

WOMEN IN STRUGGLE 1



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INTRODUCTION

It becomes increasingly clear, as the present international crisis of capital deepens, that the State is going to try to use the impetus of our struggles as women to solve its problems. Already we have seen, on the one hand, the re-composition of the work force with growing numbers of women and, on the other hand, more and more workers threatened with wagelessness -- all of which means that capital is using women to lower its overall labour costs and to threaten those who struggle. Our exploitation as women is being deepened and we are being used to attack the rest of the working class. Wherever workers have made a struggle and succeeded in disconnecting wages from productivity, thereby challenging the basic mechanism of capital accumulation, the State has responded by counter-attacking with higher levels of unemployment, higher inflation rates, and increased female participation in waged work at lower rates than men. Capital has only begun to discover the tremendous potential that women offer as a supply of cheap labour and as a discipline on other waged workers. The astronomical figures for part-time work among women -- one of the heaviest and lowest types of waged work -- in the State sector, in service work, in white collar jobs, and in light industry, is very telling. Where the man's wage used to once maintain the whole family, it is virtually impossible now to make ends meet without women also getting a job outside the home. More and more women are refusing marriage precisely because they know it will be more work rather than less. For the men this means facing the steady erosion of their wages and a less secure footing from which to make their struggles. We can see more and more clearly that wherever women are exploited, inside and outside the home, as waged or unwaged workers, the entire working class is weaker because of it.

In this context, it is imperative for our movement to develop a political perspective that will prevent our struggles for liberation from being used to exploit us further and divide us further from the rest of the working class. Which means we must base our perspective and our struggles on our first and most fundamental exploitation as women, which is our unwaged work in the home. As long as women overwhelmingly remain unwaged workers in the home, we are all in a position of powerlessness vis a vis the State. We saw this precisely when many of us thought we had finally escaped the home and were no longer "housewives" -- only to find ourselves serving coffee to the boss in the office, breaking our backs in short-staffed and low-paying hospitals caring for the sick, disciplining children in overcrowded classrooms, in short, finding out that capital presses all of us into service as housewives wherever we go, regardless of whether we are full-time wives and mothers.

Wages for housework as a political perspective starts with this fundamental fact. In pointing to the powerlessness of women in the home it points to the weakness of the rest of the working class who must submit to the discipline of the wage in order to support the unwaged. Wages for housework is a feminist perspective precisely because it is a class

perspective, i.e. it makes the link between building the power of the mass of women and challenging the fundamental weakness of the entire working class, which is the division between the waged and the unwaged, between those who depend on capital directly and those who depend on it through the wages of others, overwhelmingly the division between men and women.

Using the impetus of our movement to make gains for a minority of women while leaving the majority unwaged and, therefore, powerless, is not feminism -- it is co-optation. And co-optation is precisely capital's response to our movement in order to disconnect our struggles as women from those of the rest of the working class and use them to solve its crises and integrate us further into its exploitative system. Those of us who are developing the wages for housework perspective do so in opposition to those in the movement who care only about increasing the power of those few women who already have some, at the expense of the mass of women who have none.

Our primary struggle in fighting against this society which wants to find new ways to keep us dependent and powerless is the development of a political perspective which will allow us to see both the pervasiveness of our exploitation as unwaged workers and our possibilities for struggle, along with the rest of the working class. Our aim is to destroy this system and not to help it function more smoothly.

The documents in this first issue of the Women in Struggle series begin to show the way forward. Taken together they are one statement about how we see our lives as women consumed by capital, in both waged and unwaged work; how our unwaged work in the home ensures our powerlessness wherever we go; and how we have begun to fight to prevent our struggles for wages and for power from being co-opted and used against us, and against the rest of the working class.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class!

February 1975

Judy Ramirez
Toronto

TO ALL WOMEN

We are a group of women, and we are all housewives because we are women. Whether we have children or not, whether we are married or not, whether we go out to work or not, we all cook, clean, wash, sew, shop, pay bills, and work to keep our homes as reasonable places in which to live. Those of us who have husbands know that if we didn't do this work, our men would be unable to work as hard as they do in factories, offices, on whatever shop floor -- they probably wouldn't be able to work at all after a time. Those of us who go out to work ourselves know that we are doing two full-time jobs -- one paid, the other unpaid.

If women refused to labour in the home, what would happen? Industry would collapse overnight. We are saying that we, as women, demand that our work be recognized for what it is -- hard, necessary labour -- necessary to other workers, to children, and to the boss. And the only way to be recognized as workers is to be paid as workers. The only way to struggle against housework is to recognize that it is work.

Many women are forced to take on a second, paid job outside the home. A man's wage is no longer a wage for the family. We desperately need money to feed the kids, we're lonely and cut off, stuck in our homes all day. We're forced to do another dreary job, in a factory, or more cleaning, washing, "women's work", because our husband's wage isn't enough for the family to survive on, and it's the only way for some of us to make our own friends and have a bit of company.

We are saying that we're fed up with having to work twice as hard as anyone else -- if we go out to work all day, we need to put up our feet as well when we come home. But we can't because someone has to get the dinner, wash up, wash the clothes, tidy up, get the kids to bed etc. etc.

We are saying PAY US for the work we already do and have done all our lives, ever since we were old enough to hold a broom. Then we'd be able to choose whether we wanted to take on another job as well. Then we'd be able to meet each other and do things together without being under constant pressure from the clock and the boss. Then we might have a chance to get the other things we want.

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK ... ALL WOMEN ARE WORKERS

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

The demand of wages for housework is steadily gathering momentum in the women's movement internationally. Perhaps its most passionate exponents are among those women who have spent years of their lives privately taking care of the physical needs of others, cooking and washing up for them, cleaning up their messes, nursing the sick ones, keeping all on their schedules, servicing them sexually and/or psychologically. They represent the hundreds of millions of women who are isolated in dreary, repetitive tasks, doing heavy as well as boring labour -- with or without machines to help -- and on top of this are taken for granted.

In the last four or five years many studies have been done to measure and evaluate the unwaged work of the housewife, whose labours have never been computed into the GNP. Different estimates have been published of the number of hours of work and the money value they represent. The greatest significance of these studies (and one function of the demand itself) is that through them all of us come to recognize that housework is work. Not a duty and service of love, but work on which the whole economy rests. We learn that housewives are not doing "nothing", that they are not "only housewives" (with a suggestion that they are parasites on people who "work"), but that they are working. And some of them damned hard.

But there are other aspects to a demand, however popularly it may speak to the needs and the rage of the oppressed and exploited housewife. An objection that is sometimes expressed against our movement's articulating the demand of wages for housework, against assisting its concretization, or against even supporting it when others raise it is that such a demand would "institutionalize" housework.

It is hard to think of a species of work which is more institutionalized than housework already is. It is even more institutionalized than factory work. For girls are trained from the cradle to fill the role of housewife, to create an identity on the basis of this fate, so that their submersion into housework will appear as the natural and inevitable outcome of their lives.

Women are rebelling against this "fate" as never before in history. There have always been subtle rejections and evasions of the role, but now there is a militant chorus of women who say "NO! Not me!" Some of the greatest rejectors, however, oppose our movement's espousing the demand of wages for housework because, as they say, "we don't want wages for housework -- we want to obliterate housework!"

On the surface that seems a logical response. But history does not work with such a linear logic. A Ford worker would like to destroy the production line that dehumanizes him, but he knows he cannot destroy it by

refusing wages and working for nothing. Indeed his main weapon is to demand more wages. His factory life is a constant battle to defend his humanity, to increase his power over the work process.

So too a housewife, if she wishes to destroy housework, must first gain that minimum leverage that a wage provides.

But then they say, housework is not only deadly; it is inefficient, badly organized, a waste of human labour. It would be uneconomic, even immoral, to support such a waste by paying it a wage. What we must do is technologize and socialize housework.

The reason housework is "economically wasteful" is precisely because it is unwaged. The system does not care how long it takes the housewife to finish her tasks -- she can work 24 hours a day for it -- because it is not paying her a wage. If it were paying, there would then be some concern about the "inefficiency" of housework. This has been the response of capital throughout its history. Every technological advance has been a response to the power of labour in its struggles against the conditions of work. The slave-labour mode of housework can be destroyed only if there is a mass unified struggle against those conditions. Before housework can be socialized, the people who work in its pre-capitalist conditions must socialize, must leave their privatized slavery to struggle together. Otherwise their forced socialization, not springing from their own needs and experiences but imposed from above and inspired by capital's need for more efficient work, will resemble the forced collectivization that the world has already seen.

But the ramifications of the demand of wages for housework are even broader and deeper. The female role of dependency, the low wages of women who work outside the home, the kinds of work that women are channelled into, all flow from women's wageless (hence powerless) condition in the home. The nuclear family itself has no solid base than women's economic dependence on a wage-earner.

We demand wages for housework from the State. Not just because there are few wage-earners who could afford to pay a housekeeper (an average of 60 pounds a week, according to one estimate). Not because it is the State which benefits from our labour, which it has taken free for centuries. But most important because this is our struggle and we must set the terms of it. We do not ask the State to rationalize housework or passively accept some oppressive plan that they will propose to put on us. We want to be in a position by our struggle to reject something worse than what we have, to create something new, alive, and liberating.

Wages for housework offers independence and the dignity that comes from a recognition of one's efforts. It offers a choice of occupation for one's energies, a freedom to leave housework, to enter into a social, instead of privatized existence (however fancy the prison of the home might have been). It offers women the chance to relate to other people on a fully human level, not as doormat, sacrificing angel, or cannibalizing matriarch. And immediately it offers women the sisterhood of waging a struggle together.

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK AND THE SINGLE WOMAN

All women are housewives. That is the role they are brought up to fulfill. Whether they get married and have children and their life consists literally of housework (i.e. keeping house for a man) or whether they stay single (with or without children) does not in any way alter this fact. Single women without children often have difficulty identifying with "real" housewives. They feel they are different because they appear to be independent and free. In fact, in a more subtle way, they are probably performing exactly the same functions for the men in their lives at home and at work and for themselves as the "real" housewife. This is a false differentiation between women which we must get rid of.

As a single woman the fact that we are all housewives was very vividly brought home to me in my last job which I did for two years. As an assistant film editor I worked in a very isolated and claustrophobic situation for one (married) man directly and for several indirectly. There were no other women either in our cutting room or nearby. Making tea or coffee all day was the least of it and a man in my job would have had to do the same. But I was also expected automatically to do other tasks specifically because I am a woman. I went out to buy special foods for anyone who felt ill or had no time, I bought cigarettes and personal provisions at the chemist if they forgot. I swept, hoovered, scrubbed the cutting room with vim from top to bottom, I suspect more often and better than a male assistant. I chauffeured men across town in my car if they didn't know the way. I was expected to keep them company at lunch and dinner if we were working late and they were alone, or know when to stay behind if they were going to talk business or eat with a woman. I was at all times a shoulder to cry on. Work problems, financial problems, personal problems, depression, ill health and sundry grumbles came my way daily in varying doses. All this on top of performing a tiring job efficiently and well and looking good, to add to my boss's status. (Inasmuch as my boss and I were friends, I did of course sometimes confide in him, but more often I held back my own problems). I often felt that we were as good as married. My boss asked me not to go out with the odd possible man that turned up; he on the other hand felt free to go out with my girlfriends.

But the crunch came for me every night when we eventually went home. All the men would ring up their wives to announce their imminent arrival and ask what was for dinner. They would go home after a hard day's work to hot meals, clean houses, clean clothes for tomorrow and lots more under-standing. I on the other hand would go home, hoping to find a shop still open to grab some food, to a flat I hadn't had time to clean, to dirty clothes, to unanswered correspondence and no energy to deal with any of it till my day off. (I sometimes worked seven days a week and didn't have a day off).

I suppose I should add that I was doing an apprenticeship and learning a trade which is why I stuck it out; but the point is it was an experience

which shows very clearly that I was a housewife at work and at home, that I was reproducing (as well as his wife) both my boss's labour power and my own and that all this work was invisible. This is true of millions of women who go out to work.

Housework is productive work which is unpaid. In a nuclear family the wife produces and reproduces labour power (both her own and her husband's). In the case of the single person who goes out to work and has to look after herself/himself, the person who reproduces the labour power is the same person who sells it. Housework includes shopping, preparing and cooking food, washing up, hoovering and scrubbing the floor, washing and ironing clothes and also the work necessary to reproduce the stereotypical female image that is expected of all women who go out to work, i.e. all the work involved in maintaining the appearance of hair, make-up and clothes.

Besides doing their own housework at home, women who go out to work often find themselves doing housework as part of the job they have been employed to do. They automatically work as caterers, cleaners, nurses and as wives, giving emotional and moral support. These services are taken for granted and not paid for because they are part of the work all women do free.

Physical housework is also an expression of emotional support. Because of the dehumanizing nature of capitalist production, housework has the necessary function of making people's lives more bearable -- one's own or someone else's. Looking after people or looking after oneself is work precisely because it enables the capitalist to go on exploiting our labour while only paying for a tiny part of it.

We demand wages for housework for all women, married or single.

Esther Ronay

WHY I WANT WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

I don't work because I like it. I hate it. I work because I need the money, just to pay the rent and buy the food I need to live. One thing about living in a nuclear family as opposed to a communal arrangement is that you need more money just to keep alive.

I work as a typist, mainly copying shit, sometimes plugged into an audio-machine, wires coming out my ears, foot pedalling at the end of another wire, hands thumping the typewriter -- and the voice, HIS voice, right inside my head. The most degrading bit is when the voice in my head uses my first name. I don't even know what his first name is.

From 8.30 to 4.15 every day I've got to forget I'm human -- forget everything that makes life worthwhile. Forget what I could be doing, what I'd like to be doing. Worst of all, when the sun's shining. I'm expected, day in and day out, to be there at 8.30 ready to give a full day's labour. No allowance is made for personal problems/depression -- everyone may be concerned, even sympathetic, if they know something's wrong -- but they still expect a full day's work of the usual standard. And they still expect you to be part of their scene -- a cheerful cog in a cheerless machine.

It gets more and more isolating. The effort required to switch from the structure to human relationships gets heavier and heavier. I come home too exhausted to think and find myself forced to relate somehow to the people I live with. Try to put my mind to work on the things I'm interested in. Try to share in the joys of my child growing up, to learn things with her and spend time with her. Try to make, or keep up, contact with real people who think the way I do. That becomes more and more difficult. Everyone has their own life, their own problems. Even in Women's Liberation it's hard to think of myself as part of a movement, as belonging with other women, when my own life means such an individualized oppression. The day's routine, the getting up at 7 o'clock and going to work, coming home to washing up/laundrette/cleaning/cooking -- even when these things are shared equally they still have to be dealt with. I know everyone shares these oppressions, but it becomes more and more my oppression, that I have to deal with myself. I know that in emergencies I can call on friends for help, or that in their emergencies I'll help them out. But the isolation, for them and for me, is in dealing with the little, everyday things.

The day's routine leaves me too exhausted, too dehumanized, to make myself wholly part of the struggle with other people to deal with it for once and for all. The struggle becomes internalized and expressed in the need to deal with what's for dinner or who's doing the washing up. And because everything is internalized in that way I find myself using up even more energy inside the family itself, fighting those issues. Or just arguing about nothing.

And it goes on round in my head, all the time I'm at work, that money is the only reason why I do it. Why else should I be enslaved to a wage which, while a good deal better than most, still leaves me without most things I need and want? Leaves me without any time for myself, to make relationships, to even think about the things I'd like to do, let alone do them. The only way I can get money is by wasting 40 hours in the week -- the best hours at that -- working, another 8 hours travelling, and then of course there's several hours more on housework. So that even when I've got time to "myself" I can't use it for myself, I'm just far too tired.

So far, the strength of Women's Liberation has been that women have recognized the problem as universal, discussed it, and tried to help each other out especially at times of particular crisis. It has tried to expose the personal, individual problem as a general, political one. But when it comes down to the nitty gritty of making ends meet and coping with the individual pressure, and oppression, the movement has not found a way of struggling against these problems. All we have learnt how to do is share them -- an essential basis for struggling against them. The demands that have been put forward have not dealt with, or only partly dealt with, the real every day oppression that all women have to deal with all the time. And many of them have become dangerously co-optable by the State as a means of pushing capitalism forward.

Wages for housework is the only thing which for me would begin to deal with all that. I could immediately stop or at least cut down the paid work I do outside the home. Even if I had to carry on doing the housework I do now I would still have 40 hours a week liberated for my own needs. It is the first demand that has put forward the possibility of a measure of personal liberation. I wouldn't have to get up at 7 a.m. I wouldn't have to go to bed early. I would be in a position of picking and choosing what I do with my day. I at least feel that with that demand I am fighting for a measure of liberation for myself -- and not just for myself, but for the whole struggle. I would then be free to meet people, discuss, read, demonstrate, or whatever. I could give up that shitty job and just begin to enjoy my time a bit.

Women who do paid work outside the home could give that up. Women who do only unpaid work in the home would have money of their own for the first time. The only way to get out of the house is if you've got the money and the time. And the only way you can feel part of a human movement for total liberation is if you can get out of the house that isolates you and imprisons you and out of the work that dehumanizes you.

I want wages for housework so that I can get out of the house for 40 hours a week, not to bash a typewriter for capitalism, but to be part of the struggle to get rid of capitalism altogether.

Helen

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK AND THE SINGLE WOMAN

We don't want the "right to work", because we already work. I think that equal pay is a demand that doesn't really deal with the fact that we all have our relationship to production determined by the fact that we are women.

Why does a part of the female work force take a second job?

- 1) For money, and
- 2) To avoid going mad (housewives), or
- 3) They're unmarried and waiting to get married, or
- 4) Single women spend all their time and energy just to avoid the fate of housework, i.e. the "career girl".

Some of us (the proportion is bigger in the movement than in the rest of society) -- more and more of us -- belong to the last category, and will be more motivated to ask for equal pay (and it's right not to tolerate such basic robbery), but it's still a very small proportion of women.

Usually, it all starts with the illusion, shared by men, that there are "interesting jobs" that men keep for themselves, that we are going to get one of them and show them what we can do. All this is mixed with a rejection of the female role, often accompanied with contempt for other women (this has been described many times). At some stage comes the consciousness that there are no "interesting jobs" in this capitalist society worth fighting for. Nor are there for men, by the way, but women have to fight twice as hard, so it ought to be really convincing (maybe that's the explanation why there are so few top business women, top lecturers, top whatever-you-want women).

Making a career, for a woman, means giving up motherhood, maybe giving up a stable relationship with a man, and losing all of her female friends, etc.

And one day you realize that you have been struggling not to get something else, but just to avoid being a houseworker, and that you can still become a houseworker at any time, if you are not careful every day of your life; you might be asked by your family to look after somebody old or ill; you might "fall in love" with a male chauvinist pig (yes, yes, it happens); you might want to have a child.

You are seen as a prostitute by most men you meet at work and you haven't escaped the general exploitation of women through advertising. You are considered a sex object: maybe the little success you have at work is due just to that.

Because of all this, plus unequal pay, even this category of woman can ask for a wage for housework: the difference between her wage and that of her male counterpart allows him to pay for the services that a wife would perform free -- e.g. he eats in a restaurant.

The woman who earns less money will spend more time just looking after herself -- and she will have to spend twice more energy at work if she wants to climb up the hierarchy, or try to conform to the male ideology of work, which serves the system so well. Wages for housework is the only demand at the moment that seems to give a chance to all women to break with that ideology.

S. L.

INTERVIEW WITH SELMA JAMES
APRIL 28, 1973

JON -- The main specific issues that I'm aware of in Toronto are the fight for free day care and to repeal the abortion laws. The main point to free abortion is that this gives a woman a right to work or not to work and generally have control over her life with relation to the bearing of children. I remember you bringing up the point on Thursday that the issue should also be the freedom to have or not have children in the economic sense, that is, to have the income to allow you to have children.

SELMA -- The question of the right for a woman to have children is really the key question, not the right to have an abortion. The reason that we have to demand the right to abortion is that first of all that the birth control either doesn't exist or it interferes with our sexual lives. There are many women who don't use birth control sometimes because they really want to enjoy themselves and the contraception which they are able to use if they are not able to use the pill prevents them from having the type of sexual relations that they think they are entitled to. Also some of us don't use the pill because it's dangerous and some of us don't use it because it makes us ill. Some of us get pregnant because the birth control that they give us is deeply unsatisfactory, but on the other hand many of us have abortions because we cannot afford it, or we don't have the housing facilities, and we don't have the ability to go on with what we're doing if we have a child. A woman's life stops dead if she has a child. An infant is a very helpless thing, and child care for an infant is really dependent on one woman.

But there is a wider context in which we have to demand the right to have or not to have children. Because the women's movement is an international movement, and because our relation with the Third World is not a moral relation, but a material relation of struggle. Women of the Third World are under tremendous pressure to cut down on the children they have. When I was in Jamaica a year ago, there was an advertisement that played on the radio once an hour, lasting for about a minute, where a woman is on the phone having a conversation with another woman telling this woman that she's getting married, and she's telling this woman also, that she and her husband are going to plan their lives, and among the things that they're going to plan is their having children, and she says "We're not going to have any children until we can afford them." That means overwhelmingly the mass of Jamaican people should not have children because they can't afford to.

The government, and when I say government I don't just mean the Jamaican government, because it takes orders from its bosses in Ottawa and Washington, because they are the ones who are in charge of the bauxite there, because it's the most important industry, and they have been told that this number of people there are in Jamaica without work, are getting

very troublesome and very dangerous, because they're not demanding work they're demanding money, and they're ready to fight for it in all sorts of ways. And so these women, under the pressure not to have children, if we just demand the right to have abortion, they will interpret that to mean, and quite justifiably, and quite accurately, that we don't give a damn about other women in the world and we are only concerned about ourselves

I'm not suggesting that only women in the Third World are suffering from that, overwhelmingly, the majority of women in the world do not have the children we want, and do have the children we don't want. In other words, we do not generally have the choice to have children when and where we want, and many women add, and profoundly so, the way we want them.

JON -- You were also mentioning a wage for housewives.

SEEMA -- We demand as a political perspective, wages for housework. We phrase it as a demand for housework rather than housewives for two very specific reasons. If men want to do the housework, that's fine with us, let him get paid. Housework is work and that's the second reason. We want to drive that into the minds of every member of society, man woman and child, that when we are working in the home we are doing work, and we are the most unique section of the work force because we are the only section which works like hell and at the end of the week doesn't get a pay packet to show for it. So that our demand for wages for housework is a demand really for us to organize a struggle conscious of the fact that all housewives are working, are workmates, and that all women, except maybe the very rich, are housewives, at least part-time. Those that work outside the home are also housewives in the evening and on weekends. It very often happens that the power of the wage that they are able to earn on the outside, no matter how small, means that they can demand of the man some help in the house. That's undoubtedly what's happened in the last 20 or 25 years. For example in the US and UK, in the metropolis.

But the responsibility of the house still remains the woman's. Because overwhelmingly all women are housewives and the work they are doing at home is not assumed to be work. Because they don't get any money at the end of the week, confirms them and institutionalizes them further in that role. Women are conditioned to want to be able to perform that role and not to resent performing that role. It seems that it's very natural when you get up from the table after having had a meal that the woman clears the table and that the woman still does the dishes and we don't even think about the fact that she cooked it in the first place. It's almost invisible the work a woman does in the home. And we want to make it very visible. We think that it's so crucial to the woman's situation what she does in the home, that she would be willing to leave her home to make a struggle with other women, precisely for that money.

Because that is the only possibility of having some autonomy from men in the first place, and even some autonomy from her children, and to have some say in what happens to her and in how she spends her life. Now we think this is a very working class demand, this demand of wages for housework. Because the greatest discipline on men to work, is not, as

sometimes young intellectuals believe, the work ethic, which is an ideology. The greatest discipline is material. A man knows that if he doesn't work his family doesn't eat. And he is trapped in this situation to the degree where in spite of the fact that he gets privileges from the woman because he has a wage, and she doesn't, those privileges cost him his life because he must keep his nose to the grindstone in order to be able to maintain that woman and the children that she bears for him. So when we demand a wage for housework, we also begin to unburden the male; first of course of some privileges over us, but secondly of some responsibilities for us which are a dead weight in his struggle against his employers.

TINA -- Who's going to pay? Are we talking about under this system?

SELMA -- I'm talking about tomorrow morning, and I'm saying that the people should pay who benefit from our labour. We don't work for men, we work for capitalism, we produce men and women and children as labourers, and therefore it's the capitalist class that benefits from our labour, and we ask the money of that body, that institution, which represents the capitalist class, which represents what we call capital, which is the State, the government. We demand from them payment for the work we are doing because it is precisely they who are benefiting from the labour that we do. We do a marvelous job for them, which we want to stop doing, incidentally. We create the working class. We produce what Marx called labour power. We discipline children, we drive them to school, we make sure that our men go out to work every morning because we know how we're going to suffer if they don't go out to work. And making sure that they go out to work is precisely our work. We don't want to do that work and we want to be able to tell the men "if you don't want to do that work it's all right with us because we're going to get some money from that goddamn state that has been exploiting us for so long."

TINA -- But under this system, the capitalist class is not supporting the government so all the money we would get would be our own money.

SELMA -- All the money the state has they got from us. Every single thing, and they keep it. And they send men to the moon with it, and they research in universities with it, to find out how better to control us. They pay sociologists, marriage counsellors, social workers, with our money. And instead of doing that we would like the money, that's not so difficult. We want that back. We don't want marriage guidance counsellors. We wouldn't need them if we had money. We would know exactly what to do. You need a marriage guidance counsellor if you're stuck in a marriage and you don't know how the hell you're going to bear it for the next 15 years until your children are old enough to support themselves. The state has a lot of money and all of it is ours. We want it back. I think that's very sensible.

TINA -- I think it would make more sense to get it from the capitalist class, and the money we give the government to come back in the form of childcare centres etc. This would allow women to free themselves from their children sometimes, and the children could enjoy themselves.

SELMA -- You know, these places that take care of our children that the government sets up, they're not good you know. They're prisons too. I think we should have some time to spend with our children, and I think men should have some time to spend with their children. Because the only function men perform for their children is seeing that they have food in their mouths. They don't know their children, they don't spend any time with them, and the women who work in child care centres get the lowest, most miserable wages. It's always women who do that work, and the children never see men change diapers in a childcare centre, or pushing them on the swings, or playing with them in the sandboxes. We want our children to be with other children and also to be with other adults.

I don't think that the American state could have the nerve, if we had a powerful women's movement, and when I say women's movement I don't mean the women's liberation movement. I mean a movement of thousands of women in the streets, which is very conceivable, which is not a dream. You can see from the reaction of the meat boycott, the cutback of nursery schools that Nixon has just put on the backs of women again, that there is a great possibility of getting hundreds of thousands of women in the streets demanding things which are in their own interest. I don't think the American state will say "but we have no money", because there are so many things we could tell them to stop doing. Destroy the space program, stop making bombs, stop polluting the atmosphere, cut down on your expense accounts, maybe the president should take a cut in wages, maybe he should get the wage of a welfare mother, and see if he can live on that. We could even double it for him. We'll give him \$210 a month.

JON -- Some people feel that women have to become part of the work force before they can become radicalized.

SELMA -- Juliet Mitchell, author of Women's Estate, says that in the formative political years which she says is between 18 and 22, women are not part of the labour force and therefore cannot develop class consciousness.

A working class child develops class consciousness at birth. They know that the neighbourhood that he is living in is a working class neighbourhood, that the father is earning a working class wage, that the mother if she's at home is not getting a wage. They are surrounded by a working class life. They are aware of the other classes in society. I think that what Juliet Mitchell says about class consciousness is the biggest load of shit that I have ever heard! You don't have to join the work force in order to have class consciousness -- the fact that we are stuck inside of our homes is a class position! We have a relation to the wage. What hides the fact that we are working is that we don't directly receive a wage.

I sometimes wonder about people who think that we should leave our homes and go to a factory, as if the road to liberation is through deeper exploitation. We do not have to have another level of exploitation to be in a position to struggle for our liberation. We can do it from the position of exploitation we already are in. It is difficult for housewives to organize because they are scattered -- but not impossible.

Tremendous tenant struggles have taken place, struggles against price rises, inflation. We have a women's movement that numbers in the millions. We can do a lot of organizing where organizing seemed impossible before. There are a lot of places in which the woman confronts the state. And she confronts the state in places where there is no mediator, as the man in industry has. She confronts the state in the supermarket. That is the state, that is capital organizing wages. That is capital taking back from the woman what it has been good enough to give to the man because the man made a hell of a battle for it. That is the organizer of the wage -- prices. There are two sides to wages -- the part they give men and the part they take away from women.

My personal dream is that some women will get together, and take their children, and go to some big factory somewhere, and walk in, and put their children down on the assembly line, and walk out. Everyone in the society should understand that if they were not seeing after the children, those men in that factory wouldn't be able to do any work. You know, you can't make Ford cars and change diapers at the same time. That will demonstrate the power of both points of production at the same time. The production of labour power in the home and the production of things which is in the factory. That would show the complete unit of struggle.

TINA -- Would you explain Marxism-feminism?

SELMA -- We call ourselves Marxist-feminists because we base ourselves on a Marxist concept of what the class struggle is all about, on the fact that the exploitation of the working class is on the basis of the power of capital to exploit workers. And the reason we add feminist to Marxist is because an area of productivity of capital in the home has been up to now hidden because the woman in the home has not received a wage. So when Marxism up to now viewed the whole of society from the point of view of the factory, Marxist-feminists view also the factory from the viewpoint of the home. It doesn't cross out the point of view of the factory but it adds something to the former definition. In politics 1 + 1 doesn't make 2 it makes 5.

The addition of seeing the other area of productivity of the whole of capitalist society as the control of life of the working class every moment of the day, is to view the totality of capitalist exploitation and therefore to view the totality of capitalist exploitation and therefore to view the totality of the struggle. Marx himself, writing about capital, described the complete circuit of capital, he never said or implied that the struggle was only in the metropolis, as so-called Marxists have taken it to be or physically, only in the factory. Marxism-feminism is the discovery of the power of women in the community to struggle for the liberation of the working class -- not as an appendage to the man, not as an auxiliary to the factory struggle but as an integral part of every section of society which is exploited and oppressed by capital.

SPEECH OF SUZIE FLEMING ON BEHALF OF
THE WOMEN'S FAMILY ALLOWANCE CAMPAIGN
(WOMEN'S DAY MARCH 10TH MARCH 1973, LONDON)

I have been asked to speak today on behalf of the Women's Family Allowance Campaign, a campaign which is being organized by Women's Liberation groups all over the country. This is a campaign to defend and increase the Family Allowance, the only money many of us have of our own.

The Family Allowance is paid to every mother with two or more children, 90 p. for the second child, 1 pound for the third. It's not much, and we need more. But for women who work full time in the home, it's the only money that's paid direct to us. The only money we don't have to ask anyone for. The only money we can call our own.

It is paid on a Tuesday. The men bring home their wages and give us our housekeeping at the end of the week. By Tuesday we are broke, but we can go to the post office and cash some money to see us through to the end of the week. We have a Family Allowance book. We know how much money we're entitled to and where we can get it. We have the money for this week and for future weeks. This is our right.

If we want to save a bit, we can delay cashing orders so we can save up for more expensive essentials. Or we can cash it every week. It's up to us. One thing we know for sure is that we can get that money. It's not tied to a man's wage. It's paid at all times -- through sickness, unemployment, strikes or breakdown of marriage. This is the only money we can rely on.

But now the government is trying to take this money away. The government have said they want to abolish the Family Allowance. Instead they want to pay what they call child tax credits. They said they want to pay these in the men's pay packets, through the employer. They say people in work or registered for work and getting sickness or unemployment benefits would get these credits, paid through the man.

But what about people on Social Security? Those on strike? Those who are self-employed? Wives of students? All these people would be left out completely. And even in those families getting the tax credit, the women would have to ask the men for the money. We're not having that. We refuse to give up what little money of our own we have.

Already the government has seen that we won't give up our right to some money of our own, and that women have been protesting all over the country. In the Budget speech the government had to back down a bit. They said they would pay some of the child tax credits to the mother.

But tax credits are not the same as Family Allowance. They would not be paid automatically. They would not be paid to all women with

children. Many women would be left out. We don't want tax credits for some mothers. We want Family Allowance for all mothers.

We want to keep the Family Allowance as paid at present, paid automatically -- never mind whether the men are working or not working, on strike or supplementary benefits.

We want the Family Allowance paid for the first child as well. We want the Family Allowance to be made tax-free. The men must no longer be taxed on what we get. We want women on Social Security to get the Family Allowance as well as Social Security. And we want more.

The government has stopped school milk. They stopped cheap school meals; They put charges on prescriptions. They put the rents and the rates and the prices up, and froze wages. We need more money, not less. We want that money from the State, not from the men. The men haven't got enough either.

We have seen what power we have. One and a quarter million women signed a petition demanding that VAT be removed from children's clothing and the government gave way. They are going to have to give way over the tax credits as well. They are going to have to keep and increase the Family Allowance.

The Women's Family Allowance Campaign has been collecting signatures for a petition. We have been to schools, factories, markets, post offices, and women have been queuing up to sign, taking away petitions to get their friends to sign. Women have been organizing meetings and working out a strategy for further action. On March 27th we shall be petitioning and demonstrating at Post Offices all over the country. Wherever you are get some petition forms and go to your local Post Office.

We are going to show this government the time for taking things away from us is over. Workers all over the country are striking. We are workers too. We are going to make them give us what we want. We say:

HANDS OFF OUR FAMILY ALLOWANCE.

MORE MONEY FOR WOMEN.

IN THE FACTORY, IN THE OFFICE, IN THE HOSPITAL, IN THE HOME,
POWER TO OUR SISTERS!

THE FAMILY ALLOWANCE CAMPAIGN: TACTIC AND STRATEGY

The Family Allowance campaign was built on the spontaneous response of women in the movement to an escalation of the government's offensive against women (prices, welfare cuts, etc.). It was a response to what the government did, however, and not the result of what we had worked out as a perspective which we applied to this particular turn of events. This is a statement of fact, not a criticism: strategy can only be worked out on the basis of concrete experience. We now have an excellent opportunity, after eight months of a campaign which has had great success in terms of the response of women and some success in terms of undermining government policy, to begin to draw from the campaign conclusions for strategy generally.

Not only is this an opportunity but an imperative. It is easy if we drop our guard to slip from undermining government policy into reshaping it so it operates with fewer snags. To put it bluntly, the campaign can be utilized to make government policy to women more effective; our movement is being linked to the capitalist State by those threads whose fineness hides their strength.

So that the weaknesses and contradictions within the campaign at this state are far more important than they were at the beginning. These weaknesses must be overcome and the contradictions resolved where possible, first, if we are to prevent those links and, second, if the work of eight months is not to be a sporadic though massive moment of activity among many other sporadic moments which the movement has known.

1. We dealt with the class issue of tax credits only as it was an attack on women workers who are all full or part-time unwaged houseworkers. Though we stated in our analysis how tax credits were an attack on men, waged and unwaged, no male-dominated "working class" organization took this up or made any campaign against tax credits as an attack on the male worker.

Along with the Labour Party, of course the TUC* supports tax credits. It accepts the taxing of insurance benefits with the proviso: "It would be essential to implement a once-for-all special increase in the rates of NI benefit, to compensate for the effects of such a change." It accepts the end of tax rebates for the sick, unemployed, etc., which this tax credit system wipes out.

If the government decides to withhold tax credits from strikers, however, ("particularly to single-person households"), this "might well lead to outright opposition by the General Council to the whole tax credit scheme." But they're not sure.

* Trade Union Congress, the British equivalent of the Canadian Labour Congress

The TUC recommends that child credits be paid to the mother. It recognizes that the take-home pay of the father would be reduced by this system. But "the impact on the take-home pay of the father could...be substantially mitigated by a gradual transition to the new situation; thus in the year preceding the introduction of tax credits, child tax allowances could be gradually reduced, and family allowances gradually increased." So that men will gradually get used to a smaller pay packet. (All quotations from TUC Memorandum to the Select Committee, March 14, 1973.)

We are often told in the women's movement to work through or with or for the unions. But those who tell us this have either felt it worthless to try to get the unions active even on behalf of men workers on this issue or, having tried to do so have largely or absolutely failed. In any case, the campaign has not and could not be expected to mobilize men against the tax credit system. Where the attack on tax credits should be coming from all sides, it comes only from one side, the feminist side: the Women's Family Allowance Campaign.

2. We were divided within the campaign on the meaning of taxation as a class issue and on where capitalist wealth comes from. We heard early from the Child Poverty Action Group women who came to our meeting: "Tell me what you want and I'll have it costed" to see if the State could afford it. We had always and repeatedly to make clear that all the capital the State has they have robbed from us, women and men workers. The question is not whether the State can afford to give it, but whether we can afford to continue to give so much to the State.

We were therefore divided on who the State represented. Some women were against that point on the petition which called for Family Allowance to be made tax-free. They felt that "the rich" would get the Family Allowance and not pay tax on it. Well the rich do not live or die by Family Allowance but by robbing large sums daily from us through our labour in the home and out of it. All workers but the lowest paid and the wageless are taxed on Family Allowance. Taxation is not a system by which the State distributes income "fairly" but the State's way of robbing the working class after it has finished producing for the week (except women -- we never finish).

3. We were divided within the movement on who the money was for. One women's group in London which held a public meeting on Family Allowance introduced the meeting by saying that Family Allowance was not for the mother but for the children. While we were attempting to make clear that the woman was entitled to the money in her own right, as a human being who is made dependent on men by wageless work in the home, they were riveting the woman to childcare in order for her to be eligible for Family Allowance. The women we met through the campaign said, "But this is the only money we can call our own." Meanwhile these women from the movement said by implication: This is money for the children which we have no right to spend on ourselves. Thereby they reinforced the guilt housewives suffer: in spending the money their husbands bring home, women are told they are living as parasites off the man since they themselves do not work.

The new proposal which is attracting liberals from all the political parties is an extension of this money-for-the-child idea. It is called variously Family Responsibility payment and Home Responsibility payment; it aims to keep women at home with under-fives, for example, and by withdrawing payment when children are over five, to force them into the labour market in order to avoid a substantial drop in living standards and financial independence. (See The Family Allowance Under Attack, Suzie Fleming, Falling Wall Press & Power of Women Collective, June 1973).

The Red Rag Collective was uncertain about the whole purpose of our campaign and the government's: "Maybe we should press for an increased, children's allowance, non-means tested, tax free, boosted by return of free school milk, meals, etc." (Notes towards a discussion of the Family Allowance Campaign and its implications, March 1973. They underlined children's.)

4. We were late in taking the lead of the Unsupported Mothers whose demand for Family Allowance on top of Social Security payments separated need as we women conceive it from need as the Capitalist Establishment conceives it. Social Security is figured on subsistence -- as long as we are not starving to death they believe we are not "needy". But money for us is autonomy from men, the right to choose what we eat and when, how much we work and where, where we live, whether or not we have children and under what circumstances and with whom. To demand Family Allowance on top of Social Security is putting our own priorities first, and refusing to be sloughed off with our children by the State because we are refusing both to live in a nuclear family situation with men and also shit jobs at shit wages in addition to housework and childcare.

That the "supported" and "unsupported" mothers began to come together in this campaign, however, on the question of money for women, even in this limited form of Family Allowance, was one of the greatest victories of the campaign and one of the biggest steps forward of the women's movement. For the first time it was practically demonstrable that only a man stands between us.

5. We were never able to clearly and forcibly distinguish ourselves from do-gooders, liberals and ambitious parliamentarians who were proposing not to eliminate our dependence and poverty, but to regulate wages more efficiently.

Family Allowance was first instituted as a subsidy for low wages on the one hand and as a population control on the other: to control the quantity and quality of future labourers -- our children. (See Social Insurance and Allied Services Report by Sir William Beveridge, Nov. 1942, known as The Beveridge Report on which the Welfare State was based. Esp. pp. 153-158). The State now wants to remove Family Allowance because they are now planning to regulate the total wage bill (wages proper, insurance benefits and Social Security) differently and were no longer interested in us as breeders for future factories and kitchens -- they had immigration and bigger machines. The Child Poverty Action Group, for example, like the government, was interested in marshalling people into

waged work outside the home to save on Social Security and other benefits. They merely disagree with the government on the most efficacious way to do this. (See again Family Allowance Under Attack.) A number of women in the movement were not able to distinguish between the CPAG programme to modify the tax credit system, and the determination of the Women's Family Allowance Campaign to have no part of that system, for women or for men.

6. We are allowing the initiative to pass from our hands and the feminist issue to be submerged by State planning, statistical calculations and income tax juggling, which leave the mass of women utterly outside of activity. They won't understand what the "experts" are talking about (that's what expert means), and to their credit, they won't care.

Once we are dragged into the intricacies of figures we lose sight of the purpose of the campaign: to mobilize women to get money which they need, not to reform the tax system. At the moment a substantial increase in Family Allowance as a universal right of women is losing ground to the Family Income Supplement which is a direct wage subsidy to private capital paid by the State to lower paid workers. But the very name makes it appear as a charity from the State, and the issue of money for women is completely lost in "family income".

As usual with "benefits" or "allowances" or "supplements", the effect of this is again to hide the source of capitalist wealth. If all the money they have is ours to begin with, then their parliamentary debate on who should get crumbs from the master's table is irrelevant. But they give the impression that there is a budget which is fixed and unalterable into which we must fit our wishes and vie with each other about what they call "a slice of the cake". When one set of workers succeeds in winning something by struggle, they threaten that other workers must take less. But there is no cake, there is no budget, there is only the wealth which we have made and which they have stolen. If they were right, then we would have to say that men's wages are higher because women receive no wage for housework. But this is not so. Men's wages are lower than they would be if they had to buy our services. Men are cheaper workers for capitalists because they don't have to buy the labour we provide in the 99-hour work week of the housewife. (Chase Manhattan Bank's figure.)

Whatever men have been able to win in wages, we all fought for. Otherwise wages would be even lower. Whatever we as women win need not be at men's expense unless men are unable to wrest control of their struggle from trade unions, which refuse to fight (or even publicize) the issue of taxes as an additional robbery of working class labour. Who does not make a fight gets blows. That is the law of the struggle against capitalism.

In order for us now to develop this campaign and not be bogged down in the quicksand of parliamentary politics and (liberal or conservative) economists' figures, we must take our cue from the women whom we have met in the streets. The campaign must state boldly and clearly that

we demand Family Allowance

Because we are entitled to money of our own.

Because we work in the home full-time or part-time without a wage.

Because we get lower wages than men when we work out of the home.

Because unless we have money of our own, marriage is only a polite form of prostitution, and more rape will continue to take place in marriage than in back alleys.

Because we need the power to refuse the job of house servant in "our own" kitchens or somebody else's.

Because we need the power to refuse the worst jobs in industry which we take out of desperation and loneliness.

Because we have demonstrated publicly and consistently that we are ready to begin to overcome that loneliness and isolation by coming to meetings, going petitioning, meeting with other women, in the fight for money of our own.

We must destroy the concept that the State gives the poorest of us -- the unsupported mother -- charity. All mothers, all housewives, are unsupported because they do not receive money for their work. We are entitled to a great deal more than the pittance of Family Allowance. We are entitled when we do waged work not to pay any taxes. We are entitled to everything.

Family Allowance is not for the family. It is the women's money.

Family Allowance is not an allowance. It is a right.

Family Allowance is the woman's right to money. Women with waged work must receive money for their entire week's work, not only the part where the capitalist is breathing down their necks. To posit this perspective is the first strategic step for women to stop him from breathing at all.

9th July 1973

Selma James
Women's Family Allowance Campaign
London

PUBLICATIONS

Women in Struggle # 1

Women in Struggle # 2

(The Women in Struggle series are collections of documents about wages for housework struggles that are taking place on an international scale and affecting every aspect of women's lives.

Included in the booklets are political statements, analyses, and leaflets coming out of these struggles).

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 1

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 2

(The Wages for Housework Notebooks are collections of the more theoretical documents about wages for housework. The first two notebooks bring together many of the theoretical articles which have not yet received widespread distribution).

THESE PUBLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE FROM:

The Montreal Power of Women Collective
c/o Susan Wheeler
3940 Berri
Montreal, Quebec

The New York Collective
c/o Silvia Federici
491 Pacific Street
Brooklyn, New York 11217

The Wages for Housework Collective
P.O. Box 38
Station E
Toronto, Ontario

The Wages for Housework Collective
c/o Bonnie Woodall
4316 Huron Line
Windsor, Ontario

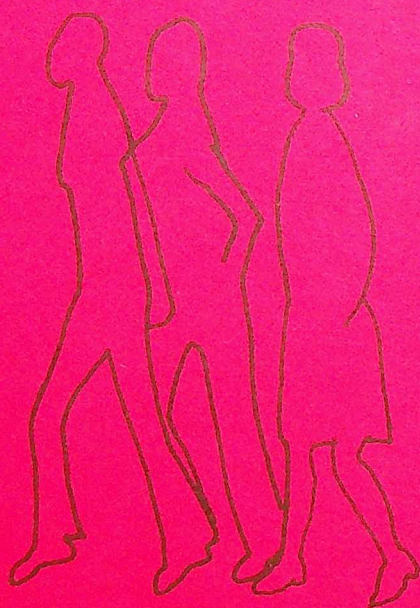
Women in Struggle # 1 and # 2 were produced by the Toronto Wages for Housework Collective.

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WOMEN IN STRUGGLE 2



ADDENDUM

NOTES ON TABLE OF CONTENTS -- WOMEN IN STRUGGLE II

Women Against Women: Another Form of Racism

This is written by Beese, a member of the Power of Women Collective, England with a membership of 40 women throughout the country. It was part of an on-going discussion on racism within the collective and was first published in the Power of Women Journal, Vol. I No. 2 July/August 1974. Copies are available from: 5 River Terrace, Flat 5
Henley on Thames
England

Living Through the Crisis: Women in Northern Ireland and Britain

This is a transcript of a public meeting held in February 1974 during the miners' strike, in London England by the Power of Women Collective. It brought together women from Northern Ireland (the taped interview) and other parts of Britain to discuss the effects of the crisis on their lives.

The Beginning ... Wages for Housework

This is excerpts from a speech given by a secretary belonging to Lotta Femminista of Italy on March 8, 1974, when their campaign for wages for housework for all women was launched in the Veneto area. It is reprinted from Power of Women Journal, Vol. I No. 2, July/August 1974. Copies are available from the address above.

The Struggle of the Nurses in England

This is three documents written by members of the Power of Women Collective, England, during the nurses' struggle for higher wages in the summer of 1974. Reprinted from the Power of Women Journal, Vol. I No. 2, July/August 1974. Copies are available from the address above.

Claimants Union Handbook

This handbook was prepared and published in 1971 by a group of "unsupported mothers" in Britain who as part of the national organization for the 200,000 people on Social Security -- the Claimants Union -- were speaking not only for themselves but also for the unemployed, the sick and the disabled. It received wide circulation throughout Britain and was originally printed by Crest Press, 154 Ladbroke Grove
London W 11, England.

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The nurses in Britain, from a position of waged work outside the home, carried forward the attack on our unwaged work both in and out of the home, spelling out for all to see how "women's work" is the same wherever capital puts us, as long as we remain powerless in the home. The office worker from Italy makes the same point in relation to single "working" women: we are all connected to each other -- none of us can ever have more power as long as the mass of women remain powerless in the home. The powerlessness of the unwaged housewife is the powerlessness of all women because it allows capital to force all of us to do unwaged work in the home -- if only part-time -- and to make us all work harder and for less money when we take a second job outside the home.

When we demand wages for housework we are challenging our most fundamental weakness as women and as working class. We cannot build our power except by going to the root of our powerlessness.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class!

February 1975

Judy Ramirez
Toronto

WOMEN AGAINST WOMEN: ANOTHER FORM OF RACISM

It is always hard for us to see the connection between our problems and the problems of women in different situations. For example, single women who have no children find it hard to see what they have in common with full-time housewives and vice versa. Women who have a bit more power than other women tend not to want to identify with the rest, especially with the full-time housewife. How those of us who live with men and those of us who don't, those of us who do waged work and those of us who don't, can struggle together is crucial for the women's movement and we have therefore discussed this often in our collective. The view we have come to is best expressed in the statement printed below. This sister shows that to make a separation between our needs and other women's, however different they may appear to be, is the basis of racism.

* * * * *

In the Power of Women group there are two black women ... I myself am also a member of the Black Women's Collective. Our presence, and the experience we bring to the group because of what and who we are is, I believe, a fundamental source of power for all of you. That the reverse must also be true has not been made clear by the group...

In the document circulated by C. the presence of black women is not reflected. But we must be somewhere around in the background because she talks about black men, white men, and white women. She says: "This particular example (that black men are more chauvinist than white men) though tainted with a convenient scent of racism, seems to illustrate an excellent point: that all men, however bright and shiny their political credentials, are compromised in relation to women, and the greater their own exploitation, the more open in their violence towards women."

Black men are more open to violence than white men. Yes, that is true. But the conclusions she comes to on this half-truth -- not only about black men but about BLACK WOMEN -- are racist and wrong. Black men are more violent. Yes. BUT SO TOO ARE WE. We discover our strength as we develop in opposition to the domination in our lives of black men, white women and white men, and what power we have, we have had to take for ourselves. We are more violent too in our day-to-day struggles against the State. And so too are black men.

C. describes the charge of racism (against her) as "convenient". In fact that racism exists and is ingrained. The totality of the black struggle by black women and men is separated off and the racist value judgments are made in which black women emerge as the supreme victims, isolated in a hopeless fight. In this way too the Family Allowance Campaign is separated off. It becomes an action by C. for other women and not for herself because she doesn't get the family allowance. If

she doesn't directly and immediately benefit from it, she doesn't see it as her need. Well, neither is she black, Asian, or Irish, and our presence in revolutionary politics must seem to her an exotic accident. This is the kind of fragmentation of which racism is made. She says: "I can postpone my needs in the interests of an external demand (e.g. the family allowance campaign) but I will not dismiss them."

If the Family Allowance is seen as an external demand and not for us all, then our struggle and our needs as black women are seen too as external and auxiliary, along with all the other fights taking place.

I am not proposing that we have a discussion within the group on racism, because I do not believe that is what will resolve the antagonistic relationship between black and white women. Wages for housework, the political perspective we want to activate, is in the interests of the WHOLE working class and has the potential to unite our autonomous (not separate) struggles.

-- Beese

LIVING THROUGH THE CRISIS: WOMEN IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND BRITAIN

The following is a transcript of a meeting held on February 14, 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:

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 too.

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.

* * *

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 baby-sitting, call ... and we'll try to help.

Organized by the Power of Women Collective - WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

ESTHER RONAY opened the meeting and read the following statement.

Women in Northern Ireland are fighting 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 shopped 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 women 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 ambulancemen'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 gives us a few hints about how to deal with them when they come down our streets. And that army has been demoralized 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 organizations.

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 rioting 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 realized 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 when 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 or 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 prolems at home. Miners 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 pounds 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 willage, 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 to a protest with Rose MacAdorey, 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 recognized me and 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 had bad nerves and, like Rose, I'm awaiting trial too, on a similar charge.

Do you realize 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 organization 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 organize 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 organizing 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 realized that they were with their wives, with the women's organization, 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 organize.

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 pounds 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 organization 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 organize. And it wasn't just a question of organizing 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 organize, 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 organized 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 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 in 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-aliadash, 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 comes 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 pounds, 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 came 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 pounds; 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 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 the fact of me being a black woman and an immigrant makes it even more kind of specific and more pin-pointing. 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 2 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 pounds, 9 pounds 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 launderette 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 one pound-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 sent me a big bill of 6 pounds 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 one pound 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 in, 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 five pounds 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).

THE BEGINNING ... WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

On March 8, 9 and 10 (of 1974) -- the weekend of International Women's Day -- the women's group of Lotta Femminista of Italy opened their campaign for Wages for Housework in the Veneto area. There were films, speak-ins, meetings, a photographic exhibition, music, songs and speeches. It was not only the launching of a campaign for money for all women from the State. It was also a celebration, a celebration of the strength that we have gathered internationally to challenge the State with this demand, to make everyone see our invisible work in the home.

We print below excerpts from one speech by an office wife, a secretary, one of that army of women who are chained for eight hours a day to a typewriter, a dictating machine, a telephone and a boss, and who go home at night to prepare themselves and others to work again.

* * * * *

I am a secretary and I speak for women like myself who have an outside job besides their housework. I want to say why I am in favour of this campaign for wages for housework and why, therefore, I'm taking part in this day of struggle.

Along with the women I work with, I have found it impossible to struggle to improve the conditions of our outside work. This is because:

On the one hand, women who take an outside job generally work for only a few years; they do it to put away money to get married, to save up for their dowry, to buy clothes, cosmetics -- that is, all the equipment that enables them to get a husband. For women, outside work is temporary. It has been impossible to build a stable organization for struggle with these young girls, who stay for a few years and then leave.

On the other hand, I found that some older women in outside work had to go back to their jobs because their husband's pay packet was no longer enough to keep the family going.

Women of a certain age, married, with children, with a house to keep going as well as their outside job, have never found the time to organize. And this is the reason for the weakness of women when, besides housework, they have to do outside jobs as well.

But what have they proposed to us up to now? They have proposed emancipation through outside work. All of them -- the reformists, the extraparliamentary groups -- all, without even noticing, without ever discussing the fact, without seeing, because they were men, that we already had a job: housework.

And they've had the nerve to tell us that, simply because we are women. They never would have said it to men, and in fact they've never had the nerve to propose the "emancipation of men" through 16 hours of work, eight for pay and eight for nothing! Only capitalism, in the early stages of industrialization, has up to now managed to impose such a working day, on women, on children and on male workers.

They've told us also: "Let's struggle for social services, let's struggle for nurseries", otherwise you won't be free -- to work outside the home. It was taken for granted that only women with outside jobs would be allowed to use the nurseries, never housewives!

We've found ourselves struggling for nurseries in very small numbers and with no strength: so we got few and these are terrible. They gave us the OMNI nurseries, concentration camps for our children.

While we were at work they gave our children valerian, tied them to beds, and we couldn't even find the strength to reject these ghettos, these "social services".

And as far as work is concerned, let's not mince words: it's not work we need, it's money! It is to get money that women take outside jobs -- to have some for themselves, to give some to the family when their husband's pay isn't enough, because they're tired of asking others for money ...

The problem then was to see on what ground we women, all of us, could struggle and demand money.

Then I discovered, we discovered, that the strength of women is enormous, that it could be enormous on just this ground of common struggle -- housework, the work we all do that nobody had ever seen. On this ground we could manage to find the strength to go forward, to begin to organize, to carry on this campaign ...

I also realized, and in part verified, that through this campaign for wages for housework we can find the strength to determine the conditions of our outside work.

I came out of the home to find an outside job in a condition of indescribable weakness. I had to take a job at 70,000 lire (₤50) a month. And this was because behind me there were millions of housewives without even a penny, ready to take the same job, ready to compete with me -- because that's how they've divided us -- ready to work eight hours for 60,000 lire (₤42) a month because 60,000 is better than nothing.

A condition of weakness again in the quality of the jobs we are forced to take.

I'm a secretary, which means being a mother, wife and mistress, having to remember all the appointments; if the boss is hungry you have to phone the cafe, go and get his coffee and buns. And the list could go on and on ...

This is my job, the work I do outside the home! The work that is supposed to emancipate me!

But how can I find the strength to determine the conditions of that work, how can I find the strength to get more money, what strength can I find to reduce that work, if millions of women at home go on being mothers, wives and maids for nothing? How can I find the strength to demand social services? How can I find the strength to demand nurseries while millions of women go on raising children for nothing...

We could get the strength to determine the conditions of social services and outside work only through the struggle for wages for housework: if we can make the work every woman does in her own home count, if we can get it paid for, we'll no longer be forced to do embroidery at home for 200 lire a day as we do in Sicily! Because that's the work they offer us. That's the money they give us. And they have the nerve to do it just because we are women!

I also realized this: that even if there was some chance of talking to other women at my job and trying at least to see how to organize against the conditions of outside work, we still weren't managing to organize ourselves, together with all other women, against housework. Housework always remains a nightmare for all women, married or unmarried, with or without children, young or old.

In the women's movement I found this chance to organize with all other women, and it became clear to us that wages for housework would be the only guarantee that we could determine the conditions of housework as well as those of outside work.

We're still dusting furniture with a rag in 1974. We're still doing housework in the most primitive ways! We still sweep out houses with brooms the way women swept caves millions of years ago! This work, housework, must change! We must find the strength to destroy it, to change it, to reduce the hours of this work, we must find the strategy of struggle through which we can break the chain of our exploitation from home to factory to office to delivery room. In wages for housework we have indicated this first strategy for the liberation of all women.

We've worked hard for this campaign because we believe in this struggle. We've distributed many leaflets. I've distributed them myself. There wasn't one woman passing on the street who didn't agree. All women think housework must be recognized, must be paid ...

Young women, students, are subject to the economic blackmail of their own parents, they have no way of expressing their sexuality, they can't travel, they have to learn to become housewives, they are utterly dependent on their families. This is to be a slave ...

You needn't look hard to see in our faces, in women's faces, the life we lead! At 40 our bodies are deformed! This body bears the marks of hundreds of miseries, thousands of hours of work which we donate free to the bosses, which we donate to the State, that State which is based

on the family, on the place of our exploitation, of our work! That is why we demand money from that State -- it is from that violent, fascist State that we want money, money like all workers ...

A man, when he finishes working, retires, which means he no longer works. Women are not only subjected to the mockery of the State pension, they go on working at home, they go on doing housework until they die.

This is our destiny. As long as we women, mothers, sisters, go on bringing up children at home for nothing, when we get old we find ourselves loaded with the role of grannies, which means we have to bring up our grandchildren for nothing as well -- and so they manage to make us go on being mothers as long as we live.

Women go through the menopause. The menopause can be treated. No, women must be made to suffer -- 10 years of hot flashes, 10 years of pain, 10 years of suffering, 10 years they take off our lives! An old woman has no right to love, or to fall in love, she is discriminated against sexually too. She has no right to gestures of affection; she must be only -- a granny!

Let's look and see what life is like for the girls who are trying more and more to refuse marriage even if they have children and are unmarried mothers! These women, these mothers, are put in disgusting institutions. Their children suffer discrimination at all levels, like rotten apples. The OMNI doesn't want them, it doesn't want those children without marriage, without Daddy; these children have to go into orphanages; these are the services they have given us, for which we are supposed to struggle.

If we have handicapped children, what help do we get? None. Derision and that's all. We have to hide them in the house, and when we can't manage them any more we have to put them in horrible institutions where they suffer further discrimination. And these too are our children, it is for them too that we struggle ...

So all over the world the women's movement has taken up wages for housework in a great effort of organization, propaganda, mobilization and struggle.

We are glad this day has been successful, that many women have come; that means that many women are coming together, over wages for housework, many women are beginning to struggle, and this we put forward today as the order of the day for all! Let this be our slogan:

STATE AND GUV'NORS, STUDY LEDGER PAGES
BECAUSE WE WOMEN WANT OUR WAGES!

A national conference of the Women's Liberation Movement, held in Edinburgh at the end of June and attended by 900 women, overwhelmingly passed this resolution:

This conference gives full support to the nurses and all hospital workers in their struggle for better working conditions and pay in the health service. We recognize that the nurses' work and pay have been as they are because most nurses are women, and that the nurses are undermining the blackmail that all women face, in the home and out of it, and are fighting a battle for all of us.

The Financial Times
Thursday, May 16, 1974.

THE NURSES MARCH -- LONDON

On June 6, a few of us from the collective went on the demonstration organized by nurses to get more wages. They gathered at Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment. We had never seen so many women together, not even on the Women's Liberation demonstrations. There must have been 6,000. The nurses were very interested in the poster/leaflet we had prepared and some of them pinned it to their aprons. A lot of them asked for hand-fuls to take back to their hospitals despite being told by senior nurses not to accept them. (See "More Money for Women Workers", following).

It was exhilarating to be amongst a crowd so overwhelmingly female which gave voice to what we wanted as women. In this case the men wanted the same thing: more pay now. We found it funny to be marching to a park where no money is kept!

A variety of opinion was reflected all along the demonstration. People were divided in all sorts of ways -- by age, rank, race, the hospital they worked in and even on the kind of demonstration they wanted -- quiet and orderly or frankly militant. But as the march proceeded, feelings and ideas were shifting and developing. The nurses chatted to each other about their tactics.

The march filled the whole of Regent Street and traffic was brought to a standstill. In Oxford Street the passersby were impressed and sympathetic but probably didn't know what to make of the slogans and remarks coming from the co-ordinating committee's megaphone. They were asking people to join the march without giving any convincing reasons. They said: "This is your National Health Service and you must be prepared to pay for it" as if it was the people in the street who were preventing

the nurses getting their money. In fact many of them were housewives, office workers and part-time women workers who are in the same boat or even worse off. The committee saw the need to speak to the people in the street and to other workers. "More pay for all hospital workers", they shouted, but they didn't grasp what was common to all of us.

As we reached Hyde Park Corner, a shower of rain drove a lot of people away before the meeting inside the park started. Nurses sitting in groups on the grass were addressed from the mike attached to the co-ordinating committee's van. The male speakers were not well received. Willy Hamilton, M.P., warned of "subversive elements" who might try to infiltrate the nurses' struggle. A union official, the only person on the demo to represent the Whitley Council, spoke of his "concern" for the nurses. He went on so long he eventually got booed off. Then several nurses spoke and it was clear that it was they the audience had come to hear. They spoke of their need for more wages, their willingness to strike for it if necessary and the need for unity with other hospital workers.

A Royal College of Nursing nurse said there would be no health service if the nurses don't get a rise. The RCN Fair Play for Nurses campaign believed in a dignified and professional campaign -- this despite the fact that young nurses wearing Fair Play for Nurses headbands were shouting and reacting to the speeches as loudly as anyone there. But another nurse got a big hand when she described the unrealistic rents and conditions of nurses' homes: "A 17-year old student nurse," she said, "is old enough to deal with a cardiac arrest but apparently not old enough to have a man in her room if she so chooses."

But the biggest applause was for the nurse who said she might be victimized for attending the demo (she must have been one of many in this situation): "They took my name as I was going and now that I know they are threatening me with victimization I'm going to fight bloody harder than I did before." Nobody minded the swear word nor thought it an insult to their "dignity".

-- Esther Ronay and Emma Wood

MORE MONEY FOR WOMEN WORKERS!

We are going through with the struggle in spite of parliamentary enquiries and in spite of the RCN. In spite of the fact that because most of us are women, the government never thought we would do anything except complain to each other.

As nurses we are constantly reminded that we must behave in a professional way. But conducting ourselves in a professional way hasn't got us anywhere in the past. What's professional about low pay?

To be a professional nurse is to be a professional mother. That's why we don't get paid anything. They expect mothers and nurses to do it all for love. The only way we'll ever get anything is to recognize that all of us -- nurses, ancillaries, domestics and mothers -- are WORKERS. We have to organize to fight for what we need, like every other worker.

They have used the blackmail against us that patients will suffer if we strike. But patients are suffering BECAUSE WE GET LOW WAGES. Because of low wages we are understaffed and overworked. Many of us have to go home and do another job for our families after a day's work or a 12-hour nightshift on the wards. And in that job at home, we face the same blackmail: don't let anyone else suffer, suffer yourself, in silence.

We are trained as women to accept hardship and take orders. We are trained as nurses to fit into the hospital system, not to question anything. We are trained to accept no pay as housewives and low pay when we work out of the home. We are trained to let all decisions be taken by the person one step above. But now we are not prepared to leave decisions about our pay and conditions to anybody. We are the only ones qualified to decide.

In the past we have been divided against each other and against ourselves. They use race and nationality to divide us. They use rank and status to divide us. They use uniforms to divide us. And they use wages to divide us. Those who get a pittance more are afraid of losing it by joining with those who get less. But we have nothing to lose by joining together and everything to gain.

We refuse to be divided any longer, by the administration of hospitals or unions or so-called professional bodies. All of us need more money, less work and more time for ourselves. No hospital can run without all its workers. If the kitchen stops, everything stops. Therefore we are all entitled to equal pay. Those of us with the lowest wages must get the biggest rise.

And all of us must get a big rise! No one counts work that women do, in our homes, in travelling to work, especially for weekend duty, as well as the hours we spend in hospitals, factories, offices, schools... Whether we are serving people or serving machines, it's not so different, it's a job. WE NEED TO BE PAID FOR ALL THE WORK WE DO. WE NEED THE MONEY AND THE TIME TO DO MORE THAN JUST KEEP OURSELVES ALIVE TO WORK ANOTHER DAY.

No hospital worker must be threatened with loss of job, loss of training, or with deportation -- as is happening with hospital workers from other countries. Black nurses face this threat as well as the extra degradation and insults they normally are forced to undergo. THERE MUST BE NO VICTIMIZATION FOR STRUGGLING FOR WHAT IS RIGHTFULLY OURS.

Although we have been forbidden to use our voice and our power, now that we have begun to act, every day more becomes possible. WE WANT WAGES FOR ALL THE WORK WE WOMEN DO, FREE TIME AWAY FROM THAT WORK. The days of blackmail and "professional" submission are over. We're going to look after our own health now!

Nurses from the POWER OF WOMEN COLLECTIVE

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

ALL OUT ON THE 8TH -- YOU CAN'T PAY THE BILLS WITH LOVE!

Nurses are in the forefront of the struggle against women's work and women's pay.

Hospital work is women's work, housework, childcare, clerical work waitressing, charring, at factory speeds. Nursing is looking after people, the very young, the old, the sick.

When we do this work at home we don't get any wage. And when we're nurses and do it on a 12-hour shift, running to keep up in overcrowded wards, they expect us to be satisfied with a pittance. IF OUR LABOUR WASN'T FREE AT HOME IT WOULDN'T BE SO CHEAP OUTSIDE. Student nurses take home £ 12 - £ 13 for a 40-hour week. And after three years you get about £ 20 a week. Women's pay -- for heavy work, long, unsocial hours and responsibility for other people's lives.

Prices have multiplied, and they still expect women to carry on working for no wage at home and for women's wages -- pin money -- if we have to take another job outside. They say it's "natural" for us. They tell us all the same thing: "Do it for love, virtue is its own reward." But low pay is not natural, and virtue will never keep up with inflation.

Nurses have been told they can't strike because the patients will suffer. But they've answered the government: "If the hospital system doesn't work, it's your fault, not ours." Patients are already dying because they're underpaid and understaffed. Women workers are always told, don't let your patients, or your family, or your customers suffer. We're supposed to suffer instead. THE NURSES HAVE BROKEN THROUGH THIS BLACKMAIL FOR ALL OF US. IF WE SUFFER, EVERYBODY SUFFERS, BECAUSE EVERYBODY DEPENDS ON US, MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN, THE OLD, THE YOUNG AND THE SICK.

The government never thought that nurses would organize, demonstrate, threaten to strike, work to rule, walk off the job. But they have. They've shown their power to the government, and IF NURSES CAN STRIKE EVERY WOMAN CAN STRIKE. If nurses can win, every woman can win: housewives, factory workers, all women workers -- all women!

If we work in a factory we think our conditions are different from hospital workers. If we work at home we think our conditions are different from factory workers. But we're all taking orders from someone higher up. We're all forced to do work we don't like. We're all facing rising prices that we can't meet. Therefore we must join together.

Nurses in Brent are asking you to support their national day of action -- the 8th of July. Workers everywhere in Britain are making it their national day of action. Brent Trades Council are calling for stoppages on that afternoon -- MONDAY THE 8TH OF JULY. There'll be a march

through Harlesden starting from outside Park Royal Hospital (Central Middlesex Hospital) at 12:30. The government and every employer will be counting how many women come out of homes, shops and factories that day. The more of us there are, the more they'll be worried about our power when we make our own demands.

*** We demand more money for women workers in the home and out of it so we can afford decent care for our children and time away from them.
so we don't have to do without in order to buy shoes for our children.
so we can have steak for dinner instead of macaroni and cheese.
The prime minister doesn't eat macaroni and cheese.
so we can be more independent of bosses, governments and men.

*** We demand decent housing and decent schools.

*** We demand more free time away from the home, the factory, the office, the hospital.

Come out on the 8th of July to demand more money for nurses, housewives and all women workers. YOU CAN'T PAY THE BILLS WITH LOVE.

POWER OF WOMEN COLLECTIVE

CLAIMANTS UNION HANDBOOK

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CLAIMANTS UNION HANDBOOK

Who Are We?

We are a group of unsupported mothers who are members of Claimants Unions all over the country.

Claimants Unions are organizations of people on Social Security who fight the S.S. system. Unemployed, sick, disabled, unsupported mothers, we all fight together. There are 200,000 of us -- women with children, or pregnant, who are claiming Supplementary Benefit for ourselves and our kids. THIS IS OUR RIGHT.

Many unsupported mothers can't claim: women whose husbands are out of work or won't give them any money. Others are struggling to make ends meet in low paid jobs, a lot of them bringing home even less than they would from the S.S. They too need to know their rights. Some of them have tried to claim and given up because of the hostile treatment they've received in the S.S. offices. Some have met with outright refusal. We all know what it's like to be treated like this. That's why we say UNSUPPORTED MOTHERS HAVE BEEN ISOLATED LONG ENOUGH.

We've let the S.S. lie to us and harrass us for long enough. We've felt ashamed and guilty because we haven't got a man for long enough. The S.S. is worse than a husband: they keep us at bare subsistence, watch over our "morality", spy on us with special investigators, walk in at any time to check on our housekeeping, our cleanliness....but mostly to see if there's a man in the cupboard. Living on S.S. means being scared to have men around, terrified to let them stay overnight, careful not to go out too often. You don't live, you just exist. When the strings are cut, we're supposed to fall down.

NOW WE'RE STANDING UP FOR OURSELVES.

Our only power is getting together to fight them back, backing each other up in the S.S. offices and in our homes when we are visited. By ourselves we can be frightened by a visiting officer: he's much less likely to intimidate us in front of witnesses.

We have to understand the way they use their "discretionary" powers to play us off against each other, making us resent the "lucky" person who gets a grant for shoes or curtains. It's not a JACKPOT, we are entitled to ask for what we NEED and if we are refused we can appeal and support each other at the tribunal. We don't have to go to the Salvation Army every time our kids need clothes.

LET'S FIGHT TOGETHER TO CLAIM OUR RIGHTS AND MAKE SURE NO-ONE IS LEFT WITHOUT.

Any unsupported mother over 16 can claim Supplementary Benefit for herself and the children (mothers under 16 are supposed to starve).

The 1966 Social Security Act says that "women who have dependent children don't have to make themselves available for work." So we don't have to sign on at the Labour Exchange, we can go straight to the nearest S.S. office and claim, and we should get our money week by week from an allowance book which can be cashed at the nearest post office.

What To Do If You Are Going to Make a Claim (for your guaranteed income for the next 16 years of your kid's life).

Where to Go

Go to the Social Security office nearest to where you are living. Most offices are open 10 - 4, but avoid lunch hours because they all go off for a good long lunch and leave you waiting. Be prepared for a long uncomfortable wait. The offices are dirty, the chairs hard, most have no toilets, and they never have facilities for children or food and drink. So take food, drink, toys, crayons, and don't worry about being out when your name is called. They have to interview you. If you're not desperate for money, make them come to you. Just write and ask for a visit -- they backdate your money to the day you put in the claim.

What to Take

Rent book (if you have one. If not, proof of address, which could be an envelope of a letter received at that address through the post). If you haven't a permanent address, you can claim from where you are staying.

Family Allowance book.

A friend or more to back you up. At home or in the office, the most important thing to remember is never meet them alone.

You don't need a stamp card or B1 (which is what they give you if you sign on at the Labour for work). You are not available for work.

How to Claim at the Office

"I am an unsupported mother with no income." That's all you need to say to make a claim. But of course the clerks won't be satisfied with that. They'll be nosy for details about why you have no income and where the husband or father is that's their problem. They ask because they have the power to take out a court order against a man to make him support his wife and children. This saves them money (see section on maintenance). So they might ask you lots of questions but you don't have to answer. You don't have to say where the father is or who he is if you don't want to. You don't have to show them the birth certificate. Even if you feel bitter about a guy who's run off leaving you pregnant, by giving them his name you don't get any more money. If they take out a

court order, they get the money because the father pays the money in to them and you get the same amount from them. So if they say to you (as they did to someone): "Are you going to let him get off and make another woman pregnant?" they're only out to line their own pockets. Say "I don't know who the father is."

Questioning

Their questioning can be an ordeal. Especially from the way they ask them, you can be made to feel if you don't answer they might stop some of your money. They can't cut your money down for not answering their questions. If they threaten to, appeal. You only need to answer six basic questions: your name, address, amount of rent, how many children you've got, how old they are, whether you live by yourself, and the fact that you've got no income.

Tell them nothing beyond what you have to: they store it up and will use it against you later. Police use S.S. files too. In Great Guildford St. office there's a notice in front of the interview desk with a list of names on it telling the clerk to call the police if any of those names come in to make a claim. In Ireland, it's a common way of catching "wanted" people. Don't tell them anything they don't need to know.

They haven't managed to starve us into submission, so now they're trying for total control of us. Not content with telling women who they can sleep with and what they can do in New York (which is always ahead of the times) they've brought in a new scheme called the "Incentives for Independence" programme, which cuts the money of unsupported mothers by half. They have to earn the other half on a points system. You get points for working, or looking after someone else's kids so they can work, having a clean and tidy house and clean and tidy kids, kids who go to school every day, kids who co-operate with teachers, and telling the S.S. who the father of your or someone else's child is and where to find him..... It can't happen here?

How to Claim When You're Pregnant

You can claim when you're seven months pregnant -- or when you want, seeing as how you're the only one who knows exactly when you got pregnant, or whether you're up to working. You need: the same as anyone else plus certificate of confinement from a doctor.

Before Confinement

You might need to make a claim for things for yourself when you're pregnant. Hospitals, doctors, the ads, everyone tells you to look after yourself: watch your health, eat steak, fruit, drink lots of milk, eat for two, everyone smiles and coos.....until you go to the S.S. and ask for a grant. Get a letter from the doctor if you need special food or a pair of comfortable shoes; put in for a special needs payment for dressing gown, nightdresses, slippers, and make sure there's a lot of you fighting to get them:

I wanted a grant for a dressing gown. So when the visitor came to see me I told him. He said I could not have it, so I put on my nighty and long white boots, and with my small white soap bag went down to the S.S. demanding my dressing gown. But still I could not have it, so I put in for a grant for beds, bedding and a hell of a lot more. This I got, so if you want a dressing gown and can't get one, put in for a big grant and you'll be sure of getting one.

Maternity Grants and Benefits

If you have the right number of stamps (26 in the last 12 months) you can claim a maternity grant of 25 pounds. Claim between 9 weeks before the birth and 3 months after on a form B.M. 4A from the S.S. or clinic.

You can also get up to five pounds a week maternity benefit if you've got enough stamps, for 18 weeks, beginning 11 weeks before the expected week of confinement.

Don't expect special treatment just because you're pregnant. When Mrs. Dinn went in for her money with a doctor's letter saying she was in danger of miscarrying if she didn't get food at once (she'd had no money for two weeks) they got the police to throw her out. The clerk said "one less mouth for us to feed". She lost the baby.

Confinement

The fight isn't over when you get into the hospital. Never meet the hospital alone.....it really helps to have a friend along, right through the birth. Most hospitals say "husbands only". We have't got husbands -- why should that mean that we have to go through it alone? The S.S. usually tries to cut your money down when you go into hospital -- at a time when it's hardest for you to fight back. A mother in West London had her book taken off her by a visiting officer because there was a man asleep in her spare bed. She was pregnant and the baby was overdue..... Make sure someone outside is fighting to get your full money, and the grant for baby clothes before you come home. If you have the baby at home you should get more.

What We \$hould Get

If you're over 16 it's easy to work out if you are getting the right amount. The total amount includes:

- 5.80 for yourself (if you pay rent)
- 4.60 for others over 21
- 4.05 for 18-21 year olds
- 3.60 for 16-17 year olds
- 3.00 for 13-15
- 2.45 for 11-12
- 2.00 for 5 -10
- 1.70 for under 5
- Plus rent

If your rent is more than 5 pounds they might refuse to pay it. If they do, appeal. Many appeals over rent have been won. In Bristol, a woman was refused 7 pounds rent; she took it to the rent tribunal who lowered it to 6 pounds, and the S.S. still told her she had to move. So she appealed and won it. Why should we pay landlords our food money? or move into slums? We've a right to live in the best housing we can find. If the rent is too high for the S.S., that's between them and the landlord or council. Rent includes rates, but not gas or electricity. If you have a mortgage, they'll pay the interest. Don't let them move you out into slums or homeless hostels.

- They deduct:
- 1) Family Allowance
 - 2) Earnings over 2 pounds
 - 3) Maintenance
 - 4) 5p for every 25 pounds of savings over and above 325 pounds

For example, here is how Mrs. A's money is made up:

	£	5.80	for herself
	£	2.45	for Sharon age 11
	£	2.00	for Michael age 6
	£	1.70	for the baby
comes to	£	11.95	
plus rent	£	4.50	
comes to	£	16.45	
less	£	1.90	family allowance
comes to	£	14.55	which is what she should get.

You can request a written assessment form (Form A124A) from them to see exactly how your money is made up. They have to give you this if you ask.

Free

- You should also get:
- 1) Free milk. (1 pint per child a day for every child under 5) But you have to demand this at the office.
 - 2) Free Prescriptions. Fill in a form from the Post Office.
 - 3) Dentist treatment.
 - 4) Free glasses.
 - 5) Free school dinners.

How They Pay Us

They send giros (cheques) every week until you get a visitor in your home, then a book which you cash at the nearest Post Office. If your book hasn't come, or you're claiming for the first time, make sure you get a payment over the counter: giros in the post sometimes never come. If they refuse, tell them SECTION 13 of the Handbook (*see bottom of next page) says they have to pay you if you're in urgent need. In most cities there's an emergency office or officer who will pay you out of office hours.

Visits

You'll probably be sent a giro payment through the post after your first visit to the S.S. office, and be told that you won't get the full amount until you've had a visit from the visiting officer. So it's important to demand a visit immediately, as they sometimes make you wait for weeks and weeks, which means you have to keep going down to the office.

Demand 24 hours' notice before all visits (so they can't catch you unawares). Never let them in unless you've got someone from the C.U. to back you up. Make the visitor show his I.D. card at the door. At the last C.U. conference, we heard that some visitors produce warrants which they claim gives them legal entry to your home -- don't fall for it. As yet no civilian has the right to come into your home if you don't want them to.

Set a time limit for the visit. If they don't come within seven days, treat it as a refusal to come and appeal. If they won't recognize the appeal, appeal again. Nothing worries the S.S. more than using their rules against them.

Special Needs Payments

You can get special needs payments whenever you need something that you can't buy out of the scale rates. But you have to fight for them.

How to get special needs payments: No grant is ever offered -- we have to demand it. Whether these things have been won before or not, they can only be got by fighting for them together.

1. Write to the S.S. office and tell them exactly what you need.
2. (see under Visits) When they send the visitor, make sure you're not alone. Have a list of everything you need and its price (average price e.g. Marks and Spencers). Go into detail -- don't just say shoes, for instance, say a good pair of boots to last the winter, or a pushchair you can fold with one hand -- 9 pounds from Mothercare.

* The Supplementary Benefits Handbook (the rule book they publish for the public -- get it from H.M.S.O. offices for 57p. They also have their own secret rules, the "A" code) says you have to be 16 to claim, so unmarried mothers of 14 or 15 get nothing. But South Shields C.U. have won S.S. for 15 year old school-leavers, so we should fight for unmarried mothers under 16 to have their own money. Up till now all they can get is money from Welfare, or their parents can claim for them and the baby if they live at home -- but that way they're stuck under their parents' control when they're desperate sometimes to get out of the home.

Don't take secondhand stuff. When the Watkins family moved into their new home, they applied to the S.S. for new furniture. They eventually received some stinky chairs and a wardrobe and buggy beds from the WRVS. On Friday Oct. 22 at about 12.30, nine members of the CU arrived at Bonhill St. S.S. office. The WRVS had refused to come and collect the furniture, so the CU delivered it in a van to the S.S. office. We placed in front of the reception the wardrobe, double and single beds with mattresses, and four chairs. The manager refused to see us and called the police; but eventually gave us 14 pounds over the counter for one bed, and the money came in the post for the others. Every claimant is entitled to buy new stuff for themselves. They'll let you know a few days later whether you are getting anything or not. If they ask for receipts, refuse. If you're not satisfied, appeal.

You Can Get Grants for all These:

The Social Security Act says "The Commission may increase an award of supplementary pension or allowance where there are exceptional circumstances." You should therefore be able to get extra money on your weekly for:

Special Diet (show them the doctor's note)

Extra Laundry

Nursery Charges (if you're working)

Domestic Help

Fares to Visit a relative in hospital or prison, with or without your kids, with an overnight stay in a hotel if needed. Also fares to school.

Storage Charges for stored furniture

H.P. Payments on "necessary items"

Extra Heating Allowance. The S.S. only allows about one pound for heat in your weekly money. The S.S. extra heating allowance is 25 p, 50p, or 75p. We demand two pounds.

Gas/Electric Bills can be paid by them. Don't let them deduct money from your weekly or force you to go on the slot if they pay a bill. The slot meter has to be fed all the time, so you use your food money and pay for the wages of the man who empties the meter as well as the electricity. If you pay quarterly, don't be scared by final notices. They have to get a court order to turn it off, so don't let them in. Tell the Electricity Board that the Social Security is dealing with it.

Rent Arrears. Don't be scared if you're threatened with eviction. If it's unfurnished, the landlord has to get a court order, and you'll still have six months after that. If it's council, tell them to get the rent off the S.S. -- it's all the same money, isn't it? If they pay your arrears, they may try to pay your rent direct, or demand receipts before they will give you your rent money. Don't stand for it -- appeal.

Christmas Money. Other people have plenty of money to spend at Christmas, why shouldn't claimants? We demand £7.50 for every claimant at Christmas. Holiday money too.

Clothes. For school-age kids, they'll send you to School-care. If the School-care won't give you what you want, the S.S. have to. Don't let yourself get pushed backwards and forwards between them -- that's their favourite trick.

Whether these things have been granted before or not (and all of them have) they can only be won by fighting for them together.

How to Appeal

It's much easier than they make out; it doesn't cost money, you don't need a solicitor, and it doesn't have to be done within three weeks like they tell you. Write a letter, or send in a CU appeal form to the manager saying "I wish to appeal against..." Send a copy to Regional Office and keep one for yourself. They will send you back a copy of your appeal, plus their "defence", ie. their reason for refusing to pay you. You'll be told the date of the appeal -- it can be anything up to about six weeks. Notice of the appeal can be "lost in the post" (as happened to one woman in North London who had her money stopped after an appeal she didn't know had taken place), so keep phoning up the Regional Office, or go down to your local office in strength.....

That's what Mrs. D. did..... Mrs. D. had her book taken off her for "cohabitation". About four weeks later she went to a C.U. meeting. The C.U. put in an appeal, and went down to the S.S. office with her the next day to get an emergency payment. They caused such an uproar when the payment was refused that the appeals tribunal heard the case three days later. At the appeal the "evidence" turned out to come from the caretaker in charge of her flat who was drunk at the time, but who had been seen regularly chatting to the local Special Investigator. She won the appeal. Don't go alone -- don't go unprepared.

The hearing takes place outside the office, usually at the town hall, because the tribunal is supposed to be an "independent" body who judges the decisions of the S.S. It consists of three people -- the chairman, the working people's representative (usually a Trade Unionist) and the business rep. Get their names so you'll know them again. Then there's the clerk who takes all the decisions, and the S.S. prosecutor. Don't be intimidated, say exactly what you want, how you want. The S.S. prosecutor starts it off, then it's your turn to speak. You're allowed one rep. and one observer: take as many people as you can get in (kids, family) and all speak. They'll pay the fares for three and witnesses if they work. Work out your case beforehand, go armed with anything that could be relevant: bills, prices, doctors' notes, letters from welfare workers and probation officers, pieces of mouldy wallpaper, rotten lino, photos, witnesses, the S.S. handbook, the Unsupported Mothers' handbook -- anything that will show them what your living conditions are like and why their handouts are inadequate.

This is an account of a Tribunal case fought and won by Birmingham C.U. Mrs. J. was accused by a NAB fraud officer of cohabiting and her book was snatched off her. We put in an appeal and eventually appeared at the Tribunal. It went as follows:

Man from Ministry: "A man has been seen leaving your house. We have a witness to prove it. Bring in our witness.

Enter NAB fraud man.

Chairman: "Tell the tribunal what you have observed going on at Mrs. J's house."

Fraud man: "On various occasions I have seen a Mr. M. leaving the house at the same time each morning."
Rep: "Explain 'various occasions'."
Fraud man: "At least four mornings a week. You can't deny it."
Rep: "We don't deny it. He's Mrs. J's lover."
Chairman: "But four times a week....once a week, but four times... impossible."
Rep: "I have never met Mr. M. but he is probably a lusty young man."
Chairman to Mrs. J.: "Is Mr. M. your lover? In fact you agreed when the book was taken off you that you were cohabiting."
Mrs. J.: "Yes, I agreed that I was cohabiting and I thought I was. Now I have had it explained to me in fact I wasn't cohabiting as Mr. M. is my lover."

The tribunal was very shocked by this attitude and the fact that the claimant had the courage to say "that was my lover". The outcome of the tribunal was that her money was restored. The NAB assumes that as your income is paid by them they should control your sex-life and everything else. Mrs. J. realized that the S.S. was making a moral judgment about her sex life. She'd been tricked into saying she was cohabiting. But she was not. That's why it's so important to have a witness every time the S.S. calls. If there's a man visiting when the officer calls don't put him in the wardrobe, why not introduce him as your C.U. representative? Never meet the S.S. alone.

Welfare

The Children's Department will sometimes pay gas and electricity bills, buy clothes or pay for holidays, or lend money to a mother who has been cut off. They do this under what's called a Section 1 payment and it's meant to stop kids going into care. It's all government money -- from the welfare it's "charity", from the S.S. it's our right, although the links between the Children's Dept. and Special Welfare of the Department of Health and Social Security are very close. In fact, between them, they carve you up and sell you out -- all for your own good of course, because you are inadequate.

We'd rather get all our money off the S.S. That way it's a straight fight. We don't have to go down on our knees asking for favours, begging for charity. The Welfare keeps people alone, makes them see their problems as their own fault and fights on behalf of them.....We fight together for ourselves and each other. We know we won't let each other down.

Some people have thought that Claimants' Unions are a branch of the Welfare Dept., a charitable service to get more money, correct abuses. We're not. We don't want to patch up the holes in the system like the welfare does -- we want to change it.

A threat that they can use against us, against any woman bringing up kids by herself, is to take the kids away if we step out of line.

Under the new Children's Act, local authority social workers have absolute power to take kids into "care" if they think it's in the kid's "best interests". The only way to fight this is to make sure there are other people ready to care for our kids if anything happens to us. If we get put in prison or in hospital, we need a network of friends who can take each other's kids in an emergency. Best of all, although it means going to a lawyer and costs money, make someone else their legal guardian, so that they've got power in court to take responsibility for your kids. Never meet the welfare alone.

Prisons

Most of us can't survive on the money the S.S. gives us, so we have to resort to stealing, going on the game, on tranquilizers, or pep pills. Then it's Holloway prison or the nut-house. Fifty per cent of women in Holloway are in for crimes against property: S.S. fraud, shoplifting etc. Another 20% are in for prostitution. (In California, 3000 unsupported mothers were cut off welfare when they legalized prostitution last year). Women are in prison simply for trying to get enough money to live!

Rose Smith (who's got five kids and is pregnant with her sixth) got six months in Holloway for changing the dates on her S.S. book to try and get two weeks' money instead of one over Christmas.....

Another woman -- her husband left her, and the S.S. refused to pay her any money until they'd traced him so they could get payments off him. Meanwhile, she and her four kids were having to live off three pounds a week family allowance. She started shoplifting, got done for it, and was put inside for three months.....

They starve you into stealing food, then put you inside for it!

Never meet the courts alone. Always go with as many friends as possible. Apply for legal aid straightaway (that means that the court pays for your lawyer). Make sure that your lawyer says what you want him to say. Don't let him persuade you to plead guilty to get it over with quickly. When the police pick you up -- don't say a word to them. You don't have to answer any of their questions except give your name and address. It won't make any difference to your case and they won't be able to twist what you've said.

Wives, girlfriends of men in prison can claim exactly like any unsupported mother, plus fares to prison for herself and her kids, and the cost of staying overnight in a hotel if necessary. Women in prison get nothing when they leave (men get four pounds). As we fight back harder, there's going to be more of us inside. Women leaving Holloway can contact 577 Holloway Road, London N16. The North London Claimants' Union is at the same address and is prepared to help and support anyone going inside or coming out of Holloway. Let's fight inside and out.

Work

You're at home all day, doing the housework, shopping, cooking, cleaning, waiting for the kids to come home, going out of your mind with worry about the bills, loneliness and boredom, and the S.S. man comes along and says: "Why don't you go out and get a little job to keep you busy and earn a bit of extra money?"

That's what Barbara did..... If you're on S.S. you're only allowed to earn two pounds on top of what you get from them. Barbara was working an 18 hour week in a sweat shop, getting five pounds a week for that -- the usual exploitation of women wanting to work -- and the S.S. was deducting three pounds a week off her money. So in fact she was only getting two pounds for 18 hours work. That's not all -- winter was coming on, she'd just been rehoused and needed heating for her kids' bedroom. So she applied to the S.S. for a grant for an electric fire. They wrote back telling her the fires weren't essential and besides, if she really wanted them that much she could buy them out of the 2 quid extra that she was earning. She appealed against their decision with the Claimants' Union. She got the money for two electric fires and gave up her job -- it just wasn't worth it!

Strikes and Occupations

Women are often accused of being the ones to break strikes. This has been because they're the ones that have had to make ends meet and worry about where the next meal's coming from. They're the ones that have had to tackle the S.S. by themselves. And their husbands usually haven't bothered to let them know what's happening during the strike, so that they feel completely left out of it.

But that's changing now:

At the occupation of the Fisher-Bendix factory in Liverpool, the men invited their wives and kids to their union meetings so that they knew what was happening.

The miners' wives gave fantastic support during the miners' strike -- staffing the pickets outside the mines while their husbands were picketing the power stations.

In Staffordshire, a hundred miners' wives and kids occupied the S.S. office demanding their money. The women put their kids over the counters and said they were leaving them there'til they got enough money to feed them. They won in the end.

But strikers' wives still have to have their husbands sign for them at the S.S., even though they're claiming just for themselves and their kids.

We're demanding that all women should be able to claim for themselves, married or not.

Unemployed Women

We're never "out of work". If we're not out at work, we're cooking, cleaning, looking after kids. Perhaps that's why we're not seen as "unemployed", the way men are, when we haven't got a job. Married women seldom sign on as unemployed -- so they don't get dole money. Even if they do, they get 3.50 pounds compared to a man's five. If both husband and wife are out of work, he claims for her!

All women, married or not, should claim unemployment benefit in their own right -- it's a way of getting paid for the work we do at home. Women have less job security than men, because few of them are in unions. Employers know that women find it harder to unionize than men because they have kids and home to attend to after work. And so, 100,000 women have lost their jobs in manufacturing already this year -- a proportion almost double that of men -- but nobody knows anything about it. And most of them don't get redundancy payments (lay-off payments), because they've been working part-time -- less than 21 hours a week. We want redundancy payments for all women who are laid off.

Women in our society are given the choice between low-paid jobs, non-paid work in the home, or miserable motherhood on the S.S. That's why we want a guaranteed income for women and men, working or not working, married or not.

Family Income Supplement

The government just spent 340,000 pounds advertising the F.I.S. It's just another con -- a new way of pushing unsupported mothers into work and making sure that we don't demand higher wages at the same time. The idea is: "You go out to work, and if you're not getting enough money, we'll make it up for you." In fact, you'll only get a pound or so more than you get on the S.S. and you won't be able to get any money for grants etc. The maximum F.I.S. will give you on top of your wage is four pounds, and that's if you've got six kids and are earning 12 pounds a week.

Foster parents get 4.80 pounds a week for children under five, 8.50 pounds for fifteen year olds in London. (In Birmingham it's five pounds for the first child, 4 pounds for the next plus guaranteed clothing grant of 32 pounds - 48 pounds a year, school clothing, a paid holiday, and a Christmas grant) and the rate goes up with the cost of living.

Why do we only get 1.70 pounds for our under-fives and 3 pounds for 15 year olds? Are our kids supposed to eat less than other people's? Always wear cast-off clothes? All because we don't live with a man?

Housework, cooking, cleaning, scrubbing is work work. Cooks get paid, housekeepers get paid, chavs get paid.....why not us? We've got no choice -- working at home or for someone else, it's all work, we don't get enough money, we've still got the kids to look after.

Housing

Without money we can't get flats -- and most landlords don't want kids. Unsupported mothers are at the bottom of every housing list. When a woman leaves her husband or he leaves her, there's nowhere to go except homeless hostels, welfare accomodation. They're as bad as prisons and are often converted prisons or barracks, old factories or victorian work-houses. In most of them you share rooms, some are segregated (men and women separate). All of them are hell holes.

One in North London -- Hillside, the inmates call it Hellside -- has just been closed down after a demonstration by the North London C.U. and a women's liberation group as well as all the inmates. They were protesting about the rats, damp and cockroaches, the food that no-one could eat, and the rent. They took all of each woman's money, except for one pound a week -- the same as in most homeless hostels: so each family was left with one pound to buy everything they needed. People in homeless hostels should get their full money, not humiliating pocket money. Within a week of the demonstrations, all the families were rehoused.

They won't find us flats, but there are empty houses everywhere. In the London borough of Hackney alone, there are 6,000! Many people are squatting, taking over empty buildings. The N.L.C.U. has squatted families; five women from Highbury C.U. with 16 kids between them, three of whom had been in welfare accomadation for years and years, decided that they'd had enough and went squatting. Two got good council houses within three weeks. Women in the C.U. in Greenwich squatted and got their rent books immediately from the Council.

Claimants Unions and Tenants Associations and Squatters Associations can all back each other up -- it's all the same people.

If they won't give it to us, we have to take it!

Cohabitation

The S.S. always wants to push women into being dependent on a man -- to being "supported" by a man who's working or signing on, rather than having money in her own right. So, on the tiniest suspicion, they snatch your book away.

What is cohabitation? It's not sleeping with a man. It's not having a boyfriend. It's not having a lodger. The rules they are meant to go by are: Whether two people are living together like a married couple.... If they use the same surname.... If the man uses the same address.... If they share living expenses What the regular sleeping arrangements are (none of their business!).... Whether they have any children as a couple. They emphasize that no "moral considerations" should come into deciding to cut a woman off for cohabitation.

That's how they describe cohabitation. We know it's a con. What really happens is that unsupported mothers who are spied upon by Special Investigators, often have their order books, their sole means of livelihood

taken from them on the spot by an S.S. officer who "suspects" them of cohabiting. Perhaps a neighbour has seen a man leave the house, perhaps the visiting officer has spotted a pipe or a pair of boots. So what? That's not cohabitation.

But they use snoopers: special investigators who watch to see who visits the house, they chat up the neighbours, caretakers in flats, ask whether a man has been seen around. They spy. There are ways of dealing with them. In North London, an unsupported father turned a hose on a S.I. parked outside his house in a car. In West London, women gather around the cars shouting "pimp".

The Social Security in one year prosecuted 7,000 claimants for fraud, another 18,000 were suspected of fraud and were harassed, unjustly accused, perhaps had their allowances cut off. Most of the 18,000 will be women. Some of the 7,000 prosecuted will be imprisoned; if they are women their children will go into care. So much for all this social work talk of protecting the family!

The S.S. and Their Morality

An unsupported mother was really bugged by the S.S. because a friend used her house as an address. Her friend was a man. The S.S. applied their puritan morality, which they deny having. He did visit her house. It's not a convent! It's certainly got nothing to do with the nosy S.S. On several occasions they cut her money and threatened to prosecute her. The S.S. even went so far as taking away the man's hostel vouchers in the hope of forcing him to live at her house, so that they could prosecute her -- one thing they enjoy doing. She joined the Union, when her money had been cut off again on groundless suspicion, and an appeal was lodged with the tribunal. The tribunal also showed the same moral prejudice. The Union representative replied that it had been proven that he did not live there. But that even if he did, it was irrelevant to the case. For "cohabitation" to be proved, the S.S. has to show that there was a shared "household budget". Moral arguments are irrelevant even though they keep using them. The result was a victory. She got her order book back for the full amount.

The S.S. says that it's not fair that a woman who is not married should get more than one who is. Two men or two women living together will get 11.60 pounds. A husband and wife get 9.45 pounds. The man has to claim for the woman. If he's incapable, she is very occasionally allowed to claim as head of the household. Men and women married or unmarried should get the same money. We want women to get their money in their own right without moral judgment by the S.S.

If you're cut off for cohabitation:

1. Appeal right away.
2. Make a fresh claim. All you need to say is "I am an unsupported mother with no income".
3. They will try to get you to say things about your boyfriend. Do not say anything. Do not sign anything except the claim form. Just keep

repeating "I am an unsupported mother with no income". It's nothing to do with them whether you have a boyfriend, how often you see him, what he looks like, where he lives, or where he works.

4. Do not give photographs of any boyfriend.
5. If that fails, demand an emergency payment under Section 13 (see "How they pay us" section). It's difficult to get these, but we've sometimes won them.

Mrs. M. in the N.L.C.U. went to the S.S. office with ten other C.U. members and held a meeting about why she had been cut off for cohabitation. At the end of the day, they gave her a payment and when she got to the appeal the tribunal took that as proof that she wasn't being supported.

In Cambridge, the C.U. and a Women's Liberation group held a demonstration in the S.S. office over a woman who had been cut off for cohabitation. Over 60 people stayed in the office after it had closed and were finally thrown out by the police: but Mrs. Baxter got her emergency payment the next morning.

We can sleep with who we like and we don't have to depend on any man. The Cohabitation ruling has got to go!

Maintenance

What happens if you already have a maintenance order? Anyone on S.S. can get the social security to take over their maintenance order. This means that you can be sure of getting money every week whether or not the father pays the money into the court. It also saves you the time and the worry of going down to the court each week to see if the money's there, and if it's not, going down to the S.S. to explain what's happened. If you collect your own maintenance money and are claiming S.S. you won't be better off -- they will only give you the difference between the order and what you would be entitled to from them. If you do decide to sign the order over to them, you should get an order book for the amount you are entitled to, and it's then up to the S.S. to take the father to court if he doesn't pay, not you. You may have to insist that the S.S. take over the order. If they try to tell you they can't, it's not true.

Can the S.S. force us to take out a maintenance order? They can't but they often try to force us to, or threaten to cut off our money if we don't. The S.S. can take out a court order against a man for maintenance if they have been making a payment to the mother of his child. They can do this any time up to three years from when the benefit was paid, or for an illegitimate child, within one year of he or she being born. If they want to do this, let them -- it's their affair. If they don't know the name of the father of your child and you don't want to tell them you don't have to. You don't have to answer any embarrassing or awkward questions about the father, about your relationship with him, when you had intercourse, and whether you have "given up" seeing him. All they need to know, and all you need to tell them, is I am an unsupported mother with no income.

If you take the child's father to court you will be asked these questions again by a probation officer and then by a magistrate:

"Have you any witnesses that he is the father of your child?"

(what do they mean by that!)

"What's the last date you had sexual intercourse with him?"

It's humiliating to be asked questions like this....You don't have to go to court. You don't have to give the father's name if you have an "illegitimate" child.

They can only take out a court order against the father of an illegitimate child within one year of he or she being born. If the visiting officer comes round when the baby is 11 months and says "take out an order now or we'll cut you off" you don't have to do it.

Remember: "I am an unsupported mother with no income."
that's all you need to say.

A new Bill about maintenance is going through Parliament. It affects unsupported women whose husbands are abroad, or have not yet got entry permits for this country. The Bill says that women whose husbands are overseas have to get a maintenance contribution from their husbands before being allowed to claim Supplementary Benefit. We do not yet know how this will work in practice. We do know that it is another attack on black and alien families who are forced to seek work in Britain and are discriminated by the new Immigration Bill. We shall have to find a way to fight this plan.

Family Allowance

Claim Family Allowance on the form at your nearest Post Office immediately after your second child is born. The S.S. will assume you have claimed it and deduct it from your benefit...so claim at once.

If your second child goes into care, even temporarily, stop cashing Family Allowance and inform the S.S. If you visit the child at weekends or he comes home sometimes, you can keep cashing Family Allowance. Family Allowance is nothing to do with stamps or income. It's for second or third children of parents who have been over a year in the U.K. In Southhall, black and Pakistani families were swindled out of Family Allowances by racist S.S. officers until the West London C.U. intervened.

Kids

We're doing what we're doing -- claiming Social Security -- because we're left with the kids. Many of us didn't choose to have them (bad contraception or none; it's hard to get abortions....) and we don't choose to be alone with them now. Children aren't catered for -- landlords don't want them, S.S. officers don't seem to realize they exist -- no lavatories, no food, nothing for them to do in S.S. offices. The men who run the factories couldn't care less what happens to our children. They spend the money we earn for them on more machinery, new

factories -- society is built around production, not around people, least of all kids. Our kids are brought up to fit into their jobs, sent to school to learn to fit into their timetables, tests, rules, and then out to work to clock in. And we're supposed to make them do it.

There are a lot of ways we can share looking after our kids so that we can have some free time and they can have some free space. In some Claimants Unions they already have by setting up baby sitter networks and playcentres. For example, women in Highbury C.U., with women living in the same street, all needing some spare time and a place where their kids could enjoy themselves, marched on the council and demanded one of their empty houses to use. They got it, and the money to do it up and run it. They're using it as a playcentre in the afternoons and hold their C.U. meetings there as well. In Newton Abbott C.U. they have set up co-operative child-minding.

We must fight for free contraception and abortion (or demand the S.S. pay), and the right to have a child and be able to provide for it if we want to. Many women are forced into back street abortions because the money the S.S. gives us isn't enough.

* * * * *

The End of Unsupported Mothers

All the way through this handbook we talk about fighting, never taking no for an answer. But how do we see this happening? It sometimes feels like hammering a dragon on the toes for peas all the time... We spend so much time demanding our basic rights off the S.S. that we don't seem to get very far in changing it. But that won't come through our efforts alone: there's 6 million claimants, 11/2 million unemployed, all starting to fight the Welfare system demanding a Guaranteed Income, working or not working. The people who chat on the telly and in the papers and air their views about the Welfare State are usually the well-paid social workers, bishops, ministers, researchers, TV personalities... What are they doing? They're telling us how good it all is -- how we should be grateful to be a mother living in a hostel with seven kids to feed on two pounds a week.

But we know it's mothers who are closest to the waste and confusion.... mothers who have to sort out how to survive... that's a woman's role. We're all survival experts, How-To-Make-Ends-Meet Experts. We work out individual solutions for our own families -- where to get cheap potatoes, second-hand clothes... and it's endless, because the prices are always going up and meanwhile another pair of shoes wears out and some politician says grandly "But we've just given the electricians an 11% rise" (but they're still not getting enough to live on). And you hear someone else saying "I saw a coloured bloke down at the office getting 32 pounds a week which is more than so and so gets." That's how the system works: they try to divide us up; white against black, working against not

working, men against women, so that we'll fight each other, instead of the ones who keep us all poor.

So our energies are drained into making ends meet, and gossip, and just managing to cope on what we've been "given". We never have the time or energy to get around to enjoying ourselves: pleasure is a perk on the side just at the weekend, or you buy it at the bingo hall, in the cinema...Whereas work glorious work...everything in this society is geared to the organization of work, of getting as much productivity as possible. You have to work to get money to live, but living their way is just surviving in a system planned by men which uses women to support them (make their meals, look after their children, do their washing, always be at home for them after a hard day's work) and uses everyone to support the system. Work comes before everything; and women and kids, playing, eating, loving, just gets squeezed inbetween.

How long has this got to go on?

This handbook isn't just information, it's a weapon. It tells you what you're supposed to get and some ways of getting it: but the strength to get what you need and live as you want can only come out of fighting with others. All over the place, groups of unsupported mothers are starting to have meetings, women who live in the same street, the same estate or homeless hostels or prisons are starting their own Claimants Unions and playcentres. It's very easy to start one -- all you need is a room. Contact your nearest C.U. to find out what they are doing and what support they can give you.

We're finding ways of getting what we want -- going down to the offices in big groups, taking food and drink, crayons and paint for the kids to cover the walls with -- and always kicking up a stink when we don't get what we want -- shouting, banging, refusing to move -- we're winning all the way. Not just money, but strength and confidence. And we're not only fighting for money -- we want playcentres for our kids, good housing, independence.....a totally new world to live in.

Right now we want:

1. End of the cohabitation ruling.
2. Higher basic rates for everyone.
3. Incomes for mothers under 16.
4. Full rates in homeless hostels.
5. A wage to bring up kids -- and we want bringing up kids to be everyone's job, not just women's -- and for all the work we do: cleaning offices or homes, producing electrical parts or babies.
6. Wives to claim for themselves (especially strikers' wives).

WE'RE GOING TO FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO LIVE WITHOUT A MAN IF WE WANT TO

And much more too.

Even if the S.S. suddenly turned into a fairy godmother and gave us enough to live on with no worries, we still wouldn't have any control over it -- they could stop it at a moment's notice if we "misbehaved" ourselves. (In Ireland, for instance, they've just passed a Bill -- the Bad Debt Act -- which can stop the whole benefit of anyone on rent strike).

The S.S. system serves the interests of the men at the top -- and we're still the women at the bottom.

Now we've started fighting back there'll be no stopping us.....

WE'RE NOT UNSUPPORTED ANY LONGER.

WE SUPPORT EACH OTHER.

PUBLICATIONS

Women in Struggle # 1

Women in Struggle # 2

(The Women in Struggle series are collections of documents about wages for housework struggles that are taking place on an international scale and affecting every aspect of women's lives. Included in the booklets are political statements, analyses, and leaflets coming out of these struggles).

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 1

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 2

(The Wages for Housework Notebooks are collections of the more theoretical documents about wages for housework. The first two notebooks bring together many of the theoretical articles which have not yet received widespread distribution).

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