

Brooklyn 26-8

Caro Ross,

scuse se ti scrivo in fretta,
 e a mano (nel senso che scrivo male).

Silvia ti darà copie delle risposte che
 Silvanou ci ha scritto spiegando i motivi
 per cui non può pubblicare l'articolo che
 originariamente Silvia e Uccio avevano
 scritto e di cui tu probabilmente sai
 già qualcosa.

Carol Lopate, una tizia che sembra
 essere conosciuta come "la donna di
 Stanley Aronowitz", aveva scritto un articolo
 intitolato "Pay for Lousovsk". Sono Silvia
 e Uccio mostrate una copia di questo
 capolavoro del sinistra inedito.

Silvia e Uccio propongono a scrivere la
 rivista. La prima versione dell'articolo-risposta

stato restituito quando ormai lei era
già in Italia. Ci venivano richieste convenzioni
e tagli. Contemporaneamente ci venivano richieste
anche il tuo indirizzo, il che diede il tuo
indirizzo e quello di Selma notando che Silvia
riceveva tutto quello che scrivevi tu e che
quindi, se avevamo bisogno di qualcosa potevamo
sempre rivolgerci a lei.

Questa è sembrata evidente, fin da quel momento
che l'editore voleva editare elegantemente di
pubblicare l'articolo. Ci dava da lavorare un
prender tempo e un poter così scrivere a te.

Ci aspettavamo poi una risposta del tipo
"scusate tanto, il vostro articolo è troppo
lungo e scritto in un inglese troppo "academic",
per cui non possiamo pubblicarlo: la gente
non lo capisce (non lo capiamo neanche noi!)
Però pubblicheremo in futuro un articolo della
stessa stessa materia quindi dovete stare
contenti.."

Poi ci delle paranoie abbiamo lavorato
sull'articolo tanto in non dare loro

versione di dire che siamo cattive
La copia colata è quella dell'ultima
versione (sempre conioni) presentate
una settimana fa.

Le lettere di rifiuto è seguita dopo alcuni
giorni.

Leggila con ti' occhi colati di come
il P.C. russo sia meno sottilmente
intollerante. (Forse perché loro non devono
tenere su il palco del libertarismo)
ma ugualmente usanti nelle gestioni
che ci dispiace che si' l'ha non fosse
~~così~~ sentiti' e che non usate parole
comunque in lo meno sai la storia
che ha preceduto una eventualità allora
di liberation (Forse credono che tu non
sappia neanche l'inglese book.)
che forse lui già ricambiato.

Per quanto mi riguarda sono di' isolati
mentre a Paolo è
ciao Carlo

per un'altro...
A noi intru...
A.B.
Se la gente che lo letto quelle parole leggere anche questa

to make clear what we wanted to convey. We want to offer an alternative rather than leave the reader groping.

Dear Nicole Cox, Silvia Federici and friends,

We've decided not to use your article on wages for housework.

We want to stress that we consider the debate to be an extremely important one. We would like to print a cogent rebuttal of Carol Lopate's article that also stands alone as a coherent statement on its own terms. Unfortunately, we found your article tended to add to our confusion.

Many of your textual criticisms of Lopate are well taken, but we've found your overall exposition of your own position very unclear. This lack of clarity is manifest in three ~~general~~ ^{general} areas: (1) your tendency to blur rather than clarify and extend Marxist categories, (2) your seeming hesitancy to deal explicitly with Dalla Costa's notion of the abolition of work and the family (that's the strategy---you are dealing with a tactic of demanding wages for housework), and (3) your refusal to discuss the ramifications of Lopate's fears about the effect of commodization of family relationships that would result from winning your demand.

It's important to delineate exactly where you follow Marx and at what points you are attempting to transcend his categories. On p.3, you state: "The production and reproduction of this labor force is precisely the work women perform in the house. In this sense we say that housework is productive, i.e. , productive of capital. (emphasis added). Yet Marx (Capital, I, p.477) states rather ~~definitively~~ definitively, "The laborer alone is productive who produces surplus value for the capitalist" We're not interested in having you adhere to Marxist categories, but we do think it important that you try to be explicit about where you and he part company. On p. 5, you blur over the distinction again: "... housework was transformed into a moment of production ..." One of the real merits of the Dalla Costa paper was its ability

to make clear where she wanted to diverge from Marx and to offer up alternative definitions rather than leave the reader groping.

Your paper never hones in on Dalla Costa's incredibly subversive ideas about the abolition of both the family and work (i.e. toil) itself. Your incremental tactical advance in demanding wages for housework is a double edge sword ; it must be situated in the context of the overarching strategy advanced by Dalla Costa.

The other edge of this sword is the commodization of family relationships. While your position is certainly defensible, Lopate's fears require explicit refutation. Any discussion of wages for housework should attempt to allay such justifiable apprehension about destroying any positive moment --love, caring -- that exist in the nuclear family.

We are actively searching for more articles dealing with the issue your paper tries to confront. WE are drafting a letter to Dalla Costa to solicit her response to the Lopate's article. We would be glad to excerpt your article as a letter for our september issue or to consider a new version for the october issue. We would greatly appreciate any source you might be able to suggest.

Lastly, thank you very much for writing the article -- the subject has labyrinthian difficult implications. Your treatment provided us incentive to ⁸⁰on exploring the wages for housework demand and to improve our own understanding of the issue raised.

Sincerely

Harvey Flock for Liberation

In the name of "classstruggle" and "unified class interest", the practice of the left has always centered around certain sectors of the working class while confining others to a merely supportive role. In this sense, the left has reproduced in its organizational and strategic objectives the same divisions of the working class which have characterized the capitalist division of labor. Since the left has accepted the wage as a dividing line between work and nonwork between production and parasitism, the enormous work women perform under wageless conditions within the home has always been considered irrelevant to the capitalist economy and to a revolutionary strategy. This lack of understanding of the specific position women occupy within capitalism has ironocally been translated into a theory of women's political "backwardness" which would be overcome only when women entered the factory gates. The logical outcome of an analysis which sees women's "oppression" as determined by their exclusion from capitalist relations is a strategy to enter these relations rather than a strategy to destroy them.

The political genesis of wages for housework is precisely the refusal of this leftist ideology. However Carol Lopate, in her article "Women & Pay for Housework" attributes to us positions which by no means can represent our perspective. In fact they are the very positions we reject.

Our starting point is the clarification of the function of housework and wageless labor in general, in the capitalist organization of work and society. In this sense, our perspective opens up a new ground of struggle both for women and for the entire working class. The document (1) mentioned by Lopate, which we assume is her source of information, states it this way :

"Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through

the wage, that is, that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage laborer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organizations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage laborer been organized. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it ... Where women are concerned, their labor appears to be a personal service outside of capital."

If we take a woman's perspective, we realize that the work day for a capital does not begin and end at the factory gate and we rediscover the nature and extension of housework itself. Housework is much more than just housecleaning. Servicing the wage earner physically, emotionally, and sexually means getting him ready to perform day after day on the job. Taking care of our children -the future wage earners- assisting them throughout their school years means ensuring that they too perform in the manner expected of them under capitalism. Holding a second job vastly complicates the task. Moreover a woman working outside the home, married or single, has to put hours of work to reproduce her own labor power and women well know the special tyranny of this task since a pretty dress and a nice hairdo are jobconditions for women. All this and more is housework. It is our time and it happens to be our lives. We doubt very much that in the U.S. "schools, nurseries, day care and television have taken away from mothers much of the responsibility for the socialization of their children" and here the housewife is "potentially left with much greater leisure time." (Lopate, p.9) Among other things, it is clear that day care and nurseries have never liberated women's time for themselves but only their time for extra work. If anything the situation in the U.S. is immediate proof that neither technology nor a second job are capable of liberating women from the family and housework, nor housework from its essential function in reproduction. Two jobs have only meant for women even less time and energy

to organize and struggle against both.

This is why up to this day both in the "developed" and "developing" countries housework and the institution of the family, which is centered around housework, are still the pillars of capitalist production and social relations. Indeed the presence of a stable, well-disciplined and minimally frustrated work force is an essential condition of production at every stage of capitalist development.

The production and reproduction of this labor force is precisely the work women perform in the house. In this sense we say that housework is productive, i.e., productive of capital.

This is not at all the expression of a need for women to be legitimized as part of the "productive forces" or, in other words, a resort to moralism. From the capitalist viewpoint being productive is creating value. From the viewpoint of the working class being productive simply means to be exploited. "To be a productive laborer is, therefore, not a piece of luck but a misfortune". (Marx) (2) Thus we derive very little "self-esteem" (Lopate, p.9) from it. But to say that housework - still our primary role and, therefore, identification as women - is a moment of capitalist production, means to clarify our specific function within the capitalist division of labor and most important the specific forms our attack against it must take. Our power does not come from the "recognition" of our place in the cycle of production but from our capacity to struggle against it. Not production per se but the struggle against it and the power to withhold it has always been the decisive factor in the distribution of social wealth.

It is this perspective, rather than mere loyalty to Marxist categories, that has shaped our strategy. It is unquestionable that Marx never dealt directly with housework. Yet we must admit that we are less eager than Lopate to liberate ourselves from Marxism, to the extent that Marx has given us an analysis that up to this day is irreplaceable in order to understand the functioning of capitalist society. We suspect that Marx's indifference to housework might be grounded in precise historical factors and by this we do not mean simply that dose of male chauvinism that Marx certainly shares with his contemporaries (and not only with them). It is clear that at the time Marx was writing, the nuclear family and housework, which is its central function, had yet to be created. What Marx had before him was wither the proletarian woman fully employed in the factory along with her husband and children or the bourgeois woman who had servants. It was only after terrible epidemics decimated the working class and, most important, after waves of proletarian struggles throughout the 1840s brought England to the verge of revolution that the need for a more stable and disciplined work force led capital to plan the nuclear family. Starting from the 1850s, England underwent a series of processes which in the space of a few decades led to the formation of the nuclear family: the increasing exclusion of women and children from the work force coupled with the shift in the economy to typically male sectors (coal, steel, transportation), the doubling of the male wage in the space of a few decades, the dramatic inversion in the birth and death rate, the creation of a network of community structures e.g. the community store substituted for the company store, and finally a flood of popular literature aimed at preparing the "perfect housewife". (3) This set of phenomena indicates that far from being a pre-capitalist structure the

family in its modern form is a specific creature of capital that is supposed to guarantee both the presence of labor power and its control. Thus "like the trade union the family protects the worker but also insures that he and she will never be anything but workers, and that is why the struggle of the women of the working class against the family is decisive." (Dalla Costa and James (1)p.39)

Ironically, the extension of capitalist relations in the form of the capitalist family took place through the privatization of these formerly socialised relations. At the very point at which housework was transformed into a moment of production, that production was hidden as a personal service. That work, in fact, was to be unwaged which, in a society where the prevailing social relation is wage labor, stigmatizes that work as nonwork. It is the lack of a wage and the consequent social negation of housework as work that has sustained the sexual division of labor and structured the whole female personality. The fact that housework is unwaged has meant not only that women have been made dependent within the family, but, most important, that a social imposition has been transformed into a natural destiny. This is why women have found it so difficult to struggle against housework and their condition within the family. The first obstacle to that struggle is and has been the fact that this work is invisible. Worse yet, we have been conditioned to consider it our primary identity and highest aspiration in life. Once again, it is the lack of a wage that has determined the way we have been socialized from our first day of life. Love, sensitivity, motherhood, spirit of sacrifice and care are all attributes that capital has glued onto us to make us accept hours and hours of unwaged work.

Thus it is no accident that "we found ourselves preferring or finding less consuming jobs which have left us more time for housecare" and that it is so difficult for a man "to ask for special time schedules so he can be involved equally in child care." (Lopate, p.11) Not an insignificant reason why the man cannot arrange for part-time hours is that, even in those cases where there is an additional wage earner in the family, his full time job is usually necessary for survival. This is the basis for these "old habits, the men's and ours" (Lopate, p.11) that Lopate has found so difficult to break.

Since "housewife" has become synonymous with "female," we carry this identity everywhere we go. As has often been pointed out, the nature of female employment is an extension of our role in the home. Capital has been very successful not only in transforming our uterus into a passage for labor power but in enforcing this socially imposed condition as one which is natural and therefore immutable. Thus, we don't need to be reminded that "the essential thing to remember is that we are a SEX. That is really the only word as yet developed to describe our commonalities." (Lopate, p.11) For years and years capital has told us that we are nothing but CUNTS. This is the sexual division of labor and we certainly don't want it eternalized, as necessarily happens when we ask ourselves "what does being female actually mean; what, if any, specific qualities necessarily and for all time adhere to that characteristic?" (Lopate, p.11) This type of question can only lead either to a biological or psychological definition which in every case turns out to be an idealization of the social relation to which we have been confined. To try to reach an eternal definition is to negate our capacity for change

and legitimize the status quo.

We are most surprised at the glorification of women's slavery in the home and free labor in general which appears in Lopate's article. "The home and the family have traditionally provided the only interstice of capitalist life in which people can possibly serve each other's needs out of love and care, even if it is often also out of fear and domination. Parents take care of children at least partly out of love.....I even think that this memory lingers on with us as we grow up so that we always retain with us as a kind of utopia the work and caring which come out of love, rather than being based on financial reward." (Lopate, p.10)

The literature of the women's movement has abundantly shown the devastating effect that this ideology of love, care and service has had for women. These are the chains which have tied us to a condition near slavery. We definitely refuse to keep with us in our memories, as a utopia for the future, the miseries of our mothers and grandmothers, as well as our own. We also reject Lopate's suggestion that asking for financial reward "would only serve to obscure from us still further the possibilities of free and unalienated labor" (Lopate, p.10) which simply means that the quickest way to "disalienate" work is to do it for free. Thus it seems to us that if instead of relying on simple love and care, our mothers had had a financial reward, they would have been less bitter, less dependent, less blackmailed and less oppressive to their children who were constantly reminded of their mothers' sacrifices. They certainly would have had more time and power to struggle against that work and would have left us at a more advanced stage in this struggle.

It is precisely the capitalist ideology which presents the family as the last frontier where women and men can "keep their souls alive" (Lopate - p. 10) and find happiness and fulfillment. This ideology, which opposes the family (or the community) to the factory, the private to the public, the personal to the social, productive work to unproductive work, is rooted in the very capitalist division of labor which in its most essential aspect is a division and a hierarchy of power within the working class. It is from our position as women that we have discovered that one of the most powerful weapons to enforce this division and hierarchy has been precisely the wage and the lack of it. The significance of this can immediately be seen when we realize that, though capital is based on waged labor, most of the population of the world is still unwaged (not only women, of course). Through the wage and the lack of it, capital has opposed a "working" class to a "nonworking" proletariat, supposedly parasitic on the former. Like racism, sexism and welfarism, are not only different ways of regulating and dividing the working class, but also stem out of different ways of being productive for capital and thus exploited. If we ignore this fact, we end up considering sexism, racism, and welfarism as moral diseases, products of miseducation or lack of consciousness, once again confining us to a strategy of education which indeed leaves us nothing but "moral imperatives to bolster our side. (Lopate, p. 11)". Lopate is right that our strategy relieves us from the reliance on "men being good" (Lopate, p. 11) to attain

liberation. Trying to educate men has only meant that once again our struggle was privatized and instead of being waged against our real enemy, was always waged against our own selves, husbands and children, in the solitude of our bedroom and kitchen.

It is on this analysis, but not only on this alone, that we base our strategy of wages for housework. In fact, this strategy has been clearly indicated by the struggles of the Sixties both internationally and in the U.S. In this context, we suggest it is about time the left start looking at the needs expressed by the working class rather than impose on it goals which are "hard for workers to visualize". (Lopate, p.9) on the assumption that the working class is backward and doesn't know what its needs are. We had hoped that the women's movement had helped us to overcome the elitist attitude which sees our role as "conceptualizing" and "communicating" to workers what their needs should be. But obviously vanguardism dies hard. In the U.S. the struggles of blacks and welfare recipients - the third world of the metropolis expressed the revolt of the wageless against the use of capital has made of them, and their refusal of the only alternative that capital offers i.e., more work. These struggles - which had their center of power in the community - were not struggles for work but for the reappropriation of the social wealth that capital has accumulated in part as a result of their unwaged condition. In this sense, they challenge fundamentally the capitalist organization of work and society and broke with the ideology of work.

On the other hand, Lopate's statement "the ideological preconditions for working class solidarity are networks and connections

which arise from working together" and " these preconditions cannot arise out of isolated women working in separate homes " are consistent with the capitalist organization and ideology of work. Not only does this position ignore the struggles many isolated women waged during the Sixties (rent strikes, etc.), it assumes that we cannot organize ourselves if we are not first organized by capital and, implicitly, that capital has not already organized us. We must emphasize here that housework is fully-organized or institutionalized as unwaged work. If we consider work not simply as a set of activities but as a social relation we realize that it is precisely its wageless condition that defines and structures housework as an institution.

In opposition wages for housework is as much a refusal of development (getting another job) as a refusal of capitalist rationalization in the home. We don't believe that the revolution can be reduced to a consumer's report as in Lopate's proposal : "we need to look seriously at the tasks which are necessary to keep a house going ... we need to investigate the time and labor saving devices and decide which are useful and which merely cause a further degradation of housework ". (Lopate, p. 9) It is not technology that degrades us but our social relations in the family and society. Moreover this type of "self-management" and "workers' control" has always existed in the house. We always had the choice of Monday or Saturday to do our laundry, or the choice between buying a dishwasher or a vacuum cleaner, assuming we could afford it. Thus we do not ask from capital to change the nature of our work, but we struggle for the possibility to refuse our reproduction as work.

An indispensable precondition toward this goal is that this work be recognized as work through a wage. Obviously, as long

as wages exist so does capital. To this extent we do not say that achieving a wage for housework is the revolution. We say that it is a revolutionary strategy, for it undermines the role we have been assigned in the capitalist division of labor and consequently changes the power relations within the working class and between the entire working class and capital in terms more favorable to us. Nothing has been so powerful in institutionalizing our work and dependence within the working class than the fact that we didn't have a wage. Here we have to clarify the nature of the wage struggle. The wage in fact has been the traditional ground of struggle between capital and the working class because the wage and the lack of it expresses the class relation and rate of exploitation. In this sense, the wage always has two sides : the capitalist side, which uses it both to control the working class and to guarantee that every raise is matched by an increase in productivity ; and the working class side, which has used it to gain more power, more money, independent of productivity. When the "fair exchange" between money and productivity is upset, the struggle for wages becomes an attack on capital's profit. In the case of the wageless, in our case, we are not offering a productivity deal: in return for a wage, we will work as before and even more than before. We want a wage in order to be able to use our time and energy in order to struggle and not be confined by our need for financial independence to a second job. To consider the wage demand as such an economic one is to fail to understand that the relation between how much money we get is a direct expression of how much control we have over our lives. Not to mention the fact that in the present economic situation, to attack the wage demand per se means to join the general capitalist call for austerity.

As for the financial aspects of wages for housework, they are "highly problematic" (Lopate, p.9) only if we take the viewpoint of capital -- the viewpoint of the Treasury Department, which claims poverty only when it comes to the working class. Since we are not the Treasury Department we didn't even conceive of establishing how much women should be paid. It is not for us to put limits to our power...It is not for us to measure our "value". It is not for us to massage ourselves..It is only for us to organize a struggle to get all of what we want, for us all, on our own terms. Similarly we completely reject the argument that some other sectors of the working class would pay for our eventual gain. According to this logic we could say in reverse that the wage workers are now being paid with the money they don't give us, but this is precisely the logic of capital, this is the way Nixon talks. In fact, to say that the demands for social welfare programs by blacks in the Sixties "had a devastating effect on any long range strategy on white - black relations" since the workers knew that "they, not the corporations, ended up paying for those programs. (Lopate, p.10) is playing into the hands of racism. If we assume that every struggle always ends up in a redistribution of poverty rather than in an attack on capital's profit, we assume a priori the defeat of the working class. Indeed Lopate's article is written under the sign of defeatism. Defeatism is nothing else but accepting capitalist institutions as inevitable..Thus Lopate cannot conceive that when capital tries to lower other workers' wages in order to give us a wage, those workers will be able to struggle against such a move. She assumes also that "obviously, men would receive the highest wage for their work at home". (Lopate, p.10). Finally, Lopate cannot imagine that we could organize to collectively

SHUT our doors in the face of a supervisor trying to control our work. But even if being waged means the imposition of control on our work, it would be preferable by far to know exactly who is commanding us, who our enemy is rather than having internalized domination so well that we don't need a supervisor because we do "instinctively" what we are expected to. We would rather hate the ruling class and express in struggle that hatred, than hate ourselves because we are compelled to "love and care" - "out of fear and domination" (Lopate, p.10).

NOTES

- (1) The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community
by Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James
The Falling Wall Press Ltd.

- (2) Marx, Capital Vol 1, chapter XVI

- (3) E.J. Hobsbawm. Industry and Empire The making of Modern English
society, Vol. II 1750 to the Present Day.
Pantheon Books, 1968