

FA, Contella 2, 78 a Marty Glaberman

Dear Marty,

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Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter to Selma regarding Mariarosa Dalla Costa's article in Radical America. I am writing to you as part of a wider discussion of the article - prompted I guess because I just can't ~~xxx~~ go along with what you say in your comments.

Let me try to explain why. First, the question of the independent validity of the woman question. Certainly, it has independent validity and certainly it contributes to the struggle for socialism, etc., etc. But I don't see where Mariarosa's article departs from this conception. Does the fact that the woman's struggle has independent validity mean that analysis of the question must proceed in isolation from other subjects of analysis. Is that how ~~xxx~~ analysis of "The Negro Question" was carried through? No. It was impossible to make the analysis without referring to other matters. Class for example. The whole analysis of the black movement has proceeded by analysis of internal class divisions. The role of the black middle class and the widening or now widened split between black middle class leadership and the black workers and the poorer sections of the urban black community. The discussion of racist America involved a discussion of almost every portion of the American social structure. The entire institutional set was racist. And nothing was more important than the relation of blacks to production.

(If only now that things are happening down South we'd done the same with poor whites... We could have at least five years ago if not more had we been willing to pay attention to subjective realities as well as objective conditions ... as we said we would.)

To say that the woman question has independent validity does not mean that it is a matter on which one takes an abstract position - one is against sexism, one is against entrapping the woman in the home, against the exploitation of the psychic energy of the woman for male ego needs, etc. To say that the woman question has independent validity means that one is all the more required to comprehend the relationships of that question to everything else known about capitalism, the changes in capitalism and to the new society.

One of the more important virtues of the article is at the level of theory and practice. It is clearly noted that the author is aware that Marx never directly addressed the question of the function of the housewife and her role in production: "The role of women, in other words, has always been seen as that of a psychologically subordinated person, and except where she is marginally employed outside the home, essentially a supplier of a series of use values in the home. This basically was the viewpoint of Marx, who, observing what happened to women working in the factories, concluded that it would have been better for them to be at home, where resided a morally higher form of life. But the true nature of the role of housewife never emerges ~~xxx~~ clearly in Marx." (p.79 The author is aware that she is going where Marx didn't go and that the "error" lies in Marx. When a theory becomes increasingly relevant to the real world, it is natural that it should expand, i.e. that there should be many points of analysis which are by no means covered or even allowed for at the first shaping of basic ideas. And actually the body of ideas will hopefully extend itself so far that the ideas no longer will be necessary; the contribution of revolutionary theory is ultimately to render itself obsolete. We scarcely need to go to that for "justification" however. All the Johnsonite documents lay great stress on the idea that fixed categories of analysis must be broken down repeatedly, if theory is in any manner to keep up with the world. I think this is a fine statement as to the role of women in capitalism, made in a Marxist manner, precisely in a way not attempted by Marx.

Two issues in particular should be taken up. 1. domestic production and the rest of the productive apparatus and 2. surplus value (education too if there is time)

1. Only in Selma's introduction is the distinction between the production of the worker, the worker as a commodity vs. production of labour power or labour power as a commodity even seemingly ignored. (Reference is to your statement that in paragraph 4, page 1) on p. 64 Selma says as you quote "The commodity they produce, unlike all other commodities produced under capitalism, is a living human being: the worker." That is clearly a matter of expression, especially since the following paragraph goes on to talk about labour power. In the article itself, labour power is the term: this is the commodity which is produced and reproduced in the private factory of the home. There can be no question of whether labour power is bought and sold; the worker in non-domestic production is "free" to sell it. On pages 79-80 Dalla Costa specifies what the relation is between the domestic worker producing the commodity labour power and the worker on the job. She lists in various places the forms of labour necessary for the production of this commodity (Everything from diapers to shoe lace tying to discipline to washing and mending, to the making of meals, to the cleaning and maintenance of the tools and machinery, e.g. the dishes and cooking utensils and the stove and refrigerator or whatever she has. All use values, but all the means by which labour power is produced.) Far from mechanically including a new group of persons under the label "proletarian", she considers the relation between the "free" wage slave and the personal service of the domestic worker with regard to objective ~~economic~~ conditions and with regard to the forms of struggle as well. Obviously this is a different matter than the American New Left labelling middle class professionals as proletarian because that would make them revolutionary or because it would make proletarian revolutionary and because in any case "everybody" is going into these occupations anyway.

2. Surplus value. The claim here is very modest it seems to me: "domestic work not only produces use values but is an essential function in the production of surplus value." If anything it is too modest. In state capitalism one could say as much about nearly any part of the state apparatus. For example, the Internal Revenue Service performs an essential function in the production of surplus value, collecting taxes from 50 million families, the better half of which (at the federal level) is destined to go back into the corporate structure to be used in an identical manner to surplus value generated in production. An essential function because the IRS is more efficient at collecting additional surplus ~~xxx~~ than Pinkerton or the National Guard. What the domestic worker does is more direct. The costs of production of labour power is the other side of the level of wages. See in Capital I where Marx talks about the historical and social circumstances connected with the level of wages and elsewhere that wages are the same as the cost of producing and reproducing labour power. That wages have been as low as they have been (even where they were high) has been based on unpaid labour on the part of domestic workers.

One of the contradictions is that the more advanced the capitalism the less it can depend on unpaid domestic labour as a basic element in the generation of surplus value. The costs of production of the labour power of a worker in the Northeastern U.S. are very high compared to anywhere else. The wages are pushed up as part of the labour struggle - when they go up the standard of living goes up - and part of a higher standard of living is the relative liberation of the woman from domestic labour. The more of the use values which ~~xxxx~~ are produced in factories and in the service industries, etc., the higher the costs of production of labour power and thus the higher the costs of production in general. In a South American town, as Dylan puts it, where the miners work for almost nothing - very little of what is in the miner's home

is manufactured and virtually everything that is done is unpaid labour. A large part of what the companies are (unknown to themselves) looking for when they go there and when they relocate in other relatively underdeveloped areas like the South is what allows them to pay lower wage in the first place: the unpaid labour of the women (and sometimes her mother as well)...

The relationship of unpaid domestic labour to surplus value indicates another way in which capitalism is continually in the process of self-destruction. State capitalist economics are based on underconsumptionism. Create more demand they say and this will make the system grow and operate better. But as they succeed in doing this, in ~~creating~~ creating more demand, widening the market for new goods and services; a portion of the base on which the whole thing rests is partially destroyed - namely unpaid labour. This has been happening in Europe. If and when the process goes further in Europe, labour costs will be exceedingly high there as well, perhaps higher than the market (world market) will bear... (This may happen elsewhere too, if it has not already reached certain limits.)

That's it I guess. I don't want to try here to go on to talk about education. It is not as central anyway. See you soon.

Warmest,

Bob (Wicke)

P.S. By the way, there is a footnote. Not to detract from it in the least, the article is not where I first encountered this discussion. Jane sent up with me some handwritten pages from St. Louis (first year or so we were together) (BLURRED) ... that talked about the home as a private factory in (BLURRED)...