

INVITATION TO AN INTERNATIONAL WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK CAMPAIGN CONFERENCE

LONDON, JULY 18-20 1975

Dear

The implications of Wages for Housework have been considerably extended since this perspective was first put forward. This is a result of the experience of different groups in different countries and our continual exchange of information and ideas.

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 all together as housewives, in all the different situations in which we find ourselves, 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 have stood in danger of being defeated either because there were not enough of us or because the State has been able to utilise particular demands for its own purpose of our more intense exploitation.

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 that we want a wage for housework, and intend to win one, is already 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 form 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.

To demand Wages for Housework internationally, is already a power. To come out on the streets together in a demonstration for it is inseparable from a 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 1000, and of 10000, 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 ever do, because we can never feel or convey our collective strength to the wageless, isolated but rebellious housewife.

The left have ignored us not only because they were men (some of them are not), but because we were unorganisable in their terms. We have an entirely different conception of what is organisationally possible and necessary for us who are isolated from each other. Our network of organisation must overcome this isolation and the divisions among us.

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.

Some who identify themselves with Wages for Housework 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 premise of Wages for Housework. We have seen that internationally women are already struggling everywhere to refuse work and win money, and demand for wages concretises and expresses what is already present in the struggles that 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.

The question of a campaign for the wage for every woman, then, has become the dividing line for us between on one hand wages for housework as one demand among many, as a slogan which is eye-catching, as a demand one day we 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.

We would like to invite you to a conference where those who are organising, or want to organise around this international campaign for the wage can work out together theory, strategy, and tactics. We hope women coming from countries where the movement is less advanced, and some of the issues discussed above have not yet been decided, will be able at this conference to use their international connections to draw strength for the campaign. The conference will be held in London, England on the weekend beginning Friday, 18th July. If you would like to come please, could you let us know your numbers and when you will expect to arrive, as soon as possible, so that we may have some idea of the size of the conference and can make arrangements for accommodation. Further details and a tentative agenda will follow shortly.

To avoid wasting time on debates that could be conducted within individual countries or cities, this conference is by invitation only. So please regard this invitation as applying only to the group or individual named. If you should know other people whom you think should be invited, please let us know. We hope, if possible groups or individuals could come with enough copies of prepared reports to distribute amongst the conference (In English preferably).

We do hope you will be able to come, it should provide a chance for us to move ahead, co-ordinate our activities, get to know each other and feel our international strength.

Power to the Sisters

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