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CHILD CUSTODY MOTHERHOOD LESBIANISM

THE CASE FOR WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK



Excerpted from a pamphlet by Francie
Jylland of Toronto Wages Due Lesbians and
Wages for Housework Committee (1976).

“Unfit” Mothers

Lesbians automatically come under the heading of "unfit mother" in the courtroom. We are "guilty" by virtue of our refusal to sleep with men and our consequent poverty. When we refuse to sexually service men, we undermine their power to command our sexual labor. And in undermining the power of men over women, we threaten the family, without which the State cannot function.

Because lesbians are such a threat, we are subject to one of the heaviest counter-attacks levelled against any section of workers. And the highest price we pay for our lesbianism is the loss of custody of our children. We as lesbians are so powerless that almost anyone - husband, relatives, Child Welfare Agencies - can lay claim to our children and win.

All Women are Vulnerable

The extreme vulnerability of lesbian women in our fight for child custody is an index of the powerlessness of all women. If we are straight - and white - the courts know we are likely to attach ourselves to another man's wage; our financial prospects are therefore better than those of a lesbian woman, and custody decisions reflect this. But even straight women are having a harder time now than in the past because they do not invariably re-marry.

The State is increasingly reluctant to give custody to women because of our rebellion against the domination of the male wage and our refusal of the work of disciplining children for the needs of the State when we raise them on our own. Instead, custody is more often being awarded to the parent with the larger income - to the man - who will always be able, with his wage, to get another woman to bring up the children inside a marriage.

We know society doesn't give a damn about the interests or well-being of our children. Our children could - and do - rot in slums and ghettoized schools in millions and capital feels no pain. What does concern the State is that we women are "destroying" our families in our fight for time and money, and we are thereby undermining both the forced dependence of today's workers on their jobs, and the "quality" of the future labor force, our children. Capital is banking on the fact that nothing will be so effective in preventing us women from abandoning our marriages as the threat of losing our children.

The growing probability that we will lose our children or the possibility of having children if we leave our husbands is preventing many, many women from becoming lesbian. Our fear of losing our children if we step out of line is preventing others of us from becoming mothers.



Photo: Oxford Mail and Times

Building Power

How can we fight back and build our power as lesbian women? Our strategy must be based on our needs as lesbians and as mothers, to win time and money of our own in order to decide whether or not we want children. It must attack our common weakness as women - our wagelessness - at its root and thereby open the way for us to organize with other women without submerging our needs as lesbians. And it must uncover for us ways of organizing that will win us more, not fewer, choices.

The Wages for Housework Campaign is our way of doing that. It is the fight of a particular woman to be lesbian without losing her children. It is the fight of all lesbian women to no longer have to hide who we are. It is the fight of all women for the right to have or not to have children. And it is the power to determine our own sexuality.

We are no longer accepting that to have children we must serve and depend on a man, nor that we must hide our lesbianism as a condition for keeping our children. In demanding wages for housework from the government for all women, we are demanding not only the power to choose to be lesbian without losing our children or the possibility of having them. We are demanding the power to be with those children in a way that is not work. We will no longer accept the entire responsibility for them or the guilt of being a "bad mother" if we take time away from them. And we will apologize to noone for rearing children who - like their mothers - are making a ferocious fight for the power to determine their own lives!



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