

HOUSEWORK :

“ A FULL-TIME BLOOMING JOB.”

Women Talking -

**the other
Cambridge**

This pamphlet was put together by some members of the Romsey Town Women's group - Cambridge

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On Saturday, May 3rd, 1975, passers-by were surprised to see several women from the Romsey Women's Group walking around with tape-recorders outside the Co-op on Mill Rd. Broadway. They were asking women who were shopping there about the work they do. This was a new idea for many, who thought of themselves as "just housewives" whose work was not worth talk-

ing about. But we thought it was very interesting indeed, and so we have printed some of the recorded interviews here.

What made us think of interviewing women about housework? Well, we are a women's group and housework is something all women do. At an early age, we learn with toy irons and brooms that this is part of our "natural" function, and when we are old we are pensioned off five years earlier than men so we can look after our men when they retire. All around us - on TV, in books, magazines, papers, in adverts - we see what we are supposed to live up to: the immaculately dressed, smiling, self-sacrificing figure who *always* uses the right brand of washing powder and keeps her hands soft as well. But we know that that glossy image is not really us. We know housework is a job with long hours and no pay. We know we often get tired, bored and lonely, though we are not supposed to complain.

Some of us go out to work, mainly to make ends meet, but also for a bit of company and change of scene. When we do, we often find ourselves doing the same sort of jobs we do at home - cleaning, nursing, catering, looking after children, etc. (see Table on p.19). No

wonder the pay is low; there are so many of us, and we are so used to work for nothing that we are obliged to take any sum of money however small.

Our group has been discussing housework for some time - why is it supposed to be the God-given role of women? Why isn't it even counted as work? Why are we paid no wages for the work we do at home and low wages for the so-called "women's jobs" we can get outside?

We decided somebody is making money out of our work:- not our husbands, maybe not any one individual employer, but certainly all employers as a whole - the people who run the country. In exchange for one man's wage they, the employers and the government, get a package deal. They get the labour of the man, which they also make a profit out of, and the labour of the woman who services the man, provides his meals, washes his clothes and manages his home so that he is free to spend all his waking life working for them. In addition the woman produces and maintains the workers of the future. So it is obviously in the interests of the ruling class that women should be unpaid housewives and they try to keep it that way.

What can we do about it? We talked for a long time about the need for better nurseries so that women are not tied to their young children all day long. We thought about things like communal laundries or kitchens to share our work and make it more efficient and less isolated. These things are obviously very necessary and desirable, but they aren't enough. Besides we stand no chance of getting them while we are still doing the same work for free.

We think what women really need is money of their own, so they won't be in the powerless position of always depending on someone else's wages. In other words what we need is wages for the work we already do - wages for housework.

A million questions come to mind immediately - where is the

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money coming from, how are we going to get this wage, etc. We can't really go into all these things here except to say there's plenty of money around and we think women should get some of it. (Just think of all the millions that go down the drain on things like propping up a dying car industry, defence, top people's salaries, building endless blocks of huge, ugly offices, etc. etc.) The fact that our housework is essential to keep society running is our strength: it means that we have some bargaining power. We can use our work to demand a wage for it, for example by refusing to work, by depositing our children outside government offices, by refusing to pay rent, etc. All of which, if done by sufficient numbers of women, is no mean thing. And we must fight for the wage on our own terms, not somebody else's.

This is not just our idea - all over the world women are getting together and organising to demand wages from the state: in Germany, 3000 women factory workers went on strike for a paid day off work to do housework and shopping; in Canada, on May Day, women held demonstrations and rallies; in Northern Italy women took over public squares to demonstrate for a wage. The International Wages-for-Housework movement is steadily gaining numbers.



Cambridge, 3rd May 1975.
Talking to women about
their work.

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Just a housewife

- I. You said you don't do any work - you're just a housewife?
- W. Well, I do work but I am a housewife.
- I. Can you tell us how much work you do?
- W. Well all the house, all the time really.
- I. Do you have children?
- W. Yes, two children, 7 and 5.
- I. When do you have to get up in the morning?
- W. Half past seven. It's not too early.
- I. And you work all day?
- W. Well, on and off. They come home to dinner so I'm...well, if you call it work, well I...I suppose you do call it work in a way, cooking and sewing.
- I. Don't you call it work?
- W. Oh yes. It's quite enjoyable, I suppose.
- I. Does your husband work long hours?
- W. From 8 till 5.
- I. Does he help any?
- W. He does the garden and the decorating.
- I. Do you have any interest in taking a job, or is that something you don't feel like doing?
- W. If the children didn't come home to dinner I expect I would. But it tires you a lot, and then there's the holidays.
- I. Do you find that you've got enough money to make ends meet?
- W. I just have so much every week for housekeeping to buy the food. I could do with a bit more for clothes and things.
- I. Do you think the work you do should be paid?
- W. Oh yes.
- I. You'd like to see a wage for housework?
- W. Yes, of course.

It's a full-time blooming job.....

- I. Would you like to talk to us for a few minutes about the work that you do?
- W. Oh, I'm a housewife.
- I. Does that mean that you don't work?
- W. Oh I don't go out to work, love, no.
- I. You don't do anything?
- W. I'm just a housewife, well I suppose that is work really. It's a full-time blooming job, girl, it is that.
- I. Do you have to get up early?
- W. Well, I get up at about 7am, get my son off to work, then my husband, then I start the day's chores. Shopping and washing, back to the beginning again. I could do it with me eyes closed, I could! I've done it for that many years, I have, yes.
- I. Why do you think people say they don't work when they do all this in the home?
- W. Well, I don't know. It comes so natural to them and all that. They don't take no notice of it they don't. That's what it is, you see.
- I. You have children?
- W. Oh just the one boy. 19 he is.
- I. Have you ever wanted to take a job?
- W. Oh yes, I used to work at the laundry.
- I. When your son was young?
- W. Yes, yes. It was terrible, real hard work. Then you had to come home and do all your housework. Time I'd finished with that, I was ready for bed.
- I. Do you think that it would have been good if you could have been paid for the work you did in the house?
- W. Oh I would, that I would. With the money we get today, well, it's not worth my husband handing it over to me. Not today, no, no.
- I. But today you don't think of working outside the house?
- W. Oh no, I've got enough to do inside. To keep that going, to keep the work down.
- I. Does your husband help you?
- W. Now and again, now and again. Depends what mood he's in. Otherwise...oh, he helps a bit, he's a good old boy, I wouldn't be without him.

It'll have to be very quickly

- I. Can you talk to us about the work you do? W. No.
- W. It'll have to be very quickly. I. None at all? Have you ever asked him to?
- I. Do you work outside your home? W. Well I've tried but I think it's more, well I can get it done easier myself, let's put it that way, it's quicker.
- W. Yes, I've got a part-time job in one of the colleges, servery side. I. Do you work outside your home because you like to or from necessity?
- I. And you've got two children? W. Yes, these two are mine.
- W. Yes, these two are mine. I. How much work would you say you do in the home? W. Both. Financial gain and I enjoy working.
- I. How much work would you say you do in the home? I. Do you think that women should be paid for the housework that they're doing in their homes?
- W. Well, sufficient. Depends how I feel and what needs doing. I. Can you give me a rough idea of how your day goes? W. In a way, yes. I think your housekeeping allowance should cover it. I don't believe many people's do.
- I. Can you give me a rough idea of how your day goes? I. What do you do in the half-terms and holidays?
- W. Up around seven, breakfast, and at the moment I have to wash the kiddy as one has a broken arm, so he can't do it himself. I usually do my beds and things before I go to work, wash up breakfast things, I drop these at school, then off to work. I don't have to be there until half-past nine, then I'm back again around half-past two, do a few more odd things that need doing, go and pick them up from school, get tea ready. Occasional evenings are spent ironing or washing, depends how I feel. W. Well, I have a very good neighbour and friend who has them for me. She has younger children so of course she can't do anything other than be at home.
- I. Does your husband do any housework? I. How did you manage when they were smaller, pre-school? W. I didn't work them. I used to help my brother occasionally, but that wasn't work as such. That was evening time.

I don't do anything

- I. What kind of work do you do? W. Me? I don't do anything.
- I. Nothing at all? I. How long do you go out to work for?
- W. Just look after him. (Young child with her) W. It depends on how long the dinner I'm doing is.
- I. Do you consider that you don't work, or is it that you don't work outside your home? I. What time do you usually get back?
- W. Well I do work at nights, I do a waitress job, but that's it. W. It varies, on the length of the dinner, sometimes twelve, it may be nine-thirty, it may be eight-thirty. It depends.
- I. Can you tell me something about your day? How does it go? I. When you first started talking to me you said you didn't do anything!
- W. Starts about five in the morning, when he gets up. From there I get up, do all the washing, get it out by about six, my husband gets up, I get him off to work, get this one off to school, the other child comes with us, do the shopping. Then I have two or three friends in for coffee and then prepare lunch. My father comes to lunch as well. Then I wash up, go out again in the afternoon till three. Get ready to meet the child from school, pick him up at half-past, come home, get tea, get evening meal. About six my husband comes in so we eat, the kids go to bed, wash up again and then go out to work. That's it. W. Well, it's not like someone who goes out to work all the time.
- I. What about your husband, does he help you with any of it? W. No, no.
- I. What sort of hours does he work? W. He works eight till six.
- I. What does he do in the evenings? W. Goes to sleep most of the time! Or he'll watch television or something, he's so whacked.



And then I really should scrub the floor, and the washing-up's piling up in the sink, and little Janie's upset because

she can't do her homework, and somewhere I've got to find time to do the shopping....



I. Do you think that you should be paid for the work that you do in the house and for the children?

W. It would be rather nice.

I. If you had money for that you wouldn't have to go out to work in the evenings.

W. Oh, well I go out for a break actually. You know, to get away. Instead of being just someone's mum or someone's wife, I can be me. The conversation is more stimulating.

I. Do you find that you get very tired?

W. You do get tired, but not unduly. It's a pace that you set, it's all fast living now, isn't it.

I. You seem incredibly cheerful for someone who gets up at 5 in the morning.

W. I've just got used to it.

I. Well, thank you.....

No Time

W. I'm a housewife - I haven't got the time to stop.

I haven't got the energy left to do any reading

I. Can you give me a picture of what your working day is like?

W. Yes, I get up about 7, give the children their breakfast, get them off to school, wash up, come shopping, go back and do the washing, if I can I put them both to bed for a rest, which isn't always possible. Then there is lunch to make, oh and I finish up somewhere along the line. In the meantime I'm usually getting stopped to do something for one of them, or both of them. I get on with lunch, and then the children lunch and my husband's, he has his whenever he comes in. After lunch, I wash up, if I can, if it's nice I take the children out and play with them. Sometimes I have odd jobs to do, you know, ironing or polishing, bit more cleaning up or something. Then I do tea, feed them and put them to bed, then in the evening I cook the evening meal and collapse into a chair at about half past 8.

I. Quite a full working day. What work does your husband do?

W. He's post office counter clerk.

I. Does he work long hours?

W. Sometimes. He does a lot of overtime yes.

I. Do you think that, as you work very hard, you should be paid for the work you do?

W. I don't know really. It would be nice to have another bit of independence really, moneywise, but apart from that..... The only times I really mind is coming up to birthdays, when I have to go and say, "can I have some money for your present?", which is a bit silly really.

I. Do you find much time for yourself, to do the things you are interested in?

W. Sometimes in the evenings I can. I get time to play the piano, or listen to some records. I find I haven't got the energy left to do any reading, I haven't the mental capacity left after I've finished humping them around all day.

I. Thank you.

I come home
To the hard work

I. Do you work?

W. Yes, I have a job.

I. Are you married?

W. Yes.

I. You also work in your home?

W. Yes.

I. Do you have children?

W. Yes, five.

I. What is your job?

W. Hand stitching, outside the house.

I. Where do your children go while you work?

W. They are still at school.

I. Do you have any small children?

W. The son is nearly 17, the daughter is 15, another son about 14, another daughter 11 and a son nearly 10.

I. Do you do very much work in your home?

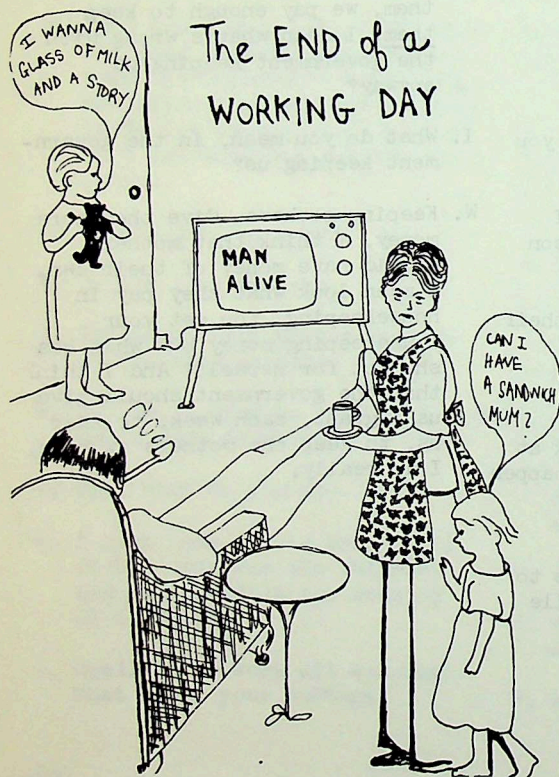
- W. Yes, I do - with five children there's a lot to do, cook, clean, wash, iron.
- I. Yes, do you get up early in the morning?
- W. About 6.15 am.
- I. And when do you go out to work?
- W. I leave home about 8.
- I. Before you go to work you must do many things in the house, what do you do?
- W. Make breakfast - oh, first make the beds, come downstairs and make the children's breakfast, and after that get the children ready for school. I go to work at 8 and then the children go to school.
- I. Is your job far away?
- W. In the city centre.
- I. How many hours work do you do in the city centre?
- W. Before, I used to work full-time, now I only do 8.45 am to 4 pm.
- I. Then what do you do?
- W. I come home to the hard work! Cook, clean for the children and go to bed in the evening at 11,30 pm.
- I. Really? You work all evening? What about your husband?
- W. My husband isn't living here - he's living in Colchester.
- I. So he's not here at all. Do your children help?
- W. My daughters, yes they help me.
- I. And your sons, what do they do?
- W. Yes, they help, sometimes.
- I. Sometimes. What do they do?
- W. They Hoover.
- I. And your daughters?
- W. Oh she makes a cup of tea, whatever there is to be done, cleaning, ironing - lots of things.
- I. She does many things. Do you find it difficult finding money for the things you need?
- W. Well, I manage.
- I. Do you think it would be good if you could get paid for the work you do in your house?
- W. Yes, that would be fine.
- I. If you could get paid for the work you do in your house, would you want to work outside?
- W. Oh, no, no.
- I. When your children were small, did you work then?
- W. No.

I Think the State should Keep Them

- I. Do you feel that the work you do in the house is quite a lot of work - quite hard work?
- I. But if there were -
- W. No, no, not nowadays.
- I. Have you had children?
- W. Yes, I've got one boy, he's married.
- I. When he was small, what did you do?
- W. Didn't go out to work, no. I didn't believe in that. My son was 14 before I went out. I don't believe in mothers going out to work, leaving their young children.
- I. Why is that?
- W. Because I don't. I mean look at the accidents and what can happen to a child in the home. For instance, I know someone, a relation of my husband, her little girl nearly got burnt to death because she was in while her mother was out to work. I don't believe in leaving children.
- I. - I think the state should keep them, we pay enough to keep them. I mean what's wrong with the government keeping us anyway?
- I. What do you mean, in the government keeping us?
- W. Keeping mothers. Give them more money. I think that mothers should have money of their own. I mean look what they pay in housekeeping. You get your housekeeping money but what has she got for herself? And I think that the government should give us a grant, each week, to keep us, to keep the mothers at home, I do really.

Too much work

- I. Could you talk to us about the work that women do?
- M. Too much work. (husband)
- W. Well, I do plenty.



- M. Tell them what you're always telling me.
- W. Oh, well I spend three hours in the morning -
- M. No, tell them how you used to work for pin money.
- W. Well, yes I did. But now I have to do it to help the housekeeping.
- I. So you've got an outside job too?
- W. Yes.
- I. So it's a pretty full day?
- W. Oh it's more than that. You could do 24 hours if they let you. Well, it used to be a case of put your feet up after dinner, but not any more.
- I. Perhaps you could give me a rough list of the jobs that you do in the week.
- W. Well, it's easier now. But up to two months ago I had a full house. My father for instance. I had him and all my kids at home. That made seven of us. I went to work three hours in the mornings, I came home, did the lunch, you spend your afternoons cleaning and you've got to teatime. And you spend your evenings ironing. I used to make a few soft toys in the evenings to stretch the money but I've packed that up now. I reckon if you sit

down by 9.30 at night you're lucky. That's a full day. You go to bed at 10.30 or 11 pm and what have you had? About 1½ hours to yourself. But we have a very busy life. Very busy. Until recently I had my father at home. Fortunately he's just died a few days ago so I can relax a bit.

- I. That's a bit bad though, isn't it, when you -
- W. Oh, I miss him. I'd rather have him but they mean a lot of work. At 80, they take a bit of looking after. But I suppose it applies to most women, all the work. I used to use my job for pin money but now I come straight home and put it in the housekeeping. Just spent it on this weekend's shopping, cost me £12.
- I. And it's always the woman who has to shop around.
- W. Oh yes. There's three males in my house but it all hinges on the woman. You see I'm a bed-maker so I do the same things at work, washing up, making beds, cleaning rooms - I come home and do it all again.
- I. Yes. A lot of women's jobs are like that.
- W. Yes. A complete bore. You do it because you can't get anything else, the hours to fit a family.

- I. It's so useless too, because once you've cleaned up it gets dirty again.
- W. Very much. It's all useless.

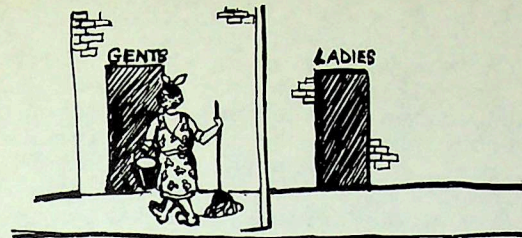
You get so bored at home all week

- I. Excuse me, would you like to talk to us about the work that you do? We feel that people don't take a lot of notice of women's work generally. Do you work?
- W. Yes but only part time. I've got two young children but I go out because I enjoy work.
- I. Do you work in your house as well?
- W. Yes. I enjoy going out though because you get so bored at home all week.
- I. Yes. How many hours would you say you worked in a week including your housework?

No Time to relax

- W. Well, 20 hours at work but you're working 24 hours a day at home. You go to bed about 11pm, 12pm, then you get up early in the morning.
- I. Do you think that you could describe a typical day in your life?
- W. Well, you start about 6.30am, get breakfast ready, get them up, get the family up, give them breakfast and get them ready for school. And there's your clearing up to do, washing and then prepare dinner. Once I've got that clear I go out to work, come home and do tea and start all over again. Then there's the ironing, wash the children and get them off to bed. You've just about had it by then. Then if you're lucky you might go out one night.
- I. Do you have any help with the children or are they completely your responsibility?
- W. They're my responsibility.
- I. Excuse me, would you like to talk to us about the work that women do.
- W. Oh, I work all day and go to the hospital in the evenings.
- I. You work there, do you?
- W. Yes.
- I. Do you have to -
- W. - to make ends meet, yes dear. So your day's took up really, whole of the day. No time to relax.
- I. We're talking to women about the work that they do because a lot of people don't realise how much women do. They just accept that the housework's done, the meals are cooked, the kids are looked after and they say "Oh it's all right for them, they just stop at home." So it only gets called work if they go out and get paid for it.
- W. Well I don't know what to say. We're overworked, there's no time to do anything.
- I. Do you find rising prices make it harder for you?
- W. Yes, it means you have to shop around a lot more...are you taping all that?
- I. Yes.
- W. Oh dear!

WHO DOES THE DIRTY WORK ?



occupation	gents	ladies
Apprenticeships:-	42% of boys at work	7% girls at work (70% hairdressers)
Day Release for further education :-	40 % of boys at work	10% of girls at work
M.P's:-	604	26
T.U.C. General Council:-	37	2
Trade Union Officials:-	1,375	25
Managers	400,000	3,000
Draughtsmen:-	99%	1%
Directors of Social Services:-	147	14
Boards of Nationalised Industries:-	422	5
Barristers:-	96%	4%
Doctors:-	85%	15% (quota operated by medical schools)
Engineers and Scientists:-	93%	7%
Jurors:-	89%	11%
Magistrates:- (Lay- unpaid) (Stipendiaries :-)	66% 49	33% 2
Professors:-	3,281	44
Education:- % which go on to university of those who have 2 or more 'A' levels	70%	40%
Housework	1%	99%

This booklet consists mainly of interviews with women workers, both in and out of the home. It was compiled and edited by the Cambridge Wages for Housework Group who, at the time the interviews were recorded, were members of the Romsey Town Women's Group. Romsey Town is the oldest working class area of Cambridge, a part of Cambridge that is rarely mentioned, concealed behind glossy images of a luxurious spacious university town with rich idle young students floating on punts down the River Cam. Romsey consists of grey terraces of small Victorian houses with pre-war council estates behind them. Here the men workers service the university as porters, waiters, etc. and work for the two main industries, Marshalls heavy goods vehicles and aeroplanes and Pye's electronics. The women workers also service the university, as bed-makers, cooks, waitresses, cleaners, etc., and also, of course, service the men and children and work in the home.

Here is the experience of some of these women and their views about it. The interviews were recorded outside the Co-op supermarket on Mill Road Broadway, the shopping street of Romsey Town, on a Saturday morning in May.

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OUR BODIES, OUR STRUGGLE



For years we women have fought for and defended our right to FREE AND SAFE ABORTION ON DEMAND. We know every child means years of unpaid work and dependence on men. Abortion is our refusal of that work and that dependence. And we are not going back to backstreet butchers.

But abortion is only part of control of our bodies. Butchers in the NHS are operating right now, sterilising women without even telling them. If we're not married or if we're black or immigrant, the medical butchers deny us the right to have children.

Because we work for no pay at home and low pay in outside jobs, many of us have to wait years till we can 'afford' the children we want. With the crisis, mothers are giving their children away because they have no money to feed them, to house them, to look after them. Having no money denies us the right to have children.

Governments all over the world want to dictate to women which of us will bear and raise workers for them and how many. Population planners blame starvation and pollution on our having children to make us feel guilty if we get pregnant. And they are using our own struggle against us - to deny us the right to have children.

Control of our bodies begins with control of our struggle. NAC is led by parliamentarians and political parties; our needs as women have never been their concern. They are building their power on the energy of thousands of women who have been fighting for the right to choose if, when and how many children we have, and under what conditions. But NAC says abortion is 'the right to choose'. It isn't if you face sterilisation. It isn't if you can't afford children.

WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN

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