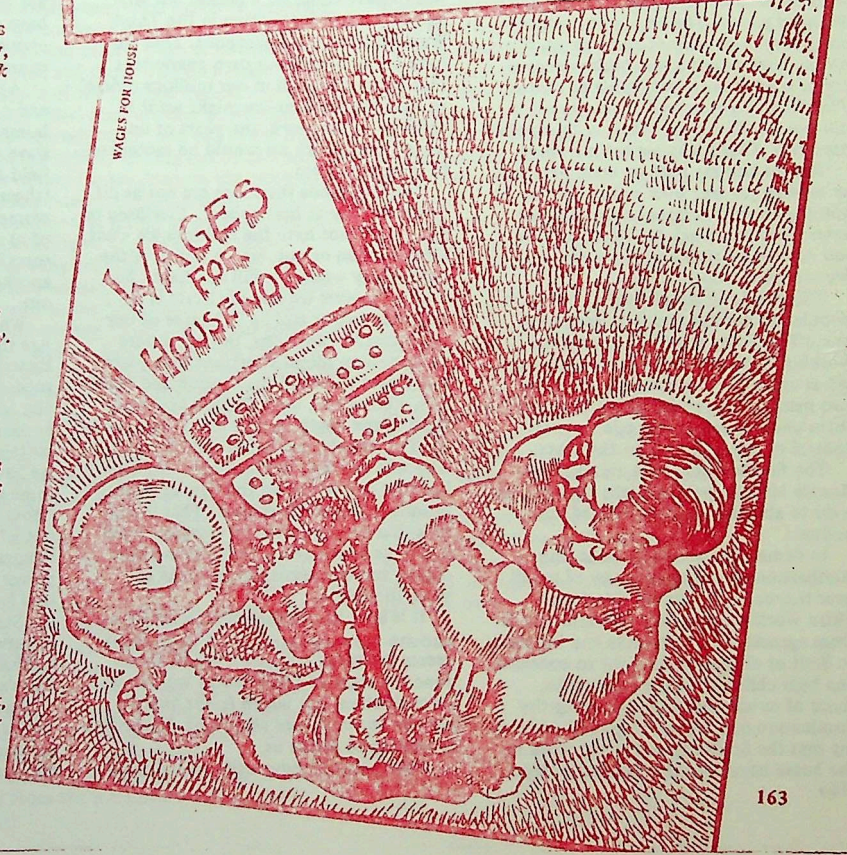
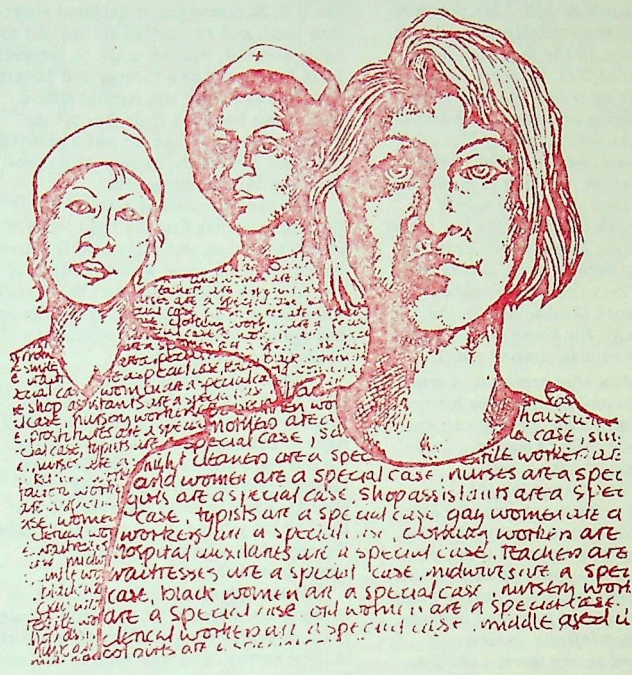
In the May issue of *Race Today*, a number of separate items appeared which, when viewed from our feminist perspective, are deeply interconnected. The first was a long article by the *Race Today* Women and an editorial, on the history and struggles of West Indian women. The second was an article on the farm workers in California, many of whom are Mexican immigrants or Mexican descent. The third was a Backlash by Bonnie Mass on population control.

The following leaflet was given out on May Day in Los Angeles, California. It was a day of action of the international network of organisations which is campaigning for Wages for Housework. It was given out in Spanish and English. (Other leaflets from different cities and countries will be part of the forthcoming anthology, *All Work and No Pay: Women, housework and the wages due.*)
Sisters — Why March?

On May 3rd, 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 organizes 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 color. 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 sterilize 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-



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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 organize; 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.

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 button holes 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 organize 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.

This brief and simple leaflet connects population control and immigration as one offensive by the State against the working class. With it, we dissociate ourselves again and more sharply from the two marked tendencies which between them undermine our struggle to wrest control of our bodies from the State.

The first tendency was attacked by Bonnie Mass in her Backlash: equating the right to abortion with control of our bodies.

In demanding abortion alone, the sterilisation forced upon many of us, all over the world, is ignored. Black and Third World women face constant attack from agencies of propaganda and butchery to limit or eliminate our right to conceive and bear children. In the metropolis, those of us who have been refusing the domination of the male wage and demanding that the State pay us for our work in the home have been the particular target

not only of sterilisation but of compulsory abortion. Mayor Daley of Chicago ordered that pregnant Welfare Mothers (Unsupported Mothers on SS), white and black, be rounded up the day after the U.S. Supreme Court declared abortions legal, and be coerced to consent to being aborted. Women must be prevented from raising the new George and Jonathan Jacksons and their less famous sisters. Our uterus has been their free labour power machine. When we put a price tag on it and change the quality of its product, we become dangerous.

Demanding abortion without at the same time demanding the right to have children is racist and plays into the State's hands. Here we agree with Bonnie. But she does not seem to see that the State's offensive is not against powerless victims, but against women on the offensive and children on the offensive.

Women who, while fighting for the right to abortion, refuse to accept the urgency of struggling for every woman's right to control her reproductive organs, for our right also to have children, are taking a position with the ruling class; they are often salaried members of that class whose job is to help capital manage the rest of us. There is a class line between us and them.

But the refusal of millions of women in many countries to let the State consign them to years of unpaid, unwanted work in their homes cannot be seen in this way. The right to abortion allows us to choose not to have children, a partial but vital choice, no less for women in the Third World than in the metropolis. That we have no money of our own guarantees that we women will in our millions refuse to have the children we might want in order to refuse work, the years of unwaged housework we would be sentenced to if we had them.

Our situations therefore are not as different as they at first appear. Sterilised or not, we do not have the children we want; metropolitan or not, we do not have the right to say when we will not have children. Wherever we are, the State is determined that it will be in charge of our reproductive functions. In Italy where three million illegal abortions take place every year to which the Church and State turn a blind eye, both Church and State fight to the death against this being legalised. The State's plan is not only to choose who will and who will not have children but first and foremost to keep all women intimidated and disciplined. That is capital's first concern with all workers. What is unique to women is that our internal organs and our sexuality are areas of work discipline.

It is easy to see, therefore, why we repudiate the second point of view which seems less racist because it seems to defend the right of Third World women to have children, but which is not looking for the power to win that right. Rather it is looking to divide us.

That point of view artificially divides

us into those who should submit to the State's plans and those who should not.

In Bonnie's otherwise informative pamphlet, *Political Economy of Population Control in Latin America*, she is quite willing for us to submit our bodies to the plans of some States and not others, to the plans of 'socialist' States.

In addition, in her Backlash she refers to 'our proletarian and, or, our Third World sisters'. Are we her readers all non-proletarian and non-Third World? Are we outside of State planning of population because we are feminists and/or readers of *Race Today*?

Women overwhelmingly, in 'socialist' States or not, do the unwaged work of producing workers and have little or no access to money of our own. That is a proletarian situation. That is the specific relations of production between women and capital. To deny that this is proletarian is like denying a house slave is a slave because she must sleep with the master. Further, 'The fact that on a mass scale women are unwaged workers has determined such a radical lack of power in working class women as to determine a lack of power even among bourgeois women.' This from our Italian sisters.

To suggest that any woman submit to any State's plan cannot raise our power as women against capital. Such a suggestion is not rooted in class politics. And in the absence of class politics, capitalist morality rears its debilitating head. Bonnie asks in her Backlash which women are 'exploited to a greater extent' (Lord have mercy on us if we aren't exploited enough), and gives us a multiple choice exam.

A) is 'women in the home as alienated and unpaid labour.' B) is women 'in the home as unpaid labour AND on the job as slave wage earner.' C) is women 'in the field as agricultural labour and in the hut (these women constitute the majority of women in the world).' No better example of a) and b) than c), women in agricultural labour who go home to huts to do another job of alienated and unpaid labour.

What are these great divisions in aid of? Are they to uncover a source of power? Exactly the opposite. These divisions succeed in mystifying what we internationally have in common as women—unwaged housework in huts, council houses and cottages in the suburbs. We explore what we have in common not for the sake of some abstract 'sisterhood'. We need to know what we have in common to find out who is on our side so we can make a struggle and win. We need to find our power base internationally to fight against that housework which we perform for the State. An important part of that housework is our function of having or not having children according to the State's wishes.

Since Bonnie sees Third World and 'proletarian' women as victims, she doesn't see our struggle for power, for money of our own with which to keep those chil-

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men and at the same time refuse the slavery that having children for capital ensures. To tell us that 'the majority of our sisters throughout the world are denied nourishment, education and fair working opportunities' is the victim theory complete. Nourishment we are denied when we and the men we are the dependent slaves of are denied wages. Education in capitalist schools can never be the source of our revolutionary training. Fair working opportunities - well, only a defeated victim or capital itself can believe such a thing exists. To which of us is work an 'opportunity'? To whom of us is work 'fair'? The *Race Today* Women's article quotes a West Indian woman hospital worker. 'It's not the work I want. I am only lending my labour for the money. So if I can lend my labour to something to get more money, I would'. That's fair. To lend less labour and get more money is even fairer. The fairest of all is a wage for wageless work so we can 'begin to refuse any work.

Third World women refuse to be baby machines and refuse to be sterilised. So do women in the metropolis, so do women in 'socialist' or 'non-socialist' States, Third World or otherwise. Unable to see our mutual refusal of exploitation, Bonnie doesn't see our mutual exploiter. Dividing us by degrees of exploitation, and by the brand names of different capitalist governments (Harold Wilson is a socialist), she cannot see that unless we all fight for power against the State, none of us will achieve it.

But this assumes one State internationally and one working class internationally, of which we women are a crucial part. Bonnie must know that all U.N. members States met in Bucharest last August to plan the quality and quantity of the labour power we are to produce for them on a world scale. One of the Rockefellers and the lady from Russia no doubt had a lot to say to each other about how much our uterus was to produce where, and how hard we were to work making babies into productive and obedient workers. If we didn't know it before (and some of us did), we now should know that the right of women in N.Y., Moscow and London to have or not to have children is inextricably linked with the right of women in Calcutta, Nairobi, Brasilia and Havana. And the demand for that right can only be based on the demand for money of our own.

We demand a wage for every woman for the work we do of bearing and rearing children for the kitchens or labour markets everywhere. We demand a wage for every woman who cannot bear children because she has been sterilised or intimidated or because she is refusing the slavery of motherhood. (By the way, the woman who refuses to have children has also overcome capitalist propaganda that having children 'fulfils' women and our social destiny. It is comical to hear capital caught in its own propaganda where it wants women to have fewer chil-

dren. It is not comical to hear 'our proletarian brothers' measuring their virility by how many women they made pregnant).

We want to make absolutely clear that our demand for Wages for Housework is the only way to demand the right to have or not to have children, the only perspective that begins with the least powerful and seeks to unite the more powerful with her. But that unity is based on mutual material interest, not charity or pity. We want to make clear also that Wages for Housework is our way as women to disrupt all capital's plans for which of us will bear children and which will not, where, how many, in what circumstances, our way to disrupt their plans for immigration, emigration, and every other facet of the international labour market. Our demand for wages, then, is our specific attack on the organisation of the labour market which is based on capital's control of the uterus and all the wageless work of raising its products; a labour market through which capital controls other parts of our bodies for a pittance of a wage.

We oppose their plan for the labour market by refusing to let them regulate our production of labour power. They can keep the price of labour power when they regulate its supply. Thus our having children in one place can be as productive to them as our not having children in another. Until we have grasped this, we cannot really grasp what capitalist planning is. We continue instead to see making babies and raising them as outside of capital, and those who do housework as outside of the struggle against capital. We make a division between 'production' and 'reproduction', and fail to see that making babies, making motor cars and harvesting tea are done on the same assembly line by the same class; that all production of things or people is the reproduction of capital and its power, which capital plans as one whole. We cannot accept Bonnie's analysis because it reduces the 'proletarian' and Third World women to passive victims to whom 'we' (and we don't know who that 'we' is) must turn our attention, forgetting our own exploitation. Liberalism like this always ends up in racism and sexism, whatever our race or sex. We are not missionaries in search of a flock; vanguards in search of proletarian sheep. We are all protagonists in the struggle against the exploitation of our bodies.

We cannot accept Bonnie's analysis because we refuse to feel guilty about the power we have achieved against capital if it is our 'good fortune' to be exploited in the metropolis. Our power must be strengthened, not weakened, and that can only happen if our struggle for power is spread and connected with the same struggle elsewhere. Women's struggle for the wage is international; that is why our campaign is international.

Bonnie, perhaps unwittingly, is not so far from the moralists who complain

that we in the metropolis eat too much, live too well and have too many children. All these are used against us when we make our wage claim in the home or out of it. This is the doctors' excuse for giving us hysterectomies and forcing on us other forms of sterilisation while we're under anaesthetic, under their care'.

For 400 years capital has been whispering and shouting that we have too much, weeping crocodile tears for those who have less - not less than they, but less than us. To invite a redistribution of our poverty is either to invite capital to cut our standard of living further and accumulate power against us faster, or to invite us to cut our standard of living ourselves and proletarianise Oxfam. Capital we know is not a charity. Is the revolution a charity? This should be discussed in church; political movements have no time for soul-searching, guilt or the view of women as needy and powerless victims.

We base ourselves on the struggle for power against the State, whatever national mask it hides behind. For the wageless everywhere power begins with the struggle for the wage. We women want it and need it, not in one place but everywhere. We know we can only get it by fighting for it, and this we have been doing. The *Race Today* Women's article is a firm piece of evidence of that. It is another proof that the present crisis which capital faces internationally is our doing. We the working class are capital's crisis: waged and wageless have struggled for more than was compatible with the profits they needed, not in one place but in every place at once. This solitary, shattering and irrefutable fact confirms that what we are demanding as women, a wage as a lever of power against our work, will be increasingly relevant to other sections of the class - men, employed and unemployed.

This only opens the subject of population control; but the opening is large enough for us to glimpse when and why population control began. It began with capital, the reign of wage slavery. It was first perpetrated on the wageless, those who were forced off the land in Britain with the Enclosure Acts and the Highland Clearances, and into wage slavery or pauperism; Those who were exterminated in their native new world for refusing wageless slavery; and those who made the Middle Passage to replace them. From the moment it came into the world dripping with blood and dirt, our bodies white or black, metropolitan or Third World, belong to capital. What is completely our own and belongs to us is the struggle to get them back.