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REASONS FOR HOUSEWORKERS TO UNITE

Housewives and mothers have no position of power, from which they can bargain to secure a better life for themselves. If we compare the situation of houseworkers to that of other workers, maybe a common basis can be found to effect a change.

Labor unions are formed on the assumption that laborers have a louder and more effective voice when they speak in unison. Pooling their power together like this, they can force employers to make decisions that will be more favorable to them. This stems from the fact that many workers are together in one factory, mine or plant and have a chance to compare and relate their grievances against a common boss (exploiter). By many of them being together and having the same complaints, the complaints no longer remain personal and individual dissatisfactions but become social, political and economic injustices. When enough laborers make demands for change, the boss has to listen in some cases. For laborers can strike, boycott or just make things difficult in general, for their bosses or the economy. It doesn't always work because even if they threaten to leave their jobs, another job might be hard to find or other bosses might be equally as bad. But their work is recognized as a social necessity and is paid for. It is recognized that male workers have a right to protest against the way they're being used. This gives them some self-respect and bargaining power, to sell their labor making the best deal possible in the existing market.

Compare this to the situation of housewives. Each woman that works at home (doing housework) is isolated and separated from other houseworkers physically and mentally and each has a different boss.

This would be the same as each factory worker, working in a small, separate factory, under a different boss, with little chance of grievances becoming collectivized. In fact, the worker might begin to believe there was something wrong with him if he was discontented at his job, being unable to communicate easily with other workers.

This is the situation of houseworkers, isolated from each other, believing they're inadequate because they find the situation unsatisfactory, thinking other women don't suffer from the same feelings of tiredness, boredom and fear. We believe we might be abnormal because of our frustration. This makes us feel guilty and prompts us to try to make things look smooth-running and happy on the outside. A need to keep up appearances creates the fear that people can see things aren't really as they should be. All women are sisters and we all have relatively the same problems. Once this is admitted the first and hardest step will have been taken to remedy our situation. Just giving up appearances releases one from a burden of fear and guilt.

There are a number of oppressions houseworkers suffer from. You can probably think of others that I've overlooked.

1. This is a culture in which almost everything has a money value to judge its worth. A man gets paid for his work and so it is respected. The more money he gets the more he is respected. This in turn gives him self-respect and a feeling of worth. Houseworkers (housewives) don't have their work recognized as having a stable value that gets paid for consistently and fairly. When your work seems worthless to society you begin to feel worthless too. As a houseworker you get an amount of money that has nothing to do with how hard you work or the conditions you work under. The money you receive depends on the whim of your husband or the welfare department. Even if your husband works hard and tries to give you as much as he can, if he doesn't make much money you are not fairly compensated for your work. If he's giving it to you that is not the same thing as your having

earned it. You don't build self-respect through handouts. It has to be recognized that you earned this money and you deserve it. It's not a favor you're receiving but your right. Your wages shouldn't depend on your husband's wages as your work is independent of his. x If he left you or died you would still have almost the same amount of work to do. Your income should not be dependent either on the kind of man you are with (rich man, poor man, drunkard, gambler) or your ability to get a man. This is inconsistent and unfair and forces women into relationships for reasons other than personal compatibility. Living on what another person chooses to give you is to live at his mercy and let him define your worth. If all society recognized your worth and paid you accordingly, you would have more economic equality and all children would have more equality of opportunity regardless of their parents' status.

2. If a woman is a housewife she feels guilty anytime she spends money. This is because she is made to feel she neither earned nor deserves it. Actually all the money a woman spends is part of the job she is doing - maintaining her home, husband and children. She is acting in the capacity of a buying agent for the household. These functions are a necessary part of her job and are not done for her own pleasure. Even when a woman buys clothing or cosmetics for herself, it's to please her husband and to help him maintain his image. The wife, children and house are considered by society to be an extension of the husband, a reflection of his worth. If a wife spends money she sometimes waits until her husband is in a good mood before "confessing" to him how much she spent. Confessing is for sins and that's the attitude her husband takes. He may say something like "I worked hard to make this money and you spend it like it's nothing" or "Don't you do anything but spend my money?" Compare this with the attitude toward a man that works as a buyer for a store or a restaurant. When he reports what he has bought, he's treated as a responsible adult with mature judgement and paid for what he's doing.
3. The relationship of houseworker to husband, welfare dept., puts the houseworker in a degrading position. It's degrading to be dependent on others who don't recognize your contribution to society. The work of houseworkers which is the maintenance of life is of primary importance in any culture. A husband's attitude toward his wife often reflects her degraded status and shows up in many ways. Husbands often abuse their wives physically and/or verbally. The reason they can get away with humiliating and embarrassing them is because they are secure in their belief that their wives are dependent on them and have no recourse. When husbands think of themselves as protectors, they are put at a psychological advantage. The one that's being protected is considered weak and dependent and this weakness can be and is used against them. It reinforces a sense of insecurity in women and makes them actually feel unable to defend and protect themselves, whether this is the case or not. One of the reasons is that they are deprived of economic independence.
4. Society implies that houseworkers live a parasitical existence and are worthless but anyone that has maintained a home or raised children knows what hard work and drudgery it is. Until society provides better alternatives, this work should be as respected as any other kind of work. In fact, no better alternatives will be created until society recognizes and pays for this work.
Right now, if a housewife complains of her husband or situation, she's rarely taken seriously. If she stays with a husband who beats or abuses her, she's considered stupid or even masochistic. This is plain anti-woman

feeling if you compare it to the reactions people would have if a man complained about his job. In the instance of a man, we would realize that -- he might not be able to get a better job -- he might be unskilled -- he might not have the means to support himself until he finds another job. In the instance of a housewife, however, there are even harder obstacles to overcome of a psychological and emotional nature. Looking at the man, we would think his boss was at fault, not him. We would consider his complaints seriously, as valid statements, of unfair conditions.

The word "housewife" has a degrading connotation for many people in this society and women are ashamed to be classified as such. This has to be changed to allow women to become equal and independent human beings and have others share their work regardless of sex. Only when housework becomes dignified will this be possible.

Women must start demanding childcare centers in their communities. They must also demand adequate compensation for the work they're doing until better alternatives can be found for the isolation and degradation that is now a part of housework.

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