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## LIVING THROUGH THE CRISIS WOMEN IN N. IRELAND AND BRITAIN

LIVING THROUGH CRISIS IS NOT NEW TO WOMEN. Even in "normal" times, women all over the world have to cope with one crisis after another just to survive. Prices are a crisis, rent money is a crisis, bringing up children is a crisis, depending on a man is a crisis. Getting money of our own is a crisis.

ON TOP OF ALL THIS IN NORTHERN IRELAND women have been living with bombs and guns. Soldiers patrol their streets, search their houses and interrogate them and their children. Irish women are fighting a war.

NOW THE CRISIS IS COMING OUT IN THE OPEN HERE TOO. This crisis is not about switching something off. It's not about the three day week. Our crisis is about three days pay, low pay, no pay. It's about the extra work it takes to get by on less money, the extra work we have to do when husbands and children are home more. The government are telling us to solve their crisis. What's in it for us but more work and worry?

THE MINERS ARE COMING OUT; the troops may be coming back. Now is our chance to say what we want and fight to get it.

Come to a meeting. Speakers include HOUSEWIVES FROM BELFAST.  
Film: WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA. . . . Discussion.  
Thursday, 14th February, 7.30 p.m. LORD PALMERSTON PUB  
308 Kilburn High Road

Bring your friends. Pass this leaflet round or put it up in your launderette - if you can still afford to go there. If you'd like to come but can't because of babysitting, call 459-1150 and we'll try to help.

Organised by the Power of Women Collective

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

The Power of Women Collective

LIVING THROUGH THE CRISIS : WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND BRITAIN  
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The following is a transcript of a meeting 14 February, 1974 in Kilburn, London, by the Power of Women Collective. We felt this was a useful and easy way to introduce ourselves as a collective to women new to the movement and to let other women know something of what we have been doing and how our views are developing.

The leaflet advertising the meeting said:

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Organised by the Power of Women Collective -WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK.

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Other publications available at this conference

"The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community"

"Power of Women", journal of the Collective

"Wages for Housework" translated from the Italian

"Wages for Housework and the Struggle of the Nurses"

"The Family Allowance Under Attack"

and various leaflets, statements and posters.

Badge: Wages for Housework

ESTHER RONAY opened the meeting, and read the following statement.

Women in Northern Ireland are fighting in a war. They are central to the struggle against British control of Northern Ireland. They are fighting with guns, with rent and rate strikes, through street demonstrations and protest marches, through keeping their families alive, at home and in the prisons. Their struggle is not part-time but involves every minute of their day. In the process many of their traditional roles as women, wives and mothers are changing. As more and more men are killed or imprisoned women's responsibility for the struggle is becoming more and more visible. Women too are being interned and imprisoned for resisting the British army. The Price Sisters, accused of throwing bombs, are in Brixton Prison undergoing forced feeding like the Suffragettes did.

The struggle in Northern Ireland is based in the community. It has often been assumed that it is only in the factory that fights can be won, for there we have the power of going on strike. But the people of Northern Ireland have shown the power the community can have through armed struggle. In this process, the women have found their own power. They have taken arms and are confronting the State head-on. They have gone on rent strikes and have left their jobs and are claiming the wealth that has been stolen from them many times over. They are rejecting the traditional work of the housewife in the home.

In Britain too women are confronting the State in the community. We have struggled to save our Family Allowances, have gone on rent strikes, have shoplifted when we couldn't afford the rising prices, have fought against the cohabitation rule and Social Security spies, have squatted when we were homeless, have fought against the racism of housing authorities and the law and have defended our kids against the police and school authorities.

The work in the home that all women do without receiving a wage is essential to the State. They know very well that if women stopped doing this work, neither women nor men would make it to the factory or the office in the morning or be able to work long hours of overtime. Children wouldn't grow up to take their turn in the same factory or office. Industry would collapse. In the present crisis, government and industry are counting on women more than ever to bail them out, by our working more and having less in our pockets. As prices rise, we can't afford easy-to-cook foods and have to spend longer shopping around; the amount of work, housework, increases. For women, the three-day week means doing more housework on even less money. No woman do a "three-day week" - a woman's week is always seven days. And many women who work outside the home are still doing five days either in cold unlit offices or in industries that are exempt from the three-day week such as food. We lose out all the way round. They remind us of our patriotic duty to save electricity with helpful suggestions. There was, for example, a full-page advertisement in the Evening Standard which suggested among other things that housewives should use a dustpan and brush instead of a Hoover.

Whatever happens, we're supposed to soldier on. We are the ones who are expected to keep the family together "for the good of the country."

We will be showing a film about women in a mining valley in South Wales. They talk about their experiences in the 1926 General Strike and the many other strikes during the Thirties, and about their struggle as women. Living in a mining village, their whole lives were shaped by the mine. And when they washed the coal out of the men's clothes, the mine owners who did not pay them got the benefit of their labour. Much has changed, but this has not. Then as now the success of a strike depends on the support of the women and children. And that support will spring from their rebellion against what the mines have done to them.

We can learn in many ways from the experience of the women of Northern Ireland. Their fight against the army may soon be particularly relevant to us. We've already seen the army at Heathrow, and being used against the Scottish ambulance men's strike. This is only the start. As Robert Carr said recently, he "couldn't guarantee" that the army and police would not be used together in industrial disputes.

The battle in Northern Ireland has given the government practice in how to use the army against us. It's closer to home than the rest of the Empire was and the housing estates look the same. But because it's closer to home, it has also taught us what to expect and give us a few hints about how to deal with them when they come down our streets. And that army has been demoralised by the beating it's getting over there.

In Britain we are now in the midst of a confrontation between workers and the State. We will be asked to support our own side, the workers' side. And we will, as we have always done. But this time we want not only our side to win, but for us as women to win. So in this crisis we will support the men and make our own demands as workers in the home, in the factory and in the office. We demand wages for housework. We demand that employers and their government pay us for the work we do free. We want money of our own. We know that the money we are demanding back is our own. As women we are ready to make a fight, against our work and for our money.

(FILMED INTERVIEW WITH ROSE MacADOREY FROM THE ARDOYNE, BELFAST)

ROSE CRAIG: I hope you don't mind me sitting down here, but my legs are a wee bit shaky. That interview was of a very good friend of mine, and not only was she lifted but also her son. He was arrested simply because he was in the house. He's only 14 years of age and he only got out on bail two days ago, by courtesy of Special Branch who said they knew he was not involved in anything but they were holding him to try and make Rose give information which she didn't have, and they didn't believe her. Now he was held for 11 days and he's out on bail at the moment. He's still not cleared of the charge and it might be six, seven months before he is even free to go to another town on a holiday.

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

politics were and the different political organisations.

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

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

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

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

And in this way I have a great sympathy with the miners and their wives because the miners get their strike money, their dole money, but it's less than what they were earning in the mines. It's their wives who get the cut, their wives who still have the same number of mouths to feed, the wives who still have the same problems at home. Mines can still go into the pub for their drink; and if his meal isn't there whenever he goes in, the poor woman's going to get it again. And now the government's going to turn round and Heath says that if he gets voted again they're going to stop the strike money for the women. Well let the women do what quite a lot of the women have done in Belfast. I don't know if it has been in the papers here. Whenever the National Assistance, or Social Security as youse call it here, was stopped, the women brought the children down and told the government: you look after the children, we can't. (RIGHT ON.)

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

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

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

And we support the miners' wives 100%, and the miners.  
(APPLAUSE)

ESTHER: WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA was made by a group of women in 1971, and unfortunately doesn't include any of the women's opinions about the last miners' strike which we missed by about two months. We shot it in the December before the '72 strike.

(FILM: WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA)

HELEN LOWE: I find it very difficult to follow the speaker and the films, but I'd like to speak to what happened in the last miners' strike in 1972, where I think we began to see what the women in the film said, that the women need a separate organisation of our own, and this began to happen at the beginning of 1972 in the big miners' strike. There were several places where we know

this happened and there are probably several more where it happened and we don't know about it yet.

But in Betteshanger in Kent the women there - it's a small village which is built right on the pits and the houses belong to the Coal Board - the women there decided that they wanted to form their own committee. And when they got together to try and organise this committee, the first people they discovered were against them was the trade union, not so much against them as trying to tell them what to do and how to do it. And it got to the point at a meeting of the women which had a platform of men from the union that one of the women had to get up and say to the men, why don't you put on a bra and a pair of pants if you want to come and run our meeting? The situation just came to a head there, where the women who started off feeling that what they were doing was in support of a union action, discovered that if they wanted to carry on organising in support of the strike and also to begin to make their own demands, that they were in fact going to have to do it against the union. And one of the most important things that happened there was that their husbands very soon realised that they were with their wives, with the women's organisation, rather than with the union, and the men would go along to the union officials and tell them to leave the women alone, the women wanted to organise.

In Rugeley near Birmingham, the women got together when they deducted the income tax rebates from the Social Security money, so that there's a family quoted as getting £7.31 for a week, and they didn't have enough money to feed the kids. They began to do what Rose described has happened already in Northern Ireland. They took the kids to the Social Security office and said, if you won't feed the kids, we can't, so you can have them. And they tried leaving the children there. But they couldn't bring themselves to leave them there overnight, and at the end of the day the social services came along and took them all off in a bus for a hot meal in some canteen and sent them home. And the next day they did it again. They had a demonstration at the Social Security and the council offices. And at the end of that struggle they got their money raised. It wasn't a question that the women got together because they had some fine ideal about organisation and getting together. They got together because they had to. They didn't have the money, they knew they couldn't go and battle with the Social Security on their own. So the only way to do it was to get together and do it. And they achieved what they were after.

Another example of what happened was in Coventry where the women got together and actually helped on the picket lines and helped with feeding the men and following the lorries that were bringing in the coal that was going into the power stations. They had to find out where this coal was and the women helped on that too. So we began to see in that strike the positive things that can happen when women begin to organise. And it wasn't just a question of organising in support of a strike that the men were doing, but they began to make their own demands in that process. Because if the woman was at home with the kids, she couldn't go out and organise, but if the man was at home on strike, he could stay in with the kids, he could cook the dinner. And this began to happen in that strike in 1972. And I'm sure, you know,

that the same thing is beginning to happen now in the mining areas where the miners are on strike, because it's obvious that there's going to be a lot of hardship among those families.

Now on the question of the crisis in general, apart from the fact that the miners' wives are really going through the mill now, I mean for all of us women, we go through the mill every day. It's not even a question of whether it's a three-day week or not a three-day week. We've always got the crisis of going to the shops and wondering whether to spend 50p on a bit of meat or to make it spread round on macaroni-cheese, as the ads tell you... (TAPE CHANGE)

... the area of education. In my own area, which is Haringay in north London, there's such a shortage of teachers now that the schools are sending home children one day a week. So the children aren't getting the education and when they grow up, there's absolutely no chance they'll be able to do the kind of examinations that they're supposed to pass in order to get better jobs, if better jobs are available and if they should want them. So in the school where my daughter goes, the parents have got together and organised round that. And what we're saying is that if the local council, if the local education Authority, can't provide education for our kids, we can't afford to take a day off our jobs (because most of us have had to take jobs in order to look after the children), if this happens then we'll take the children down to the town hall and we'll say, it's your responsibility to look after these children, to educate them. We can't do it. Let them take it from there in the same way as with the Social Security.

The State takes our children from us when they're five, and I remember well when I took my child to school first when she was five, and I really felt that it was the end of any relationship I might have had with her, that she was being taken away and I wouldn't know her again. And through the years she's been at school, I've felt that more and more, because she can't tell me what happens at school, I can't know what goes on in the classroom. And they say they're taking the child for her own good to educate her for her own future. And yet now they're turning round and saying they can't do it. So it's all back to me to take a day off work and lose my money if they can't provide a teacher for her. So the mothers, we've all got together and we've decided we're going to do something about that. And I think more and more women are being forced to do things that perhaps we weren't forced to before, I don't know; perhaps we didn't have the courage to stand up and shout back. But I think we're beginning to get the courage now.

I think that deals with the crisis that I feel I'm in anyway. (APPLAUSE)

JOYCE LUCK: I don't know all the fancy words. I'm from the dock area. I'm a docker's wife and I feel the crisis that we're in now I've been going on since I can remember, four years old. I feel when we get these adverts on the television, S.O.S., switch off the lights, switch off the fire, this is what I've been doing from when I was a kid. You know, we could never go in from one room to another without my dad saying, don't leave that light on,



don't leave that, because we haven't got a penny for the lights. (RIGHT ON, APPLAUSE) And this is what I feel, there's no crisis, there's always been a crisis.

I can relate to Rose with her problem. I live on the Isle of Dogs. There's police harassment; I've got a juvenile son of 14, and it's just a build-up of things. I was put on the Isle of Dogs to live; it wasn't a choice, it was a place to live. There was absolutely nothing there, so with friends we decided to call U.D.I. We are completely isolated from anywhere, there's water on both sides, so we decided to block the bridge one day. But since 1967, my children have been persecuted by the police and anything that goes wrong, if there's a warehouse broken into, if the boy doesn't go to school, it's, you know, 32-alidash, and that's it. (I'm shaking like a leaf.)

And I've experienced strikes, you know. I mean I've sat in with three kids under four years old demanding money, and my husband's been on 10-week strike. The one that stands out mostly in my mind, he was on strike for six weeks and every Thursday he used to go to a payout place where they paid the strike money from the Social Security; but it was kept in a separate place. On the last week, he returned back to work. He went back one day and was taken seriously ill. So we never had no money to come. So he said, well we'll have to borrow it. And I said, I'm fed up with borrowing money, this is all we're doing, borrowing this, leaving the rent to pay that. So I just got the three kids - they were what? four, seven and eight then - I just got the three kids, picked them up from school, went down to the payout office where they'd been paying out, you know, in the past, and I sat in the room with about 500 men. You know, and terrible looks I got sitting there with three kids. Then a guy came in and said, what are you doing here? You know, this is not for you to be here. So I said, well, my husband's ill and I've got no money. He said, but you shouldn't be here, your husband should be here. I said, but he can't; I'm here for some money. And this great big thing because I was a woman, in there with them men, so I said, well, I refuse to go until I go out with some money, and I'm intending to stay here or leave the kids here till I get some.

Anyway they just called out numbers, because they're paid off by numbers, like prisoners. And in the end I suppose they felt sorry for me, you know, this poor woman sitting in the middle of about 400 men, she must feel embarrassed, but I never! I never felt embarrassed. Because I wanted the money and that's all I was there for. And in the end they called me out and said, - it was £11, I remember - next week, you know, you'll have to go to the Social Security office, don't come back here no more, because you are an embarrassment to us. That wasn't the word, but that's what come across.

You know, there's all these things. These are all my crises. And like wages for housework, if I'd had my own income I would have said, and the £11; I'll feed my kids on my money, what I'm working for in the home. I've been called an overprotective mother, lots of things I've been called. You know, if I was a bad mother, I'd be - that's a bad mother. But if I'm a good mother, then I'm overprotective. And these things are just really my crisis, you know, all the way through the police on the island, and the

and that is my crisis. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

BERNADETTE MAHARAJ: Well with Helen's and Joyce's talk about their crisis, I'm afraid my crises are very much in their line. But added to that the fact of me being a black woman and an immigrant makes it even more kind of specific and more pinpointing. I can never forget the fact, wherever I go and whatever my crisis, it's magnified by me being as I am.

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

I feel a kind of war within my home, never mind the war that's being waged constantly - my husband is a factory worker. He works evening shift from two to 10. It means that my child who is at school never sees him for the week, because he comes home at 10 o'clock. I am left solely with the burden of them from 14 to 16 hours, because I just get about six hours sleep and I'm up again like a machine. And it's the fact that he's away from the home so much working for our bare subsistence, because that's about where it takes us. I mean you're worried about how you're going to spend the bloody money anyway, because you go to the shops and £8, £9 shopping, it just about runs out midweek, and you just have to make do. Well I'm sick of making do. And there is a kind of fight that's created within my husband and I, because I feel that even if he's off on a Saturday and Sunday I still don't get any time off. I mean I don't even have time for a bath; sometimes I have to go without a meal. And although he contributes a hell of a lot by way of sharing with the burden of the housework and washing dishes, doing the laundrette for me, I still feel very jealous when he is up and out for two hours or three hours. I mean it's not his fault. He has to get out, he feels a need to get out. Otherwise he'll go mad. And I am left. I mean there's no way to turn. And not me alone; most women I associate with, in my situation, they're in that position. Sunday to Sunday and year in and year out. And there is this kind of internal conflict. So there is no peace outside, no peace inside.

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

Anyway I don't work in a factory. I've worked in a hospital, it's all the same thing. They work you to death and even if I felt that if I went out and brought more money in, it still wouldn't be enough at the rate of inflation. Every day you go to the shops a penny up, this up, that up. And everyone - I've been to the launderette today and there is an old woman saying, oh this towel cost 90p a few months ago; now it's £1-something. And the realities of merely subsisting are really hitting us now. I mean if you're single, you're married, you're a bachelor or what the hell you are. And the only way I am dealing with it at the moment is to confront whatever situation I'm in.

I want to get my gas heater repaired after the conversion. They never did it properly. The Gas Board send me a big bill of £6 and tell me that I have to pay up before they come to repair it. So now they're trying different tactics. You pay your money and you have to wait six months before the service is carried out. You have to put in your bloody labour before you can bring £1 home in your pocket. So I stand up and I say, keep your gas service, I'm not going to pay for it.

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

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

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

La Parte Sostenuta dalla Donna Oggi nell'Irlanda del Nord  
di Madge Davidson, dell'associazione nordirlandese per i Diritti  
Civili.

Il ritratto che James Connolly fece delle donne Irlandesi come 'schiave di schiavi', è stato distrutto per sempre dal loro emergere come leaders forti e risolute nella campagna per la democrazia nell'Irlanda del Nord in questi anni.

Sebbene abbiamo un buon numero di donne prominenti come figure politiche - questa situazione non divenne regola piuttosto che eccezione fino a che il governo unionista non iniziò ad usare l'esercito inglese come strumento per mettere in atto la sua disastrosa politica di repressione attraverso l'Internamento.

Il 3 luglio 1970 - Il coprifuoco su Falls Road - vide le donne di Belfast prendere la loro posizione. L'area era stata tagliata fuori e gli spostamenti fuori delle case del tutto limitati per due giorni, tuttavia migliaia di donne marciarono da altri quartieri (zone abitate) portando cibo (di cui molto era stato dato da donne Protestanti), per le famiglie assediato dietro le linee dell'Esercito. Ignorando le minacce alla loro vita, marciarono direttamente superando ~~ixfiftoxspinx~~ le barriere di filo spinato e distribuirono il cibo e, aggiungendo al danno la beffa, continuarono in una marcia di vittoria tutt'intorno all'area per tre ore, cantando inni per i diritti civili ai soldati stupefatti.

Da quel momento le donne stanno sostenendo un ruolo prominente in tutti i movimenti di massa, specialmente nell'Associazione per i Diritti Civili dell'Irlanda del Nord. Ma il significato di ciò diventa chiaro solo se si capiscono le condizioni in cui le donne vivono nelle aree antiunioniste.

Le case in cui esse dovrebbero allevare le loro famiglie (con salari da fame o denaro proveniente da carità), si possono descrivere come null'altro che tuguri, con due camere da letto, senza acqua calda, con il gabinetto fuori; case costruite affrettatamente sul finire del secolo per sistemare gli operai dell'enorme industria del lino. Nonostante queste condizioni atroci, per la maggior parte le case sono spesso definite 'piccoli palazzi' da coloro che le visitano, per via del loro aspetto pulito e ordinato. Immaginate cosa devono provare quindi, quando alle quattro di una mattina qualsiasi vengono trascinate fuori dal letto, mentre i soldati inglesi scardinano a calci la porta di casa, trascinano ogni membro maschio della famiglia, tranne il lattante nella culla (e persino quello, talvolta) fuori nelle macchine Saracen per 48 ore d'interrogatorio e/o di tortura; spaccano il 'piccolo palazzo' (fanno buchi nelle pareti, soffitti, credenze; usano uncini per svelare le tavole dell'impiantito) e tutto ciò in uno sforzo inteso a localizzare armi e munizioni. Infine partono dopo aver avuto il coraggio di chiedere alle donne di casa di firmare un documento della legge dei Poteri Speciali in cui si afferma che "nessun danno è stato fatto alla casa durante la perquisizione"!

Oppure, immaginate quello che deve provare un parente di Maura Meechan e Dorothy Maguire. Queste due donne coraggiose, suonando clacson e segnali antinebbia, stavano dando l'allarme in una zona in cui l'esercito inglese stava per fare un'incursione, quando una pattuglia di soldati le assassinò a sangue freddo facendo saltar loro <sup>la</sup> testa nella loro macchina, e più tardi le accusarono di aver tentato di sparare ai soldati. Inutile dire che non fu mai trovata un'arma da fuoco e che le testimonianze di 20 persone in quell'area dicono che gli unici colpi furono sparati dall'Esercito. La necessità di donne 'vigilantes' che diano l'allarme alla gente può sembrar strana agli Inglesi - ma questo è ormai un rito di routine quasi ogni notte, da quando le tattiche dell'esercito cambiarono col cambiamento del governo nel 1970, da "pian piano" a "siamo più duri!"

Dal 9 agosto 1971, il giorno dell'Internamento, la lotta per la democrazia è stata portata avanti quasi unicamente dalle donne, semplicemente perchè gli uomini erano internati nei campi di concentramento, oppure imboscate, e non rimanevano se non mogli, mariti, sorelle a fare tutto il lavoro di organizzazione della campagna di disobbedienza civile contro l'Internamento. C'è un vecchio detto secondo cui le donne della nostra terra sono molto difficili da provocare - ma una volta provocate sono molto difficili da rabbonire - detto che si sta provando vero giorno per giorno.

Le donne del Nord ne hanno avuto abbastanza della repressione dell'autorità. Questa è la ragione per cui lo sciopero dei fitti e delle tariffe, <sup>il suo scopo è</sup> iniziato dal NICRA come l'unico metodo pacifico per resistere alla politica dell'Internamento della polizia, è stato un successo così strepitoso; perchè in ogni caso erano le donne che prendevano la decisione (non facile in circostanze normali) di non pagare affitto o tariffe al corrotto regime Stormont, fino a che tutti gli uomini non fossero rilasciati dall'Internamento illegale. Questa tremenda campagna sta avendo un tale effetto negativo sul governo unionista che <sup>questo</sup> nel suo stile <sup>abituale</sup> ~~ha~~ <sup>potrebbe</sup> ~~introdusse~~ <sup>che ora</sup> ~~più~~ <sup>che ora</sup> ~~legislazione~~ <sup>che ora</sup> ~~repressiva~~ <sup>che ora</sup> ~~che ora~~ <sup>permette</sup> ~~al~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~governo~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~dedurre~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~denaro~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~per~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~gli~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~affitti~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~dalle~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~indennità~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~di~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~previdenza~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~sociale,~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~dagli~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~assegni~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~familiari~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~-~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~effetti~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~da~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~qual-~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~siasi~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~pagamento~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~effettuato~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~dal~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~governo~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~e~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~anche~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~dai~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~salari~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~degli~~ <sup>di</sup> ~~operai.~~ <sup>di</sup> Questa legislazione detestabile è stata descritta dal gruppo d'azione Child Poverty in Inghilterra come "il più antisociale atto legislativo di questo secolo." - ma le donne, temerarie, continuano lo sciopero perchè il governo <sup>può</sup> ~~può~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>modo</sup> ~~recuperare~~ <sup>il</sup> ~~denaro,~~ <sup>ma</sup> ~~gli~~ <sup>gli</sup> ~~costerà~~ <sup>costerà</sup> e gli sta <sup>costando</sup> ~~costando~~ milioni di sterline <sup>parlo</sup> ~~parlo~~.

Attualmente ci sono più di 900 uomini e ragazzi internati o in attesa di internamento e <sup>finora</sup> ~~finora~~, nessuna donna <sup>finora</sup> ~~finora~~, sebbene alcune donne prominenti del Nord si siano anch'esse imboscate, temendo l'imminente internamento per le donne, supposizione realistica, <sup>considerando</sup> ~~considerando~~ che stanno procurando danno indescrivibile all'autorità attraverso la loro pericolosa resistenza - pericolosa perchè totalmente pacifica.

Naturalmente di sono donne, per la maggior parte provenienti dalla classe media, che sono Protestanti ex che, secondo loro, stanno facendo un sincero sforzo per stabilire 'la Pace' ad ogni costo. Sono organizzate in un Gruppo noto come "Women Together" (donne insieme) e sono considerate dalla maggior parte delle donne delle aree di lotta come una bottega di chiacchiere dove le donne si uniscono per lavorare a maglia, cucire e parlare della situazione ma non fanno proprio un bel niente per risolvere qualsiasi problema. Come dice una donna leader del movimento per i diritti civili nel Derry "Parlare costa poco". Ma perlomeno esse hanno stabilito un campo dove donne Protestanti e Cattoliche possono incontrarsi senza animosità, e almeno di questo bisogna dar loro credito. La maggior parte di lavoro nella campagna attuale è portato avanti da donne proletarie, ma ci sono segni che le classi medie stanno tentando di esprimere in loro disgusto per l'Internamento, rifiutando di pagare le ~~tariffe~~ <sup>imposte</sup>; naturalmente questo è solo in scala minore ma è uno sviluppo accolto favorevolmente, come lo fu l'apparizione della "Brigata delle Pellicce" alla massiccia adunata per i diritti civili tenutasi a Belfast. ~~Non si sa se~~ <sup>questo</sup> Tutto ciò indica che il movimento contro l'Internamento sta riducendo (riducendo) le barriere di classe nel Nord.

Naturalmente tutti questi sviluppi continuano senza alcuna <sup>vera</sup> copertura da parte della stampa, specie in Inghilterra, e la <sup>misura</sup> ~~misura~~ <sup>in cui le donne sono impegnate</sup> ~~per crederci bisogna veramente vederla~~. Negli incontri di disobbedienza civile, non si parla mai di "Women's Lib" semplicemente perchè qui le donne sono su un formidabile piano di parità, non solo in astratto, ma nella più importante sfera di capacità e di lavoro pratico raggiunto.

Le donne in Irlanda sono sul piede di guerra e ci staranno finchè non vinceranno le loro giuste richieste per la democrazia nell'Irlanda del Nord. Richieste che stanno facendo al governo di Westminster che esse comprendono essere l'autorità suprema negli affari delle 6 contee. Le donne d'Inghilterra, si metteranno ora anch'esse sul piede di guerra e si uniranno alla campagna per aiutarle?

WIP  
THE ROLE PLAYED BY WOMEN IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND TODAY

Madge Davison ( Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association)

The image that James Connolly once portrayed of women in Ireland as the "Slaves of Slaves" has been shattered forever by their emergence as the stalwart leaders of the campaign for democracy in Northern Ireland at the present time.

Although we have a fair share of outstanding women as political figureheads - not until the Unionist Government started to use the British Army as tools to implement their disastrous policy of repression through internment has this situation become the rule rather than the exception.

July 3rd 1970 - the Curfew on the Falls Road - saw the women of Belfast coming into their own. The area had been cut off and movement out of doors completely restricted for two days, yet thousands of women marched from other housing estates carrying food ( much of which had been given by Protestant women) for the beleaguered families behind the Army lines. Ignoring threats to their lives they marched straight over the barbed wire barricades and distributed the food, and to add insult to injury, continued in a victory march round and round the area for three hours singing civil rights songs to the bewildered soldiers.

Since that time the women have been playing a prominent role in all the mass movements, especially the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. But the significance of this only becomes clear if one understands the conditions in which women live in anti-Unionist areas.

The homes in which they are expected to raise a family ( on "dole" money) can be described as nothing more than hovels, with two bedrooms, no hot water, outside toilets - houses hastily erected at the turn of the century to accommodate the mill workers of the huge linen industry. Notwithstanding these atrocious conditions, most of the houses are often termed "little palaces" by visitors to them because of their clean and tidy appearance. Imagine how they must feel then, when at 4 a.m. any morning they are dragged out of bed as the British Army kick the front door

off its hinges - drags every male member of the family excluding the baby in the cot ( and even that not always) off to the waiting Saracen Cars and 48 hours of interrogation and/or torture - tears the "little palace" asunder - knocks holes in walls, ceilings, cupboards - uses grappling hooks to tear up floorboards - and all in a supposed effort to locate arms and ammunition. Eventually they depart after being audacious enough to ask the women of the house to sign a document under the Special Powers Act stating that "no damage has been done to the house during the search"!

Or, imagine how a relative of Maura Meehan or Dorothy Maguire must feel. These two courageous women were alerting an area that the British Army were about to "raid" by blowing car horns and fog horns, when a patrol of soldiers cold-bloodedly murdered them by blowing their heads off in their car and later accused them of having attempted to shoot soldiers. Needless to say, no gun was ever found and the statements of 20 people in the area say the only shots to be fired were from the Army. The necessity for women vigilantes to be alerting people may sound strange to English people - but this has been a routine ritual almost nightly since the Army's policies changed with the change of Government in 1970 - from "softly-softly" to "get tough".

Since August 9th 1971, Internment Day, the struggle for democracy has been championed almost solely by the women, simply because the men were either Interned in the Concentration Camps or "on the run" and there was no-one left but the wives, mothers, daughters and sisters to do all the work in building up the civil disobedience campaign against Internment. There is an old saying that the women in our country are very difficult to rouse - but once roused they are very difficult to pacify - saying which is proving true day by day.

The women in the North have had enough of repression by the authorities. This is why the Rent and Rate strike initiated by the NICRA as the only peaceful method to resist the Government's Internment policy, has been such a tremendous success - because in all cases it was the women who took the decision ( not an easy one



in normal circumstances) not to pay any rent or rates to the corrupt Stormont regime until all the men were released from illegal Internment. This tremendous campaign is having such an adverse effect on the Unionist Government that in true-blue style they introduced more repressive legislation which now enables the Government to deduct money for rent from social security benefits, family allowances - in fact from any payment made by the Government and also from the wages of workers. This obnoxious legislation has been described by the Child Poverty Action Group in England as "the most anti-social piece of legislation this century" - but undaunted the women are carrying on with the strike, for the Government may eventually retrieve the money but it will and is costing them millions of pounds to do it.

At present there are over 900 men and boys Interned or awaiting Internment and as yet no women, although some prominent women in the North have also "gone on the run" fearing the imminent internment of women, which is not an unrealistic assumption considering that they are doing untold damage to the authorities by their dangerous resistance - dangerous because it is totally peaceful.

Of course there are those women, mostly from a middle class background, who are Protestants and who are making in their opinion a genuine effort to establish "Peace" at any price. They are organised in a Group known as "Women Together" and are viewed by most of the women in the areas of strife as a talking shop where women gather to knit, sew and talk about the situation but do precious little to solve any of the problems. As one woman leader in the civil rights movement in Derry says - "Talk is cheap". But at least they have established a forum where Protestant and Catholic women can meet without animosity and must be given the credit for this much. Most of the work in the present campaign is carried out by working class women but there is an indication that the middle classes are tentatively showing their disgust at Internment by refusing to pay Rates, of course this is only on a small scale but it is a welcome development, as was the appearance of the "Tur Coat Brigade" at the massive civil rights Rally held in Belfast last Sunday. All

an indication that the movement against Internment is spanning the class barriers in the North.

Of course all these developments go on without any press coverage, especially in Britain, and the scale on which women are involved has really to be seen to be believed. No talk of "Women's Lib" ever enters civil disobedience meetings simply because the women here are formidable equals, not only in the abstract but in the more important sphere of capabilities and practical work achieved.

The women are off their knees in Ireland and they are staying off them until they win their right and just demands for Democracy in the North of Ireland. Demands which they are making of the Westminster Government which they understand is the ultimate authority in affairs of the Six Counties. Will the women of Britain now get off their knees and join the campaign to help them?

Testimony on Unwaged <sup>Housework</sup> Northern Ireland

I understand that there are some women who are opposed to my speaking today. But I am very glad of this opportunity to speak because I come from Northern Ireland and although Northern Ireland is always <sup>on</sup> the news <sup>media</sup> a woman's point of view is never heard.

I come from Belfast which is occupied by the English State. They have our soldiers there to stop the people trying to free their own country. I come from one of the segregated areas which is Catholic. The state has the areas sealed off by Iron gates at the end of all the streets and we the women of minority areas have suffered a lot through state control. First because its hard to get hold of any money. When you apply for a job in Northern Ireland you have to state which school you went to and all the firms know right away what religion you are. Eight years <sup>ago</sup> my husband was made redundant at work, he applied for about 10 jobs which he was well qualified for and was turned down because of his religion. So he went to Scotland to work. The state paid his fare over and since then I have not seen him. He sends me some support for my three children whose ages now are 13, 9, and 8. What I get from him now is well below National Assistance level. Although the state knows this they will not give me a penny towards the support of my family. I have even applied for free <sup>school</sup> dinners for my children. I have been turned down because the government judges my needs by what my husband earns and not by how much he contributes to his family. The point is that I have no rights by law. I am not the only housewife in our area like this. I know of others who have five and six children and the state gives them a bare subsistence. When these people apply once a year for the clothing grant which they are entitled to for their children they are turned down.

The state sees women as cogs <sup>in</sup> their machine and cogs that are not even worth oiling. This is how the state works in the houses of Belfast.

The woman is not given any wage for all the work she does. She is not given any wage for the time she gives to the state which is 24 hours a day. I started doing housework when I was 10 - 11 years old. The same as my daughters. And up until now I have never ever received a retaining fee either from the state or from my husband. I am a jack-of-all-trades. Here so since my husband left me as I now have to do in the home the jobs that he did, like papering and painting and general repairs, to the house. Also I now have the full responsibility of rents, rates, electricity and trying to clothe the children, without the occasional extra pound from my husband and although I am now living below state subsistence level the state refused to pay me for my work.

But this same state rules the home, from the day that you get a flat or a house. You are not allowed to paint the house the colour that you want. Then when a woman is due to have a baby the state says which hospital she is to go to. In a lot of cases the doctor induces labour so that the baby is born in the states time and not in its own natural time. When she leaves the hospital the state in the form of the welfare tells you how much weight your baby puts on and when she should be walking and talking. Then when she is 4 1/2 years old they tell you the child must go to school. They decide what sort of an education she must have. Whether she has a high enough I.Q. for grammar school or secondary. At what age she should leave, then try to put her into a job they want her to do and not what she wants to do. If the child is a slow learner - there is no hope for her. She will be given any old job and if she refuses she is then blamed as a trouble-maker. While the children are growing up and while the state is dictating what is right in the home the woman who obeys the state orders does not receive one penny in wage. Not if through ill health or anything else she does not come up to standard then the state again steps in and takes the women to court. The reason a lot of women are in ill-health and depression is because they have money problems in the home. If the state were doing what is right and paying a woman her rightful wage she would

*very little*  
have ~~no~~ health problems.

I applied for work at the employment exchange. The state trained me a leather stitcher and there are only two factories which would employ me and they are off the Shankill Road. I had to turn these jobs down because they are in the heart of a <sup>loyalist</sup> loyalist area. I have been threatened with my life if I am seen there again. When I explained this to the Social Security officer she made me sign a form to say I had refused two jobs and then I was told I would not get any benefits at all. All I am getting now is 5 pound a week. If I was being paid for housework I would need to go out to work. My family and myself would not be living under the conditions we are living in.

Another way the state is in the home in Northern Ireland is through the soldiers. Women, whose husbands and sons have been interned or sentenced for political reasons, and their sympathisers. When the soldiers raid one of these homes the women and children are insulted and degraded by the army. Many a time the woman woke up with a soldier standing over her. The raiding Patrol had burst in the door and he would tell her that this is a raid - we are going to search your house - get out of bed. When the woman asked him to leave the room he just laughed. She could not get her dressing gown. She had to wrap one of the blankets around herself and get out of bed. If there was a military policewoman with them if she or any of her children were girls. If she wanted to go to the toilet - she would go with her. If the woman tried to hit the soldier for being so insulting she would be beaten up. And make no mistake about it this is the only time that the state treats women

women as equal to men" it is under "interrogation" and "interrogation" and "sentencing" them. Needless to say the only reaction which the state gets from the women is not submission but retaliation in the form of stone throwing, fighting and harrassing the soldiers in turn. And also we want wages for the work that we do at home.

If wages for housework were granted in Northern Ireland it would mean a lot of people would give up their jobs in factories as they are forced to work there at the moment through sheer necessity as there are not enough jobs in the country at the moment and the rate of unemployment is very high there. And then the unemployed could get work and there would be a surplus of jobs which in turn would mean the large business people would have to raise the factory workers wages to keep the people working for them. And because there would be a surplus of jobs, the fear which the Protestant people have of losing their jobs, which is one of the reasons the unionist government was in power so long, would have been solved, and the people of N. Ireland would start to think what has the British government been doing with the money they have been making out of us all these years. And they would soon start to realise that the so called British share-holders had been using them to line their own pockets and the ones they should have been fighting and fearing all along was not the minority but the state. Then the way to a free and united Ireland would be seen as a better course than unity with England.

When women unite and win wages for housework they will then realise how they have been exploited by the governments of their countries and will also be able to be independent of men. Which in turn will make them realise that they need no longer be door mats to male bullying and dominance.

Rose Craig

TO THE READERS OF THE POWER OF WOMEN JOURNAL

We must draw your attention to a serious error in the address list on page two of our Journal Number Three. The address of the group at via dei Tadi, Padua, Italy, on page two should not be there. This group is not a Wages for Housework group.

In the past it has refused to participate in or support the campaign for Wages for Housework publicly launched in Italy on International Women's Day, 1974, by the then Lotta Femminista Group no. 2 and other L.F. groups.

In the present explosion of feminist activity and power on the abortion question in Italy, the via dei Tadi group have now said it is divisive to carry the Wages for Housework banner on abortion demonstrations.

These two positions are connected. Wages for Housework is not only an analysis of all of women's work beginning with our work in the home. It also makes political struggle against "women's work" in and out of the home an imperative. The right to abortion is an integral part of the power to determine the size of our family and therefore the power to control the quantity of our work. The abortion struggle is part of the total struggle against "our" work which is the only road to greater power for women, since it unites women on the basis of our common exploitation.

It is not surprising then that the via dei Tadi group have found themselves in political alliance with male left groups, separating themselves from the struggle for the wage and against our work, and from feminist autonomy.

The growing strength of the feminist movement against church, State and (on the so-called left) Communist Party who all opposed free abortion on demand, brought this issue to the stage of mass struggle it has reached today. Male groups now wish to cash in on this consistent feminist activity for their own political advancement, which can never result in the growth of power for women. The Triveneto Wages for Housework group in Padua have fought hard to keep the management of this struggle in the hands of the feminist movement. The via dei Tadi group not only joined with the male groups and signed leaflets with them, but in Padua used them to intimidate physically the Triveneto Wages for Housework group.

Actions and lack of them speak louder and plainer than words. Increasingly as Wages for Housework is seen to be the focus of struggle of women working in the home and out of it, it will be taken as a slogan by those who want to use it for their own political purposes. We are already experiencing this in other parts of the world. Wages for Housework is not three little words but a revolutionary perspective for action to build women's autonomous power against the State in all its forms on an international level. The via dei Tadi group's actions have made their politics clear. Therefore we ask you please to cross out their address in the copies of the journal that you have and to circulate copies of this letter to all who may have got the journal through you. The address of our sister organisation in Padua is:- Comitato Triveneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico, Centro delle Donne, Piazza Eromitani 9 bis, Padua, Italy.

GENERAL ADDRESS:  
64 Larch Road  
London, N W 2 England  
Tel. 452-1338

The Power of Women Collective  
JOURNAL ADDRESS:  
Flat 4  
5 River Terrace  
Henley on Thames, Oxfordshire, England

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 set out 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 Trivento 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 <sup>continue to</sup> break new ground.

In Sisterhood, Power of Women Collective