

WOMEN

IN

STRUGGLE

ITALY NOW

No. 3

WAGES
FOR
HOUSEWORK

SLAB. 14.82

Comune di Padova
Biblioteche

FUV SS

Cod. Bibl.
FUV 1411709

SID
1060214

INV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction -- Judy Ramirez	Page 1
Long Weekend of Struggle	Page 3
A Secretary Speaks -- Polda Fortunati	Page 21
Maternity and Abortion	Page 28
Leaflets and Communiques on Abortion from Italy and England	Page 35
Tri-Veneto Communique on Lotta Femminista	Page 41

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK LITERATURE:

The Toronto Wages for Housework Committee
P.O. Box 38
Station E
Toronto, Canada

The New York Collective
c/o Silvia Federici
491 Pacific Street
Brooklyn, New York
U.S.A. 11217

The Power of Women Collective
c/o 64 Larch Road
London NW 2, England

INTRODUCTION

This collection of feminist documents from Italy highlights the emergence, in recent years, of women's struggles on a mass scale. What is critically important is the parallel development of an autonomous women's movement with a political perspective which is capable of expressing both the power of these struggles for all women and the connection between women building our power and the struggle of the entire working class against the State. It has meant, fundamentally, a battle with political forces which would reduce women's struggles to mere appendages to their already fixed programs. Programs which revolve around those with more power than us, which always ask us to postpone our own needs, and which ultimately rob the entire working class of the power and direction which our struggles have generated.

The battle to break out of the isolation and degradation which wagelessness imposes on women in Italy - and the world over - is clearly expressed by the Italian women as the battle to define and control our own struggle, to build an autonomous base of power, and to fight off those forces which would once again subordinate women's struggles to some larger "general struggle". The twin questions of a political perspective based on our own exploitation as women and the autonomous forms of organization to fight against that exploitation are, therefore, the underlying unity of these documents.

It is no accident, then, that the article and leaflets on maternity and abortion go beyond the limited demand by some women for the right to not have children and express the common need of all women to have the power to decide if, when, and under what circumstances we will have or not have children. Experience has taught many of us who fought in the abortion movement in North America how divisive and racist it is to make demands in isolation from one another; while some of us agitated for the right to not have children, those of us who were Black in the US or Native women in Canada were facing policies of forced sterilization. To demand the right to not have children without also demanding the right to have them, and the power to choose freely, has proven to be suicidal politically because it created new divisions where we needed to find the common, material ground from which to conquer a new level of power for all women, internationally.

It is also no accident that it was those women in Italy that were moving with a perspective based on our need as women to attack our overriding and fundamental weakness, our wagelessness. It was those women who were able to define autonomous organizational forms for our struggle that safeguarded it from

the political forces which would reduce it to a civil rights issue or tack it on to "more important" struggles. When in large demonstrations to repeal the anti-abortion laws in Italy men from the political parties of the left and women from the "women's commissions" of those parties are directed to march as individuals, without banners, it is not cheap sectarianism; it is a minimal guarantee that we retain control over our own struggle, over the way those struggles are defined, the strategic direction they must take, and the way we must organize them to prevent that they be used for ends which are not our own.

The documents from International Women's Day 1974 and MayDay 1975 show that the direction that feminist organizing has taken in Italy, on a visibly widening scale, is towards a direct attack on women's wagelessness in the home. With the opening of the Wages for Housework Campaign in 1974, the Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework became a vital point of reference politically for the entire movement and all other workers in struggle. The significance of this campaign in Italy, as elsewhere, is that it expresses and organizes the growing rebellion of women against our common source of weakness, unwaged work in the home, and its pervasive effects, which we experience daily in every area of our lives.

But it is not only the autonomous ground on which we women are moving, it is also a source of power and a strategic direction for the entire working class which is struggling, in the present international crisis, to refuse the defeat of higher productivity, on the one hand, and the threat of wagelessness, on the other. When we women demand wages for housework it creates a new point of power which uncovers the entire 24 hour working day of the whole working class, internationally. It uncovers the fact that when capital controls our labour, waged or unwaged, it controls our entire lives. This perspective becomes the basis for a new strategy which does not aim for this or that improvement, in this or that part of the world, but for POWER- the power to destroy the State's control over all of us, male or female, black or white, young or old.

Judy Ramirez
Toronto Wages for
Housework Committee
December 1975



On March 10, 1974, Ferretto Square, which seemed forever consecrated to the "workers' movement", conceived as the movement of "male workers", was for the first time filled with workers of the home and of the factory: women united against their common exploitation, in the home first and outside of it.

For several months, that is, since the Fall of 1973, the Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework had established a network of contacts, mostly in the Venice area, between groups of women who up to that time had been kept carefully divided by the traditional organizations; first by the trade unions and the parties, while the extra-parliamentary groups had just followed the beaten path.

Precisely because we start by positing housework as the first link in the chain of exploitation that enslaves all women and allows capital to discriminate against women on the outside job, the Committee was able to "take the right road". That is, the Committee tried to make channels of political communication among all women, and, therefore, to create the possibility for a growth of political power for all of us, so that women who are already in a stronger pos-

ition would give strength to women who are in a weaker position. But if it was not to be based on a merely ideological solidarity that never develops real roots, this unification could only be based on the acknowledgement of our common exploitation- housework.

Nobody had ever taken this road.

In fact, politicians, would-be leftists, trade unionists and the Women's Commissions of the parties and the (supposedly) leftists groups all agreed on the premise that women are "nothing"; thus, they were all convinced that there is no need to analyse the condition of women. It never crossed anybody's mind that women are the labour power which is consumed in the process of producing and reproducing labour power, though this productive process is known, for it is experienced by everybody.

They all had started from the capitalist appearance and, consequently, had considered women always and only as someone else's appendages. And, as appendages, they had seen them divided first of all into mothers, wives, daughters, fiancées, single women etc. They did not see, however, the basis on which these divisions are founded. On the contrary, we women had seen very clearly this basis and we have identified it with housework. For each of these roles is based on a determinate quantity and quality of housework that women must do in the home. A woman must provide her husband not only with the maximum amount of housework, but also with all the duties that housework involves, love-making included. A sister is not expected to provide this latter service to her brother, in the same way as she is expected to provide an amount of housework much inferior to that which is expected of a wife with respect to her husband, or of a mother with respect to her children. Now the roles to which the highest productivity of housework corresponds are generally that of wife and mother. Moreover, on a mass scale, they coincide because to be a wife generally means to be also a mother. Therefore, the woman who is a wife and a mother (besides being a sister, a daughter, etc.) represents the highest level of productivity of housework. But also those who today are sisters, daughters, fiancées, etc. tomorrow will be wives and mothers. For the cycle of housework is determined in such a way that it requires certain roles during the period of our heavy training (daughters, sisters, fiancées, etc.) and other roles during the period of the highest productivity (wife and mother). The woman who refuses to go through the cycle of housework, and thus refuses to guarantee her consumption as labour power at the most highly productive level is further divided from other women. This is the woman who, though she

is a wife, does not want to bear children; it is the woman who, though she has children, does not want to be a wife; it is the woman who does not want to be either a wife or a mother. These divisions too are mystified by capital through moral and ideological judgments. But in reality they are determined by the lower productivity of housework.

It is clear, then, that this first order of division is in fact built on different levels of productivity of housework which are imposed on us women.

The fact that this division was never questioned by anyone contributed to codify a capitalist hierarchy among women based on the higher or lower productivity of their work: housework.

Furthermore, as wives (mothers, daughters, sisters etc.) women were defined in turn as proletarians if the male wage which commanded them was that of a proletarian, bourgeois if the income which commanded them was that of a bourgeois. No one saw that in every case women did not have money of their own in their hands for that common work which all of them did. And that this basically determines a lack of power for us all.

Being defined always and only with respect to the level of power (or non-power) of a man, women were divided among themselves from the viewpoint of the (non) analysis, of the (non) objectives, of the (non) political strategy. They were divided not only in terms of the class to which "the man" belonged, but also according to the hierarchies of power within the class itself to which "the man" was subject.

If we, on the contrary, define women precisely on the basis of their work, we must assume that all the women who on a mass scale do housework, who are labour power consumed in the process of producing and reproducing labour power, are workers; they are workers of the house. They are workers without a wage of their own, but they are workers. The fact that on a mass scale women are unwaged workers has determined such a radical lack of power in working class women as to determine a lack of power even among bourgeois women. In fact, the wife of a powerful man, for example, certainly enjoys a reflected power through her husband, but she is not powerful on her own. The wife of a man who has a low level of power has little power because of the low level of power of her husband, but to his low power she adds her own lack of power.

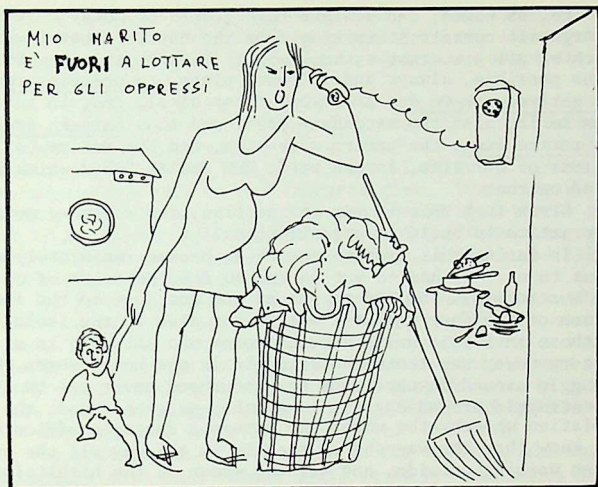
There exists a condition of weakness common to all women, that is a lack of power of their own such that can provide a common ground of struggle for all.

Besides this type of division others were being postulated and fixated. Some of them were never put on paper (it would have been too much) but they were always said and thought. These are the divisions based on "aesthetic" appreciation: beautiful-ugly; and those based on moral judgment: saints-prostitutes. It is worthwhile to point out that the highest productivity of housework has been the object of positive moral judgment (that woman -- who works like an animal -- is a saint), while the refusal and the rebellion against housework has always been the object of a negative moral judgment (that woman -- who does not do her "duty" -- is no good).

Other divisions, instead, have been written about and theorized. Starting always from a definition of women as wives, mothers, daughters, seen as appendages to everything and everybody, rather than as workers of the house, they all have further divided women into "non-workers" (the housewife) and "workers" (the women who have an additional job outside the home). And again, the woman with a "clean" job -- these are the factory workers, employees, shop-girls -- and those with a "dirty" job, the prostitutes. Also this further order of divisions was based on the fact that housework was not recognized as work. This prevented them from seeing that housework is the ground of exploitation common both to the housewife and to the woman who also worked outside of the home, and that prostitution is nothing but socialized housework. TO MAKE LOVE IS HOUSEWORK.

They had always approached women starting from the divisions of power capital has created among us, taking them as "natural" and therefore "inevitable", or worse yet, as a "consequence of the backwardness" of the women themselves, and therefore, after all, "well-deserved". In this way they reinforced these divisions, and also caused guilt feelings in those women who have not performed "brilliantly" in the race for "emancipation" -- and, as housewives, we all know what that is. Thus, these political organizations tended to strengthen, instead of destroy, the objective divisions created by capital and the consequent lower degree of power some women have with respect to others. It is worthwhile, however, to make it clear once and for all that this is the relation the so-called political forces with a leftist reputation have always established not only with women but with the whole class.

But in the case of women this has been particularly damaging, because by ignoring the "housewife" as "too weak", "non-organizable", or "too backward", or even "non-existent as a worker", these political forces deprived women of any



My husband is out fighting for the oppressed.

possibility for a mass organization. All women, in fact, as well we know, are fundamentally "housewives", that is "workers in the home". For housework is the "first and only front where we all are and which determines all aspects of our lives".

But nobody ever started from this and consequently nobody ever tried to build an organizational continuity between the woman who works in the home and the woman who also works outside the home. Aiming at "keeping the divisions", they had never even tried to make an organizational connection between the woman who works in the big factory and the woman who works in the small factory, the woman who works in the countryside and the woman who works in the city, between the woman who must accept a textile machine in the home and the woman who must run out to work at a textile machine in a plant.

We, the women of the Committee had started precisely in the opposite way, by assuming that the power divisions capital has created must be destroyed. Obviously, this does not mean -- as some would like to believe -- giving up the power some of us have already gained against capital; on the contrary, it means for all women, and therefore for the entire working class, to gain the greatest power against capital.

We, as women, can achieve this growth of power only if we organize ourselves starting from the battle front in which we all are, that is housework. Only in this way will it be possible, always and in every place, to bargain around the entire work we do; housework first of all and, in addition to it, also the secondary jobs, and thus bargain around the entire wage, the entire work-time, and the entire conditions of our life, in one word, OUR SOCIAL POWER which is based on them.

Given that this is our perspective, how would we move in practice to build it organizationally?

In facing this problem one thing became immediately obvious to us: we had to put an end to the isolation of women's struggles. We had to put an end not just to the isolation of the four domestic walls, but also to the isolation of those invisible walls whereby women who struggle in a factory never see those who struggle in the home, women who struggle around daycare in a neighbourhood never see those who struggle around daycare in another neighbourhood, the isolation whereby the woman who enters a doctor's office does not know that the way she is treated is the way all the other women waiting outside, and all the women in the hospitals, will be treated, and therefore does not know that her revolt can join that of the others.

Let us say it again: the isolation of our struggles is a direct consequence of the fact that all the so-called political forces have wanted to see only partial aspects of the exploitation and oppression of women, and therefore have built a wall of silence around every "part" or "aspect" which they were not interested in recognizing. Our viewpoint, to bargain immediately around all our exploitation, gave us also -- we were to discover it for the first time -- the possibility of thinking of a moment of mobilization common to all women, and therefore the possibility for the first time to break every division and every isolation.

How to build this?

We, the women of the Committee, as all other women had little time and money for "political work", that is to build an organizational network which would give more strength to all women and, consequently, to us too. But we began to think of some instruments in a strategic way. In Padova it was the problem of the centre. Not only had we to be ready to travel in order to have meetings, to mount a debate to establish a first contact with women in other cities, or other villages; it was also crucial that these women have the possibility to easily reach us. As we know, few women have cars. Thus, we chose a center close to the bus and

train station. It was extremely handy. Many women, some from villages, could "come and go back" in one afternoon, without any member of their family even being aware of it, and without their interfering.

The centre was open regularly a few days a week, to answer any question of the women who came, to give information, to offer reading materials and a chance to speak with other women; and it became immediately the place for a series of meetings which grew as our contacts grew. The address, the opening time of the centre were publicized also in the papers and in any other way. We, the women of the Committee, would take turns to keep up with the meetings, as we would take turns in travelling around.

At first, the function we performed was essentially this: to make contact with the greatest possible number of women. What was our immediate perspective? To go a first time in the streets all together, with the only demand which could see us all together, and which therefore would give us a new power to bargain all the rest: WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK.

This was our immediate objective. And then?

We will go many times again in the streets, all together, always with this demand until we be not thousands but millions; for while we in Italy are putting forward this demand, our sisters in every country are moving on the same demand. We won't have to wait long before we are millions.

Until the unification of women is large enough, strong enough, until we have all gone into the streets many times together, we will not have an idea of where to concentrate our organizational effort, where we will be able to strike harder, because there we are strongest and with what forms of struggle. Building the first demonstration on the demand of wages for housework (the March 10 demonstration) has meant giving an organizational basis to the increasing refusal of housework which every woman feels and expresses in more or less open revolts. The price we women pay for this refusal is high. Men block our struggle, they blackmail us, they beat us, they kill us. It is horrifying to read in the papers, over the last few months, of women murdered by their husbands explicitly because "she refused to do housework".

Already many hours which have not been spent doing housework -- whatever the price we might pay -- have been spent, here in Veneto, writing documents, having meetings, making bulletins with information about our struggles, travelling, taking pictures, making movies, songs, in one word preparing for the 10th of March demonstration. This was and continues to be the phase of the underground strike, of the increasing refusal of housework. Next time, in the spring



March 8, 1974

of 1975, there will be an open strike. Not a national strike yet, but a strike by a network of women such as no trade union or party ever succeeded in organizing, a strike by a network that overcomes the objective divisions created by capital.

We said in the Square: "Today we are opening the campaign for wages for housework". Had we further detailed what we meant by a campaign, probably none of us would have said anything more than to keep multiplying what we had done so far, to have many more women than were in the Square on that day. But precisely because we had constructed a first occasion, afterwards it was much more clear, to us and to all the women who participated in the demonstration, what it means to build a campaign for wages for housework. And this is precisely what has to be emphasised: the 10th of March caused a leap in the organizational capacities of all the women who participated in it. Not only the older woman had seen beside her the younger, the women with children had seen beside them the women without children, the factory worker had seen beside her the shop-girl, the student had seen the woman who does piece-work in her home; in one word, every woman had seen the condition of the other women; but also through the impact of our speeches, of the interventions each of us made, speaking perhaps in public for the first time, the interdependence of every aspect of her condition as a woman and the interdependence of her condition and that

of the other women came to light. Precisely because of this, once back home every woman had the power to see with new eyes her life environment, discover the ties that tie her to other women, and thus succeed in focusing with them on the possibility of an organizational network.

Obviously, even before that, many of us were involved in organizational situations. We were involved in the early struggles over daycare, prices, the conditions of the neighbourhood, rent-reductions, wage-discrimination and on the defense or search for a job. But we also knew the sense of weariness and weakness induced by our sustaining such hard struggles, struggles for which we pay a higher price than anybody else, and which do not guarantee us any power as women and any possibility of a permanent organization, based on our interests and controlled by us.

Now, on the 10th of March we had given ourselves first of all a new perspective in which to move. This new perspective wages for housework, had given us for the first time the possibility of a mass organization, because, as we said before, and as we said in all our speeches, "housework not only claims all of us, but it is the work which determines all other aspects of our life". For this very reason this perspective had given us not only the possibility of a mass organization, but also the only possibility of a permanent organization. In fact, while the struggle over daycare ends when we take the daycare centre, the struggle for wages for housework ends only with the end of housework itself. As long as we have to spend one minute of our day to reproduce ourselves, not as free individuals, but as labour power for others -- and this is housework -- labour power others will exploit, our struggle against housework will not end. Even to put rollers in our hair every Saturday (because a shop girl must have a nice hair-do) is housework we perform for the bosses. If we were free individuals, we would or would not put rollers in, our choice would be dictated only by our taste, not by somebody else's, our boss' need to make us into a model shop girl who attracts more customers. And this is only one example among thousands. The same holds for all that we do in order to reproduce our body and mind. A comrade from the West Indies, who having intuited (thanks to female teachings) what is housework, began to better "visualize" our entire "working day", commented: "Well, those who are commanded by capital never punch out". Brushing our teeth is housework, putting lipstick on is housework, making love is housework, sleeping is housework and it does not make any difference that we also like a lot to sleep, for the fact that we sleep guarantees the existence of capital.

Our perspective is that everything, as long as it is commanded to us, must be paid for to us. And we must get everything paid for by those who want us to brush our teeth, put lipstick on and to go to sleep early so that we can get up early in the morning. If they want to impose all this on us, it means that they profit from all this. Then as long as they are forcing us to do something, they are always indebted to us, whatever the wage level we have reached. It goes without saying that our struggle for wages for housework does not end with a certain wage level, but with the destruction of their command over us to make us work. That is, with the destruction of every class relation, with the end of the bosses, with the end of the workers, of the home and of the factory and so of male workers too.

And our reproduction?

We say immediately that it will not require housework any longer. Housework will not exist any longer in the same way as forced labour will not exist. Given our present technological possibilities, and the present level of technological invention, every possible solution is at our disposal. At one condition, however, that we break the class relation which prevents us from enjoying the benefits of these inventions.

Only if our time is not commanded by others, only if our space is not confined by others, will we be able to develop our full capacities: the capacity to understand, to invent, to act and to build completely different social relations.

Earlier we said that the 10th of March with the political perspective it expressed has concretely demonstrated to all of us the possibility of building a permanent organization. The roots of this organization that we began to build were grounded in the daily struggles of women, but freed at last from the accumulated debris of the male tradition which always suffocated them. Only a male interpretation of women's struggles could see in the struggle over the price of steak our interest as defending the man's wage, rather than our interest to have first of all a wage of our own to be able to afford a steak for ourselves. The same holds for the struggle around housing. Only a male interpretation could see this women's struggle as satisfied when the house would be assigned to the "head of the family", without thinking that women could aspire to have a house of their own, independently from their being the reproducers of an entire family: a house where they could live alone, or with a female friend, or with a child, or with a man, but not necessarily a man.

All the struggles over prices and housing -- we can say without fear of error -- expressed first of all women's need for autonomy, a need for money of our own, space of our own, free time of our own. But in order for the totality of our interests, that these struggles and thousands of others expressed, to emerge completely and find an organization form, it was necessary to break with the male management of class struggle. When as women we decided to interpret our struggles ourselves, and to define our own interests ourselves, we were able for the first time to ground our AUTONOMY as our strategy. In fact for the first time we were able to see the totality of our interests, and therefore, try to build our full organizational power from the ground up. That is, an organizational power that always, at every moment would represent the totality of our interests.

It was a clear break with men and their organizations, precisely because men and their organizations by interpreting our interests in a limited and distorted way, had deprived us of a definitive strategy against our exploitation. Thus, they had confined us to political impotence, that is to depend on capital, to depend on capital's strategy for us. We were condemned by male interpretations to start from the branches (the outside job) rather than from the roots of our exploitation. We were condemned to bargain over partial interests (the job that supplemented the male wage in order to support our family) rather than bargain over our whole interest: to have immediately a wage of our own starting from the housework we all do, not to preserve but to destroy the family, which is based on our unwaged work. Thus, we were condemned to fight from a defensive position; we were confined to struggle to prevent capital from worsening our condition, instead of being able to struggle like waged males to destroy our exploitation.

OUR LACK OF AUTONOMY FROM MEN, FROM MALE ORGANIZATIONS WAS A LACK OF AUTONOMY FROM CAPITAL. It meant that we were condemned, let us say it again, TO DEPEND ON CAPITAL, to depend on capital's choices for us.

When we decided to interpret our struggles ourselves and the needs they express, we were consequently able to outline a definitive strategy and thus BUILD IN ORGANIZATIONAL TERMS OUR AUTONOMY FROM CAPITAL.

This must be thoroughly clarified, because up to this day there is a tendency to confine the meaning of feminist autonomy to the fact that we hold meetings separately from men. To have meetings separately from men has been an indispensable condition for building a strategical autonomy. But to limit ourselves to having separate meetings, while moving

around a male strategy, means to let what we have thrown out the door come back through the window. And all the political organizations and their Women's Commissions are in fact under our windows waiting to jump in. As we said before, only the demand of wages for housework allows us to struggle against the totality of our exploitation, for it allows us to bargain around our entire work-time, the entire wage of our work. This then is the only demand on which we can build a definitive strategy, and all those -- men and women -- who are against this demand, want to come back through the window to disarm us. If the Women's Movement sponsors their strategy it means that these people have already come back through the windows of some Women's Centres.

March 10, 1974 was the last of three days which expressed the organizational effort of many months of work: the continuous search for money to travel around, to print and distribute 20,000 leaflets, to print and circulate 6,000 wall posters, to rent a movie theater, a stage with amplifiers in the square of the rally, to run off and off-set piles of materials which were essential to distribute during the months of preparation, and particularly on that day, to build a photographic show which lasted for three days in the square, to rent the movies to be shown.

There was always the problem of time: time that was continuously snatched at night, on Saturdays and Sundays, for many of us "on the job", typing stencils instead of office correspondence while the boss was in the other room, meeting with our sisters pretending to sell them a sweater behind the counter of a department store.

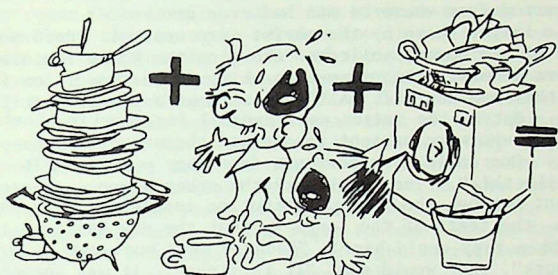
TIME AND MONEY. Now that our political struggle had begun we needed even more time and money. Our power, our liberation depended on how much time we could spend on it, how much money we succeeded in extracting from anybody, to prepare adequate tools of struggle.

The 10th of March was also the first testing of the tools we had created and of their ability to provide a clear and immediate communication among all the women present.

In the morning at the Excelsior movie theatre in the Ferretto Square we showed two feminist movies: "The Struggle is Not Over", and "The Adjective Female" produced by the Roman Feminist Movement. The first pictures the demonstration of March 8, 1972 and 1973, and the second pictures the first public protest about the situation of abortion in Italy, the situation of women forced to work in the general markets, the struggle of women who had occupied a factory in Rome, the heaviness, fatigue and monotony of housework. Admission was free. Many women entered with their children. In the

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

March 8, 1974



TOO MUCH WORK FOR NOTHING!

We open the campaign for wages for housework to struggle against our FIRST exploitation.

With money of our own we will be stronger in our struggle to determine the conditions of:

*HOUSEWORK
THE SECOND JOB
SOCIAL SERVICES*

*OUR HEALTH
PROCREATION
OUR SEXUALITY*

intervals, in the movie theatre, the Musical Group of the Committee, who had composed songs would sing with guitars. Many women in the room started singing (and the children too in their own way). The rhythm was easy to learn and the words were immediately grasped for they spoke of a reality they knew all too well. Many men came in "to see". It was the first time they saw movies made by women for women. They had a rather bewildered expression on their faces and they were silent.

There were others, however, who with quickness of wit managed to "say the right thing at the right moment". These were the militants of Avanguardia Operaia (Workers' Vanguard), who came to see us going out of the movie theatre with a pamphlet of their own on abortion. They said: "After all,

if you have understood anything it is because Lenin taught you". We answered them from the stage -- so that our answer could reach the ears of all their allies scattered in the square -- "No, Lenin has never said anything on this that makes any sense, and neither has Marx. The Women's Movement has started from where no man had ever arrived.**"

The images shown by the movies were unusual: deformed bodies of old women, policemen charging the Roman feminists who were demonstrating, women speaking of the condition in which they had aborted. All this without any male mystification. But if the images were unusual for a movie theatre the women who were present recognized themselves in these images. One could hear comments from many points: "It is just like this". They would ask the other women -- those who went through the rows distributing leaflets, small pamphlets, the texts of the songs -- what the day was organized for. When they would hear: "Because they must pay us for housework", they would say, "It is right". It was something they had never thought about, though many times they would say with anger, "I work so much for nothing."

When the show ended it was lunch time. Many women rushed home; the men, as usual, hung around in the square looking at the posters, the banners, the pictures of the show, and at us who were singing, speaking with other women, and shouting slogans. Then, one of us, took the loudspeaker and started shouting in their ears: "Men, where are your wives? Women, come to the square to struggle. Men, go home to cook."

By 1:30 the square had emptied for the Sunday meal. It was at that time that it was possible to see immediately with one look the marvelous floral taste with which the Communist Party had decorated the walls for the 8th of March, filling them with posters. The scene was reminiscent of D'Annunzio's "yellow daffodil fever", except that instead of daffodils, on the posters, there were mimosas. But the effect was the same: crazy. And crazy were the words that invited women to "emancipate themselves" and "to give help" (to whom it was not clear) to come out of the crisis. Luckily our posters were purple otherwise they would be confused. And luckily we put banknotes, large and well visible, in the hands of women, so women understand immediately that we are the party of money and not the party of work. Since that day the party of work has increasingly emphasized its floral relation to women's struggles.**

Around 3:00 p.m. the square started filling up again: it took just that much time for women to feed their family and wash the dishes. But the news that in the afternoon in

the square there would be shows with feminist songs and debates must have circulated very widely because we saw many older women coming, who ruffling the "Bulletins" on the stalls read at last something about themselves. Older women, who listening to the songs, felt that we spoke of them too. Older women, who leaning out of the windows (we saw many of them), heard that we spoke of them too in our speeches. "Women not only get the mockery of social pension, but they continue to work in the home, they continue to do housework until they die." "When we are old we find on our shoulders the role of grandmother, which means that we must raise also our grandchildren for nothing and in this way they keep us working as mothers until we die." "For a woman there is menopause; menopause could be treated, but no, she must suffer. And it is ten years of our life they take away. An older woman does not have the right to love, she is discriminated against sexually, she has no right to receive sexual attention; she must be only a grandmother."

Mother, You've Always Told Me

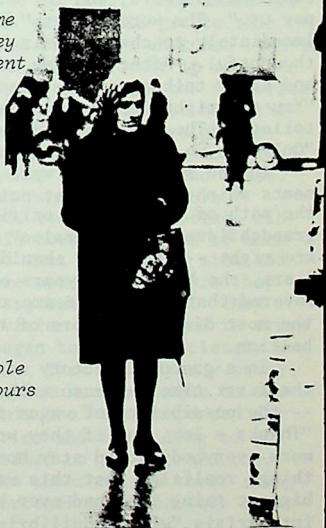
*Oh mother, you've always told me
that I had to be silent and obey
mother, I don't want to be silent
I don't want to obey and serve*

*Oh mother, for me, your life
has been truly a model
which I do not want to follow
because it made you die*

*mother, I have understood
you had to bow your head
to your husband's wishes
you had to serve your children*

*Oh mother, you are now fifty
I see you destroyed and miserable
you have worked thousands of hours
and no one has thanked you*

*Oh mother, in the movement
there is room for you too
but even if you do not come
we shall struggle for you..*



In the square arrived also all those women who had not been able to come in the morning. The women who came to the square for a Sunday walk on their husbands' arms met with the women who had come specifically for the demonstration, leaving their husbands many miles away.

There was a strange tension. Those of us who continued to distribute leaflets and documents saw the out-stretched hand of a husband who wanted to see what this was about before handing it to his wife; and the wife often did not have the power to say: "Wait a minute, this is for me." The situation of the women walking on their husbands' arms worsened when we started speaking at the microphone. It was clear that the husbands liked neither the tone nor the content of our speeches, because they would drag their wives away, putting pressure on their arms, ignoring the protests of the women who wanted to stay and listen.

And then there were the soldiers on leave, who were more than happy to have a chance to speak with so many women. Seemingly interested in what we were saying, some of them asked us what we wanted. "Wages for housework," we told them, "for all the work we do at home without which the State could not survive, and for which the State does not want to pay us." The words "State" and "housework" caused them immediately to change their attitude, from courteous to thoughtful. After looking at each other and around a bit, and after talking among themselves, they came to tell us: "You are right; we too in the Army have to wash dishes and toilets. The State should give us a wage too for this work." "Only now we understand the burden of our mothers."***

In the square there were a series of episodes and comments which would suggest political directions and outline the path of a new class unification. From the, "Even the grandchildren we must raise" of the older women, to the "You are right -- the State should give us a wage too," of the soldiers, the hours, the years of housework that each one discovered that they do became the common "thing" against which the most diverse sectors of the class expressed a common rebellion.

In a group of factory workers who were considering for the first time -- because they heard it for the first time -- the possibility of wages for housework, some said: "Thanks a lot, but if they would give a real wage for housework everybody would stay home." Others would not say anything, realizing that this was something big, perhaps the biggest thing they had ever heard, something that would put into crisis "world equilibrium", and "certain values", even if they did not see clearly in what way. Thus, while some

would comment, "I prefer to give money to my wife myself. For Christ sake, we are not animals, sure I don't want her to lack anything. What is mine is hers"; others would remain silent and thoughtful.

A woman from the Committee, the wife of one of these workers, joined the discussion. She laid out with passion her viewpoint on the issues which had come out, throwing out also things which she had been brooding about for a long time and we with her. First of all she started making it clear that there would not be anything wrong if once housework is waged men would decide to do it; and if a man feels pleasure in giving money to his wife he could keep doing it also after his wife has a wage of her own.

At one point some said that after all they agreed, that after all it was right that the State would give women a wage; after all with two paycheques in the family you could keep your head above water. Actually, in the case of a strike, probably one could get by better. They told us that they were struck by a sentence uttered in the square: "No strike has ever been a general strike. When half of the population works in the home, in the kitchens, while the others strike, it is not a general strike." They asked her how she thought -- how we thought -- we would get to this general strike. At this point she told them what had been in her mind for a long time, and she answered that in order to achieve this they should be ready to shut down the factories and join us in the square when we would decide to have the next demonstration. It was a very important straightforward political direction. Our strategy allowed us to give some new direction also to the other sectors of the class.

The discussion went on around "what is housework". Through our words they discovered, some with surprise, others with dismay, that they too did housework, even if much less than women. They discovered that fixing the sink and changing the light bulbs etc. were not small favours they conceded grudgingly to their wives, but housework. They discovered that many of the activities they engaged in every day were housework. They also began to see more clearly how this relates to commuting to work. They had already struggled hard to get it paid as work, but were now able to see it in a new light. It was not only the hours expended for the bosses outside the factory (time and travelling to and from work), but many more to be added to those. And they also began to see more clearly the shortcomings their struggle around commuting had had, shortcomings which were deter-

minded by the limitations of their objective, and therefore the limitations of the involvement in the struggle by other sectors of the working class.

It will depend on our strength and level of organization whether the issues raised in this discussion in the square on the 10th of March will become turning points for the theory and revolutionary practice of the male working class. However, for the present, let us see their immediate effects.

First of all the men started thinking of the hours of housework they too perform and of the possibility of bargaining over this work, precisely because we had opened the struggle around it. And the fact that we intended to bargain around this work had not only opened their eyes about the actual length of their working day; it had also given them an essential basis of strength to be able to bargain over it.

Besides this, for the first time some waged males thought of uniting with us on the basis of our objectives (which not accidentally also expressed their class interest) rather than repeating to us as usual that we had to unite with them on their objectives, even if their objectives never succeeded in expressing our interests.

Our strategy opened up for the first time the possibility of a class unification, which would happen not through the repression of the sectors defined as weaker -- we women first of all -- but which would spring from our autonomous organization as women bringing a new level of power for the entire class, rather than a further stratification of power.

Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework
Padova
November 1974

* Their allies were: Lotta Continua, Manifesto, Quarta Internazionale, P.D.U.P., Organizzazione Comunista, Circolo La Comune. They had gathered together with Avanguardia Operaia at the movie theatre Marconi to babble about the "emancipation of women, in a room crowded with men.

** In Il Corriere Della Sera (November 7, 1974, page 3) we read a statement made by Rassinovic, at a meeting in Monza, for the re-launching of recruiting for the Communist Party in Brianza. "If while we go by in a protest demonstration we meet a woman in a car, not only do we offer her a propaganda leaflet, we give her also a rose." We start being suspicious about the function of carnations. (N.B. The red carnation is one of the most popular symbols of the Italian C.P.)

*** This episode was reported in L'Espresso by a particularly careful reporter.

A SECRETARY SPEAKS



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 transitory work. With these young girls, who stay for a few years and then leave, it has been impossible to build a stable organization for struggle.

On the other hand, a few of the women I work with were older women who had to go back to work 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 they have to do outside jobs as well as housework. This is our situation, women's situation.

But what has been 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. A heavy, unpaid job which they never discussed, never even saw, I repeat just because they were men.

They have told us: "Emancipate yourselves through outside work", and we have found ourselves working 16-18 hours a day.

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 capital, in the early stages of industrialization, has yet managed to impose such a working day, on women, children and male workers.

They've told us also: "Let's struggle for social services, let's struggle for nurseries", otherwise you can't come -- 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: we've obtained very few nurseries and those are terrible. They gave us the OMNI nurseries, concentration camps for children.

While we were at work they gave our children valerian, tied them to the 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. I've never heard a woman who wasn't "political" say she was going out to work in order to emancipate herself. I've always heard women say, "It's never finished", that when they get time they have to "go right back and start working again".

This question of work I've only begun to see clearly since I've been in the women's movement. From the very beginning the movement has unanimously denounced housework as work we all do which has never been paid. I realized then that in the struggle for the money we get for outside work we were few -- too few -- and so we have been losing that struggle.

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

Even those of us who go out to work have to do housework: when we come home we find the washing-up to do, the beds to make, the children who no longer recognize us, don't know who we are.

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 that will last many years.

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 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 they have so divided us -- ready to work eight hours for 60,000 lire 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 bar, 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 if millions of women at home go on providing the same services for nothing? How can I find the strength to demand nurseries while millions of women go on raising children for nothing?

I finally realized that was not the right way: outside work was not the place to begin. I realized that we had to pick out another objective, common to all women, on which to struggle.

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 home count, if we can get paid for it, 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 won't give any more horrible examples of ill-paid jobs, which for women are very numerous.

I also realized this: that even if there was some chance of talking with 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 the 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 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.

We must have our own national insurance, it is the right of all women. 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.

After marriage women work all day, if there isn't enough money or if they don't want to ask their husbands for it they go out to work. At 40 we women are deformed! You needn't look hard to see it 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 and which is the place of our exploitation, the place of

I'm Going Crazy

I'm going crazy in the factory
with speed-ups and exploitation
and as if that weren't enough
I have to work overtime

After my working hours
I go back to Giudecca
where I find the house falling apart
and sewage overflowing in the street

I'm going crazy in the house
looking after my kids and husband
who want everything from me
Hurry to the kitchen !

And the plaster
is falling off the walls
and the toilet is collapsing
you can never get it clean

I've got this work to do
on top of my factory job
just because I'm a woman
I've got to work 20 hours a day

The hours in the factory
I get paid less than a man
and cleaning the toilet
I do that for free
just because I'm a woman
because I'm a woman.

The songs on pages 17, 25, 48 are translations from the Canti di Donne in Lotta (Songs of Women in Struggle) distributed by the Comitato Triveneto Centro delle Donne, Eremitani, Padua, Italy. "We Women" was written by Turri-Morato; "I'm Going Crazy" by the Neighborhood Committee of Giudecca in northern Italy; and "My Mother" is an old Tuscan folk song.

our work! That is why we demand money from the State- it is from that violent, fascist State that we want money, money like all workers!

To the comrades who came to tell us "You should carry on the class struggle," as if our struggles were not class struggles, we say, "Comrades, read our documents!"

Half the world's working population is unpaid: this is the biggest contradiction on a class level! This is our struggle, the struggle for wages for housework. It is the strategic demand, it is at this moment the most revolutionary demand for all, for the whole working class. If we win the class wins, if we lose the class loses.

That's for the comrades who don't understand, who don't want to read, who laugh at what their mothers do - our leaders of the extraparliamentary left! Our leaders of the extraparliamentary left who tell us that we are ideological, that we are so ideological.

Sisters, we say to these leaders: go home and look at your mother with different eyes - like human beings, not like robots, like males!

I want to say something also about the situation of older women, because nobody ever talks about them. Women of 50, women of 60, old women, never retire. This is because their work is unrecognized and unpaid.

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 not 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!

We have to pay a very high price for motherhood, at every age and in every situation.

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 these 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.

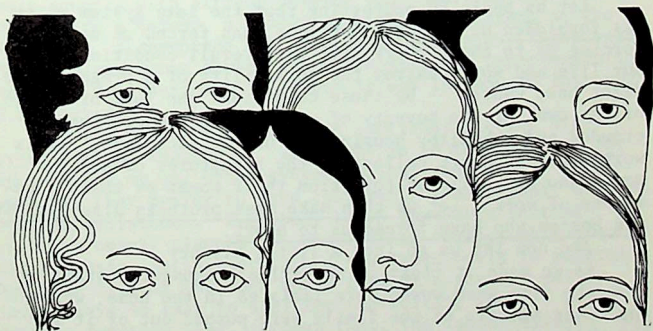
We have to hide them in the house, and when we can't manage them any more we have to put them in horrible institutions where they suffer further discrimination. And these too are our children, it is for them too that we struggle!

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 us all say this slogan:

STATE AND BOSSES, START CALCULATING,
WE WANT OUR WAGES, AND WE'RE NOT WAITING!

-- Poldia Fortunati



MATERNITY AND ABORTION



Photo: Clara Gutache

Recently women in France, Germany and other countries have been publicly declaring, en masse, that they have had abortions. This is one of the forms of struggle the world-wide women's revolt has resorted to in order to tear away the veils that have always covered abortion.

We in the Women's Movement feel the need to clarify the terms of our participation in the struggle for abortion. However, we feel equally the need to reconsider abortion as it has been imposed on us up to this day.

Let us begin by protesting that the same system which has forbidden us to have abortions, has forced us and keeps forcing us to abort every time the overall conditions of our life and work destroy the possibility of a pregnancy we might have wanted -- be these conditions the lack of a wage of our own, or the poverty of our husband's wage, overcrowded and unhealthy housing and unsafe factories. It is worthwhile to start collecting the signatures of all the women who had children torn from their wombs by their conditions of work. Let us then make mass protests also against the bosses who have forced us to abort.

And now let us go into a little history.

As we made it clear in an earlier document*, starting from the time when women were isolated in the home, while the other members of the family were pushed out of it for the whole day, women have been told that through "motherhood" they fulfil their "physiological destiny".

This, they were told, was "their natural vocation", since their organs are "oriented" towards the perpetuation of the species. But, as we all know, the reproductive function has never been dictated only by chance and nature. Thus, this talk about the "naturalness" of our destiny stinks first as a definition, and it stinks even more when we realize that this so-called natural destiny gets shoved on the backs of women only. Even if by force of circumstances we have grown greatly in beauty, much in virtue and little in wisdom, we know that to make a child it takes a man as well. If we give a quick look at the way these things, that supposedly work out so naturally, have gone historically and are still going, we see that:

1. The more the woman has been seen as a mother, the more she has been negated as a person, an individual. They have succeeded in tying motherhood to women's neck (motherhood meaning not only conception, but the ultimate responsibility for raising the children) to the extent that they have succeeded in sexually castrating us and excluding us from social life.

2. Having shaped and exhausted our personality and sexuality as motherhood, they forced us to make our motherhood function according to the needs of the labour market and of political control. Thus, with equal nonchalance they either exalted or destroyed our function as mothers.

To mention just a few examples, the practice of mass sterilization of Puerto Rican women goes back to 1930, when doctors promoted it as the only means of contraception. In 1947-48, seven per cent of the women were sterilized; this in a country with extreme poverty that American capital had reduced to a colony, a source of high profits and, at the same time, a showpiece of American benevolence. These same Puerto Rican women served as guinea pigs for experimentation on the birth control pill before it was introduced into the U.S. market.

In the U.S. black women are continually being sterilized without knowing it, when they go to the hospital for an abortion or any other gynaecological treatment. Consequently, they prefer to have children, or abortions, without medical assistance. Everybody knows that this sort of thing is openly planned for problems of "demographic growth" also in Asia, Latin America and the Third World in general. And this is just the most naked form of a general policy (not always so easy to see) for controlling women's reproductive function, and, through that, the labour market. The

term "overpopulation" hides not only a clear policy of genocide by starvation, but also a "people count" made strictly on the basis of the level of capital's investment and its concomitant need for labour power.

3. The delay with which the research on contraceptives appears on the scientific scene, when contraceptive methods had already been discovered and perfected which the Church opportunely helped to bury, suggests a parallel with the American kitchen: things are touted as the latest technological discovery which are not even up to the Stone Age of technological development. This delay has been just one more deception by science and the power structure to skin us. The fact that we still need to resort to abortion makes us protest once more the monstrous deficiencies and the non-accidental delay of this research.

4. That contraceptive research always uses women as the first guinea pigs for experiment, the result of which continues to be destined only for women, confirms a discrimination whereby, when questions of sex are involved, the problem is female, and conception is a "woman's affair". This tendency has been one more instrument of control over female sexuality; since by dictating the methods of birth control it also dictates the terms of the relations between men and women, and between women and society in general. If at any time they need a large number of women to be exploited as labour power also outside the home, they are ready to give us a variety of effective (though barbaric) methods of birth control.

5. Abortion, while being the only possible alternative to the deficiencies of contraceptive research, is forbidden virtually worldwide.

In some countries it is allowed for "therapeutic" reasons (i.e. if you can get doctors, psychologists and sociologists to declare you unfit, a bit feeble-minded and in disastrous economic conditions). Never and nowhere is the woman's right to decide whether and when to become a mother recognized and -- given the conditions described above -- to have an abortion when she wants to.

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST ABORTION IS SO WIDESPREAD THAT ABORTION MUST BE CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE RISKS IMPLICIT IN THE FEMALE CONDITION.

We want to add that the risk we refer to is not that "serious risk" mentioned in the penal code. Actually, as even the most narrow-minded doctors have had to admit, when it is done in a hospital, with proper medical care, and with anaesthesia, abortion is less dangerous than childbirth. The risk lies precisely in the conditions in which

we are forced to abort, since we are forced to have illegal abortions.

6. As for the "moral problem", it is not even worth mentioning the whimsey used by the Catholic Church to uphold the prohibition against abortion, like the disquisitions to establish if and when the fetus begins to have a soul, and if (a more ancient question) female fetuses have a soul. From this we can deduce that if one could have seen inside the uterus whether the unborn child was a male or female, the Church would have authorized the abortion of female fetuses.

The disgust we feel in reading certain ecclesiastic literature makes us put a quick end to the question of the "moral problem". For those who want to look further into this matter, the literature of the Women's Movement is beginning to collect more and more of the choice bits of such clap-trap.

7. We protest the fact that the concession of therapeutic abortion (a gracious concession in the general prohibition) has functioned and functions essentially as one more instrument of class discrimination. In fact, only the women whose social position gives them a certain power, manage to find quickly (read in time to use them) the medico-social statements necessary for obtaining therapeutic abortions. For the others it is almost impossible to get these statements, and they become the first victims of that social sadism which, even when restricted by seeming liberalism, wants to maintain the right, at all costs, to decide if and when women should become mothers. The doctors function as the prime instruments of this social sadism.

8. However, when the child has been made, at whatever the cost might be, we see the true face of the system:

The women who cannot get abortions have children.

The women who cannot get abortions belong, in general, to the most proletarian strata.

Once the child is born, when the repressive goal is reached, the same State that has forced you into motherhood washes its hands of any responsibility: "It is yours, do whatever you like to support it."

At most, they give you \$8.00 a month for the first year of its life and \$4.00 until the child is five. But clearly a person who needs \$8.00 a month cannot support anyone else on the \$8.00.

The child ends up in an orphanage. At this point the State re-enters the scene, not to help the mother, obviously, and even less the child, but to make some business. The \$8.00 originally allocated for the mother is immediate-

ly turned into \$75.00 for each child paid to the institution for abandoned children. It is well-known that almost all of these institutions are run by the Church. It is well-known how the children are brought up there, even the papers in recent years have been full of reports: malnutrition, violence, sadism of every kind. They raise those destined to the lower religious orders, to underemployment, emigration, the reformatory and the prisons.

Let us protest and struggle also against the Church, the right arm of this business.

9. As for those women who with the blessing of God and the consent of the system (it does not seem necessary to discuss further their consent) give birth and manage their children -- that is, those who have a job and medical insurance -- they, after growing up in an atmosphere fragrant with the exaltation of maternity, see their "maternity leave", won by contract, labelled as "sick leave".

A maternity conceived of, distorted and reduced to the function of reproducing labour power does not even end its journey in glory. The fact that when a woman is absent from her second job she is not paid for it is the very reason why the maternity leave itself does not have a more "productive" connotation. It is again only a question of "illness".

Conclusion

We, like all women, find that there is a need -- a very urgent one for all of us -- to organize a struggle for abortion, since the level of medical research does not allow us to demand simply a legal and free distribution of contraceptives.

By no means are we satisfied with the pill, the injection, or the other chemical systems, mechanical devices etc. We are perfectly aware of the degrees of danger they involve, dangers which gynaecological development -- which not accidentally is extremely low compared with other branches of medicine -- has done very little to resolve. So, as a minimal immediate objective we are forced to organize a struggle for abortion. It should be clear that we are not organizing to demand some kind of "therapeutic" abortion, which would only reinforce the class discriminations that already exist. Our demand is for abortion available on demand, free, with anaesthesia, and accessible to all women.

At the same time, we protest the fact that up to now, precisely the illegality of abortion has functioned as a great pillar for a trade in human flesh. For it has been a



*Abortion - Free and on Demand. From
the January 1975 demonstration in Florence.*

method for retarding or actually discouraging the research in contraceptive systems that would not ruin the bio-psychic health of women.

More than that, the illegality of abortion has been the basis for setting up and shaping this trade, in the sense of selecting where to grant abortions, and how to capitalize on the alternative use of illegality-legality. This has meant business both for the doctor beginning practice and the university "barons" trying to build their clientele in private clinics.

Precisely because we have thoroughly understood all this, our struggle is first of all a struggle against the social structures and power structures that have let this happen, that have willed this at our expense. Let us make it clear then, right from the beginning, that we are reversing the terms of this struggle:

OUR PROBLEM IS NOT TO BE ABLE TO ABORT

OUR PROBLEM IS TO BE ABLE TO BECOME MOTHERS ANY TIME WE WANT TO, ONLY WHEN WE WANT, BUT EVERY TIME WE WANT.

The proletarian women in the South have 15 children, while the middle class women somehow manage to have only two or three. Yet, our greatest desire is not this miserable privilege of not having children. This is not our final goal.

After all they have begun to give us these badly made pills, these injections that do not work, and they might even give us something better, they might even give us abortions. But since this only means, "You make your own calculations". "If you make \$240.00 a month have a child; if you make \$320.00 a month, you can even have two"; our immediate answer is "NO WAY".

We immediately refuse to accept this deal. This calculation which fixes how much we or our husbands make, and supposedly should determine how many children we can have is something we must look into again.

Some "feminist" literature which has begun to circulate encourages mothers and particularly the mothers of Europe to assume "social responsibility" in planning the production of their children. We reply at once that the type of "social responsibility" we feel is not at all that of adapting our target to our wage level, but of being able to have all of us all the children we want, and only when we want them.

Precisely by our struggle to fully realize the right of each and all of us to place a child on the face of the earth whenever we want, do we measure the only "social responsibility" we feel.

It is a right that often is still conditioned on having gained a bedroom for two. If the community where the parents made love in front of their children may have been the lost paradise, now that the original sin has separated Adam from Eve and both from their children, a bedroom for two is a minimal objective in Turin as well as in Reggio Calabria.** Promiscuity as overcrowding is the opposite of the community we want to construct. We want to make love whenever we want, have children whenever we want, in comfortable, warm and beautiful surroundings. This means not paying for motherhood either at the price of the wage, or at the price of the exclusion from it.

Only by measuring how much of this right we enjoy can we measure our share of social wealth.

-- Lotta Femminista

(Second Edition, February 1973)

From: Il Personale e Politico, Quaderni di Lotta Femminista, Musolini edit., Torino 1973.

* S. James and M.R. Dalla Costa: The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community. Second edition February 1973. Falling Wall Press, Bristol, England.

** Those who emigrate from Southern Italy (eg. Reggio Calabria) to go to work in the northern cities (eg. Turin) often leave in the South a bedroom where the whole family has to sleep; to be compelled in the North to sleep in a bedroom where many workers take turns renting a bed by the hour according to the shift they work. So in Italian capitalism they pass from underdevelopment to development.
(Translator's note).

URGENT COMMUNIQUE: For distribution to all women and for the information of men.

The days in Florence, between the invasion of the military police in Dr. Conciari's clinic and the demonstration of January 12, 1975, were used by all the groups of the Feminist Movement to thoroughly discuss the criteria for organizing future women's movement demonstrations, beginning with the January 12 demonstration in Florence. The discussion was necessarily directed towards how to concretize in such actions (demonstrations, etc.) the fundamental criterion from which the Feminist Movement was born and developed, that is its autonomy with respect to any and all male organizations. Even on the question of abortion -- on which men have never shed a tear nor said a single thing before the Feminist Movement declared open war beginning with the abortion trial in Padova, June 5, 1973 -- there was a risk that the resources, the money and the experience at the disposal of male organizations would overpower our levels of organization and distort our struggle. The question is not who has organized this or that clinic. But who has always paid -- and that is only women -- and who has always raked a profit out of this. Let us state clearly also that 100 or 150 thousand lira (approx. \$60-\$90) for an abortion is an outrageous price; that whoever asks it is definitely not on our side, and whoever bears anaesthesia, and makes a woman beg for it or even demands more money for it, is a sadistic, profit-hungry pig.

The following are the criteria which were established by the Feminist Movement in those meetings:

1. Men have no right to speak (make any sort of public address), to carry their group's banners or to shout their slogans; but only those indicated by the women in the movement. They (the men) must also march at the rear of the line.
2. Only women have the right to speak publicly and only the Feminist groups can carry their banners, placards, posters, and shout their slogans, etc. In fact, it is desired that each feminist group bring and distribute their own leaflets denouncing the total exploitation and oppression of women according to the political perspective in which each group sees it. The illegality of abortion is not merely an oversight of the legislators; the "expenses" -- in money, in blood, in fear and death -- that we pay for abortion are not "in contradiction" with our total condition, of our very existence as women. The clarification that each feminist

group can give on this question while building the struggle of the whole Movement, is extremely important.

3. The women of the "women's commissions" of the various parties and of male groups may participate in any demonstrations not as representatives of their own commission, but as individuals. Thus, banners, posters, leaflets, etc., of any women's commission are not allowed.

Whoever ignores these criteria, as happened in Padova recently, attempting to prevent a feminist group from carrying its own banner in a demonstration, assumes the responsibility for betrayal of these hard-won criteria and for trying -- as the men have done -- to weaken the movement. It is no coincidence that this is exactly what the male organizations did in Piazza Ferretto in Mestre a few days ago.

The above criteria have been established precisely in order to put everyone in his (or her) place.

We will not allow any party or male group to feed on the abortion question, thus finding a fertile terrain for growth from which to direct everything counter to the overall interests of us women.

The call for united action and mobilization which the Radical Party and all others invited us to participate in is an attempt to totally hide and confuse the autonomous struggle of women by asking us to join organizations whose goals and methods have been determined by them.

Gone are the days of whites inviting blacks to "unite and fight" with them by supporting demands and forms of struggle determined by the whites. If unity in our struggle can be built, the only guarantee we have that it won't be used against us, is for us to determine in what ways these so-called democratic forces must unite with us.

The male strategy -- whether this be reformist or "revolutionary" -- is quick to put forth this objective of unity as part of its objective in its "class strategy", which is a "class strategy" in words only because it calmly ignores the totality of the exploitation of women and consequently, our needs.

The criteria which we have established with the whole feminist movement in Florence are critical precisely because they guarantee that we will not be overrun in demonstrations by organizational slogans and methods of communication which are not our own, and of drowning in the sea of their masculine blabbering.

This time their long experience won't be long enough!

We want to reappropriate our own struggles and affirm the totality of our needs without having to worry about out-yelling those who are used to making a lot of noise.

Wages for Housework Committee of Padova
printed at via VIII Febbraio 10.2.75

TO ALL WOMEN:

On January 9, 1975 in Florence, Italy, the military police invaded an abortion clinic arresting 6 people, holding 40 women and forcing five of them to submit to a gynecological examination. All are accused of undergoing, practicing or favouring abortion. In the face of this incident, after the political mobilization around the trial in Padova on the fifth of June, we women are unwilling to explain again why it is our right to decide whether or not to have a child. The Feminist Movement all over the world has more than widely demanded not only in words, but fighting directly, the right of women to make decisions about our own bodies and on becoming a mother -- a right which we have always exercised against every law of the State and Church.

The Feminist Movement has thoroughly exposed the motives the politicians, scientists, priests and officials have always held against our fundamental right to decide whether to become a mother, when, and under what circumstances and conditions.

We women today launch an accusation against the state and the bosses which continue to allege their mystifying reasons in order to exploit us today more than ever. In fact, while they throw us out of the few salaried jobs we have -- underpaid and disgusting at that -- and by unemployment and inflation, they intend to intensify the rythms of that housework that they have never paid us a cent for. They try to make sure that with the intensification of terrorism, they will force our resignation and abandonment of our struggle against all aspects of our exploitation, starting with housework.

This is the meaning of the exemplary trial in Trent, Italy, against 273 women indicted for abortion, of the recent abortion trial in Milan and of the arrests and indictments for abortion in Florence.

In response to these exemplary trials we:

1. Accuse the state of the murder of all the women killed by the conditions in which the illegality of abortion has forced them to abort, and for all the babies killed because of the conditions in which we are forced to conceive, give birth, and raise them. Italy stands out for having one of the highest fetal, prenatal and infant mortality rates.
2. Accuse the state of grand larceny for all the work it has extorted from us for centuries without so much as a penny in payment in our homes and with the outrageous wages they pay us outside.

TAKE ABORTION OFF THE CRIMINAL CODE

FREE ABORTION ON DEMAND

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

to bargain the conditions

- of housework itself*
- of waged jobs*
- of social services*
- of procreation*
- of sexuality*

Padova Wages for Housework Committee

*mimeographed
via S. Nicolo 6b
Florence 1.12, 1975*



ITALIAN WOMEN DEMONSTRATE FOR FREE ABORTION

This leaflet was written by the Power of Women Collective in England on the occasion of a demonstration they held in front of the Italian Embassy in London to protest the closing down of an abortion clinic in Florence, Italy and the arrest of the staff members.

* * * * *

On, January 12th, police invaded an abortion clinic in Florence, Italy, and arrested the gynaecologist, Dr. Conciani, and four women assistants. Seven women were awaiting abortions, already under anaesthetic.

Who benefits from these actions and laws? Worldwide, the State, the Church and big business are trying to regulate women's reproduction, to make us have children or prevent us from having the children we want, when, where and in conditions that they dictate.

* They say they're against murder - but they force us into backstreet abortions that murder us, and plan or turn a blind eye to the genocide of famine.

* They make us work, wageless at home and for pennies outside, and then expect us to pay hundreds for the control of our bodies.

* When we want to have children, we don't have the money to keep them, the housing to shelter them, the time to enjoy them.

* When they want us to have children it is for their own ends-- to expand the workforce, to expand production, to increase profits, and they want us to bring them up free, for "love".

* When too many people are their problem, abortions and sterilization are condoned. In Pakistan recently even the Catholic church has advocated forced abortion and sterilization. "It need not be a repressive sort of thing," said a missionary. "But it must be compulsory."

* They try to make us think that getting an abortion in Britain is easy. Anyone who's met unsympathetic doctors, hospital bureaucracies, ruinous private clinics, knows it isn't. And now a powerful lobby of MP's, churchmen, leading industrialists, are pouring money into a campaign to make abortions even more difficult to obtain.

THEY'VE NEVER LET US DECIDE. EVERYONE'S LIFE IS SACRED BUT OURS.

NOWHERE IN THE WORLD WILL WE ACCEPT THEIR PLANS FOR OUR BODIES. NOT WHERE THEY PAY US TO HAVE CHILDREN AS IN FRANCE AND ESPECIALLY EASTERN EUROPE. NOT WHERE THEY PAY US NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN AS IN INDIA -- WITH TRANSISTOR RADIOS. EITHER WAY, WE REFUSE THEIR PRODUCTIVITY DEALS. IF WE HAD OUR OWN MONEY, WE COULD DECIDE. AND THAT IS WHAT WE WANT.

WE DEMAND THE RELEASE OF THOSE ARRESTED IN FLORENCE, OF THOSE 263 WOMEN IN TRIAL IN TRENTO, ITALY. WE DEMAND THE RELEASE OF ALL WOMEN'S BODIES FROM THE CONTROL OF ALL STATES.

Power of Women Collective



Right- State, Bosses, Study Ledger Pages! Because the Women Want Their Wages! Left- Only when we have money of our own can we really decide whether to have children or not-- Wages for Housework!

TRI-VENETO COMMUNIQUE ON LOTTA FEMMINISTA

The Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework, previously constituted as the Veneto Committee by Lotta Femminista #2 in Padova, Lotta Femminista #2 in Venice, Lotta Femminista in Trieste, following the dissolution of the organization Lotta Femminista at the national co-ordinating meeting held in Padova, Oct. 5-6, 1974, due to the fact that a number of different political analyses and programs were represented in the organization-- and already noted in the statement of dissolution issued at that time-- continues to carry forward the campaign for wages for housework.

The Committee, which has been involved with this campaign since the fall of 1973, and which has already organized the first public mobilization on March 8-10, 1974 at Piazza Feretto in the city of Mestre, continues to function as the political reference point co-ordinating the initiatives of all the various nuclei of women who are committed to carrying out a strategy of mobilization and struggle for wages for housework at present and in future years.

The sisters who have been part of this Committee, had already developed within Lotta Femminista, since its inception, an analysis which was emerging from the feminist movement internationally, which identified unwaged work in the home as the material basis for the exploitation of all women the world over.

These sisters, who for one year, and in agreement with this perspective and the political direction emerging from the struggle of the women on government benefits-- in the Mother's Allowance campaign in Britain in 1973, and the welfare rights struggles in the USA throughout the 60's-- had articulated within Lotta Femminista a political program which aimed at co-ordinating a common organizational effort which would result in a first public mobilization to demand wages for housework directly from the State.

But since this political proposal was not accepted within Lotta Femminista, despite efforts to generate a debate with the circulation of position papers and other materials, the groups which had been supporting this proposal formed the "Veneto Committee" in the fall of 1973, autonomously from Lotta Femminista, and with the express aim of organizing a first moment of public mobilization to demand wages for housework, starting from the Veneto area.

The Veneto Committee had to be formed autonomously from Lotta Femminista not only because Lotta Femminista as a whole did not recognize the need to create a common political project within the framework mentioned above, but, more importantly, because Lotta Femminista, as an organization, no longer had any political homogeneity on which to base any common political strategy.

The sisters who formed the Veneto Committee continue to develop their political work from the perspective that the demand for wages for housework is the first and most fundamental moment of struggle which is open to all women. By which is meant that only a mass confrontation by all women against the State on the demand of wages for housework can give us a new level of power to conduct our daily struggles-- especially during the present crisis-- against the conditions of our domestic work, our work outside the home, social services, and procreation and sexuality.

Since the Committee was formed in the Fall of 1973-- and especially since the mobilization on March 8-10, 1974 at Mestre-- many groups of women have been formed and continue to form in the Veneto region and beyond (which is why the name was changed last October to "Tri-Veneto Committee") who want to connect themselves organizationally to the ever-expanding movement for wages for housework in both rural and urban areas, in the metropolis as well as the so-called third world.

We note for the benefit of the sisters outside Italy, to whom we also address this statement, that the new name "Tri-Veneto Committee" includes the entire network which has grown out of the Veneto region to the regions of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, and Trentino-Alto-Adice. These three regions in Italy are known as the "three Venices". In addition, it also includes the many "groups" and "nuclei" of women organizing for wages for housework outside the immediate area of the "three Venices".

The "chapters" of the Tri-Veneto Committee include:

Padova Committee for Wages for Housework

Centre delle Donne

Piazza Eremitani 26, Padova

Tel. 049-653016 (Mariarosa), 615119 (Pia), 36384 (Polda),
651515 (Erika)

Venice Committee for Wages for Housework

Tel. 041-25857 (Francesca)

Trieste Committee for Wages for Housework

Tel. 040-411344

**SIAMO TANTE
SIAMO DONNE
SIAMO STUFE !**



WE ARE MANY, WE ARE WOMEN, WE ARE FED UP. From an Italian poster. Original photo of the Women's Emergency Brigade, Flint, Michigan steel strike, 1937.

Trentino Committee for Wages for Housework
Centre delle Donne
Via Maffei, 7
Riva del Garda, Trento
Tel. 0464-56943 (Yvonne)

Addendum

1. In 1973 in Italy the different parliamentary political forces were debating how to change the amount of family allowances; however all of them agreed in maintaining the mystification of the system of family allowances as money added to the husband's pay packet -- for the "maintenance" of his wife and children -- instead of giving money directly to the woman who, married or not, works hard to produce and reproduce, and thus in our view to "maintain", her husband, (if she is married), herself and her children.

2. The absurdity of the parliamentary game that did not put in question either who was to get the payments or their amount (except for ridiculous variations), gave us an excellent opportunity to denounce these mystifications and raise the demand for wages for housework.

3. The fact that at the same time women in England were carrying on a very similar battle (the Family Allowance campaign) gave us more strength.

4. Thus in Florence in June 73, in the effort to create for the first time a common instrument that would enable us to conduct public agitation together, we arrived at the formulation of the Volantone (a single-issue tabloid) of Lotta Femminista called "Against family allowances; for wages for housework".

5. But immediately afterwards the Volantone was no longer distributed by the groups in many centres, who considered it an unusable instrument. In our view this position is due not only to different evaluations of the Volantone's meaning and thus of the urgency of distributing it at least to set in motion a wide debate and a wave of agitation, but also because of profound divergences as to how political organizations grow.

6. For this reason, before going on to make new proposals with the risk of launching initiatives that would be disavowed at once, the Padua co-ordination meeting of October 73 was devoted to discussion of the minimal criteria of political organization; on this subject, the following documents were circulated:

7. 1. Draft of document on the meaning of power in Lotta Femminista.
2. Draft of document on the organization of Lotta Femminista.
3. Additional notes on number 2.
4. Observations on the use of instruments.
5. Initiatives on health.
6. Use of signatures for materials produced by women in the groups.
7. Leaflet-document with indications on how to use the Volantone.

8. Then, at the November 1973 co-ordination meeting in Florence we set out concrete proposals for building a common political program on the wages for housework demand, by circulating the document "Proposals for building the first national phase of the wages for housework campaign."

9. These proposals were not accepted by any of the centres except those which launched them (namely Padova II, Venice II, and Trieste). These centres were the ones who started the Veneto Committee.

10. At the January 1974 co-ordination meeting in Milan, these same groups again invited Lotta Femminista women to take part in the demonstration organized by the Committee in Piazza Ferretto in Mestre on March 8,9,10, 1974. This was the first demonstration in Italy on the wages for housework demand. This invitation was not accepted either. Thus, the demonstration expressed neither the organizational work nor the participation of Lotta Femminista, but rather exclusively the women gathered together for the first time by the organizing efforts of the Veneto Committee.

11. During the days of March 8,9,10, the document, "Wages for Housework as a Lever of Power,"* produced by the Padova Committee, was distributed in Piazza Ferretto. This document expressed and still expresses the political perspective of the Committee itself and of the former centres of Lotta Femminista that had started the Veneto Committee.

12. The first two issues of the "Women's Bulletin", produced by the Venezia and Padova Committee's, were also distributed at that time.

* This was subsequently published in book form by the international Feminist Collective as Le Operaie Della Casa (Marsilio, Padova, February 1975) and is presently being translated into English.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF STRUGGLE FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK
MAY DAY 1975

Program for the day:

- ** Meeting at 2:30 p.m. in Piazza Ferretto, Mestre
- ** Theatre and songs at 3:00 p.m. in Piazza Ferretto
- ** Demonstration at 4:30 p.m.

All over the world we women work at home for free.

All over the world we women struggle to be able to have children -- when, how, and if we want them -- because we know that to have a child means an intensification of our exploitation, a hell of a lot more housework, being more dependent on men, and increased isolation.

All over the world the state tried to keep its control over every aspect of our lives, by any means necessary. They want to remain the despotic owners of our arms and our uteruses. They want to decide how many children we must have and under what conditions, and they expect us to keep accepting the work of raising them for free.

They think they can keep on using our maternity, exploiting motherhood as an excuse for discriminating against us in jobs we are forced to take outside our homes.

THEY DO NOT PAY US FOR HOUSEWORK. They underpay us and discriminate against us in every way on the second job. They want to forbid us abortion or they concede it to us under many conditions. They allow us the use of contraceptives with the only purpose of ensuring a number of births that guarantees the utmost profit.

In Italy more than ever the strategy of repression around abortion is the attempt to break the mass struggle of women who, all over the world, demand the right not only to decide if, how and when, to become mothers, but to bargain around the conditions of work that motherhood implies. The refusal of motherhood, carried out by any means, even that of abortion, is the response of us women to the command of the state and bosses who impose on us:

- 1. All the housework of raising children for no money.*
- 2. Social isolation.*
- 3. The conditioning and denial of our sexuality*
- 4. Discrimination against us in the waged workplaces which we are condemned to work in.*

The first of May can no longer be a day of struggle only for men, while we women, even when we work for a low wage outside the home, keep working for free at home.

Today WE strike against our first job.

WE go into the streets.

WE struggle all together to bargain over the conditions of that work that is our common bondage.

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

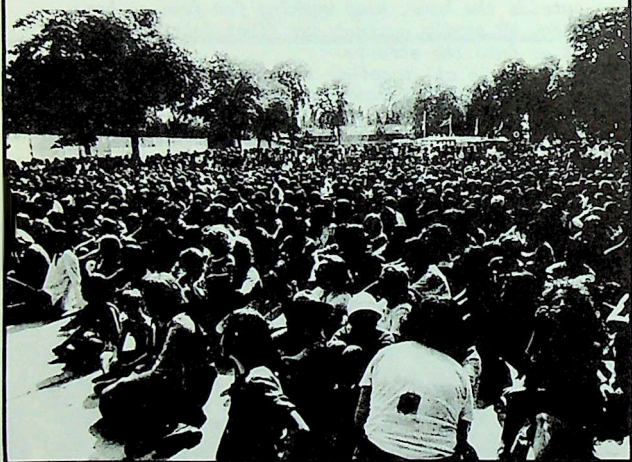
-- Tri-Veneto Committee for Wages for Housework



We Women

We women know each other
we all have a belly
we can all bear children
we have breasts to feed them
a body that is our weapon
and our shame
sold everywhere
a mind with deep insight
into life
a target of a thousand commands
a heart full of love
but tight with anger

We women look at each other
each one of us knows
the life of the others
we've become very many now
wanting our freedom
with the courage to struggle against normality
the strength to choose the life we want
the power to be who we want to be.



PUBLICATIONS

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.

In Women in Struggle # 1, a number of women in "different situations" discuss why they each want wages for housework. The pamphlet also contains an interview with Selma James given during her first Canadian tour in 1973; documents about the Family Allowance Campaign in England; and others.

Women in Struggle # 2 contains documents from the nurses' struggle in England in the summer of 1974; excerpts from the British Claimants Union Handbook; a transcript of Irish women speaking about their struggles; and others.

Women in Struggle # 1 and # 2 were prepared by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee.

Women in Struggle # 3 was prepared by the Toronto Wages for Housework Committee and the New York Collective.

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.

Wages for Housework Notebooks # 2 contains a speech by Selma James discussing the relationship between women in the "Metropolis" and the Third World; another speech by Selma James given to Italian feminists on the development of the women's movement; and an analysis of the women's movement in England from a wages for housework perspective.