

WHY WE EXPELLED TORONTO WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK GROUP 1.

NOTES ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTREAL CONFERENCE FEB. 1975

Forward

The weekend of February 22, 85 women, mostly from the U.S., Canada and England, were in Montreal to discuss the direction of our movement. Although we were primarily North American, we understood that our decisions not only affected us on this continent but would have implications for the entire international network and would be part of the development of an international strategy.

For just about all of us, this conference represented a turning point. Two political tendencies were emerging. One based itself on the international nature of capital and the need to fight it on that level. The other gave lip-service to the international nature of capital and clung to the possibility and necessity of the local view. One saw the need for an international campaign for the wage, and therefore for organizational coherence to win it. The other saw wages for housework as a consciousness-raising tool or something to be won in dribs and drabs, here and there, with organization restricted to a conglomeration of groups. One saw leadership as a strength to the movement, to help us move forward. The other saw leadership as a threat to the development of individual members.

Although neither tendency was totally clear at the conference*, one attempted to put forward its point of view as clearly as possible. The other attempted to gloss over differences and obscure the issues. Glossing over differences is part of their perspective: if you only need a conglomeration of local views, why bother to clarify differences and choose a direction?

One tendency emerged as the political direction of the conference. A group of women who most clearly personified the other tendency was expelled.

For many of us, this was a moment of transformation. We had come to understand that what we decided in that room had significance, that we could not afford to be liberals any more, that capital was in crisis and so were we, and that we had to take the offensive and confront the state.

We were not totally clear at the time about what divided us. But we chose anyway, with all our uncertainties on the basis of what we knew and were certain of. Since then, with thought and discussion, we have come to understand much more completely both positions. We are even more sure now that our choice was correct and crucial. We hope these notes help other women in the network, both those who were at the conference and those who could not come.

Beth Ingber

Introduction

1. Political Direction vs Fragmentation.

Most of those who attended the Montreal conference came away understanding one crucial fact better. The daily lives of all women, whatever work we do, whatever relationships we have, wherever we live, are part of an integrated system of exploitation, to which our wagelessness is crucial. The struggles we make are therefore by their nature fundamentally connected. The task we face is not to build and link separate struggles but to understand the connection that objectively exists and to break down the divisions that capital has

* A few people were clear about the campaign, but some elementary questions remained - and remain. For instance the conference began on Sunday to discuss whether the campaign should start with a specific focus for our propaganda, and if so whether we should concentrate first on speaking to women on welfare. RH

imposed on us by making that connection clear and giving it concrete form, building and focussing the power that gives us.

Before this conference a number of us had not understood the difference between linking separate struggles and exposing an essential connection. People kept saying we had to show how struggles, e.g. the nurse's struggle and the housewife's struggle were "all the same struggle" and it sounded to us like the vanguardists trying to brush over the particularity of each situation. People kept saying all struggles were struggles for the wage and we thought there were a lot of other struggles going on too. People kept telling us ideas were power and we thought we were going to submerge ourselves in abstractions, or end up with the politics of "raising people's consciousness". They told us we had to go to all groups of women and talk about wages for housework; we thought we had nothing to say to these women. They told us we needed a campaign for wages for housework, and we understood only one word - not the campaign, not the wages, only the housework. The perspective sometimes seemed merely a useful way of looking at the independent struggles that women are forced to make. We had not understood how the perspective is both a reflection of our objective unity and a tool to give that unity another form and direction, to make a well-connected hand into a fist.

Waged or wageless we are all exploited through the wage relation. Waged or wageless we are all divided through the wage relation, and these divisions are essential to our exploitation. In the struggle for jobs that are the source of a wage each sector of the class is set against all others - the waged against the wageless, the waged against the waged, the wageless against the wageless. The working class isn't fighting for work, it is fighting for money. But the wage labour system is built on the poverty and powerlessness of those without waged jobs: we are forced to work for a wage and we are forced to fight each other for jobs. Trade unions defend the jobs of native white male workers; movements of blacks, immigrants, and women fight discrimination; nationalist movements in the 3rd world struggle for a "socialism" based on wage slavery. Other struggles, which have not been channeled in this direction, have still been undermined by the same divisions. The welfare movement had been isolated in the absence of a concerted movement of other workers to refuse wagelessness without accepting more work. The youth culture was disorganised and directionless; it refused the work but did not get the money. Millions of others struggling for money and against work have not had the power even of such a movement. For all of us, in trade unions, in the Women's Liberation Movement, in the welfare movement, in ad hoc groups, and alone, our unity has been only the objective unity of our exploitation, our enemy, and the motivating impulse of our struggle against them. The perspective of wages for housework has arisen from all these struggles and in enabling us to see at once all our exploitation and the source of our divisions it offers us a way to transform this objective unity into a strategy against work, against divisions, against capital.

Those of us who had not understood how we could base ourselves on our wageless exploitation to make a unified struggle looked for other ways to fight back. The prospect was pretty bleak. You could hope that the revolution would all pull itself together one day. Or you could hope that if everyone made a struggle where they were, to get organised and to win some improvements in their own situation, then these struggles and organisations could be linked, and maybe some day even hit capital all together. The trouble was that this process looked like taking forever. Struggles came and struggles went, and it was hard to see how we could get much stronger. Maybe the "working class" would get it together, maybe not; it was hard to see how we could do anything with our perspective to contribute to the fight for our lives, and hard to see where women would get the power to make sure the fight was on our terms.

This perspective is libertarianism, a conception of struggle as something that takes place in separate, local confrontations with no fundamental concrete connection. From it flows a particular view of theory, of international struggle, of leadership, of autonomy, and therefore of wages for housework.

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The document produced by the Toronto Wages for Housework Collective, "Statement of Political Differences with Wages for Housework Group I" began to break for us the stranglehold of this libertarian perspective, and the Montreal conference made still clearer what the differences are in practice between this perspective, which can sometimes sound almost like ours, and the perspective we need in order to move forward.

On the Saturday morning we dealt with the question of what is the wage. In the afternoon we fought over leadership, autonomy, and the international. All day the division was between those who saw the perspective as a way of uncovering the unity of our struggles and situations, as a way of making that unity concrete in a campaign, as a theory which will profoundly affect our practice, and those who saw only struggles around specific "issues" as concrete, who saw the perspective as something we have to "translate" into these issues,

and who thought of our integral connections as "links".

"Links" was the word we finally seized on to define the difference between the two perspectives. It had come up again and again when IGL was trying to express agreement with the concept of an international strategy. Again and again they emphasised that they did not deny the importance of links. Libertarians have always known the importance of links. In Britain they have an organised network with a regular newsletter and conferences. What they cannot envision, as long as they remain libertarian, is a strategy to take on the state as a whole, in which the form, the direction, the immediate goals and the results of local confrontations are shaped by the fact that these confrontations are moments of such an assault.

Saturday night we used the concept of links to draw the line between the libertarians and those who wanted to move in the political direction being laid down by the network. Many had moved in the course of the day to see that capital plans our international wagelessness, that the struggles of women everywhere are integrally connected, and that a campaign for the wage will allow these connections to emerge in a powerful form. Those who could not accept this perspective were caught in a libertarian ideology and view of themselves. The fact that in the past many of us have shared their views does not make them any less destructive. The expulsion has given us the clarity we need to get these ideas out of our way.

FOOTNOTE TO PAGE 6:

In October 1974 Lotta Femminista, an Italian organisation composed of groups with varying degrees of commitment to wages for housework, dissolved because of differences which paralleled those dividing the tendencies at this conference. Some groups, which with the dissolution formed the Comitato Triveneto per il Salario al Lavoro Domestico (Piazza Brevitani 26, Padua, Italy), were organising a campaign for wages for housework. The document quoted below was written by Padova Group I in opposition to this strategy. Since the dissolution, the Comitato has been continuing the campaign, and giving feminist direction to the campaign around abortion which is mobilizing thousands of Italian women. Padova Group I organised a demonstration on abortion in conjunction with the women's commissions of male left groups.

II) Every Struggle is a Struggle for the Wage

Silvia Federici's opening speech showed how the international refusal of waged work and of work in the community and the family have caused the crisis. She showed how capital is extending unemployment in an attempt to gain control of the situation, and planning to reorganise itself for the future, using workers' control, Union democracy, drugs, and reinforcement of the family. This presentation set the tone of the conference, by beginning to show concretely capital's international strategy and by bringing home the urgency of acting on ours.

But the specific issues that Silvia raised were rarely directly discussed, because many of us had not understood that our strategy is the campaign for the wage. The lack of understanding was apparent from the start. Some were saying that wages for housework was revolutionary because it was unattainable. Some, in the expelled group, Toronto Group 1 (TGI) said they wanted to "translate" wages for housework into "concrete things", and wanted a campaign "in a specific city". Some had objected to the dollar sign on the New York Button: they found it crude and materialistic, not revolutionary enough. A number of us, till this conference gave us a sense of our power, had simply not believed that a campaign for the wage was possible. The conference showed that it is both possible and necessary, by clearing up a number of points:

- 1) Money is power.
- 2) We need an international strategy if we are to win.
- 3) We need a campaign for cash wages for every woman:
 - to refuse their use of our wagelessness in the crisis.
 - to refuse the jobs they are offering us and leave the jobs we are doing.
- 4) We need the organisational power of a campaign to reach women everywhere, inside and outside the big urban centres.

The struggle for wages is revolutionary, whether it is being made by those who already receive cash directly related to their labour or by those who labour without a wage of that kind. The wage rate--how much work for how much wages--is the measure of our power: it is the bargain we must strike with capital. We say "wage" and not simply "money" because "wage" reflects the reality of our lives in that it implies the relation with capital which is the basis of all our struggles; it implies labour, the other side of the bargain. There is no place to struggle except within the wage relation in which we are all trapped. By struggling within it we will push this relation to the breaking point. We are fighting to price ourselves out of a job.

The amount that we win from capital, in cash and in time and in comforts is all wages--it is all in exchange for our labour. And it determines our life. In this "equal exchange" we always lose. The only question is "how much?" The class struggle is a struggle about how much--how deep a destruction of how much time for how much money. Every moment of our lives is controlled by capital, and we struggle every moment to determine what kind of bargain we are going to make. The bargain we strike determines how much time we can spend on the beach or at meetings, and how much at the assembly line; whether we live in a slum or in relative comfort, what our working conditions are; how much we have to prostitute ourselves for husbands, foremen, heads of departments; how much we see our friends and family and how much work we have to do for capital by working for them, what our relations with them are; how many times we have to say no to our children; how much humiliation we have to accept; how far we can refuse capital's dictatorship over our lives, how soon we can make the revolution.

Both capital and the working class are so essentially involved in this struggle over "how much" that attempts to change the "quality of life" are immediately translated into quantity, and fought for or resisted on that basis. Everyone must count the cost. Those who think they can change the quality of their lives without taking on this battle against capital end up redistributing their poverty and

miserable relationships in new ghettos. Or worse, they help capital invent new schemes for workers' control which are supposed to make us happy and capital rich in one motion, and which in fact serve to help them screw us out of money. We only gain when we gain at the expense of the ruling class.

The wage is how much we are able to win back from capital, and how much we are able to refuse to give them. Every struggle in the class war is a struggle for the wage. Every time women hold back rent, refuse work, shoplift, fight for free facilities or services, or better working conditions or paid time off waged work, we are fighting over the terms of our bargain with capital: we are fighting for wages. And because our bargain with capital is based on housework, we are fighting for wages for housework.

III The Campaign Vs. "Local Issues"

To pose these struggles in terms of wages is already to make clear the fundamental unity in the fights that women make, and it is already to have an idea of what we want to fight for in a specific struggle (time, money, power) and of what we want to avoid (fighting for jobs, or equality, or the industrialization of every aspect of our lives; ending up providing free services...) But its no good knowing what we don't want if we're forced into it anyway. If wages for housework is going to lift these struggles out of their isolation and give them power, we need something more substantial than an understanding in the heads of some organisers. We need an international campaign to win a cash wage for all women, for all the work we do, not as something to be fought for in each workplace, in each launderette, to be won, lost, bargained with, not as part of a deal between women of town X and city hall but as a recognised, established wage that we can count on as the foundation for all our struggles.

The struggle women are making for wages for housework in cash is revolutionary not only because, like all wage struggles, it wins back for us the wealth that we produce and that otherwise goes to build the power of our enemy. It is revolutionary also because it exposes how whole areas of our activity that have been considered "free" or "on our own account" are labour for capital. It thereby undermines the ideology of "equal exchange" which capital uses to keep wages down. In particular it demystifies the labour of women, which has always been veiled by the lack of a wage. It is revolutionary because it gives women a lever of power against that work and against the divisions that have crippled the working class, against capital and all its agents: employers, the welfare state, and mon. Every wage struggle is revolutionary, but the success of the struggle for more wages depends on the success of women who are struggling against wagelessness.

The campaign for the wage in cash for every woman is an urgent necessity now, because of capital's increasing use of wagelessness as a weapon against the working class. They have always maintained themselves on the basis of our free labour. But now through inflation they are massively increasing this labour, and because it is wageless there is no extra cost to them. Because we are wageless and our time is not measured they can make us do extra work to carry them through the crisis. They have always used wagelessness to divide us, along lines of sex, race, age, region, third world and metropolis, using the wageless as a threat against the waged, forcing us to compete on the international labour market for the jobs we loathe. Now they hope that a massive increase in wagelessness will reverse the refusal of waged and unwaged work that has put them in crisis. They want it to force us women to put aside the needs we have been asserting and take up again the self-sacrifice, the physical labour, and the labour of consoling and disciplining others that pull a family through a time of crisis. And they want it to bring us knocking at the factory gates, ready to accept any wages for the jobs we've been thrown out of, or the jobs men have been thrown out of, jobs we may need now for the first time because prices have gone up.

The only way to break this attack is to fight for wages without fighting for jobs, to refuse to be wageless any longer. No struggle

for free services, for time off work, for the wage in any other form than cash for every woman, is an appropriate response to this use of our wageless condition.

This wage will enable us not only to destroy their offensive but to turn it around and escalate massively our refusal of their work. The more we win wages for housework, and the more men follow our lead and win wages for travelling time, for repairing their cars, washing, sleeping, eating, and the housework they will be doing, and the more we all win wages for the labour of unemployment, the more there will be a mass exodus from what is now waged work, and the more they'll have to offer us to induce us to spend our time there and at home in intense exploitation. As we cease to be wageless we will cease to be a reserve army and continue to become a social problem.

Toronto Group 1 never at this conference explicitly came out against such a campaign for the cash wage for every woman. They showed, by their equivocations, by their emphasis on the specific struggle, by their concept of a campaign as something you could wage in one city, and by their refusal to repudiate their previous positions, that their fears prevented them from accepting it as our strategy. But the Padova 1 group in Italy, which in many ways shares their position*, has been more articulate. In October, 1973, they said: "we should not confuse the power we need in order to bring up wages for housework as a perspective, as a trail to follow for ever and in any situation, whatever struggle is going on...we know very well that we will keep wages as a perspective in our minds as well as in our speeches and work for many years, because it takes years to know how to reach it. The problem now is: what must we do during these years in order to build a movement strong enough to begin to make wages a term of struggle."

Their idea of the perspective, separable from the demand for the wage for every woman, is not ours. The idea that we have to wait before making wages a term of struggle is not ours. It leaves women's struggles in precisely the isolated fragmented state which we have to get out of. The way to "build" a strong enough movement is precisely by demanding wages for housework. How do they expect to get the power to win particular struggles, and to make these victories last? And what do they think has been holding us back till now? A lack of understanding? A long-term plan, with a campaign for sometime when we are more powerful is in fact a rejection of the campaign as our strategy.

Without a campaign for the wage, the result of our struggles in almost every case is a productivity deal. When we fight for daycare we either end up working twice as hard to look after the children ourselves and raise funds, or we lose our children to a state institution where the workers are paid pennies because we'd do the work for free, and where the nursery is provided on condition that most of us go out to a job. When we fight for abortion we end up with forced abortion—forced by lack of money, space and time to be with the children we'd like to have, and time to be away from them. And we end up with forced sterilization as part of the deal. Control of our bodies, when we are powerless, means their control of our bodies. When as lesbians we refuse the labour of relating to men and the whole definition of female nature, we find ourselves penniless, ghettoised, powerless, and still housewives, often working twice as hard. Being poor, and being cut off from the masses of lesbian women with children who cannot afford to come out, and cut off from the struggles all women are waging against their work and against their identification with that work, we can still be used as the bogey man against all the other women we need. When we fight for equal pay it is offered—on condition that we accept night work—for us, quite literally, a 2nd or 3rd shift. When we fight for better conditions on the job, or get part-time or flexible hours, capital uses these "concessions" to "help" more and more of us to fit in a second job: it imposes on women a more intensive working day.

Only a cash wage for every woman from the government will enable us to refuse these productivity deals. Because the wage will be for every woman it will be unconditional—we will not have to work in a

factory or office, live with a man, live without a man, have children or avoid having children to get this money. They will not be able to use it to make a bargain with us. It will not be something for which we have to run risks or make sacrifices. Every woman who shoplifts or who takes an extra hour at lunch time is taking the wage for herself. But as Mie Watanabe said, "we've had enough of having nervous breakdowns stuffing steaks into our bags. And we've had enough of that extra hour as a "privilege" or a blind eye that they can blackmail us with and repeal at any time. A wage established as a right will not be something they can always take away but a point at which we can always ask for more, and a basis for asking for more.

The power to win this wage and refuse productivity deals comes from the fact that wages for housework is a battle that unites all women. Here, in the struggle against the totality of our work, we have the power of our numbers. The wage, the threat posed to the state by a movement organised to win that wage, the very size of the demand we are making and the knowledge that we soon may have it, will give us the power to make gains, not deals, when we fight around childcare, abortion, sexuality, jobs. Whatever our intentions, if we organise on a local level without this strategy for building and using our power we will be forced to do exactly what a trade union does; to fight for a compromise which will help us for a while to accept our lives, and help capital to accumulate.

Once we accept the need for a campaign to win a wage from the government it becomes a self-evident priority to spread propeganda across each nation, making known the existence of such a campaign so that people can join it. Propeganda is not something abstract. It is the opening shot of the war and it will continue as an integral part of our mobilization. Padova 1 writes: "such tools as the press, pamphlets and books, meetings and lectures, video tapes, films, etc, are very useful for propeganda on wages but they can never substitute for struggle". "We reject the idea of a national propeganda campaign disguised as a struggle to which all the centers of Lotta Femminista must give priority." Propeganda is not disguised as a struggle and it is not separate from and substituting for struggle. It is part of the struggle we want and a part without which none of the rest can exist. When they set the two in opposition to each other they are thinking of "struggle" only in terms of local actions for specific goals, not in terms of a struggle for the wage which will build our power. Of course it is true that leaflets are not bullets, that a mass meeting is not the kind of confrontation which will bring down the state. But as the movement grows we will have the power to make more and more direct confrontations—to demonstrate, picket, occupy, disrupt, strike for the wage. That kind of growth is impossible if we bury ourselves in the struggle at the corner of our streets. If we don't get on television and make sure everyone knows that the demand, the perspective, and our organisation exist, we'll be pretty helpless even on our own street corners.

A number of people have been asking "what is a campaign?" A campaign is travelling around each country, inside and outside the urban centres, getting on local television and radio, speaking to welfare groups and other groups of women wherever we go. It is spreading literature in many languages. It is newspapers or newsletters to keep contact with women we meet. It is taking our banners and literature to demos and picket lines. It is making ourselves known as a body that can be contacted by women who want to work on the campaign or want our support and the strength that a national and international campaign can bring them in a struggle around a particular issue where they are. It is having centres or headquarters where people can reach us and see what we're about. It is calling a women's strike and march next spring in Washington, Los Angeles, and Canadian and European capitals. It is smaller local rallies or demonstrations before that time. It is building a movement for wages for housework that include all women. It is a film about wages for housework to use for public meetings, records of songs about wages for housework, street theatre about wages for housework. It is taking part in, or initiating local actions, e.g. at Maimonides or in the Mother Led Union.

A) A national. propeganda campaign does not preclude involvement in specific or local struggles. When we take part in local actions our goals are many but related. We want to win what time, and money, and power can be won in each situation. We want to give each struggle strength and direction by exposing and concretising its connections with the struggles of other women. And we want to mobilize women for other battles in the war for wages for housework for every woman.

Libertarianism is based on the principle that everyone should organise "around their own situation" and within the limits imposed by that situation. For libertarians this means that it is imposing something on people to go into a struggle basing yourself on a political line that has not been born whole out of that particular struggle; it's still more of an imposition if you are hoping to mobilise people for something else beyond the day care centre, laundry or wage rise they are fighting for at the time. This idea led members of two Toronto groups—the Wages for Housework Collective and TGI—to take part for a long time in the Mother Lod Union (MLU) without making clear their relation to Wages for Housework, or, therefore, their relationship to the welfare system and to the MLU. It led women at the New York conference in October to ask what those women were doing in the MLU in the first place, since most of them were not on welfare.

The Toronto Wages for Housework Collective (TWFHC) has left behind this politics of withdrawal. Frances Gregory laid out at the conference how it had reflected their failure to see themselves as part of the working class. Without seeing ourselves as part of the working class we cannot see our connections with other women, and we will always view our own self interest as something external and opposed to other women's.

But even if we do not see ourselves as external we have to go further and understand the internal unity of the class if we are to see how women from one sector can go to women from another and say that their perspective is a necessity for both. Otherwise we will be afraid to talk to other women whose particular situations are unfamiliar to us, we will not know how or why to learn about those situations, and we will not be able to mount a campaign. It is only by seeing and attacking the wageless labour through which we are all exploited that women can stop making "links" based on guilt trips, manipulation, and vague principles of "solidarity", and start breaking down the divisions between us. In organising for money for welfare women we are organising around our own situation, and in building, there and elsewhere, a campaign for wages for housework we are hitting capital in the only way we can—starting from our unity, not from our fragmentation.

I 7 An International Vs. Links

No divisions are more crippling than the divisions between women in different countries, and particularly between women in the third world and women in the metropolis. Capital plans internationally where to put jobs, where we should have babies, where we are going to emigrate from and immigrate to. The campaign for the wage is our strategy because it attacks on an international level. Our speeches, leaflets, and mobilisations, our decisions about what demands to take up and what position to take in relation to the struggles going on where we are, have to be based on the wageless exploitation common to women everywhere in the world, and on the particular, related forms that that exploitation takes in different countries. We have to know and fight the ways in which capital exploits women everywhere so we can fight to refuse all these options—the factory and the home, forced sterilisation and forced child bearing.

The perspective of wages for housework is based on our international condition, and attacks our divisions at their source. A campaign for wages for housework as an international strategy is not only more significant, but sometimes more possible than "links". Women on a farm in India and women in a shoe factory in East Anglia may not be able to link their struggles, but they can have a common strategy.

This international campaign is still being born, and it is up to us to find theoretical and organisational connections that will help to make it possible. We have only just begun to understand the implications of an international perspective and strategy. We draw some strength from the wages for housework movement in other countries in Europe and North America. But we have hesitated to even think about our connection with the third world. We have sometimes been paralysed by the fear that third world women, inside and outside our own countries, will tell us to go to hell. Terrified of the racism of interference and presumption, we have retreated to the racism of ignorance and silence. We have succumbed to the divisions by which capital conceals and enforces our common exploitation and powerlessness.

The perspective of wages for housework, in identifying women's common situation and struggle, exposes the absurdity of accepting our divisions for fear of being "imperialist", patronising or presumptuous, or "imposing" a strategy on third world

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As we more fully understand the meaning of an international perspective will make clearer and clearer in practice how we differ from TGI. But also we differ in that their perspective of links has nothing to do with an international strategy. Marie (TGI): "I'm not denying the absolute necessity of an international network to find out what's happening in all cities, and wherever it seems strategically possible to bring all these things together...it's not clear to me how to mount an international but I do see in the particular city that I'm in that there's a preparedness right now that might be able to mount a campaign in a year".

V. Leadership Vs. Self-Protection

The 'Statement of Political Differences' made clear how when we see ourselves as housewives and as part of the working class, and see our perspective as a perspective for women and a perspective for the working class, we see leadership not as an imposition but as an integral part of our struggle. The perspective does not come from outside the class, and we are not outside the class. The perspective offers a political direction which all of us--inside and outside the network--need.

The conference continued the process of making clear what this means for our own internal organisation. The connection was expressed by Suzie Fleming: "If we're not going to be embarrassed about the fact that we're developing a perspective... and that we think that we can contribute something to the struggle that we as women and other women are waging, then surely we equally shouldn't be embarrassed about the fact that when you sit in a room there might be 3 people in that room that are going to contribute more to everyone's development than other people... these things are very closely related..."

This view of leadership implies that leadership must be given the freedom to lead. If the perspective offers a political direction, leadership has to make that direction clear and available to everyone, inside and outside the network, and determine what that direction is concretely in each situation. As Suzie said, "A leader is someone who's going to help me get where I want to go".

Clearly, this does not mean that no one should ever say boo to a leader. People will have to be fighting leaders all the time: fighting over political positions, fighting to make leaders lead more--make them make their politics clearer, fighting to make them recognise and help develop the abilities of others in the group. But this is the opposite of fighting to ensure that no one becomes--or remains--a leader. Frances Gregory: "I'm not going to fight against leadership. I might fight so I can take a little leadership myself...but it's not something I do in battle with other women, because we're fighting for the same thing. We're fighting for our power, against capital and against men. We really allowed wages for housework to be obscured by saying that certain people are trying to take power over other people...Those women are trying to take power for themselves and they can only do it when we all take power for ourselves."

The leadership in our movement are followed because they have seen and said most clearly where we have to go, have been the most international in their outlook, have been the first to see the necessity and implications of a campaign. To the extent that they cease to fill that function they will cease to be leaders, and to the extent that others take it up they will become leaders; it should be plain to everyone that there's plenty of room for more.

In contrast to this view of our organisation there was a tendency at the conference which felt a need to try to put some constraints on leaders, to ensure "democracy". In putting forward one form of this view, Sallie Schum separated the question of internal leadership from the question of the organisation's relation with the rest of the class: "There are two ways of looking at leadership...What the perspective of wages for housework can do is offer leadership to the struggle of all women against capital's plans...that's the leadership of the perspective. Then when we're talking about organisation, that's another whole discussion on leadership. And I really appreciate the fact that there have to be leaders in any organisation. What I would like to say about those leaders is that I would like to have that leadership recognised, I would like to have that leadership made explicit so that I understand who they are and what they're saying, and I would like to understand very clearly that that leadership at all times represents the feelings and the interests of everybody that's in the organisation. And that if at some time they don't represent, or go against what the mass of the organisation says that the mass of the organisation have some way in which to challenge that leadership."

Judy Quinlan spoke for most of the meeting in rejecting this sort of democracy: "The last thing I want in the world is representative leadership. ...a person is in a leadership position because of what they are able to offer. If we all agree on what we want, at the point at which they're not offering what we want, then they're not going to be there any more".

But misgivings remained, and were expressed in a concern that leadership should not stifle the development of other members. It is important to locate the source of these misgivings. We all have experience of people holding and using power over others. That's how capital rules. But in our movement, far from stifling individuals' development, leadership has made it possible, both directly in the process of working together, and by forming and strengthening the perspective, the campaign, and the organisation. It has also helped to deal with the power relations which exist in any organisation and which spring not from leadership but from the different political situations we are based in (see next section on autonomy). The fear of leadership in some cases may come from experiences of leaders failing to do their job, failing to put their power at the disposal of the movement, and of other members failing to ensure that they did. But the fear can only survive where there is no political direction and no hope of victory.

The libertarian view is that since everyone is fighting for herself and on her own home turf there should be no need for leadership. They want to work towards a situation where everyone leads herself. This leads easily to more traditional democratic politics in which the leaders who inevitably do arise are bound all around by an obligation to represent everyone else. It stems from the philosophy that there exists nothing for the leaders to offer--no political direction arising from the total situation of the working class that experience of struggle, theoretical labour, and a good political nose can discover.

Without such a direction not only are we confined to the powerlessness of isolated struggles, but we cannot hope for revolution. We become obsessed with the need to preserve whatever slight control we can grasp over our own situation or over other women. TGI's "local autonomy" is based on what only we can call the "housewife syndrome". We have so little power as women that we become very protective of what little we have; when we form organisations we get very chary of anyone who seems to have a little more than us. We protect our domain. Our jealousy is painful and politically absurd. We struggle to repress it, but it weakens us, and by binding us more firmly in our powerlessness, perpetuates itself. Only the conviction that we can win, that the power the leaders have is real power against capital--and that is a conviction we can easily lose hold of --can convince us that the leaders' power is power in our hands, and that our organisation's power is power to all women. At that point we stop looking for a leadership that will represent all the political confusion in a room, we stop saying no one should move until everyone is ready (they never will be), we stop being reticent in approaching other women, and we begin to look seriously at ourselves and the state. As we give our capitalist function as housewives less sway over our lives and over our personalities, we begin to destroy our sector of the class.

VI Autonomy Vs. Peaceful Coexistence

Libertarians' fear of leadership is bound up with experience and rejection of vanguard party politics. In expressing their concerns in terms of "autonomy" they make use of a concept which was vital in enabling us to break with those politics. What do they mean by it, and what is our difference from them?

Autonomous movements have grown up when sectors of the working class formed organisations and movements which refused to be absorbed in or directed by the organisations of other sectors. Trade Unions and vanguard parties had never based their struggles on our needs. In insisting on the "general interest" and the "unity of the class" they subordinated the struggles of the less powerful sections of the working class to the immediate interests of the most powerful, of white males, often of employed, skilled white males. The rest of us, inside or outside their organisations, were supposed to ignore our own particular experience, forget our own needs, and toe the line--their line. All too often we did: we had no choice.

It was in order to have the power to discover and assert our own needs, against capital and against men that we formed separate, autonomous, self-directing movements. Our autonomy is essential for us: we are fighting for ourselves, for our needs as we define them. It is equally essential for the

rest of the working class: our struggles will reveal their needs, and our power will make the revolution possible.

In contrast to a vanguardist perspective, wages for housework speaks specifically to the needs of the most powerless: full-time housewives with no wage of their own, and those housewives with a small wage for part of their work who are struggling for every penny. For this reason it is sometimes hard for women with a little more power to accept the perspective. They do not want to identify with the housewife. Yet they are housewives, and the perspective offers them too the only way to fight back against their own position. It speaks to the needs of all women because it is based on our common, fundamental situation.

This means that in fighting for wages for housework no woman must give up the needs that she feels in her gut or fight for the interests of another, stronger sector of the class which will gain power or make deals against her. It does not mean that there is no need for autonomous organisation within the movement for wages for housework. We do not know yet what forms that autonomy will take, or what will be the internal structure of the body we have called "the network".

Capital uses all of us in different ways, and the differences have already been felt in our movement—between women with children and without children, women with different kinds of jobs, with different experience, between lesbians and non-lesbians; still more sharp are the divisions among women of different races and nationalities, for example few black women are now in wages for housework organisations. These are not only differences but divisions based on power, and it will be necessary for each of the less powerful sectors to gather its collective strength in order to reveal the implications of the perspective and make sure they are acted on. We need the power and the specific experience of each sector of women to understand capital's overall plan and the strategy and tactics we need against it.

The divisions between women do not necessarily lead to separate organisations. They may lead only to political struggles within an organisation, struggles showing who we are, what we have to fight for, and how particular struggles can and cannot be made. For instance, in the network, a whole area of discussion was opened up on Sunday by the Wages Due Collective, a lesbian group within the network which had been meeting both separately and with TWFHC. The visible presence of a group of lesbian women, and the things they had to say, made everyone look again at how our relationships, which are defined and determined by capital, affect and are affected by our struggle; at capital's repressive organisation of our lives in which we spend our days working with women or doing "womens work" alone at home and are supposed to spend our "leisure" with men; at the struggle we always make against men, and at the extent to which we can struggle with them; at lesbianism as a struggle against work; at the oppression and at the power of women who do not have men around us, and at how we can mobilise the power that these women, and particularly lesbian women, have to offer. Differences persist (e.g. on "loving" and on men), and the debate continues within the network.

There will always be some differences within the network, and not only differences of emphasis. But this does not mean that we should agree to disagree. It means there will be internal battles as women in different situations fight out how wages for housework is to be presented and fought for by the movement as a whole. It means that we will be able to make a "general struggle" which is not, as in the vanguard parties, a struggle for the immediate interest of the most powerful sector at the expense of the other sectors who take part, but a struggle which is general precisely because it grows from and pushes forward the needs of each sector of women. As autonomous sectors fight to impose their views we will ensure not only that we are fighting for what we all need, but that our tactics are appropriate to the real situations in which we are making the struggle; in other words, that we can win.

If different sectors find it necessary to remain outside our network the political struggle will take place nevertheless. Only that struggle will ensure that when we speak and act we are speaking and acting for wages for housework—for a perspective which grows from the situation and needs of every woman.

The extent to which we do this will determine the extent to which this network offers women the power of the perspective. The power of the perspective is not limited to that which the network offers. But the politics of the groups, inside or outside the network, which initiate a campaign for the wage, will have an effect on how that power develops. As the movement grows a lot of people will be saying different things about wages for housework. Some women will push the movement forward by fighting for the wage in a limited form applying to themselves

--for instance MLU's demand for parity, waged workers' demand for paid time off and refusal to do housework on the job. At the same time other women, both inside and outside the movement, and inside and outside the ruling structures, will be acting for capital as state planners. They will be considering what they can demand and offer that will stem the tide and if possible divide us, and force us to do more work. The presence of one or more political bodies which are not speaking only for one sector, which know why they must not stop at a wage for some women, or a little bit of a wage, or a wage we have to pay for, will help to defeat the state planners, and help to lift the struggles of others out of isolation. Whatever we win will give us power against men and against capital. But the scope and power of the movement, and the kinds of victories we win, will be determined partly by the degree to which we can offer our perspective and tactics in opposition to those which the state planners are considering. For this we must be clear about what we want in all its aspects.

So the autonomy which we oppose to vanguard party politics is an autonomy through which sectors of the class, including sectors of women, by organising as sectors within an organisation or by refusing to join it, organise the power to impose on all of us the struggle they see necessary. Is this the autonomy TGI is concerned with?

TGI is concerned not with organising power but with defending themselves against power, not with struggling to impose an essential view of class struggle but with preventing such imposition from taking place. They want a structure and "process" which allow different viewpoints to coexist peacefully in the organisation, rather than one which forces us as far as possible to fight the differences out. The result of such autonomy would be white women going on TV and presenting a racist view of the struggle in the name of Wages for Housework--exactly what would happen with a vanguardist approach.

If it is not peaceful coexistence what else can be their aim in defending not the autonomy of specific sectors but local autonomy and individual autonomy? They can't mean the local groups should not be in the organisation. They can't mean they want to be able to meet together without others--there is plenty of opportunity for that. They can't mean that there is a power relationship which forces each locality to step away from the group to develop its own formulations and the strength it needs to confront the rest of the organisation. If they were speaking for rural areas, or "underdeveloped" areas that might be the case, but it can't be their concern in Toronto. They must be concerned to protect themselves from dictatorship from the centre, afraid that they will have to fight some one else's battle and not their own. If as they say they see the struggle for wages for housework as personally necessary for them, why do they worry about some one telling them what to do? Why don't they want to tell us what to do?

Since the women in TGI are not the ruling class, we have to assume that this fear of power is based yet again on a failure to realize that we can take power and use it for ourselves. It starts with defeat as its premise, with an acceptance of the fragmentation which is the source of our weakness. If you accept fragmentation the revolution is either impossible or will come out of the blue one day. It is nothing you can build towards. And there is no way for women to gather our power.

Their perspective leads some libertarians to imagine that the strategic and organisational connections between struggles emerge for the first time at a final revolutionary moment--they claim Hungary in '56 and France in '68 showed how these connections are unnecessary till then. We have only to ask the question: what was the power of women in those uprisings? to see the difference between autonomy as a basis for our power and autonomy as a rejection of organisation.

Some women in the network have referred to the expulsion of TGI as Stalinist. It is their perspective, not that of the women who pushed for the expulsion, that takes us back to a politics where the class interest is defined by a few of its members and everyone else is too powerless & disorganised for their needs & experience to count. We are not saying everyone should forget their own particular experiences, push aside their own needs as they see them, and take orders from leaders who have pulled a full-blown perspective and strategy from the thin air somewhere over the Atlantic. We do not want a perspective or strategy which is not continually shaped by all the particularity of our individual & collective experience. And we do not want women in the

network who have not at least begun to see the perspective as speaking precisely to their own personal needs and experience. We have to do everything possible to help women who are attracted to the perspective to see this more fully: to come to grips with all its implications, and see how it relates directly to the and how it relates to other women and to the revolution. To do this, and to reach the perspective and the struggle we do want, we need to be organized, we need leaders, we need theoretical clarity and we need a process of political struggle within the network which is the opposite of TGI's "autonomy".

VIII Political Confrontation Vs. "Progress"

The conference itself was an example of TGI's and others' refusal of this struggle. They did not believe there could be an overall perspective and strategy which would determine everyone's actions, in fact they found that idea threatening. They envisioned an organisation in which everyone would come in with a different viewpoint, and we would reach a politics of consensus. So they had no impetus to force a political confrontation. Their statements and their questions were incoherent; their answers were evasive.

Some people have been saying that the expulsion was necessary but the "process" of expulsion was bad. What do they think we should have done? Waited till the next conference and taken time there to try and wrest a coherent statement from TGI? They are forgetting that TGI's--and some others' -- incoherence was not an accident that we should have made allowances for but an expression of their politics. TGI claimed that they had not been given a "chance" to explain themselves. They claimed they were being persecuted. They claimed they agreed with everything we said. Anyone tempted to believe any of this should note the following three points:

There has been a whole history of dissension between TGI and those who have taken leadership internationally, and between TGI and TWFHC. TWFHC prepared and distributed a document stating their view of the differences. TGI prepared nothing--not before the New York Conference, after the New York conference or before this conference.

In New York TGI had been very clearly hostile to the kind of international perspective and organisation that were being established. They were very insistent about "local autonomy" and angry about the way leadership was functioning. In Montreal they said they had "no disagreement". If this was true, why didn't they dissociate themselves from the position they had taken up? Why didn't they say how they had changed? They would hardly have been alone. Some at the conference objected to the way others were trying to make TGI "eat their words". For most of us in political struggle words are common and palatable fare. When you've changed your mind and believe in what you are doing, nothing is less humiliating than to say so.

Again, if they really shared our perspective, why did they speak in terms of links, intervention, and local campaigns? Why did they accept everything everyone said--conditionally? "Do you think it's important to have an international statement?" Angela: "If we can make that statement useful." Angela earlier: "I have no disagreement with the importance of developing an international group or perspective. Where disagreements or misunderstandings...come up is how in practice we ensure that we build the kind of links that will enable us to be strong." What were the disagreements or misunderstandings? What kind of safeguards did she want, and against what? Why didn't she tell us?

Certainly, it wasn't for want of asking. Judy Quinlan: "I sense that there is something you want to say, like there's something you want not to see...and there's something you want to see..., and that you're putting it very abstractly in a conditional thing--well, maybe if, maybe not. I want to hear what it is that you don't want and what it is that you do want." Silvia Federici: "If people have disagreements why don't they say so?"

It is no accident that the most coherent expression of TGI's tendency came in the form of a statement on representative democracy from Sallie Schum, the member who later left them. She was prepared to state her position in such a way that it could be answered.

Not everyone who is unable to express a position is a political enemy. There were many at the conference who were new to wages for housework, including most of the women who had come with TGI. There were others of us who had been in the movement for some time, but who, at the outset of the conference, had deep confusions and uncertainties which often reflected or resulted in a leaning towards the libertarian position. No one was expelled for being new, unclear

uncertain. New members, including those in TGL were told explicitly that they should not feel compelled to choose in any way" (Silvia), and that they should only leave if they felt they adhered to the tendency which TGL represented and which was defined in terms of links on Saturday evening. Old members who were uncertain had the opportunity at this conference to begin to see where the different political positions led, to follow them through to their conclusions and decide which direction they wanted to move in. But the rest of TGL and some others at the conference suffered confusion of a different sort. They had a political position, and with the exception of Sallie they gave no indication of being open to changing it.

When we press for precision and for theoretical clarity we are not gram-marians quibbling over words or hacks in love with a hard line. We do it because lack of clarity is debilitating. It is a handicap that has in some libertarian circles been taken as a sign that the speakers are on the side of the powerless, even as a proof of sincerity. In fact it enforces their own lack of power, and it undermines also the power of those who are trying to make a struggle in the same organisation or movement. We are concerned to be clear because without clarity we cannot know what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against, who are our friends and who are our enemies, what are the implications of what we are saying for how we have to act; because without it we can flog around between a working class feminist strategy and a state plan, without seeing any contradiction and without moving, decisively, to confront the state. The onus is always on those who are trying to hold on to a revolutionary strategy to free themselves from those who prefer confusion. The latter only rarely feel the need to make a distinction.

It was clear that TGL felt at the conference the power that the network represents, and did not want to be cut off from that source of strength. It was clear that they wanted to be as agreeable as possible. They had decided that they could work with us, and did not want to give us a chance to decide that we could not work with them. The refusal for this reason, of some in that group, to stand behind their politics made a lot of people very angry, and clinched for many the question of whether they should be expelled. Members of Wages Due summed it up: "That group is refusing the process of struggle."

There were some who felt that we were picking on TGL, that they had not taken a stand against us and should have been left alone. This policy would have been disastrous. Every discussion, then and in the future, would have been inhibited, held back and continually interrupted by the need to deal with a tendency based on a different perspective. The expulsion was essential for us to clear our own heads. Without it we would have been unable to speak freely: we would not have known what context our words would be placed in or how they would be understood. Our search for tactics would have been held back and interrupted by those who did not share our strategy. We would have spent another conference dealing with a tendency which refused to come out, but which set the tone and the boundaries of our progress. We would have had what Silvia called "a network which is not a network, full of mistrust, which will not enable us to act". We would have been unable to trust members of our own organisation to speak for us in public; we would have panicked when they got on the media. We would not have been able to develop either the understanding or the public identity we need in order to oppose those who try to make capitalist development the end of women's struggles.

IX Revolution Vs. Capital

If the form TGL gave their politics failed to protect them and spurred their expulsion, their position itself made the expulsion inevitable. As Silvia said many times at the conference, not every political difference has to lead to a split. But this one did. Judy Quinlan, of Wages Due: "We came here specifically planning to connect with (TGL) and hear their side of the story. Now I'm feeling that I've been a goddam liberal to do that..." (Toronto Wages For Housework Collective's "Statement of Political Differences") very clearly defines the biggest, most important and most upsetting split happening in the Wages for Housework movement. I want that split formalised, I want it dealt with, and I want it finished." In Italy, where the libertarian position has been stated relatively clearly, the groups who wanted to work for a campaign had already formed their own organisation in 1973. As one woman said in Montreal, "how do you work with people who don't believe in Wages for Housework?"

Well before the conference people in the network had been worried about saying others were "not for wages for housework". Even on Saturday night when this question was put there was an uproar in the room. How do you say someone who says she's for the wage is not?

To answer this we have to look at different ways of viewing a demand. A Trotskyist who said she was for wages for housework would put it forward as a transitional demand--not as something she wanted to get but as something to raise the consciousness of other women; in organising around "other issues" she would not use these struggles to build a movement for the wage. Libertarians find the concept of transitional demands insulting to the working class. But they think the demands we can mobilize around must be thrown forward by "the class itself"--excluding us--in local struggles. Since the wage we want for housework cannot be fought for locally or by one sector of women, libertarians too can only see this wage as an abstraction, a consciousness raising tool. For Trotskyists and Libertarians both, demands either arise within the limits of a specific struggle or serve merely to raise people's consciousness of what they can't get under capitalism. Neither conceives of a demand as something we can mobilize around and win which will increase our power and enable us to refuse the lousy choices capital offers us.

For Trotskyists who want to plan the new society from above, and for libertarians who see no way to break through our fragmentation, the revolution is separate from local and sectional struggles. They can therefore only see these struggles as leading to reform: some actual, quantitative gain for us, and a rationalisation of the capitalist system.

For us the struggle for wages is a struggle to progressively increase and mobilize our power, and to break down the divisions between us. In fighting for wages for housework we put forward a demand which can unite struggling localities and sectors on the basis of what we need and not by subsuming one sector's interests to another's. We are giving focus to what is already a worldwide movement against work and for money. And we are pushing the wage relation to the breaking point. Whatever rationalisations the working class and capital invent, our struggle for more will press capital harder and harder up against the wall.

The libertarian perspective separates the total from the concrete, separates revolution from struggles and demands, separates women from each other, and sends us fleeing to concrete, isolated struggles where we cannot defeat capital.

We have seen in many contexts how the libertarians' acceptance of fragmentation is an acceptance of defeat. They are not alone in this acceptance. All of us live with defeat all around us. We are defeated every time we clock in to a job, everytime we come home tired and cook, every time we make "love" when we'd rather go to sleep, every time we have an abortion when we want a child, every time we are jealous, every time we breathe this filthy, cancerous air. We are defeated every time a woman is raped, every time a woman is forcibly sterilised, every time someone's husband dies in a mine, every time a child is turned away from a hospital because her mother has no cash. For all of us, it's hard to believe that we can win. We are tempted to put our hopes in partial victories and turn to isolated struggles which we know are concrete, instead of setting our sights on a revolution which seems unreal. This political perspective represents the power and ideology of capital in our heads. A group which puts it forward represents capital in our organisation. An acceptance of fragmentation and an acceptance of defeat can only lead to defensiveness, self-protection, and compromises with capital which will inevitably be at the expense of the least powerful sections among us--and at the expense of us all.

TGI is not the ruling class in disguise. They are no different from the rest of us, and their viewpoint is native to us all. But they represent a stage in working class ideology and organisation which we have passed or are passing, a stage of weakness and disorganisation in which capital's hold on us was firmer. We have tried to show concretely how, in practice, the presence of this tendency would hold back the movement for wages for housework. It remains to make the point in general: people who believe that what we're doing is impossible can only tie our hands.

The vote at the conference to expell TGI was passed by 43 to 2, with 20 abstentions. I hope these notes have helped some of the abstentions to see the irrelevancy of kid glove politics, and the urgency of what we have to do. We feel daily the effects of capital's strategy, and daily become more certain of our own. We have to get those wagons on the road.

Ruth Hall APRIL 1975

A number of women, including Beth Ingber, Sidney Ross, Jenny Lister, and Suzie Fleming have helped me to clarify the points made in these notes, and share this analysis of the events at the Montreal conference and of the tendencies that have emerged, there and elsewhere, in the wages for housework movement.